

## “Watering by Foot”: GEN 36-37 and Parallels\*

*Miguel Civil* † – University of Chicago

[Noteworthy among the passages of problematic interpretation in the Sumerian story tale “Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld”, is the episode of Inanna and the *halup*-tree. Inanna is said to water the tree not with the hands but with the foot. This expression has puzzled translators and commentators, and the present article attempts to clarify it as much as possible.]<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** irrigation, watering, orchard, garden.

### 1. *Literary sources*

#### 1.1. Gilgameš and Enkidu

The narrative unit (lines 27-44) of Inanna and the Tree, in “Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld”<sup>2</sup> starts suddenly, with no other connection to the preceding material than *u<sub>4</sub>-bi-a* “at that time”, and is repeated no less than twice in lines 79-80 and 123-24. Lines 36-37 and their repetitions are the main concern of the present investigation. The first time they are formulated in the main dialect of Sumerian; while the repetitions in lines 79-80 and 123-24 are in the female Emesal dialect. The whole narrative unit is something of a textual nightmare. Long discussions of lines 36-37 and their parallels, with previous literature, can be found in Attinger 1993: 477-84, 2009, 2015, and Gadotti 2005, 2014, and they have puzzled not only the modern scholars: of the seven sources expected to have lines 36-37, the scribes of two sources (N4 and N17) elected to simply skip them, and N42 moves lines 79-80 to the wrong place. Since many of the textual problems do not affect directly the subject matter of this article, most of their discussion is relegated here to an Appendix.

---

\*This article, labelled “Draft 2”, was sent to Gonzalo Rubio and Fumi Karahashi by Miguel Civil in 2015. Even though it was never completed, it is full of keen observations and deep thoughts, the very characteristics of his writings. It should definitely be available to every student of Assyriology. Following the publication of Civil’s *An Outline of Sumerian Grammar* (Barcino. Monographica Orientalia 14, 2020), Adelina Millet Albà, Director of *Aula Orientalis*, kindly offered to include this article in the journal. The text has been left unchanged except for some of the bibliographical information and further bibliography, by Karahashi, has been added at the end of the article. The text contains symbols (three asterisks \*\*\*) indicating points that Civil considered that he had to finish preparing, completing or revising.

1. This is a somewhat revised version of the 2012 personal communication mentioned in Gadotti 2014: 254.

2. ETCSL 1.8.1.4. The latest critical edition of the entire tale is Gadotti 2014. Attinger 2008-09 provides an annotated translation with important remarks and a quite complete bibliography (a previous presentation of the crucial lines under discussion is Attinger 1993: 482).

Lines 27-37 read in translation:

- 27 At that time, there was a lonely tree, a lonely oak tree, a lonely tree,  
 28 It had got stuck on the banks of the pure Euphrates,  
 29 It was being wetted by the Euphrates.  
 30 The might of the South Wind pulled out its roots and tore off its branches  
 31 It was being buffeted by the waters in the Euphrates.  
 32 A woman was walking, respecting the instructions of the Sky god,  
 33 She was walking, respecting the instructions of the Sky god.  
 34 She took the tree in her hands and brought it into Uruk,  
 35 She brought it into the splendid/ luscious Inana's garden. \* went into  
 36 The woman did not plant the tree with her hands, she planted it with her foot,  
 37 The woman did not water the tree with her hands, she watered it with her foot.

#### Remarks

27. Gadotti translates *ha-lu-úb* not 'oak' but 'cherry tree', see the argumentation, that I find unconvincing (cf. Civil 2013: 30), in Miller and Gadotti 2009. Since the botanical identity of the tree is not germane to the analysis of lines 36-37, the matter is not pursued further here. At least two mss. (N21 and N40) add at the end "a lonely boxwood tree" (<sup>giš</sup>*taškarin*),<sup>3</sup> in contradiction with the previous stated identity. Unless this gloss-like addition represents a divergent tradition, the explanation shows once more that <sup>giš</sup>*taškarin*, besides its specific meaning "boxwood", or the like, is a generic term for "noble, precious wood", the same way that *za-gìn* can be a generic designation for "precious stones". Remember the honorific, and millennia long, first place of <sup>giš</sup>*taškarin* opening the lists of woods and trees.

28. A translation "stuck", perfectly acceptable within the semantics of the verb *dù*, gives a better scenario than "planted": an exotic sapling is carried down by the current and gets stuck on the river banks, rather than being *planted* there.

