Water of labour? A Note on the Story of Sin and the Cow

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Para Gregorio, maestro y amigo,
con ocasión de su 80 anivesario.

[This is the first of a series of studies on the Babylonian incantation texts from Late Bronze Age Ugarit following the recent edition by the author in Gregorio del Olmo Lete's *Incantations and Anti-Witchcraft Texts from Ugarit*. This first study deals with the fragment RS 25.436 that preserves part of the Story of Sin and the Cow. After considering its relationship to the few other extant versions of the myth, the article presents a discussion of a number of new readings and alternative interpretations of words and passages in the story, especially the crucial expression generally translated as "water of labour".]

Keywords: The Cow of Sin; Babylonian myth; incantation texts; water of labour.

The brief Babylonian myth known to modern scholarship as the Cow of Sin falls roughly into two sections: a first, shorter one tells how the moon god fell in love with a cow of his, came down to earth in the form of a bull, and secretly mated with her; and a second, longer one describes how, in due course, the cow gave birth, with much pain, and how Sin sent down two divine helpers to assist her at the birth.[1] The text as we know it was used as a spell to be recited for women in labour. There are presently six copies of this Akkadian incantation. Four of them, coming from Assyria, Ugarit (mod. Ras Shamra) and Hattusa (mod. Boghazköy), are roundly dated to the last quarter of the second millennium and present differences in wording and formulation; the other two manuscripts are Late Assyrian copies of the Standard Babylonian recension and currently constitute the main source of the historiola. The Ugarit fragment is the latest addition to the dossier. Published by D. Arnaud in 2007, RS 25.436 preserves part of the second section of the myth, and provides significant additions to the history of the text as well as improvements to the reading of some passages.[2]

1. W.G. Lambert was the first to give a proper synopsis of the story (Lambert, W.G. 1969: 33) and this I have followed here.

2. Since its reconstruction thirty years ago, by W. Röllig (Röllig, W. 1985), only a few studies have dealt with the Story of Sin and the Cow. Veldhuis, N. 1991 is the more thorough treatment; other, later studies and translations include Stol, M. 2000:66-68, Sanders, S.L. 2001:432-440, and Bergmann, C.D. 2008:17-28. Lambert, W.G. 1969, which was the first attempt to consider the whole material at hand before the publication of RS 25.436, remains fundamental. Note also the translations of the text by W. Farber (Farber, W. 1987:275), B. Foster (Foster, B. 2005:1007-1008), and more recently J.A. Scurlock (Scurlock, J.A. 2014:128, see also Scurlock, J.A. 2002:367).

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1. *The fragment from Ugarit*

RS 25.436 is a small fragment (46 x 48 x 22) from the left side of the obverse of a single-column tablet. Nothing is left of the reverse surface. The beginning of ten successive lines are preserved on the obverse, as well as the last two signs of what seems to be a colophon on the left edge of the tablet. Because the Story of Sin and the Cow is inscribed along with other incantation texts in all other manuscripts, it is at least conceivable that the tablet to which RS 25.436 belonged did not only contain this one story. Arnaud provided a handcopy of RS 25.436 (Arnaud, D. 2007:pl. XI) and photographs of the obverse and reverse are published in Del Olmo Lete, G. 2014:pl. XXII. The script, orthography and language are normative Middle Babylonian, agreeing with the remarkable and exceptional "Babylonianising" Ugarit archive where the piece was found, namely the so-called "House of the Lamashtu tablets".[3] In my recent edition of the text (Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:77-78) I commented that the minor differences from Arnaud's *editio princeps*, especially in the restoration of some lines, were based on the more complete extant manuscripts of the Story of Sin and the Cow. For the sake of reference and completeness, I offer here a list of sources and an edition of the lines present in RS 25.436.

2. *The sources*

Because the Middle Babylonian version from Ugarit, unlike the two Middle Assyrian manuscripts, presents a text very close to the standardised Babylonian recension handed down in the first millennium, the order of the sources in the following edition is not a strictly chronological one but rather aims at conveniently illustrating the place of the Ras Shamra fragment within the history of the text. The choice of the abbreviations given to the manuscripts (different from previous studies) also reflects the present interest in the history of transmission of the Story of Sin and the Cow.[4]

RS RS 25.436 (Arnaud 2007 no. 20, pl. XI; translit. p. 75; photo in Del Olmo Lete, G. 2014:pl. XXII)
Ugarit (mod. Ras Shamra). Fragment from the left side of the obverse of a two-column tablet; see description above.

