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Papers Presented at the International Conference on
“SCHOLARSHIP AS LITERATURE: INTERNAL MECHANISMS OF TEXT GENERATION
AND RHETORICS IN SCHOLARLY TEXTS AND SERIES FROM ANCIENT
MESOPOTAMIA AND NEIGHBOURING CULTURES”

The seven papers collected in this section were presented at the conference “Scholarship as Literature: Internal Mechanisms of Text Generation and Rhetorics in Scholarly Texts and Series from Ancient Mesopotamia and Neighbouring Cultures” hosted by Vienna University’s Institute of Near Eastern Studies on the 18th-19th of December 2017. The conference aimed to highlight and explore text-internal mechanisms of compilation and expansion in compendia and other types of technical compilations of erudite material in the various fields of Ancient Near Eastern scholarship. In particular, the contributors were asked to pay attention to the interrelation between a given text’s form and its function or intention, to the role played by processes of analogical thinking in the development of scholarly-literary creativity in Ancient Mesopotamia, and to the intertextual relations between representatives of different textual genres of scholarly literature.

The conference addressed the principal branches of Ancient Mesopotamian erudition and their specialist literature, starting with lexicography. Two papers deal with the ‘list’ as a ubiquitous element in the formal make-up of Mesopotamian scholarly texts. J. Crisostomo’s article (“Creating Proverbs”) reveals the fundamental role played by hermeneutical structuring principles of listing scholarship in the reproduction and study of the Sumerian Proverb collections. J. Pfitzner’s article (“*Ellum*, *ebbum*, and *namrum*”) explores the complex mechanisms of association that can be identified in the sign list *Diri* and its intertextual relations with Sumerian literary compositions.

Two papers focus on Mesopotamian omen collections. U. Koch’s article (“Principles of Astrological Omen Composition”) demonstrates that an analysis of tensions and micro-fissures in the received text can do much to reveal the underlying principles of Mesopotamian astrology. A. Winitzer’s article (“History as Scholarship”) discusses the embeddedness of Old Babylonian ‘historical’ omens within the organisational and interpretative framework of early divination literature.

Two papers deal with ritual and liturgical compositions. U. Gabbay’s article (“The Production and Transmission of Sumerian Emesal Litanies”) reveals the fine balance between conservatism and innovation underlying the transmission of Sumerian liturgical Emesal texts during the second and first millennia BCE. In a similar vein, C. Debourse’s article (“*Debita Reverentia*”) demonstrates the interplay between tradition and innovation in the account of the rite of the negative confession and humiliation of the king during the Babylonian New Year’s Festival as envisaged in its Hellenistic textual incarnation.

Finally, N. De Zorzi’s article (“Scholarship as Literature”) focuses on the relationship between Mesopotamian poetry and scholarship. The micro-structure of the *Šamaš Hymn* reveals that it shares with Mesopotamian scholarly texts, divinatory lists in particular, certain core characteristics that are linked to processes of text construction. Analogical reasoning plays a crucial role in these processes.

The conference was organized in preparation for the project “Repetition, Parallelism and Creativity: an Inquiry into the Construction of Meaning in Ancient Mesopotamian Literature and Erudition” (REPAC; ERC Starting Grant n° 803060, 2019-2024) that is led by N. De Zorzi at the Institute of Near Eastern Studies of Vienna University.

Nicla De Zorzi

LITERATURE AS SCHOLARSHIP: SOME REFLECTIONS ON REPETITION
WITH VARIATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING
IN THE ŠAMAŠ HYMN 112-117

Nicla De Zorzi¹

1. Introduction

The great Akkadian hymn to the sun-god Šamaš (Lambert 1960, 121-138) contains a long section (ll. 83-121) which delves into the god's role as the upholder of justice who brings punishment to bear upon wrongdoers and rewards good conduct.² These lines represent the central section of the 200-line long hymn. It has long been seen that they provide important insights into Šamaš' role as god of justice, but they have never been investigated in detail.³

1. This article results from research conducted under the auspices of the project REPAC "Repetition, Parallelism and Creativity: an Inquiry into the Construction of Meaning in Ancient Mesopotamian Literature and Erudition" (2019-2024, University of Vienna) that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement no. 803060). I owe thanks to Enrique Jiménez (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) who generously put at my disposal his working transliteration of ll. 95-124 of the *Šamaš Hymn* and shared with me unpublished manuscripts of the prayer *Marduk 1* and of the wisdom text *Šimā Milka*. Nicole Lundeen-Kaulfus (University of Vienna) kindly corrected my English. Michael Jursa (University of Vienna) has discussed with me many of the ideas presented in this paper and has supported and encouraged me throughout: I cannot thank him enough. Needless to say, I am responsible for the ideas presented in this article and any shortcomings are only my own.
2. Not included in Lambert's edition is a Neo-Babylonian manuscript from Sippar which was published by A.R. George and F.N.H. Al-Rawi (1998, 202-203). Lambert's copies of six new Neo-Assyrian and Neo- and Late Babylonian manuscripts of the hymn, which were also not included in his 1960's edition (but some passages are quoted in the CAD), have been recently published by A.R. George and J. Taniguchi (2019, nn. 128-133; the volume includes copies of several Late Babylonian school-exercise tablets containing extracts from the hymn: nn. 134-142). For a recent English translation of the hymn, see Foster 2005, 627-635 (see p. 635 for a list of previous studies and translations).
3. For discussions of individual passages, see Nakata 1970/1971, 91-101 (ll. 103-121); Reiner 1985, 75-76; Moran 1991 (ll. 112-117, 118-122); Vogelzang 1996, 177-179 (ll. 101-102, 107-119); Hurowitz 2007a (ll.

The section represented by ll. 83-121 takes the form of an enumeration of wicked and virtuous deeds and the punishments or rewards attached to them. It mostly consists of couplets, but groups of three lines are also attested.⁴ The wrongs prompting Šamaš' punishment are presented as moral failures rather than as 'simple' illegal behaviour. The range of misdeeds punished by Šamaš includes oath breaking (ll. 85-87), adultery (ll. 88-94), blasphemy (l. 95), 'persecution' (i.e., deeds of an *ēpiš riddi*, l. 96),⁵ and miscarriage of justice (ll. 97-98). On the other hand, the thoughtful judge who takes up a poor man's case without charge and gives just verdicts is praised (ll. 99-102). The rest of the section (ll. 103-121) deals with honest versus dishonest trading activities. The harsh and the lenient moneylender (*nādin kašpi*) each receive one distich (ll. 103-104, 105-106). A three-line strophe describes the fate of the dishonest merchant (ll. 107-109) and the following two lines (ll. 110-111) reveal the reward given by Šamaš to the honest merchant. A sequence of three couplets focuses on the punishments befalling the dishonest lender of barley (ll. 112-117), while the rewards awaiting the fair creditor are dwelt with in two couplets (ll. 118-121).

From the point of view of its structure, this section of the *Šamaš Hymn* reveals a high degree of formal sophistication: its most important feature is the use of exact and variant repetition at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels.⁶ At the macro-level, key phrases and thoughts return at various points in the text. However, it is especially the interplay of similarity and contrast at the micro-, i.e., sub-sentential, and meso-level, between contiguous textual units, that functions as a major vector for stylistic as well as epistemological creativity and for rhetorical effectiveness. Previous studies on the formal make-up of the *Šamaš Hymn* have mostly focused on macro-level repetition.⁷ The present paper aims to offer an insight into the micro-structure of the hymn by focusing on the lines describing the fate of the dishonest lender of barley, ll. 112-117. These have been the subject of much discussion. Nevertheless, they have hitherto not been understood completely.

118-121, 122-127); Frahm 2009, 42-44 (ll. 95-96, 103); Winitzer 2013, 446-449 (ll. 83-91, 94-96); and Nurullin 2014 (ll. 112-117).

4. See Lambert 1960, 121-122.

5. See Frahm 2009, 42-44.

6. By variant repetition, I mean the re-statement of some linguistic feature in a similar form close after its first occurrence. In terms of forms, repetition can be articulated through phonetics, morphology and lexicon, as well as through syntax and semantics. In poetic texts, sound repetition includes consonance, assonance and rhyme, at different positions of the poetic line. Morphological repetition may involve the repetition of morphological patterns (for instance, morphological parallelism) or the repetition of lexical roots. Lexical repetition refers to repeated words at different positions in the poetic line. Syntactic and semantic repetitions most often operate on the meso- and macro-levels. They are articulated through particular devices. These include macro-level repetition with variation (e.g., in narrative texts, entire episodes are repeated with some variation at a certain distance from the first occurrence), refrain, ring composition, chiasm, wordplay, and parallelism. For repetition in general in Akkadian literature, a summary paper by Vogelzang (1996) and pertinent remarks by Hecker (1974) remain the principal works of reference. More studies have engaged with parallelism: Groneberg 1987, 181-190; Izre'el 2001, 77-81; Streck 2007, Haul 2009, 176-183; and Helle 2014. Among discussions of individual texts, A. Annus and A. Lenzi (2010, xxx-xxxiv) offer a comparatively extensive discussion of parallelism as it appears in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*. Still, in comparison to the quantity of research done in related fields, e.g., in the study of Hebrew poetics, the investigation of repetition in Akkadian is still in its infancy – a fact at odds with the frequency of the phenomenon. One of the objectives of my ERC project REPAC is to investigate comprehensively the role played by repetition, especially parallelism, as a structuring device in Akkadian literature and scholarly writing.

7. See Reiner 1985, 68-83, and Vogelzang 1996, 177-179.

The paper will be divided in three parts. I will first introduce the most important previous studies of these lines. The second part will focus on the meaning of the keyword *bitu* in l. 115; the question of its possible figurative usage in the *Šamaš Hymn* and in other texts will be discussed. In the final part, I will present my interpretation of *Šamaš Hymn* ll. 112-117 and provide some considerations on the structure of the *exempla* of retributive justice in the hymn. In the conclusion, I will briefly address the wider ramifications of this study for the investigation of Mesopotamian erudition as a whole. The *Šamaš Hymn* shares with Mesopotamian scholarly texts, divinatory lists in particular, certain core characteristics that are linked to processes of text construction and the role that analogical reasoning plays in these processes.

