

A MIDDLE ASSYRIAN TEXT CONCERNING VINEYARDS AND FRUIT GROVES

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The text presented here is part of a private collection in Venice¹. It measures 40 x 34 mm; the color of the clay is blackish. The tablet, which bears 6+3+5+3 lines, is substantially complete².

Transliteration

Obverse

1 2 IKU 7 GİR^{GIŠ}KIRI₆

2 *ša* ŠU¹BIL-*ia*

3 *ù*^{1d}UTU-ŠEŠ-SUM-*na*

4 1 IKU 2 *ku-ma-ni*

5 *ša* ŠU¹DUMU-^dUTU

6 ¹10-tu-[]

Upper Edge

1 3 *ku-ma-ni*

2 *ti-lu-tu*

3 *ša* GEŠTIN

¹) The tablet is part of the collection of cuneiform tablets of the Centro Studi e Ricerche Ligabue of Venice. A presentation of the document, in the fuller setting of the collection, was also given in F.M. Fales, *Prima dell'alfabeto*, Venezia 1989, pp. 191-192, no. 60. I take the present occasion to provide full photographic documentation of the text, as well as to present a modified reading of Rev. 5, which I reached by way of a helpful observation by H. Kühne, to whom I am most grateful.

²) I am grateful to J. N. Postgate for discussing the text with me, and for helpful hints.

Reverse

- 1 GIŠ-TIR-MEŠ
- 2 ša^{GIŠ}ša-šu-gi
- 3 ù a-za-am-ri
- 4 sa-mu-he
- 5 ša^{URU}BAD¹-kat¹-li¹-mu

Lower Edge

- 1 ITI¹ša sa-ra-te
- 2 UD 28 KAM li-mu
- 3 ¹Qi-bi-^dA-šur

Translation

2 *ikûs* 7 feet of orchard, belonging to Bilia, and Šamaš-ahu-iddina; (4) 1 *ikû* and 2 *kumāni* belonging to Mar-Šamaš, (and to) Adad-tu ...; (U.E. 1) 3 *kumāni* of vine shoots; (R. 1) groves of *šaššugu*-trees, (and) of mixed fruit-plants — (all³) of the city Dur-Katlimmu. (L.E. 1) Month VI, day 28, eponymy of Qibi-Aššur.

The main feature of interest of this 13th century document³ lies in a series of rare occurrences, both contextual and lexical, which it shows within the relatively small MA text-corpus. First of all, the parallels to lists of this form and typology (land, connected to personal names and toponyms) are few and far between in the MA archives, and they essentially concern cornland, not orchards or vineyards⁴. Secondly, our tablet clearly shows the units of measure *ikû*, *kumānu* and *šēpu* applied to land types other than cornland in MA texts — similarly to the system used at Nuzi, where, however, the *emāru* substitutes the *ikû*⁵. Thirdly, the sole toponym of the text may be made out as Dur-Katlimmu, nowadays well identified as the extensive and archaeologically rich site of Tell Shekh Hamad on the left bank of the lower Khabur, known from MA annals as well as from contemporary tablets discovered on the site itself, as yet only known from preliminary reports⁶. Thus our tablet might originate from the vicinity of Dur-Katlimmu

³) The eponym Qibi-Aššur should be referred to the age of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244-1208 B.C.): cf. C. Saporetti, *OMA* p. 375; *Gli eponimi medio-assiri*, pp. 55, 124. The toponym in Rev. 5 has an unclear first sign, after ^{URU}: for place names built with *Kakkab-*, cf. e.g. Parpola, *NAT*, p. 188, 2 (now collated for the *SAA* edition as ^{URU}*Kak-kab-na-še¹*).

⁴) Cf. e.g. *KAV* 125-129.

⁵) Cf. the discussions in *CAD* I/J, p. 69b; K. 532a. For the Nuzi measures, cf. C. Zaccagnini, *JESHO* 22 (1979), p. 23 fn. 28.

⁶) Cf. W. Röllig, *Dur-Katlimmu*, *OrNS* 47 (1978), pp. 419-430; H. Kühne, *Tell Šeh Ḥamad / Dūr-Katlim-*

— a fact which might *per se* explain the rarity of the previously noted aspects.

Finally, a significant feature of curiosity in the text concerns the attestation of some MA forerunners to administrative terms used in the NA period. Thus, two items which were hitherto exclusively, or almost exclusively, known in NA textual material occur in this document. The first is *tillutu ša karani*, which essentially means “grapevine”, but here — in view of the measurements in *kumāni* — must be taken to indicate more specifically the “shoot of vine”, the “vine-stalk”⁷. Now, *tillutu* is attested in lexical material of various periods with a small series of nuanced meanings, including the above⁸; however, no occurrences of the term in legal and administrative contexts prior to the NA age were hitherto recognized.