35. The verb is translated by Gadotti "she brought it [sc. the tree] into", while Attinger prefers "on la fit entrer", introducing an entity, unspecified in the tale, that somehow controls Inanna. The reflexive form *im-ma-ni-in-ku<sub>4</sub>-re*.<sup>4</sup>

37. An eclectic reconstruction of line 37 would read (see Appendix for details); *munus-e giš šu-na a li-bí-in-dug<sub>4</sub>/dé gir-ni-ta \*a bí-in-dug<sub>4</sub>/dé*.

It is difficult to decide between *a--dug<sub>4</sub>* and *a--dé*, the latter is favored by the Emesal repetitions and the parallel from The Heron and the Turtle (1.2). No significant difference in meaning needs, however, to be assumed between the two verbs in a non-technical, or not accounting, context.<sup>5</sup> The absence of the nominal *a* in the repetition of the second half of the line is syntactically unproblematic. The difference implied by the use of the locative *-a* in the first part,

3. The scribe took the final *giš diš-àm* as an interrogative. A nuance "exotic, unique" for *diš* is probable in the present context.

4. The editor does not accept the *-re* of N4 and N23 (with an incorrect additional *-e n*). The interpretation with Inanna as the object seems to forget that it is the text that makes the grammar, not the other way around.

5. Civil 1994; Attinger 1993.

and of the ablative-instrumental -ta, in the second differs from lines 174-75 of the *Heron and the Turtle* in 1.2, with -ta twice, and has no obvious explanation. The proposed interpretations of lines 36-37, discussed by Gadotti 2014: 254-55, have been so far unsatisfactory, to say the less. Her conclusion (based on the extended folk connotation of the foot<sup>6</sup> as a clumsy instrument) is that “[b]e that as it may, GEN here clearly stresses Inana’s inefficiency as gardener”. In short, the passage would contrast the expert manual handling of the sapling to a clumsy treatment with the foot. Keetman 2007 gives a psychological twist: “Inanna has sich um den Baum gekümmert, aber nun mit den Fuss, also ohne Hass aber auch ohne Liebe”. As is common in such cases, the possibility of a sexual interpretation, mentioned but not adopted by Gadotti, is not forgotten. Tigay 1989: 112 is the only one to suggest a solution, among unlikely others, very close to the one proposed below (4.1), namely the transportation of the irrigation water. The confusing textual situation opens the possibility of a mixed solution: the original sense would have been the contrast between two irrigation techniques, but in a given moment, or moments, of the textual transmission, the scribes (city boys?) did not understand the text anymore and adopted an explanation, or explanations, quite similar to the ones of the modern scholars, see 5.1 and Appendix for details.

### 1.2. *The Heron and the Turtle*<sup>7</sup>

The plot in the final sections of this composition is not yet understood: Enki plays in it a central role, there is mention of the bricks of the ziggurat (u<sub>6</sub>-nir), and then:

171 umbin-si-ni mu-sír ba-ra-an-DU ðim-gi<sub>4</sub>-šè ba-an-dù  
 172 ðim-gi<sub>4</sub> ki-a im-mi-in-si?-ir  
 173 gu abzu-a ki ba-ni-in-è  
 174 tur-tur-bi a šu-ta bí-in-dé  
 175 gal-gal-bi a ñir-ta bí-in-dé  
 176 gu ba-bulùṅ gu ba-sukud-rá-ta  
 177 [x x]-ra im-mi-in-kéš-da-ta

(*continuation broken*)

171 He (Enki) took out dirt from his fingernails, and he converted it into *ðim-gi<sub>4</sub>*,  
 172 The *ðim-gi<sub>4</sub>* fell on the ground, \*ki--è  
 173 Textile plants sprouted in the Apsu.  
 174 He watered the small ones with the hand,  
 175 He watered the large ones with the foot.  
 176 The textile plants grew and after they became sufficiently tall,  
 177 After they were bundled up . . .

6. See Attinger 2008-09: 6, note 31.

7. ETCSL 5.9.2. Original reconstruction in Gragg 1973, 1977; a more complete edition in Peterson 2007. Neither includes lines 171-77 attested only in source \*\*\*. The passage is not used in Gadotti, but is independently recognized in Attinger 2008-2009: 11.