2. *Šamaš Hymn* ll. 112-117: *status quaestionis*

Currently, these lines can be reconstructed on the basis of four manuscripts: two Neo-Assyrian tablets from Nineveh and two Neo-Babylonian tablets, both probably from Sippar. All these manuscripts only contain this text, written in four columns. The Neo-Assyrian tablets, K 3182+⁸ (ii 56 = 112, iii 1-5 = 113-117) and 83-1-18 472⁹ (ii 5-10 = 112-117), represent the manuscripts A and C in Lambert's edition (1960; plates 33-35). The Neo-Babylonian tablet Si 15 (iii 7-12 = 112-117) was also published by Lambert (1960; plates 33, 36 ms. i). Lambert's copy of another Neo-Babylonian tablet documenting ll. 33-39 (i), 81-98 (ii), and 99-117 (iii) was recently published by A.R. George and J. Taniguchi (2019 n. 128, plates 98-99, BM 65472+). In addition, a Late Babylonian school-exercise tablet, BM 101558 (George-Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, plate 102), containing extracts from different texts, quotes ll. 116-121 of the hymn. The passage is transliterated and translated by Lambert (1960, 132-133) as follows:

112. *ša-bit sūti*(^{gi}šBÁN) *e-piš ši-[[i]p-ti]*
 113. *na-din ši-qa-a-ti a-na bé-ri-i mu-šad-din at-ra*¹⁰
 114. *ina la u₃-me-šú [a]r-rat*^{A1} *nīš*(UN.MEŠ) *i-kaš-šad-su*
 115. *ina la a-dan-ni-šú 'i-šá-al i-raš-ši bil-ta*¹²
 116. *mak-kūr*(NÍG.GA)-šú *ul i-be-el apil*(IBILA)-šú¹³
 117. *a-na bīti*(É)-šú *ul ir-ru-bu*¹⁴ [*š*]u-nu *ab-bū*(ŠEŠ.MEŠ)-šú

8. Lambert's 1960 edition does not include K 19835 (Lambert 1992, 41) which has later been recognized as a fragment of K 3182+. Photos of K 3182+ are available through the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) project at <http://cdli.ucla.edu> (P394856). The fragment K 9356 (Lambert 1960, 125, pl. 33) has been joined to K 3182+ (I owe this information to Enrique Jiménez).
9. According to Lambert's edition (1960, 125), Sm 1033 is part of the same tablet as 83-1-18 472.
10. BM 65472+ rev. 15 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 128, pl. 69) has a variant here: [... *ši-q*]a-^ra'-[*t*] a-na ^rbī-ri-i la mu-[šad-din DIRI]. The reading *diri* is indicated by the fact that not much seems to be missing on the right-hand side of the tablet. For a possible explanation of the variant, see below (§4).
11. 83-1-18 472 ii 7: *ár-rat* (Lambert 1960, 132-133, pl. 35).
12. 83-1-18 472 ii 8: *i-ra-áš-ši* GU[N ...] (Lambert 1960, 132-133, pl. 35). BM 65472+ rev. 17: *i-ra-áš-ši* (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 128, pl. 69).
13. 83-1-18 472 ii 9: *a-pal-šú* (Lambert 1960, 132-133, pl. 35). BM 101558: 5: [...-š]u *ul i-bé-e*[*r*/or: -[*u* ...] (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, pl. 102).
14. BM 101558: 6: *ul i-ru-[bu ...]* (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, pl. 102).

112. The merchant who practices trickery as he holds the corn measure,
 113. who weighs out loans (of corn) by the minimum standard,¹⁵ but requires a large
 quantity in repayment,
 114. the curse of the people will overtake him before his time,
 115. if he demanded repayment before the agreed date, there will be guilt upon him.
 116. His heir will not assume control over his property,
 117. nor will his brothers take over his estate.

Lambert interprets ll. 112-114 as a triplet consisting of a double-line antecedent, ll. 112-113, describing the dishonest merchant's behaviour, and a one-line consequent, l. 114, which reveals the consequence of the merchant's wrongdoing. The following three lines represent another triplet. However, in this case, Lambert interprets l. 115 as a virtual conditional clause, containing both the antecedent, i.e., the wrongdoing, and its consequence – “guilt” will be upon the wrongdoer. This line is followed by two lines (ll. 116-117) which detail the punishment Šamaš inflicts on the fraudulent lender.

Lambert does not miss the clear parallelism between *ina lā ūmišu* (l. 114) and *ina lā adannišu* (l. 115), but interprets *adannu* as a commercial term, i.e., the date on which a loan has to be repaid, and concludes that the parallelism between *ina lā ūmišu* and *ina lā adannišu* is either “a coincidence, or the writer did not recognize the commercial sense of *adannu*” (Lambert 1960, 321 note to l. 115). In support of his translation of *biltu*, commonly “load, yield, rent, tribute”, as “guilt” (l. 115), Lambert (1960, 321 note to l. 115) quotes a line from a Babylonian commentary on the series of medical diagnoses and prognoses *Sagig* (GCCI 2 406, see CCP 4.1.13.B) which apparently associates *biltu* with *šertu* “guilt; punishment”: *šu gá-gá : na-še-e bi-il-tú / šu gá-gá : na-še-e še-er-ti* “*šu gá-gá* means bearing said of a load / *šu gá-gá* means bearing said of guilt/punishment” (obv. 5-6). On this basis, Lambert concludes that the concepts of “burden” and “guilt” seem to be related in Akkadian sources.

A different reconstruction of the *Šamaš Hymn's* ll. 112-117 is proposed by B.R. Foster (2005, 632):

112. He who commits fraud as he holds the dry measure,
 113. who pays loans by the smaller standard, demands repayment by the extra standard,
 114. before his time, the people's curse will take effect on him,
 115. before his due, he will be called to account, he will bear the consequence(?),
 116. no heir will (there be) to take over his property,
 117. nor will (there be) kin to succeed to his estate.

Focusing on the parallelism between *ina lā ūmišu* (l. 114) and *ina lā adannišu* (l. 115), Foster interprets ll. 114-117 as a sequence of two structurally and semantically parallel couplets listing the

15. CAD B, 267b *biruju* translates: “a merchant who lends by the medium measure (but) collects by the larger one”. CAD Š/3, 102a *šiqu*: “he who practices fraud as he holds the seah measure, lending by the medium š.-measure (but) collecting by the larger one”.

punishments which Šamaš will visit on the treacherous merchant whose actions are described in ll. 112-113. The interpretation of l. 115 as referring to the punishment of the fraudulent lender stems from a different reconstruction of the first verb, i.e., ¹⁶ *is̄-šá-al* instead of Lambert's *i-šá-al* (Foster 2005, 635 note to l. 115).¹⁶ Lambert (1960, 321 note to l. 115) considered the possibility of reading the damaged first sign as *is̄* instead of *i*, but in the end rejected it. We will come back to this paleographic problem below (§4). Foster's understanding of l. 115 involves the additional difficulty that several words are taken in otherwise nearly unattested meanings: *adannu* "deadline" should mean "appointed time of death",¹⁷ the N form of *šálu* "to be asked" is taken as "to be called to account",¹⁸ and *biltu* "load, yield, rent, tribute" as "consequence" or something along these lines.

Indeed, a common feature of both Lambert's (1960, 133) and Foster's (2005, 532) translations is that *biltu* (l. 115) is given figurative meanings, "guilt" and "consequence(?)", respectively.¹⁹ But, is *biltu* attested elsewhere in such figurative usage? Beside the above mentioned *Sagig* commentary GCCI 2 406 (CCP 4.1.13.B), our passage from the *Šamaš Hymn*, and some personal names, CAD B, 230-231 lists only five other occurrences of *biltu* with the general meaning of "burden, onus, plight": the tale of the *Poor Man of Nippur* and the *Etana Epic* are attributed one each; according to CAD B, a letter sent by King Assurbanipal to the Babylonians (ABL 301) alone contains three.²⁰ In these texts, *biltu* is written syllabically either with BIL or with BÍL; only the *Sagig* commentary has the spelling *bi-il-tú* and only one of the manuscripts of the *Šamaš Hymn* has the logographic reading GUN (83-1-18 472 ii 8, Lambert 1960, 132-133, plate 35, ms. C). With the exception of the commentary, this material has been the object of a detailed discussion by W.L. Moran (1991). Contrary to CAD B, Moran suggests for the above-mentioned literary passages, including *Šamaš Hymn* l. 115, as well as for Assurbanipal's letter (ABL 301), the reading *pištu/piltu* "insult" instead of *biltu* "burden, onus, plight". We will discuss in detail Moran's interpretation of these passages below (§3 and §4).

A further candidate for a figurative use of *biltu*, not included in Moran's study, is found in the Late Bronze Age wisdom composition *Šimā Milka* "Hear the Advice". In a recent study, R. Nurullin (2014) suggests for this alleged attestation of *biltu* in figurative usage the meaning "guilt; punishment". Nurullin (2014, 213-219) also discusses the evidence available to Moran (1991) and comes to the conclusion that, contrary to Moran's opinion, *biltu* is used with the meaning "guilt; punishment" both in Assurbanipal's letter to the Babylonians (ABL 301) and in the *Šamaš Hymn*.

Importantly, both Moran (1991) and Nurullin (2014) base their interpretations of l. 115 of the *Šamaš Hymn* on their respective understanding of the rest of the available evidence. In the following, I will argue that there are good grounds for querying the conclusion of both works

16. CAD B, 231a reads *iššál*, but does not have a translation of the line. CAD A/1, 98b reads *iššál* and translates: "Before his days are up, the curse of the people will overtake him (the dishonest money-lender), he will be brought to account before his time". M.-J. Seux's (1976, 58 and fn. 61): "Avant l'échéance on lui réclamera"; Reiner 1985, 75: "(He) will be called to reckoning before it is due"; CAD R, 200b: "He will be brought to account before his due time".

