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# Scribal Hermeneutics and the Twelve Gates of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*

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In the final tablet of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* lines 42–53 Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan passes through twelve gates in or near the precincts of Marduk's Esagila in Babylon. As the protagonist passes through these twelve gates he is symbolically rehabilitated and reintegrated into society, marking the end of his trials and the beginning of his Marduk-renewed life. One gate is named in each of the twelve lines. At each gate, identified in the first half of the line, the protagonist is granted something positive, which is described in the second half of the line. In the present study I argue that the author of *Ludlul* derived the substance of what the sufferer received at each gate—and therefore the textual substance of the second half of each of these poetic lines—from the names of the gates themselves via the same kinds of learned scribal interpretive methods used in commentary and explanatory texts. That is, the author of *Ludlul* connected the names of the gates and the descriptions of what the sufferer received at each by way of applied translations of the Sumerian gate names, sound plays on the words and syllables comprising the names of the gates (homonymy/etymology), graphic plays on the cuneiform signs with which the names are written (etymography), and in at least one case a mythological interpretation based on the gate's name.

*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, “I will praise the lord of wisdom,” is a Standard Babylonian poem that dates back to the late second millennium B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> As is well known, the poem is a retrospective, first-person account narrated by a certain Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan. In the course of the poem, this man describes how Marduk became angry with him and caused him to suffer both social alienation (Tablet I) and physical affliction (Tablet II). But eventually Marduk had mercy on the sufferer and restored his health (Tablets III and IV?) and social standing (Tablet V). The present study is concerned with a passage that is the centerpiece of the sufferer's restoration, V 42–53.<sup>2</sup> These lines name twelve gates from the city of Babylon, one in each

A seminal draft of this study was first presented at the 2009 national meeting of the American Oriental Society in Albuquerque, NM. I wish to thank the members of the Society who were present and provided critical feedback, which helped me rethink aspects of the idea. I also wish to thank two anonymous reviewers who provided constructive criticism on an earlier version of the paper; their suggestions led to several improvements.

1. For a survey of the introductory issues surrounding the poem and its textual basis, see my previous statement in the introduction to Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi: The Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, SAACT 7 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2010), ix–lvi (henceforth SAACT 7), and Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, ORA 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 3–77 (henceforth Oshima, ORA 14).

2. The tablet numbering used in this article tentatively follows the new critical edition of *Ludlul* by Oshima, ORA 14. Oshima has proposed that the poem in fact consisted of five tablets rather than four. The proposed missing tablet falls between what SAACT 7 identified as Tablets III and IV. Thus, Tablet V here = SAACT 7 Tablet IV. The line numbers used here also follow Oshima, who has found evidence for a few more lines in the final tablet of the poem. Thus, V 42–53 here = SAACT 7 IV 39–50. The partitur of each line used to reconstruct the text of V 42–53 is based on new collations with personal photographs in consultation with Oshima's edition (for the latter, see Oshima, ORA 14, 432–33). Finally, the manuscript sigla follow the new system proposed by Oshima: V.A = BM 32208 + 32214 + 32371 + 32378 + 32449 + 32659 + 32694 and four unnumbered fragments (SAACT 7: MS jk), V.D = VAT 9303 (SAACT 7: MS i); V.E = VAT 9442 (SAACT 7: MS u), and V.j = OECT 11 48 (SAACT 7: MS vv).

of the lines.<sup>3</sup> At each gate, identified in the first half of the line, the protagonist of the poem is granted something positive, which is described in the second half of the line. For example, the sufferer states in V 50, "In the 'Gate of Releasing Sighing' my sighing was released." The sufferer's passing through the twelve gates symbolically rehabilitates and reintegrates him into society, marking the end of his trials and the beginning of his Marduk-renewed life. My thesis, briefly stated, is that the author of *Ludlul* derived the substance of what the sufferer received at each gate—and therefore the textual substance of the second half of each of these poetic lines—from the names of the gates themselves.<sup>4</sup> He accomplished this via the same kinds of learned scribal interpretive methods used in commentary and explanatory texts, which recent scholarship has expounded.<sup>5</sup> That is, the author of *Ludlul* connected the name of the gates and the description of what the sufferer received at each by way of applied translations<sup>6</sup> of the Sumerian gate names, sound plays on the words and syllables comprising the names of the gates (homonymy/etymology), graphic plays on the cuneiform signs with which the names are written (etymography),<sup>7</sup> and in at least one case a mythological interpretation based on the gate's name.

The (unknown) author responsible for composing these lines did not feel compelled to use a consistent hermeneutical method throughout the passage. In some lines he uses each part of the gate's name to derive the description in the second half of the line. In others, he ignores some elements in the name to arrive at his description. And in still others he uses elements in the name of the gate twice. Like so many literary artisans and interpreters after him, he seems to have been quite pragmatic in his literary *modus operandi*, which the line-by-line exposition demonstrates below.

The poem's literary features and institutional setting provide the contexts within which the present thesis should be evaluated. As the text shows, the poem utilizes a high literary

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The first manuscript was published by Alan Lenzi and Amar Annus, "A Six-Column Babylonian Tablet of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* and the Reconstruction of Tablet IV," *JNES* 70 (2011): 181–205; a hand copy is available in Oshima, ORA 14, plates I and II.

3. For a topographical treatment of the various gates mentioned here, which are not all identified as part of Marduk's temple in Babylon, see A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, OLA 40 (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 90–91 (and throughout for the gates in the broader tradition of topographical texts), and Oshima, ORA 14, 324–30. I essentially agree with George's conclusion that the poet did not choose the gates on the basis of topography but for what their names could contribute to the poem literarily. The gates named in the last two lines (IV 52–53) are the exceptions. It can be no accident that the sufferer concludes his restorative walk at the gates that led to the cellae of Marduk and Zarpanitu. The desire for twelve gates may explain the repetition of one of the gates' names in ll. 44 and 52.

4. So already Erica Reiner, who writes, "The poet, as we remarked earlier, is also a scholar, displaying his scholarship by interpreting the Sumerian names of the gates. But he is no mere scholarly commentator; he does not simply translate these names into Akkadian as we often find in the numerous extant lists of temples, gates, and even of the streets of Babylon, but finds for each name an application to the progressive restoration of the hero's state of grace and to his acts of thanksgiving" (*Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* [Ann Arbor: Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan, 1985], 112).

5. The two most important monographic works on these topics are Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), and Eckart Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011). Frahm's work is a magisterial treatment of the commentary tradition and hermeneutical techniques used therein. He also cites the secondary literature exhaustively.

6. That is, we easily recognize these cases as correct translations of Sumerian names into Akkadian, which have been adjusted grammatically to apply to the sufferer's situation of restoration (see likewise Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces*, 112).

7. Etymography is the exploitation of the graphic form of a cuneiform sign for interpretive purposes. See Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 70, who states that he has borrowed the term from Egyptology.



register of Akkadian and has a penchant for rare words, technical vocabulary, paranomasia, and alliteration.<sup>8</sup> Institutionally, *Ludlul* reflects the context of the learned scribal circles of the conjurers (*āšipū*) and their professional concerns.<sup>9</sup> The author of this poem is therefore precisely the kind of scribe from whom we could expect this kind of scribal creativity.

#### PRELIMINARY CONCERNS

Before turning to the actual text, there are four preliminary concerns that require attention.

