

Lamenting in Susa

Michael P. Streck

Abstract

The text Sb 19319 (MDP 18, 250) has recently been treated by Wasserman 2019 and Zgoll 2020. The article suggests an improved interpretation of the text, understood as an excerpt of a personal lament. It is argued here that the text has no netherworld connection and does not provide any information about netherworld conceptions.

Known as one of the so-called “Susa funerary texts” for more than a hundred years, Sb 19319 (MDP 18, 250) has recently been treated twice. Wasserman 2019, esp. 860–862, re-edits it together with the remaining six Susa funerary texts. His edition is based on a collation of the texts and new photos.¹ He also addresses important questions about its literary history and meaning. Zgoll 2020, esp. 216–218, treats the text Sb 1931 alone – without taking into account the other Susa funerary texts – within a study on “Sphärenwechsel” within the netherworld, applying a “Hylemanalyse” developed in her project on ancient myths.

The interest of the author of this article was piqued by the conflicting results of Wasserman and Zgoll with regard to individual readings, as well as the translation and overall interpretation of the text. Although Wasserman’s study of the “Susa funerary texts” is in many respects a great progress, a closer examination of both studies showed that the author’s interpretation of Sb 1931 differs both from Zgoll’s and Wasserman’s understanding in several decisive points. The author will first present a new transliteration² and translation of the text as a whole and then comment on his deviating interpretations. Finally, some questions on the interpretation of the text will be taken up again.

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- 1 Since Sb 19319 is on display in the Louvre the obv. unfortunately, could not be collated nor could new photos be taken from it. A new photo of the rev. is found in Wasserman 2019, 882, fig. 1. Photos of the obv., lower and upper edge as well as the rev. of the text are published in Steve – Gasche 1996, 335. A photo of the rev. is also found in André-Salvini 1992. The text has been copied twice: by Scheil 1916, 168, and by G. Dossin in MDP 18, 250.
 - 2 Differences from Wasserman’s transliteration are marked by “!”. Zgoll follows Wasserman’s readings, already uploaded before the edition in Wasserman 2019 on the SEAL website (<https://seal.huji.ac.il/>) under no. 1832, in all instances but in one case in l. 8; see the commentary below.

Obverse

1. *al-ka lu-li-ka ì-lí be-li*
2. *ᵀa⁷-na ma-aḥ-ri-ti E-nu-na-ki*
3. *ᵀlu⁷-ti-iq ḥar!?-ra!?-na*
4. *ᵀlu⁷-ḥu-uz qa-at-ka₄ i-na ma-ḥa-ar ì-lí*
5. *ra-bu-ti*
6. *lu-uš-me-ma di-na lu-uš-ba-ta*

Lower edge

7. *še-pi-ka₄*
8. *ᵀù⁷ ki! ma-šú!-mi ì-lí*

Reverse

9. *tu-šà-aḥ-ba-ta-an-ni*
10. *ap-pa-ra šà ma-ki*
11. *ù du-ul-li*
12. *i-na qa-aq-qa-ar da-na-ti*
13. *te₉-še-a-ni*

Upper edge

14. *tu-qí-ra me-e ú šà-am-ma*
15. *[i]-na e-qé-el₅ šú-ma-mi-ti*

1–7. Come! May I walk, my god, my lord, may I pass the road (!?) to the Enunakū! May I hold your hand in the presence of the great gods! May I hear the verdict! May I grasp your feet!

8–15. And for how long, my god, will you make me go through a marsh of need and toil? You have called me to account (or: troubled me) in a land of distress! You made water and pasture rare for me in a field of thirst!

Commentary:

L. 3: The signs *ḥar!?* and *ra!?* are not written well, and there might be an erasure. But there seems to be no other choice than to read, with CAD G 70a, *ḥar-rāna*, a reading also adopted by Wasserman and Zgoll.³ *ḥarrāna etēqu* is a well known phrase in Akkadian.

L. 8: Wasserman, reads *ad?-di-ma* É GI₆ “I have abandoned the house of darkness”, whereas Zgoll suggests *ta₄-de-ma* É GI₆ “du kennst ja das Haus der Finsternis”.

