Nos. 1–19

Hymns and Prayers

No. 1

Old Babylonian Balag, to the Mother Goddess Aruru

Konrad Volk

Introduction

MMA 86.11.62 can be dated by the script to the Old Babylonian period. The text most probably belongs to the genre of the balag composition, liturgical compositions accompanied by a musical instrument called balag, which denotes either a drum or a harp (see A. D. Kilmer, “Musik,” RLA 8 [1995], p. 463 s.v. “Musical Instruments”). The genre of this text would have been indicated at the end of the tablet, but unfortunately, the end is broken away. Nevertheless, the text can be identified as a balag because it contains the typical features of the Old Babylonian balag.

The text is divided by horizontal rulings into sections, some of which are explicitly labeled kirugu or, rarely, gišgigaL Characteristic features include a mournful tone, repetitions of words and phrases, and especially the use of the Emešal dialect. This purely literary dialect is the typical language of the Sumerian gala = Akkadian kalâ liturgist, a temple functionary who usually sang or recited (and perhaps also composed) liturgical literature for a ritual context, such as festivals, particular days of the month, and ceremonies for the leveling and restoration of temples (see below p. 11). The ritual of temple restoration is closely connected with the contents of these compositions. They generally describe the destruction of sacred buildings (along with the removal and expulsion of the gods) and of cities and their inhabitants, resulting in the disruption of cultural and economic life. But in evident contrast to historical lamentations, balag compositions make no mention of any specific historical event. They are limited to a very general terminology.

Balag compositions are attested in the Old Babylonian period and were copied in canonical form from the Middle Babylonian period until the Seleucid period (see text Nos. 2–17). The Old Babylonian balag compositions have forerunners that date to at least the Isin-Larsa period. Unfortunately, it is still quite unclear how far back we can trace the origins of this genre.

Selected Bibliography

M. E. Cohen, Balag-Compositions: Sumerian Lamentation Liturgies of the Second and First Millennium B.C.
Sources from the Ancient Near East 1/2 (Malibu, 1974)

1.

**MMA 86.11.62**

Old Babylonian balag, to the mother goddess Aruru

Plates 1, 2

Old Babylonian period

H. 100 mm  W. 49 mm  Th. 27 mm

Publication: J. Maynard, "A Lamentation to Aruru (Metropolitan Museum No. 112)," *JSOR* 3 (1919), pp. 14–20

Obverse

1. ul₂-ul₂-la mu-u-n-DU [...]
2. "A-ra-ru ul₂-ul₂-la mu-u[n-DU [...
3. nm-sa₄- ga x [...]
4. ab er-ra 'SAL. + x₁ x [...]
5. mu-lu zi-ga-ni mar-u₂-[z][i-ga]
6. mu-lu nú-a-ni e-me-sig n[u-a]
7. gu₄-dam ki-bal-ā muš-sā-[i[er [...]
8. i₇-gal-gal-e mā-da-[q]₁ [...]
9. i₇-bur-dagal-e sīgi₄[g][₄ [...]
10. i₇-da na-āg ba-e-tar i₇-bi [...]
11. a-sa-ga na-āg ba-e-tar še-b[i [...]
12. i₇-nam-ku₅-da-zi i₇[ [...]
13. a-sa-nam-ku₅-da-zi [a-sa [...]
14. dam-na-āg-ku₅-da-zi [dam [...]
15. dumu-na-āg-ku₅-da-zi [dumu [...]
16. é-kar-ra-zi [...]
17. A-tu-₄-zi [...]
18. a-dāra-zi [...]
19. é-zi é-zi-gim [...]
20. āru-zi āru-zi-gim [...]
21. dam-zi dam-zi₄-gim [...]
22. dumu-[u dumu]-₄-zu₄-gim [...]
23. x [...]