The magic creation of something out of fingernail's dirt is well-known from *Inanna's Descent* (and from Enki himself in the Akkadian *Agušaja poem*). The  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}_4$ <sup>8</sup> is a poorly documented plant, has elsewhere the classifier SAR and provided the raw material for cords and threads. One could suggest a provisional translation “hemp”, and consider it a subclass of  $g\grave{u}$  “textile plant” and “thread” in general. What came out of Enki's fingernails must be something filiform, most likely a finished piece of string made of  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}_4$ . The Akkadian translation of this word is *šippatu* B, back borrowed into Sumerian as  $z\grave{i}-(i\grave{p})-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m$ , and variants, frequently preceded by  $g\grave{u}$ :  $g\grave{u} z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m$ .<sup>9</sup> Its best-known occurrence is in *Dumuzi's Dream* 158 = 185 = 219, where the demons braid cords ( $g\grave{u} z\grave{i}-i\grave{p}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m mu-un-na-sur-ru-ne$ ) to tie Dumuzi's arms. What is interesting is that the term  $z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m$  appears in the first part of *Heron and the Turtle* 108 = 117:  $z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m \acute{a} g\grave{u}b-ba \grave{u}-b\grave{i}-i\grave{n}-sur-ra$  “having braided the z. with the left arm”, as a step in putting together what may well be a fishing rod with a bronze hook and a line of  $z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m$ . Is the coexistence of  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}_4$  and  $z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m$  in HT an indication that they are not strictly synonyms, or is HT really the conflation of two independent compositions, one using  $z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m$ , the other  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}_4$ ?

### 1.3. Administrative texts

In Ur III documents, the irrigation of the orchards planted with date palms, or a few other types of trees, is performed by two types of workmen: (1) the  $a-bal = d\grave{a}l\grave{u}$  “water carriers”, and (2) the  $kak-a-k\grave{u}_5-(d')$  = *mupettu* “openers of the ‘regulators’<sup>10</sup> of a water (conduit)” OB Lu A 237-38. The term is amply attested in Pre-Sargonic Lagaš (references in Deimel 1928, and Selz 1993: 172). A still older attestation of the term is  $kak.DU_6$ ,<sup>11</sup> followed by  $nu-kiri_6$  in ED Lu E 131-32. The Ur III documentation concerning these workers consists mostly of their pay records, listing the barley amounts they receive ( $\acute{s}e-ba$ ), and provides no concrete, technical information about their tools and activities. It is clear enough, however, that the  $a-bal$  carries the water to its destination, while the  $kak-a-k\grave{u}_5$  does the same by manipulating the water stream in the irrigation channels.

[[\*\*\* The workers  $a-bal-a \text{ }^{\text{gis}}kiri_6$  “water carriers of the garden(s)” (*CUSAS* 4 236 1.2);  $gi-gur.$ ]]

8.  $d\grave{m}_4$ :  $g\grave{u}^{SAR} EDV 122$ ;  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}_4^{SAR} FH 17:51$ , *OBN* 4:23  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}^{SAR} = \acute{s}ippatu$  B,  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}^{SAR} = MIN$ ,  $z\grave{i}-p\grave{a}-t\grave{u}m^{SAR} = MIN Hh 17:381-83$  (after  $g\grave{a}d\grave{a}$ );  $d\grave{m}-g\grave{i}^{SAR} = \acute{s}ippatu$  B = *akkulakku* Hg 17 D 254. In literary texts, seems to be found only once in an uninformative list of vegetables in *EE* 079. One may wonder if  $d\grave{m}g\grave{i}$  is not an Apsu-compound (i.e., written  $Sign_1+Sign_2$ , but read  $Sign_2+Sign_1$ ). The Ur III word for shoelaces is  $g\grave{u}-d\grave{m}_4$  that with an inverted reading would be identical to the word in the ED vegetable list. An assimilation process  $*/g\grave{u}-d\grave{m}/ > */g\grave{i}-d\grave{m}/$  poses no problems.

9. Note the puzzling passage:  $20 ma-na g\grave{u}-GI\acute{S}.BA /z\grave{i}-ba-t\grave{u}m mu sa-pa-ra-\acute{s}\grave{e} PN \acute{s}u-ha [ \acute{s}u ba ]-ti$  “PN, a fisherman, received 20 mana of  $g\grave{u} Z$  for nets” *CUSAS* 3 1162 3: 55'-58' [P324703]. The scribe must have been unfamiliar with the term  $g\grave{u} d\grave{m}_4$  and replaced the second sign, that has precisely a (partial!) reading  $/g\grave{e}\acute{s}b\grave{a}/$ ; see Civil 2011: 261, note 70.