Bogh Bo 4822 (*KUB* IV 13,1-12; photo in hethiter.net/:PhotArch N05373 and BoFN00106a)
Hattusa (mod. Boghazköy). Fragment from the left side (of the obverse?) of a two-column tablet. The other side is destroyed. The inscribed text preserves part of the Story of Sin and the Cow (lines 1-12, here 1'-12') followed by the corresponding subscript and brief accompanying ritual, and the beginning of another Akkadian birth incantation.[5]

3. See van Soldt, W.H. 1991:209, 373-374; id. 2012:173-178; Arnaud, D. 2007:31.

4. The abbreviations follow the ones of *CAD*. Bogh = Boghazköy; MA = Middle Assyrian; RS = Ras Shamra; SB = Standard Babylonian (note the subscript additional abbreviation: K = Kuyunjik).

5. The other incantation has been recently treated by E. Zomer (Zomer, E. 2013).

SB_{Assur} VAT 8869 (*KAR* 196 = *BAM* 248 III 10-35; photo in the CDLI web under no. P285333)
Assur. Almost complete four-column tablet. The surface of the upper part of the obverse is damaged and a number of lines of the first two columns are therefore lost. The reverse surface is perfectly preserved. The tablet is inscribed with a compendium of Akkadian prescriptions and incantations with accompanying rituals for women in labour. Lines 10-35 in column III preserve the full incantation text of Sin and the Cow.

SB_K K 2413(+) (Meloni, G. 1911:pl. II = *AMT* 67,1 III 1-25; translit. Meloni, G. 1911:569-571; photo in the CDLI web under no. P394413)
Nineveh (mod. Kuyunjik). Fragment from the left side of the reverse of a four-column tablet. Three small fragments (K 8210 and K 3485+10443) are all that is left from the obverse. The tablet is a duplicate of VAT 8869 and was accordingly inscribed with the same compendium of incantations, rituals and prescriptions. About 2 cm are missing from the right side of the fragment; as a result, the lines of column III, where the text of Sin and the Cow is found, are incomplete.

MA_1 Ligabue private coll. (Lambert, W.G. 1969:pl. VI, 51-62; translit. p. 31)
Assyria. Two-column tablet almost fully and perfectly preserved. It is inscribed in Akkadian with prescriptions for a pregnant woman suffering from colic as well as two incantations for a woman in labour. The second of the incantations, a version of the Story of Sin and the Cow, begins at the end of the reverse, continues on the top edge, and ends on the left edge of the tablet.

MA_2 Rm 376 (Lambert, W.G. 1965:287 obv. 19-36; photo in the CDLI web under no. P282433)
Kalḫu (mod. Nimrud). Large fragment of what seems to be a four-column tablet of ca. 35 lines per column. Originally, the tablet must have had a landscape orientation. One almost complete column is preserved on each side. The two well-preserved columns are inscribed with various incantations, all in Akkadian except for one written in phonetic Sumerian. The end of the (presumably second) column on the obverse (lines 19-36) contains a version of the Story of Sin and the Cow.

3. *Transliteration*

As stated above, only the lines present in the Ugarit manuscript are treated here. Except for the last one, all the lines (here numbered 1 to 10) follow the lines of text in RS; this is also because, as will be seen, they correspond closely with the lines of poetry.[6] The irregularities in the two Middle Assyrian copies (cf. especially line 4 in MA_2) are the result of the frequent scribal corruptions in both texts (see the notes below).

6. See the commentary below. The only previous attempt to compare the different versions within the stream of tradition is Röllig, W. 1985. There, the presentation of the different sources basically follows the SB recension. Note, however, in the relevant section (Röllig, W. 1985:262-263), the inconsistencies in lines 23/24 and 25/26, as well as line 27, inadvertently omitted.