17. See CAD A, 98b.

18. See CAD Š/1, 282b.

19. See also CAD A/1, 98b: "He will be punished(?)"; Seux's 1976, 58 (and fn. 61) "Il sera grevé"; Reiner 1985, 75: "(He will) suffer *punishment*"; Vogelzang 1996, 178: "There will be guilt upon him"; CAD R, 200b "He will incur a (heavy) burden".

20. AHw, 126a 1) e) only quotes the passage from the *Etana Epic*.

owing to some misunderstandings and a certain degree of circular thinking. After this discussion, which takes the form of a yet another excursus on *biltu* in (possibly) figurative usage, I will present a new interpretation of the *Šamaš Hymn*'s ll. 112-117.

3. Another excursus on *biltu* “load” in (possibly) figurative usage

There is no a priori reason to assume that *biltu* should always necessarily refer to a ‘material’ burden. (*W*)*abālu* obviously can be used to express the ‘bearing’ (with different connotations) of immaterial entities, such as “words”, “tidings”, “greetings” and “guilt (*arnu*)” (CAD A/1, 17-20). The point is rather to investigate under which circumstances *biltu* is used to express an immaterial ‘onus’ (CAD B, 230-231) and in particular when, or if, *biltu* as ‘immaterial burden’ takes on the additional nuance of “moral burden, guilt” and/or “punishment” that was suggested for our passage of the *Šamaš Hymn*.

The commentary passage (on a still unknown *Sagig* omen) CCP 4.1.13.B obv. 5-6 quoted above which Lambert (1960, 321 note to l. 115) invokes with obvious caution in support of his “guess” (his word) that *biltu* might mean “guilt” cannot be considered independent evidence. It quite likely created an entirely artificial link between *biltu* and *šertu* based on the (supposedly) shared Sumerian *šu gá-gá*, of which *našé bilti* and *našé šerti* would just be two different meanings united by the common element “to carry”.²¹ While “burden” might conceivably be sufficient common semantic ground for *biltu*, literally “load”, also to accommodate the meaning “guilt”,²² assuming so based on this commentary alone could be compared to taking the *Principal Commentary* on *Šumma izbu* as grounds for saying that *šabātu* means “to kill” because of the passage: LAL : *kamû* / [*kamû*] : *šabātu* / [*kamû*] : [*d*]áku “LAL (means) ‘to bind’; [‘to bind’] (means) ‘to seize’; [‘to bind’] (means) ‘to kill’”.²³ If *biltu* used figuratively exists, it needs to be documented in contextualized settings.

Two candidates for a figurative use of *biltu* with the general meaning of “burden, onus, plight” are found in the tale of the *Poor Man of Nippur* and in the *Etana Epic*, respectively. In the *Poor Man of Nippur*, Gimil-Ninurta tells the gate-keeper (ll. 67-68) to deliver the following message to the mayor who has just wronged him: *ana belika taḫdāt ilāni kīam qibāššu* / *aššu ištēt BÍL-tú ša tēm[id]anni* / *ša ištēn 3 ribētu arābka*. In his edition, Gurney (1956, 152-153) reads BÍL-tú as *biltu* and translates the passage as follows: “The blessings of the gods on your master! Give them this message: ‘For the one load which you put upon me, I will pay you back three times for one’”.²⁴ This reading has been adopted by CAD B, 230b (“trouble”) and CAD E, 141a (“prank”). In his discussion of the passage, Moran (1991, 327-328) admits that “load” and “trouble” make “some sense in context”, but adds

21. It is unlikely that the commentary would have sought to explain *šu gá-gá*. This Sumerian verb probably would not occur in *Sagig*. More likely, the commentator encountered *biltu*, or even *biltu našú*, whose common (Bronze Age) meaning “pay rent/tax” was unfamiliar to him, and tried to find a ‘moral’ meaning by means of the Sumerian equivalence.

22. A recently published Old Babylonian wisdom text (Streck – Wasserman 2019) uses *biltu* in the expression *bilat arnim* “the burden of wrongdoing”, which proves that, at least for the authors of that text, *biltu* alone is not sufficient to accommodate the meaning “guilt”.

23. Frahm 2011, 64 and De Zorzi 2014, 374 comment on omen 5.

24. This line is repeated four times in the tale (ll. 67-68, 112-113, 138-139, 157-158): see Ottervanger 2016, 32.

that they seem “blandly general and hardly an adequate designation of the stinging humiliation the Poor Man has suffered”. He then convincingly suggests reading *pil-tú ša tēm[id]anni*, from *piltu/pištu* “insult”, instead of *bil-tú ša tēm[id]anni*. Moran’s suggestion is followed by B. Ottervanger in his recent edition of the *Poor Man of Nippur*: “For the single offence which you in[fli]cted on me, I, for one, will pay you back a threefold compensation” (Ottervanger 2016, 10 (transliteration) and 17 (translation)).²⁵

Another candidate for figurative *biltu* appears in the *Etana Epic*. Childless Etana, desperate for an heir, asks Šamaš to grant him the plant of birth and adds: BIL-ti *usubma šuma šuknanni*. J.V. Kinnier Wilson (1985, 100-101) reads BIL-ti as a spelling for *biltu* and translates the passage as follows: “Take away the burden, establish me with a son and heir!” (Late Version Tablet 2: 140 and *ibid.*, 104 Tablet 3: 14).²⁶ Moran (1991, 328) argues that here, as in the *Poor Man of Nippur*, *piltu/pištu* would fit the general context better than *biltu* “burden”: he proposes *pilti usubma*, “remove my insult”, i.e., the shame of being childless.²⁷ This reading was independently suggested around the same time by S. Dalley (1989, 201 fn. 22). It has been adopted in two recent editions of the *Etana Epic* by M. Haul (2000, 188-189: 140 “Tilge meine Schmach, schaffe mir einen Namen!”; see also *ibid.*, 194-195: 14) and J. Novotny (2001, 19: 143 and 21: 14), respectively.²⁸ However, the idea that the correct reading might in fact be *biltu* “burden” still endures in the field.²⁹ In any case, we have here no potential parallel for the meaning “guilt; punishment” claimed for *biltu* in the *Šamaš Hymn* by Lambert (1960) and Nurullin (2014).

This is different in the case of the letter K 84 = ABL 301 (Parpola 2018, 5-6 n. 3 = SAA 21 3),³⁰ a famous letter from Assurbanipal to the Babylonians, which is the starting point for Moran’s (1991) discussion of *biltu* in possibly figurative usage and has been used by Nurullin (2014) in his argument in favour of *biltu* “guilt; punishment” in the *Šamaš Hymn*.

The letter’s historical context is the revolt led against Assurbanipal by his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, king of Babylon, in the years 652-648 BCE.³¹ The letter makes use of powerfully emotive language to achieve its purpose, which is to warn the Babylonians not to join Šamaš-šumu-ukīn. At the beginning of the letter, Assurbanipal describes Šamaš-šumu-ukīn as “a non-brother” (*lā abū*, obv. 4) speaking “words of wind” (*dibbi ša šāri*, obv. 3). He then denies the lies – “stinking words” (*dibbi bi’šūte*, obv. 8)³² – that Šamaš-šumu-ukīn has been spreading against him, claiming that they are all part of a scheme devised by the rebellious king to taint the reputation of the Babylonians

25. See also Worthington 2018, 251. Foster (2005, 933) translates the passage as follows: “For the one disgrace you [laid] upon me, for that one I will require you three!”. But note CAD R, 54a *biltu* “trouble(?)”. Noegel 1996, 173-174 suggests a wordplay between *biltu* “burden” and *piltu* “insult”.

26. CAD N/2, 4b “burden”; thus also CAD Š/1, 144b and Š/3, 296a. The passage is known from the Middle Assyrian version of the *Etana Epic*: see Kinnier Wilson 1985, 58-59 I/C: 3.

27. For personal names such as *Usub-pilti-Marduk*, see Moran 1991, 328-329. See also CAD P, 434a.

28. For the same passage in the Middle Assyrian version of the epic, see Haul 2000, 140 (MA-IV: 4?). The reading *piltu/pištu* is adopted by Kinnier Wilson 2007, 18 *ad* 11.

29. See Foster 2005, 549 fn. 2 and Koubková 2017, 37.

30. An online edition of the letter based on Parpola 2018 is available at <http://oracc.org/saao/P393748/> (last accessed 05/02/2020).

31. The letter is dated (652-II-23) and records the deliverer’s name (Šamaš-balāssu-iqbi). See Parpola 2018, 5-6 n. 3: rev. 19-21.

32. For the association of inappropriate enunciations with bad smells in emotional settings in Ancient Mesopotamian sources, see De Zorzi 2019.

along with his own: “It is nothing but a scheme that he has devised (thinking): ‘I will make the reputation of the Babylonians, who are loyal to him, detestable along with me’” (*niklu šū ittikil umma šumu ša Bābīlē rā’imānišu ittiya luba’i*, obv. 11-13). From this point onwards, emotion-provoking considerations about loss of reputation (*šumu*) and personal defilement become the main theme of the letter (Moran 1991, 324). Assurbanipal first reassures the Babylonians that their brotherhood (*abḫūtu*, obv. 15) with the Assyrians and the privileged status (*kidinnūtu*, obv. 16) they enjoy and that he himself has established for them remain valid to the present day (obv. 15-18). He then urges them not to listen to Šamaš-šumu-ukīn’s vain words (*šārātešu*, obv. 19) and let their reputation be tainted by association: “Do not taint your name which is in good repute before me and the whole world, do not make yourself culpable before god” (*šunkunu ša ina pāniya u ina pān mātāti gabbu banū lā tuba’ašā u ramankunu ina pān ili lā tuḫattā*, obv. 20-24). The matter is further pursued in the second part of the letter. This contains the BIL*tu* section and is therefore quoted below in full, together with Moran’s (1991) and Parpola’s (2018) respective translations (rev. 1-11):

u šanītu amāt ša itti libbikunu / kuṣṣupākunu anāku īdi / umma [[UMMA!]] enna ašša / ni-it-te-ki-ru-uš a-na BIL-ti-ni / i-ta-ra ul BIL-tu ši-i / jānu šū kē šumu / babbanū u ašša itti / bēl dabābiya tattašizgā / šu-ú ki-i šá-kan BIL-te / ina muḫbi ramenikunu u ḫatū / ina libbi adē ina pān ili

(Moran 1991, 327)

“And I know another matter that is on your minds. ‘Now, at this time, since we have opposed him/it so often, it will become our reproach [*piltu*]’ This is no reproach. There is none of this when the reputation is excellent. But as for your siding with my enemy, this would be the same as bringing reproach upon yourselves and to sin against the oaths before God”.

(Parpola 2018, 6)

“I also know another matter that you have been pondering in your hearts: “Now, the very fact that we taken [sic] hostile action against him will be a burden [*biltu*] on us” – it will not be a burden; it is nothing, since the name is very good. Though the very fact that you have sided with the opponent is like placing a burden on you, and violating the treaty is a matter (to be settled) before God”.

Moran’s and Parpola’s understanding of the passage are basically the same, but Parpola interprets BIL-*tu/ti/te* as spellings for *biltu*, which he translates as “burden”. In a previous study of the letter, Parpola refers to Moran’s reading in a footnote: “I prefer reading *biltu* “burden” rather than *piltu* “insult, reproach”, despite the arguments of Moran in *Studies Tadmor*, 323-324” (Parpola 2004, 227 fn. 4). Moran’s main argument for *piltu/pištu* is that the central theme of the letter is the reputation of the Babylonians and that the close relationship between scorn and bad reputation makes *piltu* a better fit than *biltu*. In my view, Moran has correctly seen that what is at stake here is the reputation of the Babylonians, and I agree with him that the relevant word is *piltu/pištu*, not *biltu*. However, as

I will explain in detail below, my argument is based on a different interpretation of the whole passage.

In my opinion, both Moran and Parpola misinterpret *ašša nittekirusš ana BIL-ti-ni itâra* at the beginning of the section under discussion (rev. 4-5). Moran (1991, 327) translates it as follows: “Now, at this time, since we have opposed him/it so often, it will become our reproach”. He then argues that the letter recalls here “the years of hostility between Assyria and Babylonia, with Babylon often the center of the opposition” (1991, 322). In this interpretation, Assurbanipal wants to reassure the Babylonians (*ul piltu šī*, rev. 5) that their actual good reputation with him counts more than their past actions: “There is none of this when the reputation is excellent” (*yânu šū kī šumu babbanû*, rev. 6-7). By contrast, their siding with his opponent now would mean loss of reputation and guilt before god.

Parpola’s (2018, 6) reconstruction (“Now, the very fact that we taken [sic] hostile action against him will be a burden on us”) is close to Moran’s, notwithstanding his reading *biltu* instead of Moran’s *piltu*.

Moran’s interpretation of *ašša nittekirusš* is also accepted by Nurullin (2014, 216-217). The latter, however, argues for a grammatical parallelism between *yânu šū kī šumu babbanû* (rev. 7-8) and *šū kī šakân BIL-te* (rev. 9) and suggests – against Moran and Parpola – that the first *kī* should be given the meaning “like”. In this interpretation, Assurbanipal is saying that the reputation of the Babylonians is not perfect (“It is not that (your) name is exceptionally good”), but “still good enough” (Nurullin 2014, 217). If the Babylonians should decide to take part in a revolt, this would be seen as *BILtu*, which Nurullin argues should be interpreted in this context as *biltu* with the meaning “onus, plight, guilt”. Nurullin’s interpretation of this passage is based on the assumption that *biltu* means “guilt; punishment” also in the *Sagig* commentary CCP 4.1.13.B, in *Šamaš Hymn* l. 115, and in a passage from the wisdom composition *Šimâ Milka* (see below). With regard to the letter, it is my opinion that Nurullin’s suggestion for the *BILtu* section is not only difficult from a grammatical point of view,³³ but also misinterprets Assurbanipal’s message.

One key to understanding this much discussed passage lies in the correct interpretation of *ašša nittekirusš* in *ašša nittekirusš ana BIL-ti-ni itâra ul BIL-tu šī* (rev. 4-5). Both Moran (1991) and Parpola (2018), as well as Nurullin (2014) following Moran, take the suffix attached to *nittekirusš* as a reference to Assurbanipal. This, however, is unlikely. The suffix refers to Šamaš-šumu-ukīn and the sentence should thus be translated as follows:

“(And I (= Assurbanipal) know another matter that is on your minds:) ‘Now, as soon as we (= the Babylonians) will have taken hostile action against him (= Šamaš-šumu-ukīn), it will bring shame on us (*ana piltini itâra*)’”.

Assurbanipal is saying to the Babylonians that they are allowed to rebel against their king, Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, because there is no shame (*piltu*) in rebelling against a non-entity like Šamaš-šumu-ukīn in order to side with the highest authority, himself: “It will not be a shame. It is nothing because (your) reputation is excellent”. Moran (1991, 322) correctly reads *ašša nittekirusš ana BIL-ti-ni itâra* as a

33. M. Jursa points out to me that “it is not as” would be expected to be *ul kī* (e.g. SAA 18, 113; SAA 17, 163), rather than *yânu šū kī*.

temporal clause, but he incorrectly interprets *nittekiruš* as a Gtn Preterite of *nakāru*, while it must be a G Perfect.³⁴ The sentence represents an example of a temporal clause introduced by *ašša* expressing anteriority in the future, a construction which is quite common in Neo-Babylonian letters.³⁵ The final sentence (rev. 7-11) semantically mirrors the preceding one and describes the contrasting scenario: should the Babylonians side instead with the enemy of Assurbanipal, this would definitely bring shame (*piltu*) on them: “But as soon as you will have sided with my opponent, this indeed amounts to placing shame on you” (*u ašša itti bēl dabābiya tattašizṣā šū kē šakān piltē ina muḫbi ramenikunu*, rev. 7-10). In this context, *biltu* “burden” might also make some sense,³⁶ but it would be too vague, whereas *piltu* “shame” perfectly fits the emotionally charged language of the letter. Assurbanipal’s address to the Babylonian ends with a reiteration of the main topic: “Now then I am writing to you: if you do not wish to stain yourself with him in these matters, let me quickly see an answer to my letter” (*adū altaprakkunūšī kē ina dibbī agannūte ittišu ramankunu lā tuṭṭannipā ḫantiš gabrī šipirtija lūmur*, rev. 12-14).³⁷ The use of *ṭanāpu* “to soil” recalls the “stinking” lies (*dibbī bi’šūte*, obv. 8) attributed by Assurbanipal to Šamaš-šumu-ukīn at the beginning of the message.³⁸

To the three occurrences of *BILtu* in SAA 21 3 as *piltu/pištu* “shame” discussed we can perhaps add an attestation of *ana pilti tāru* (see above, SAA 21 3 rev. 5) with *ramānu* in an unpublished duplicate to the prayer *Marduk 1* ll. 47-48, in the context of a description of the sufferer: “Caught by decay,³⁹ the mire trapping him, his (whole) being turned into a source of shame for him” (*keussu ina lu’ti kalīš nārīṭtu / itūršu ramānuš ana piltišu*).⁴⁰ The ‘strong’ words (Martinez 2001) *lu’tu* and *nārīṭtu* create an image of defilement, and hence shame. I would prefer this interpretation to the alternative which would see *biltu* “weight, burden” as motivated by the underlying image of the incapacitated body trapped in mud.

One last alleged instance of a transferred or figurative meaning of *biltu* is found in the wisdom composition *Šimā Milka* “Hear the Advice”, also known as *The Instructions of Šūpē Amēli*.⁴¹ The

34. Moran will have taken the fact that the -i- before the -r- was not elided to be an indication that the -k- was doubled (*nittekiruš*). This is not a strong argument for Neo-Babylonian and must yield to syntactical considerations.

35. See Hackl’s study of the syntax of the Neo-Babylonian dependent clause (Hackl 2007, 133) for other examples.

36. Oppenheim (1965, no. 115) translates *biltu* as “charge”. Moran (1991, 323) admits that “charge” might also fit the context of the passage. See also Nurullin 2014, 215.

37. I follow here Parpola’s (2018) translation of the passage. Moran (1991, 326-327) translates: “If you have not defiled yourselves with him in this business, let me see a reply to my letter immediately” (see also CAD T, 46b). The verbal form is a Perfect indicating anteriority in the future, as expected in conditional clauses: see Hackl 2007, 122-123.

38. The verb *ṭanāpu* “to soil” has few attestations in Mesopotamian sources. In a collection of animal anecdotes from Aššur (KAR 174 iii. 5-16: see, most recently, De Zorzi 2019, 232-233), *muṭannipū* is said of the stinking “dirty pig” (*šabū [ar]šū*) that “lies in filth” (*rabīš ina luḫūmmē*), is not allowed into the temple (*lā simat ekuṛri*) and is an “abomination to all gods” (*ikkib ilāni*).

39. For the meaning of *lu’tu*, see Feder 2016, 103-104. See also Schwemer 2007, 106: together with *mangu*, *lu’tu* can indicate a generalized physical decay caused by witchcraft.

40. I owe thanks to Enrique Jiménez (Munich), who has provided me with this unpublished reference and allowed me to quote it in this context. The responsibility for the interpretation is mine. For *Marduk 1*, see, provisionally, Oshima 2011, 137-190.

41. For a recent study of this text, see Cohen 2013, 81-128.

composition, which is mostly known from Late Bronze Age manuscripts from Ugarit, Emar and Hattuša,⁴² is structured as a debate and features a father teaching his son. The main part of the composition consists of a set of instructions and admonitions which the probably aged father speaks to his son. This section is then followed by a much shorter reply by the son. *Šimá Milka* is one of the longest wisdom compositions from Ancient Mesopotamia. Unfortunately, our understanding of it is marred by the bad state of preservation of most of its manuscripts. Moreover, the fact that poetic units are not arranged line-by-line on the tablets makes it often difficult to establish where one unit ends and another begins.⁴³ As we will see in detail below, this structural problem also affects our understanding of the passage containing *biltu*. The passage itself can be reconstructed on the basis of three sources, two from Ugarit (Ug₁ and Ug₂)⁴⁴ and one from Emar. The best preserved and most complete manuscript comes from Ugarit (Ug₂ = RS 94.5028, Arnaud 2007, pl. XXIV-XXV):

- Ug₂ obv. 4' *a-ia ub-la pī(KAxU)-ka tu-pu-ul ni-ši*
 Ug₂ obv. 5' *e ta-aq-bi tap-ḫa la tap-ḫa-šu*
 Ug₂ obv. 6' *e tap-pul-šu ul e-te-ši me-e pī(KAxU)-ka*
 Ug₂ obv. 7' *tá-ra-aš-ši bíl-ta bíl-tu₄*
 Ug₂ obv. 8' *ḫar-ru-up-tu₄ šu-ut-ta-tù e-ṭè-tù*
 Ug₂ obv. 9' *nukurtu(NAM.KÚR.RA) ša la-a nap-ša-ri i-bi₅-sú-ú*
 Ug₂ obv. 10' *ni-ḫi-il e-ni e te-eš-ši imī(IGI.MES)-ka*
 Ug₂ obv. 11' *a-na aššat(DAM) amēlim(LÚ^{im}) (...)*

The other manuscript from Ugarit (Ug₁ = RS 22.439, Nougayrol 1968, 273-290) shows a different arrangement of the lines and some variants:

- Ug₁ i 21 (... *a-a ub-la pī(KAxU)-ka*
 Ug₁ i 22 *tu-¹pú¹ nišī(UN.MEŠ) e táq-bi tappa(NAM.TAB.BA)*
 Ug₁ i 23 *lā(UL) tappa(NAM.TAB.BA)-šú <e tap-pul-šu> ul ¹iḫ-ta-š¹ mé(A) pī(KAxU)-šú*
 Ug₁ i 24 *taraššī(TUKU^š) bíl-ta bíl-¹u₄ ḫa¹r-ru-up-tu₄*
 Ug₁ i 25 *šu-te-tum ¹i-ki¹-il-tu₄ ¹nukurtu(NAM.KÚR) ¹ša lā(UL) nap-ša-ri*
 Ug₁ i 26 *[i-bi₅-sú-ú] ni-ḫi-il imī(IGI) e te-eš-ši imī(IGI.MEŠ)-ka*
 Ug₁ i 27 *[a-na aššat(DAM) amēlim(LÚ^{im})⁴⁵ (...)]*

For these lines the following translation can be offered:

42. A detailed overview of *Šimá Milka*'s source base and publication history is offered by Nurullin 2014, 175-185. Nurullin identifies a tablet from the Nabû Temple at Nimrud (CTN 4 203) as a possible further manuscript of this composition.

43. See Cohen 2013, 82.

44. I follow here the abbreviations used by Nurullin 2014 to identify these manuscripts.

45. The manuscript from Emar (Arnaud 1987, 377-382 nn. 778-780) reads: l. 16'. [*bíl-ta bíl-tu₄ ḫar-ru*]-up-tu₄ š[*u*]-te-¹x¹, l. 17'. [*i-ki-il-tu₄* NAM.KÚR] *a-a nap-ša-ri*, l. 18'. [...-*i*] *e-ni*. See Nurullin 2014, 213.

“(…) May your mouth not insult people (Ug₂ obv. 4; Ug₁ i 21-22). Don’t tell (anyone) a friend is not his friend (Ug₂ obv. 5; Ug₁ i 22-23). Don’t destroy his (reputation), so he will not foam at the mouth (Ug₂ obv. 6; Ug₁ i 23). *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* (Ug₂ obv. 7; Ug₁ i 24). A dark pit, an irreconcilable enmity, sudden losses (Ug₂ obv. 8²-10; Ug₁ i 25-26). Do not covet another man’s wife (Ug₂ obv. 10²-11; Ug₁ i 26-27) (…).”

A review of the many treatments of this passage reveals uncertainties regarding both its interpretation and its place within the sequence of instructions given by the father to his son. Most commentators connect *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* (Ug₁ i 24 and Ug₂ obv. 7) to the preceding three lines which concern slander (Ug₁ i 21-23 and Ug₂ obv. 4²-6) and interpret it as a metaphorical description of the precarious advantage that could be obtained through slander. In this interpretation, *biltu* is given the meaning “gain” and the sequence *šuttatu eṭētu* (var. *ekiltu*) *nukurtu ša lā napšāri ibissū niṭil īni* (Ug₁ i 25-26 and Ug₂ obv. 8²-10) is interpreted as referring to the many bad things that might befall the slanderer: “tu en aurais revenue: revenue bien hâtif, chausse-trape enténébrée, inimitié sans remission, pertes en un clin d’oeil” (Arnaud 2007, 154).⁴⁶ A different reconstruction was recently proposed by Y. Cohen (2013, 86-87 and 104). According to Cohen, *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* is the beginning of a two-line instruction concerning business losses: “You will acquire a yield – but it will be an immature yield, a dark pit, an irreconcilable enmity, sudden losses”. Following Arnaud (2007, 155 §4), Cohen (2013, 86-87) reads *ē tešši īnīka ana aššat amēli* (Ug₁ i 26-27 and Ug₂ obv. 10) as a distinct brief instruction: “Don’t covet another man’s wife”.

In a recent detailed discussion of the whole passage, R. Nurullin (2014, 213-214) proposes yet another arrangement of these lines. He separates *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* (Ug₁ i 24 and Ug₂ obv. 7) from the section on slander (Ug₁ i 21-23 and Ug₂ obv. 4²-6) and argues that the text included between *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* and *ē tešši īnīka ana aššat amēli* (Ug₁ i 26-27 and Ug₂ obv. 10) represents a distinct instruction – the fourth instruction in his reconstruction – concerned with adultery. In this interpretation, *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* is understood as the beginning of list of disasters befalling an adulterer and *biltu* is given the meaning “punishment”: “You will get punished! A premature punishment, a dark pit, a mortal enmity, a sudden misfortune – do not covet (another) man’s wife” (Nurullin 2014, 213).⁴⁷ “A premature punishment” is interpreted by Nurullin (2014, 219) as a reference to “premature death” as punishment for adultery.

Admittedly, the lack of clear divisions between poetic units, as well as the terse allusive language used throughout the text, make it difficult to establish the original meaning of the passage. However, I would argue that to make sense of the chiasmic structure *tarašši bilta biltu ḫarruptu* (Ug₁ i 24 and Ug₂ obv. 7) it must be assumed that *biltu ḫarruptu* is intended to create a contrast to *tarašši*

46. Similar translations have been proposed by other commentators: “Tu en aurais le fruits. Des fruits hâtifs: mépris, ruses, inimitiés implacables” (Nougayrol 1968, 281); “Du erntest dabei Erfolg, aber es ist ein verfrühter Erfolg” (Dietrich 1991, 42-43); “(così) avrai ottenuto un punto a favore, ma sarà un guadagno prematuro” (Seminara 2000, 497-498: 24); “You might garner a gain. But the over-hasty harvest is a pitfall(?), a trick, and unbreakable enmity” (Foster 2005, 417).

47. The idea that *biltu* could mean “punishment” in this context was already advanced by V.A. Hurowitz (2007b, 46). Hurowitz discusses *Šimā Milka* from the perspective of the Biblical wisdom tradition and offers a translation of the text, but, unfortunately, his translation of *biltu* as “punishment” is left uncommented.

biltu (Ug₁ i 24 and Ug₂ obv. 7') rather than to offer a somewhat redundant clarification of its meaning, as suggested by Nurullin (2014, 213-219). In other words, the chiasmic structure of *tarašši biltu biltu ħarruptu* (Ug₁ i 24 and Ug₂ obv. 7') introduces with *ħarruptu* a 'negative' qualification of 'positive' *biltu*: "You may achieve something – but it will be just an early/passing/evanescent achievement (which will reveal itself instead as a dark pit ...)". The contrast between *tarašši biltu* and *biltu ħarruptu* is well reflected in other translations of the passage, such as: "tu en aurais revenue: revenue bien hâtif" (Arnaud 2007, 154); "You will acquire a yield – but it will be an immature yield" (Cohen 2011, 86-87); or "Du erntest dabei Erfolg, aber es ist ein verfrühter Erfolg" (Dietrich 1991, 42-43). The warning clearly derives its effectiveness from its symmetrical structure and its use of grammatical variation that sheds light on the idea that things may change over time. In the *Counsels of Wisdom* l. 133 (Lambert 1960, 104) a chiasmic sequence is used to underscore the same idea: "What you speak in haste will follow you afterwards" (*surriš tātammu tarašši arkāniš*).

Crucially, Nurullin's (2014) argument for interpreting *biltu* as "punishment" in *Šimā Milka* basically rests on the idea that *biltu* has a similar meaning also in *Šamaš Hymn* l. 115 and in Assurbanipal's letter to the Babylonians (SAA 21 3). Such a usage of *biltu* can now be excluded for the latter. Below, I will suggest that the same is true of *Šamaš Hymn* l. 115. In the case of *Šimā Milka*, I agree with Nurullin (2014, 217-218) that BÍL-ta/BÍL-tu₄ cannot be considered a spelling for *piltu/pištu* "insult". The word is definitely *biltu* and *tarašši biltu biltu ħarruptu* should be interpreted as a metaphorical description of the precariousness of advantages wrongfully acquired. The list that follows *ħarruptu* details the consequences of wrongful action (Ug₁ i 25-26 and Ug₂ obv. 8'-10'): "a dark pit, an irreconcilable enmity, sudden losses" (*šuttatu eĕtu* (var. *ekiltu*) *nukurtu ša lā napšāri ibissū niĕl im*).⁴⁸

With regard to the placement of this passage within the sequence of instructions, there are three possibilities: it could have been an independent instruction, as suggested by Cohen (2013, 86-87), part of an instruction warning against slander (Ug₁ i 21-23 and Ug₂ obv. 4'-6'), as suggested by Arnaud (2007) and others, or it could have been attached to *ē tešši imika ana aššat amēli* "do not covet another man's wife" (Ug₁ i 26-27 and Ug₂ obv. 10') as suggested by Nurullin (2014, 213-219). In support of the latter possibility, Nurullin remarks that *šuttatu* "pitfall" (Ug₁ i 25 and Ug₂ obv. 8') is used to describe a woman in the *Dialogue of Pessimism*⁴⁹ and that the description of women as "traps" seems to be a topos of Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literatures (Nurullin 2014, 221-222). However, in the *Counsels of Wisdom* l. 38 (Lambert 1960, 100-101) *šuttatu* "pitfall" (Ug₁ i 25 and Ug₂ obv. 8') is also used to describe *šaltu* "dispute(s)" associated with lawsuits: "A dispute is a spread-out trap" (*šaltumma šuttatu šeĕtu*). This section of the *Counsels of Wisdom* warns against the risks arising from meddling in other people's disputes and invites one to treat enemies with kindness (ll. 31ff.). And this is indeed the topic that is dealt with in Ug₁ i 21-23 and Ug₂ obv. 4'-6', the lines that precede the *biltu* passage we discuss here: "May your mouth not insult people. Don't tell (anyone) a friend is not his friend. Don't destroy his (reputation), so he will not foam at the mouth" (*ayubla*

48. I am following here Cohen's (2013, 87) translation of the passage. See also Nurullin 2014, 220.

49. *Dialogue of Pessimism* l. 51: "A woman is a pitfall – a pitfall, a hole, a ditch" (*sinništu būrtu būrtu šuttatu ħiritu*, Lambert 1960, 146-147).

pīka tupul nišī ē taqbi tappa lā tappašu ē tappulšu ul ittašši mé pišu var. pīka.⁵⁰ Nurullin (2014, 213) observes that the passage between *ayubla* and *mé pišu* is characterized by the repetition of the consonants *t/ṭ, b/p* and *l*, which binds the text together. This could be another argument for associating *tarašši bilta biltu ḥarruptu* with the slander section, since the same consonant pattern can also be found in *bilta biltu ḥarruptu*.⁵¹ In any case, whatever the placement of the passage within the sequence of instructions,⁵² the argument made above for taking the chiasmic structure of *tarašši bilta biltu ḥarruptu* (Ug₁ i 24 and Ug₂ obv. 7') as introducing with *ḥarruptu* a 'negative' qualification of 'positive' *biltu*, must stand.

Having thus so far not found any clear cases of figurative *biltu* in the sense of "moral burden, guilt", (or "punishment (resulting from guilt)"), we now return to the starting point of our discussion.

4. *Šamaš Hymn* ll. 112-117: an example of 'poetic' justice

For clarity, Lambert's transliteration and translation of the passage (1960, 132-133) are quoted once more in full:

112. *ša-bit sūti*^(g^sBÁN) *e-piš ši-ḥ[ṭp-ti]*
 113. *na-din ši-qa-a-ti a-na bé-ri-i mu-šad-din at-ra*
 114. *ina la u_A-me-šú [a]r-rat nišš[UN.MEŠ] i-kaš-šad-su*
 115. *ina la a-dan-ni-šú [r]-šá-al i-raš-ši bil-ta*
 116. *makekūr*^(NÍG.GA)-šú *ul i-be-el apil*^(IBILA)-šú
 117. *a-na bitī*^(É)-šú *ul ir-ru-bu [š]u-nu abhū*^(ŠEŠ.MEŠ)-šú

50. This is Nurullin's (2014, 209) translation, apart from the middle part. My translation of *ē taqbi tappa lā tappašu* is an attempt to render this obvious reference to slander (left untranslated by Nurullin) in as literal a way as possible. As for *ē tappulšu*, I simply suggest taking *napālu* "to destroy" (lit. "do not destroy him") as referring to destroying a person's 'face' or social persona (as suggested by the preceding phrase about slander).
51. A recently published Old Babylonian wisdom text presents the same consonant pattern: *bilat arn[im]* "the burden of wrongdoing" is followed by *mutappilu* "the one who insults" (ll. 9-10): see Streck – Wasserman 2019.
52. An unpublished Neo-Babylonian school tablet from Nippur (HS 1943) might give some new information. The excerptum from *Šimā Milka* begins with *ē tešši inika ana aššat amēli* "don't covet another's man wife", which is Ug₁ i 26-27 // Ug₂ obv. 10'-11'. Therefore, the line could be seen as making sense independently. It should be noted, however, that this "late" excerptum is most of all evidence for the fluidity of the textual transmission. There is an arbitrariness in the arrangement of the single lines which probably means the (late?) scribes tended to take them as independent units: after the *ē tešši*-passage the text inserts a line corresponding (albeit with an important variant) to the second half of Ug₁ 27 and the beginning of Ug₁ 28 // the second half of Ug₂ obv. 11' and Ug₂ obv. 12' ([*ana šup-šuq-ti (šá)*] *a-mu-ru pa-šuq-ti di-i-ni*). The final line (before a break) is largely broken, but, interestingly, the preserved part on the right side corresponds to the beginning of the *šuttatu*-passage (Ug₁ i 25 and Ug₂ obv. 8'). However, the break on the left side does not seem large enough to allow reconstructing *tarašši bilta biltu ḥarruptu*. A thorough discussion of this unexpected arrangement will have to await the edition of the tablet. I owe thanks to Enrique Jiménez (Munich) who has provided me with this unpublished reference and allowed me to quote it in this context.

112. The merchant who practices trickery as he holds the corn measure,
 113. who weighs out loans (of corn) by the minimum standard, but requires a large
 quantity in repayment,
 114. The curse of the people will overtake him before his time,
 115. If he demanded repayment before the agreed date, there will be guilt upon him.
 116. His heir will not assume control over his property,
 117. Nor will his brothers take over his estate.

According to Moran (1991, 329 fn. 26), Lambert's interpretation of l. 115 – "If he demanded repayment before the agreed date, there will be guilt upon him" – is problematic for three reasons: ll. 114-117 represents a sequence of punishments, the parallelism between *ina ūmišu* (l. 114) and *ina adannišu* (l. 115) argues against giving *adannu* a commercial meaning, and "guilt" is not a "punishment in the value-world of the hymn". Moran's (1991, 319-329) discussion of the meaning of BIL/BÍL-*tu* in Assurbanipal's letter to the Babylonians (SAA 21 3), in the *Poor Man of Nippur*, and in the *Etana Epic* (see above) brings him to the conclusion that *biltu* is not used in a figurative meaning in Akkadian. In his opinion, BIL-*tu* in *Šamaš Hymn* l. 115 is therefore not a spelling for alleged *biltu* "guilt", as suggested by Lambert, but should be taken as yet another occurrence of *piltu/pištu* "insult". In support of this suggestion, he draws a parallelism between this passage from the *Šamaš Hymn* and the *piltu/pištu* passage in the *Etana Epic*, where *piltu/pištu* is the "taunt of being childless" (Moran 1991, 330; see above). In the *Šamaš Hymn* the following is said of the man acquiring BIL-*tu*: "his heir will not assume control over his property, nor will his brothers take over his estate" (ll. 116-117). According to Moran, this is a reference to the death of the fraudulent lender, who will die without an heir, "having neither son nor kin". Below, I will argue that this represents a misunderstanding of the connection between l. 115 and ll. 116-117.

Moran further suggests that *arrat nišī* in l. 114 should be interpreted as "the common, popular curse, probably *the* popular curse", by which poverty, and, especially, the early and heirless death of the merchant is meant, "the commonest curse, the direst curse" (1991, 330). The fact that *arratu* "curse" appears together with *pilšu* also elsewhere in Akkadian texts is mentioned in additional support of the reading *irašši piltu* in l. 115.⁵³ In Moran's view (1991, 329), the logographic reading GUN of BIL-*tu* in one of the sources for this line⁵⁴ results from a scribal mistake due to the ambiguity of BIL-*tu*. Regarding the meaning of *irašši piltu*, Moran argues that it should be seen as a reference to the dishonest merchant's being an object of revilement due to his childlessness (1991, 330). Finally, Moran (1991, 331) reads the first verb of l. 115 as *iššāl* with the meaning "he will be asked about", which he explains as the questioning of the merchant prompted by his childlessness.

Moran's interpretation, though suggestive, is not satisfying. One problem is that it does not provide an explanation for *ina lā adannišu* at the beginning of l. 115, i.e., it is not clear how *ina lā adannišu* relates to the rest of the line in Moran's reconstruction. It certainly does not go well with

53. Moran 1991, 327-328. For instance, in a letter from Mari, ARM 10 43: "Why did you not wear my garment, but send (it) back to me, thereby inflic[ting on me] insult and curse?" (ll. 7-11: *ana minim šubātī lā taltabšīma tuterrēmma pištam u erretam tēmidī[nni]*). See also CAD P, 433b.

54. Lambert 1960, 125 83-1-18 472 (ms C) ii 8 (plate 35).

his interpretation of *šálu* as an N form with the meaning “to be asked about (childlessness)”.⁵⁵ This interpretation is quite forced and improbable by itself, not only because *šálu* N is barely attested in our sources.⁵⁶ It is also unclear how *ina lā ūmišu* relates to *arrat niši* (l. 114), if the latter alludes to poverty and an heirless death.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it does not seem right to simply dismiss the reading GUN instead of BIL-*ta* offered by one of the manuscripts for l. 115 as a scribal mistake.

In his recent discussion of the passage, Nurullin (2014, 217-219) argues – against Moran (1991, 330 and fn. 28) – that *arrat niši* in l. 114 should be interpreted as a “kenning-like periphrasis for ‘death’”: death is everyone’s destiny, but the dishonest merchant will meet it before his due time (*ina lā ūmišu*). In support of this suggestion, Nurullin observes that in ll. 118-119 of the hymn the honest merchant is awarded long life. The idea of a close correspondence between these two sections of the *Šamaš Hymn* (ll. 112-117 and ll. 118-121) was already advanced by Moran (1991, 330). We will return to this issue in detail below.

Nurullin further argues that BIL-*ta* in l. 115 should be interpreted as a spelling for *biltu* with the meaning “guilt; punishment” and as an additional reference to the death of the merchant. However, we have seen (§3) that this conclusion is based on the premise that *biltu* means “guilt; punishment” also in Assurbanipal’s letter to the Babylonians (SAA 21 3) and in *Šimā Milka*. So, in fact, Nurullin’s argument displays a certain degree of circular thinking. The reading of the verb at the beginning of l. 115 is not addressed explicitly: Nurullin (2014, 218) takes the verb as *šálu* N, indicating that the merchant will “be brought to account”, which fits well his interpretation of *irašši biltu* as referring to the “punishment” of the fraudulent merchant.

