

# Leggo!

Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales  
on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday

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# The Pig and the Fox in Two Popular Sayings from Aššur

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The popular saying BWL 215: 5–8 deals with the behaviour of pigs. Unfortunately, all lines are broken. Whereas W. G. Lambert could quite convincingly restore ll. 7 and 8, the broken passages of ll. 5 and 6 had to be left open.

I have already suggested a restoration in l. 6 of the word *[lu-ḫu-u]m-me* „mud“.<sup>1</sup> The dictionaries list the word, attested in OB and SB, with the variants *luḫummû*, *luḫmû* and *luḫāmu*.<sup>2</sup> This restoration is favoured by an insult in the Sumerian text *A Diatribe against Engar-dug*, i 6':<sup>3</sup> šáḫ lu-ḫu-um-ma sù-a, “a pig spattered with mud”. The same phrase occurs in Alster 1997 Coll. 8 Sec. A 5.<sup>4</sup> In these cases, the Akkadian loan *lu-ḫu-um*<sup>5</sup> is also used in connection with pigs. Both the missing plene spelling in our saying and the loan in Sumerian point to a further variant *luḫummu* (note that -ma in the Sumerian examples does not point to a form /luḫuma/ but is the locative).

For l. 5, I suggest the less certain restoration *[ar]-šá'* with a late “wrong” accusative. The adjective (w)*aršū*, “dirty, unclean” is listed in the dictionaries mainly with reference to cloths and persons;<sup>6</sup> with animals it is hitherto unattested.

Lambert noted the unexpected plural *iqabbû* in l. 7.<sup>7</sup> I understood this as a hint to the subject, namely an impersonal “they” referring to people.<sup>8</sup> The same subject I also assumed for *iqabbi*, “(a man) says”, in l. 8. This yielded an interpretation of the saying that man can not expect honours from a pig but simply uses it for consumption. However, I now think that the saying makes better sense if the pig itself is the subject in both lines. This interpretation is favoured by the restored variant *iqabbi* in l. 7, since in this case a change of subject would not be indicated at all. The plural *iqabbû* depends on a switch of the subject from one pig to pigs in general.

The foregoing considerations yield the following interpretation of the saying:

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1 In Streck 2010: 366 (also quoted by M. Weszeli in Weszeli 2009: 325 §10).

2 AHw: 562; CAD L: 239f.

3 ETCSL 5.4.11; Sjöberg 1972: 108. See also the commentary of Å. Sjöberg *ibid.*: 114.

4 Already quoted in CAD L: 239 s.v. *luḫummû*.

5 Cf. Sjöberg 1967: 277f.

6 CAD A/2: 309f.; AHw: 1471.

7 Lambert 1959: 338.

8 Streck 2010: 366.

- 5 ŠAḤ [ar-]šá ul i-ši té-e-ma  
 6 ra-bi-i[s ina lu-ḥu-u]m-me ik-ka-la ku-ru-um-ma-tu  
 7 ul i-[qab-bu-]ú (var. -b[i]ʹ) ŠAḤ me-nu-ú ku-ba-du-ú-a  
 8 i-qab-b[i ana š]á-šú šá-ḥu-ú tuk- la'-ti

- 5 The [dirt]y pig has no sense.  
 6 He lie[s in the m]ud, eating food.  
 7 Th[ey (the pigs)] do (var. He] does) not say: “Pig, what respect do I get?”  
 8 (But) he sa[y[s to him]self: “I (only) trust in the pig”.

The pig does not care of what others think of him. He is dirty and eats his food. His mental horizon does not exceed his existence as a pig. Thus the pig is a deterrent example of a selfish, egoistic person who lives without morals.

The popular saying BWL 216: 21–25 deals with a fox. The crux of the text is the clear *nu-ḥu-UB* in l. 21 which seems to be a hapax in Akkadian. Lambert does not offer any translation.<sup>10</sup> W. von Soden in AHW booked the reference under *nuḥ-ḥub/pu*, “in Übermut versetzen?”<sup>11</sup> CAD N/2: 317 under *nuḥḥubu*, “insolent?”. von Soden later translated “*unbedacht*”.<sup>12</sup>

All these translations are mere guesses not necessarily supported by the context. In fact, at the beginning the fox is neither insolent nor inconsiderate since he is not caught by the lion or the wolf. However, foxes eat carrion, and it might well be that the fox in our story was driven by hunger to follow the track of these animals potentially dangerous for him in order to eat the remains of their meal. Can *nu-ḥu-UB* mean something like “hungry”?

The form is clearly a D-stem stative of a root *\*nḥb/p* otherwise not attested in Akkadian. However, the Aramaic lexicon offers two solutions.