First, I state a basic assumption. As demonstrated below, lines 42 and 48–50 clearly show a connection between the name of a gate and the description that follows it in the second half of the line—indeed, the second half of each line is based on a translation of the Sumerian name. Given these indisputable cases, I assume that the other lines contain a similar, though sometimes less transparent connection between appellative and description. This is a reasonable assumption, I think; but it may be incorrect. The reader will have to judge.<sup>10</sup>

Second, there is the issue of methodological control. It is widely accepted that ancient scholars rather explicitly utilized so-called artificial or creative philological/hermeneutical methods in commentaries and explanatory texts. If such methods were part of the scribal repertoire, then it is reasonable to look for (less explicit) uses of the same methods in other genres, including literary texts. However, looking for such cases could very easily lead to uncontrolled and excessive etymological and etymographical suggestions among modern Assyriologists. To avoid this when interpreting a literary passage such as *Ludlul* V 42–53, which does not provide hints at its exegetical reasoning (as do, e.g., many commentaries and explanatory texts), I have employed two controls. First, I have based my suggestions analogically on known examples of scribal hermeneutics in commentaries and explanatory texts.<sup>11</sup> In other words, I have limited my own suggestions to methods the scribes would have used. And second, when I suggest graphic similarities between two signs, I support the proposed similarity by citing their proximity in lists arranged by the so-called acrographic principle. In other words, I have only compared signs that the Mesopotamian scribes themselves would have deemed similar. These two practices provide some methodological control to ward off excesses or, at least, to help one know when a suggestion has crossed into highly speculative territory.

Third, I must register a caveat about what one can expect in a study such as this. This manner of speaking about the author's use of hermeneutical methods should not imply that we can discern the author's actual intention, reconstruct his consciousness, or retrace his exact interpretive methods. This manner of speaking about the author is something of a convenience. As with any interpretation of a literary work, we can never be certain that we have adequately or properly divined the author's thoughts.<sup>12</sup> We only have the author's text and the intellectual and cultural context in which that text was written. In some cases in the passage discussed below, one might be able to imagine more than one scenario or technique

8. See SAACT 7, xxvi–xxxiv.

9. See Alan Lenzi, "The Curious Case of Failed Revelation in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*: A New Suggestion for the Poem's Scholarly Purpose," in *Between Heaven and Earth: Communication with the Divine in the Ancient Near East*, ed. C. L. Crouch, J. Stökl, and A. Zernecke (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 36–66.

10. It may be that one or two lines (or elements within a line) were written without any connection by way of hermeneutical scribal technique. This has to remain an open possibility.

11. The one exception is my speculation on V 46 (see below). But this speculation is offered only as a secondary possibility.

12. Of course, he himself was probably not one hundred percent aware of everything that went into the production of his text!



the author may have used to achieve his desired literary end—as I have noted in a couple of cases. Moreover, not all of the attempts at discerning these scribal techniques are equally clear, and thus they are not equally certain. These limitations must be kept in mind as one reads the following exposition of hermeneutical scribal techniques employed in the service of literary composition.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, I anticipate a fundamental objection to using first-millennium commentaries and explanatory texts to aid in the interpretation of a second-millennium literary text. The hermeneutical techniques used in the commentaries have their roots in and were inspired by the methods used in second-millennium bilingual lexical and literary texts as well as omen texts, which often forged connections between protases and apodotes “through etymology, etymography, mythological and symbolic association, indigenous conceptions of the laws of nature and culture, and many other principles that vary in the different branches of Mesopotamian divination.”<sup>14</sup> These traditional interpretive methods may be observed already in the exposition of Marduk’s names in *Enūma eliš*,<sup>15</sup> which probably dates to the Middle Babylonian period.<sup>16</sup> But the hermeneutical methods themselves are older, as recognized by Lambert: “the author of the Epic, and the author of the document explaining the 50 names which has been incorporated, did not invent this art of ‘etymology’ but took over and modified what suited them from earlier work.”<sup>17</sup> Similar scribal methods are in evidence even earlier in a literary text. As Andrew George has recently shown, the translation technique of an Old Babylonian bilingual text, entitled by him “The Scholars of Uruk,” demonstrates the translator’s use of substitution (of synonyms, homonyms, and values of the same sign), abbreviation of compound Sumerian words, artificial patterning, false grammar, and erroneous equivalences. George concludes that “[t]he present composition shows accordingly that the bilingual virtuosity that characterized Babylonian intellectual enquiry in the first millennium was already prevalent among scholars in the Old Babylonian period.”<sup>18</sup> I do not intend to deny the fact that the commentaries and explanatory texts of the first millennium represent a new development in ancient scholarship. But the evidence is mounting that this development was an outgrowth of scribal methods already in place in the second millennium. It is

13. Even if we had an ancient commentary that treated these lines, there is little chance that such a commentary would be a true reflection of the author’s interpretive process or intention. One need only look at one of the commentaries to *Enūma eliš* to see the potential disparities between a literary text and its ancient commentary. For this commentary, see Jean Bottéro, “Les noms de Marduk, l’écriture et la ‘logique’ en Mésopotamie ancienne,” in *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein*, ed. M. De Jong Ellis (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1977), 5–28. A new edition is provided in W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 139–42; see also his comments on pp. 167–68.

14. See Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 12–23. The quote is from p. 20.

15. See Bottéro, “Les noms de Marduk,” 25, sub no. 31. The expositions after each of the names of Marduk in *Enūma eliš* VI and VII, though showing the application of hermeneutical methods at times (see Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 164–66, for an exposition and etymological suggestions for the material surrounding Marduk’s first few names in VI 123–36), do not seem to derive—in an etymological sense—entirely from the name they follow, though the later commentary would have us think so. (Describing the work of the commentator is the substance of Bottéro’s article cited just above.)

16. For a full discussion of the dating of the poem and the defense of a Middle Babylonian origin, see Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 439–44.

17. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 166–67.

18. A. R. George, *Babylonian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2009), 78–112, esp. 104–10. The quote is from p. 109. For “an early example of speculative etymologizing as a tool for revealing the characteristics immanent in a divine personality” (i.e., as is found in first-millennium explanatory texts) in another Old Babylonian text in the same volume, see his discussion of *sinnišum*, “woman,” written as <sup>d</sup>SUEN-ni-iš-tu-um, “Moon lioness,” in the first line of a prayer to Ishtar/Venus (p. 76).

quite reasonable therefore for a learned text such as *Ludlul* to be deeply implicated in such methods, especially in a context in which we know the author is translating Sumerian names (as V 42 and 48–50 explicitly demonstrate).

#### EXPOSITION

Rather than proceeding through the passage line by line, I begin with the most transparent cases (i.e., the applied translations in V 42, 50, 48, 49) and move through what I consider very plausible (V 51, 43, 47, 44, 52) and then less certain cases (V 53, 45). I have ordered the lines within the respective groups in terms of my level of confidence in each suggestion (highest to lowest). In the final line treated (V 46), I offer a speculative suggestion alongside the clear cosmological/mythological association used to translate the name of the gate in that line.

##### A. Transparent Cases (V 42, 50, 48, 49)

I begin with the first line of the passage, which, although incomplete, certainly introduces, if only partially, the principle I have assumed is at work in the other lines of the passage.

V 42:

*ina ká ḫé-gál (bāb ḫegalli)<sup>19</sup> ḫegalla inni-. . .*  
in the Gate of Prosperity prosperity was . . .

V.A *i-na ká ḫé-gál ḫé-gál-la in-ni-*<sup>20</sup>

V.D *k]á ḫé-gál ḫé-gál-la in-<sup>r</sup>x?<sup>r</sup>-*

The noun in the second half of the line, *ḫegallu*, is clearly a translation of the Sumerian name of the gate, ḫé-gál—indeed, the Akkadian word is a Sumerian loanword. Unfortunately, the final verb is not fully preserved, and no candidate for reconstruction is readily suggested by the name of the gate.<sup>21</sup> Though one need not appeal to one of the more exotic hermeneutical scribal methods used in commentaries to understand this line, it is clear on the basis of what is preserved in this first line of the passage that the name of the gate and the description of what the sufferer receives at it are connected. One might consider this most obvious connection in the first line of the passage a kind of primer to the reader's expectations for the lines that follow.

