

Sumerian Riddles: a Corpus

M. Civil - Chicago

[An edition of all known Sumerian riddles –twenty-five in all– so far discovered and preserved on cuneiform tablets dating from the XVIIIth century B. C. The transliteration of the original text is accompanied by a translation and a brief comment to make it understandable to the non-Sumerologist. More detailed philological annotations provide the justification for the interpretation.]

This article contains a critical edition of all texts designated as riddles by the ancient scribes, i. e., all the texts which end with the *ki-búr-bi*-formula which gives the solution of the riddle. This excludes the text published by R. D. Biggs in *JNES* 32(1973)26-33 (now republished in BM 3 no. 26) –which does not include the answers–¹ and the passages from proverb collections or literary compositions that may be riddles but are not formally marked as such.

The existence of Sumerian riddles² was first discovered by E. I. Gordon in 1960 (*BiOr* 17(1960)124, 142) in the preliminary copies of the Ur Tablets (sources A-I, below), then still unpublished. In 1976 B. Alster published source J in *JNES* 35(1976)267ff. Individual riddles have been occasionally translated or commented upon (see the pertinent remarks), but so far there has been no comprehensive study of the genre³.

Each riddle is published here accompanied by a translation and a general comment that attempts to make it understandable to the non-cuneiformist (anthropologist, folklorist, or literary historian). Philological remarks justify afterwards the translation and interpretation. A special effort has been made to identify the cultural role and literary implications of the answers in order to provide clues for better interpretations to scholars more inspired or better versed in folkloric matters. The numbering of the riddles is completely arbitrary and meant only to make their quotation easy. Needless to say, the interpretation of these riddles is fraught with difficulties. Phonological ambiguities, double-entendres, and all kinds of word plays are everywhere essential features of the genre. The imperfect knowledge of the language as well as the

1. This text consists of a four-line formula, repeated at least twenty-five times, giving the canal, the deity, the fish, and the snake titulars of a given village. These paragraphs, as already suggested by Biggs, are to be considered as didactic riddles with the answer, a village name, not given. For instance xi 2ff.: *íd-bi-uri^k, dingir-bi nin-ur₄-rá ú-dug₄ é-kur-ra, ku₆-bi agargar-sila, muš-bi bar (?) -igi-gūn* 'its canal is the Akkadian canal, its deity is Ninurra, the ghost of the Ekur, its fish is the *a*-fish, its snake is the chameleon'. The name of the deity does not appear among the six *u d u g é-kur-ra* in An-anum I 262ff. For the fish name, see ED Fish List 25 (MEE 3 98) and ITT 1 1408. For the "snake" name, see Hh XIV 205.

2. The only other known riddles from ancient Mesopotamia are the Akkadian ones in the tablet TIM 9 53.

3. I wish to thank Veysel Donbaz, Robert Falkowitz, and Piotr Michalowski for collations of text M, McGuire Gibson, Maurits van Loon, and Roger Moorey for useful discussions of some archeological points, and Dietz O. Edzard for constructive criticism. Text L is published by kind permission of the Director of the Nippur Expedition, McGuire Gibson.

chronological and cultural distance make the understanding of the Sumerian riddles still more difficult. Were it not for the thoughtfulness of the ancient scribes who gave the solutions alongside the riddles, most of them would have remained a complete mystery to the modern reader⁴.

Riddles are recognizable in Sumerian texts by the presence of the word *ki-búr-bi* 'its solution' at the end just before the answer. Only in source A in riddle 1 and possibly in OECT 5 35, a parallel to riddle 17, is this formula wanting. The Sumerian term for 'riddle' is unknown. Riddle 5 is preceded by *i-bi-lu a-da-lu*, not part of the riddle since it is omitted by two of three sources. It can very well be a nonsensical rhyming formula used as introduction –opening formulas in riddles are frequent in many cultures– but it is also possible that it hides the term for 'riddle'. The first possibility that comes to mind is the rare word *a-da*. It is mostly known in the compound *a-da-mi* 'an ada of two, a double ada', the usual term for a verbal or symbolic 'contest'. Followed by *en* or *lugal* it is attested in lexical texts (Proto-Izi II 451f. and Proto-Kagal 402f.) and in the literature (Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 147)⁵ which also includes *a-da-nun*. A meaning 'fight, contest' for *a-da* alone seems reasonable, and considering riddling as a form of contest is not without folkloric parallels⁶.

Sources

Ur texts:

A = U 17207,73 (UET 6 340)	1.
Lenticular tablet, 106 mm diam.	
B = U 17207,123 (UET 6 341)	1.
Lenticular tablet, 75 mm diam.	
C = U 17207,40 (UET 6 342)	2-3.
Lenticular tablet, 71 mm diam.	
D = U 17207,93 (UET 6 343)	4.
Lenticular tablet, 90 mm diam.	
E = U 17207,120 (UET 6 344)	5.
Lenticular tablet, 81 mm diam.	
F = U 17207,137 (UET 6 345)	5.
Lenticular tablet, 116 mm diam.	
G = U unnumbered (UET 6 346)	1.
Oblong tablet, 39 × 60 mm.	
H = U 17207, 139 (UET 6 347)	6.
Lenticular tablet, 65 mm diam.	
I = U unnumbered (UET 6 348)	7.
Lenticular tablet, 67 mm diam.	

4. No discussion of the riddles from a folkloristic point of view is attempted here. The pertinent bibliography is enormous and can easily be found in folklore journals. Riddle studies fall into two main categories, collections of riddles, and structural discussions. The latest publication of the latter kind is W. J. Pepicello and Th. A. Green, *The Language of the Riddles* 1984; its bibliography can be a starting point for the interested reader.

5. Completed by the text OECT 5, 2. see S. N. Kramer, *Or* 39(1970)103ff.; *JAOS* 88(1968)108ff.; and J. van Dijk, *Or* 39(1970)305ff. The latter presents a quite different interpretation of *a-da*, which I have difficulty following. In any case, *a-da-lam* (< *i-da-lam* by vowel harmony) has nothing to do, in my opinion, with *a-da*.

6. The term *a-da lugal* appears in an obscure context at the end of an Early Dynastic text which seems to be a collection of proverbs: WVDOG 43 26 + TSŠ 124 r. iii 8ff. with duplicates WVDOG 43 27 + TSŠ 327 + NTSŠ 294 and OIP 99 255: *sag sag-gá* (var. *-ga*) ŠID dug titab *a-da lugal*. Is it a subscript? Note that the OB text WB 169:52 (OECT 1 pl. xiii ff.), whose beginning parallels the ED text, ends with *dug titab gu-du ša-ba gi-ga* 'the jar of beer mash is an anus with a dark inside'.

Nippur texts:

- J = CBS 9814 + 9815 (JNES 35[1976]264) 8-17.
 Three-column tablet, the obverse (not copied in *JNES*) has only a few traces of col. i, see fig. 1, about one third of the reverse is preserved.
- K = N 3759 (copy, fig. 2) 21
 Lower edge of a one-column tablet, width = 50 mm, very badly preserved.
- L = 13N 146 = IM 78580 (photo fig. 3) 24-25.
 Complete one-column tablet, 39 × 52 mm, from WA locus 22, floor 5.
- M = Ni 1306* (SLTN 148, photo fig. 4) 18-20.
 Lower right corner from the reverse of a multicolumn tablet.

Text of unknown origin:

- N = Ash 1924-480 (OECT 5 32) 5.
 Lenticular tablet, 84 mm diam.

All Ur texts and the Nippur texts in Philadelphia have been collated by the author. Some portions of text too poorly preserved for transliteration are not included in this study: the obverse of J, the beginning and end of K, and the left column of M. For the Sumerian text of riddle 17, see the pertinent remarks.

