

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 originally¹. 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. 261-2². 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 Aplāya is again mentioned in charge of weavers of Arbail who are coming to Kurbail to make *kusītu*-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 *iškāru* 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.

¹ See J. Reade, *Archaeology and the Kuyunjik Archives*, in: K. Veenhof (ed.), *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*, 1986 (33rd R.A.I. [1983]), p. 213; and p. XXX f. in his introduction to E. Leichty, *Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum VI: Sippar I* (1986).

² Cf. also K. Deller, *Or* 56 (1987), p. 181.

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Transliteration

Obverse

- 1 *a-na* LUGAL EN LUGAL^{MEŠ} [EN-*ia*]
 2 ÌR-*ka* 1DUMU.UŠ-^Γ*ia*^Γ
 3 LÚSANGA *ša* URU *Kur-ba-il*
 4 *lu-u* DI *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia*
 5 ^dIM ^dŠa-*la*
 6 ^dGAŠAN-*rat na-kan-ti*
 7 DINGIR^{MEŠ} *a-ši-bu-tu* É.DÚR.HÉ.NUN.NA
 8 *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia* *lik-ru-bu*
 9 *lu-bal-li-tu tu-ub lib-bi*
 10 *tu-ub* UZU^{MEŠ} *a-na* LUGAL EN-*ia*
 11 *li-di-nu* UD^{MEŠ} *ár-ku-u-te*
 12 MU.AN.NA^{MEŠ} *dà-ra-a-te*
 13 ^Γ*a-na* LUGAL EN^Γ-[*i*]a *liš-ru-ku*
 14 [x x x x] ^{I?}*Ba-si-a*
 15 [*a-na* LUGAL EN-*i*]a *ú-s*[*a- x x*]
 16 [x x x x] *la ú?* [x x]
 17 [x x (*la*) *i-ma*]-*ga-ru*-[*u-ni*]

Reverse

- 1' [x x x x x x] x [x x]
 2' [x x x x x l]a[?] *ás*^{d?} x
 3' ^Γ*ri*^Γ [x x LÚUŠ].BAR^{MEŠ}
 4' TÚG^Γ*la-b*[*u-su la*] *i-di-nu*
 5' *i-su-ri* [LUGAL *be-l*]í *i-qa-bi*
 6' *ma-a ina la*-[*bi*]-*ri*
 7' TA* *a-a-k*[*a i-t*]a-*nu*
 8' ÉŠ.GÀR TA* *lib*-[*bi* É].GAL
 9' *i-du-nu* ^ΓLÚUŠ.BAR^{MEŠ}
 10' DUMU URU *Arba-il i-ma-hi-šu*

Translation

To the king, the lord of kings [my lord], your servant Aplāya, the *šangû* of Kurba'il. 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 *iškāru* 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 Aplāya 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: Šarrat-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 *Götteradressbuch* I. 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 *q]a-ba-si-a* may be tentatively suggested (Deller).

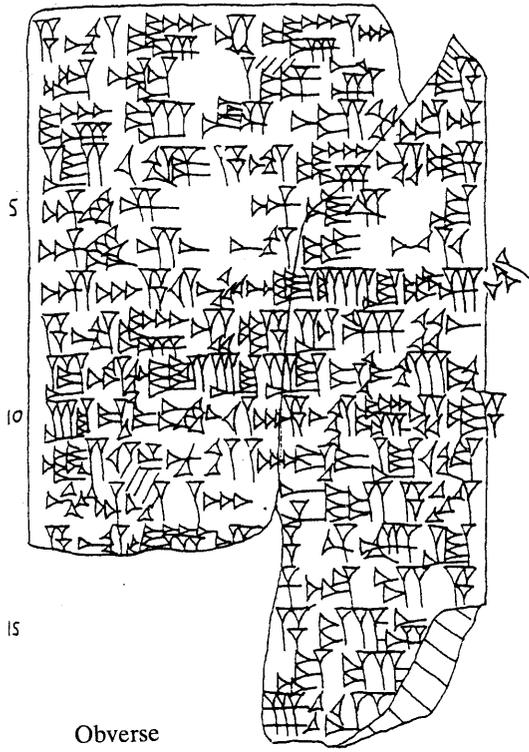
16: *la ú-[da]*, “I do not know” is a possibility (Deller).

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

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

10’: In form the verb *i-ma-hi-ṣu* 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 *mahāṣu* is a technical term to do with weaving (*CAD mahāṣu* 3a, *AHw mahāṣu* G.3) and our form here must be from this. Of course, we might normally have expected a form **imah(h)aṣu* rather than **imah(h)iṣu*, but a similar vocalization of the G-stem, *a-ma-hi-ṣ[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 (*i/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. *imdahiṣ* for **imdahaṣ*, see *CAD mahāṣu* 5b): this is explained by von Soden (*GAG* §92.b) as under the influence of the Dt and Št forms of the verb, and it is possible that the formation of a G-stem of *mahāṣu* 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.



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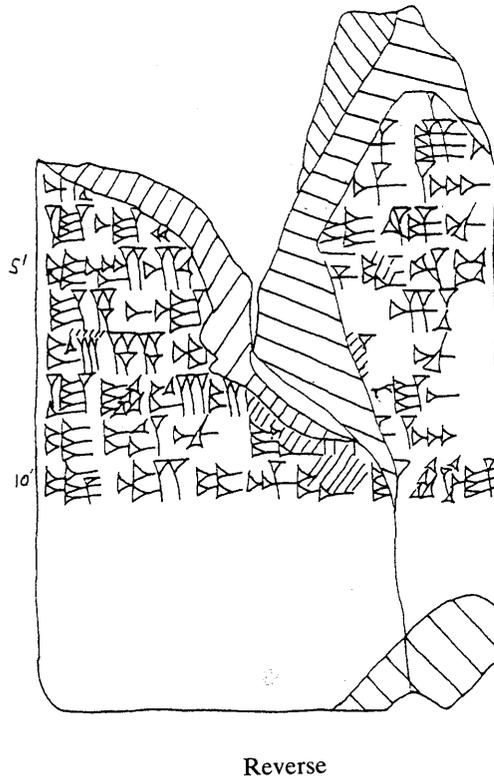
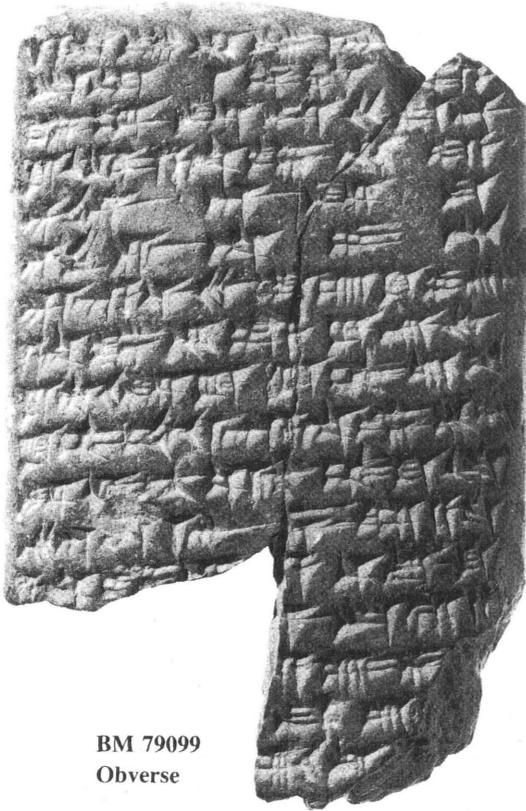


Fig. 1

PLATE I



BM 79099
Obverse

BM 79099
Reverse