(rest of obverse broken)
Reverse

1. 'égi ga-ša-an-ḫur-[sag-gá . . .]
2. sipa-tur ki-amaš-ta [ . . .]
3. ede-ma DU N L.DU [ . . .]
4. ta a-ab-ba
5. 'égi ga-ša-an-ḫur-sag-gá
6. i-bi il-lá-зу
7. du₄₂-bad-ra-zu
8. 'égi ga-ša-an-ḫur-sag-gá
9. é-ḫur mu-e-gul
10. ki-amaš mu-e-ḫul e-žé
11. dumu ama-gan-zi-da ur-re-cš
12. mu₄₄-ma₄₄ mu-bur-ra nu-mu-e-DU x [ . . .]
13. tu-mu-mer za-ga nu-mu₄₄ [ . . .]
14. é-gal-kēški-ke₄
15. u₅ er-mah
16. nin-gal₄₄-mu-ul-il-la
17. 'égi ga-ša-an-ḫur-sag-ke₄
18. UR₄₄.UR₄₄-tur-ra
19. UR₄₄.UR₄₄-du₄₄-te₄₄me₄₄-tur-re₄₄-gim
20. e₄₄mar-ma₄₄-tur-re₄₄
21. e₄₄eren-kud-ra-e
22. sa₄₄ars(?)-s₄₄u₄₄-ga
23. a-R₁.R₁ tum-ma

Translation

Obverse

1. The one who hastens came along . . .
2. Aruru, the one who hastens [came along . . .]
3. The beautiful lady . . .
4. The cow in wailing . . .
5. (When) she rises up, a storm rises . . .
6. (When) she rests, slander rises . . .
7. (Like) a wild bull in the rebel lands, a poisonous snake . . .
8. To the great rivers . . . the punting pole.
9. To the river, a broad vessel . . . shouting . . .
10. For the river you decreed a destiny, that river . . .
11. For the field you decreed a destiny, that grain [
12. You cursed a river, [(that)] river [ . .
13. You cursed a field, [(that) field . . .
15. You cursed a child, [(that) child . . .
17. Your Atu [ . .
18. Your ibex horn [ . .
19. Your house like your house—[(Alas!)]
20. Your city like your city—[(Alas!)]
21. Your spouse like your spouse—[(Alas!)]
22. [Your] child like your [child—[(Alas!)]
23. . . . . . . . .

Reverse

1'. Princess Ninbur[sag . .
2'. [You have killed(?) the young shepherd in the sheepfold.
3'. Walking in the steppe [ . .
4'. What can [stride with you] in the sea?
5'. Princess Ninhursag, [pincess . .
6'. When you lift your eyes—who [can escape(?)]
7'. When you stride—who [can get off(?)
8'. Princess Ninhursag, princess [ . .
9'. You devastated the cattle pen: the cows [were scattered by you].
10'. You destroyed the sheepfold: the sheep were [scattered in the sheepfold].
11'. (Even) children (and) child-bearing mothers [were heaped up together].
12'. You did not let the high priest carry the magic wand. . .
13'. You did not [hold back] the north wind [ . .
14'. At the palace of Keši you did not [ . . . . . . ] for me(?)
15'. Woe! Profound weeping! Woe! [Profound weeping!]
16'. Elder sister of Enlil! Woe! [Profound weeping!]
17'. Princess Ninhursag! Woe! [Profound weeping!]
18'. The little kiši-plants, the [finest] kiši-plants,
19'. the kiši-plants altogether are overturned like a qaqqulla-plant.
20'. By the small shrubs, the [ . . . . . . ] shrubs,
21'. by the cut cedars, the cut cedars.
22'. the soil is ravaged. Woe! [Profound weeping!]
23'. Spilling the seed that has been [ . . . . . . ] she scatters [ . . . . . ] in the sheepfold.
Notes

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Obverse


2: The other goddess Aruru of Keš is identified with Ninhursag (Emesal: Gašanhurstag) several times on the reverse of the composition.


10–11: na-āg—tar of these lines must be separated from nam—tar of ll. 12–15, because of the different construction (with locative /a/ as opposed to absolutive /Ø/). For nam-/na-āg—tar, "to decree fate," with the locative see D. O. Edzard, "Zum sumerischen Eid," AS 20, p. 70. Interestingly, the Aruru-text CT 36, 48:rev. col. ii 15 states i₇ a-bi mu-ra-an-ba a-sā še-bi mu-ra-an-ba, "He (An) gave to you as a gift the water of the river: he (An) gave to you as a gift the barley of the field." So apparently Aruru decrees fate for the river and the field that she was once given by the great An.

