An Old Babylonian Plaint against Black Magic*

Gary BECKMAN and Benjamin R. FOSTER

— Ann Arbor and New Haven —

The Old Babylonian tablet (YBC 6461) published herewith is a complaint addressed to Enki concerning the effects of black magic. It is not clear whether Enki is addressed directly or through an intermediary. Although this piece may be compared superficially to Old Babylonian letter prayers (for example, De Meyer, Studies Kraus, 274ff., Studies Finet, 41ff., AbB 5 140, AbB 9 141, see further Borger, RIA s.v. "Gottesbrief"), it lacks a salutation and names neither the offender nor the suppliant. A closer parallel is UET 6 402, a pierced cylinder with a complaint concerning a broken oath (see Moran, JANES 22 [1993], 113ff.), but that is a considerably more elaborate composition than this.

(1) $\text{aš-šum-i-šu }$ $^\text{d}En-ki$ ša $ib-ni-a-ni$
$bu-bu-tam$ $^\text{zú}-ma-am$ $ub-lam$
$ku-ša-am$ $ü$ $du-bu-ub-tam$
$e-li-ja$ $it-ta-di$

(5) $\text{šum-ma }$ $ta-ab-kum$ $ü$ $li-ib-ba-ka$
$qi-bi$-$\text{šum-ma }$ $i?-na?$ $x$ $x$ $^\text{d}En-ki$
$wa-ši$-$ib$ $\text{NUN}^\text{ki} [\text{wu}$-$\text{r}]-^\text{r}_^\text{ir}-^\text{r}_^\text{šu}$
$a-na-ku$ $ra-bu$-$ut$ $^\text{d}En-ki [\ ]$
$lu$-$uš$-$ku-u[n]$

(10) $\text{aš-šum-i-šu }$ $la$ $i-ḫa$-$ba$-$lu$-$ni$-$i[n-ni]$

"On account of him, O Enki who made me — he has brought hunger, thirst upon me, he has cast chills and misery upon me — if it please you, then tell him your wish, that, by [command?] of Enki, who dwells in Eridu ..., I may establish the

* We thank William W. Hallo, curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, for permission to publish this tablet, and Antoine Cavigneaux, who discussed its problems with us and who made some suggestions that we have gratefully incorporated here. Copy by Beckman, study by Foster. A photo of the obverse appears on the cover of Benjamin R. Foster, From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1995).
greatness of Enki. On account of him, lest he harm me.”

(1) We read aš-šum-i-šu as a plene spelling of the type discussed and documented by Aro, StOr 19/11 (1953), 7 (for its role as marking secondary stress, see von Soden, GAG, 65a). Aro observed that spellings of this type were particularly characteristic of the kingdom of Larsa, hence, Goetze’s “southern Old Babylonian” (MCT, 146ff.). Independent study of the group of tablets to which YBC 6461 belongs, carried out by Gary Beckman, suggests a Larsa provenience independently of the orthography.

(2) Note that this short, asyndetic line is expanded in lines 3f. with a conjunction, a personalizing preposition plus suffix, and a change from preterite to perfect; compare Ehelof, LSS 6/III (1916), 16ff.

(3) dubbubtum is found in the OB incantation YOS XI 15 line 25: du-bu-ub-\text{-}\text{-}ta-šu in-na-sa-\text{-}aḫ.

(5) ȗ introducing an apodosis or resumptive clause is considered a feature of peripheral dialects by von Soden, AHw, 1397b, but this seems to us the best interpretation here. Presumably Asalluhi is addressed; for discussion of this deity in OB magic, see Geller, FAOS 12, 12ff.

(7) Restoration suggestion of Cavigneaux.

Yale Babylonian Collection
An Old Babylonian Plaint against Black Magic

YBC 6461