

A Fragmentary Erotic Sumerian Context Featuring Inana

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[In this article an unpublished fragmentary Sumerian text that features Inanna in an erotic context that includes an occurrence of the ideophone construction *mulmal ... za* is provisionally edited.]

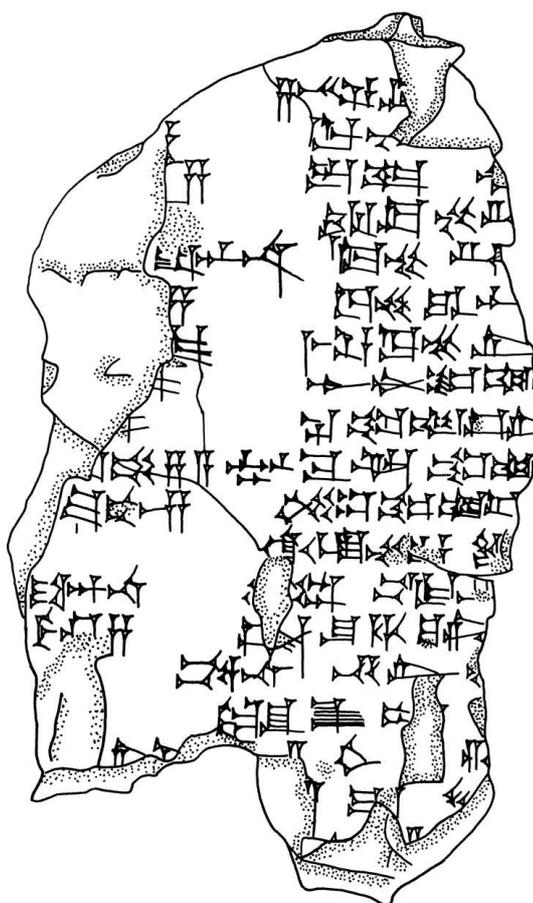
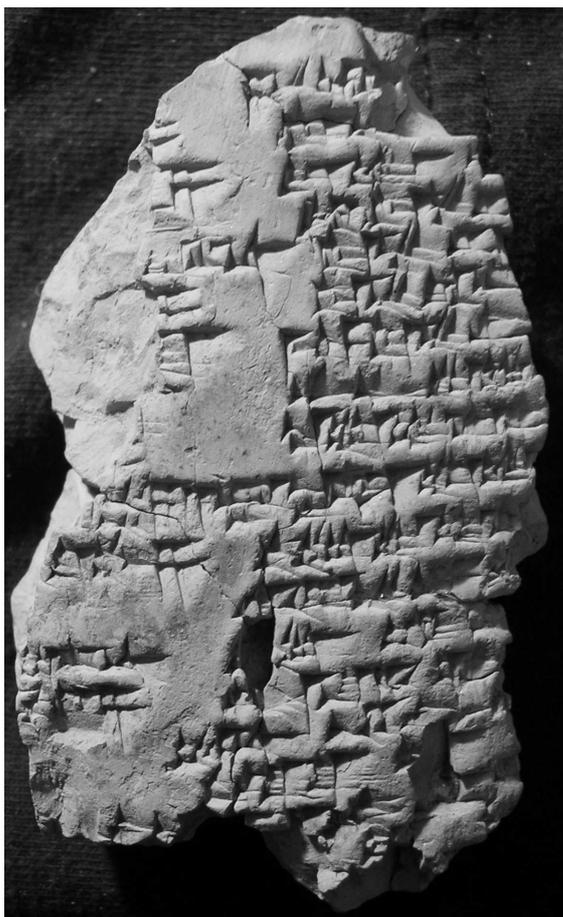
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N 2085 is a central fragment of a single column *imgida* with the dimensions $8.0 \times 4.7 \times 2.7$ cm. It preserves only one side of the tablet, perhaps the obverse, to judge from the curvature. This fragment contains an unplaced Emesal passage that describes what seems to be an imminent or fantasized sexual encounter between Inana and what is most likely Dumuzi. It can be added to the corpus of erotic contexts that has been assembled, for example, by Alster² and, quite possibly, the corpus of Dumuzi-Inana texts, assembled and edited by Sefati,³ which includes a number of *balbale* compositions. Unfortunately, the fragmentary state of preservation permits only tentative interpretation.

1. I would like to thank Yitschak Sefati for the helpful observations he made in conjunction with this text, which were crucial to the interpretation that is advanced here. I am solely responsible for the content of this article.

2. Alster 1993

3. Sefati 1998, Sefati 2005



- 1') [...]za nu?-e-¹x' [...]
- 2') [... z]a du₅-mu- [...]
- 3') [...] ¹x'-za da-aĝ₂-¹x'- [...]
- 4') [...] u₅ du₅-mu-r[i? ...]
- 5') [... Ga]-ša-an-na du₅-mu-ri- [...]
- 6') [...]za du₅-mu-ra-an- [...]
- 7') [...] ¹x'⁴ me-e du₅-mu-ni- [...]
- 8') [...] ¹x' hal-hal de₃-em₃-m[a₃ ...]
- 9') [...] ¹x' si de₃-em₃-ma₃-ni- [... sa₂?]
- 10') [...] ¹x' gaba-za a mul-ma-al de₃-em₃-[ma₃-ni...za]
- 11') [...] ¹x' šag₄ sug₄-za #i-li de₃-em₃-ma₃- [...]
- 12') [...] ki u₃-mu-un n[u₂ ...]
- 13') [... Ga]-ša-an-na h[i]-li gur₃-¹ru¹ [...]
- 14') [...] gal₄-¹la¹-za ¹lal₃ šu ha-ba-ni- [...]
- 15') [...] edin-na en-ne₂ ¹x' [...]

4. This sign, the first half of which is missing, appears to be either the SAG or KA sign or a derivative.

- 16') [...] gal₄-la-še₃ 'x' [...]
 17') [...] NI 'x' [...] 'x' 'x' ? %I 'x' 'x' [...]
 18') [...] 'x' 'x' [...]
 19') [...] [x] [...]

- 1') ... on your ...
 2') May ... on your ...
 3') May ... on your ...
 4') May ... oil ...
 5') May Inana ...
 6') May ... on your ...
 7') May I ...
 8') May ...
 9') May ... be done properly(?)
 10') ... may water(?) splash(?) against your chest
 11') ... on your bare breast, may allure ...
 12') ... where the lord lies ...
 13') ... Inana, filled with allure ...
 14') May he ... honey on your vulva
 15') ... in/of the steppe, the lord ...
 16') ... towards the vulva ...
 17') ...
 18') ...
 19') ...

Commentary

1') It is initially logical to assume that the ZA sign in this line reflects the second person singular possessive suffix + the locative (zu.a), as it does elsewhere in this fragmentary passage. However, the ZA sign is not written in proximity to the noun or nominal phrase that it would modify, which would not be generally anticipated.

10') The presence of the lexeme /a/, “water, sperm” is assumed to be present here instead of the use of the grapheme A to lengthen the preceding vowel.

This line constitutes another occurrence of the ideophone construction /mulmal/ ... za, for which see Civil (1966: 120) and Black (2003: 49-50). The basic meaning, although somewhat elusive, may be “to make a swishing/rustling sound,” and elsewhere can involve corporeal contact, as it clearly does here. Perhaps the most comparable occurrence is found in the *širnamšub* to Ninisina (Ninisina B) line 15,⁵ where the ideophone construction appears to describe the application of oils and dairy products to the body of the bathing goddess. This ideophone construction also occurs with the lexeme /a/ with the meaning of “water” in description of Ninlil’s barge in Shulgi R 63.⁶ The lexeme /a/ can describe both water and semen: thus, this context may involve bathing or perhaps ejaculation onto the chest.

11') The expression šag₄ sug₄ seems to describe the bare female torso in several contexts,⁷

5. Cohen 1975: 601

6. Klein 1990: 106

7. For a discussion of this term, see Peterson 2007: 582-582.

including Nanše A 203,⁸ one version of Inana H,⁹ and the unpublished Dumuzi-Inana hymnic fragment N 1365 rev 4’.

12’) I assume that the Emesal word u_3 -mu-un occurs here as opposed to a prefix chain including the prefix of anteriority u_3 .