Texts:

1. Sources A, B, and G.

A é AN-gin ₇ ^{en}	uru ₄ ki-gar-ra
B é AN-gin ₇	uru ₄ gar-ra
G é []
A é dub-šen-gin ₇	gada mu-un-dul
B é dub-šen-gin ₇	gada mu-un-dul
G é dub-š[en]
A é uz-gin ₇ ^{en}	ki-gal-la gub-ba
B é uz-gin ₇	ki-gal-la gub-ba
G é uz-gin ₇	ʽki-gal-laʼ gub-ba
A igi-nu-gál	ba-an-ku ₄
B igi-nu-bad	ba-an-ku ₄
G igi-nu-bad	ba-an-ku ₄
A igi i-gál	ba-an-ta-é
B igi-bad	ba-an-ta-é
G igi-bad	ib-ta-é
A	é-dub-ba-àm
B ki-búr-bi	é-dub-ba-a
G ki-búr-bi	é-dub-ba-àm

'A house based on a foundation like the skies,
 A house one has covered with a veil like a (secret), tablet box,
 A house set on a base like a 'goose',
 One enters it blind,
 Leaves it seeing.
 Answer: the School'.

The two last lines, referring to the results of education, are transparent, but the first three—all echoes of literary passages—remain ambiguous and obscure. The word *dub-šen* 'chest', mentioned in line 2, contains on the one hand the syllable *dub* which is the second syllable of the solution (*é-dub-ba-a*), and it is a designation for a depository of secret tablets on the other. Together with the three times repeated initial *é* it may be considered as a verbal clue.

Remarks

This riddle has been translated by E. I. Gordon in *BiOr* 17(1960)142, by W. Heimpel in *Tierbilder in der sumerischen Literatur*. Roma 1968, pp. 415 f., and by Å. Sjöberg in *AS* 20(1976)159. All three translations are based solely on source A.

1. One can read AN as *dingir* 'god', as an 'sky, heaven', or as an 'ear of grain', and ENGAR can be read as *engar* 'farmer', *absin* 'furrow', or *uru₄* 'foundation'. A reading *dingir* seems best eliminated, unless one assumes that the genitive is not expressed in writing—which would be rather unusual in the case of the word *dingir*. This leaves two possibilities: the interpretation given above or 'placed in a furrow like an ear of grain'. In the second explanation, note that the Ur version (UET 6 172) of the "Farmer's Instructions" uses the writing *absin* instead of *ab-sin* and thus there is no objection from this side; but the locative would not be expressed in writing. A variant of the second interpretation is *engar(-e) (ki) gar-ra* 'an ear of corn put by a farmer', again with no overt agentive suffix. Note the spelling *-gin₇^{en}* in source A.

2. The key word is again ambiguous in several ways: one can read *urudašen* 'kettle', *uruda₁₀dur* 'ax', or *dub-šen* 'treasure chest'. Gordon accepted the first translation ('copper kettle') with the remark 'written DUB-šen'; Heimpel, followed by Sjöberg, translates 'DUB.PISAN-Gefäß'. After P. Steinkeller's study of the word *dub-šen* in *OrAn* 20(1981)243ff. and 23(1984) 39ff., and because the second sign of the line is clearly DUB in A and B, the last solution is the right one. Besides the passages identified by Steinkeller, the word appears in the following passages:

- a) *uri^{ki} he-nun-né ki-gar-ra*
ša-bi dub-šen kù abzu igi nu-bar
 'Ur, founded in prosperity,
 its heart is a holy treasure chest, an abyss that cannot be seen'.
 CT 36 27:13f. (Šulgi hymn).

Note the similarity of this passage with the first two lines of the riddle.

- b) *dub-šen kù dingir-re-e-ne-ke₄ uri^{ki} igi i-ni-in-bar*
 'The Akkadians have looked into the holy treasure chest of the gods'. Curse of Agade 130⁷.

7. J. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*. 1983, pp. 152 for the text, and 247 f. for parallels and for the views of C. Wilcke and D. Edzard; of the sources examined, at least T, G, and B₄ have a clear DUB, not URUDA. Note that a cursive DUB is in any case difficult to tell apart from URUDA. An example in point is Dialogue II 130: *dub-šen-gin₇ ni-mu gál ga-ab-tak₄* 'I want to open/reveal myself like a *tupšennu*-box'. One could read also *urudašen-gin₇* 'like a kettle (opened after the cooking is finished)', and the context seems to make the latter interpretation preferable, but no decision can be reached by paleography alone with the sources now available.

c) *dub-šen kù lú igi nu-bar-re-dam lú erim igi i-ni-in-bar*

'The enemy looked into the holy treasure chest which no one should see'.

Lament of Sumer and Ur 447.

d) *dub-šen kù lú igi nu-b[ar-re]-da lú SU^{ki} lú ha-l[am-ma-ke₄] igi i-ni]-in-bar.*

'Subarians and Elamites, destructive peoples, looked into the holy treasure chest which no one should see'.

Lament of Eridu 4.9f. (M. Green, *JCS* 30 [1978]136).

The last three passages are all instances of a literary topic characteristic of the lamentations and clearly indicate that the contents of the *dub-šen* were secret. This explains the phrase 'covered/hidden by a veil' in the riddle. The Akkadian occurrences of the loanword *tupšennu*, recently discussed by C. Walker in *JCS* 33(1981)191ff., show that its contents consisted, at least in many cases, of tablets. Not, it seems, accounts but historical records.

3. The phrase *é uz-gin₇* can be understood either as *é uz^{mušen}-gin₇* 'a house (which) like a goose...', or as *é-uz-ga-gin₇* 'like a uzga-house...' The word for 'goose' lacks very often in the texts the bird determinative, presumably because the sign HU is part of the logogram. This can be observed already in the ED Bird List (MEE 3 110: 15ff.) and the Pre-OB administrative texts omit the determinative in most cases. On the other hand, *é-uz-ga* has always the *-ga* which is almost certainly part of the (loan) word. Thus while the absence of the determinative in the riddle texts can be explained, the absence of *-ga* cannot; the first interpretation 'like a goose' is therefore to be preferred even if the meaning remains enigmatic. The Kěš hymn, certainly part of the elementary curriculum, has in line 87 *é UD-gin₇ ki-gal-la gub-ba* 'standing on a base like the sun(?)'. Could it be possible that the riddle includes here a scribal joke based on the similarity between *ud* and *uz*? Perhaps the young scribes had some trouble in properly keeping apart the two final consonants.

2. Source C lines 1-4.

- 1 *sa im-ma sa gi-ám*
 - 2 *mu-ri mu im-ma nu-šub*
 - 3 *mu gi-ám nu-šub*
 - 4 *ki-búr-bi ^šbún*
- 'Answer: the bellows.'

The connection of some of the words of this riddle with the bellows (of the bag or concertina type, not piston-driven) is clear: *gi* is the reed pipe, *sa* the string to pull the leather diaphragm, and *im* the air flow; the meaning of *mu* in the present context is unclear to me. The repetitive structure conveys the rhythmic effort of working the bellows. 'It does not drop' or 'it does not let down (*nu-šub*) may describe the constant pulling up of the string to 'inflate' the bellows. Other than this, a satisfactory translation is impossible at present.