In the NA period, as is known⁹, *tillutu* is not infrequently to be found in the description of the types of landed property for purposes of sale, or for census records (presumably linked to taxation matters). The legal texts provide mentions of *tillutu* alone, or together with other forms of property, as the case may be: cf. e.g., *ADD 360*¹⁰, where a ^{GIS}KIRI₆ *zaq-pu šá* ^{GIS}til-liti, “a fully planted vineyard” adjoining a threshing-floor, a grove, and two roads, is sold in the town of Urulli for 31 shekels of silver; or *ADD 448*¹¹ where 4 vineyards, bearing altogether 7000(+n) vine-shoots¹², bordered by stone walls¹³, are sold with 7 people and 2 houses in the town of Ispallurê of the land Izalla¹⁴; etc.

Similar information may be gleaned from administrative material of various types. The “Harran census” gives evidence for the normal contiguity of cornland with *tillutu* in the hill country of the northwestern corner of Mesopotamia, with single vineyards reaching an average of 9500 shoots in the region of Kipani¹⁵. The same may be said for other material of cadastral type, either from specific and homogeneous text groups — such as the land schedules within the royal grants¹⁶ — or from random lists of general

mu. The Assyrian Provincial Capital in the Mohafazat Deir az-Zor, AAAS 34 (1984), pp. 160-181; W. Röellig, *Preliminary Remarks on the Middle-Assyrian Archives of Tell Schech Hamad / Dūr-Katlimmu*, *ibid.*, pp. 158, 189-194.

⁷ Cf. *AHW.*, pp. 25a, 1385b (s.v. *tillatu*) and 1360a.

⁸ For the meaning “shoot of vine”, “vine-stalk”, notice the contiguity of *tillutu* to *papallu*, “shoot, branch” in *MSL* 5, p. 94, and the parallelism ^{GIS}geštin-GAM-ma = *tillat/kippat karani* (Hh III, 18a, 19). On the other hand, *tillatu/tillutu* may also act as general synonym for *karanu* (e.g. in the parallel attestations [Ú a-a]-ar ka-ra-ni : Ú a-a-ar til-la-te, quoted in *CAD* K, p. 206a.

⁹ Despite no full treatment of the issue up to the present (cf. Postgate, *JESHO* 17 [1975], p. 226).

¹⁰ *ARU* 373; *FNALD* 4; *NALK* 152.

¹¹ *ARU* 443; *NALK* 265.

¹² Not just 4000, as reconstructed in *NALK*, pp. 315-316.

¹³ 4 ^{NA}i-ga-r[a-te] in Obv. 12.

¹⁴ The same town and region are mentioned in connection with a vineyard in *ADD 742* (= *CCENA* 24), 32.

¹⁵ Cf. *CCENA*, *passim*, and esp. p. 128.

¹⁶ Cf. Postgate, *NARGD*, *passim*; *CCENA*, nos. 23ff.; and see also e.g. *ADD 774*.

bureaucratic nature¹⁷. The evaluation of the vineyards in terms of acreage/yield was not always provided, but when present was consistently by the number of shoots or stalks, as may be desumed from *ADD* 1052, an inventory of a (royal ?) park, where 3000 ^{GIS}*til-lu-tu* flank other fruit-bearing arboreal species, numbered by individual plants (e.g. 135 apple-trees, 50 fig-trees)¹⁸. Preferably done roughly by thousands, this count could also reach greater detail, as proved by the 49300 shoots attested in a text of the Harran census¹⁹.

The second item of interest in our document is (*a*)*zamru*. Often taken until the recent past as a term for a particular fruit²⁰, (*a*)*zamru* (attested in NA as *zamru*) is now commonly believed to be the Assyrian word for “fruit” in general²¹. As stated recently by Postgate, “The meaning ‘fruit’ is admittedly a guess, but strongly supported by contexts and the phrase *zamru sammuhu*, ‘mixed fruit’ ”²². Taking up on this brief remark, a look at such contexts may be useful here: although the material is, again, well-known, the point is to show that “fruit” (or alternatively “fruit tree”), is the most plausible interpretation for the variety of occurrences of the word, which range from legal and administrative documents to lists of offerings for the temples and the gods to a single case in the royal inscriptions.

