

MANKIND'S BITTER FATE: THE WISDOM DIALOG BM 79111+

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Two fragments of a dialog, another vestige of ancient Mesopotamian wisdom and moral deliberation, were joined by W. G. Lambert, whose scientific work contributed so much to our understanding of Mesopotamian literature and religion. We dedicate this article to his memory.

The Tablet

The tablet edited here was joined from two fragments: BM 79111+ 80065 (Bu. 89-4-26,408 + 89-10-14,612).¹ Only the upper part of the tablet is preserved, measuring 12.6 × 5 cm. The tablet had at least three, perhaps four columns on each side. The separation line between columns ii and iii is clearly visible, but the separation between columns i and ii is less clear. There is an empty broken space that originally might have contained a similar line. On the bottom of the reverse, a horizontal separation line sets apart the last three lines that are not a colophon; they may form a new section in the text, or less likely, a catchline to the following tablet.

Outline of the Text

The text contains a learned dialog in the Akkadian language between a certain Mannu-utâr-issu and a man named PU-UT-TI. The relation between the two is not made explicit in this text. It is unclear whether the word *ebrum*, “friend,” in the broken line 12' on the reverse, refers to them or to another person. On this point see further the paragraph on the Yale prism below.

The present dialog resembles in its structure and tone another fragmentary dialog between a fellow and his friend published by Streck and Wasserman (2009–11: 120–23 [BM 95431]).

In col. i Mannu-utâr-issu is talking to PU-UT-TI about mankind's duties and fate. The regular morning offering has been established for providing the temple (obv. i 2–3). Although not explicitly mentioned, it is clear that feed-

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1. The text was mentioned in the catalogue of Wasserman 2003: 188 as no. 12.

ing the gods with offerings is the constant duty of mankind. A parallel to this idea is provided by a Late Babylonian incantation for building a temple: *ilī ina šubat tūb libbi ana šūšubi amēlūti ibtani* (Ambos 2004: 202 ll. 19–20) “He (Ea) created mankind to let the gods dwell in the abode of (their) choice.” See also *[i]bni šarru ana zāninū[tiki?]* *[ibn]i amēlūti ana itabbul[u ...]* “He (Ea) created the king for [your(?) (the brick’s)] car[e, creat]ed mankind for providin[g the temple(?)” (Ambos 2004: 182 ll. 35–36, from a building ritual).

Mannu-utār-issu continues with the statement that mankind cannot reasonably act without divine consent (*lamassum*, lit. “protective spirit”) and attention (obv. i 4–5). The following metaphor of the regular flood in the river (obv. i 6–7) is open to several interpretations. It may refer to the constantly changing mind of mankind or the futile attempt of humanity to change its fate. Men and women cannot escape various plagues like famine (obv. i 8–9) and will die in due time just as the cane falls (obv. 10–11); for cane as an image for mankind see Streck and Wasserman 2009–11: 188 § 7.2.

Another speech of Mannu-utār-issu opens in obv. ii 1. Again he expresses a pessimistic view of human nature. The gods created man (obv. ii 2–3), but mankind does not act according to divine will: its behavior is untrustworthy and its speech is unreliable (obv. ii 4–5, ii 9). Similar ideas about the immoral behavior of humans are expressed elsewhere, for example, in a dialog between a fellow and his friend: *mīnšu lā wēdu iliššu dābib mišārim [m]ukil kīnātim [kī?] raggī lū šakin* “Why does not (even) a single (man), towards his god, speak justice (and) be truthful, (but) indeed behaves like a wicked one?” (Streck and Wasserman 2009–11: 121 ii 11’–14’). See also The Babylonian Theodicy: *šarkū ana amēlutu etguru dabāba sarrātu u lā kīnātu išrukūšu santakku* “They (the gods) endowed humanity with crooked speech. They endowed them forever with lies, not truth” (Lambert 1960: 88, ll. 279–280), or in the Epic of Gilgameš: *raggat amēlūtu* “Mankind is deceitful” (George 2003: 716, l. 220). Apparently variants of both the river metaphor of obv. i 6–7 and the cane metaphor of obv. i 10–11 are repeated again (obv. ii 6, ii 8).