Remarks

The last sign in line 4 is not clear in the copy of UET 6, but my collation shows an unambiguous KAXIM. The term is known from Hh IX 377⁸: ^šbún = *nappahu*, which designates both the 'bellows' and the

8. Completed now by a Warka fragment, courtesy of E. von Weiher. There is an apparent variant LAGABxIM (*bun*), see Ea 191, etc. Perhaps the term *gi. KA. IM* in WVD0G 43 v 10 represents *gi bún*. The name for the clay pots used as body of the pump has not been identified; it is not *bur bún-di*, listed among various types of pots in Lagaš texts (see PSD 181b).

'blow pipe'; two types of bellows follow: ^šb ū n-šū 'hand bellows' and ^šb ū n-gir 'feet bellows', Hh IX 378f. For additional lexical references, see CAD N/1 307a *nappahu* and PSD B 181a bun₂ B⁹. The physical structure of the bellows used in Mesopotamia is known from remains from a foundry excavated in Tell-el-Dhiba'i, studied by L. al-Gailani, *Sumer* 21(1965)33f., interpreted with the help of ancient Egyptian representations (e. g., P. E. Newberry, *The Life of Rekhmara* pl. XVIII, lower left) and ethnographic parallels (Ch. J. Singer, *History of Technology* 1, 577ff. and fig. 382). If m u-ri and m u im-ma have to be taken in the sense of 'that distant year' and 'last year', the relevance of the metaphor is not apparent.

3. Source C lines 5-7.

5 ba-an-dab₅-ám 4 in-^lx^l
 6 šu-bar-ra-ám 6 in-^lx^l
 7 ki-búr-bi ^{ur}da^{dur}₁₀-tab-ba
 'It seizes it, there [are] three,
 released, there [are] six.
 Answer: the double ax.'

Despite the broken verb in lines 5-6, noncommittally translated 'are', the riddle is clear. The ax can cut things in half so after cutting one has twice as many pieces as before. There is no obvious reason for the choice of the number three as against any other.

Remarks

While the traces of the verb preserved in line 6 are slightly different on the original, against the UET 6 copy, they are inconclusive. In any case the verbs *tuku* and *gál* are excluded. The word for 'double ax' is attested in Hh XI 400: *dur*₁₀-tab-ba = *paštu*, *paltu* and the reading *dur*₁₀ is given by Diri VI E 79 and confirmed by the complement -ra in Lugalbanda II 146f. (see C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos. Wiesbaden 1969*, p. 175)¹⁰. According to the administrative texts, the double ax could be 'triple' or 'quintuple' and had a handle made of bamboo ('Magan reed'): ... *dur*₁₀-tab-ba [5-ta ...] *giš-bi gi-ma-gan*^{ki} *ù dur*₁₀-tab-ba 3-ta *gú-lá-a zabar giš-bi gi-má-gan*^{ki} 2 a-a-lá *sag-^lx^l-gub-ba gá-gá-dè* UET 3 363. The restoration [5-ta] is taken from the similar UET 3 521, see further 699¹¹. The term, with no qualifications, appears in a Pre-Sargonic list of weapons (Nikolsky 1 281, pass.) alongside *giš-gíd-da* 'lance' and *e-úr* 'armor',¹² and a letter of Lipit-ištar (B 5:6ff.) lists troops (*erín*) with spears (^ššukur), bows (^ššpan), and double axes. In the Gudam tale (PBS 5 26:27) Inanna's fisherman wields a double ax against the monster: ^{ur}da^{dur}₁₀-tab-ba m u-na-an-bar-re-ia-ka (var. šu hé-[in Ni 4409 [ISET 2 921]). The double ax is mentioned twice in the "Debate between the Tree and the Reed:" [...] *dur*₁₀-tab-ba i-ni-in-sig (line 31), and *dur*₁₀-tab-ba em e-bi TAR-4 (line 187). The latter occurrence in a passage where the Tree argues that reeds make no good handles for weapons, they should be of wood. More interesting is the reference to the 'four tongues' or 'a'blades' which helps to understand the 3-ta and 5-ta of the Ur texts, above, and ultimately

9. MEE 4 224:229 gives KA.A.SI = *ma-ba-^hu-um, na-ba-^hu-um*; the form with *ma-* suggests that *mappahu* (Akk. *nappahu*) is intended.

10. Wilcke takes *ra* as a verbal predicate; although I do not understand the metaphor, I suspect that *a* and *ha* are parts or attributes of the ax and -*ra* indicates the genitive.

11. Compare *1 ha-zi-ním šu 4 EME-su* 'one ax with four tongues' MDP 4 pl. 2 iii 14 (dedicatory inscription), which shows that this type of ax could also be designated by the more generic term *ha-zi-in*.

12. See B. L. Eichler, *JAOS* 103(1984) 95ff., specially note 38. I assume that the word is properly ^{kuš}š-^šur and could be written simply *e-úr*, like ^unaga^{ga} can be written *ú-ga*.

gives the key for the archeological identification of the *dur₁₀-tab-ba*. It is not properly a double-edged ax. It has a blade with a normal cutting edge, but the opposite side ends in several spikes, from three to five. Textual and archeological data are in agreement in this point. See J. Deshayes, *Outils de bronze*. Paris, 1960, nos. 1362 (Ur III), 1306, 1455ff., 1469, etc. It appears also on cylinder seals, see *Iraq* 11(1949)105 and F. Digard *et al.*, *Répertoire analytique de cylindres orientaux*. 1975, p. 255.

4. Source D.

- 1 [b]á-ra-ga-ni nu-šub-ba mu-ni nu-pà-da
 2 'dingir' nam-lú-lu₇-gin₇
 šu ba-an-kar-re
 3 [k]i-búr-bi péš-gi
 'Its throne (platform) does not fall down; its name is not invoked
 it steals from god as well as from man.
 Answer: the canebrake mouse'.

The canebrake mouse, much appreciated as a delicacy, is a small rodent not exactly identified (dormouse?). Here 'throne platform' designates its nest which is in a place where it cannot be toppled (underground?). Its name seems to have been taboo (there are no other attestations to confirm this fact). Only gods and kings could sit on such platform, but in contrast with them, whose names could be invoked, the mouse's name is not invoked.

Remarks

The péš-^šgi is translated in Akkadian as *ušummu* in Hh XIV 190¹³. The word is attested as *ù-šu-mu-um*, among other rodent names, in an animal list from Ebla (MEE 4 386 ii 5). In Ur III texts, this animal is listed in very small numbers among the more refined food offerings: AnOr 1 190:21 (nidba of the Moon God); 292:12 (for the house of King Amar-Sin); Nakahara, *Sumerian Tablets Kyoto*. Kyoto 1928, 19:15 (nidba of Enlil); UET 3 102:5; 141:6 (for the king, m^áš-da-ri-a ki-lugal-šé). According to Virolleaud, *Comptabilité* XXIV 16 these mice were raised in captivity and fed 4 gin of grain (ca. 33 gr) a day. In most cases, however, they were hunted and were difficult to obtain, judging from the OB letter TCL 17 13. In it Šamaš-našir has sent half a dozen of these animals each to two friends. He has kept one for himself and after eating it, he declares it delicious (*mādiš āb*) and asks his addressee to ask the gardeners to procure him¹⁴ fifteen of them. This animal appears later in a quasi standard list of food offerings in Sargon (Winckler, Sargon 130:169) and Nebuchadnezzar (VAB 4 p. 365 sub ^(sam)šummu; *Iraq* 27(1965)7:6) inscriptions and in rituals (Thureau-Dangin, *RAcc* 78:6, 79:28)¹⁵. In "Journey of Nanna to Nippur" 275 péš-^šgi níg kun-gíd-kun-gíd-da 'canebrake mice with very long tails' are listed among the presents. A proverb (6.21) reads a-rá ^šgi-a nam-mu-ná-dè-en péš-^šgi-a-ke₄[i-g]u₇-gu₇-dè-en 'on the road, do not sleep in a canebrake, the canebrake mice will eat you up'¹⁶. See also WVDOG 43 20 r. iv 11 dug i péš-gi-a 'a jar of fat from a canebrake

13. One source offers instead péš-^šgi-A = *burmāmu*.

14. For the idiom *ina qaqqari šūli*, used here, see the note of M. Stol in *BiOr* 31(1974)222f. It implies special effort and difficulty in obtaining something. If the animal lived underground the idiom could be taken here quite literally. All the animals in the letter come from the same locality, pointing again to their relative rarity.