The connection between the name of the gate and the literary description in lines 48–50 is rather easily detected; we readily recognize the description in each as an Akkadian translation

19. I have normalized the Sumerian names of the gates into Akkadian *for illustrative purposes only*, that is, to show the potential connection to the Akkadian in the latter half of the line. Obviously, the names were Sumerian and would have been read as such.

20. Recent collations of witnesses have cast doubt on Lambert's restoration of a verb from *nadānu* here (see p. 60, l. 79 in his edition, W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960; reprint, Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996], 21–62, 283–302, 343–45, and pls. 1–18, 73–74). V.D shows *in-<sup>r</sup>x?<sup>r</sup>-* [. . .] (very little is visible) and V.A has *in-ni-* [. . .]. The latter reading of V.A was given correctly in Annus and Lenzi, "A Six-Column Babylonian Tablet of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 189 (the explanatory note) but incorrectly in the text on pp. 187 and 193, which read *in-ni?*. A review of the photographs of this section of the tablet confirms *in-ni-* as correct. Oshima reads the last visible sign in V.A as TAN (and the last two in V.D as *in-n[a-]*) and restores the final verb in the line as an N of *nadānu*, *in-tan-[di-na-an-ni]*, "was giv[en to me]" (Oshima, ORA 14, 108–9 and 432). He thinks this form may be "a scribal error for *it-tan-[di-na-an-ni]* or *in-nam-[di-na-an-ni]* or *in-nad-[di-na-an-ni]*" (p. 327). Although restoring a passive verb form from *nadānu* makes good sense, the tablet does not support reading the final sign on V.A as TAN.

21. One might consider an N stem verb from *emēdu*, *ešēru*, or *etēqu* among others.



of the Sumerian gate's name as applied to the sufferer. I begin with line 50, the most transparent among these.

V 50:

*ina ká a-še-er-duḥ-ù-da (bāb paṭār tānīḫi) uptaṭṭara tānīḫi*  
in the "Gate of Releasing Sighing" my sighing was released

V.A *i-na ká a-še-er-duḥ-ù-da ip-paṭ-tár t[a-<sup>22</sup>*

V.D *ina ká a-še-er-duḥ-ù-da up-ta-ṭa-ra ta-ni-ḫi*

V.j *-š]èr-duḥ-ḫu-du ip-pa-ṭir ta-n[i-*

Sumerian a-še-er in the name of the gate is equated with *tānīḫu*, "sighing," the noun in the second half of the line. This equation is known from several lexical sources.<sup>23</sup> Sumerian *duḥ* in the name of the gate is the common logogram for *paṭāru*, the root of the main verb in the line. There is no question about the well-established relationships between these pairs of words. Thus, the elements in the name of the gate clearly provide the description for what the man received at it.

V 48:

*ina ká nam-tag-ga-duḥ-a (bāb paṭār arni) e'ilti ippaṭir*  
in the "Gate of the Releasing of Guilt" my bond was released

V.A *i-na ká nam-tag-ga-duḥ-a e'-il-tú ip-p[ṭir]*<sup>24</sup>

V.D *ina ká nam-tag-ga-duḥ-a e'-il-ti ip-pa-ṭir*

The first part of the Sumerian name of the gate, *nam-tag-ga*, is the common logographic writing for Akkadian *arnu*, "guilt," which is a near synonym of the less common noun *e'iltu* used in the last half of the line.<sup>25</sup> The second element of the name, *duḥ*, is, as noted already, the logogram for *paṭāru*, the root of the main verb in the line.<sup>26</sup> Like lines 42 and 50, this line provides a manifestly clear case of the name of the gate essentially providing the description of what the sufferer receives at it by translating the gate's Sumerian name and applying the result to the sufferer's situation.

The example in V 49 is a bit more interesting but still a clear case of applied translation.

22. The verbs in V.A and V.j are correctly read *ip-paṭ-tár* (compare *ip-paṭ-ra* in Oshima, ORA 14, 108 and 433) and *ip-paṭ-ṭir*, respectively. SAACT 7, 28 (see the note on line 47) and Annus and Lenzi, "A Six-Column Babylonian Tablet of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 187, 194, give the last sign in both as ṬĀR. A look at the photograph/copy shows this to be an obvious impossibility. The readings seem to be due to an overlooked data entry error in the score upon which both were based.

23. See Lanu F i 3, cited in CAD T, 171. *Tānīḫu* glosses a-še-er in Proto-Kagal 480 (see MSL 13, 80) and translates the same in Proto-Kagal bilingual section E 25 (see MSL 13, 86, restored).

24. The first part of the PAṬ sign is present on the tablet. Compare Annus and Lenzi, "A Six-Column Babylonian Tablet of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 187 and 194 (*ip-[ ]*), and Oshima, ORA 14, 432 (*ip-p[ar- . .]*).

25. Note, e.g., the use of *e'iltu* and *arnu* (both objects of *paṭāru*) in parallel in the Great Ishtar Shuila, ll. 80–81 (for which see the edition in Annette Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens: Form und Funktion, Theologie und Psychagogik in babylonisch-assyrischen Handerhebungsgebeten zu Ištar* [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2003], 41–95) and in proximity to one another in an OB letter from the Ur-Utu archive (for which see C. Janssen, "*E'iltam Paṭārum : Awat Ḫadē*," in *Mesopotamie et Elam: Actes de la XXXVIème Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Gand, 10–14 juillet 1989*, ed. L. De Meyer and H. Gasche [Ghent: University of Ghent, 1991], 99, text Di 614: 4, 7). Commentaries show a similar use of synonyms. That is, an Akkadian term that is not (yet) attested as an equivalent to a Sumerian term in the lexical tradition is equated with it because a near synonym to the Akkadian term is sometimes equated with the same Sumerian term. See, e.g., LI = *nagû* in a commentary to *Enūmu eliš* VII 138, treated by Bottéro, "Les noms de Marduk," 14, with his remarks on p. 23, sub no. 27.

26. It is worth noting that the scribe has avoided simple repetition by using the verb *paṭāru* in two different stems.

V 49:

*ina ká ka-tar-ra (bāb dalīli) ištāla pīya*  
 in the “Gate of Praise” my mouth inquired

V.A *i-na ká ka-tar-ra išt-a-lu pī-[-*V.D *ina ká ka-tar-ra išt-a-la pī-ia*V.j *]-ra<sup>?</sup> išt<sup>?</sup>-[- ] x x [*

Sumerian *ka-tar* means “praise” and is also the common logographic writing for the Akkadian word *dalīlu*, “praise.” But this Akkadian word does not appear in our line. The scribe had a different idea in mind. The KA element in the gate’s name suggests the logographic writing for the word *pū*, “mouth”; the TAR element suggests the verb *šālu*, “to inquire, ask,” which is equated with Sumerian *tar* in lexical sources.<sup>27</sup> The second half of the line therefore derives from the name of the gate but only by taking the two different elements of the Sumerian name separately and reading them as logograms of Akkadian words.<sup>28</sup> This technique is very common in learned texts.<sup>29</sup>

### B. Very Plausible Cases (V 51, 43, 47, 44, 52)

I move on now to examples that I think are plausible but not as transparent as the above. I begin with line 51, which offers a unique example of homophony, a principle which we will have several occasions to note below but in a different form.

V 51 :

*ina ká a-sikil-la (bāb mē ellūti) mē tēlilte assaliḫ*  
 in the “Gate of Pure Water” I was sprinkled with water of purification

V.A<sup>30</sup> *i-na ká <a>-sikil-la A.MEŠ te-lil-tum as-s[a-*V.D *ina ká a-sikil-la me-e te-lil-te as-sa-li-iḫ*V.E *]-sikil-la [*

The Akkadian nouns in the line, *mū* (Sumerian *a*) and *tēliltu*, written logographically as SIKIL.E.DĒ, translate rather obviously the gate’s Sumerian name (*a-sikil-la*), even though *tēliltu*’s logogram, SIKIL.E.DĒ, is not an exact grammatical equivalent of *sikil* (also a logogram for *ellu*). The derivation of this noun from only a portion of the name of the gate (the SIKIL portion) shows that the scribe was not attempting to achieve absolutely perfect grammatical derivations; rather, he was simply looking for elements in the name of the gate that suggested his Akkadian description.