12: A parallel to this line is found in BM 38593 (see K. Volk, "Die Balag-Komposition ṭuru ṭa-ma-ir-ra-bi," FAOS 18 [1989] pl. Ib); this text will be published by the present writer: col. ii 25: i₇-da a-bi umun[₄] A-m-a₄-ki-ke, na-āg im-ma-ku₄-dēn-na-r₄ Ša-₄-ši be₄ lum₄ [₄]É₁-a li-ru-ur-ši, "May Lord Enki curse that river" (Sum.: "the water of the river").
16: The mention of the temple é-kar-ra in this context is noteworthy. Ekarra points to Dilmun, where this temple ("House of the Quay," see George, *House Most High*, pp. 107–8) is the temple of Ninsikila, who, in a certain tradition, is the wife of Lisin, the son of Ninhursag (see A. Falkenstein, "Sumerische religiöse Texte. 4. Ein Lied auf Šulpa'e," ZA 55 [1961], p. 30). The possibility of a (syncrétique) confusion between Ninhursag's son Lisin and the mother goddess Lisin cannot be discussed here. For the present note S. N. Kramer, "Lisin, the Weeping Mother Goddess: A New Sumerian Lament," in G. van Driel et al., eds., *Zikir Šumuk: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten Studia Francisci Scholten Memoriae Dicta 5 (Leiden, 1982), p. 137 n. 12. In Langdon, *BL* 175:rev. 9–10, the Ekarra is connected with Ninbanda.


18: The meaning of a-dāra in this passage is not entirely clear. It literally means "horn of the ibex" and is to be compared with CT 42, 19:14, paralleled by VS 10, 198:15 (eršemma of Dingirmah): aš-li₄-dāra TUR sug-ge gu₄-*a*-gu₁₀. Significant for the problem of how to interpret a-dāra is the late and quite distorted translation of a-dāra gašān-hur-sag-gá with i-dan šā-qa-a-tā be-let-DINGIRM₄₅₉₆₇₈. "She of the ibex horns, Ninhursag: She of valorous strength, Bēlet-ili." (see Cohen, *CLAM* 2, pp. 50; 518). One could also argue that in our text ā represents a syllabic spelling of e and that the term then represents the late é-dāra-(an-na) of Enki. Note however Langdon, *BL* 56:obv. 20: gašan-é-dāra-an-na.

19–22: This section is perhaps to be restored according to CT 44, 17:obv. 10–13: é-zi é-zu-su₂₄-ē₂₄-um₂₄ / uru-su₂₄-um₂₄-ē₂₄ / dam-zu₂₄ dam-zu-su₂₄-ē₂₄ / dumu₂₄-dumu₂₄-um₂₄-ē₂₄, "Your house! To your house! Alas! etc."

Reverse

3': There is no convincing evidence for the reading of DU NE.DU. gen-ne-mēn. "You were the one who walked in the steppe" seems possible but not compelling. Although this line is incomplete, it surely alludes to parallels like *SBH* 12:obv. 20–21: eden-na DU-ba eden ša-su-ga-(gu₁₀) / se-ra-am ina a-la-ki₂₄ ša₂₄-hut₂₄ / ur(1)₂₄-bu₂₄-uri₄, "When he walks around (Sum.: stands) in the steppe, the steppe becomes wasteland."

4': *SBH* 23:obv. 26 and Langdon, *BL* 96:obv. 2: ta a-ab₂₄-ba₀₂₄-da-ab₂₄-is permit us to restore this line. This phrase, as in the text just cited, usually forms a couplet with ta idim₂₄-ma ta nu₂₄-mu₂₄-da-sā, "What in the
depths, what (is it), that you do not reach?" Interestingly, the couplet of ll. 6'-7' of our text also follows immediately in SBH 23:obv. 23-29 and Langdon, BL 96:obv. 3-4.


12': mu-bur-ra is to be understood as Emaral writing for giš-bur-ra = ṯš pišṛi, "magic wand" (see CAD I-J, p. 218 s.v. ṣantu).

13': For tu-₄₄ as a syllabic spelling of tu₁₅ (-m) = šaru, "wind" see G. Cros, Nouvelles fouilles de Tello (Paris, 1910), p. 207: obv. col. iii 6, where we read tu-mu-me-er, "northwind," za-ga is possibly the nominal part of a compound verb. Compare for example za-(ga)—dab/tag/gub/lā/ūs. Based on the context one could guess a meaning like "you did not detain?" the northwind," perhaps constructed with the semantically related za-(ga)-dab/tag (see W. H. Ph. Römer, "Das sumerische Kurzepos 'Bilgames und Akka,'" AOAT 2091 [Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980], p. 67: Á. Sjöberg, "Beiträge zum sumerischen Wörterbuch," OrNS 39 [1970], pp. 88-89). Yet it should be noted that the faint traces of a vertical wedge after /-gal/ could indicate a reading za-ta.