In the legal material, a ^{GIS}KIRI₆ *ša za-mar* is attested as the object of a mixed sale (land and people) in the town of Nabulu of 683 B.C.; in a further mention in the same text, it is abbreviated to a simple ^{GIS}KIRI₆, attended by a “gardener” (^{LUNU}.^{GIS}.KIRI₆)²³. Basically the same terminology occurs in a tablet of the Harran census, where a garden is said to comprise both *zamru* and *urqu*, “vegetables” (1 ^{GIS}KIRI₆ *za-am-ri* ^USAR) and to bear 300 “stalks of *zamru*” (300 *kan-ni zam-ri ina ŠÀ*) as well as 150 ^{GIS}šar-bu-tu ^{GIS}hi[?]-lu-pu, “150 (stalks of) poplar and willow trees”²⁴. And a similar

¹⁷) See e.g. *CTN* 2, no. 155, VIII, 7', an inventory of mixed goods, with land mentioned only in the very last column, in census-type style.

¹⁸) *ADD* 1052, ll. 9, 5, 7, resp.

¹⁹) *CCENA* 9, VIII, 2.

²⁰) Cf. e.g. *CAD* Z, pp. 40-41; Postgate, *TCAE*, p. 207.

²¹) Cf. in any case already *CCENA* (1973), p. 28.

²²) *BSA* 3 (1987), p. 136 fn. 10.

²³) *ADD* 447 = *ARU* 61 = *NALK* 14, Obv. 8ff. For notes on the place name, cf. *NALK*, p. 19. The site may be identified with modern Girnavaz, cf. Donbaz, *SAAB* 2 (1988), p. 5.

²⁴) *CCENA* 3, I, 6-10: the final total (l. 10) is PAP 450. Two further mentions of ^{GIS}KIRI₆ *za-am-ri* occur in the same text (II, 5; III, 3). And a similar connection between *zamru* and other arboreal species may be desumed from the following passage of *CCENA* 5, VIII, 4-7: (4) 1 ^{GIS}q[ab-lu x x] (5) *ina bir-ti* ^{GIS}[KIRI₆ x x] (6) 1 ^{GIS} " *za[ma]r GAB.DI* ^{GIS}KI[Ri₆ x x], “one gr[ove of ...], among the ga[r]dens of ...], one fruit garden, adjoining the ... garden” (*CCENA* 5, VIII, 4-7). On *qablu*, cf. fn. 37, below.

picture is again offered by a group of cadastral texts of large estates, where we find, e.g., 3 ^{GIS}KIRI₆ ^{GIS}za-am-ri ina URU.ŠE ^dAG ina ^{KUR}Ha-lah-ha²⁵.

Turning to the offering schedules and similar documents, we may notice that *zamru* is a regular presence in food lists for the gods and temples. Our substance is usually mentioned in these offering schedules in “baskets” (*sallu*)²⁶ alongside other foodstuffs and/or containers: e.g. ^{DUG}šá-za-mu-u, “Zamuan-type wine jars” (with numerous varieties of wine)²⁷ “pots of olives” (^{DUG}qa-butu sir-di²⁸), “dishes (*ašudu*) of *haršu-fruit*”, “vessels (*massitu*) of *alappānu-beer*”. The concurrent attestations and the lack of ^{GIS} are obvious markers of the fact that here we are dealing with an edible fruit, not with the plant on which it grows.

The single case from the Assyrian royal inscriptions pertaining to (*a*)*zamru* is, as so often in these cases, illuminating when cast against the background of the “pure” NA documentation. Indeed, the famous banquet stela of Ashurnasirpal²⁹ lists among many other foodstuffs “100 (containers) of grapes (^{GIS}KIN GEŠTIN), 100 (containers) of *za-am-ru sa-mu-hu*, 100 (containers) of pistachios, etc.”. Now, it may be noted that the association/opposition between *zamru* and nuts occurs also in administrative texts, e.g. *ADD* 1036, I, 28³⁰, where ^{GIS}za-ma-ri is present alongside ^{GIS}duk-di, “almonds”³¹, and *bu-šu-na-te*, “pistachios”³²; and it further recalls other contexts, in which grapes and pistachios are listed together with various, specifically named, types of fruit as, e.g., in an inventory of *ilkakate*-payments from Nimrud³³. In conclusion, the mention of *zamru sammuhu* alongside nuts in the Banquet stela has a decisive function: it eliminates any possible doubt that *zamru* might have, in fact, referred to nuts and nut-bearing trees — a tenuous possibility, to be sure, but not one to be totally discounted in the texts discussed above.

²⁵) *CCENA* 24, Rev. 14. Notice also *CCENA* 23, 35.

²⁶) *CAD* S, pp. 217ff.