The verb used in the description, *assaliḫ*, is not a translation of any part of the gate’s name, as far as I can determine. But if one simply reads the line aloud, the scribe’s method is quite clear: *a-sikil-la* sounds very similar to *assaliḫ*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the scribe derived the Akka-

27. See, e.g., Izi D ii 33’ (see MSL 13, 182 [published 1971], restoring with CAD Š/1, 274 [published 1989]) and Aa III/5(= tablet 20): 121 (see MSL 14, 346).

28. Likewise, George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 396, and Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces*, 117 n. 12.

29. See Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 72, for two examples of this interpretive practice, which he likens to rabbinic *notarikon*. In one case, a commentator takes apart the Akkadian word *barāri* (written *ba-ra-ri*), “dusk,” reads it as two Sumerian words (*bara* and *ri*), and then translates it back into Akkadian (*lā* and *adannu*). In another, a commentator takes apart the divine name *Mami* (written <sup>4</sup>*ma-me*) and interprets each syllable in order to derive a divine epithet: *ma* = *banû*; *me* = *nišî*; thus, *Mami* is “creator of the people.” Examples could easily be multiplied.

30. V.A places this line after l. 48.

31. See Scott Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2007), throughout, but esp. pp. 9–55 for such puns in Akkadian; Livingstone,



dian verb in the second half of this line from the homophony between the gate's Sumerian name (a-sikil-la) and the *conjugated* Akkadian verb (*assaliḫ*). Note also that the scribe is reading the gate's name twice (as he will in other cases below) to arrive at his description: partially the first time to acquire his substantives and then the whole thing a second time for the verb.<sup>32</sup>

Line 43 employs homonymy of the Sumerian elements in the name of the gate (and perhaps etymography) to derive the Akkadian description in the second half of the line.

V 43:

ina ká d<sup>1</sup>amma-ra-bi (bāb . . .<sup>33</sup> lamassi) lamassi iṭṭeḫā[nni]

in the "Gate of the . . . Divine Guardian" a divine guardian appro[ached me]

V.A i-na ká d<sup>1</sup>amma-ra-bi d<sup>1</sup>LAMMA iṭ-ṭe-[-

V.D k]á d<sup>1</sup>amma-ra-bi la-mas-si iṭ-ṭe-ḫ[a-

Line 43, like line 42, contains an obvious connection between the gate's name and the description of what the sufferer receives at it: *lamassi* in the Akkadian description clearly translates the Sumerian *lamma* in the gate's name. Deriving the verb from the gate's name, however, is more complicated. It seems that our poet derived the verb *iṭṭeḫānni* from the obscure second half of the gate's name.<sup>34</sup> I see two, not necessarily mutually exclusive, possibilities for how he may have done this. The first is a case of simple homonymy. The BI element of the gate's Sumerian name is homonymous with the sign BI<sub>7</sub>, which a lexical text equates, when read as KU, with the verb *teḫû*.<sup>35</sup> This kind of homonymic interchange is very common in Livingstone's explanatory texts and the commentaries treated by Frahm.<sup>36</sup>

But a second possibility exists, wherein the scribe may have employed both homonymy and etymography to derive the Akkadian in the second part of the line. The reasoning may have gone something like the following. The BI sign is homonymous with bi<sub>2</sub>, which is written with the NE sign. The NE sign may also be read ṭe<sub>4</sub>, which is often used to write the

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*Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 150, who notes a text in which the sound of the temple name é-du-ga-ni suggests the Akkadian *idūku Anī*, "who killed Anu"; Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 73, who cites a commentary that equates Sumerian saḫar, "dust," with Akkadian saḫar (i.e., *ṣeḫru*), "young child," on the basis of sound; and note also *Enūma eliš* VII 15–16, where Marduk's name d<sup>1</sup>TU.TU–d<sup>1</sup>ZI.UKKIN.NA in l. 15 resonates strongly with the conjugated verb *ukkin* in l. 16.

32. The principle is recognized by Lambert in his exposition of Marduk's name in *Enūma eliš* VI 135 (*Babylonian Creation Myths*, 165). See also Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 50, who notes the interpretation of the GI sign three times in the Esagil commentary (VAT 17115) in order to equate the name Esagil with the translation "temple which fashions everything and adores justice." The text is treated fully most recently in George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 80–81, with comments on pp. 386–89. See further the example cited later in the present study involving the sign GIGIR. It is quite common to see commentaries read whole words more than once, indicating explicitly that this is what they are doing by including the comment *šanīš*, "secondly," and *šalšīš*, "thirdly." See Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 60.

33. Modern scholarship has not determined the meaning of the second half of the gate's name (see George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 392).

34. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 392, believes the author has ignored the final element of the gate's name. As I show above, I do not think he ignored it completely.

35. The text is part of a secondary branch of Proto-Aa, published in MSL 9, 128:184 (and note MSL 14, 121–22). This text was not necessarily the direct source for our scribe.

36. See Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 43 and 63, for two examples and Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, chapters 5–7. Bottéro makes this point repeatedly throughout his study of Marduk's fifty names as explicated in a commentary to *Enūma eliš* ("Les noms de Marduk," see esp. pp. 16–17 for the generalization).

verb *teḥû* syllabically and sounds like the common logogram for *teḥû*, TE.<sup>37</sup> Such a series of connections may seem tortuous to the modern philologist, but these kinds of coincidental chains of connections are commonly used in the commentary tradition.<sup>38</sup>

V 47 also uses homonymy and etymology to connect the gate's name with the description in the second half of the line.

V 47:

*ina ká u<sub>6</sub>-de-babbar-ra (bāb tabrāti namrāti)<sup>39</sup> iddātūya immerā*  
in the "Gate of Shining Astonishment" my signs became clear

V.A *i-na ká-u<sub>6</sub>-<de?>-babbar e-da-tu-ú-a im-m[e-*

V.D *ina ká u<sub>6</sub>-de-babbar-ra id-da-tu-ú-a im-me-ra*

The UD sign, used here for the Sumerian word *babbar* in the name of the gate and understood as the Akkadian adjective *namrāti*, can also be read as *zālag*. If read in this manner, it homonymically anticipates the logographic writing of the main verb of the line, *ZĀLAG* (= Akkadian *namāru*).<sup>40</sup> It is also worth noting that the ERIM sign, used to write *zālag*, is graphically similar to the UD sign.<sup>41</sup> So homonymy and etymology seem to combine here.

Etymology is also at work to derive the word *idātu*, "signs," whose logogram is GISKIM. The GISKIM sign is quite similar graphically to the U<sub>6</sub> used in the name of the gate.<sup>42</sup> One need only ignore two horizontals to transform GISKIM (IGI-DUB) into U<sub>6</sub> (IGI-É).<sup>43</sup>

Simple translation, synonymic substitution, and homophony were probably used in V 44 and 52. My suggestions for the derivation of the verbs in these two lines are more tenuous than the suggestions discussed above.