We have now come at the end of our review of the most important previous interpretations of the *Šamaš Hymn*’s ll. 112-117. All previous studies have focused their attention on the interpretation of the meaning of *irašši* BIL-*ta* in l. 115. However, a certain degree of uncertainty is also associated with the meaning of other key-words in ll. 114-115, i.e., *arratu*, *adannu*, and *šálu*. In my view, the latter, in particular, has been misunderstood by most of the previous commentators. Lambert (1960, 133) reads *ʾi-šá-al* as a Present G of *šálu* “to ask” and interprets *ina lā adannišu išál* as a virtual conditional clause: “If he demanded repayment before the agreed date”. However, all subsequent studies and translations of the passage have favored a reading *ʾiṣ-šá-al* instead of Lambert’s *ʾi-šá-al*. I have already mentioned that Lambert (1960, 321 note to l. 115) considered the possibility of reading the damaged first sign as *iṣ* instead of *i*, but in the end rejected it. The verb is attested by only one manuscript, K 3182+ iii 3, manuscript A in Lambert’s edition (1960; plates 33-34). A comparison between Lambert’s copy and a relatively good photo of the tablet now available on the website of the CDLI project (P394856) indicates, in my opinion, that Lambert’s *ʾi-šá-al* is indeed preferable. The first sign is damaged, but the traces fit the reading *i* better than *iṣ*: the ‘tail’ of the middle horizontal of *i* seems to be visible and one might have expected to see traces of the oblique wedge of *iṣ* if this were the correct reading. In any case, I will argue that Lambert’s reading is not only preferable from a paleographic point of view.

55. Nurullin 2014, 218 seems to be assuming that Moran’s translation of *iššál* is “brought to account”, but it is not.

56. See CAD Š/1, 282b.

57. The same point is raised by Nurullin 2014, 218-219.

A comparison between the various translations of this section of the *Šamaš Hymn* reveals that the idea that Lambert's 'i'-šá-al should be read 'iš^a-šá-al instead is based on the assumption that l. 115 should form a couplet with l. 114 because of the parallelism between *ina lā ūmišu* and *ina lā adannišu*. Foster (2005, 632), for instance, understands ll. 112-117 as a sequence of three parallel couplets (see above §2). But need this to be so? This form of the couplet is indeed used throughout the hymn. However, as Lambert remarks in the introduction to his edition (1960, 121-122), it is not the only one: for example, ll. 107-109, just a few lines up from our passage, are a semantically interconnected triplet made up by a parallel couplet and a single verse.⁵⁸ Similarly, I suggest taking ll. 112-114 and ll. 115-117 as two semantically linked triplets. In my view, the triplet in ll. 112-114 is composed by a parallelistic double-line antecedent (ll. 112-113) describing the bad behaviour of the merchant:

112. *ša-bit sūti*(^gBÁN) *e-piš ši-[i]p-ti*
 113. *na-din ši-qa-a-ti a-na bé-ri-i mu-šad-din at-ra*

112. He who commits fraud when measuring,
 113. who pays loans by the smaller standard, demands repayment by the extra standard,⁵⁹

This is followed by a one-line (l. 114) consequent:

114. *ina la u₄-me-'šú [a]r-rat nišī*(UN.MEŠ) *i-kaš-šad-su*

114. before his time, the people's curse will take effect on him.

So far, my interpretation of the passage does not differ from Lambert's (1960, 132-133). Contrary to Lambert, however, I believe that ll. 115-117 represents a chiasmatically inverted triplet mirroring ll. 112-114, in which a full one-line antecedent (l. 115) is completed by a parallelistic double-line consequent (ll. 116-117). Regarding the meaning of the keywords in l. 115, *adannu*, *šálu*, and *biltu*, I suggest taking them in their usual meaning, "appointed time", "to ask", and "yield" or "rent", respectively. The translation of the passage I propose is thus:

115. *ina la a-dan-ni-šú 'i'-šá-al i-raš-ši bil-ta*
 116. *mak^kūr*(NÍG.GA)-šú *ul i-be-el apil*(IBILA)-šú

58. Note that the new ms. BM 65472+ rev. 10 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 128, plates 98-99) for l. 108 helps to complete the text. The copy has *ú-šaq-qá-'ar'* for the verb, which was missing hitherto, this results in "(the merchant) who uses two sets of weights, thus rendering (merchandise) more expensive (or) lowering (its value)". E. Jiménez (unpublished transliteration) suggests emending the copy to ... *ú-šaq-qá 'u'* ..., which would yield the translation "... thus allowing (the balance) to rise and sink (according to his wishes)".

59. BM 65472+ rev. 15 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 128, pl. 69) has a variant here: [... *ši-q*]-a-'a'-[*t*] a-na 'bi²-ri-i la mu-[šad-din DIRI]. If the additional *lā* is indeed the only variant, the Neo-Babylonian scribe (who would have had difficulties with the first half of the line, which uses economic terminology of an earlier period) apparently understood the second half of the line as a kind of explanation for the first, along the lines of: "... (thereby) not allowing (his agents?) to give generously".

117. *a-na bīti(É)-šú ul ir-ru-bu [š]u-nu abhū(ŠEŠ.MEŠ)-šú*

115. (If) he requests taking the yield (of the debtor's field) at a time not agreed upon,

116. (then) his heir will not control his property,

117. his kin will not succeed to his estate.

I follow Lambert (1960, 133) in my interpretation of l. 115 as a virtual conditional clause, but I interpret *išál irāšši* as a verbal couple without *-ma*. The line is taken to reflect a socio-economically banal scenario resulting from a pre-harvest consumption loan payable after the harvest taken out from a crooked merchant as described in ll. 112-113.⁶⁰ Importantly, antecedent and consequent in ll. 115-117 are in neat 'talionic' correspondence: the consequence envisaged for the evil deed is not the lack of an heir, as supposed by Moran (1991, 330); it is more specifically the lack of control over the inheritance on part of the heirs – loss of legitimate property as consequence of the acquisition of illegitimate property (*biltu*). In this interpretation, the use of *irāšši biltu* in the *Šamaš Hymn* is close to the use of *tarašši biltu* in *Šimā Milka* (see above 3.): both texts warn against the consequences of gains wrongfully acquired.

Why does the *Šamaš Hymn* talk specifically about the guilty man's son, *apilsu* in l. 116? The text points us to the semantic mirroring of l. 115 in l. 116 (and l. 117) by giving us a phonetic clue in form of a micro-level variant repetition: the assonance between the word *biltu* in l. 115 and *ul ibēl apil(İBILA)-šu* in l. 116. The sound of the first word conditions the other two, providing the link between the two verses. This connection is of a type that is frequently encountered in omen sequences – we can call it connective wordplay⁶¹ – and it indicates the presence of an internal, semantic link between the two verses. The same kind of association connects the protasis and the apodosis in the following extispicy omen: *šumma(BE) tirānū(ŠÀ.NIGIN) pānū(IGI.MEŠ)-šú-nu lipā(İ.UDU) ar-m[u šarru(L)UGAL) idannin(KAL)-ma [mātu(KUR) kalāma(DÙ).A.BI) biltu(GÚ.UN) [(x) inaššī(İL)-šú* "if the front parts of the colonic spiral are covered by fat, the king will become strong and the w[hole land] will bring him a tribute" (Heeßel 2012, 36 I 28-29).

Connective wordplay plays a role also in the make-up of the first triplet in our passage from the *Šamaš Hymn*: *mu-šad-din at-ru* (l. 113) is phonetically related to *[a]r-rat nišī(UN.MEŠ) i-kaš-šad-su* (l. 114). The assonance reflects a semantic connection between the two lines shedding light on the mechanism of retributive justice in the *Šamaš Hymn*: owing to the dishonest merchant's excessive demands (*mušaddin atr*), his lifespan is reduced (*arrat nišī ikaššassu*). I understand the expression *arrat nišī* as "the people's curse", i.e., the curses uttered by debtors against the dishonest merchant: it seems probable that what it is meant here is indeed the death of the merchant. In the *Dialogue of Pessimism*, ll. 68-69 (Lambert 1960, 148-149), the slave warns his master against the ingratitude of borrowers: "they will ea[t] your grain, curse [you] without ceasing and deprive you of the interest on [your] grain" (*uṭṭatke[a] ikeke[alū an]a kâša ittanamzar[ūka] u b[ub]ulli uṭṭatika uballaqūnik[ka]*). In the

60. The same topic is treated in the *Dialogue of Pessimism* (Lambert 1960, 148), ll. 62-69.

61. In general on wordplay in divinatory texts, see Noegel 2007, 9-26 and 2010. On the role of wordplay with regard to the organization of omen sequences, see Winitzer 2017, 438-449. Several examples of sound associations in omen sequences, both on the horizontal (protasis-apodosis) and on the vertical (sequences of interrelated omens) level, are treated in De Zorzi 2014, 194-199.

Šamaš Hymn, *arrat niši ikaššassu* could mean that Šamaš' punishment against the fraudulent lender brings about the fulfilment of those curses. Connective wordplay thus links antecedent and consequent both in ll. 112-114 and ll. 115-117. By playing with similarity and contrast between contiguous textual units, the text points out that the consequence is appropriate to the deed by showing that the consequence resembles the deed. An interest in symmetry in fact pervades the whole passage: the internal link between ll. 115-117 and ll. 112-114 is underscored by the grammatical parallelism between *ina lā ūmišu* and *ina lā adannišu* at the juncture between the two triplets. Another link between these two triplets is represented by the close phonetic association between l. 112 *e-pi-š-si-[p-t]* (šš lpt) and l. 115 *i-ra-š-si bil-ta* (šš blt): also in this case the phonetic relationship hints at a semantic connection between practicing trickery (*šilipṭu*) and getting illegitimate gain (*biltu*).

