

## THE NEO-ASSYRIAN WORD FOR “QUEEN”

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The problem of how to read the Neo-Assyrian logogram for “queen”, <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL (abbreviated in <sup>MÍ</sup>KUR), has so far remained without a convincing solution. The reading *ša ekalli* proposed by B. Landsberger in the *Festschrift Baumgartner* (VT Suppl. 16, 1967), p. 187, is attractive in view of Biblical *šēgāl*, “queen”, but involves a serious phonetic difficulty. While the middle /g/ would well fit a loan from Neo-Assyrian, the initial /š/ requires Neo-Assyrian <s>, not <š>; and this is a rule without an exception<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, the reading *ekallitu* suggested by W. von Soden in ZA 45 (1939), p. 51 (cf. also LAS II [1984], p. 206 referring to <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL-tú in ABL 1291 r. 5), is clearly unacceptable because the nominative construct form of <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL with a third person suffix is <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL-šú, not -su as required by a word ending in the feminine morpheme -(a)t<sup>2</sup>. This indicates that the logogram is a genitival compound, as actually proved by a MA text recently published by S. Franke and G. Wilhelm in *Jahrbuch des Museums für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg*, 4 (1985), p. 21, 2, reading “PNF, the queen (MÍ É.GAL-li) of PN”. The reading *sinnišat ekalli* “woman of the palace” proposed by E. Weidner in AfO 17 (1954-56), p. 261, and R. Borger in BiOr 18 (1961), pp. 151-152, would fit a genitive compound and has the right kind of initial sibilant. But of course it is otherwise difficult to reconcile with the Biblical word, which, after all, clearly is a loan from <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL.

This looks like a dilemma, but there is an extremely simple way out of it. All the difficulties disappear once the Biblical word is accepted as a loan from Assyrian but its proposed ‘etymology’ *ša ekalli* is abandoned, and the logogram is read with the *Neo-*

<sup>1</sup>) See S. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*, 1974, pp. 140-141, and S. Parpola, *Assur 1* (1974), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>) Cf. <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL-šú (nominative) LAS 280, 9 and 13.

Assyrian values of its components as “the woman (MÍ) of the palace (É.GAL)”. This simple way out was already suggested in 1979 by J.N. Postgate, unfortunately only in a footnote<sup>3</sup>, where it escaped the attention of the present writer (and presumably many others as well) until it recently occurred to me independently. Since the incorrect reading /*ekallitu*/ has recently found its way even to the glossary of *SAA* 2, it seems appropriate to set the matter straight with a fully developed discussion.

As pointed out by Postgate in the footnote just referred to, “the parallelism in *ADD* 960 and 961 of *KUR(.)MÍ.MEŠ* and *KUR(.)i-sa-(a-)te*” indicates that the word for “woman” in Neo-Assyrian was not *sinništu* or *sinnissu* but *issu*. By coincidence, I had myself come to the same conclusion in a note published simultaneously with the Postgate article in *OLZ* 74 (1979), p. 34 (submitted in 1976). In this note I quoted another attestation of *i-sa-a-te* in *ABL* 203, r. 4<sup>4</sup>, and suggested that the Neo-Assyrian word, pronounced [*iššu*], may be related to the rare OB word *iššu* “woman” (*CAD* I/J, p. 267b) occurring in poetry and equated with *marhītu* “spouse”, *aššatu* “wife” and *sinništu* “woman” in synonym lists. Postgate, *loc. cit.*, suggested that the original form of the word may have been \**ištu*, but this seems unlikely since the nominative construct form of the word with 3rd person masc. suffix is regularly *MÍ-šú* /*issušu*/<sup>5</sup> not *MÍ-su*, as expected in feminine and segolate nouns of the pattern (C)VCC (cf. <sup>UZU</sup>*GABA-su* /*irassu*/, *ABRT* 2, 19, 15’, from *irtu* “breast”; *GÉME-su* /*amassu*/, *ND* 2325, 4 [Iraq 17 pl. 24, 1], from *amtu* “female servant”; <sup>GIS</sup>*IG-sa* /*dalassa*/, *TIM* 9, 54, rev.10, and <sup>GIS</sup>*IG-su* /*dalassu*/ *KAV* 215, r. 9, from \**daltu/dassu* “door”)<sup>6</sup>.

The construct form of *issu* before a genitive can be posited as *issi* (cf., e.g., *qa-ba-si*

<sup>3</sup> J.N. Postgate, *On Some Assyrian Ladies*, *Iraq* 41 (1979), p. 95 fn. 9.