The first solution was suggested by Lambert himself.<sup>13</sup> He noted a Syriac verb *n<sup>c</sup>ḥab*, “was lean”, and an Arabic verb *naḥiba*, “to be timid”.<sup>14</sup>

A second solution is offered by Payne-Smith, who lists *nḥep*, “tenuis, macer fuit” (“to be thin, meagre”).<sup>15</sup> Brockelmann does not offer this meaning for the P'al.<sup>16</sup> he

9 From K 5797, Lambert 1959: pl. 55

10 Lambert 1959: 217.

11 AHW: 801.

12 von Soden 1990: 187.

13 Lambert 1959: 338.

14 Cf. Brockelmann 1928: 422, *nḥeb*, “macruit”, and the adjective *naḥbā*, “parcus, tenuis”; see the translation of Sokoloff 2009: 906f., “to grow thin, pine away”; Pa'el “to emaciate, render thin”; adjective *naḥbā*, “poor, meagre, weak”; Payne-Smith 1879: 2334, “macruit”; Pa'el “emaciavit, macrum reddidit”, adjective *naḥbā*, “macer” (“thin, meagre”). Drower & Macuch 1963: 290 list a “doubtful” NHB, “to be lean, meagre, starving”. Wehr 1985 does not book *naḥiba*, nor does Lane 1893; both dictionaries (Wehr 1985: 1454; Lane 1893: 2776) list *naḥaba*, “he drew, or took out, or forth”, a verb whose relation to the Aramaic root is not obvious.

only books the meaning “discalceatus fuit” (“unbekleidet sein”); however, for the Aph’el he offers, among other meanings, “debilitatus est”.<sup>17</sup> A similiar meaning is attested for the root \**nhf* in Arabic: *nahufa*, “dünn, schlank, mager sein”, also attested in stem II with the meaning “dünn, mager machen, ausmergeln”.<sup>18</sup> According to M. Johnstone, Mehri *nəháyf* means „lean, thin“.<sup>19</sup>

One can hardly avoid the conclusion that Syriac/Mandaic(?) \**nhb*, “to be thin, meagre”, is a variant of Syriac/Arabic/Mehri \**nhp/f* with the same meaning.

I therefore suggest to analyse *nu-ḫu-UB* as *nūḫhub/p*, “is thin, meagre”, a verb which perfectly fits the subject *libbašu* which here means “abdomen, belly” rather than “heart”. The Akkadian root \**nhb/p* might be a loan from Aramaic or a cognate of the West Semitic root \**nhb/p* attested in Syriac, Mandaic(?), Arabic and Mehri.

The end of l. 25 is broken. Lambert does not offer any translation.<sup>20</sup> Von Soden translates “[läuft] dem Häscher [in die Arme]”.<sup>21</sup> The tablet VAT 8807 was collated by N. Wasserman in February 2011, who also took a photograph. Photo and collation show that the sign after *i* is a broken *ša*. The sign after *ša* is probably a very broken ‘*ba*’. The remaining signs at the end of the line are still visible as copied by Lambert.<sup>22</sup> I suggest reading *i-ṣ[a]-‘ba’<sup>2</sup>-t)a-‘šú’*.

The foregoing considerations yield the following interpretation of the saying:

- 21 KA<sub>5</sub>.A ŠÀ-*ba-šú nu-ḫu-ub/p-ma ina su-ul-le-e né-ši i-ba’*  
 22 *a-na su-ul-le-e bar-ba-ri i-ḫaṭ qer-bé-tu*  
 23 *ina ba-ba-at URU ina ‘qé’-re-bi-šú ú-ṭar-ri-du-šú kal-bi*  
 24 *a-na šu-zu-ub ZI.MEŠ-šú šil-ta-ḫi-iš ú-ši*  
 25 ‘*ša’ la i-du-ú a-mir-šú EN bir-ki i-ṣ[a]-‘ba’<sup>2</sup>-t)a-‘šú’*

- 21 A fox – his belly was meagre and he walked on the track of a lion –  
 22 At the track of a wolf he was spying out the field.  
 23 (But) when we approached the city gates, the dogs drove him away.  
 24 To save his life he flew out like an arrow.  
 25 The hunter c[atch]es ‘him’ who does not know who watches him.

As already seen by von Soden, l. 25 contains the moral of the saying.<sup>23</sup> This is structurally remarkable since no other saying of this tablet expresses its moral in general

15 Payne-Smith 1879: 2339.

16 Brockelmann 1928: 423.

17 In his translation of Sokoloff 2009: 908, “to be weakened”.

18 Wehr 1985: 1252f.

19 Johnstone 1987: 291.

20 Lambert 1959: 217.

21 von Soden 1990: 187.

22 Lambert 1959: pl. 56.

23 von Soden 1990: 187.

terms. As I understand it, the saying tells the moral that sometimes one cannot escape his fate. Even if you avoid the lion and the wolf, there might be someone else, whom you don't know, watching and finally catching you.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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