

A TABLET OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE FROM NIPPUR

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Ni. 2177 is a unique tablet of historical significance, (7 x 6 x 2.4 centimeters in size. Plate 1 and 2), which, to judge from the script, may probably be dated to the late years of the Third Dynasty of Ur. It seems to be a rather unusual form of an incantation, including a ritual, directed against Sumer's perennial enemies Elam and Anshan. Unfortunately the text is broken in part, and even the well-preserved lines are extremely difficult and obscure. The transliteration, translation, and interpretation here presented, were undertaken for the purpose of making the text available to cuneiformists the world over, in the hope that they will help to clarify the real meaning of its contents.

Transliteration¹

obv. i

- Space 1. NI nam-lú-[lu₆-kur-elam]-an-ša-ù-ma-da-bi [si] bí-ib-sá
Space 2. NE ⁴nin-NE eš(?) -a mu-da-ga-NE-dé-šè
Space 3. nam-lú-lu₆-kur-elam-an-ša-ù-ma-da-ba-ta á-ba-ta ír-bi
níg-ba-ba
Space 4. ban-ba sa ba-du₅ ti-šub-bi ba-ta-ku₃-ku₃
Space 5. nar-kur-TAR-inin-na-ne-ne dumu-urú-a-ba-tu-da-me
Space 6. nimgir-húl-gál-kur-ra un-kur-elam-an-ša-ù-ma-da-ba KA
GÁXIGI-ag-me-šè
Space 7. 2-àm igi-tir-kur-ra-me igi-ba kisal-luḥ si mu-ne-?
Space 8. 3-àm KAB-KÉŠ(?) -?-ba-me kaskal ba-da-til mu-ne-gál
nam-ta-ab-tùm

1. In the transliteration, two dots stand for one omitted sign, three dots for two omitted signs, four dots for three or more omitted signs.

obv. ii and rev. i

- Space 1.
- Space 2.-me níg ..[nam-lú-lu₀]-kur-elam-an-ša-ù-[ma-da-ba-t]a (?)
níg-ba-ba
- Space 3. ⁴en-ki-ke₄ dumu-⁴... gù mu-na-[dé-e]
- Space 4. a-BU-ḫa-du an-ta[hé](?)-dib-e
- Space 5. ⁴nin-a-BU-ḫa-du ù-ma-da-ri
- Space 6. a-gùb-ba-še ḫa-mu-ši-du_s
- Space 7. ⁴tu maš-maš-gal-an-na-ke₄ gu-ù-?-ma-ni hé-lá-e
- Space 8. ⁴?-UN-za-KU lugal-nam-išib-ba-ke₄ eme-ḫa-mun-na-ni
ḫa-mu-rí-uš
- Space 9. ⁴asar-lú-ḫi dumu-⁴en-ki-ke₄
- Space 10. ⁴ma-?-mu dumu-eridu^{ki}-ke₄
- Space 11. ⁴é ... dumu-abzu-ke₄
- Space 12. ⁴NE [dumu]-
- Space 13. ⁴šul-[pa-e dumu]-

rev. ii

- Space 1. tu^{mušen}-imin-e še-gur₁₀ a-ba-ni-dug₁
- Space 2. nam-lú-lu₀-kur-elam-an-ša-ù-ma-da-ba² ní-ba še-gur₁₀
ḫa-ba-dug₁
- Space 3. imin-sin^{mušen} ù-bi-? gú-gú-GĪR-bi-da ù-da-..
- Space 4. nam-lú-lu₀-kur- elam-an-ša-ù -ma-da-ba-ba hé-..

Translation³ and Commentary

Space 1. «.... the people [of Elam], Anshan, and their *mada* he(?) directed.» The restoration of the verb as *si bí-ib-sá* seems reasonable but the subject is uncertain, and the meaning of this partly broken space is quite obscure.⁴

2 Under the *-ba*, there seems to be an inexplicable *é*.

3 In the translation, two dots stand for one omitted word, three dots for two omitted words, four dots for three or more omitted words.

4 Note that the final *n* of *anšan* is omitted throughout this text, and that the ambiguous *mada* may perhaps be rendered «territory.»

Space 2. In this space even the word division is uncertain, and although all the extant signs are legible, there are too many unknowns for any plausible surmises.

Space 3. If the transliteration of this space is correct it seems to mean literally: «From the people of Elam, Anshan, and their *mada*, from their arms (or «by their might»), their tears, their gifts.» Note that there is no finite verbal form, and that the contextual relation of this space to the spaces preceding and following, is not clear.