²⁷) Cf. Dalley-Postgate, *TFS*, p. 150, who translate ^{DUG}šazamû “skins/jars of Zamuan wine”, although noting recent reservations on this interpretation. It may be further added that such a rendering is quite clearly ruled out by a passage in various offering-schedules (e.g. *ADD* 1024, Rev. 10-14; *RA* 69 [1975], Rev. 12-13, etc.) which reads ^{GIS}sa-al-lu za-am-ri ^{DUG}šá-za-mu-u / GEŠTIN me-zi ^{DUG}šá-za-mu-u GEŠTIN la-’u-<u>, with reference to two well-known types of wine of the NA empire (cf. *CAD* M/2, pp. 148b-149a). Thus it is not the wine that is indicated as (possibly) Zamuan, but the type of jar (with *AHW.*, p. 1206a).

²⁸) Cf. Postgate, *BSA* 3 (1987), p. 130, on *serdu*, “olive”.

²⁹) First edition by D.J. Wiseman, *Iraq* 14 (1952), pp. 24-44, pls. II-VII; cf. also J.N. Postgate, *GPA*, pp. 238-240 (collations). Forthcoming is the full re-edition of the text by A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers*, vol. II, pp. 293ff. (MS. kindly given in vision by the author). The passage in question is l. 123.

³⁰) Transliterated in Postgate, *TCAE*, p. 328. A group of ^{GIS}NÁ za-mar is attested here; cf. also *ADD* 1060, I, 5, for this term.

³¹) On nuts in NA sources, cf. *BSA* 3 (1987), pp. 133-135.

³²) Or “terebinth”: cf. *ibid.*, p. 133.

³³) *TFS* 87, *passim*.

“Mixed fruits”, then, is the most plausible translation for *zamru sammuhu* in the 9th century royal inscription; and “mixed fruit trees” is the translation to be given to the *azamri sammuhe* of our 13th century text. In this connection, it may be noticed that ours is not the only mention of *azamru* in MA material: the term further occurs in the administrative document VAT 17892³⁴, showing a vague but interesting connection with the type of fruit called *haršu*, already quoted above.

A final notation. In our text, the mixed fruit trees are planted in groves or small woods (^{GIŠ}TIR^{MEŠ}) in close connection with ^{GIŠ}ša-šu-gi, a type of tree commonly believed to be of the fruit-bearing variety³⁵, but perhaps in fact of a different kind altogether, e.g. a willow or a mountain ash³⁶. Particularly if this were so, the general “landscape” of our MA tablet would come to bear strong resemblances with that of the 8th century census of the region around Harran: in this corpus, not only do we find a landed property comprising *zamru*-trees together with typical riverbank flora, such as poplars and willows, as seen above, but also a further plot entirely formed of 1 *qab-lu* ^{GIŠ}ša-šu-gi, “a grove of *šaššugu*-trees” looked after by a ^{LÚ}ma-šar *qab-li*, “guardian of the grove”³⁷. Thus, conclusively, our text is not only a forerunner of some terms for components of the Neo-Assyrian rural landscape, but — in a broader outlook — presents a description of the Assyrian countryside which antecedes the riverine scenery of the Harran census by half a millennium.

³⁴) Cf. Bahijah Khalil Ismail, *Sumer* 24 (1968), 27, line 12.

³⁵) Cf. e.g. *AHw.*, p. 1198b.

³⁶) Notice the mention of ^{GIŠ}šaššugu in the fable of the willow (*BWL* 165, 18): [*ki-ma* ^{GIŠ}M]ES.GÀM *sa-pi-in* KUR *a-a-bi* x [, which does not seem to apply to fruit trees at first sight. Another literary passage, *SAA* 3, 39, 14, gives no contextual clues as to the plant's appearance and function. In *ABL* 566, 20, specimens of the tree are utilized to make beams *a-na tal-li* (line 16); in general on tree-cutting procedures in NA times, cf. F.M. Fales, *Studi ... Pintore*, Pavia 1983, pp. 49-92.

³⁷) Pace von Soden (“hill” — cf. Arabic *jebel* — *AHw.*, pp.888a, 1198b), *qablu* is a grove (cf. already RA 75 [1981], pp. 67-69), and generally recognized as such (*CAD* Q, p. 16a; *SAA* 1, 223a). Particularly interesting in this connection are some recent comments by Deller, which have some bearing on the text under examination: “In Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass das Wz. ^{GIŠ}.TIR in nA Texten fehlt, andererseits aber häufig von Holzfällernarbeiten in ^{GIŠ}MURU₄ die Rede ist, wird man wohl annehmen müssen, dass *qablu* (C) das eigentliche nA wort für Wald ist” (*OrNS* 58 [1989], p. 256).

PLATE III

Obverse



Reverse