1	RS 1’	^{d}nanna-*ru* [ ]
	Bogh 3’	[^{ding}]$^{ir?}$n[anna$^{?}$-*ru*$^{?}$]
	SB_{Assur} III 23/24	^{d}nanna-*ru* / ^{d}30 *ina* an-*e iš-tam-me ri-gim-šá*
	SB_{K} III 13/14	[^{d}nanna-*ru*] / ^{d}30 *ina* an-*e iš-tam-me ri-*[ ]
	MA_{1} 58	^{d}30 *na-na-ar* an-*e* [ ]
	MA_{2} obv. 29	<^{d}30$^{?}$ *i*$^{?}$->*na* an *iš-ta-ma-a ri-gi-i*[*m-šá*]
2	RS 2’	*iš-ši* šu-*su a-n*[*a*]
	Bogh 4’	[*iš*$^{?}$*-š*]*i*$^{?}$ *q*[*à*$^{?}$*-as*$^{?}$*-su*$^{?}$]
	SB_{Assur} III 24	*iš-ši qa-as-su šá-ma-me*
	SB_{K} III 14	[ ]
	MA_{1} 58	[ ]
	MA_{2} obv. 29/30	[ ]
3	RS 3’	2 *la-mas-sa-at* [ ]
	Bogh 4’	[ ]
	SB_{Assur} III 25	2 ^{d}lamma.meš an-*e ú-ri-da-ním-ma*
	SB_{K} III 15	2 ^{d}lamma.meš an-*e ú-ri-*[ ]
	MA_{1} 59	2 *ši-na* dumu.mí ^{d}*a-nim* ta an-*e ú-ri-da-a-ni*
	MA_{2} obv. 30	2-*ta* ^{d}alad an-*e ú-ri-da-ni*
4	RS 4’	1-*et* ì bur *na-*[*ša-at*]
	Bogh 5’	[1$^{?}$*-e*]*t*$^{?}$ [ì$^{?}$]
	SB_{Assur} III 25/26	1-*et* ì.giš bur *na-šá-at* / *šá-ni-tum ú-šap-pa-la me-e ḫa-li*
	SB_{K} III 15/16	[ ] / *šá-ni-tum ú-šap-pa-la me-*[*e*]
	MA_{1} 59/60	1-*te na-ša-at* a.meš [*ḫ*]*i-i-li ša-ni-tu* / *na-ša-at* ì *pu-ú-ri*
	MA_{2} obv. 30-32	*il-t*[*i-it*] / [ ] x x x x x *na-šá-at* a.meš *šul-me* x[ ] / [ ] x x x x x x *šá* gu_{4}.áb x [ ]
5	RS 5’	*il-pu-ut* ì [ ]
	Bogh 6’	*il-pu-u*[*t*]
	SB_{Assur} III 26	*il-pu-ut* ì.giš bur *pu-us-sa*
	SB_{K} III 16	[ ]
	MA_{1} 60	a.meš *ḫi-li* {li} *il-pu-ut* sag.ki.meš-*sa*
6	RS 6’	*me ḫal-li u*[*š-*]
	Bogh 6’	[ ]
	SB_{Assur} III 27	*me-e ḫa-li ú-šap-pi-ḫa ka-la zu-um-ri-šá*
	SB_{K} III 17	*me-e ḫa-li ú-šap-pi-*[*ḫa*]
	MA_{1} 60/61	ì *pu-ú-ri* {x} *ú-*<*šap*>*-pi-*<*ḫa*>/ NI (for dù).a.bi su.meš-*šá*

7	RS 7’	*iš-ni-m*[*a*]
	Bogh 7’	*i-na ša-ni-i il-p*[*u-ut*]
	SB_{Assur} III 28	*šá-na-a il-pu-ut* ì.giš bur *pu-us-sa*
	SB_K III 18	*šá-na-a il-pu-ut* ì+giš bur *pu-*[*us-sa*]
8	RS 8’	*me ḫal-li* [ ]
	Bogh 7’/8’	[ ] / *pa-na*[sic] su-*šu*[sic]
	SB_{Assur} III 29	*me-e ḫa-li ú-šap-pi-ḫa ka-la* su-*šá*
	SB_K III 19	*me-e ḫa-li ú-šap-pi-ḫa* [ ]
9	RS 9’	*ina šal-ši* [ ]
	Bogh 8’	*i-na ša-a*[*l-ši*]
	SB_{Assur} III 30	*šal-la-ti-iš-šu ina la-pa-ti*
	SB_K III 20	*šal-la-ti-iš-šu ina la-*[*pa-ti*]
10	RS 9’/10’	[ ] / *a-na qa-*[ ]
	Bogh 8’/9’	[ ] / *im-qú-ut qa-aq-qár-šu*
	SB_{Assur} III 31	*bu-ru* gim *ú-za-li im-ta-qut qaq-qar-šú*
	SB_K III 21	*bu-ru* gim *ú-za-li im-t*[*a-qut*]
	MA_2 obv. 33	[ ] x x *im-qu-ta* a.[sic]*qar-šu*