10. The Akkadian name is “peg” (*sikkatu*) (see  $^{\text{gis}}k\grave{a}k-d\grave{u}_8$ ,  $^{\text{gis}}k\grave{a}k-k\grave{u}_5 = (sikkatu) mupatt\grave{u}$  Hh 6: 131-32) hence the transliteration  $k\grave{a}k$  in the Sumerian, rather than the customary  $d\grave{u}$ . A peg is suitable to close a pipe, what physically would be a  $k\grave{a}k$  in an open conduit (ditch or runnel) is not clear. The reading  $k\grave{u}_5$  is confirmed by the spelling with  $-r/d$  of the nominalized forms as  $k\grave{a}k-a-k\grave{u}_5-r\acute{a}$  *BPOA* 1 398, or  $k\grave{a}k-k\grave{a}k-a-k\grave{u}_5-da$  *ASJ* 17 229 (note the reduplication). References for  $k\grave{u}d/k\grave{u}_5 = pet\grave{u} \acute{s}a m\acute{e}$  in *CAD* P 341a *pet\grave{u}*, lex. section.

11. The use of the sign  $DU_6$  in the sense of  $d\grave{u}_8$  is new (cf.  $k\grave{a}k-d\grave{u}_8$  in the Hh 6 passage, above).

## 2. A Biblical Parallel

Deuteronomy 11: 10-11 contrast the harsh working conditions in Egypt with the bright ones to be encountered in the promised land:

“For the land which you are entering to take possession of it is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and *watered it with your feet* (emphasis added), like a garden of vegetables; but the land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven.”

The interpretations so far proposed (judging from a sampling of opinions in Eslinger 1987: 88) are unsatisfactory, when not absurd, for instance: “marking the ground with footdug (*sic*) channels”, or “the picture is of a man walking in his garden and almost casually kicking a hole in the embankment with one foot”. Inevitably, a sexual explanation is suggested as a last resort: “the word ‘foot’ is a common biblical euphemism for the genitals”. The hard labor of transporting the irrigation water by carrying it to destination, gives a much more natural sense.

## 3. Egypt

The Deuteronomy statement becomes understandable, centuries later, considering some agricultural practices implied in the legal papyri of Greek and Roman Egypt. One finds in them the irrigation ἀπὸ ποδός. P. Ryl. 157,<sup>12</sup> a division of property held on lease in 135 A.D., for instance, states that:

“If it should become necessary at the inundation to irrigate the said southern portion by foot (εἰ χρεία γενοίτο [ποτίσαι ἐ]ν ἀναβάσει ἀπὸ ποδός τὴν αὐτὴν νοτίνην μερίδα), the recipient of the northern portion shall permit water to be conducted (ὕδραγωγείσθαι) through it.”

[[\*\*\* Insert here the discussion of ἀπὸ ποδός (P. Flor 369, P. Mil. Vogl. 308), and ἀπὸ γε(ι)ρός (P. Mich. Zén. 112, P. C/Z 59155), after revision.]]

## 4. Conclusion

A “textual” link between the three sources examined (and more could probably be found) is most unlikely, but there must be some reason for the terms “to water by/on/with the feet”, as against doing it “by hand”, to pop up independently centuries apart and in more than one place. The reason must be a basic, universal feature of any irrigation system: the level of the available water is either above or below the level of the target area where the plants or trees grow. In the first case, the water will flow by gravity through channels or pipes, in the second, before the general introduction of more or less sophisticated machines such as the *shaduf* and the *noriah*, the water had to be carried by porters to its destination, or at least to a place high enough that water could flow by gravity to its destination. The first case will require more or less stationary operators

---

12. Also, in Hunt and Edgar 2001 [1932]: 159.



Ur7 o o o o o o + . o o o o x + o o  
**037 = 080 = 124**

037 munus-e giš šu-na a li-bí-in-dug<sub>4</sub> gir-ni-ta bí-in-dug<sub>4</sub>  
 N04 om.  
 \*N08 o + + + + . . o o o o o o o o o  
 N17 om.  
 \*N23 . . + . + + + + o o . + - + + dé  
 \*N40 + + + + . o o + o o o o o o o o o  
 N44 tr.  
 Ur1 o + + + + + + + dug<sub>4</sub> + . + àm + + dug<sub>4</sub> PA

080 nu-nuz- e mu šu-gá a li-bí-in-dé me-ri-mu-ta-àm bí-in-dé  
 N43 . . [mèn] . . + + + + + + x o + + + + + + dé N.V.  
 bí in [DU]  
 \*N44 nu=nuz e + + na - + . . dé . . . - - + - +  
 \*N48 ga=š[a=an]=na mèn + + gá + - + + dé + + + + a + - DU  
 Ur8 o o o o o o o o o + + dug<sub>4</sub> o o o o o + . [dug<sub>4</sub>?]  
 Uk1 o o o o o o o o + + - DU m[e o o ? al + . x

124 d.<ga>-ša-an-na-ke<sub>4</sub> mu šu-na a li-bí-dé gir-ni-ta bí-[in]-[x]  
 \*N19 + o + + + + + + + . . + + + + + . o o  
 Ur7 o o o o o o o o o o + + o o o o o o o

\*\*\* dé = *babālu* [EME.SAL] Ea 4:154. Quote.