15. The passage UET 5 69:10, listed in AHW 1443b as an occurrence of *ušummu*, probably has to be read *ù (for ù) šum-ma* 'and if. The tablet has several irregular writings.

16. In a broken context: níg-ú-r-4 [...] péš-^šgi HI [...] CBS 6832.

mouse'. Regarding its zoological identification, B. Landsberger, *Fauna*, pp. 107f. proposed some type of dormouse (Gartenschläfer, Heselmaus, Siebenschläfer). However, a recent study states that 'dormice have not been proven to be present in Iraq' (R. T. Hatt, *Mammals of Iraq*, 82), a rather surprising fact considering that they are found in all neighboring countries. Either these animals prove now to be as elusive to the modern collectors as they were to Šamaš-našir, or their zoological identity has to be sought outside the Muscardinidae. The dormice were famous as a delicate dish among the Romans who fattened them up in special *gliraria* described by Varro, *de re rustica* III 15.

5. Sources E, F, and N (twice).

1	E i-bi-lu a-da-lu	
	FN om.	
2	E tur-ra-me-en	dumu sar-ra-me-en
	F [il-tur-ra-me-en	[]
	N i-tur-ra-me-en	dumu sar-ra-me-en
3	E bulùg-me-en	su dingir-ra-me-en
	F [im-ma-gur ₄ -re-[] dingir-re-e-ne-[]
	N i-gur ₄ -ra-me-en	su dingir-ra-me-en
4	E šu-gi ₄ -me-en	a-zu kalam-me-en
	F [a]b-ba [ba]-[an]-ku ₄ -re-en	[a-z]u kalam-ma-m[e-en]
	N ab-ba-ab-ba ba-an-ku	a-zu kalam-ma-[me-e]n
5	E ki-búr-bu gada-à[m]	
	F [ki-b]úr-bi gada-àm	
	N ki-búr-bi gada	

'When I am a child, I am the son of a furrow,
when I am grown up, I am the body of a god,
when I am old, I am the physician of the country.
Answer: linen'.

The first line a source E, an introductory formula, has been discussed above. This is a straightforward riddle of a common type. The linen starts as flax in a field; once processed it is used for garments for the statues of the gods; and old linen rags are used as bandages.

Remarks

This riddle has been translated by S. N. Kramer in OECT 5 p. 9. Textually, there are two clear-cut versions, one represented by E, the other by F and N. The latter two while agreeing in most points against E, diverge in some details. The two versions differ a) lexically in bulùg (E): gur₄ and šu-gi₄; ab-ba (FN), and b) morphologically in prefixless (E) versus prefixed (FN) verbal forms. Sources F and N differ mainly in the verbal prefix in line 3, in the singular (N) versus plural (F) in the same line, and in the reduplicated plural (N) against singular (F) in line 4. Minor orthographic variants affecting all sources are: the omission of -m a- by E in line 4, the use of ku (N) for ku₄ (F) in the same line, and the omission of -àm by N in line 5. The lexical variants are of some interest. Both pairs are synonymous; the two terms of the first are both translated by *kubburu* or *šamāhu*, the ones of the second by *šibu*. The variation may represent a sort of lexical exercise on synonymy, two divergent Sumerian translations of an underlying Akkadian original, or, more likely, the

result of oral transmission. Grammatically, the text of E is preferable to that of F and N (the prefixed verbal forms are hardly correct), and N has a worse text than F (ku for ku₄ and the reduplicated ab-ba-ab-ba). It is noteworthy to see that E and F, despite their differences, were both found in Ur and presumably were written in the same school.

6. Source H.

- 1 [...] an-tuku
 2 [...] nu-tuku
 3 [...] ur-bar-ra
 4 [...] ur-mah
 5 [ki-b]úr-bi bí-za-za
 'It has [...]
 but has no [...],
 [the howls(?) of a wolf,
 [the roar(?) of a lion.
 Answer: the frog'.

One half of the tablet is missing and while no restoration can be safely proposed for the two first lines, a reasonable guess is that in the riddle the sounds of wolves and lions are compared to the croaking of the frogs.

Remarks

The references for bí-za-za can now be found in PSD B 149b s. v. The first three passages quoted there are partial quotations from different sources for the same proverb (6.13): bí-za-za gù-dé am bar-ra m e-te-bi 'the croaking frog belongs to the marshes'; preceded by 'the voice of the passenger pigeon belongs to the orchards, the voice of the partridge belongs to the fields'. Figurines of frogs are known from texts (refs. PSD loc. cit.) and are extremely common in archeology (E. D. van Buren, AnOr 18 101f.). A somewhat unusual role of the frog is attested in connection with the measure ba-an / bán (Akk. *sūtu*). At least once in Nippur, oil for the household of the governor is measured with the 'frog's measure' (^{si}ba-an bí-za-za)¹⁷. This measure is still mentioned in Ana ittišu III i 34 in a formulation that shows that the measuring container was marked or stamped (*maḥṣat*) with a figure of a frog. For the frog as a potter's mark in Mesopotamia, see E. Herzfeld, *Ausgrabungen von Samarra* V. p. 95, fig. 222 n. 6a-b. In line 3 one could restore something like '[the teeth] or [the mouth] of a wolf. However, the howling of the wolf is a frequent literary simile: ur-bar-ra-gin₇ šubtu-ta zi-ga-ni dum-dam-e ak-da 'to howl like a wolf, when he rises in an ambush' Pabilsag 14 (PBS 13 44+); ur-bar-ra-gin₇ gúm-ga-àm i-ni-za Lugalbanda II 242¹⁸ (see C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos*. p. 187); ur-bar-ra- [sila₄]šú-ti-a-gin₇gun-sun^{am} u-ù-za 'he howled like a wolf seizing a lamb' Ni 4511 r. 2 (SET 1 28, Šulgi fragment, see J. Klein, *Three Šulgi Hymns* p. 219); and possibly ur-mah a-šà-ga u₄-zal-la-àm mur-ma-ra mu-un-ša₄ ur-bar-ra sila₄ šú-ti-a-gin₇ ul₄-ul₄-e im-ša₄ 'the messenger) roared like a lion in the fields at dawn, he howled like a wolf seizing a lamb', *Enmerkar and Ensuhešdana* 48f.¹⁹.

17. CBS 7625:11 (JCS 36[1984]169 and 182). The line has been understood neither by its editor who reads ^{si}tu kul^u ^ubí-za-za (ibid. 169) nor by PSD B 149b which reads ^{am}itu m bí-za-za.

18. Vars. gúm-gúm m i-ni-za and gúm-gúm^{am} m i-ni-za.

19. Uncertain; perhaps one should read du/gen instead of ša₄ (for za) and translate 'he goes roaring...'.
 20. *Enmerkar and Ensuhešdana* 48f.

7. Source I.

- 1 é gál-tak₄-a
 2 é sag-gi₄-a
 3 igi bí-in-du
 4 ù en-na sag ba-an-gi₄
 5 ki-búr-bi ú-ḥú[b].