37. See CAD T, 71 for citations and note especially Antagal G 148 (MSL 17, 224), which has TE = *te<sub>4</sub>-ḥu-ú*.

38. As Frahm has stated: "Ingeniously establishing new meanings through the use of (near) homonyms of words or syllables, as well as through graphemic association and other forms of analogy, they [i.e., the ancient scribes] would produce explanation after explanation and regard all of them as equally valid" (Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 40). Frahm offers a similar example to the one suggested above from the Esagil Commentary, ll. 29–30. He writes, "[f]irst, *gil* is related to the homophonous sign *gīl*, which can also be read *kur<sub>4</sub>*; this reading in turn is linked to *kur*, the Sumerian word for 'mountain'; and *kur* provides a bridge to Enlil, a deity frequently addressed as *kur gal* or *šadū rabū*, i.e., 'great mountain'" (p. 343). Irving Finkel has found a similar use of homonymy in the writing of a place name in an Ur III text. The (apparently bilingual) scribe wrote the place name *lu-lu-bu-um<sup>ki</sup>* in Šulgi's forty-second year name as *ḪE-ḪE-bu-um<sup>ki</sup>*. Finkel explains this odd writing through a kind of reverse engineering. He suggests the *ḪE* sign is homonymous with *ḪE<sub>2</sub>*; *ḫe<sub>2</sub>* is the Sumerian grammatical equivalent of the Akkadian precativ particle *lū*; and *lū* is written with the LU sign, which is the sign normally used in the syllabic writing of the name *lu-lu-bu-um<sup>ki</sup>*. See Finkel, "Strange Byways in Cuneiform Writing," in *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity*, ed. Alex de Voogt and Irving Finkel (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 9–25, here 17–19. (I thank Jeffrey Cooley for alerting me to this article.)

39. I take *babbar* to mean *namru* in Akkadian, with George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 393.

40. See CAD N/1, 210.

41. Their graphic similarity was used indexically; the two signs appear adjacent to one another in Sa (see MSL 3, 23: 128–29, 130–35). Yet the signs were not always clearly distinguished in texts, as noted by Rykle Borger (*Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2003], nos. 596 and 612).

42. Noted by both Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces*, 117 n. 12, and George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 393, who mentions this possibility alongside the (less likely, in my opinion) possibility of homonymy between *u<sub>6</sub>-de* and *ittu*. It may be worth pointing out that *u<sub>6</sub>* is equated with the verb most commonly used to describe the activity of diviners, *barū*, "to look at, examine," in lexical lists (see CAD B, 115 for citations). *Barū*, of course, is clearly within the same semantic domain as the main verb in the line.

43. Note the two signs' proximity in S<sup>b</sup> Vocabulary (see MSL 3, 127: 355 and 359). Both signs are also part of the IGI section in Diri II (GISKIM = IGI-DUB in ll. 100–107 [MSL 15, 124] and U<sub>6</sub> = IGI-É in lines 171–77 [MSL 15, 128]), as one would expect.



V 44:

*ina* ká silim-ma (*bāb šulmi*) *šulmāna* appal[is]  
in the “Gate of Well-Being” I loo[ked upon]<sup>44</sup> well-being

V.A *i-na* ká silim-ma *šul-lu-ma-niṣ* a[p-

V.D k]á silim-ma *šul-ma-na* ap-pa-l[is]

The Sumerian word *silim* in the name of the gate can be read as a logogram for the Akkadian substantive *šulmu*,<sup>45</sup> which is cognate to and a near synonym of *šulmānu* here in our line.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, line 44 is very similar to the translations we have seen above. As for the main verb, it is a very real possibility that the scribe knew a tradition that equated *silim* or *ma* with *palāsu*—an equivalence unknown to us—or he simply made it up.<sup>47</sup> But invoking one of these possibilities too readily could prematurely end the search for a discernible connection. In the interest of discovering such a connection, I suggest the scribe may have read *silim* (DI) as *dī* and have taken this as sufficient grounds to connect it to Sumerian *u<sub>6</sub>-dī*. Such abbreviations are known elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> Although *u<sub>6</sub>-dī* is a logogram for *tabrītu*, “vision,” (pl.) “admiration,”<sup>49</sup> it is also equated with *palāsu* in bilinguals. Note, for example, the Akkadian translation *naplis* (imperative of *palāsu*) for *u<sub>6</sub>-dī* in an Emesal Sumerian hymn to Marduk.<sup>50</sup>

The relationship between the name of the gate and the benefit the sufferer received at it in line 52 is similar to that suggested for line 44. The significance of the name of the gate in line 44 appearing again in line 52 is unclear to me. It is possible, of course, that the author simply used it again because he knew it would provide the literary description he wanted.

V 52:

*ina* ká silim-ma (*bāb šulmi*) *itti Marduk annamir*  
in the “Gate of Well-being” I was seen with Marduk

V.A k]á-<sup>r</sup>silim-ma<sup>r</sup> *it-ti* <sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU *an-na-m*[ir]

V.D *ina* ká silim-ma *it-ti* <sup>r</sup>d<sup>1</sup>AMAR.UTU *an-na-mir*

V.E *a-na* ká silim-ma x [

44. SAACT 7, 43 renders the verb as “encountered,” but I no longer think this adequately expresses the visual component of the verb’s semantic range.

45. See CAD Š/3, 247.

46. The same applies to the variant in V.A: *šullumāniṣ*. This word is an orthographic variant of *šulmānu* (see CAD Š/3, 244) with the addition of a terminative-adverbial suffix *-iṣ*.

47. In light of the fact that commentaries sometimes evince lexical equivalences that are not known (to us) elsewhere in the tradition (see, e.g., the list in Bottéro, “Les noms de Marduk,” 21, no. 23), we cannot rule out the possibility that the scribe simply equated *silim* or *ma* with *palāsu*.

48. Such phonological abbreviations have already been discussed by Bottéro in his treatment of the commentary to *Enūma eliṣ* (“Les Noms de Marduk,” 22). See also Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 51 and 150, for a few specific examples (e.g., *si* stands for *si-sá*; *ra* for *rab*; and *ga* for *gaz*), and George, *Babylonian Literary Texts*, 105, where the OB translation abbreviates a number of Sumerian compounds (e.g., *bal* for *áš-bal*, *zu* for *izi-sù-sù*; *mí* for *mí-dug<sub>4</sub>*).

49. See CAD T, 31, and line V 47 above.

50. Cited by CAD P, 54. See now Stefan Maul, “Marduk, Nabû und der assyrische Enlil: Die Geschichte eines sumerischen Šu’ilas,” in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994*: Tikip santakki mala bašmu . . . , ed. Stefan M. Maul (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1998), 159–97, here 168, l. 34. A new edition of the prayer is forthcoming from Daisuke Shibata. Resorting to Emesal Sumerian was a known practice among commentators. See, e.g., Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 165, and Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 91, for a couple of examples.

The words *itti Marduk*, “with Marduk,” were probably derived from knowledge of cultic topography: the gate led into Marduk’s cella (see likewise, line 53).<sup>51</sup> As discussed above, line 44 seems to have understood *dī* as *u<sub>6</sub>-dī* and then equated this with *palāsu*, which is a translation equivalence attested in bilingual Sumerian Emesal prayers. It is possible that the use of *amāru* here in line 52 is simply the substitution of a near homonym to avoid using *palāsu* again.<sup>52</sup> (Note that lines 48 and 50, both of which use the same verb—*paṭāru*, use different stems of that verb, thereby avoiding blatant repetition.)

### C. Less Certain Cases (V 53, 45)

I am less confident in the suggestions for lines 53 and 45 offered below, yet there are parallels in the commentary tradition for the techniques I propose the scribe used to connect the gates’ names to the benefits the sufferer received at them.

Line 53 seems to use the double reading technique observed above and also may have employed both homonymy and etymography.

