

FIVE NEW SUMERIAN LITERARY TEXTS

S. N. KRAMER, MUAZZEZ ÇİĞ, HATİCE KIZILYAY

One of the more significant archaeological contributions of the past hundred years to the humanities consists of the discovery, restoration, and translation of the Sumerian literary documents, the oldest group of belles lettres in the history of civilization. Inscribed some thirty-five hundred years ago in the cuneiform script on over four thousand clay tablets and fragments ¹, they include a varied assortment of man's first recorded myths and epic tales, hymns and lamentations, proverbs and essays. Long before the Hebrews wrote down their Bible, and the Greeks their Iliad and Odyssey, the Sumerians, who were neither Indo-Europeans nor Semites and whose original homeland may have been in the steppes of Central Asia ², created a rich and mature literature, largely poetic in

¹ Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, p. 11 f. where the number given is approximately 3000. However to this number are now to be added another five hundred pieces in the University Museum (cf. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 67, p. 322) and about 4 hundred in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient (that is the latter has about 1200 rather than 800 Sumerian literary tablets and fragments from Nippur, as stated in S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Literary Texts from Nippur*, p. 8; so according to F. R. Kraus's careful and very valuable catalogue of the entire Nippur collection in the Museum of the Ancient Orient). It is to be borne in mind, however, that from ten to fifteen hundred of the numbered pieces in the two museums are very small fragments; also that there is a considerable number of tiny fragments in the both insitutions which are still unnumbered altogether, and which it may prove impractical to number individually. Probably most of these scraps will prove of little scientific value and will add nothing to the reconstructed texts, although a considerable number should be useful for restoring a word here and a phrase there. But obviously enough even these will be of little practical value until the fuller texts of the Sumerian literary compositions are pieced together from the more readily identifiable pieces. Finally the new excavations in Nippur sponsored jointly by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania have yielded some four hundred tablets and fragments and a considerable number of scraps (so according to the still unpublished reports of the excavators).

² Cf. for example the writer's "New Light on the Early History of the Ancient Near East" (*American Journal of Archaeology* vol. 52, pp. 155-16).

form, which was copied, translated, and imitated all over the ancient civilized world. Nor has it failed to leave its mark on the thought and spirit of modern man, though how and to what extent will long remain a matter of scholarly research and debate³.

Now in this process of the restoration of the Sumerian belles lettres, Turkey and America happen to play a leading, coordinate, and mutually supplementary role. For by far the greater number of Sumerian literary tablets and fragments were excavated by the University of Pennsylvania some fifty years ago at the site of ancient Nippur, the cultural center of Sumer, and are now located primarily in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient and in the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. These are the two institutions therefore that have been largely responsible for the copying and publishing of the Sumerian literary material in order to make it available to scholars and humanists the world over⁴. In the earlier years a number of scholars devoted some of their time and effort to this work : Radau, Poebel, Barton, Lutz, Myhrman, Legrain, Langdon, and particularly Edward Chiera whose well-laid long range plans were cut short by his untimely death⁵. In more recent years Dr. Kramer has concentrated his energies to the task. Thus in the years 1937-9, with the generous cooperation of the Turkish authorities, he copied more than one hundred and sixty tablets and fragments inscribed with the Sumerian literary works, from the Nippur collection of the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient

³ The reader who is not a cuneiform specialist will get a fairly adequate idea of the nature of the Sumerian literary remains from *Sumerian Mythology* and from translated Sumerian texts in the recently published (Princeton University Press, 1950) *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (James B. Pritchard, Editor).

⁴ This is not to deny the great debt we owe even in this highly specialized field of cuneiform research to such institutions as the British Museum, the Louvre, the Berlin Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum; the material from these museums copied and published by such scholars as Zimmern and De Genouillac, King, Langdon, and Gadd, have proved to be invaluable for the restoration of the Sumerian literary documents. Moreover in view of the recent tablet discoveries of the Joint Expedition to Nippur (cf. note 1), not to mention the highly penetrating Sumerological studies of Thorkild Jacobsen, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago no doubt stands to play a leading role in this field of research in the days to come.

