

## THE SEALED BURIAL CHAMBER

Karlheinz Deller - Heidelberg

The article *A Neo-Assyrian Text Describing a Royal Funeral* published recently by John McGinnis in this journal<sup>1</sup> contains a phrase which calls for comment, "obverse, col. I" 8'-12': <sup>NA</sup>*a-ra-nu* <sup>9</sup>*a-šar ta-aš-lil-t[i]-šú* <sup>10</sup>*ina URUDU dan-ni* <sup>11</sup>*KÁ-šá ak-nu-uk-ma* <sup>12</sup>*ú-dan-ni-na ši-pat-sa*, "I sealed the entrance to the sarcophagus, his resting place with tough bronze and cast for it a potent spell".

E. Ebeling had translated this passage by "den Sarg, den Ort seiner Ruhe, mit starkem Erz versiegelte ich seine Öffnung, machte kräftig seine Beschwörung"<sup>2</sup>. In his review of Ebeling's *Tod und Leben W. von Soden* paraphrased it by using these words: "Der steinerne Sarg wurde durch ein schweres Bronzeschloß und eine Fluchbeschwörung gegen Grabräuber und Dämonen zugleich gesichert"<sup>3</sup>. These three scholars agree in interpreting *ši-pat-sa* as *šiptu*, "incantation" plus possessive suffix 3rd feminine singular (corresponding to *KÁ-šá* in the preceding line).

The *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* offers, however, a divergent interpretation: "I sealed the opening of the stone coffin, his resting-place, with strong copper and reinforced the seal" (transcribed *ši-pat-sa*, *CAD A/II*, p.231b); "I sealed the opening of the stone sarcophagus with heavy copper (bands) and made the tags secure" (transcribed *šipassa*, *CAD K*, p.137a). It is obvious that in this dictionary *ši-pat-sa* is con-

<sup>1</sup> SAAB I/1, 1987, pp.1-12, pl. I. The present situation of the tablet goes beyond the join K. 6323+K. 7856 shown on pl. I. T. Kwasman succeeded, in September 1987, in joining two more fragments, +K. 14241 (unpublished)+80-7-19, 122 (*ADD* 978). A new edition of the enlarged text will be published by Kwasman in another issue of this journal. After careful inspection of the tablet I. L. Finkel came to the conclusion that obverse and reverse are to be interchanged and Kwasman followed Finkel's suggestion. Obverse col. I has now to be counted as reverse col. IV.

<sup>2</sup> E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier. I. Teil: Texte*, Berlin und Leipzig 1931, p.57.

<sup>3</sup> W. von Soden, *ZA* 43, 1936, p.255.

sidered an accusative of *šipassu*, “clay tag, bulla”, without any possessive suffix. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, lemma *šipassu*, “gesiegelte Tonbulle” (p.1244a) does not list the reference in question.

This note aims to adduce corroborating evidence to support CAD’s interpretation of *ši-pat-sa*. As for *ina erî danni bābša aknuk-ma* a new attempt will be made to arrive at a more satisfactory translation.

### 1. *ši-pat-sa*, “clay tag”, not “its incantation”

a) The spelling of *ši-pat-sa* does not necessitate separating this reference from other attestations of the word *šipassu*. At least two analogous spellings (with *-t*) occur: *ši-pat-su* MSL 7, 104:478 (Hh X 478) and *ši-pat-su* CT 11, 46 II 50 (*Diri* IV 135); they are to be explained as an incorrect application of the graphemic principles which govern the orthography of suffixes after dentals<sup>4</sup>.

b) The ending *-sa* can easily be explained as accusative singular *šipassa* while <sup>NA</sup>*a-ra-nu* though logical object is to be considered syntactically a nominative (*casus pendens*, GAG § 128c).

c) The verb *kanāku* with object *bābu*, “to seal a gate” conveys the idea of using clay tags which the seal can be rolled onto. There is at least one reference in which the terms *bābu* and *šipassu* occur together: *i-na ba-a-bi ù a-pá-tim ši-pá-sú id-a*, “attach clay tags to the gate and to the windows”, TC 1, 30:9-10 (OA)<sup>5</sup>.

### 2. *bābu* “gate of the burial chamber”, not “opening of the stone coffin”

a) The opening of the stone coffin or sarcophagus might possibly be called *bāb arāni* but this term definitely does not apply to its stone lid where the sealing would be expected<sup>6</sup>.

b) It is, therefore, more convenient to stick to the basic meaning of *bābu*, “gate”. Once the entrance to the chamber in which the sarcophagus has been placed is safeguarded not only the stone coffin but also the funeral gifts are sufficiently protected<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>) Compare also the spelling *li-šal-bit-su-ma* for *lišalbissū-ma* discussed by K. Watanabe, ASJ 6, 1984, p.112.

<sup>5</sup>) See M.T. Larsen, BibMes 6, 1977, p.95 and p.102, fn.32.

<sup>6</sup>) For a description of the stone lid of Šamši-Adad V’s sarcophagus see A. Haller, *Die Gräber und Gräfte von Assur*, WDOG 65, Berlin 1954, pp.175f.

<sup>7</sup>) The fact that these gifts are mentioned ll.13’-24’ after the report on the sealing of the gate does not preclude that they were placed inside the burial chamber before closing its gate.

1987]

c) It can be inferred from the text that both a metal device (*ina erî danni*) and a certain quantity of moist clay (*ši-pat-sa*<sup>7</sup>) were needed to seal the *bābu*.

d) In a recent study<sup>8</sup> R.L. Zettler has shown how (gates and) doors were sealed: a metal hook fastened to the door was hooked around the door knob that was anchored by means of a plaque into the door jamb. Hook and knob were then surrounded by a clay covering which the seal was rolled onto.

e) Referring to Zettler's analysis of clay bullae in which the metal hook has left its impression E. Leichty studied the lexical material related to door sealing<sup>9</sup>. The result of this investigation makes it virtually certain that *namzaqum* denotes the "latch-hook" (not "key", the meaning offered by *AHw* and *CAD*). This hook "appears to be made of bronze ... or copper" (*loc. cit.*, p.191); "the weight of a bronze *namzaqum* is given as three and half minas" (p.192).

f) There can be little doubt that the sealings depicted by Zettler (pp.215-234, figs.5-16) were called *šipassu*. As far as they display impressions of metal objects these were left by the bronze or copper latch-hooks. Hence, in all likelihood, *ina erî danni* also points to these hooks.

<sup>8</sup>) R.L. Zettler, *Sealings as Artifacts of Institutional Administration in Ancient Mesopotamia*, JCS 39, 1987, pp.197-240.

<sup>9</sup>) E. Leichty, *Omens from Doorknobs*, JCS 39, 1987, pp.190-196.