16': As often, the intended nin₄₄, "sister," is written nin. For Aruru as a sister of Enlil see, for example, Á. Sjöberg, The Collection of Sumerian Temple Hymns, TCS 3, p. 74.

18': These lines can be interpreted only with de Genouillac, Kich 2, B 471:rev. 16'-18' // OECT 5, 10:col. iv 15-17, because the unit quoted there corresponds roughly to ll. 18'-19' (split) of our text. Since de Genouillac, Kich 2, B 471, has UL₄-UL₄-tur-ra-zu šu mu-ra-[ab]-du₇/UL₄-UL₄-mah-a-zu šu mu-ra-[ab-du₇], "Your small . . . has been made perfect for you, your outstanding . . . has been made [perfect] for you," UL₄-UL₄ must denote some reāla. If the following context is correctly interpreted, UL₄-UL₄ might then denote some tree or shrub, probably to be read kiši₁₇-kīši₁₇ = ašāga, "prosopis tárca," a thorny, straggling shrub (Arab.: zūk/harūb) bearing harūb-fruits (see M. Civil, "The Lexicon as a Source of the Literary Inspiration," in F. Rochberg-Halton, ed., Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner, AOS 67 [New Haven, 1987], pp. 47-48, and C. C. Townsend, "Leguminoses," in C. C. Townsend and E. Guest, eds., Flora of Iraq 3 [Baghdad, 1974], pp. 38-42 and pl. 7). Less likely is the interpretation of ul₄ as "myrtle" (see K. Volk, "Zur Lesung von teme (NAGA-inversum) und te-me (NAGA)," NABU [1990], p. 37 n. 54). Whether this expression is to be paralleled with ul-gal-gal. of the Aruru text published by L. Speleers, Recueil des Inscriptions de l’Asie Antérieure des Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire à Bruxelles (Brussels, 1925, 189:obv. 13-14) remains uncertain.

19': The reading of ṣéme₄₄₄₄ is evident from the syllabic parallel OECT 5, 10:rev. col. iv 17' UL₄-UL₄-de-me-gim šā-šū-a. For tême = qaqqulla see K. Volk, NABU (1990), p. 37 n. 54. Cf. for our context HS 1885:14 (atabbuk) ki qāqulli, "(I throw down [the enemy]) like a qāqulli/qāqulli-plant" (unpublished MB text, quoted by CAD Q, p. 124 s.v. qaqqulla 1).

20': giš-mar-maḥ-tur-re creates a number of difficulties. At first glance one could be tempted to interpret giš-mar-maḥ as "great shovel," in view of the fact that Ninkasi, who is the Nin-ḫur-sag-ga₄₄₁ mē-zi-dē-eš du₁₄-ga,
"tenderly cared for by Ninḫursag," handles the 𒉺𒌓mar-maḫ to mix the dough for the boppir-bread (see M. Civil, "A Hymn to the Beer Goddess and a Drinking Song," in Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, June 7, 1964 [Chicago, 1964], p. 69 ll. 4, 14). But this makes no sense in our context. 𒉺𒌓mar-maḫ may also be interpreted as (m)armanaḫu, "shrub." Admittedly this seems to be lexically a hapax legomenon, but it fits our context well. So armanaḫu (see CAD A/2, p. 290 s.v. armanaḫu), until now attested only in lexical texts and a single Neo-Assyrian royal inscription, may be derived from 𒉺𒌓mar-maḫ (see K. Vols. "(m)armanaḫum-mar-maḫ 'ein Obstbaum,'" NABU [1992], pp. 14–15).

21: The first sign of the line is not entirely clear but is most likely saḫar; compare lexically and semantically kušš (ṣaḥar)—ṣu-su/su-su, "to level the land" and ṣa-su-gu, "waste, empty land."

22: The translation offered here remains highly tentative. Since this line is the beginning of a new literary unit, one cannot be sure whether the preceding subject (destruction) is continued or not. Possibly the contents of the line are to be connected with Cohen, CLAM 2, p. 732 (= BM 96568) ll. 9–10: u₄-te-eš ₄tur-ra a ri . . ./u₄-te-eš amaš a ri . . ., "a violent storm that spills the seed in the sheepfold. . . ."

Also note OECT 5, 10:col. iii 11–12: u₄ a ri-a A ri₄-hu-tum-₄ma/i₄-gim u₄ A ri₄ a ri₄-hu-tum-₄ma.