'An open house,
 a locked up house,
 he sees it,
 but even then it remains closed'.

Answer: a deaf person.

The mouth –compared to a house door– opens and closes; but to a deaf person it is as if it were always closed, even if the mouth moves.

For the metaphor 'deaf = closed door', see ig-ni an-za = <su> -uk-k[u-u]k, ig-* ni (tablet SA) an-za = iš-ta-na-'i MSL 9 93:38, 40 (SB List of Diseases), where the Sumerian means 'his door is closed'²⁰ i. e., 'deaf'. Sumerian has a large number of synonyms for 'deaf', see the lexical section in CAD S 362b *sukkuku*, to which can be added the passage Proto-Lu 542ff. The term used here is by far the most frequent. In the literature, concretely in the Edubba texts, several terms for 'deaf' (ú-hub, ú-ug, geštú-lá) are used metaphorically for '(person) difficult to teach' or 'obstinate'. In line 3, note igi--du for igi--du_g.

8. Source J iv 1' (?) -4'.

- 1 he-el-ṣu KA [...] á bí-in-[gar?]
 2 gú-m u-da hé-[im-da-lá]
 3 ki-búr-bi gal₄-la-[âm]

The [...] mouth (?) has vanquished the fortress,
 so that I can embrace it (?)

Answer: the vagina'.

Despite the damaged text, the general idea can be recognized. If the meaning 'mouth' for the ambiguous sign KA is correct, the original may have had '[sweet] mouth/words' or the like.

Remarks

The word he-el-ṣu is a loanword from Akk. *ḥalsu* 'fortress', with a by-form *ḥilsu*. The choice of this foreign word may have been dictated by the phonetic similarity with ḥi-li-sù 'full of (sexual) charm'. The word is otherwise attested only in Šulgi B 205: ḥi-il-ṣu^{ku} dab₅-bi elam um-ši-[x]- the Elamites [...] the captured fortress'²¹. Plausible restorations after KA are [lá] or [sag₉-sag₉]. The meaning 'to prevail, to win

20. A verb za 'to close' is otherwise unattested; its meaning is inferred from the context and from the Akkadian translation *šaná'u*. There is a slight possibility that the emendation to line 40 is unnecessary, compare perhaps sa-az 'deaf', –curiously coexisting with ú-ug, even as a textual variant– which could imply a verb *sa-za.

21. The words was not recognized by the editor in G. Castellino, *Two Šulgi Hymns*. Roma 1972, p. 52, but see the text *ibid.* fig. 12 i B, now confirmed by the new duplicate 3N-T575.

over' of á--gar is established in my comments to line 64 of Edubba D (*Mélanges Birot*, 78). The verb gú--lá takes either a pronominal suffix or the suffix -da after gú; this passage seems to be the only one with both; When this verb has 'city walls' (bád) as object it has the idiomatic meaning 'to peer out' (lit. 'stretch the neck'), see the discussion by W. Römer in AOAT-SSLT 1 74ff.²².

9. Source J iv 5'-6'.

- 1 lú ki-ág ku-l[i ...]
2 ki-búr-bi [...].

'A loving one, a friend [...].
Answer: [...].

The missing answer to this short riddle may have been a sexual one, as in the preceding riddle.

10. Source J iv 7'-9'.

- 1 ÉŠ ba-an-¹x¹[...] ša ama-n[i ...]
2 ÉŠ-bi n[u- ...]
3 [ki-búr-bi ...]

The riddle is too fragmentary to attempt any interpretation.

Remarks

The sign ÉŠ can be read zi 'flour' or éš 'rope'. The tablet has ÉŠ and so does Alster's copy, but in his transliteration he gives TÚG(?). In line 1 the sign after -an- is not in the *JNES* copy. For other instances where the mother is mentioned in a riddle, see riddles 12 and 19 as well as the Akkadian riddle TIM 9 53:9-12.

11. Source J v 1'.

- 1' [ki-búr-bi]i ¹ur¹-gir₁₅-ra-àm

'Answer: a dog'.

The body of the riddle is lost.

Remarks

The tablet shows the end of the sign BI, and the following sign, although damaged, is clearly UR.

12. Source J v 2'-5'.

- 1 ¹x¹ gi a kud-rá
2 [a?] íd-lú-ru-gú-ta DU-a
3 i-im-túm-ma igi ama-za-ka al-gùn
4 ki-búr-bi ²¹níg-esir-ra

22. The data seem to allow for a more positive conclusion than Römer's. Note further the passage ab-ta gú ba-ra-lá-é: *ina apti utal[...]* CT 17 35:67. The verb is broken in CT 17; partly restored from VAT 9970.

'A reed (?) away from the water,
carries [water] taken from the river of the ordeal,
and then it sparkles in front of your mother.
Answer: a washbowl'.

The washbowl was made of reeds coated with bitumen, i. e., 'kept away' from the water, but carried washing water, like the river of the ordeal, considered a 'cleanser' of legal culpability.

Remarks

The term *níg-esir-ra*, Akk. *namsû*, 'washbowl' is attested lexically in Hh IX 208 and Fore. Hh VIII-IX 88, but not, as far as I know, in any non-lexical context, unless the Fara text TSS 753 has to be read LAK 449xGU *níg-^lesir^l-ra a mu-da-gál* 'I/you/he put water in the... -jar and in the washbasin'²³ Containers for liquids often were made of reeds coated with bitumen, see, for instance, *Studies Oppenheim* (1964) 83. I find Alster's tentative reading [ki] gi-dur₅ kud-du 'the place where the umbilical cord is cut' a little too farfetched, the "connection" between lines 59 and 72 of the Nungal hymn, quoted by him as a justification, being purely accidental. Preferable would be an interpretation based on ki-dur₅ = *raḫbu* 'water-soaked reed' Hh VIII 244 (unpubl. revision). My translation, tentative in any case, is based on passages like a-gār-ta a um-ta-kud-a-ta Hoe-Plow Debate 83, and a-gār-a-gār-ta a um-ta-kud Winter-Summer Debate 174, 'after the fields have driep up', lit. 'after the water has been cut out from the fields'. For the river of the ordeal in literary texts, see Å. Sjöberg, TCS 3 60f.

13. Source J v 7'-11'.

- 1 šušin^k i-šè i-du-dè-en-ma
2 egir-mu-šè i-im-gur-re-en
3 [ki]-^lbúr^l-bi ^gšnim bar-á[m]

'I had to go to Susa,
and then I have come back.
Answer: the date palm'.

Simple riddle based on phonological clues: Susa was the most important town in the upper country (nim) and one of the terms for 'back' is bar, thus nim + bar = nim bar 'palm tree'.

Remarks

This explanation of the riddle hinges on the correct phonological form of the word usually transliterated *gišimmar*: the older and more reliable sources all give /nim bar/ spelled *nim-bar* (Proto-Ea 515b; Ea I 232. PRAK D 45*8)²⁴, *ni-in-ba-ar* (M. Civil and R. Biggs, *RA* 60(1966)9 r. 3'), *ni-in-bar* (VAS 2 25 ii 52), *nim-mar* (S. N. Kramer in *Studi Volterra*. p. 196:90, 93; TRS 70:3; etc.). The form without initial n appears in Ea I 231, S^b I 175, and Voc. S^a U 17, but there is one syllabic attestation that seems to be OB (*gi-ši-im* -[...] in ZA 45(1939) 17:17. Note that most forms without n keep the double š showing that there has been an assimilation (all forms except Ea I 232). Akkadian has uniformly *gišimmaru* (with simple š) since OB -no

23. The tablet sounds more like a literary quotation than an administrative document. The sign LAK 449 x GU is a) a container for flax (or a way of bundling flax), and b) a large jar. etc.