V 53:

*ina ká ḥi-li-sù (bāb kuzbi salḥi/za’ni)<sup>53</sup> šēp Zarpānītu annašiq*  
in the Gate “Sprinkled with Luxury”<sup>54</sup> I kissed the feet of Zarpanitu

V.A                                    ]-ep <sup>d</sup>zar-pa-ni-[

V.D *ina ká ḥi-li-sù še-ep <sup>d</sup>zar<sup>1</sup>-pa-ni-tum<sup>155</sup> an-na-šiq*

V.E *a-na ká ḥi-li-gar<sup>56</sup> GÌR.II <sup>d</sup>[                                    -i]q<sup>?</sup>*

V.j                    k]á ḥi-li-sù GÌR.II <sup>d</sup>zar-pa-ni-tu[m

This gate led into the cella of Zarpanitu. As in line 52, the poet seems to have derived the deity’s name for use in the line from the gate’s proximity to the deity’s private quarters.<sup>57</sup> *Šēpu*, “foot,” may have been derived from reading *ḤI* as the homonym *ḥí* (the GAN sign), which is graphically quite similar to *GÌR*. But it may be that the Mesopotamian scribe achieved this etymographical interpretation without the need of the intervening homonymic reading (*ḥí* = GAN). Signs formed with initial *ḤI* are adjacent to *GÌR* in *S<sup>b</sup> Vocabulary I* 24–40 (*ḤI*), 41 (*GÌR*).<sup>58</sup> To the ancient scribe, the graphic representation of the *ḤI* sign may have itself suggested *GÌR* and thus *šēpu*. As for the main verb in the line, *našāqu*, “to kiss,” its equivalent in Sumerian is generally considered to be the compound verb *ne su-ub*. The poet may have derived the Sumerian verb from the signs *LI* and *SÙ* in the gate’s name and then translated this into Akkadian. The *LI* sign is homonymous with *lí*, which can be read as *né*. He then took the *sù* as warrant enough to equate it with Sumerian *su-ub*, thereby

51. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 90. It is possible, however, that the Akkadian preposition connects to *silim* since *silim* can also be read as *dī*, which suggests *itti*.

52. See CAD A/2, 5 and P, 52, for various lexical texts that list *palāsu* and *amāru* as translations of the same or similar Sumerian terms. It may be worth mentioning that a *DI* sign is somewhat similar to an *IGI* sign, which occurs in the logogram for both *palāsu* (IGI.BAR) and *amāru* (IGI or IGI.DU<sub>6</sub>). But as there is no evidence from the acrographic lists for it, the similarity seems to lie in the eye of the contemporary beholder.

53. The Sumerian term *sù* in the gate’s name is translated by both *salḥu* and *za’nu*; see George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 394, for text attestations.

54. For this rendering of the Sumerian name, see George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 90 and 394.

55. The sign shows several extra horizontals on its right side.

56. See George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 395, for this variant.

57. See George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 90.

58. See MSL 3, 98.



completing *ne su-ub*. It is also possible that the scribe ignored *LI* and simply took *SÛ* as warrant enough to connect to the compound *ne sub*.<sup>59</sup>

Line 45 uses etymology to achieve the desired results.

V 45:

*ina ká nam-ti-la (bāb balāṭi) balāṭu ammaḥir*  
in the “Gate of Life” I was granted life

V.A *i-na ká nam-til-la ba-la-tu am-*[

V.D *k]á nam-ti-la ba-la-tu am-ma-ḥi-ir*

Obviously, the noun *balāṭu* was a translation of the *ti-la* part of the gate’s name. The verb, however, may have been derived in a more complicated fashion, utilizing etymology and the lexical tradition. Before turning to the verb, however, we should take note of a heretofore unmentioned aspect of etymographical reasoning. Namely, scribes occasionally manipulated *constituent parts* of signs to derive new meanings. Although *Diri* signs were likely candidates for such etymographical interpretation,<sup>60</sup> the method was not limited to them. I offer several examples known to me as justification for the application of this method in line 45 to a non-*Diri* sign.

1. K.232 + K.3371 + :26<sup>61</sup> reads <sup>d</sup>*Namma nap-ḥar pi-riš-ti* DINGIR.MEŠ, “Namma, totality of the secret of the gods.” Lambert cites this line as an example of “a sign used to write a divine name being translated according to its constituent parts.” In this case, “the [*Diri*] sign used for Namma, ENGUR, is composed of LAGAB and ḪAL [i.e., LAGAB×ḪAL], respectively *napharu* and *pirištu*.”<sup>62</sup>
2. The *shuila*-prayer designated Gula 1a contains an odd textual variant. Three manuscripts of the prayer preserve MUL.MEŠ in its text (MSS A, E, and H) while one (MS G) has *nap-ḥar* DINGIR.MEŠ.<sup>63</sup> The scribe of MS G divided the MUL sign, forming the signs NAB and DINGIR in the process,<sup>64</sup> and then inserted a ḪAR between the two, thereby arriving at *nap-ḥar* DINGIR.MEŠ. One might call this a mistake, as does Mayer. But I think it is just as likely to be considered a deliberate interpretive innovation.
3. A commentary to Sa-gig, Tablet 1 (SBTU 1 27, rev. 23–26) uses etymology and gematria to connect a chariot, mentioned in the protasis of the base text, with Ishtar, named in the apodosis. The ancient interpretation is very elaborate, as Andrew George has shown.<sup>65</sup> The most relevant portion of this text for the present purpose is the following from ll. 25–26: *gigir : nar-kab-tu<sub>4</sub> : ū-bu<sub>u</sub>bu<sub>x</sub>(U) : di-l[i-pat . . .*<sup>66</sup>  
*ū]-bu : bán 3 qa : ū-bu : 15 : <sup>d</sup>15*, “*gigir* (means) ‘chariot,’ (the sign) U (when read) *ubu<sub>x</sub>*, (means) *Dilipat* (Venus); [ . . . ] *ubu* (corresponds to) one *sūtu* and 3 liters,

59. For abbreviations of Sumerian compounds in an OB translation, see George, *Babylonian Literary Texts*, 105 (see also note 48 above for abbreviations in general).

60. See Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 74, for the general point and two examples.

61. See [http://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/cdlifiles/geers\\_b.pdf.zip](http://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/cdlifiles/geers_b.pdf.zip) (page labeled no. 13) for Geers’ copy of K.3371.

62. See W. G. Lambert, “A Late Babylonian Copy of an Expository Text,” *JNES* 48 (1989): 215–21, here 219.

63. See Werner Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen „Gebetsbeschworungen“* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1976), 452 n. (2) on l. 78.

64. MUL is not attested in *Diri*. Note that ll. 1–4 of the second tablet of S<sup>b</sup> Vocabulary show DINGIR, NAB, and MUL adjacent to one another (see MSL 3, 132; note also Ea II 270–79 in MSL 14, 259), which suggests that the Mesopotamians clearly noticed the similarities among the three signs.

65. See his “Babylonian Texts from the Folios of Sidney Smith, Part Two: Prognostic and Diagnostic Omens, Tablet I,” *RA* 85 (1991): 137–63, here 150–51 with comments on p. 161. The commentary’s interpretation is also summarized by Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 80–81.

66. George suggests *šá-niš?* (“Babylonian Texts from the Folios of Sidney Smith, Part Two,” 150).

(so) ubu is 15 (and thus represents) Ištar (<sup>d</sup>15)."<sup>67</sup> The commentator has equated GIGIR(LAGAB×BAD) with an arcane GÍGIR(LAGAB×U). Ignoring the LAGAB part of the sign, the commentator extracted the U part and equated this with ubu<sub>x</sub> (which is written with the U sign). He then interprets ubu according to a standard measure wherein 1 *sūtu* 3 *qû* equals 15 *qû*. The number 15, of course, is Ishtar's divine number. Thus, GIGIR connects to Ishtar by taking apart an arcane form of GIGIR, using one of that sign's constituent parts, and interpreting it via acceptable hermeneutical methods.

