1. One of the First Middle Assyrian Texts Found at Assur

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K. 11823 from the Kouyunjik collection of the British Museum was published by C.H.W. Johns as ADD I, No. 713. That it was not of Neo-Assyrian date could have been (and no doubt often has been) deduced from the characteristic Middle Assyrian writing a-šur in place of the almost universal aš-šur of Neo-Assyrian scribal practice. However, Johns' copy obscures other typical Middle Assyrian features such as the ductus, the correct reading of ši-pār, and the tablet shape (more or less square with rounded corners, familiar from Middle Assyrian administrative texts), so we may perhaps be forgiven for not assigning it directly to its period (it is not, for instance, taken up in the name lists of Saporetti and Freydank). That the tablet came from Assur could not have been guessed so confidently, but this information is given by Bezold (Cat., 1197), and he probably took it directly from a paper label glued to the uninscribed reverse and reading “Calah Shergat”. There seems to be every reason to accept this as the correct provenance, no doubt from Layard’s short visit to the site in 1846-7 (Nineveh and its Remains, II, pp. 49ff.).

Transliteration
Obverse
(upper half broken away)
1'. 1BAR-ŠU.GUR 14[1

1) Occasional short notes arising from work on the ADD texts for the SAA series: either editing or commenting on texts not included in either of the SAA volumes for any reason, or discussing points of interest in the texts which are not suitable for treatment in the SAA Introductions.
2'. 1a-šur-mu-šab-ši 1d.PAP.SUKKAL-x [x (x)]
3'. a-na ši-pār tal-pi-te

4'. 1a-šur-le-i 1šēš-sum-na
5'. 1d.PAP.SUKKAL-A-PAB 1a-šur-dam-me-eq
6'. 1EN-SAG a-na el-la-pu-hi

Reverse
uninscribed

Translation

"Kidin-Nergal, ..., Aššur-mušabši, Papsukkal—-— for the smearing work. Aššur-le'i, Aha-iddina, Papsukkal-apla-ušur, Aššur-dammeq, Bel(u)-qarrad — for the bladder."

Notes

The “bladder” (ellappuhu, etc.) is already attested in three Middle Assyrian letters from the Babu-aha-iddina archive as a container for anointing-oil (see the dictionaries).

The correct reading of the first sign of rt-pi-te is a long-standing crux. AHw., p. 987, has ripitu, assigning both Middle and Neo-Assyrian words to a root rapā'u which (it must be conceded) is not itself the most secure of lexical entities. The suggested meaning is “etwa ‘Verbrauch’”. The occurrences of a word written rt-pi-te etc. were later discussed in CTN II, p. 99, to which AHw. also refers later (s.v. talpittu). I do not pretend to understand all the references or to have solved all the problems, but the Neo-Assyrian evidence includes the plural form r]t-pi-a-te, which is of course incompatible with a derivation from rapā'u, and must favour taking this word as talpittu, with a derivation from lapātu(m) D. This is not necessarily valid for the Middle Assyrian texts which should write the r doubled, and they may therefore be using the tapris form, also used as nomen actionis to the D-stem, hence talpitu. Either way, since the ellappuhu of the second section is known to have been used as a container for ointment or anointing-oil, a connection with luppata, well attested in the meaning “to smear, apply” oil or ointment, is very seductive. As to what, or whom, these gentlemen might have been anointing, I fear I have no bright ideas.

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Since the tablet was presumably a stray find, it is unlikely to belong to any of the archives excavated half a century later by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft. A search through the Middle Assyrian name lists of Saporetti and Freydank does not reveal any
significant prosopographical links. The nearest is perhaps that the witness Bel-qarrad in KAJ 262 (VAT 8859 = Ass. 14327ce; J.N. Postgate, *The Archive of Urad-Šerua*, no. 23), has a father called Aššur-dammaq. I suppose this father and son pair could appear here in ll. 5'-6', but the two names are common, and it would be unwise to build any theories on this.