24. With a var. *me-éš-ni* -[...].

older forms seem to be known— except in Malku II 63-67 where a couple of forms with *n* have been preserved. In Ebla VE 399 offers *gišim mar* (without determinative!) = *sa-ma-lum*, i. e., /šam(m)aru/ showing that the form with initial š is older than OB²⁵. Note that in line 2 the riddle avoids the direct use of bar and uses a phrase with *egir* to make the clue less transparent. For bar 'back' contrasting with *igi* 'front', see PSD B 96b 2.1.3 and 98a 3.1.3.

14. Source J vi 1'-2'.

- 1' ki m[u ...]
2' ki-búr-bi é [...]

'Answer: a house [...].'

15. Source J vi 3'-5'.

- 1 1-àm pú al-b[a-al(?)]
2 2-àm igi àm-ba[r-re (...)]
3 ki-búr-bi giš bir₄ igi-b[ar?-ra(?)]

'One has d[ug] (or o[pened]) a well,
two look at it.

Answer: a flaccid penis in vi[ew(?)].'

In the situation described by the answer, the woman is ready, but the couple can do nothing but stare.

Remarks

See PSD B 158 bir₂ C, with a different transliteration of line 2: *m in-àm ah hur* (IGI.A) AN [x] [(x)] 'second: foam which...' ²⁶. The verb at the end of line 1 could equally well be BAD. The sign bar in the verb of line 2 is clear on the tablet. After *igi* in line 3 there is the head of a low horizontal, taken here as the beginning of BAR, not copied in *JNES*. PSD reads again IGI. [A 'foam' which does not fit the trace.

16. Source J vi 6'-8'.

- 1 gud su₄-a bí-g[az]
2 uzu-bi lib_x (Ī.UDU) a [x] [(x)]
3 ki-búr-bi zà-ḫi-li^{sar} [(ám)]

25. G. Pettinato, in L. Cagni, ed., *La Lingua di Ebla*. Napoli 1981, p. 259 (see also E. Zurro, *AuOr* 1/2 [1983] 268) proposes to see in *gišim mar* a loanword from Semitic *samar* (He. *tamar*, Ar. *tamr* 'dried) dates'). It appears more likely that there was an original *nimbar or *nambar, possibly Pre-Sumerian (note that the paleobotanists place the original home of the date palm in the Arabian gulf, see P. Popenoe, *The Date Palm*, 1973, pp. 3 f.) from which the Sumerian form *geš + nimbar* 'the nimbar tree' is derived. The Semitic form would be derived from a form with -šn > šš— assimilation, possibly dialectal, by elimination of the preceding word *geš* or, alternatively, by loss of the initial syllable in a form *geš + imbar*. For the loss of initial, *n*, compare *inda* and *indá* with *ninda* and *nindá*. The irregular correspondence Akk. š = He. *t* = Ar. *t* militates also against a Semitic origin of the word.

26. The reading of IGI. A in the meaning 'foam' is *im hur*, not *ah hur*, see discussion in *MSL* XV, forthcoming. For 'second' one would expect *min-kam-ma*, not *min-àm* 'two'.

'A red/brown bull has been killed,
its meat [...] fat.
Answer: the zà-ḫi-li-plant'.

The seeds of the plant in the answer were crushed and used as a condiment. In addition to the visual image: seed = bull, contents of seed = fat (and meat), possible phonological clues are: su₄-a, pronounced /sa/ or /s^wa/, is close to zà, and 'fat' evokes i-li 'oli', pointing to the rest of the word.

Remarks

In line 2 the reading lib_x comes from an unpublished gloss to Hh XV 314. The plant zà-ḫi-li^{SAR} provided the perhaps most frequently mentioned condiment next to gazi. The word appears as šà-ḫi-li^{SAR} in ED lexical texts: Fara II 58 v 13²⁷, and 20 r. vii 23. On this writing, see I. J. Gelb, MAD 3 237 SHL. The spelling suggests a loanword, presumably from Semitic; the choice of the signs used in its writing may have been dictated by a pun with hi-li 'delight'. Perhaps ḫi-li^{SAR} in MEE 4 317:1082 has to be considered as an attestation of the word in Ebla. Syllabic OB spellings are ha-za-hi-li (VAS 2 3 i 15) and ḫa-za-ha-e (VAS 2 1 ii 6), representing hi-iz^{SAR} zà-ḫi-li, as in CT 15 26:20²⁸. In the Ur III texts the word is written in most cases without determinative²⁹ and only the seeds (nu mu n zà-ḫi-li) are mentioned: MVN 4 70 ii 1, iii 4', i iv 8'³⁰; RA 55 94:5 (Sargonic?); RA 18(1921) 59 vi 29; RTC 307 iv 8; ITT 2/2 892 iv 9 (in these two cases with determinative); ITT 3/2 5296:3; ITT 5 1001 iv 9; IB 95 ii 1' (Or 17(1925)57); RA 18(1921)59 vi 28'; Reisner, *Telloh* 121 iii 10; Pinches, *Amherst* 69 i 7; UET 3 900: 6: 1082 ii' 11'; 1188:1'. The seeds were crushed: zà-ḫi-li-a šu--ra-ra = *maḫāsu ša saḫlê* Nabnitu XXI 42. Several names of the paraphernalia for processing the condiment are known: 1) a mortar, ^{na}na-zà-ḫi-li^{SAR} = *uršu* = *masūktu*, and its pestle, ^{na}šū-na-zà-ḫi-li^{SAR} = *elit urši/masūkti*, Hh XVI 309f. and Hg XVI 137f. 2) a small spoon, m ar zà-ḫi-li, made of ivory UET 3 675:4; 768:8; 1498 i 10³¹; and 3) an unidentified implement, ^{gar}GAR zà-ḫi-[li], UET 3 835:1'³². From Akkadian hemerologies it appears that using this condiment on certain days was taboo (see references in CAD S 62b). According to a proverb, this prohibition is associated with the better known one of not eating fish and leeks:

Ni 4210+ (ISET 2 107 f):
en-e ku₆ an-gi₄ ga-raš^{SAR} an-gi₄
ù zà-ḫi-li-a hé-da-an-gi₄
UET 6/3 *357:
en-e ku₆ an-gig ga-raš an-gig
ù zà-ḫi-[l]i an-gig
OECT 5 35:5f.:
en-e ku₆ an-gu₇ ga-raš^{SAR} mu-un-gu₇
zà-ḫi-li-a^{SAR} mu-un-da-an-gig

27. Dupl. Fara II 67 ii' 4 and OIP 99 23 + 24 + 412 viii 7'. Other duplicates of Fara II 58, but with this line not preserved, are NTSS 123, 6N-T933, 6N-T676, and CBS 7094 (RA 60 9).

28. See A. Falkenstein, *A/O* 16(1952-53)60ff.

29. In late texts it may occasionally have the determinative ^u in front, e. g., CT 16 49:306, 4R 58 i 33. Note also that an -a is sometimes added at the end in post-Ur III texts. This -a, when found in Akkadian texts, should be considered part of the logogram and thus the problem discussed by W. von Soden, *Or* 23(1954)343f. simply disappears.

30. Obtained ki nu-^uḫiri₆ akšak^{ki}-ta, or, assuming a haplography of GIŠ, um ma (<GIŠ>.U]H)^{ki}. Most Ur III references are inventories with no indication of provenience or destination.

31. In the last reference the copy has GAL instead of MAR, but since it certainly refers to the same item listed in the other two texts I assume a modern miscopy.