\*\*\* why did the editor insist on taking a textually unattested dù as the best reading?

## 6. References

- ASJ 17 : see Maekawa 1995.
- Attinger, P. 1993. *Eléments de linguistique sumérienne: La construction de du<sub>11</sub>/e/di “dire”*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis Sonderband. Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Attinger, P. 2008-2009. “Bilgameš, Enkidu et le monde infernal”.  
<https://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/pdf/P469670.pdf> (updated in 2015).
- Attinger, P. 2009. “La lamentation sur Sumer et Ur (2.2.3)”.  
[https://zenodo.org/record/2599623#.YW0Fxy\\_3L5Y](https://zenodo.org/record/2599623#.YW0Fxy_3L5Y) (updated in 2019).
- Attinger, P. 2015. Book Review of “*Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*” and the Sumerian *Gilgamesh Cycle* by A. Gadotti. ZA 105: 235–265.
- Black et al. 1998-2006. The Electric Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.  
 (<https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>), Oxford.
- BPOA 1: see Ozaki and Sigrist 2006.
- Civil, M. 1994. *The Farmer’s Instructions: A Sumerian Agricultural Manual*. Aula Orientalis Supplementa 5. Sabadell: Editorial Ausa.
- Civil, M. 2010. *The Lexical Texts in the Schøyen Collection*. CUSAS 12. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.
- Civil, M. 2011. “The Law Collection of Ur-Namma”, in A. George, ed., *Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions and Related Texts in the Schøyen Collection*. CUSAS 17. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, pp. 221-86.
- CUSAS 3: see Owen and Mayr 2007.
- CUSAS 4: see Kleinerman and Owen 2009.
- CUSAS 12: see Civil 2010.
- Deimel, A. 1928. “Die Lohnlisten aus der Zeit Urukaginas und seines Vorgängers”. *Orientalia, Series Prior* 34-35: 1-122.
- ETCSL: see Black et al. 1998-2006.
- Gadotti, A. 2005, “*Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld*” and the Sumerian *Gilgameš Cycle*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Johns Hopkins University. Baltimore.
- Gadotti, A. 2014. “*Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*” and the Sumerian *Gilgamesh Cycle*. Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie, Band 10. Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Gragg, G. 1973. “The Fable of the Heron and the Turtle”. *Archiv für Orientforschung* 24: 51-72.
- Gragg, G. 1977. “The Heron and the Turtle (l. 178)”, in W. Hallo and L. Younger, eds., *The Context of Scripture I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 571-73.
- Eslinger, R. 1987. *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homeric Methods*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Hunt, A. S. and C. C. Edgar. 2001 [1932]. *Selected Papyri, Vol. I: Private Documents*. Loeb Classical Library 266 (originally published 1932). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Keetman, J. 2007. “König Gilgameš reitet auf seinen Untertanen: Gilgameš, Enkidu und Unterwelt politisch gelesen”. *BiOr* 64: 5-32.
- Kleinerman, A. and D. I. Owen. 2009. *Analytical Concordance to the Garšana Archives*. CUSAS 4. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.



- Maekawa, K. 1995. “The Agricultural Texts of Ur III Lagash of the British Museum (X)”. *ASJ* 17: 175-231.
- Miller, N. F. and A. Gadotti. 2009. “The KHALUB-tree in Mesopotamia: Myth or Reality?” in A. S. Fairbairn and E. Weiss, eds., *From Foragers to Farmers: Gordon C. Hillman Festschrift*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, pp. 239-243.
- Owen, D. I. and R. H. Mayr 2007. *The Garšana Archives*. CUSAS 3. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.
- Ozaki, T. and M. Sigrist. 2006. *Ur III Administrative Tablets from the British Museum, Part One*. BPOA 1. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
- Peterson, J. 2007. *A Study of Sumerian Faunal Conception with a Focus on the Terms pertaining to the Order Testudines*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia.
- Sallaberger, W. 2011. “Sumerian Language Use in Garšana: On Orthography, Grammar, and Akkado-Sumerian Bilingualism”, in D. I. Owen, ed., *Garšana Studies*. CUSAS 6. Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, pp. 335-72.
- Selz, G. 1993. *Altsumerische Verwaltungstexte aus Lagaš*, Teil 2: *Altsumerische Wirtschafts-urkunden aus amerikanischen Sammlungen*, 1. Abschnitt. FAOS 15/2-1. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Tigay, J. H. 1982. *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers.