A LETTER FROM THE ŠANGŪ OF KURBAIL

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BM 79099 is a letter to a Neo-Assyrian king now in the British Museum and registered as part of the Sippar collection, though it is almost certainly from Kuyunjik originally. The existence of the tablet has been known for many years but no copy has ever been published, though S. Parpola gave a transliteration of the introductory lines in LAS II pp. 261-2. I am most grateful to Professor Parpola for his encouragement to publish the tablet, for his suggestions on details of the text, and for sending print-outs from the relevant entries of the computer files in Helsinki. I would also like to thank J.N. Postgate, J.V. Kinnier Wilson, K. Deller and F.M. Fales for their comments.

There can be no doubt that the letter must be associated with ABL 413, in which Nabû-šar-iddin writes to the king about problems in the manufacture of textiles, and in which Apīlaya is again mentioned in charge of weavers of Arbail who are coming to Kurbail to make kusîtu-garments. In ABL 413 it is specified that they are weavers of Ištar of Arbail, and accordingly both these letters will be of interest for the information they provide on the production of īškāru for the central administration through provincial temples. I must thank Professor Deller for the observation that the fragmentary ABL 1243 is most likely from the same correspondent as (I) the greetings formula, though damaged, is probably the same and (II), it also deals with the temple of Adad.

The bottom of the tablet is broken off and it now measures 4.4 x 6.7 cm; there were probably a further 3-4 lines on the obverse and about 9 on the reverse.

BM 79099

Transliteration

Obverse
1 a-na LUGAL EN LUGALMES [EN-ia]
2 ĠR-ka 1DUMU.UŠŠ-iā1
3 ĠSANGA ša URU Kur-ba-il
4 lu-u DI a-na LUGAL EN-ia
5 ĠIM ĠŠa-la
6 ĠGAŠAN-rat na-kan-ti
7 DINGIRMES a-šī-bu-tu É.DUR.HÉ.NUN.NA
8 a-na LUGAL EN-ia lik-ru-bu
9 lu-bal-li-tu tu-ub lib-bi
10 tu-ub ÚZUAMES a-na LUGAL EN-ia
11 li-di-nu ÚDMES ār-ku-u-te
12 MU.ANAMES ā-ra-a-te
13 Ġ"a-na LUGAL EN-ia liš-ru-ku
14 [ x x x x ] ĠBa-si-a
15 [a-na LUGAL EN-ia ú-s[a x x ]
16 [ x x x x ] la û? [ x x ]
17 [ x x ] (la) i-ma]-ga-ru-[u-ni]

Reverse
1' [ x x x x x x x x x ] x [ x x ]
2' [ x x x x x x la] āš? x
3' Ġ"r [ x x ĠUŠ].BARAMES
4' TUG la-b[u-su la] i-di-nu
5' i-su-ri [LUGAL be-l]i i-qa-bi
6' ma-a ina la-[bi]-ri
7' TA* a-a-[a i-t]a-nu
8' ĠĖŠ.GAR TA* lib-[bi É].GAL
9' i-du-nu ĠLUŠ.BARAMES
10' DUMU URU Arba-il i-ma-hi-šu

Translation
To the king, the lord of kings [my lord], your servant Aplāya, the šangū of Kurbail. May it be well with the king my lord. May Adad, Šala (and) Šarrat-nakanti, the gods who dwell in the Edurhenunna, pray for the king my lord (and) cause (him) to live. May they bestow soundness of mind and body on the king my lord. May they grant long days and extended years to the king my lord. [...] Basiya [...] are not willing [...] (long
break)...] the weavers have [not] given the clothes. Perhaps the king my lord will say “From where did they give (it) in the past?” They give iskāru from the palace. The weavers of Arbail weave it.

Notes

Obv. 1: The use of the formula “to the king, the lord of kings, my lord” makes it likely that this letter is addressed to Ashurbanipal (cf. Pfeiffer, JAOS 43 [1923], p. 27 fn. 8) though most of the letters with this formula are from Bēl-ibni and in connection with Elam.

2: This Aplaya must be the same as that of ABL 413 rev. 5 (see above).

3: The šangū of Kurbail is also attested in CTN 2, 15.34, 35.21 and 36 rev.7.

6: Sarrat-nakanti also occurs in CT 46, 51.29, a late Assyrian list of temples and gods, but as she is otherwise unknown, it is possible that the name is an epithet of Šala rather than that of a separate deity.

7: That the temple of Adad in Kurbail was named Edurhenunna is known also from the Göttteradressbuch l. 155 (B. Menzel, AT, T. 158). It was also the name of the god’s temple in Assur and so another example of the temples of a major god in different cities all having the same name (like the Ebabbara’s of Šamaš and the Ezida’s of Nabû).

14: The first sign after the break looks like an [a]n but could be a Personenkeil crossing a horizontal wedge from the preceding sign. The name Basiya also occurs in unpublished documents from Assur, as well as in Neo-Babylonian documents, where, according to Oelsner, it may be hypocoristic for DN-balassu-iqbi (OLZ 76 [1983], p. 250 on no. 139). On the other hand, the presence of a personal name does not seem indispensable from the remainder of the contents (Fales), and solutions like qa-ba-si-a may be tentatively suggested (Deller).

16: la ú-[da], “I do not know” is a possibility (Deller).

Rev. 4': la-b[u-su] is an Assyrian form for lubuṣtu though perhaps not the most common one; see AHw lubuṣtu 2c, CAD lubuṣtu 1a.

8': For the Neo-Assyrian iskāru, see J.N. Postgate, TCAE, pp. 94-110, and especially p. 94 with ABL 209, another text dealing with the iskāru of weavers. For the minor restorations of the line see ABL 413 rev. 2.

10': In form the verb i-ma-hi-šu looks like a N-stem but this cannot be correct in the context. On the other hand, it is well known that one of the specialized meanings of the G-stem of mahāšu is a technical term to do with weaving (CAD mahāšu 3a, AHw mahāšu G.3) and our form here must be from this. Of course, we might normally have expected a form *imah(h)ašu rather than *imah(h)išu, but a similar vocalization of the G-stem, a-ma-hi-š[i], is already attested in Neo-Assyrian in BWL 162.35 (Fable of the Tamarisk and the Palm). I would like to thank Professor Parpola for the suggestion that as in this passage too the meaning is “to weave”, we may be right in distinguishing a split in Neo-Assyrian into two independent verbs, one (a/a) meaning “to strike” and one (ii/i)
“to weave”. Nevertheless, it must be noted that an /a/ to /i/ shift is well documented for the Gt of the verb in contexts where the meaning is unquestionably “to fight” (i.e. imdahis for *imdahas, see CAD mahasu 5b): this is explained by von Soden (GAG §92.b) as under the influence of the Dt and Şt forms of the verb, and it is possible that the formation of a G-stem of mahasu with an /i/ was in turn influenced by the modified Gt. Such an analysis does not conflict with the theory of a split into two verbs, and may indeed help to clarify the process by which it happened.
Fig. 1
PLATE I

BM 79099
Obverse

BM 79099
Reverse