32. It is unlikely that this gar stands for m ar since the same tablet has ^{am}m ar in line 3'.

'The lord dislikes fish, dislikes leeks,
and even dislikes zà-ḫi-li'³³.

The dictionaries translate zà-hi-li /*sahlū* by 'cress', [*Lepidium sativum*] CAD S 62a with nuancing comments 64b³⁴, AHw 1009b, with question mark. This translation goes back to B. Landsberger, *OLZ* 25 (1922) 343, and is based on etymological parallels with Hebrew and Aramaic, amply discussed in I. Löw, *Flora der Juden* I. Wien 1924, pp. 506ff. It was adopted by R. C. Thompson, *DAB* 1949, p. 56. It fits, albeit not too well, the mustard-like uses of the plant attested in the texts. There is, however, a passage in Maqlu V 32 *kīma sahlē lishulši* 'may it (the sorcery) prick her like s.', which seems to imply that it was a prickly plant. Thompson (loc. cit.) obviated the problem by having the phrase refer to the "pungency" of the plant. A text not yet known to Thompson from the botanic series Šamnu šikinšu (F. Köcher, *Pflanzenkunde* 33:13) describes the lethally poisonous plant *namharū* –in all likelihood *Datura stramonium*, thorn-apple, with its prickly fruits– as having 'spines (GIŠ.KU = *kakku*) like the spines of the *sahlū* plant'³⁵. The possible relation of *sahlū* with *sahālu* 'to prick' tends to confirm that the texts refer to a spinous plant. If so, the presence of thorns excludes the cruciferae proposed by the translation 'cress'³⁶. It seems better to leave the botanical identification open. Many plants could have been used as spices in antiquity and later replaced by similar, more suitable ones. A candidate, among many others, could be the wild safflower, *Carthamus oxyacanthus* (see E. Guest, *Notes on Plants*. p. 19 and *Flora* I p. 93), Ar. *kassūb*.

17. Source J vi 9'ff.

On the tablet there is a very clear dividing line, after the answer of riddle 16, not copied in the *JNES* edition. The following text, whose last line is missing, is known from many duplicates belonging to several proverb collections and has been edited and discussed by R. Falkowitz, *Sumerian Rhetoric Collections*. 1980, pp. 232ff. To keep the length of this article within limits, the reader is referred to Falkowitz' book for the Sumerian text and textual apparatus³⁷. It may be simply a text used here as filler at the end of the tablet and not a formal riddle, but, judging from its structure and contents, it may very well be a genuine riddle. The source OECT 5 35: 1ff. adds a final line not found in the other sources, except for a late duplicate (BWL 263); I would propose to see in this line the answer to the riddle (see remarks, below).

'It became cloudy, but it did not rain;
it rained, but the sandals were not untied;
the Tigris roiled with the rising waters, but the fields were not filled.
[Answer:] it rained within the river banks, the land did not get a drop'.

The answer refers to a localized downpour with the aggravating circumstance that the rain falls on the river and therefore it is useless to the farmer from whose mouth the riddle presumably comes.

33. See S. N. Kramer in OECT 5 p. 37, with a different translation motivated by his preference for the readings of OECT 5 35. My translation is based on the first two sources, which give *gig* 'to hate' or *gi₄* 'to make take back, reject'.

34. The explanation offered there seems to confuse cardamon (*Elettaria*, of the ginger family, imported from India), the genus *Cardamine* (bitter cress), and the *kārdamon* of the ancient Greeks of uncertain botanic identity.

35. Akkadian text in CAD N/1 229a and S 62a.

36. Note that all this hinges on a meaning 'thorn' for the logogram GIŠ.KU (*kakku*), see CAD K 56b d). This meaning is, on the one hand, limited to botanical texts (*Šamnu šikinšu*, references to be added to CAD loc. cit., and once in Uruanna) and one would expect *šillū* or the like to be used for thorn, on the other. If GIŠ.KU were to designate 'coarse stiff hairs' (the 'hispid' of botanical descriptions) the difficulty disappears since both *Brassica nigra* and *Sinapis arvensis*, very common types of mustard growing freely in Lower Iraq, can be said to have 'hispid' leaves. In this case the identification of *Datura*, based on its prickly fruits, would be questionable. Note also that there is a xerophytic subspecies of *Lepidium* called *spinescens* which has the fruiting racemes ending in a spiny point (E. Guest et al., *Flora of Iraq* 4 888), but its spines are too inconspicuous, it would seem, to give the name to the plant.

37. Quoted according to the University Microfilms edition (8018543); the book is now in press at Eisenbraun's.

Remarks

The translation of the third line could also be 'water roiled in its (the river's) mouth'. I take zur = *nazarbubu*. Other proposed solutions—not based on the line given above—are 'snowy weather' (Alster, *JNES* 35(1976)266) and 'sandstorm' (Falkowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 233). This riddle was also discussed by S. N. Kramer (OECT 5 p. 36f.) who could not be aware at the time that it could be a riddle. Note that the presumed answer is found alone in Ni 4210 + ii 10'f. (ISET 2 102f.), but it is preceded there by an entry that can be restored from Ni 9752 iii' 8' (ISET 2 98) and from BWL 263:9f: engar igi ŠEŠ-a a-na-àm 'x ak x¹ (BWL ak-na) 'what did the farmer with vigilant eyes³⁸ do (= say)?' This interrogative sentence cannot stand alone and is to be considered an introduction to the 'riddle'. And thus in Ni 4210 + the 'answer' replaces the complete riddle³⁹.

18. Source M i 1'-5'.

The text is very poorly preserved and no transliteration of the first three lines is attempted here. The solution is:

5 ki-búr-bi ú kù-ga bir₄ mušen-àm
'Answer: the clean food of the sparrows'.

19. Source M i 7'-9'.

1 ama-mu é ma-an-dù-ù-ma
2 ab ta-àm ab-ta-è e-še
3 ab ta-àm àm-ku₄-ku₄-dè e-še
4 ki-búr-bi zi ki-si-ga lú-[ù] mu-e-tùm-m[a]

'My mother built me a house;
"window, what comes out?", she said,
"window, what comes in?", she said.
Answer: the flour of a funeral offering which someone brings'.

Another possible translation is 'it comes out through a window, it comes in through a window'. The graves had a pipe and/or a window (ab) through which libations and solid offerings were put into it. The riddle seems to imply that someone may remove the funeral offerings after they have been placed in the grave.

Remarks

Since the text is in the Emesal dialect, ta-àm stands for a-na-àm, and this makes the phrase ambiguous for it can also stand for ablative -ta + àm. Note also that a b 'window' with the verb ku₄ in the

38. Reading uri, or 'bitter, disappointed eyes', reading ŠEŠ.

39. There is no foundation for the sexual interpretation of the 'answer' proposed in OECT 5 37⁵; the 'girdle' is nonexistent (the sign BU is malformed on the tablet and resembles an [B]), and the zu is the result of a gratuitous emendation to the OECT text which reads IM nu-ba-e '(the land) has not received its share of rain'.

meaning 'to enter through the window' takes elsewhere the suffix *-ta*: *ab-ta (ina apti) nam-mu-un-da-ku₄-ku₄-dè* AOAT 1 10:166. The 'window of the grave' is known from the same text (line 173): *ab urugal-la-a-ta*⁴⁰. It is not clear whether it is different from the *a-pa₄* = *arūtu* a clay pipe through which water and beer were poured into the grave⁴¹. These drains are known already in Sargonic times when the word is written ÉXPAP (LAK 736), e. g., ÉXPAP *en-en-ne* 'the funerary pipes of the ancestors' A 985:6 (Adab text) and *passim* in the Ebla texts. It may be the same as *'à-pa₄* = *'à-ra-tum, àr-ra-tum* in Ebla (MEE 4 234:315).

