

An Old Babylonian Complaint against Black Magic*

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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, *RLA* 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) *aš-šum-i-šu* ^dEn-ki *ša ib-ni-a-ni*
bu-bu-tam šú-ma-am ub-lam
ku-ša-am ù du-bu-ub-tam
e-li-ja it-ta-di
- (5) *šum-ma ta-ab-kum ù li-ib-ba-ka*
qí-bi-šum-ma i?-na? x x ^dEn-ki
wa-ši-ib NUN^{ki} [wu-'i]-^{ir}-^{šu}
a-na-ku ra-bu-ut ^dEn-ki []
lu-uš-ku-u[n]
- (10) *aš-šum-i-šu la i-ḥa-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

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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 Ehelolf, *LSS* 6/III (1916), 16ff.

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

(5) *ù* 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.

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