

BM 118796: A DEDICATION TEXT ON AN 'AMULET'

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BM 118796 is a thin plaque in the familiar 'amulet' shape, with a lug for suspension at the top, which is perforated transversely as indicated by the broken line in the drawing (Figs. 1 and 2). The diameter of the hole through the lug is about 3.5 to 3.75 mm, and a short length of corroded wire remains in the hole, about 2.5 mm in cross-section, protruding about 5 mm from one side of the lug. Both amulet and wire are of copper or a copper alloy, and weigh 114 gr. The amulet itself measures 11.3 x 7.7 cm; its maximum thickness is about 1 mm, tapering towards the base, where the metal has been eaten away (especially at the right-hand corner), although it does not seem that anything substantial is missing from the original length. The lug is thicker, spreading regularly out to a maximum of 7 mm, so as to accommodate the perforation. It projects 1.6 cm above the top of the plaque, and its width varies from 1.8 cm at the top to about 2.2 cm where it joins the plaque.

As Fig. 1 shows, the upper section of the Obverse is occupied by the figures of four deities: the main outlines are supplied by quite deeply incised grooves, and within these the detail is indicated with extremely fine, shallow incisions, executed with great skill. This scene, and the cuneiform text below it, are quite well preserved, although the metal is worn away and pock-marked, especially towards the base. The Reverse, however, is very badly corroded, so that the cuneiform signs are little more than circular depressions, making it usually impossible to know if they were meant to be vertical, horizontal or diagonal. I have only been able to 'copy' these wedges where their composite configuration suggested a complete sign, and the sign makes sense in relation to others: there are therefore long stretches of text on the Reverse which I have left blank, in spite of the presence of 'wedges'. If an exact duplicate of this section of the text were identified, it would no doubt be possible to match the signs, wedge by wedge, but I see little prospect of deciphering much more of the text in any other way.

The text of the Reverse is written inversely, with the lug of the amulet at the bottom. This may simply reflect the practice with clay tablets, but it would also be the

most convenient arrangement if the amulet were hanging by its lug against a wall, with the Obverse outwards, so that the reader would pivot it upwards to read the Reverse.

BM 118796 was published in photograph by E.A.W. Budge in his book *Amulets and Superstitions* (London, 1930), p.98. I take from Borger *HKL* I, p.38, the information that the book was also published in New York in 1961 as *Amulets and Talismans*, that a (good) photograph of the Obverse was reproduced in H.W.F. Saggs *The Greatness that was Babylon* (Fig. 56 B), and that the text was mentioned by E. Reiner in *JNES* 19 (1960), p.155, who correctly characterized it as a votive text. Mr. C.B.F. Walker tells me that nothing can be deduced from the Museum's acquisition records as to the provenance of the amulet; internal criteria suggest that the text refers to the Nabû Temple at Kalhu. My attention was drawn to the text some years ago by A.K. Grayson, and since (as he rightly perceived) it has resemblances to legal dedication texts, I have followed his suggestion that an edition should be given of what can be deciphered. I would like to express my gratitude to him, to John Curtis for advice on the description of the amulet, and to Irving Finkel for supplying me with a surprisingly informative xero-copy of the two sides of the object, on which my drawing of the scene is based.

The scene

On the left a god (A) stands on a bird- or fish-tailed dragon, facing a suppliant goddess who stands on a brick dais (B). Behind her comes another god (C), standing on another horned dragon, and followed by a second suppliant goddess (D). Each of the deities holds a ring (of beads?) in the left hand, except for C, who holds a wedge-shaped stylus and is presumably Nabû, to whom the dedication is made. To judge from his beast, god A is presumably Marduk, who is perhaps present as Nabû's father, and is mentioned in one of the surviving curses of the Reverse; although it should be remarked that the associations of the bird-tailed dragon remain rather obscure (cf. *RIA* III p.489 *Göttersymbole* 1. *Löwendrache mit Vogelschwanz*). Nabû's dragon is the same as the beast on which he stands in the Maltai sculptures (see W. Bachmann, *Felsreliefs in Assyrien*, *WVDOG* 52, Taf. 30b, also holding a stylus). Whether the suppliant goddesses have any individual identity is less clear, but if they do then one of them might be Gula, who is likewise mentioned in one of the surviving curses. However, in the absence of any diagnostic attributes, this is far from certain.

If the presence of one more of the deities is connected with their mention in the curses, the association of scene with text reminds one of the symbols on Babylonian *kudurrus*, which can sometimes be closely matched with the deities listed in the curse formulae. On the other hand, the position of the scene across the top of the Obverse is very reminiscent of the seal impressions on Neo-Assyrian conveyance texts (including dedication texts), and this may also have had some influence on the placing of the scene, if not actually on its contents.

The text

By comparison with the delicacy of the incised scene above, the execution of the cuneiform signs is rather clumsy. The text is ruled off after each pair of lines: there is good reason for such a ruling after the introductory formula in ll. 1 and 2, but thereafter the position of the ruling is meaningless, and I have therefore omitted it in the transliteration which follows.