4. In a commentary to *Šumma izbu* (SBTU 2 38:6–7) the scribe explains the term <sup>lú</sup>GÚ. EN.NA by equating GÚ with *nap̄har*, "total," EN with *bēlu*, "lord," and then seems to interpret the final element, NA, as AŠ DU, perhaps to be understood as *gitmālu*, "perfect" (though this last equation's meaning is unclear since the line breaks off).<sup>68</sup> The last equation is the interesting one for our purposes. The scribe seems to have broken the (non-Diri) NA sign into two parts that are interpreted as two separate signs: an AŠ sign and an UD. The UD sign was then phonologically reversed and represented as a DU, perhaps justified by the fact that UD and DU share a homonymic reading (UD = tú and DU = tù).<sup>69</sup> Thus, we have another case of breaking signs into different parts for interpretive ends.<sup>70</sup> But this case goes farther than the previous because one of the resulting signs was also interpreted by way of phonology and then represented as an entirely different sign (UD > DU).

These examples show that this decompositional etymographical technique was available to scribes in and out of commentary texts with both Diri and non-Diri signs. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that it was also a technique available to the author of our passage.

I now return to the verb in line 45, *maḥāru*. If one takes NAM apart, the sign consists of a sign that looks very much like a ḪU followed by a ŠE.<sup>71</sup> Ignoring the latter element, one is left with the ḪU-like sign. This sign is quite close graphically to RI. (ḪU and RI are adjacent in Sa, so even the Mesopotamians noticed the similarity.)<sup>72</sup> The final step, ri = *maḥāru*, could have been made with the help of a lexical list such as Aa II/7 i 13', where the two terms are equated.<sup>73</sup> Thus, from NAM one can arrive at *maḥāru*.

67. The citation and translation is from Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 81.

68. See Egbert von Weiher, *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk*, Teil 2 (Berlin: Mann, 1983), 165 (= SBTU 2).

69. Frahm has called such backward readings "retrophonic." See his *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 39, where he notes the equation of "False Planet" (<sup>mul</sup>lu1-la) with Cancer (<sup>mul</sup>al-lu1) in a commentary to *Enūma Anu Enlil*.

70. Barbara Böck suggests a similar dismantling of a NA sign as a graphic means of connecting an omen's protasis and apodosis: *na*(AŠ-UD)-*da-at* in the protasis becomes *ina*(AŠ) *tam*(UD)-*ṭa*(DA)-*a-ti* in the apodosis ("Physiognomy in Ancient Mesopotamia and Beyond: From Practice to Handbook," in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, ed. Amar Annus [Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010], 199–224, here 209).

71. Given the probable Babylonian origins of *Ludlul* in the latter part of the second millennium, one should look at Middle Babylonian sign forms for comparison. See René Labat and Florence Malbran-Labat, *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne: Signes syllabaire, idéogrammes*, 6th ed. (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1988), 74, provisionally until L. Sassmannshausen's Middle Babylonian sign list is published. As for taking a ḪU-like sign as RI, one need only recall that the scribe in IV 43 derived the GISKIM sign (reading it as ḪU = *iḏātu*) for his description in that line from the similar looking U<sub>6</sub> in the name of the gate.

72. See MSL 3, 15: 10–13, 14–15. Note also Fragment E of S<sup>a</sup> Vocabulary (MSL 3, 55) and Proto-Ea II 125–32 (MSL 14, 36–37). Historically speaking, as noted by one of the reviewers of this article, the two signs were interchangeable in the third millennium.

73. See MSL 14, 296. (This tablet used to be cited as II/8, thus CAD M/1, 51.)



Perhaps this latter idea goes too far. I remain open to that possibility. Nothing is lost in making a provocative suggestion. On the other hand, we ought to consider the possibility that our own expectations have blinded us to this kind of philological reasoning. As stated above, to guard against caprice, I have limited my suggestion to known scribal practice. We know that scribes could take signs apart for some interpretive purposes. And we know that the sign forms were considered similar in appearance. Thus, the suggested reasoning is certainly possible and, in my opinion, not outside the realm of plausibility.

#### *D. A Transparent Case with a Speculative Suggestion*

The interpretation I suggest for V 46, the final case to be treated, is twofold. First, I offer a cosmological/mythological connection between the gate name and the description; this connection is indisputable. The second connection I suggest is much more speculative than the previous ones. I offer it as nothing more than a provocative possibility.

V 46:

*ina ká<sup>d</sup>utu-è (bāb ašī šamši) itti balūtūti ammani*

in the "Gate of the Rising Sun" I was counted among the living.

V.A *i-na ká<sup>d</sup>utu-è-a<sup>r</sup>it<sup>1</sup>-ti TIN<sup>74</sup> am-ma-[-*

V.D *ina ká<sup>d</sup>utu-<<UD>><sup>75</sup>-è it-ti bal-ṭu-ti am-ma-ni*

Unlike most of the lines in V 42–53, the Sumerian name of this gate and the meaning of the Akkadian description in the second half of the line have nothing obviously in common in terms of linguistic connection. The description is clearly not a translation of the gate's name. Moreover, unlike for some of the other scribal interpretations noted above, I could not find any way to account for either the main substantive in the Akkadian description (*balūtūti*) or the main verb (*ammani*) in terms of homonyms, etymographic interpretation, or other scribal philological methods. It seems therefore that the scribe has connected the name of the gate and the description in the second half of the line at a conceptual (i.e., cosmological/mythological) rather than a philological level—a distinction that may be as clear to us as it was unimportant to the ancient author. That is, the conceptual association of the eastern horizon, the place of the rising sun, with life and renewal may have been reason enough to connect the gate's name with the description in the second half of the line.<sup>76</sup> As noted above, the final two gates (V 52 and 53) seem to derive part of their descriptions in the second half of the line from cultic topography rather than philology. Moreover, interpreting texts in light of mythological or cosmological associations is known quite well in the commentary and explanatory traditions.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the above cosmological/mythological suggestion is the clearest and most likely connection between the two halves of the line.

74. Reading with Oshima, ORA 14, 432. Correct SAACT 7, 28, note on l. 43 and Annus and Lenzi, "A Six-Column Babylonian Tablet of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 190, 194.

75. Contrary to Oshima, there is an extra UD sign on the tablet (see ORA 14, 432 at l. 46 in witness V.D, obv. 8'). The insertion of an extra UD sign is an atypical orthography for this gate's name (see George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, 391). It appears to be a dittography here. Although the gate's name is partially attested in V 41, the line breaks off in all witnesses before it can help resolve the issue.

76. For the eastern horizon's association with renewal and life, see, e.g., Christopher Woods, "At the Edge of the World: Cosmological Conceptions of the Eastern Horizon in Mesopotamia," *JANER* 9 (2009): 183–239, here 192–93. Also, note *Ludlul* I 1–6 and III 47–50, where divine favor and healing come in the morning hours (i.e., with the rising sun in the east).

77. Using mythological associations for interpretation is among the hermeneutical techniques attested in the commentaries and explanatory texts. See Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, passim, and Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 339–44 generally. Several specific examples may be seen

Alongside this certain connection I want to explore a philological possibility, too, which, if accepted, requires us to credit the scribe with more creativity than in previous lines. In order to understand the basis of this speculative idea, one needs to look at the three cuneiform signs that comprise the gate's name.<sup>78</sup>

𐎶 𐎶 𐎶

The È sign in the name of the gate is comprised of two separate, basic signs: UD (the same sign as UTU in the name of the gate) and DU.<sup>79</sup> Thus, if one looks at the cuneiform, one could read four signs after the word for gate (ká): DINGIR, UTU=UD, UD, and DU.