However, Zgoll’s reading *ta₄-de* presupposes a form that does not exist in Akk.: “you know” is usually *tīdē*, sometimes *tuddā*, but never “*tāde*”. More-

3 Also followed by Bottéro 1982, 394; Tsukimoto 1985, 3; Van der Stede 2005, 155 and 2007, 96, the latter however “faute de mieux”. The reading *g[e]-...-na* (*gegunū*, Scheil 1916, 168) has rightfully been refuted by Van der Stede 2005, 155, no. 25, the reading *ša⁷-aq-qal⁷(?)*-na (Steve – Gasche 1996, 334) by Wasserman 2019, 861.

over, a syllabic value ta_4 is, contrary to her claim, practically unattested in Susa Akk.⁴ Finally, the text elsewhere uses the sign TA for /ta/: s. *lu-uš-ba-ta* l. 7 and *tu-ša-aḥ-ba-ta-an-ni* l. 9.

The reading É GI₆, taken over from Scheil 1916: 169 by both Wasserman and Zgoll,⁵ is already conspicuous because of the compound logogram. Sb 19319 nowhere else uses logograms; even the Anunakū gods in l. 2 are written syllabically *E-nu-na-ki*. Moreover, *bīt ekle/ēti* is nowhere else written logographically É GI₆.⁶ When one compares the alleged É sign with unquestionable É signs⁷ in the Akk. texts from Susa on the one hand and with *šú*(ZU) signs⁸ on the other hand, it becomes clear that the sign in question, with two long horizontal wedges and a single, shorter horizontal wedge in between, is ZU, not É; thus Bottéro 1982, 395 read the sign correctly. Apparently, the reading É GI₆ was uncritically accepted by many scholars because it provided them with the searched-for connection with the netherworld.

Wasserman's reading of the first sign – squeezed a little bit on the lower left edge on the tablet – as *ad?* does not fit the visible sign rest well, as he himself indicates by the question mark. The second half of the sign as visible on the photo shows a vertically oriented rectangle with probably a single⁹ horizontal wedge crossed by an only weakly visible vertical wedge in the middle, differently from AD in l. 4. To the author's eyes, the second sign, with four horizontal wedges, is KI (as was read by all previous editors) and not DI.¹⁰

Therefore, the author is convinced that the reading $\text{r}^{\text{u}} \text{ki ma-šú-mi}$ ¹¹, proposed by both dictionaries (AHw. 622a *mašú* 6b; CAD M/2, 346b *mašú* e 1'), is correct. It fits the signs better than any other reading and makes perfect sense in context.

4 Zgoll 2020, 217, no. 11 refers to Salonen 1962, 49 for an alleged syllabic value da_4 . Salonen, however, only mentions a single and uncertain instance in the name DAM-*am-qí-ia* MDP 24, 370: 7 which can, according to him, be interpreted as *Dam^{am}-qí-ia*, i. e., *Dam* with phonetic complement. Zgoll does not refer to Salonen 1962, 69 where Salonen mentions one instance of ta_4 in the name *Nu-úr-^aKab-r^ata^a* MDP 22, 140: 8.

5 This reading was also followed by Ebeling 1931, 20; André-Salvini 1992 (“house of shadows”); Steve – Gasche 1996, 334 (with question mark after GI₆); Van der Stede 2005, 155, no. 155; 2007, 96 (transliterating KU₁₀ instead of GI₆, with question mark after É). Bottéro 1982, 395 reads *sú-pí* “ma prière”; the photo and the copies show, however, that the second sign is a clear MI and not *pí*(BI). Tsukimoto 1985, 17 reads *šú?!-um-mi* “meinen Durst”, already refuted by Wasserman 2019, 861, no. 9.

6 This was already noted by Tsukimoto 1985, 17, no. 77. The dictionaries (CAD I 60 f., AHw. 195) only know the logogram GI₆, GI₆ for *eklētu*, and never in a combination with É.

7 E.g.: MDP 23, 235: 6; 325: 28; MDP 24, 330: 10, 11; 352: 10. É is either elaborate with many horizontal wedges or simple with only two horizontal wedges.

8 E.g.: MDP 22, 82: 3; MDP 23, 204: 1; 249: 1; 251: 1; 267: 1. The lower wedge is frequently written horizontally and not slanted.

9 Both copies do not seem to be correct here.

10 DI in l. 6 only has two horizontal wedges. KI in ll. 2 and 14 has four horizontal wedges each. The copy in MDP 19, 250 shows three horizontal wedges and interpreted the upper horizontal wedge rather as the head of an additional vertical wedge after the ‘*Winkelhaken*’.

11 Neither Wasserman nor Zgoll discuss this reading.

L. 9: Zgoll translates *tušahbatanni* “du lässt mich hindurchkommen”. But this is not the meaning of *ḥabātu*. When used in transferred meaning, *ḥabātu* rather denotes “to suffer”. Cf. the parallel *dulli iḥ-bu-tu* AOS 67, 190: 10 (OB, *Man and his God*) “the toil he has gone through/suffered”. For “to let escape”, one would rather expect *wašû Š* or *ezēbu Š*.

L. 13: *te₉-še-a-ni*, is derived by both Wasserman, Zgoll and all previous editors from *še'û* “to search”: “you look for me” (Wasserman), “suchst du mich” (Zgoll). However, according to both AHw. and CAD, *še'û* is never used in the sense of “to look after/to care for (human beings)”, which is the reason why CAD Š/2, 358 rather translated “you have called me to account(?)”. This translation perfectly fits the meaning of the text: the speaker is called to account by the gods for his sins. An alternative interpretation is to derive the verb from *ešû* “to confuse, to trouble”. The use of *še* instead of *ši* slightly favors the derivation from *še'û*. However, the use of TI for /te/ in the same word shows that the Susa texts do not clearly distinguish between /e/ and /i/ in all instances. On the other hand, also the Sumerian *Man and his God* (ETCSL 5.2.4) 13, 60 knows “trouble/confusion” (*sùḥ*) of the sufferer.

L. 14: Zgoll suggests to read the first word as *tuqerra*, from *qerû* D, and translates the line “du lädst reichlich/andauernd ein hinsichtlich Wasser und Gras”. However, a form *tuqerra* probably does not exist in Akk.: verbs with *e*-coloring almost always either have *e* or *a* in both the second and third syllable of the present D. Thus, one expects *tuqerrē* or *tuqarrā*.¹² Moreover, the well attested verb *qerû* is never¹³ used in the D-stem (although a D-stem does seem to be possible in principle). Finally, Zgoll’s reading forces her to analyse *mê u šamma* as accusativus relationis which would give an unusual, if not impossible construction. The verb *qerû* is never used in this way. Rather, an accusative with *qerû* always designates the invited person. For “you invite for water and grass” one would expect a construction with *ana* (as in *ana utûl sūni* RA 69, 121, no. 8: 10, quoted CAD Q 242 *qerû* c).

Therefore, the derivation of *tu-KI-ra* from *waqāru* D, already suggested by Scheil and since then followed by all editors,¹⁴ is correct. But the author does not follow Wasserman’s translation “you made ... precious for me”, commented by him as follows: “the personal god is depicted as a savior, not one ‘who calls to account,’ or makes water and pasture ‘rare’”. However, the latter is the usual

12 Kouwenberg 2001, 232, no. 22. Kouwenberg ib. discusses two questionable forms but concludes that one of them is probably a mistake and the other one is of doubtful reading. Also, a ventive form *tuqerrâ* < *tuqerrē-a* would be unexpected since the text does not contract *e/i-a*, s. *te₉-še-a-ni* l. 13.

13 Zgoll 2020, 222, no. 27 says “kaum bezeugt”, but the dictionaries do not know a single instance of the D-stem.

14 Also, CAD A/2, 206 *aqāru* 2a.

meaning of *waqāru* D (and Š) attested with consumer items like plants, oil, rain, water, or barley (cf. CAD A/1, 206).

As understood here, the short text consists of two parts, linked by *ù* “and” at the beginning of l. 8. In part 1 (ll. 1–7), the speaker addresses his (personal) god and asks him to lead him to the great gods in order to get a favorable verdict. This is the literal description of the introductory scene frequently depicted on cylinder seals. In part 2 (ll. 8–15), the speaker laments his misery. The content and nature of this text will be clarified in the following final discussion of three interconnected questions. It will turn out that all conclusions drawn by Wasserman 2019 are basically correct.

a) The “Mesopotamian connection”: Wasserman 2019 connected the Susa funerary texts with the Mesopotamian literary tradition and identified as related genres personal prayers and reports of oracular or prophetic visions.

The interpretation given above makes clear that we have to add a third genre, namely personal laments. Compare the following words and phrases: It has already been mentioned above that the phrase *tušahbatanni appāra ša makî u dulli* “you make me go through a marsh of need and toil” has to be compared to *dulli iḥbutu* “the toil he went through” in AOS 67, 190: 10 (*Man and his God*). The speaker has been abandoned by his (personal) god (*ilu*) and lord (*bēlu*) as has been the sufferer in *Ludlul* II 4 (*ilu alsīma ul iddina panišu* “I shouted to my god, but he did not raise his face towards me”). Cf. also the sufferer in *Man and his God: eṭlum rû’iš ana ilišu ibakki* AOS 67, 188: 1 “a man constantly wept to his god like to a friend”; *bēliššu* ib. 190: 10 “to his lord (he recounts the toil)”; ib. 192: 49 *gamrā šanātu ūmū ša amlā’uni dulla* “the years, the days I (the god) filled with toil are finished”. Also, the Sumerian *Man and his God* (ETCSL 5.2.4) 15: *igi diḡir-ra-na* “before his god (he weeps)”; ll. 57, 69 and 98 and passim: *diḡir-ḡu₁₀* “my god ...”.

The speaker is hungry as is the sufferer in *Ludlul* (cf. *Ludlul* II 87: [*a*]rkat *bubūti* “my hunger was long”; *Ludlul* II 91: *ina lā mākalê zīmū’a itt[akrū]* “without food, my appearance chang[ed]”). The hunger motif also occurs in the bilingual personal lament PBS 1/2, 135 (SEAL no. 1809) r. 7: *ana lā ākulumi ḥamiš šubātī* “because of lack of food my cloth is stripped off”. Cf. also the Marduk lament AuOr. Suppl. 23, 32 (SEAL no. 7452) 17: [*ā*]takal *mutṭā akala* “I only ate scarce bread”. Finally, cf. also the Sumerian *Man and his God* (ETCSL 5.2.4) 46: *su-gu₇ ninda-ḡu₁₀.um* “my bread is hunger”.

The question “for how long” occurs in the same text l. 100: *en-na-me-^ršè^r èn-ḡu₁₀ nu-tar-re-en ki-ḡu₁₀ nu-kíḡ-kíḡ-en* “until when will you not care for me and not look after me?”.

The parallels show that Sb 19319 belongs to the literary genre of personal laments. The sufferer has been abandoned by his (personal) god and lord and seeks a favorable verdict (*dīnu*) of the great gods which hopefully will put an end to his toil.

b) Complete text or excerpt? According to Wasserman 2019, 869 f. and 873, the landscape format of the Susa funerary tablets and their content proves that they are extracts of longer texts – “with the possible exception of Text No. 1” (Wasserman 2019, 875). However, the author is convinced that also Sb 19319 is an excerpt. This is not only proven by the same landscape format of the table but also by its content. The imperative *alka* “come!” is hardly the beginning of the text. Instead, we may expect a proper introduction as in the other known personal laments. As for the end of the text, the parallels from Mesopotamian personal laments raise the expectation that the god finally will turn again to the sufferer and the latter will recover. Therefore, the original text was probably longer than the preserved text.

c) Does the text provide any information about the netherworld? Is the speaker dead or alive? Already Wasserman 2019, 872 and 875–879 disproved all previous claims that the Susa funerary texts contain any information about specifically Elamite or Iranian netherworld conceptions. As for Mesopotamian netherworld conceptions, he concluded that the “Susa funerary tablets” “are connected thematically to the netherworld, but the connection is tenuous and insufficient to term”¹⁵ them “funerary.” For text Sb 19319, this conclusion is based by him on the readings *ḥarrāna* in l. 3 and É GI₆ in l. 8.¹⁶ Naturally, especially the latter reading has been seen in the scholarly discussion as a strong argument for a netherworld connection of the entire lot of the “Susa funerary tablets”. According to the interpretation given above this is a misreading. As for *ḥarrāna*, this does not describe the road into the netherworld but simply the road to the great gods giving the verdict. Also the presence of the Enunakū (Anunakū)-gods is inconclusive: whereas in later periods Anunakū sometimes specifically refers to gods associated with the netherworld, in the Old Babylonian period the name “is used to cover all the major deities of the pantheon”.¹⁷ True, the sufferer is thirsty and hungry as are the shadows in the netherworld. But this is a motif also known from personal laments (see above) and does not prove that the speaker is dead.

Therefore, the author is convinced that the speaker is alive and that the text Sb 19319 does not have any netherworld connection at all. The text does not provide any information about Elamite or Mesopotamian netherworld conceptions. As for the fact that the text had been buried in a grave, Wasserman 2019, 881 f. is right that the archaeological context is not connected to the text’s content. Rather, the text was buried in a grave because the dead person had used the text magically or apotropaically during his lifetime. Therefore, it is in any

15 Wasserman 2019, 880.

16 *dīnu* “verdict” in l. 6, not discussed by Wasserman, does not refer to the judgement of the dead – such a judgement probably does not exist, see Katz 2014–2016, 74 f. – but to the judgement which finishes the sufferers toils.

17 Lambert 2013, 194.

respect a misnomer to call Sb 19319 a “funerary text”, and the text cannot be used to reconstruct the ancients’ ideas of death and afterlife.

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