In the beginning of col. iii we are introduced to a third character, a wise man (*emqum*) called HU.NUMUN. The next lines (obv. iii 12–13) describe immoral behavior against a young man and probably a woman. An evil person (*rag[gam]*) is mentioned in obv. iii 14.

The reverse is too broken to get any clear idea about its contents, but HU.NUMUN is mentioned again (rev. 5’). PU-UT-TI answers with a short speech to a friend (*ebri* rev. 12’). This speech of three lines is regrettably mostly broken (rev. 11’–13’).

The Yale Prism Parallel

Surprisingly enough, a partial parallel to our text is provided by an unpublished prism kept for more than hundred years in the Babylonian Collection of Yale University. It was Eckart Frahm of Yale who pointed out to us this important parallel and we turned to Benjamin Foster who has been working for years on this difficult text. He most kindly provided us with his preliminary edition of this prism. The Yale composition also contains a long wisdom dialog between the same characters present in our text, PU-UT-TI and Mannu-utār-issu. In the Yale prism they are clearly a father and son. Moreover, lines obv. i 6–12 of our text have parallels in the prism. This parallel made it clear to us that the obverse of our tablet contains at least three columns and not two wide columns, as we first thought. As far as we can see, no further parallels between the Yale prism and the BM tablet exist. Therefore, the texts don’t seem to be full duplicates but compositional variants, similar to the love dialogs ZA 49, 151–94 and CUSAS 10 10 and the love incantations YOS 11 87 and CUSAS 10 11. However, a better understanding of the relation between these two texts must await the publication of the Yale text.

Orthography and Dating

The text does not contract the vowel sequence /i-a/, see *ma-ši-a-kum* (obv. ii 13) and *an-ni-^ra¹-a[m]* (rev. 11’). This points to an OB date, also confirmed by paleography. However, mimation is often not written: *ḫu-ša-^raḫ¹-*

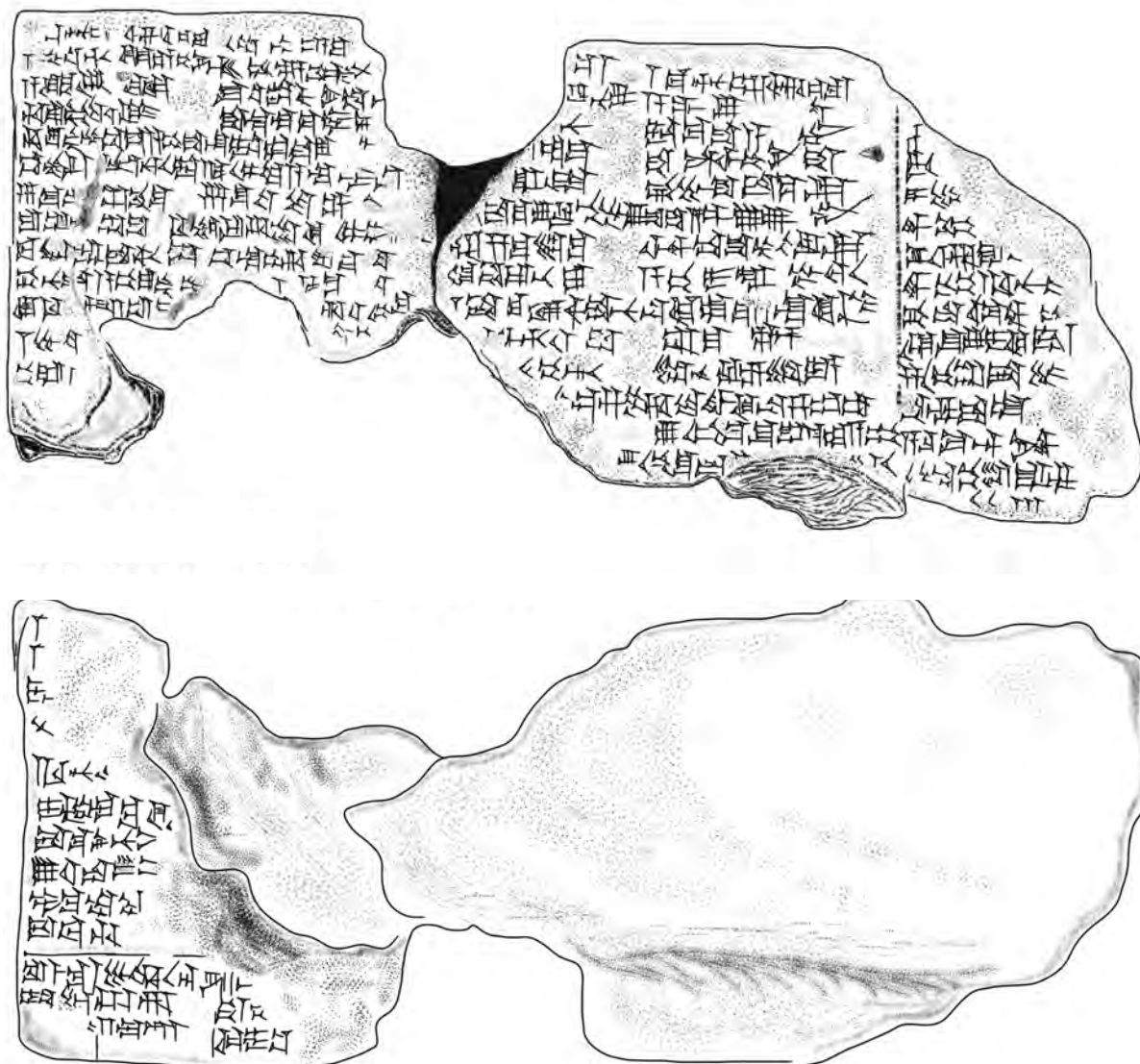


Fig. 1. BM 79111+80065 (copy by N. Wasserman).

hu ne-eb-ri-tu (obv. i 8), *qá-nu* and *a-pí* (obv. i 10), *ra-bu-ti* (obv. ii 8), *ʿši-it¹-nu-na* and *at-ma-ʿa¹* (obv. ii 9). This feature, as well as *at-ma-ʿa¹* for *atwâ* and perhaps also the use of *sa* instead of *sâ* in obv. iii 7² (but note *sú-* in obv. i 8), point to a later phase of the OB period.

Vowels are sometimes spelled plene: *ma-ta-a-tim* (obv. ii 3), *ru-ub-bu-ú* and *a-wi-lu-ú-tim* (obv. ii 6; but see *a-wi-lu-tam* obv. ii 2), *ut-te-e-e[r]* (obv. ii 7), *ki-i-ma* (rev. 13'), and the unexpected *mu-du-ta-a-am* (obv. i 5).

The orthography shows mixed “southern” and “northern” characteristics. It uses “southern” *ta* (obv. i 5, rev. 10') and *ti* (obv. i 8) but “northern” *pí* (obv. i 2, ii 4, 8) and *te₄* (obv. ii 12). The text uses both *ši* (obv. i 5, ii 12) and *ʿši* (obv. ii 13). Note the rare use of *ni₇* (obv. ii 4) for which see *Akk. Syll.* no. 251 and YOS 11, 19: 14.

2. In the middle OB period one would expect ZA- for /sa-/ in word initial position; see Streck 2006: 219.



Fig. 2. BM 79111+80065. Obverse top, reverse bottom.

The text uses the logograms $SÁ.DUG_4$ (obv. i 3), $ÍD$ (obv. i 6) and DUG_4 (obv. ii 9). To this list one could also add the names—if to be read logographically— ${}^mGÍD.UD.TI$ (obv. i 2, 6, 12, rev. 11') and ${}^mHU.NUMUN$ (obv. iii 8, rev. 5').

Transliteration

Obv. i

- 1 $[{}^mM]a-{}^r an-nu-ú-ta-ar-is-sú^1 it?-be^1-e-ma {}^r x^1 [x x]$
- 2 $[{}^mP]U-UT-TI ki-ma e-pé-er gi-gu-un-ne-em! \{IM!\} [(x)]$
- 3 $a-di ša-ar-{}^r ma!{}^?1 SÁ.DUG_4 šu-ut i-na še_{20}-er-{}^r te^1-e[n?]$
- 4 $ḥu-šú-ub uz-nam ša la la-ma-as-s[í-im]$
- 5 $ḥu-šú-ub mu-du-ta-a-am ša la i-na-aṭ-ṭa-lu ṣ[é-r]u!{}^?-šu$

- 6 *ta-mu-ur* ^mPU-UT-TI *i-na* ÍD *mi-lam a-la-^rak-šú¹*
 7 *6-šu i[s?]-si-am-ma* 7-šu *ut-te-e-e[r]*
 8 *sú-un?-[qu]m* *ḥu-ša-^rah¹-ḥu ne-eb-ri-tu* *ù mi-^rtí-[tu]*
 9 *ba-li-il* ^r*it¹-ti ni!* ^r*ši!* ^r*ma¹ la-bi-ri-^riš¹ ba-ši*
 10 *qá-nu* ^r*i-na¹ a-pí lu-ub-^rbu¹-r[u]-^rum¹ ^ri¹-m* *a-^raq¹-qú-ut*
 11 *ki-ma* *g[i-l[u?]]* ^r*še¹-eḥ-ru-u[m (i-)il-la-kam]* ^r*a-di¹ UD-mi-šu*
 12 ^mPU-UT-T[I ...]
 13 ^rGA/BI¹-x-x [...]

Obv. ii

- 1 [(x) x x x x] ^r*x¹ ^mMa-an-nu-ú-ta!-ar-is-^rsú¹*
 2 [(x) x x x i] *b-nu-ú a-wi-lu-tam*
 3 [(x) x x x] *-nu i-na ma-ta-a-tim*
 4 [*sa?-ar?-r*] *a-at-ma ša-ni₇(NIM) ši-pí-ir-ša*
 5 [*i -p*] *a?-ra-aš-ma qá-bu-ša it-ku-ur*
 6 ^r*ú?* ^r*x-KU-ú ru-ub-bu-ú ša {ŠA} a-wi-lu-ú-tim*
 7 ^r*x-e?* ^r*šu/ša¹ ma-li-ma ši-im-ta-ša mu!-ru-ur*
 8 ^r*x¹ MA? it-ma x ZU a-pí-i ra-bu-ti*
 9 ^r*x¹ it-ma DUG₄ ^rši-it¹-nu-^rna* *ù¹ at-ma-^ra¹ ^rla¹ ki-nam*
 10 [x] ^r*x x¹ GI?-na? x iš-ku-un*
 11 [x x x] ^r*x¹ bi-^rx¹ li-mu-ru e-li-ia*
 12 [x x x x] *x iš?-sé-ri ṭe₄-em-ki-na ša-ab-ta*
 13 [x x x x x] *ú-ul šu-šu-ra ma-ši-a-kum*
 14 [x x x x x] ^r*x¹ ú-ul šu-ú?* ^r*x x¹ [x x x] ^rx¹ ^rtí¹*

Obv. iii

- 1 broken
 2 broken
 3 *a [...]*
 4 *GA? [...]*
 5 *i-l[i ...]*
 6 *em-qum [...]*
 7 *sa-ar-ra-t[i?-im ...]*
 8 *em-qum* ^mHU.NUMUN ^r*x¹[...]*
 9 *qá-du ki-im-ti[m?]*
 10 *ù šu-ú i-de i-na[...]*
 11 *ḥa-bi-il eṭ-lum [...]*
 12 ^r*ša¹-ag-ša-at w[a?-ar?-da?-tum? ...]*
 13 *a-na ma-an-ni-im [...]*
 14 ^r*li¹-bi-il ra-ag-[ga-am ...]*
 15 [x x] ^r*x x¹ [...]*

Rev.

- 1' ^m [...]
 2' ^m [...]
 3' ^r*i¹-[...]*
 4' *x [...]*

- 5' ^mHU.NUMUN ᵀx¹ [...]
 6' *i-nam la ba-ki-t[am ...]*
 7' *i-na-šu AH?-nu-ᵀni?¹ ᵀx¹ [...]*
 8' *lu ud-du-ú x [...]*
 9' *šum-ma te-te-[pu?-uš? ...]*
 10' *ᵀa-ba-ḥu [...]*
-
- 11' *iš-me-ma* ^mPU-UT-TI *an-ni-ᵀa¹-a[m ...]*
 12' *i-na-aḥ eb-ri ša ᵀx¹-[...]*
 13' *[i]l-la-ak ki-i-ᵀma¹ ᵀx¹ [...]*

Translation

Obv. i

- 1 [M]annu-utār-issu¹ arose(?) and
 2 “Oh PU-UT-TI, in order to provide for the temple
 3 the regular offerings, those in the morni[ng], exist forever.
 4 He is deprived of wisdom, he who is without protective spir[it].
 5 He is deprived of knowledge, at whom he (the protective spirit) does not look.
 6 You have seen, oh PU-UT-TI, the flood in the river, its advancing:
 7 Six times it receded(?) and seven times it was turned bac[k].
 8 Hun[ge]r, famine, want and los[s]
 9 is mixed up with the (fate of) people and lasts for a long time.
 10 The cane in the canebrake will fall down in old (age),
 11 just as the young *gillu*(?) cane will reach its (destined) day.”
 12 PU-UT-TI ...
 13 ...
 14 ...

Obv. ii

- 1 [...] Mannu-utār-issu:
 2 [“The gods ...] have [crea]ted mankind.
 3 [They ...] in the lands.
 4 [(Mankind) is treach]erous and its behavior is strange.
 5 [It keeps lyi]ng(?) and its speech is not understood.
 6 [An]d(?) *risen*(?) are the waves of mankind.”
 7 He was full of his/its ... and was made bitter by its (mankind’s) fate:

- 8 “... vast canebrakes.
 9 It (mankind) has sworn a contentious speech and an unreliable word.
 10 ... he established,
 11 ... so that they look upon me.
 12 ... take your (pl. f.) decision!
 13 ... they (people?) are not on the right way. Enough for you (sg. m.)!”
 14 ...

Obv. iii

- 1-5 *Broken*
 6 The wise [...]
 7 Fals[e ...]
 8 The wise HU.NUMUN [...]
 9 With the fami[ly(?) ...]
 10 And he knows in [...]
 11 The young man is treated unjustly [...]
 12 [The young woman(?) is murdered [...]
 13 To whom [...]
 14 May he bring the e[vil ...]
 15 *Broken*

Rev.

- 1'-4' *Broken*
 5' “HU.NUMUN [...]
 6' An eye not weepin[g ...]
 7' His eyes ... [...]
 8' May they know [...]
 9' If you [do(?) ...]
 10' To slaughter [...]”

 11' PU-UT-TI heard this [...]:
 12' “My friend has become tired, he who [...]
 13' He walks like a [...]”

Commentary

Obv. i 1: Mannu-utār-issu “Who can turn away his arm?” Pious names starting with *mannu* are common but we did not find a parallel to this name. “His arm” refers to the power of a god.

Obv. i 2: The reading of the name PU-UT-TI is unclear. It might be syllabically read as *Putti*; see, for example, *puttu*, “ruler,” (CAD P, 546, attested only in *Malku*) and the Hurrian(?) name of a king of Simurrum, ^m*Pu-ut-ti-ma-da-al*, attested in a version of The Great Revolt against Narām-Sîn (Westenholz 1997: 242:29, we thank E. Frahm for the latter reference). A logographical, learned reading as GÍD.UD.TI, perhaps *Arik-ūm-balātīm* “Long-lasting is the time of (his) life,” is not excluded. Although such a reading of the name does not have a direct parallel it reminds one of the name of the famous hero of the Sumerian flood story, Zi-u₄-sud-rá, “Life of long days,”

(George 2003: 153). Compare perhaps the name Ud-ġu₁₀-ul “My day is far” in Enki and Ninmaḥ 88, probably referring to a baby (Kilmer 1976: 265).

Obv. i 3: See *adi šāri* CAD Š/2, 36 *šār* 2a. For the dual *šertēn* see CAD Š/3, 322 *šertu* A 1b.

Obv. i 4–5: *ḥašābu* “to break off reeds or twigs,” here used metaphorically. Another example of a nonliteral use of *ḥašābum* is found in the love-lyric CUSAS 10 10:9: *ḥuṣbī ezbi tašt[aknī? q]ūlī* “Beat it, leave! You ma[de me speech]less.”

Obv. i 6: The Yale prism has a question instead: ^mPU-UT-TI *ú-ul ta-mu-ur* “Oh PU-UT-TI, did you not see ...?”

Obv. i 7: For the formula “six-seven” in literary texts see, e.g., *ša bašmim šeššet pīšu sebēt lišanūšu* “Six are the mouth of the serpent, seven his tongues” (TIM 9 65:9 // 66:17–19). If read correctly, the broken form *issī amma* derives from *nesû* in the meaning “to recede (said of water).” The Yale prism has *iš-ši-a-am-ma* instead, a form deriving from *našûm*.

Obv. i 8: The reading *mi-^rtī¹-[tu]* was suggested by E. Frahm.

Obv. i 10: The Yale prism has *qá-nu-ú i-na*.

Obv. i 11: The Yale prism has *ki-ma gi-li še-eḫ-ri i-il-la-kam a-di UD-mi-šu* “Like a young *gillu*-reed it (the old reed) it will reach its day.” The word *gillu* has hitherto been attested only once lexically (CAD G, 73; AHW 288 and 1556).

Obv. ii 3: Restore probably [*išku*]nū or [*ukin*]nū “they established”.

Obv. ii 4: See *šani šipirša nukkur* “Her work is different (and) strange” (*Agušaya* A vi 24’).

Obv. ii 5: We thank M. Krebernik for the reading *-aš-ma*.

Obv. ii 6: At the beginning of the line we expect a stative form of *našû* or *šaḫû*, but the signs do not easily yield to such a reading.

Obv. ii 7: After a misshapen *mu-*, the scribe started to write another *mu-* but did not finish the sign and continued with *-ru-*. Lambert’s copy (see n. 1, above) shows *i-UB-ru-ur*; a reading *i-ár-ru-ur*, however, is excluded since *ár* is only used late and the verb *arāru* “to fear” makes no sense here. Or should one read *i¹-[x]-ru-ur* “he cursed”?

Obv. ii 9: Compare *atwām lā kīnam itanappalūšu* “They will always answer him an unreliable word” YOS 10 20:6.

Obv. ii 11: We thank M. Krebernik for the reading *-mu-*.

Obv. iii 7: We thank M. Krebernik for the reading *sa-*.

Obv. iii 8: The name ^mHU.NUMUN is unclear to us. Is it an abbreviation for (A)*ḫu-zēram*-(*iddinam* etc.) “The brother (has given, etc.) an offspring”? For the abbreviation (a)*ḫu* in personal names from Ebla (but only in the middle of the name) see Krebernik 1988: 30. See also the aphaeresis in the OB name *Salluḫum*, an abbreviation of a name composed with the god’s name *Asalluhi* (Stol 1991: 210).

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