⁵ For the pertinent bibliographical references, cf. *Sumerian Mythology* p. 108 (note 7).

Orient. These copies have now been published with a detailed introduction in Turkish and English ⁶. The years which followed were spent largely in cataloguing and studying the unpublished Sumerian literary material in the University Museum at Philadelphia. In 1946, not long after the Second World War, Dr. Kramer again came to Istanbul and copied another one hundred and twelve tablets and fragments, those inscribed with the Sumerian epics and myths; these are now being prepared for publication.

This year he has been appointed Fulbright Research Professor by the United States Educational Commission in Turkey in order to continue the copying of those Sumerian literary pieces in the Museum of the Ancient Orient which are still unpublished. All in all there are still about eight hundred such pieces in the museum⁷. About 450 of these, however, are very small fragments and of relatively little practical value at the moment⁸. The remaining 350 which consist largely of small and middle sized fragments will be copied in large part in the course of this year by Dr. Kramer and Hatice Kızılyay (Bozkurt) and Muazzez Çığ, the two curators of the museum's Tablet Archive. As for the compositions inscribed on these 350 tablets and fragments, they represent a cross-section of all branches of Sumerian literature. But the large majority consists of proverbs, essays, and hymns, and as the five texts presented in this paper will help to demonstrate, it is for the restoration of these literary categories that the newly copied material will prove most valuable⁸.

Ni. 9695 (Copied by H. Kızılyay), the first of our five texts, contains a composition which might be described as a "hymnal-prayer". It consists primarily of a hymn addressed to the storm-god Ninurta, interspersed with prayers for Lipit-Ištar, the fifth ruler of the Isin Dynasty who reigned some time about the middle of the nineteenth century B. C. The more intelligible parts of the text may

⁶ *Sumerian Literary Texts from Nippur in the Museum of the Ancient Orient at Istanbul* (Vol. 23, *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*).

⁷ So according to F. R. Kraus's detailed and very helpful catalogue of the Nippur collection.

⁸ Cf. the preliminary report in *Orientalia* vol. 21, pp. 249-50. Muazzez Çığ and Hatice Kızılyay are copying the hymnal material while Kramer is copying all other categories.

be sketched briefly as follows : Ninurta is glorified as the deity whom the goddess Nintu had fashioned with particular care, his very special endowments being bravery and awe-inspiring heroism. After birth she brings Ninurta, "the avenger of his father,"⁹ to the Ekur, Enlil's far-famed sanctuary in Nippur. Here, upon her request, Enlil decrees for him his great destiny : the power to smite his enemies with the help of the winds and storms. This passage ends with a two-line prayer for the king Lipit-Ištar in which Ninurta is petitioned to force all of Lipit-Ištar's enemies to bow down before him. The text then continues with a more extensive prayer : may Ninurta's wife, "the Lady of Nippur," speak up daily to her husband in Lipit-Ištar's behalf; may Ninurta stand by him in the place of battle; may he grant him, the king who had brought justice and happiness to Sumer and Akkad, victory over his enemies. The composition closes with a line in which the ancient scribe himself classifies it as belonging to the hymnal genre known as *adab* of Ninurta¹⁰.

Ni. 4150, (Copied by H. Kızılyay), the second of the texts presented in this paper, is a copy of the lower part of a four column tablet inscribed with one of the rather rare hymns to Enlil, the leading deity of the Sumerian pantheon¹¹. The Istanbul piece contains

⁹ Ninurta is termed the avenger of Enlil in a number of literary compositions, but the details of the relevant myth are still unknown.

¹⁰ Cf. now Falkenstein's excellent study in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* vol.49, p. 80 ff. for an analysis of this type of composition. In connection with Falkenstein's study it may be of value to point out and correct an error which has confused practically all the cuneiformists dealing with the *Adab* composition VS X199 II 9 III 7 (cf. now Falkenstein, *loc. cit.* p. 88 and especially the troubled comment in note 3 as well as the relevant remarks on pp. 96, 97, and 99), that is, that this VS composition concerns the deity Uraš. The fact is that it in no way involves the deity Uraš, but the king Ur-Ninurta, that is, the ^dur (so, not ^dIB) of lines II 12, 19, 33, 36, 41, 49, and III 6, are scribal abbreviations for ^dur-^dnin-urta, just as for example in the preceding hymn on the very same tablet the writings ^dli-bi of I 42 and ^dli- of II 8 are contractions for the name ^dlipit-ištar. The full name of the king is actually given once in the text, cf. II 24 : ^dur-^dnin-urta-ra mu-na-an-dah, and there is little doubt that this composition which is a hymn to the god Nanna is interspersed with prayers for the king Ur-Ninurta, just as the composition preceding it is a hymn to the god An interwoven with prayers for the king Lipit-Ištar.