Space 4. «Of their bows, the strings were loosened, their arrow-hurlers were cut down.»⁵ If this rendering is even approximately correct, it would seem to indicate that the Elamites and Anshanites had been defeated in battle, and the ritual instituted by Enki (col ii space 2) was to celebrate the Sumerian victory.

Space 5. «(As for) their seven *kur-TAR*-minstrels, they who are sons that were born in the city.»⁶ The «their» seems to refer to the Elamites and Anshanites; the implication of the description «sons that were born in the city», is not clear.

Space 6. «As for the evil criers of the mountain (and ?) of the people(?)⁷ of Elam, Anshan, and their *mada*, they who make ...» If this rendering is approximately correct, the complex *KA GÁXIGI-ag* may depict the incantatory chants uttered by the minstrels and criers to honour the victory of the Elamites and Anshanites, which, however proved to be ineffective.⁸

5 The *-ta* of *ba-ta-ku₅-ku₅* is difficult to explain.

6 The rendering «as for» assumes that the final *-še* of the following space is to be understood also at the end of this space; the enigmatic *kur-TAR* seems to describe the minstrels.

7 If *un* «people» is the correct reading and meaning of the sign, it seems to be a variant of the *nam-lú-lu₆* found in spaces 1, 2, etc.

8 Note, however, that the following spaces whose contents presumably explain the ineffectiveness of the incantation chants of the minstrels and criers, are quite incomprehensible.

Space 7. «Two (of them) are in front of the mountain-forest, in front of them the courtyard-cleaners» The meaning of this literal rendering of the space is totally obscure, as is that of the following space.

Space 8. «Three (of them) are⁹, the journey has come to an end,¹⁰, it has been brought out.»

obv. ii and rev. i

Space 1. This space seems to be a repetition in part of obv. i space 3, but its fragmentary content is quite uncertain, as is also its contextual relationship to what precedes and follows.

Space 2. «Enki says to the son of ...» The restoration of the verb as *gù mu-na-dé-e* is reasonably assured; Enki seems to be addressing the son of some deity.¹¹

Space 3. «Let the *BU-ḥa-du*-water come(?) from heaven.» The complex *BU-ḥa-du* seems to describe in some way the heavenly water.

Space 4 and 5. «Let the goddess *Nin-a-BU-ḥa-du*,¹² having directed it to me,¹³ add(?) it to the holy water.»

Space 6. «Let the god Tu,¹⁴ the *mashmash*-priest of An fasten his ..-thread.»

Space 7. «Let the god ?-UN-za-KU, the king of the *išib*-ship, bring close to you his harmonious speech.»

9 The reading and meaning of *KAB-KÉS(?)*-?-*ba* are quite uncertain.

10 The meaning of *mu-ne-gál* is uncertain.

11 If it were not for the *dingir* following *dumu*, the complex might have been expected to read *dumu-[ni-ir]* «to his son,» (that is, Asarluhi).

12 For this deity, see Deimel, *Pantheon* No. 2405.

13 The rendering «having directed it to me» assumes that the *ù* of *ù-ma-da-ri* introduces the pluperfect tense of the verb.

14 The god Tu is otherwise unknown.

- Space 8. (Let) Asarluhi, the son of Enki,
 Space 9. *Ma-?-mu*,¹⁵ the son of Eridu,
 Space 10. The god É-..., the son of the Abzu,
 Space 11. The god NE-....,
 Space 12. *Šul-[pa-e]*....,¹⁶

rev. ii

Spaces 1 and 2. «Having implanted¹⁷ a sickle-knife of seven doves, may the sickle-knife be readily¹⁸ implanted on the people of Elam, Anshan, and their *mada*.»

Spaces 3 and 4. «Having ..-d seven swallows, having ..d them neck and foot¹⁹, may the people of Elam, Anshan, and their *mada* be ..in their...

15 This deity is otherwise unknown.

16 The restoration of the god's name is doubtful of course.

17 The two ritual acts depicted in these two spaces and in the two spaces following, reflect a belief in the effectiveness of sympathetic magic. The rendering «having implanted» assumes that the *a-* of *a-ba-ni-dug*₃ as an assimilated form of *ù-* and that it introduces the pluperfect tense of the verb.

18 «Readily» renders *ni-ba* (literally «of themselves»).

19 The reason for the repetition of the *gù* is not clear.