<sup>4</sup> The context reads: “Today it is a month since I have been ill and since this piercing pain (*sihlu*) has been stinging me. They have asked (? *is-sa-ah-lu*) ... a woman (? *i-su*), who says: ‘You are ill with the Hand-of-Venus; it is due to *intercourse* with women (*ina* *UGU* *si-ih-ir ša i-sa-a-te*). I am afraid and shall not do (anything) without (an order from) the king” (Obv. 7ff.; modify the rendering in *OLZ* 74, col. 34).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., *MÍ-šú* *ADD* 269, 3; 270, 5; 275, 2; 618, r. 1; *MÍ-šú* *ADD* 473, 5; and 125 further examples in NA legal and administrative documents. Note the spelling *MÍ-su-šú* /*issušu*/ in *ADD* 430, 6, and cf. *a-na* *MÍ-su-ti* /*issūti*/ “for wifehood” in *ADD* 308, 8 and *CTN* 3, 47, 7. While the former spelling (*MÍ-su-šú*) could also stand for /*sinnissušu*/ (cf. *šu*] *ru-up-tú-ka* *LAS* 4, 17; *na-mur-ta-ka* *ABL* 1360, 3’; *ma-šar-tu-šu* *LAS* 62, 10; 63, 7), reading /*sinnissūti*/ is excluded in the latter case, since the abstract of *sinništu*/*sinnissu* is *sinnišūtu* not \**sinnissūtu* by analogy to *aššatu* : *aššūtu* and *amtu* : *amūtu*.

<sup>6</sup> Note, however, <sup>GIS</sup>*BAN-šú-nu* /*qassašunu*/ *ABL* 1400, 12, and *GÉME-šú* /*amtušu*/ *ADD* 207, 4; 209, 4; 213, 3, and *passim*, indicating that the place of the auxiliary vowel was somewhat variable. The same phenomenon also occurs in masculine segolates, where we have /*urdušu*/ (written *ARAD-šú*, *passim*) beside /*urassu*/ (*ARAD-su*, *ABL* 916, 11, the only attested example), but regularly *šu-la-an-šú* (*ABL* 1149, 9’, and *LAS* 250, rev. 12), *šu-lam-ka* (*TI*, pls. 2-3, II, 27’), *šu-bar-šú* (*GPA* 109, s. 2), *šu-bar-šú* (*ADD* 75, 1; *GPA* 14, 1; 19, 2, and *passim*), *pa-gar-šú* (*ABL* 92, rev. 13), *ri-ga-an-šú* (*BA* 2, 634, 13), *lu-um-an-šú* (*LAS* 278, rev. 13’), etc.

/qabassi/ mu-da-bi-ri NL 70, r. 13, from \*qabaltu/qabassu; and <sup>LÜ</sup>ma-za-si /mazzassi/ pa-ni LAS 153, r. 8', from mazzaltu/mazzassu). Hence the basic phonemic shape of "palace woman" is to be reconstructed as \*issi ekalli in Neo-Assyrian. However, this basic form was subjected to various phonological pressures in practice transforming it into \*sēgallu (pronounced [še:gallu]), as shown by the variants of the following syllabically spelled compounds also having *issu/issi* as their first component:

1. *issi ahāiš* "together" (lit. "with each other"); variants indicate that the components of this compound tended to be fused together, whereby the final vowel of *issi* was regularly elided with a concomitant lengthening of the first vowel of the following word: *issi ahāiš* > *issāhāiš* (etc.)<sup>7</sup>. Analogously, \**issi ekalli* > \**issēkalli*.

2. *issu annaka* "from here", *issu ammaka* "from there", and *issu pāni* "from before": here the components likewise tended to be fused together, but this time the first vowel of *annaka/ammaka* was elided with a concomitant loss of first the gemination and then the first syllable of *issu*:

Accordingly, *issu annaka* > *issunnaka* > *sunnaka*<sup>8</sup>;  
*issu ammaka* > *summaka*<sup>9</sup>;  
*issu pāni* > *supāni*<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>) The attested variants include:

<i>i-si a-ha-iš</i>	CT 53, 257;
<i>is-sa-a-he-e-iš</i>	LAS 70, r. 15;
<i>i-sa-a-he-iš</i>	LAS 284, r. 11;
<i>i-sa-a-hi-ši</i>	CT 53, 888, 8;
[i-s]a-a-hi-ši	NL 19, 13;
<i>is-sa-he-'i-iš</i>	ABL 1388, r. 5; LAS 172, r. 14; 182, r. 5; 195, r. 2;
<i>is-sa-he-iš</i>	ABL 185, 9; 419, 15; 1115, 12; 1203, 7; 1389, r. 9; ADD 1252, 6; CT 53, 205, r.7; 935, r. 6; LAS 145, 10;

<i>i-sa-ha-ii-ši</i>	ABL 645+, 13;
<i>i-sa-he-iš</i>	ABL 910, r. 8; CT 53, r. 12;
<i>i-s[a-h]i-ši</i>	NL 2, 91;
TA <i>a-ha-a-a-iš</i>	ABL 168, r. 8, 18;
TA <i>a-ha-iš</i>	ABL 121+, r. 11;
TA <i>a-he-iš</i>	ABL 823, 12; 1026+, 27; 1292, 10; CT 53, 17+, 3; 266, 4.

<sup>8</sup>) Cf. TA *an-na-ka*  
 TA *un-na-ka*  
 TA *un-na-a[k*  
*su-na-ka*  
 CTN 3, 5, r. 4;  
 NL 39, r. 49.