Obverse

- 1 a-na ^dPA EN GAL-e [U]-šú ¹aš-šur-re-šu-u-a
 2 a-na TI.LA ZI^{MEŠ}-šú GÍD UD^{ME}-šú
 3 É ina ^{URU}kal-hi É 30 ANŠE A.ŠÀ
 4 za-ku-ti ina[?] URU.ŠE ma[?]-al-la-ši
 5 ¹rém-ni-^d15 ^{LÚ}ENGAR 3 ZI ^{1d}PA-ŠU.2-DIB-bat
 6 ^{1d}PA-NIGIN-hír ¹šil-^dPA ^{LÚ}SIPA 3 ZI
 7 a-di UDU^{MEŠ}-šú ¹ka-par-DINGIR ^{LÚ}NINDA
 8 É 12 ANŠE A.ŠÀ ina URU šá ¹İR-15 ^{LÚ}ENGAR [x] ([])
 9 [LÚ x x] LUGAL ¹a-x[
 10 (traces only)

Reverse

- 11-13 (illegible)
 14 ¹na-šá- x x x [
 15-16 (illegible)
 17 a-[
 18 [x x]-ru-qu ^{LÚ}[
 19 []ur[?] ú šam [
 20-23 (illegible)
 24 ^dAMAR.UTU LUGAL AN-e u KI-tim še-ret-[s]u[?]
 25 ka-bit-[tu] šá la pa-[ša-ri]
 26 ^dgu-la a-[zu]-gal-la-ti na[?] x-x []
 27 NAM[?] GAL.GAL [
 28 (illegible)
 29 [] qar-du da-pi-nu
 30 [] ina ^{GIŠ}TUKUL^{MEŠ}-šú li- x (x) -ma[?]

Obverse

To Nabû, great lord, his lord, Aššur-rēšua [has dedicated] for the preservation of his life and the prolongation of his days: a house in the city of Kalhu; an estate of 30

homers of tax-exempt land in⁷ the village of Mallaši(?); Rēmāni-Ištar, a farmer, (and) 3 persons (of his family?); Nabû-qata-šabat, Nabû-(u)pahhir, (and) Šil-Nabû, a shepherd (and) 3 persons (of his family?), with his sheep; Kapar-ili, a baker; an estate of 12 homers of land in the town of Urad-Ištar, the farmer, (long break).

Reverse

May Marduk, king of heaven and earth [impose on him] a heavy punishment, [may] Gula, the great physician, [visit him with a curse/illness] which cannot be cured
May [GN], doughty hero, [] smite(?) him with his weapons.

Detailed notes

1-2: I have restored [has dedicated] in the translation, which was either omitted by the scribe, or somewhere in the illegible part of the Reverse, after the enumeration of the property being dedicated.

18-19: while the signs in l. 18 look as though they belong to the list of PNs, the rather clear repeated *ú* signs in l. 19 seem likeliest to come from a verbal form starting *ú-šam-* and hence to be within the final curse section (cf., e.g., *šá ú-šam-za-ku* in *ADD* 640: 16). Not enough survives to enable a decision.

30: the line might end with *li- x -tu* but then we should expect *-šú-nu* in place of *-šú*. The *qardu dāpinu* was possibly Adad or Nabû, but other gods, e.g. Ninurta, cannot be ruled out.

General comments

In its structure the text is not dissimilar to ND 5550, most recently edited in *FNALD* as No. 15. Each text begins with the name of the god (in both cases Nabû at Kalhu, to judge from l. 3 here), and then gives the name of the dedicant followed by a list of the property. Like other dedications (e.g. *FNALD* No. 16), the texts conclude with some curses against anyone attempting to dispute the deed. On the other hand, it seems likely that this is only a display version of the act of dedication, and that a more formal and legally valid sealed conveyance also existed on a clay tablet: this plaque has no date or witnesses, nor could the previous owner have acknowledged his consent by impressing his seal.

The similarities to other Neo-Assyrian dedications from the 7th century suggest that the text is of 1st millennium date. The curious configuration of the *A* sign in ll. 1-2 and the *šá* in l. 8 are only the scribe's rather half-hearted concession to the fact that he is writing a formal text on metal; he is rather better with his *lu* and SIPA signs, but these are mixed in with the abbreviated Neo-Assyrian LÚ, and are in any case 'monumental'

rather than older cursive forms. Hence we can only say that the text is of Neo-Assyrian date.

The Aššur-rēšūa who makes the dedication could be the scribe of the queen, a eunuch, who is listed among the witnesses of the land sale text *TCL* 9 No. 58 from Dūr-Šarrukēn (= *FNALD* No. 2). He could also be the well-known author of letters to Sargon about the northern frontier (cf. a list of references in *CTN* 3, p.234). Another possible identification for Aššur-rēšūa is the homonymous priest of Ninurta from Kalhu who wrote *ABL* 493, a letter dating either from the reign of Esarhaddon or the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal. There are no other probable identifications for the PNs, which are either too rare or (in the case of Urad-Ištar) too common. For the sake of completeness I mention the existence of Nabû-qata-šabat in *CTN* 2 No. 155 I 5, from Kalhu, and Urad-Ištars in *CTN* 3 (p.279a), but I do not propose an identification with any of these.