4. *Translation*

The transliteration above shows clearly that the Ugarit text, as already mentioned, is very close to the Standard Babylonian recension. It is therefore possible to restore the lacunae of the Ras Shamra fragment with the help of the completely preserved manuscript SB_{Assur} (indeed what was done in Márquez Rowe 2014:77-78). The translation of the passage is accordingly based on this later source.

1 The Luminary, Sin, in heaven heard her (i.e. the cow’s) cries again and again.
2 He raised his hand to heaven,
3 (and) two protective spirits came down from heaven.
4 One carried oil-from-the-jar, the other brought water-from-the-bowl.
5 She (i.e. the former) rubbed oil-from-the-jar on her brow,
6 she (i.e. the latter) sprinkled her whole body with water-from-the-bowl.
7 A second time she rubbed oil-from-the-jar on her brow,
8 she sprinkled her whole body with water-from-the-bowl.
9 As she rubbed for a third time (oil-from-the-jar on her brow),
10 the calf fell to the ground like a (swift) young gazelle.

5. *Notes*

Line 1. It has been assumed, especially in the light of MA_1, that the name of the moon god and his epithet *Nannaru* were originally understood in apposition, accordingly belonging to the same clause in the *Vorlage*, so that the late SB version where the two words appear split in two clauses, *Nannaru* at the end of one and Sin at the beginning of the next, was corrupted at this point of the text. This assumption gains now support from the fact that the MB version from Ugarit (and probably also the one from Boghazköy), where the lines of text generally agree with the lines of poetry, has the epithet at the beginning of the line. Note further that the almost identical clause *Nannaru Sin ištemme rigimša*, where divine epithet and name stand in clear apposition, is written as a line of poetry in a parallel Cow-of-Sin incantation text in the same SB compendium (SB_{Assur} III 39 // SB_K III 29).

Usually, and obviously, based on the SB recension, translations of the Story of Sin and the Cow have generally taken the late version to be free of corruptions, understanding lines 23 and 24 as two different clauses: "At her crying, at her screaming in labour, Nannaru was downcast. / Sin heard her screaming in heaven and lifted high his hand" (Veldhuis, N. 1991:9; Stol, M. 2000:67; Sanders, S.L. 2001:433; Foster, B. 2005:1007; Bergmann, C.D. 2008:25). However, that the clause division in the SB recension is indeed corrupt, as Röllig already pointed out (see Röllig, W. 1985:267 and the translations by Farber and Scurlock)[7], is clearly shown by the fact that stative *nepalsaḫ* in line 23 cannot have the moon god as subject; the one who "fell to the ground in supplication" is no doubt the herdsman (note that statives are precisely the forms used in the previous lines to describe the sentiments of the distressed herdsman and herd boys on viewing the cow's suffering).[8] What is especially interesting here, and has apparently gone unnoticed in previous studies (in spite of the precise reference given in *CAD N/1* p. 272), is that the sequential formula *appašu qadādu - napalsuḫu* is attested in another text, namely the *zikurudû* ritual BAM 449 II 13; there, and presumably in the parallel damaged text BAM 454:6'-7',[9] "bowing down and falling to the ground (in supplication)" marks the ritual act before invoking the moon god for help.