𐎶 𐎶 𐎶 𐎶

Let us first consider the final two signs, the ones derived from È. The first sign, UD, can also have the syllabic value *ut*. The second sign, DU, can be read *tù*. Thus, one could read these two signs as *ut-tù*. One may then read this resulting *uttu* as the homonym *úttu*, which is written with the ŠID sign. Sumerian *šid* is equated with *manû*, the root of the form *ammani*, in Proto-Izi I 254<sup>80</sup> and a number of bilingual texts.<sup>81</sup> I conjecture, therefore, that the verb in our line was derived from a re-reading of the component signs of È and connected to the main verb by way of homonymy and translation.<sup>82</sup>

The substantive in the line, *balṭūtu* (in the nominative), may have been derived from a reading of all four signs in the name of the gate. The first two signs, DINGIR UD, resemble a BAL sign, if one ignores the vertical of the UD. (Obviously, the DINGIR lacks a *winkelhaken*, thus my use of “resemble.”) The following images from the Neo-Babylonian manuscript V.A are reproduced here for illustrative purposes only.<sup>83</sup>



Fig. 1. DINGIR UD



Fig. 2. BAL

The second two signs may be read *again* to yield *tú* (= the second UD) and *tù* (= DU), resulting in *bal-tú-tù*, which suggests *balṭūtu* by homophony. Reading signs twice, as already noted above, is common in explanatory and commentary texts.

There are two reasons that this derivation of *balṭūtu* is much more tenuous than other interpretations offered in this study. First, I cannot find DINGIR and BAL in proximity to one

in one of the commentaries (K.4657 +) on *Enūma eliš*, discussed briefly by Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 137–38, and in a few places by Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 113–14, 352–53, 355.

78. I am ignoring the variant spelling in V.A as an unimportant orthographical variant.

79. The composite nature of È was clearly recognized by the Mesopotamians. See, e.g., the canonical Diri series, tablet I, ll. 149–61 (MSL 15, 110).

80. See MSL 13, 25; this section of the canonical series is not available.

81. For citations in bilingual texts, see CAD M/1, 221.

82. È read as *ut-tù* may also have suggested the preposition *itti* in front of *balṭūti*.

83. These images are extracted from my personal photographs of the tablet.



another in an acrographically ordered syllabary. Thus, I cannot be sure that the Mesopotamians would have recognized the graphic similarities that seem reasonable to me. And second, I cannot offer a parallel to the combining of two signs for interpretive purposes except in numbers.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the suggestion that DINGIR and UD could have been combined to form BAL must remain speculative. However, we do know that scribes occasionally combined two signs by accident during the copying process to form one sign.<sup>85</sup> If sign combination could occur in error and deliberately with numbers, it seems reasonable to think that creative combination could be done deliberately with signs forming words. In any case, I offer the suggestion as a provocative speculation. The cosmological/mythological association is much more certain and completely consistent with known hermeneutical practices.

#### CONCLUSION

The present study argues that the author of *Ludlul* V 42–53 used the same hermeneutical and philological methods that ancient Mesopotamian scribes employed extensively in commentaries and explanatory texts. Exploring the use of these methods as tools of ancient Mesopotamian intellectual life is no different than exploring the scribes' historiographical, juridical, or astronomical methods and perspectives.<sup>86</sup> The problem lies in identifying where and how these methods were employed in texts outside of the genres in which we expect them to appear (i.e., outside of divination, commentary, and explanatory texts) without the aid of indigenous explanations. Given the fact that these methods were used to explore the meaning of Marduk's fifty Sumerian names in *Enūma eliš* and, as I argue above, were employed to relate the names of the twelve gates in *Ludlul* V 42–53 to the description of the sufferer's restoration in the same lines, the issue of where to look for the application of these methods in Akkadian literary texts might best begin with proper names and the phrases that follow them.<sup>87</sup> The issue of how the methods were employed will be more difficult to untangle. Spe-

84. For which, see Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works*, 63, who notes how the reciprocal of 27 (= 2,13,20) was divided and recombined to yield 2,1 and 3,20. Interestingly, in the subsequent interpretation of the resulting number, the 1 in 2,1 is ignored.

85. See Martin Worthington, *Principles of Akkadian Textual Criticism* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 92 and 156 n. 520. In the latter reference he notes how U and KU are sometimes combined to form KI.

86. For this reason, we should resist the practice of labeling these methods with qualifiers such as "artificial," "creative," or "pseudo-scientific." The ancient scribes' method may be judged to be such in light of our own practice, but the terms are not appropriate identifiers for the historian trying to understand the worldview of his or her subjects.

87. Note, e.g., Lambert's idea that the epithet *tābiḫu na'du* in Erra and Ishum I 4 derives from the preceding name *Išum*, understood as *I* = *nādu* and *šum* = *tābiḫu* (see W. G. Lambert, "Review of F. Gössmann *Das Era Epos*," *AfO* 18 [1957–58]: 395–401, here 400, as noted by Luigi Cagni, *L'epopea di Erra* [Rome: Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, 1969], 140, n. 12). Viable candidates for investigation in *Ludlul* include the Sumerian personal names in III 25 (Lāl-úr-alim-ma) and III 40 (<sup>1</sup>Ur-nin-tin-ug<sub>5</sub>-ga) as well as the street name in IV 16" (*Kunuš-kadru*; formerly Tablet III, line o). The Akkadian (presumably) that follows the name in III 40 is mostly broken away (see Oshima, ORA 14, 416, for a conjectural restoration). The name in III 25 is modified by the phrase *āšib Nippur*, "resident of Nippur," about which Lambert remarks, "[n]o doubt the connexion with Nippur was established by some play on the values of signs" (*Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 296). Neither he nor I can specify this presumed method. The Akkadian street name in IV 16" is followed by the words *ina pišertu aba'a*, "I was walking (on Kunuḫ-kadru Street) a free man." (Foster renders *ina pišertu* with "in a state of redemption" [*Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 407].) It is unclear if this phrase was derived by way of scribal hermeneutics and/or philology from the street's name. But one might consider the idea that the *kadru*-part of the name, "fierce one," refers to the newly healed and thus emboldened Šubši-mešrē-Šakkan. The imperative part of the name, *kunuš* (probably correctly restored as *ku-nu-uš* since the commentary shows [ku-n]u-uš [see SAACT 7, 26, and Oshima, ORA 14, 428]), might have been dissected and translated syllable by syllable. Thus, KU, when read as dib, could be equated with *bā'u* (see CAD B, 178) and thereby provide the verb.

cific suggestions will probably always evoke the same kinds of mixed reactions as do suggestions for puns in literary texts. But we need not give in to an “anything goes” mentality. I have formulated two guiding principles that may be easily transferred to other texts. First, any exposition of the use of a scribal hermeneutical or philological method in a literary text should be able to cite an analogous example in the commentaries and explanatory texts. If it is unable to do so, it must at least recognize its highly speculative character. And second, any etymographical suggestion that is based on the similar appearance of two different signs must be able to establish that the Mesopotamians themselves recognized the similarity by citing the signs’ proximity in a syllabary or acrographically organized lexical list. Again, if it is unable to do so, it must be recognized as highly speculative. These principles will not dispel all disagreement in interpretations that explore the use of scribal interpretive methods in literary texts any more than improved understandings of Akkadian metaphors can be expected to reconcile different readings of whole works. But they are a place to begin.

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The nu could represent *lā*, “not,” and *ÚŠ*, homonymous with *ÚŠ*, could be understood as *úš* = *mītu*, “dead.” Thus, the street name could be read as “the fierce one was walking along not dead.” On this interpretation, *ina pišertu* would seem to translate *lā mītu* with reference to the mythology of the netherworld. That is, the dead or dying are trapped by the grave; their rescue is a kind of release from an interminable sentence (see my comments on the phrase *kullimanni nūra*, “show me the light,” in a *shuila* to Nabu in *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: An Introduction*, ed. Alan Lenzi [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011], 332–33). Interestingly, the sufferer describes his suffering and rescue in terms of death, the netherworld, and a kind of resurrection in V 5–8, 30–36 (where much is obscure), and 71–76. Also, *pišertu* is used to describe the dispelling of evil (CAD P, 428) and would therefore seem to be an appropriately ironic word to use for the release/rescue of a person destined for the grave.



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