¹¹ Most of the Enlil hymns published hitherto are either hymnal prayers for various kings, or the so-called *enem* compositions devoted largely to his more destructive aspects.

only about half the text of the hymn, but the latter can be restored almost entirely with the help of a published fragment from the University Museum, and a piece found just recently in Nippur by the new Joint Expedition, which is the upper half of a four column tablet. The composition consists of about 170 lines which celebrate Enlil as a most powerful and benevolent deity : he is a god whose word and decision are unalterable; the gods of heaven and earth prostrate themselves before him in all humility; he detests the violent and the unjust and sees to it that they do not go unpunished; his sanctuary the Ekur is the home of awesome and profound rites and ceremonies; he is free of all controls and his features remain invisible even to the other gods; his exalted word brings down abundance from heaven and makes the earth fruitful; his wife and adviser is Ninlil, the gracious and well-formed, the queen of the universe. What Enlil means to man and civilization is stated in the following simple and not unmoving lines :

Without Enlil, the great mountain,
 No cities would be built, no settlements founded,
 No stalls would be built, their sheepfolds would not be founded,
 No king would be raised, no high-priest born,
 No *mahhu*- priest, no high-priestess would be chosen by sheep-
 (omen),
 The workers would have neither governor nor supervisor,
 The river--, its flood-waters would not *overflow*,
 The fish of the sea would not [lay] eggs in the canebrake,
 The birds of heaven would not [set up] nests in the broad earth,
In heaven, the *drifting* clouds would not [*yield their moisture*],
 Plants and herbs, the glory of the plain, would not [sprout],
In field *and* meadow the rich grain would not [flower],
 The trees planted in the mountain-*forests* would [yield] no fruit¹².

¹² The fragment in the University Museum, published by Stephen Langdon in *PBS* X 4 No. 10, is probably the upper part of the very same tablet as our Istanbul piece Ni. 4150. The piece excavated by the new Joint Expedition to Nippur was made available to Kramer by Donald McCown, the director of the excavations (photograph No. 3 : 195). In addition there are the following small duplicating fragments already published : *STVC* 116, *Kich* C 53, *SEM* 192 B. The hymn is listed as No. 5 in the two ancient "catalogues" now in the Louvre and the University Museum, and treated in *BASOR* No. 88 p. 10 ff. The quoted passage italics

Ni. 9801 (copied by M. Çiğ), the third text, is a hymn to the goddess Inanna which will take its place alongside the two long known major hymns to that deity¹³. The tablet is unfortunately only partially preserved so that no more than about a quarter of the approximately 300 lines constituting the full text of the hymn, are intelligible. However fragmentary as it is, it will be valuable nucleus for the restoration of the composition as additional duplicate material is uncovered in the future.

The fourth text, Ni. 2461 (copied by M. Çiğ), is one of the oldest love-songs in man's recorded history, although it is to be noted, that it is religious rather than secular in character. The ancient scribe himself classifies it as a *bal-bal-e* of the goddess Inanna¹⁴, and to judge from the contents it may perhaps have been intended to be sung by a *lukur*-priestess on the eve of her union with the king Šū-

(indicate doubtful translations) consists of lines 108-122 (lines 115 and 116 have been omitted as largely unintelligible at the moment) of the reconstructed text which reads as follows :

108. kur-gal-^den-líl-da-nu-me-a
 uru^{kl}-nu-dù á-dam ki li-bí-ib-gar
110. túr nu-dù amaš-bi nu-gar
 lugal nu-íl-e en nu-ù-tu-[de?]
112. lú-maḥ nin-dingir máš-e nu-mu-un-da-[pàd]
 erin-na šakanna ugula nu-tuku-tuku
114. íd-da a-gu₄-ù-bi nu-dun-dun....
- ku₆-engur-ra-ke₄ giš-gi-a nunuz nu-mu-ni-ib-[ná-ná]
117. mušen-an-na-ke₄ ki-dagal-la gúd nu-[mu-ni-ib-uš]
 an-na IM-dirig-sir-ra KA-bi nu-mu-.....
120. edin-na ka-zal-bi ú šim nu- [mu-ni-ib-BU-BU-dè]
 a-šà-ga še-gu-nu a-kár-ra nu-[mu-ni-in-mú]
122. giš-ki-mú-a giš-tir (?) -kur-ra-ke₄ gurun nu-[mu-ni-in-íl]

Among the difficulties to be noted are : the use of the present tense in line 111; the uncertain complex division in line 119; the unusual position of a-kár-ra in line 121. The restoration of the verbal forms in lines 117, 118, 121, and 122 are quite certain—they are based on practically identical lines scattered throughout the literary texts; not quite certain is the restoration in line 120.

¹³ The hymns are entitled nin-me-šàr-ra and an-ta-è-a-ra in the ancient catalogues, cf. *BASOR* No. 88 p. 10 ff; the former is Ni. 4 of the University Museum tablet and the latter is No. 45 of the Louvre tablet (an excellent duplicate of the latter— Ni. 4363+9802 has been copied by Hatice Kızılyay.

¹⁴ Cf. now Falkenstein, *Die Welt des Orient* (1947), p. 48 ff. and Landsberger, *JNES* vol. 8, p. 295, note 151.

Sîn in the course of the *hieros-gamos* rites celebrated on New Year's day, when the king representing the god Dumuzi, married a lukur-priestess who served as a substitute for the goddess Inanna ¹⁵. Following is the first attempt at a tentative translation of the song; it will serve to give the reader some idea of its mood and temper; of its beat and rhythm :

Bridegroom, *dear to my heart*,
 Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet,
Lion, dear to my heart,
 Goodly is your beauty, honeysweet.

You have captivated me, let me stand *tremblingly* before you,
 Bridegroom, I would be taken by you to the bed-chamber,
You have captivated me, let me stand *tremblingly* before you,
 Lion, I would be taken by you to the bed-chamber.

Bridegroom, let me *caress* you,
 My precious *caress is more savory than honey*,
 In the bed-chamber, *after honey had been made to flow*,
 Let us enjoy your goodly beauty,
Lion, let me *caress* you,
 My precious *caress is more savory than honey*.

Bridegroom, you have taken your pleasure of me,
 Tell my mother, she will give you *delicacies*,
 My father, he will give you gifts.

Your spirit, I know where to cheer your spirit,
 Bridegroom, sleep in our house until dawn,
 Your heart, I know where to gladden your heart,
Lion, sleep in our house until dawn.

You, because you love me,
 Give me pray of your *caresses*,
 My lord god, my lord protector,
 My Šū-sîn who gladdens Enlil's heart,
 Give me pray of your *caresses*.

¹⁵ Cf. Falkenstein, *Die Welt des Orients* (1947), p. 50.

Your place goodly as honey, pray lay (your) hand on it,
Bring (your) hand over it like a *gišban*-garment,
Cup (your) hand over it like a *gišban-sikin*-garment.

It is a *bal-bal-e*-song of Inanna¹⁶.

- ¹⁶ Italics indicate doubtful renderings. The Sumerian text reads as follows :
- mu-ti-in šà-mà mu-lu [ki-ig-ga] . . .
 ħi-li-zu ám-zé-ba-ám lál-ám ku₇-ku₇-da
 gi-ru šà-mà mu-lu ki-ig-ga . . .
 ħi-li-zu ám-zé-ba-ám lál-ám ku₇-ku₇-da
5. en-KU-en IM-mà du₅-mu-u₈-ši-gub
 mu-ti-in ga-ba-e-da-kar ki-mu-ná-da-šè
 en-KU-en IM-mà du₅-mu-u₈-ši-gub
 gi-ru ga-ba-e-da-kar ki-mu-ná-da-šè
 mu-ti-in ám-zé-zé-ba du₅-mu-u₈-ag
10. zé-ba-kal-la-mu lál-e da-am-e-ga
 é-ki-ná-a lál-PÚ-dug₄-ga-ba
 ħi-li-ám-zé-ba-zu ga-ba-ĥúl-ĥúl-en-dè-en
 gi-ru ám-zé-zé-ba du₅-mu-u₈-ag
 zé-ba-kal-la-mu lál-e da-am-e-ga
15. mu-ti-in ma-ra ħi-li mu-e-kar
 ama-mu-ra dug₄-mu-na-ab IM mu-ra-ab-zé-è-m-e
 ad-da-mu-úr ám-ba-ba mu-un-ba
 ĥur-šag₆ ki-ĥur-šag₆-ga-bi mu-zu
 mu-ti-in u₄-te-en-šè é-me-a ná-a
20. šà-za ki-šà-ĥúl-bi mu-zu
 gi-ru u₄-te-en-šè é-me-a ná-a
 za-e ma-a-ra ki mu-e-ág-a-ta
 gi-ru ma-a-ra am-zé-ba-zu nu-uš-mu-e-a-ag-e
 ù-mu-un-dingir-mu ù-mu-un-^dlama-mu
25. ^dšu-zuen šà-^dmu-ul-líl-lá-ke₄ ba-zé-bé-en-na-mu
 ki-ze-ba-zu nu-uš-mu-e a-ag-a
 ki-lál-gim-zé-ba-zu šu nu-uš-mu-e-tag-ge
 túg-giš-ba-an-gim šu túm-ma-ni
 túg-giš-ba-an-sì-ki-na-gim šu-DAR-DAR-ma-ni
30. bal-ba-e-^dinanna-kam

The poem, as expected, is written in the Emesal throughout. The rendering "dear" in lines 1 and 3 is most doubtful; it assumes that *ki-ig-ga* is an unusual writing for *ki-ág-gá* (cf. perhaps *SRT* 31, line 18), and that *-me-en* followed (note however that the traces in line³ do not point to the sign *ME*). Needless to say there are other possibilities; the *IG* for example might be part of the verbal form *ig-kid* "to open", and the following *GA* may be for the first person precative which, to judge from lines 6, 8, and 12 seems to be used instead of *da* even in the Emesal (Perhaps because of the following labial). In lines 3, 8, etc. *gi-ru* is assumed to be a Semitic loan-

Ni. 9804 (copied by S. N. Kramer), the last of the texts presented in this paper, is an eight-column tablet which originally contained a "book" of over one hundred and eighty proverbs and sayings. It is poorly preserved, and of itself, would provide us with but a few of the maxims originally inscribed on it. But fortunately this particular proverb collection was rather popular in the Nippur schools and at least twenty-four duplicates and extracts, all excavated in Nippur and now in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient and the University Museum, can now be identified as belonging to it ¹⁷. As a result it is possible to recover the practically complete text of fifty-five of the proverbs which made up this "book," while the text of another eighty or so can be restored to a considerable extent. But the great difficulty with Sumerian proverbs is their translation, since like proverbs and sayings the world over, they are by extremely and compact, and are without a guiding and controlling context. By way of experiment, therefore, forty-eight of the best preserved sayings were sent to a number of scholars who worked on

word. The rendering "you have captivated me" for *en-KU-en* in lines 5 and 7 treats the latter as if it were grammatically (i-)e-n-dib-en where the final *en* is the first person accusative suffix. "Tremblingly" in lines 5 and 7 makes the very doubtful assumption that *IM-ma* means literally "in my fear." The *du₆* - of *du₅-mu-U₈-ši-gub* in lines 7 and 9 is the Emesal first person precative *da* which becomes *du₆* because of the following *mu*. In lines 6 and 8 note the unusual position of the verb due to poetic license. For the *du₅* of the verbs in lines 9 and 13, cf. the comment immediately preceding. The first complex in lines 10 and 14 is rendered as if an initial *ám* were accidentally omitted; the grammatical structure and meaning of *da-am-e-ga* (the rendering "is more savory" is a guess only) are quite uncertain; the *da* at the beginning may of course be the Emesal for *ga* in which case *da-am-e-ga* would be a verb with unknown meaning. In line 11 the rendering of *lál-PŪ-dug₄-ga-ba* is no more than a guess based on the context. The rendering "delicacies" for *IM* in line 16 is based on the obvious parallelism with line 17, and has no known lexographic justification. In line 18 the first complex is rendered as if it read *hur-za* (instead of *hur-šag₆*) since it seems parallel to *šá-za* of line 20. For the particle *nu-uš* in lines 23 and 26 cf. now Falkenstein *ZA* vol. 60, p. 8; note too the unexpected *a* instead of *e* at the end of line 26, and the fact *ki* at the beginning of the line seems to be an error for *ám* (cf. line 23).

¹⁷ These are : Ni. 3803, 3877, 4085, 4172+4173, 4209, 4439, 4594, 5028, 5102, 5246, 9769, 9804, 13197, SLTN 146 (all in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient) and CBS 13852, 13854, 14009, 14023; UM 29-10-50, 29-13-504, 29-15-85; N 3054; STVC 5, 7 (all in the University Museum at Philadelphia).

them independently ¹⁸. In the majority of cases there was very considerable disagreement in the translations. There was however a fairly substantial accord on about a dozen proverbs, and these are here presented in transliteration and translation :

1. níg-gú-kud-kud-du gú nam-bí-kud-du
Do not cut off the neck of that which has already had its neck cut off.
2. ⁿnin-giš-zi-da-ra ga-ti na-an-na-ab-bé-en
Say not to Ningišzida (an underworld deity):
“Let me live.”
3. níg-ku₆-lam-ma dingir-ra-kam šu-tu-tu nu-ub-zu
Destruction is of the gods, it cannot be warded off (literally : it knows no hindering (?) hand).
4. níg pàd-da-zu nu-ub-bé-en
níg-ú-gu-dé-a-zu ab-bé-en
You do not speak of that which you have found,
You speak only of that which you have lost.
5. níg-ga bur₅-re ki-tuš nu-pàd-dè-da
Possessions are birds on the wing who have no (permanent) home.
6. níg-u₄-de-kú ur-re ba-gar
níg-ur-re-kú u₄-dè ba-gar
What the day (=time?) consumed is attributed to the enemy,
What the enemy consumed is attributed to the day.
7. níg-igi-nu-du₈-a-gim mu-un-ag
He acted like a blind man.
8. ukú ḥa-ba-TIL nam-ba-da-ti-le (?)
ninda ì-pàd mun nu-pàd mun ì-pàd ninda nu-pàd
é ì-pàd amaš nu-pàd amaš ì-pàd é nu-pàd
The poor man *is better off dead than alive* ¹⁹
If he has bread he has no salt, if he has salt he has no bread,
If he has a house he has no fold, if he has a fold he has no house ²⁰.

¹⁸ The scholars who were good enough to cooperate in this experiment are : Falkenstein, Gadd, Jacobsen, Jestin, Kraus, Lambert, Van der Meer, and Witzel.

¹⁹ A more literal rendering might perhaps be : “The poor man, let him die, let him not live.”

²⁰ The proverb did not end here (the text is destroyed) but continued in the same vein for one or more lines.

9. uru én-bi nu-tar-re sa₁₂-suk₇-bi dam-kár-àm
A city without vigilance, its comptroller is a merchant.
10. igi-íl-la-zu dam konu-ba-ni-ib
ša-ge-guru₇-zu- dumu konu-ba-ni-ib
Take a wife according to your choice,
Have a child according to your desire.
- 11 dam-nu-gar-ra é-a-ti-la
á-sìg á-sìg-e dirig-ga-àm
A *restless* wife in the house,
Is worse than all the devils.
12. dumu-si-nu-sá ama-ni na-an-ù-tu
dingir-ra-ni na-an-dím-dím-e
The perverse child, its mother should not have given birth
to it,
Its god should not have fashioned it.