Also unnoticed so far is the parallel to this line and mythical motif at the beginning of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. In Tablet I of the SB recension, the text following line 70 can now be partially restored thanks to the Gilgamesh tablet RS 94.2066 that was recovered from the Late Bronze Age ruins of Ras Shamra (see Arnaud, D. 2007:130-134, no. 42, pls. XIX-XX; and George, A.R. 2007:238-248). As is well known, the passage narrates how Gilgamesh harassed the young women of Uruk and how their complaint reached the gods in heaven. Two related references are of interest here because they echo the Story of Sin and the Cow. One is the metaphor used to describe how the hero harrassed the young women: *šū rīmšina šina arḫātu* "He is their wild bull, they are his cows" (RS 94.2066:13 // SB I 73). The second element is found in the next two lines of the Ugarit version, the first of which corresponds to SB I 78; the couplet runs as follows: *tazzimtašina iltenemme Ištar* / *rigmu marṣu iktanaššada ana šamê Ani* "Ishtar hears their complaint again and again, / the terrible cry reaching the heaven of Anu again and again". Note that *iltenemme Ištar* corresponds to and restores beyond doubt the first-millennium text *i*[*š-te-nem*]-*ma-a* ^{d}1[5], as quickly recognized by George (George, A.R. 2007:243); and that the (present) form *ištenemmâ* clearly parallels the Assyrian (preterite) form *ištammâ*, spelled *iš-ta-ma-a*, in manuscript MA_2 of Sin and the Cow. In both cases, the verbal form stands clearly for a singular ventive, not a feminine plural (see George, A.R. 2007:243 for the Gilgamesh passage, and correct Veldhuis 1991:11, 63 who understood the

7. There are other possible corruptions in the SB recension; see for example Lambert, W.G. 1969:39.

8. The structure and "articulation" of the story, including the verse structure, proposed in Veldhuis, N. 1991 therefore require modification or readjustment.

9. It is now Text 10.3:38' in Abusch, T.-Schwemer, D. 2011.

protective spirits to be the subject in this Assyrian version of the historiola). Although in the context of the hero's tyrannical behaviour, the motif of repeated lowing reaching the gods in heaven for help, as told in the Gilgamesh Epic, finds indeed a clear parallel in the Story of Sin and the Cow.

The emendation in MA_2 follows Lambert, W.G. 1965:284 (see also Röllig, W. 1985:267). In view of the other versions of this line as well as the Gilgamesh parallel, I would now prefer to restore *ištemme* in RS instead of *išteme* (as I did in Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:77), and understand this form (as well as the one in SB_{Assur} III 39 // SB_K III 29) as a Gtn preterite. Arnaud did not restore the moon god name in his edition of the text.

Line 2. Arnaud read the last traces of the RS fragment *ana* an$^{?!}$.an$^{?}$, remarking that he could not identify the last sign. The photograph shows clearly that what is written on the tablet is *a-n*[*a* or *a+n*[*a*; the same sort of ligature writing of this preposition can be seen at the beginning of line 10' (both in the photograph and in Arnaud's handcopy). Compare also the prepositional constructions in lines 9' and 10' instead of the adverbial forms of later versions (see the commentary to line 10 below). For the reading of the traces of the Boghazköy fragment, see already Arnaud, D. 2007:76.

Line 3. The syllabic writing in the Ugarit version confirms the bound form of the noun *lamassātu*, the syntagm *lamassāt šamê* paralleling then *mārāt Ani* in the Middle Assyrian manuscript MA_1. It is of course not possible to tell whether the later scribes, as well as the one of MA_2, who wrote the word for the divine messengers logographically, understood *šamê* as having an adverbial function instead of a genitive one (as interpreted, for example, in Veldhuis, N. 1991). In any case, the meaning of the phrase obviously refers to the origins of the protective spirits. Compare *šittā šina mārāt Ani ša šamê* in *Maqlû* III 31-32.

Line 4. Arnaud restored *mê šulme* in RS "par souci de variété" (Arnaud, D. 2007:76); note that the word *šanītu* is missing in the restoration. A restoration *mê ḫalli*, as proposed in Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:77 seems, however, more likely in view of the extant versions and the fact that *mê šulme* is one more exceptional variant of MA_2. Because it is not possible to restore the missing text in lines 30-32 of MA_2 or even guess at its full content, it has been considered more suitable to include here all these lines. For the interpretation of the nature or qualification of the divine water and the variant names, see the note to line 6 below. For the reading of the traces of the Boghazköy fragment, see already Arnaud, D. 2007:76. The scribe of MA_1 reversed the order of appearance of the divine messengers.

Line 5. Arnaud restored the word *šanītu* in RS where it is neither needed nor expected (see the note to line 4 above). As already stated, MA_1 has reversed the order of appearance of the divine assistants and consequently also their treatment of the troubled cow is inverted. The word order in this clause in MA_1 is also different. The interpretation of the dittography follows Lambert, W.G. 1969:31; Veldhuis, N. 1991:64 preferred to read *lilput* instead, but this seems less likely in view of the other versions of the line, the many scribal corruptions in this text, and the fact that the expected sense of the verb is declarative rather than prescriptive, thus requiring a preterite rather than a precative. The writing sag.ki.meš in MA_1 should be added (together with nag.meš in line 55 or ka.meš in line 58) to the list of Middle Assyrian examples of the use of the plural sign to mark the words they follow not as plurals, since they are clearly singular forms, but as logograms (see Müller, K.F. 1937:21-22).

Line 6. Apart from the already mentioned reversed order in the treatment of the troubled cow, the text of MA_1 is at this point very corrupted; the emendation of the verbal form follows Lambert, W.G. 1969:39.

The Ugarit manuscript confirms that the verb in this line and in line 8 is to be read *šapāḫu* rather than *sapāḫu* (as generally understood). The lexical distinction between the two verbs is also clear in their different uses and possibly also etymology: *šapāḫu* is used in medical context to describe the application of ingredients or drugs; and *šuppuḫu* with an analogous meaning is attested in culinary texts to denote the dressing or sprinkling of ingredients onto the food;[10] Ar. *safaḥa* "to pour out", and MHeb *špḥ* "to pour out slowly" are probably cognates stemming from the same original Semitic root. The meaning "etwa 'breit hinstreuen'" of *šapāḫu* given in *AHw* p. 1167 should accordingly be readjusted; *CAD Š/1* p. 3 translates "to sprinkle" but prefers to list the examples under the allophone *šabāḫu* (s.v. A); both dictionaries should update the attestations under the D form, including the example of the Story of Sin and the Cow. In RS the verbal form, presumably to be restored *uštappiḫa* (see Arnaud, D. 2007:75-76, Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:77), does not reflect the MB change /št/ > /lt/.

The Ugarit manuscript also suggests that the word qualifying the water brought down from heaven by one of the divine helpers and used to magically assist the troubled cow has been misunderstood so far. It is possible that the context of the birth incantation and the puns and alliterations characteristic of this literary narrative have misled modern scholars (and probably also ancient scribes) in the interpretation of the word. The noun, spelled *ḫa-li* in the SB recension, has been regularly taken as the infinitive (genitive) form of *ḫiālu* / *ḫâlu* "to be in labour". This is surely correct in SB_{Assur} III 23 where *ri-gim ḫa-li-ša* (cf. SB_K III 13: *ri-gim ḫa-*[ ]) describing the pangs suffered by the cow is to be understood as *rigim ḫâliša* "cries of labour". But the case of *mê ḫâli* is less obvious. The expression has been translated variously: literally as "water of labour" and "Wasser des Kreissens"; physiologically as "Wasser am Blasensprung" viz. "Fruchtwasser"; and contextually as "water of (easy) birthgiving". The latter is *CAD*'s rendering (*CAD Ḫ* p. 55) and was strongly discarded by B. Landsberger in favour of the physiological one given by W. von Soden (*AHw* p. 342). In this very commentary to the word *ḫīlū* (Landsberger, B. 1967:8) Landsberger stated that "the Babylonians named the delivery not from the pains (= Akkadian *pušqu*) caused by labor, but from the amniotic flow (German: Fruchtwasser) discharged during this period". One should note here the variant in MA_1: a.meš *ḫi(-i)-li* (cf. *rigim ḫi-li-ša* in line 58). Landsberger's interpretation was taken at face value by Lambert (Lambert, W.G. 1969:33) and Stol (Stol, M. 2000:125) who translated *mê ḫâli* and *mê ḫīlī* in the Story of Sin and the Cow as "water of birth pangs" or "water of delivery", explicitly understanding thereby the amniotic fluid. This interpretation, however, presents two problems. One is that birth fluids seem to be called in Akkadian *mê pušqi* or *mê bišri* (or *pišri*) in incantations against Lamashtu; and the second one is that in these texts the malevolent demon is said to make babies swallow the fluids in order to kill them.[11] It is then difficult to conceive that the same fatal "water" would be used in the incantation of Sin and the Cow to ease birthgiving, even though by magical means. (Is this possibly the reason why the Middle Assyrian scribe of MA_2 decided to write instead the variant *mê šulme* "water of well-being", definitely more meaningful to him?) The Middle Babylonian RS fragment seems now to provide the solution to the problem. The spelling *ḫal-li* in both lines 6' and 8' suggests that the word is in no way etymologically related to the verb *ḫiālu* / *ḫâlu* "to be in labour". The alternative (offered in Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:77) is to read *mê ḫalli* and understand *ḫallu* as a kind of small container or vessel (see *CAD Ḫ* p. 45, *AHw* p. 312, Sallaberger, W. 1996:111). According to the main source Ḫḫ X 223-237 (see now Civil, M. 1996:144), *ḫallu* (< Sum dug.ḫal) is a container for liquids (as defined in *CAD*); cf. Ḫḫ X 226: dug.ḫal-a = (*ḫallu*) *ša mê*. This new reading, on the other hand, agrees well with the context of this and other, similar incantations. To begin with, oil, as the other magic ingredient to appease the pains of the

10. Note the French translation "saupoudrer" given in these texts by J. Bottéro (Bottéro, J. 1995:218); the English translation has "to sprinkle".

11. See Wiggerman, F.A.M. 2000:231 n. 93; Michel, C. 1997:63-64; compare now, though, Farber, W. 2014: 203-204.

cow, is qualified as "of the jar" (*pūri*).[12] Secondly, in the parallel Cow-of-Sin birth incantation inscribed on the same SB compendium tablet, the pure water to be sprinkled over the troubled cow is called *mê bandudî*, literally "water-from-the-*b*.-bucket" (SB_{Assur} III 42). And finally, in a number of *mannam-lušpur* incantations, the daughters of Anu (like the *lamassātu* sent by Anu in Sin and the Cow) are invoked to bring pure water specifically in their vessels and pots(tands) made of *ḫulālu* stone, lapis lazuli or gold.[13] Alliteration is a figure of speech commonly used in incantations and it is indeed characteristic of the Story of Sin and the Cow (Veldhuis, N. 1991 discusses it in detail). That *ḫallu* was meant to play on *ḫâlu*, like *pūru* on *būru* or *littu* on *ālittu* seems clear; the meaning of the word, however, must have been lost through the process of transmission of the incantation and later scribes seem to have misunderstood it.

Line 7. The reading of the ligature ì+giš in SB_K III 18 is confirmed after collation. Thanks are due to the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish the results of the study of the tablet.

Line 8. The form *pāna* instead of expected *pāni* in the Bogh fragment can be a contamination from *kala*, the word it actually replaces; note also the not infrequent attestations of *ana*/*ina pāna* instead of *ana*/*ina pāni* in the Akkadian texts from Boghazköy (see Labat, R. 1932:47, 73 n. 13). A clear contamination from Hittite is the use here of the 3 sg masculine possessive pronominal suffix for the expected feminine form, as already pointed out in Veldhuis, N. 1991:65 (see Labat, R. 1932:58); note, however, the proper feminine suffix in the other incantation written on the same tablet line 17'.

Line 9. The transliteration (*i-na*) of the preposition in RS in Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:77 should of course be corrected into *ina*. Röllig, W. 1989:263 restored the wrong word in the Bogh fragment and therefore misunderstood and misplaced the line in the narrative.

Line 10. The scribal corruption in MA_2, also assumed here (and in Arnaud, D. 2007:77), was put forward by Lambert in his edition of the text (Lambert, W.G. 1965:287). Röllig, W. 1985:269 and Veldhuis, N. 1991:63 preferred to understand it as a variant (*ugāršu*); although this is of course possible, it is less likely in view of the much corrupted text and the fact that *qaqqaršu* is an Akkadian stock expression, indeed the adverbial noun formed with the locative suffix *-šu(m)* par excellence (cf. the parallel phrases *limqutam qaqqaršum* in the OB incantation VS 17, 34:18, and *qaqqaršu<m> limqutam* in the OA incantation Kt 90/k 178:19-20).[14] Like in line 2, the Ugarit manuscript favours again the prepositional construction. Because already in LBA times the function of the locative suffix was misunderstood, as shown by the use of the prepositions *ana* and *ina* before words with such markers (cf. e.g. *ana qaqqarišu* in the Amarna version of Adapa line 70')[15], *qaqqaršu* was tentatively restored in RS in Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:78; however, as already mentioned, the Ugarit version of the Story of Sin and the Cow shows a remarkably distinctive Middle Babylonian stamp. Most probably, therefore, the word should be rather restored *qa*[*qqari*], as suggested by Arnaud, D. 2007:75; cf. the spelling *ina qa-qa-ri* in the incantation text from Ugarit RS 17.155 rev. 12' (see Márquez Rowe, I. 2014:51).