20. Source M i 10-11'

- 1 [x-D]U a-ri-a ba-an-til
2 [ki-búr-b]i íd-da-ám

'[It co]mes(?), puts an end to the desert.
[Answ]er: a river'.

The initial word is perhaps a verbal form. The general meaning is clear: where there is a river, there is no desert.

At the beginning restore [i-D]U 'it comes/came', or even [a-t]ú m '(it) brings water', the latter perhaps too transparent a clue. The term *a-ri-a*, Akk. *namū A, ħarbu/ħurbu*, designates a waste land, the desert; it has in most cases a variant *é-ri-a* and, less frequently, *a-rá*, cf. *In-nin-šà-gur-ra* 16 and *Lugale* 436. If the initial verb is to be read *-rá*, one can assume a word play, or at least assonance, between the two first words of the line.

21-23. Source K.

Poorly preserved remains of three riddles, the second of which deals with cows:

- 1 áb x 'tur x¹-a-kam?
2 unù [...] i-bi-[da] [,,,
3 ki-búr-bi 'x x¹ [...].

Although some words are recognizable, *ab* 'cow', *unù* 'cattleman', *i-bi* 'its butter', the text is too damaged for translation.

24. Source L obv.

- 1 en-e gá éš-da mu-un-íl
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
2 ku₆ hu-mu-un-lá
1 2 3 4 5

40. Restored by H. Hunger, SpBTU 2 26a:8'.

41. For the word, see A. Sjöberg, *AS* 16, pp. 63f. Vertical drains found in quantity in Ur were interpreted by the excavators as libation drains (see E. Burrows, *Or* 1(1932)231). This interpretation was generally rejected later on by the archeologists, but recent excavations in the Hamrin valley tend to confirm the validity of the former interpretation (personal communication by McG. Gibson).

3 dumu-aš ki-gi₄-gi₄-ra nu-tuku
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
 4 nam-me i-ak-e
 1 2 3 4 5
 5 ki-búr-bi
 6 gá-e ki nam-ra-aš-ak-me-en
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 7 ki-mu-šè hu-mu-gi₄-gi₄
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

'The lord carried me with a rope,
 he caught a fish.
 To the only son who has no place to go back to,
 what will he do?
 Answer: I am in a place of captivity,
 let me go back to my place!

A purely literary riddle, all the cuneiform signs used to write the answer are found in a different sequence in the body of the riddle. The 'lord' is described as a fisherman who has taken the speaker captive. The riddle is similar to the type called 'neck-riddles' in which life and freedom depend on the ability of the victim to solve a riddle. This riddle was no doubt the kernel of a short story telling how someone won his freedom by composing a clever riddle.

To show the sign correspondences, the following table gives the signs of the answer and their place in the body of the riddle. The first digit gives the line, the second the place of each sign in the line:

6.1 = 1.3	6.5 = 3.6	6.9 = 1.1	7.4 = 2.2
6.2 = 4.5	6.6 = 3.2	7.1 = 3.3	7.5 = 1.6
6.3 = 3.3	6.7 = 4.4	7.2 = 2.3	7.6 = 3.4
6.4 = 4.1	6.8 = 4.2	7.3 = 1.4	7.7 = 3.5

In 7.3 = 1.4 -éš and -šè are considered equivalents. In 3.2 one would expect a reading -dili rather than -aš, but the latter is required by 6.6. The grammar is incorrect in line 3 where the -ra is expected to be after tu ku, and -dè or -da should follow -gi₄-gi₄; in line 6 -me-en is correct only if the ki is disregarded ('I am a captive'); if there is a locative construction ('I am in a place of captivity'), one should have had another verb. The word nam -ra-aš refers of course not to any captivity but precisely to a capture in war (I. J. Gelb, *JNES* 32 [1973] 76).

25. Source L rev.

1 lú-dingir-da-nisag-a-ka
 2 mu lugal-tur-e hé-sa₄
 3 [ki-búr]-bi lugal-nisag-a dumu lú-^dda^l-mu

'If Lu-dingir-da-nisag-a
 were named Lugal-tur-e.
 Answer: (he would be) Lugal-nisag-a son of Lu-Damu'.

This riddle, written in a much more cursive script than the preceding one, appears to be a scribal joke using the same techniques of sign rearrangement of riddle 24.

Remarks

The sign transliterated *nisag* is the one usually and incorrectly transliterated *m urub₄* (in the name *lugal*-*"m urub₄"*-e and in the month name) in Ur III literature. For the value *nisag*, see the remarks of J. van Dijk in *JCS* 19(1965)19ff. Correctly written the sign has a whole vertical at the end, while *MURUB₄* has a broken vertical. In some OB texts there may be at times some confusion between the two. LAK 159 is one of the ancestors of ŠID and has, besides the value *nisag*, the values *zāg* and *sag₅*; the latter being preferable and much better attested by Proto-Ea 557, Ea VII iii 14', Proto-Izi 248, etc. The sign LAK 159 is used until Ur III. In Proto-Ea the reading *sag₅* is already attributed to ŠID thus completing the merger with the similar sounding LAK 711 = *sanga* (see Proto-Ea 559).

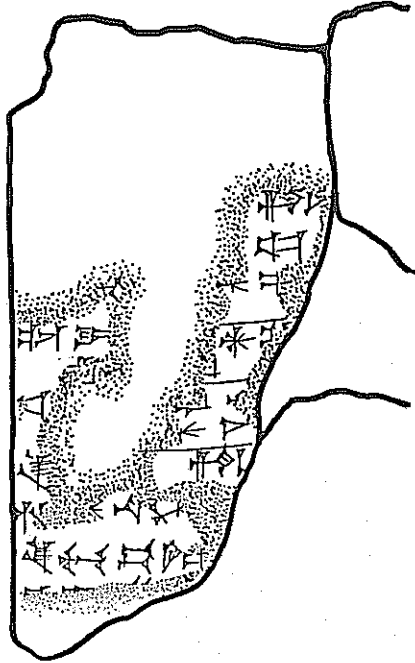


Fig. 1. CBS 9814 + 9815 obv. (Source J).

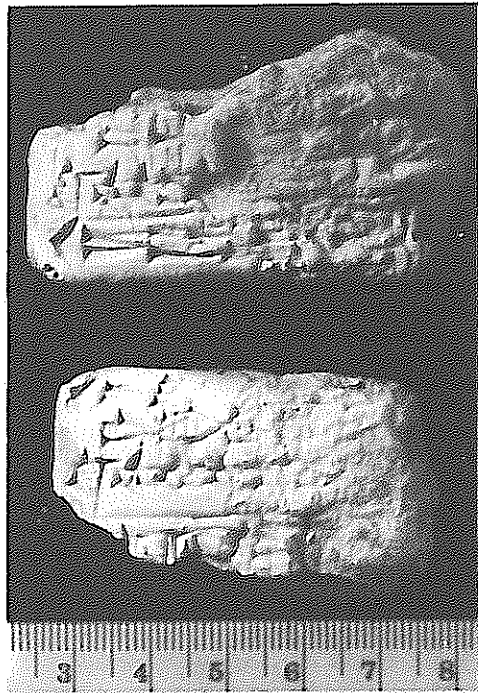


Fig. 2. N 3759 (Source K). Original size. From the author's archives.



Fig. 3. 13N 146 (Source L). Original size. Courtesy Nippur Expedition.



Fig. 4. Text M (reverse and edge).