This interest in symmetry can be further appreciated if one looks at the next four lines of the hymn:⁶²

118. *um-ma-ni ki-nu na-din še-em ina [kab-r]im pān(pi) ú-šat-tar dum-q[ū]*⁶³
 119. *tāb(DÜG.GA)*⁶⁴ *eli(UGU) Šamaš(dUTU) balāta(TI.LA) ut-ta[r]*
 120. *ú-rap-pa-áš kim-ta*⁶⁵ *meš-ra-^ra^r i-ra-áš-š[ū]*
 121. *ki-ma mé(A.MEŠ)*⁶⁶ *naq-bi da-ri-i zēr(NUMUN)-[šū] da-[r]*

118. The honest merchant who weighs out loans (of corn) *b[y the maximum standar]d*,
 thus *multiplying kindness*,
 119. It is pleasing to Šamaš: he will prolong his life.
 120. He will enlarge his family, gain wealth,
 121. like the water of a never-failing spring [his] descendants will never fail.

As already noted by Moran (1991, 330) and Nurullin (2014, 218-219), the consequences of the crooked merchant's wrongdoing in ll. 112-117 are contrasted with the reward of the honest one in these lines. By making excessive demands (*mušaddin atri*, l. 113) the dishonest merchant brings upon himself a reduction of his lifespan (*arrat niši ikaššassu* l. 114), while the honest merchant who grants

62. Currently, these lines can be reconstructed on the basis of four manuscripts: K 3182+ iii 6-9 (Lambert 1960, pl. 34 ms. A), 83-1-18 472 ii 11-12 (= 118-119) (Lambert 1960, pl. 35 ms. C), and Si 15 iii 13-16 (Lambert 1960, pl. 36 ms. i); BM 134517 obv. 1-4 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 131, pl. 100, Neo-Assyrian). The Late Babylonian school-exercise tablet BM 101558 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, plate 102) quotes ll. 118-121.
 63. Variants: Si 15 iii 13 (Lambert 1960, pl. 36 ms. i) reads '*ki^r-ni*'; BM 101558: 7 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, pl. 102) reads *ki-i-ni*; 83-1-18 472 ii 11 has [...-r]i pa-an. An unpublished manuscript from Sippar (courtesy Enrique Jiménez) calls into question Lambert's *ina [kab-r]im*, but it is in need of collation. An alternative possible reading of the second half of the line could be *ú-šat-tar dumqu*, to be interpreted in a commercial context as "(duly) noting credit".
 64. BM 134517 obv. 2 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 131, pl. 100); Si 15 iii 14 (Lambert 1960, pl. 36 ms. i) has *ta-a-ab*; on K 3182+ iii 7 this part is broken but the end of GA is still visible [DÜG.G]A (Lambert 1960, 133 reads here [*ta-a-b*]i); BM 101558: 8 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, pl. 102) is broken at the beginning: both [*ta-a-b*]i and [DÜG.G]A seem possible.
 65. BM 101558: 9 (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 140, pl. 102): *kim-tum*.
 66. BM 134517 obv. 4: KI A.MEŠ (George – Taniguchi 2019 n. 131, pl. 100).

loans fairly (l. 118) is granted a long life (*balāta uttar*, l. 119). As observed by Moran (1991, 330), the similarity of language between the two passages – l. 113 *nādin šiqāti ... mušaddin atri*, l. 118 *nādin še'im ... ušattar dumqu* – underscores the difference of conduct between the honest and the dishonest merchant. In both passages, Šamaš' retribution has a social aspect: it concerns the man's family (*apilšu*, l. 116, *kimtu*, l. 120) rather than the man himself. The dishonest merchant, who takes his debtor's yield before the agreed time, is punished by the lack of control over his inheritance on part of his heirs, whereas the honest merchant will see his family and his wealth multiply. There is a clear contrast between *irašši bilta* (l. 115) and *mešrā irašši* (l. 120), i.e., between illegitimate and legitimate property.⁶⁷ As in ll. 112-117, this section is bound together by assonance and connective wordplay: *ú-šat-tar* (l. 118) is associated with *ut-ta[r]* (l. 119), *ki-nu na-din še-em* (l. 118) is associated with *kim-ta meš-ra-'a'* (l. 120). The final line 121 represents an expansion of l. 120 both on the semantic and phonetic levels: *kim-ta meš-ra-'a'* (l. 120) is phonetically related to l. 121 *ki-ma mé(A.MEŠ)*.

5. Conclusion

This paper offers a new interpretation of a *crux interpretum* in the *Šamaš Hymn's* ll. 112-117. The reading for our passage that is offered here reveals a micro-structure that corresponds to that of other *exempla* of retributive justice presented by the hymn.⁶⁸ The quasi-talionic correspondence between the deeds of the merchants (and other paradigmatic types of socio-economic actors) envisioned by the text and the compensation meted out for them by the sun god – sometimes through the agency of public opinion (*arrat nišš*) – finds parallels in other works of erudite literature that deal with the topic of retributive justice.⁶⁹ In the *Advice for a Prince*, for instance, a ruler's imagined misdeed is avenged by a misfortune befalling the ruler that mirrors the original misdeed: e.g., “if he gives the fodder of a native of Sippar, Nippur, or Babylon to (his own) thoroughbreds, [those] thoroughbreds which have eaten the fodder will be led away under the yoke of the enemy” (*mār sippar nippuri u bābili imrāšunu ana mūr nisqi šarāki mūr nisqi šūt imrāšunu ikulū ana šimitti ajjābi irreddū*; Lambert 1960, 112-113 ll. 31-34; Cole 1996, 273).⁷⁰ ‘Mirroring punishment’ is also found in the *Esangila Chronicle*, where the punishment of ‘evil kings’ relates to the nature of the kings’ misdeeds: for instance, Šulgi's infringement of rules of purity in the cult leads to his being punished by a disfiguring skin disease.⁷¹ In several cases, the *Esangila Chronicle* links the ‘antecedent’ (the misdeed to be punished) with the ‘consequent’ (the punishment) not through semantic parallelism, but through repetition of lexical items or phonetic sequences.⁷² One such case describes the circumstances of Utu-ḫegal's death: “[Utu]-ḫegal, the fisherman, carried out (*ubil*) criminal designs on his (Marduk's) city, and the river (Euphrates) [carried] [off] (*itbal*) his corpse” (*Utu-ḫegal šukudakku*

67. For a possible quotation of these lines in an astrological omen, see De Zorzi 2015, 253-254.

68. Other examples will be discussed in detail in a forthcoming publication.

69. This ‘Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang’ is a central concern of wisdom literature in general.

70. The text contains many more statements built along the same lines: see Lambert 1960, 110-115.

71. For the functioning of the retributive justice in the *Esangila Chronicle*, see Schaudig 2012, 436-438. In Schaudig's terminology, these are “illustrative Spiegelstrafen”. On Šulgi's skin disease and his negative portrayal in first millennium BCE pseudo-historical texts, see Cavigneaux 2005.

72. Schaudig 2012: 437 (“verbale Spiegelstrafen”).

qāssu ana ālišu ana lemutti ubilma nāru šalamtašu itbal; Grayson 1975, 150 ms. A Ass. 13955 rev. 29).⁷³ The verbal pair *ubil/itbal* in, respectively, premise and consequent, reflects the close relationship between the evil behaviour of the king and the punishment that inevitably follows.⁷⁴

In the passage from the *Šamaš Hymn* discussed here (ll. 112-117) there is both semantic parallelism between the deed and its retribution, and the phrasing used contains variant repetitions on the phonetic level that underscore the connection between the two. Variant repetition between contiguous textual units guide us to the intended interpretation of the passage as a reference to perfect ‘talionic,’ that is, ‘repetitive’ punishment meted out by the sun god. By following the path of similarity, the text gets from *biltu* in l. 115 to *ibêl apilšu* in l. 116. The sound of the first word conditions the other two, providing the link between these two lines of the poem and explaining why the son of the fraudulent lender is punished rather than the sinner himself. Rather than being inconsistent with the sun god’s supposed perfect justice, these lines actually demonstrate its perfectly symmetric consistency. The theological message is coded into the text and can be deciphered by looking at the poetic structure of the passage: the poetic structure is part of the message itself.

The wider ramifications of this phenomenon cannot be discussed here exhaustively. Suffice it to point out that we are not dealing with mere ornamental wordplay. Rather, the linguistic mirroring of an antecedent in a consequent is (also) the reflex of a worldview that is prepared to read an extra-linguistic (‘real-world’) relevance into such cases of (variant) repetition.⁷⁵ This worldview finds its clearest expression in divinatory literature, where protasis and apodosis systematically mirror each other through ‘variant repetition’ on the phonetic, grammatical, lexical, and semantic level.⁷⁶ Our example reveals that also literary texts could be constructed along the same lines. In conclusion, I would argue that we have much to gain by also approaching Mesopotamian literature, not just divination, as pervaded by structures of analogical thinking and argumentation through similarity.⁷⁷ Future research into variant repetition in literary and scholarly texts will yield further insights into this particular aspect of Ancient Mesopotamian erudition.

73. On Utu-ḫegal’s death in the *Esangila Chronicle* and its parallels in the divinatory literature, see De Zorzi 2016, 133-134.

74. See also Pomponio 1998 for the section of the chronicle narrating the fate of Amar-Sîn (ll. 30-31).

75. Of central relevance here are Noegel’s observations on the functions of punning beyond the realm of literary and rhetorical flourish: Noegel 2014, 38.

76. In omens, the correspondence between sign and prediction is based on a likeness of some kind between them on the semantic, phonemic or graphic level. The contiguity of sign and prediction in an omen phrased as a conditional clause is homologous to a syntactic parallelism that promotes the perception of equivalence between its two parts even in the absence of an obvious semantic connection. In the same way, parallelistic juxtaposition enhances or even creates equivalence in omens. Omen compendia, which consist entirely of such constructed juxtapositions, are a repository of parallelisms. In these parallelisms, the likeness shared by an element of the antecedent with its corresponding partial repetition in the consequent is attributed referential value – the predictive power of the omen rests on their similarity-based interconnection.

77. Other case-studies like the one presented in this paper are in preparation in the context of the project REPAC led by the present author at the University of Vienna (2019-2024).

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