<sup>9</sup>) [i]s-su-um-ma-[ka]  
 CT 53, 497, r. 4' (cf. *ibid.*, obv. 8);  
 TA *ma-ka*  
 ABL 146, 11; CT 53, 880, r. 6; NL 39, 49.

<sup>10</sup>) TA *pa-ni-ia*  
 BM 99055, 6;

Analogously \**issēkalli* > \**sēkalli*;  
 compare \**akkēlamši* > *kēlanši*<sup>11</sup>;  
*iššaššūmi* > *šaššūmi*<sup>12</sup>;  
*ikkillu* > *killu*, etc.

It is of course a well-known fact that in voiced root environment and in the absence of lexical constraints, Neo-Assyrian unvoiced stops tended to be voiced. Since there was no minimal pair *ekallu* : *egallu* and since //l/ is a highly sonorous consonant, a Neo-Assyrian variant \**egallu* can be unhesitatingly posited for *ekallu* even though it is not explicitly attested<sup>13</sup>. Hence \*(*is*)*sēkalli* > \**sēgalli/u*<sup>14</sup>.

The reconstructed form /\**sēgallu*/ can thus not only be extensively documented (the phonological evidence cited here is only a fraction of all the evidence that could be mustered), but it also provides a perfect etymon for the Biblical *šēgāl*. Pending the discovery of a syllabic spelling for <sup>MÍ</sup>É.GAL, which hopefully will eventually become available, this virtually amounts to a mathematical proof of the correctness of the suggested reading<sup>15</sup>.

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|-----|---|----------------------------|
|     | <i>su-pa-ni-ia</i>  | SAA 1, 29, r. 13.          |
| 11) | <sup>1</sup> <i>ke-(e-)lam-ši</i>   | TCL 9, 58, 2, 8, 14, etc.; |
|     | <sup>1</sup> <i>ki-i-la-an-ši</i>   | K. 241, XI 14 (ADD App.);  |
|     | <sup>1</sup> <i>ke-e-la-an-ši</i>   | ADD 775, 2;                |
|     | <sup>1</sup> <i>kil-lam-ši</i>  | ADD 462, s. 1.             |
| 12) | <i>iš-ša-šu-me</i>  | ABL 605, 7;                |
|     | <i>e-ša-šu-u-me</i>   | BM 116230, 30;             |
|     | <i>ša-šu-me</i>   | ABL 414, r. 8; 99, r. 3.   |
| 13) | Cf. <sup>TUG</sup> <i>gu-zip-pi</i> LAS 224, r. 3', 10'; 272, 13, for / <i>kuzippi</i> /, <sup>LÜ</sup> <i>Zi-gír-ta-a-a</i> ABL 205, 6, 9, for / <i>Zikirtājul</i> , <i>gi-da-(a-)ni</i> ABL 126, r. 6 and NL 67, 24, for / <i>kidānīl</i> /, etc., as well as the evidence cited by Kaufman, <i>Akkadian Influences</i> , pp. 138-139. See also K. Deller, JEOL 29 (1987), p. 49.   |                            |
| 14) | Cf. <i>ša-rēši</i> "eunuch" → <i>šarēšu</i> (wr. <i>ša-re-šú</i> , Igituh Short Version 232); similarly <i>ša-ziqni</i> "(bearded) courtier" → <i>ša-ziq-nu</i> , ND 2498, 31 (Iraq 23 [1961], pl. 18).   |                            |
| 15) | When this article was already typeset, K. Deller referred me to <i>ša É.GAL-lim</i> in NARGD 42-44, 16 (context: 4 <i>qa ZÍD hi-in-hi-ni</i> 4 BĀN ŠE.GIŠ.Š <sup>MES</sup> <i>hal-šu-ti ša IGI-du-ga-ni ša LUGAL-ma ša É.GAL-lim-ma i-du-n[u]</i> ), which according to him provides "the earliest and the only unequivocal attestation" of <sup>MÍ</sup> É.GAL = <i>ša ekalli</i> (see Deller, JEOL 29 [1987], p. 46 with fn. 22). However, as Deller himself admits, taking <i>ša É.GAL-lim</i> here as "queen" is only possible by assuming a scribal mistake and emending the text into <LUGAL> LUGAL- <i>ma</i> ( <i>ibid.</i> ), which appears very unlikely in a text as important and carefully written as NARGD 42-44. Even if this emendation were granted, the ambiguity of <i>ša É.GAL</i> , which in any other context would stand for "that/of the palace", makes it extremely unlikely that the feminine determinative <sup>MÍ</sup> would have been omitted before <i>ša</i> if the intended meaning really had been "queen". Hence the passage has to be rendered simply "4 liters of <i>hinhinu</i> cereal and 4 seahs of crushed sesame seeds, likewise (- <i>ma</i> ) belonging to the king's <i>panduganu</i> (offering), are provided by the (treasurers) of the palace". The enclitic - <i>ma</i> appended to <i>É.GAL-lim</i> indicates contrast to the preceding section, where the treasurer of the Aššur temple figures as the person responsible for the <i>panduganu</i> foodstuffs. |                            |