14’) In this line, the modal prefix is rendered here in the Emegir dialect in contrast to the use of the Emesal modal in the preceding lines. This could reflect a shift from a female to male speaker.

As Civil has recently noted, the exact referent of the various Sumerian terms that pertain to female genitalia and whether the clitoris, vagina and vulva were lexemically distinguished is unclear.¹⁰

Honey or syrup (lal_3) occurs frequently elsewhere in erotic contexts, often in conjunction with the bed or bedchamber, as in Dumuzi-Inana D 11,¹¹ Dumuzi-Inana F₁ 2¹² as well as Šu-Sîn B 10-11.¹³ It frequently occurs in these contexts with the modifier hab_2 , which clearly describes a foodstuff in contexts such as the Marriage of Enlil and Sud 116 and Summer and Winter 98.¹⁴ Honey is also utilized to describe the quality of allure ($hi-li$) as possessed by the bridegroom ($mu-ti-in$) in Šu-Sîn B 2 and 4.¹⁵ The epithet $lu_2\ lal_3$, “honey man,” describes Inana’s lover in Dumuzi-Inana E 5-8, where the lover’s extremities ($šu-gîr_3$, $a_2-šu-gîr_3$) are further described adjectivally as “honey.” In Šu-Sîn B 27,¹⁶ the female lover wishes that Šu-Sîn would touch “your place (that is) sweet like honey” ($ki\ lal_3-gin_7\ ze_2-ba-zu\ šu\ nu-uš-mu-e-tag-ge$). Although, as Sefati notes, this line clearly reflects a euphemistic description of sexual foreplay, it is not entirely clear whether this constitutes a reference to the genitals. In this context, however, honey is unequivocally involved with the vulva, perhaps in description of a vaginal secretion or, given the fact that Inana’s vulva is the indirect object of this action, the male ejaculation.

The restoration of the root of the apparent compound verb with the nominal component $šu$ is uncertain. Compare, however, the context of Dumuzi-Inana W 39,¹⁷ where, depending on the interpretation of the compound verb $šu \dots gur$, Dumuzi either applies (thus Sefati) or gathers (thus Civil) milk and honey via the compound verb $šu \dots gur$ prior to embracing Inana.

15’) The term $edin$, “steppe,” may involve an epithet or a rendezvous for the two lovers. It is also possible that the phrase $^{8is}kiri_6-gî_6-edin-na$ is to be restored here, which has the potential meaning of “deep shade” and occurs in the erotic metaphor utilized by Inana to describe her lover in Dumuzi-Inana E 2.¹⁸ The $hi_6-edin-na$ also occurs Dumuzi-Inana I 1-6,¹⁹ but as Sefati notes, the context seems to involve prestige of birth as opposed to eroticism.

8. Heimpel 1981: 94-95

9. ROM 721 line 19/UM 29-15-560 + CBS 13915 + N 3156 obv. 10’-11’ (Sjöberg 1977: 18-19)

10. Civil 2006: 58. Note that the lexeme gal_4 is used to describe part of the ear in the entry $gal_4-la\ gêštug_2-gû_10$ of Ugu-gû₁₀ 146 (MSL 9: 56), which may possibly be explained by a morphological analogy between the vulva and ear cartilage. Note, however, that Sjöberg (1970: 94) understands this entry to describe the ear canal (“meine Ohrenhöhle”).

11. Sefati 1998: 152

12. Sefati 1998: 320

13. Alster 1993: 22, Sefati 1998: 353

14. For this term, which is sometimes confused with the lexeme / $tahab$ / (for which see, for example, Civil 2007: 22) due to the similarity of the spellings $ta-hab_{1/2}$ and $lal_3\ hab_2$, see Civil 1983: 63, Civil 1987: 45, Sefati 1998: 160-161, and Attinger 1993: 718-719, who offers the possible translations “vieux miel” or “miel durci” for $lal_3\ hab_2$.

15. Sefati 1998: 354

16. Sefati 1998: 354

17. Civil 1987: 39, Sefati 1998: 262

18. Sefati 1998: 165, 168. For the reading $gî_6-edin-na$ with the meaning of “deep shade,” see Civil 1983: 4 n. 9.

19. Sefati 1998: 194. See also Rubio 2001: 273.

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