12. For this container, see Sallaberger, W. 1996:98.

13. See Farber, W. 1990 texts nos. 1.1 (OA), 2.2-2.4 (OB), 3.2 (Emar), 4.1-4.5 (SB). The OA text 1.1 (Kt a/k 611) has been fully published and commented upon by K.R. Veenhof (see Veenhof, K.R. 1996, esp. p. 430).

14. See e.g. Groneberg, B. 1978-79:29, Mayer, W.R. 1995:185. The OA text was published by C. Michel (Michel, C. 2004:398-399); the emendation *qá-qá-ar-šu-<um>* offered here for line 20 finds support in the spelling *qá-qá-ar-šu-um* in the OA Lamashtu incantation BIN 4, 126:13.

15. See more recently Izre'el, S. 2001:33.

6. *Commentary*

Before the publication of the Ugarit manuscript, one could have the impression that there existed "no stream of verbatim textual transmission apparent before the Neo-Assyrian period" or that "each individual recorded instance before this period was the product of a different configuration of the components and formulae that constitute the Cow of Sîn theme", reaching the conclusion that "until the first millennium, the identity of the Cow of Sîn theme did not exist at the verbal level but at the level of a *theme applied to a situation*" and that "the appearance of earlier duplicates would not change this picture much, because the attested range of variation is already so great".[16] Of course not everybody shared unconditionally this opinion. Lambert, for one, displaying his vast experience, remarked that, "although the currently available evidence is nonetheless suggestive [...] this may yet turn to be the result of an accident of preservation".[17] As shown now by a small fragment like RS 25.436, the existence of which was known since 1974,[18] Lambert's cautious advice was entirely justified; conclusions are never definite as regards (cuneiform) textual history. The picture of the history and nature of the Story of Sin and the Cow is now completely changed in the light of this modest and peripheral new piece of evidence.

In view of the Middle Babylonian copies of the historiola found at the LBA archives of Boghazköy and Ras Shamra, as well as the long development of the Cow-of-Sin theme tradition,[19] there can be little doubt that the story itself derived from an Old Babylonian, presumably southern Mesopotamian, source. Although no early manuscript has surfaced so far, the fragments from Hattusa and Ugarit, in particular, preserve the text with few alterations. In fact, from what is left of the tablet, the RS copy seems to have been transmitted directly, either imported straight from Babylonia or rigorously copied from a Babylonian original (by a Babylonian hand?) in a twelfth-century scriptorium at Ugarit. The orthography and grammar of the text are without mistakes or corruptions (cf. the spelling *ḫal-li*) and the lines of text seem to correspond almost exactly to the lines of poetry (cf. the moon god's epithet *Nannaru* in l. 1'; but cf. also line 10 apparently split in two lines, RS 9' and 10'). With this regard, it is interesting to note that the Boghazköy text, though it shows a number of alterations in the line structure and word variants (cf. l. 8'), is rather close to the Ugarit recension viz. *Vorlage* (to the suggested readings of the traces of signs at the beginning of Bogh lines 3', 4' and 5', I would add the following for the beginning of line 2': [*a*$^{?}$-*n*]*a*$^{?}$ *i*[*k*$^{?}$-*ki*$^{?}$-*li*$^{?}$-*ša*$^{?}$/*šu*$^{?}$]).[20] In contrast, and as accurately diagnosed by Lambert (Lambert 1969:35), the two Middle Assyrian copies are both full of scribal corruptions, show the appropriate dialectal forms, do not adhere to the lines of poetry, and contain the results of workings over in Assyria, thus departing considerably from the original version. As for the late SB recension, and as once more precisely observed by Lambert (back in 1969!), "though at first reading apparently impeccable, [it] shows [...] some smoothed-over mistakes originating from the scribal tradition" (Lambert 1969:35).

16. Sanders, S.L. 2001:434 with n. 18 (his italics).

17. Sanders, S.L. 2001:434 n. 17.

18. Following the identification made by J. Nougayrol (published in Caquot, A. et al. 1974:386 n. 1).

19. The myth itself "may well go back to neolithic times", as put forward by Lambert (Lambert 1969:35). See also Stol, M. 2000:59-72; Bergmann, C.D. 2008:17-33.

20. For the possible confusion of genre in the writing of the possessive suffix, see the comments to line 8.

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