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# Lament and Ritual Weeping in the “Negative Confession” of the Babylonian *Akītu* Festival

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## Abstract

This study seeks to contextualise the king’s “negative confession,” which took place in the spring *Akītu* Festival of Babylon, within the established norms of Mesopotamian ritual practice. The king’s humiliation is situated within the contexts of status reversal, lament and ritual weeping. The study includes a comparative almanac of the Akkadian prayer and/or exclamation known as *šigû*.

## Keywords

*Akītu* – Babylon – lament – tears – *šigû*

## 1 Introduction\*

During the *Akītu* Festival of Babylon on the fifth day of Nisannu, the king participated in an extraordinary ritual that has attracted the attention of scholars for over a century. According to the Late Babylonian text, the king is led into the temple of Marduk in Babylon (the *Esaġil*) where he undergoes a “ritual

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humiliation.” This involves the high priest striking the king’s cheek, leading him into the cella in front of Bēl (Marduk), pulling the king by the ears, and making him kneel on the ground. The slap on the cheek appears to be an accusation;<sup>1</sup> this assumption is confirmed by the fact that at this point the king utters a protestation of his innocence to Bēl, asserting that he has not committed an offense against Marduk, Babylon, the Esaġil, or the privileged subjects of Babylon:

[I did not s]in, Lord of the Lands. I was not neglectful of your divinity. [I did not des]troy Babylon, I have not commanded its dispersal, I did not make Esaġil tremble, I did not treat its rites with contempt, I did not strike the cheek of the *kidinnu* citizens, I did not humiliate them,<sup>2</sup> I did [not]... to Babylon, I did not destroy its outer walls ...<sup>3</sup>

After a break in the text, the high priest reassures the king that Bēl will support and extol his kingship and destroy his enemies. At the beginning of the ritual, a sceptre, loop, mace, and the Crown of Kingship are taken from the king. After the king is handed these insignia back at the end of the ritual, the high priest strikes the king’s cheek a second time. This part of the ritual is formulated as an omen:

He (the high priest) strikes the king’s cheek. When he has struck his cheek, if his tears flow, Bēl is content. If tears do not flow, Bēl is angry; an enemy will arise and bring about his downfall.<sup>4</sup>

This ritual has been understood as an act of atonement for the people, a symbolic death or resurrection of the king, a (re-)coronation, a rite of passage, and

1 For slapping the cheek as an accusation, see Jiménez and Adalı 2015: 189 with n. 80.

2 J. Bidmead offers an interpretation of the phrase *lētum maḥāšum* not as literally “striking the cheek”; instead, Bidmead interprets *lētum* as “assets,” resulting in the translation “I have not ruined the assets of the privileged citizens; I have not set them to be small” (Bidmead 2002: 81). I am sceptical of this translation, mainly due to the fact that later on in the ritual, the phrase *lētum maḥāšum* is used for literal slapping of the king’s cheek.

3 Lines 423–428: [ul aḥ]-tu EN KUR.KUR ul e-gi ana DINGIR-ti-ku [ul uḥ-t]a-liq E<sup>ki</sup> ul aq-ta-bi BIR-šú [ul ú-re]b<sup>1</sup>-bi é-sag-gil ul ú-ma-áš me-šú [ul a]m-ḥa-aš TE <sup>lu</sup>šab-bi ki-din-nu [ul] áš-kun qa-lal-šú-nu [x x-A]G ana E<sup>ki</sup> ul a-bu-ut šal-ḥu-šú (Sallaberger and Schmidt 2012: 573–4).

4 Lines 449–452: TE LUGAL i-maḥ-ḥa-aš e-nu-ma TE-su [imḥašu] šum<sub>4</sub>-ma di-ma-tu-šú il-lik <sup>d</sup>EN sa-[lim] šum<sub>4</sub>-ma di-ma-tu-šú là DUMEŠ <sup>d</sup>EN e-zi-[iz] <sup>lu</sup>KUR ZI-am-ma i-šak-kan šUB-su (Sallaberger and Schmidt 2012: 574–5). Note especially the formulation *nakru* (<sup>lu</sup>KUR) *itebbiamma* (ZI-am-ma) “the enemy will arise” or its variants, a widespread phrase in the apoduses of various omens (see CAD T, 314a).

a rite of reversal.<sup>5</sup> The first major study of the ritual by H. Zimmern interpreted the king as a repentant, who atones for the people by means of a “negative confession.”<sup>6</sup> Zimmern and other scholars also interpreted the ritual in the light of the so-called “Marduk Ordeal” text, as an enactment of the death and resurrection of Marduk. This approach has been refuted by W. von Soden and other scholars since the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> As remarked by J. Black, the interpretation of the king as representative of the collective sin of the community in this ritual is outdated and without foundation.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, B. Pongratz-Leisten argues against the Christian theological interpretation of the ritual as an act of atonement and repentance; instead, she argues for its role in keeping the king in check on the part of the elites.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the most current interpretation considers the ritual as a means of confirming the king as a fit and proper worldly representative of the deity, in a concealed ritual between the king and Marduk.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the ritual has been interpreted as a (re-)coronation, whereby the royal insignia are taken from the king and then returned to him as a (re-)confirmation of his royal status.<sup>11</sup> The sceptre of kingship, as well as the loop, mace, and crown, are removed at the beginning of the ritual. The return of these insignia at the end of the ritual symbolizes the reconfirmation of the

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- 5 J. Bidmead (2002: 77–86) offers an overview of the wide-ranging interpretations. B. D. Sommer (2000) resurrects the old theory that the *Akitu* festival in Babylon in Nisannu functioned as a “renewal of the cosmos.” A central component in Sommer’s argument is the ritual involving censer, torch and ritual slaughter, on the 5th day of Nisannu. According to Sommer (2000: 86), this ritual “represents the overthrow and rebuilding of Marduk’s temple.” However, these common activities are known from a wide variety of Mesopotamian rituals.
- 6 According to H. Zimmern (1918: 40–1), the king is a repentant (Büßer), and the ritual following the tears with burning of the reeds is a ritual of atonement (Sühneritus).
- 7 Such interpretations are obviously based on the Christian belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection, and Jesus’ atonement for the sins of humanity. For the history of scholarship on this text, see Frymer-Kensky 1983.
- 8 Black 1981: 54.
- 9 Pongratz-Leisten 1997.
- 10 Thus, it has been called a “Ritual des Rechenschaftsberichtes” (Pongratz-Leisten 1997: 101), a “Ritual der Rechtfertigung” (Zgoll 2006: 25–8) and “eine Art Rechenschaftsbericht an den Gott Marduk” (Ambos 2013a: 136). The concealed nature of this ritual accentuates the distinction between the king and the general population. By contrast, the population almost certainly witnessed the procession of the deity to and from the *Akitu* house outside of the city, an event which took place between days 8 and 11 of the festival at Babylon. See Zgoll 2007: 181.
- 11 For the interpretation of the ritual as a coronation, see Zgoll 2006: 61–4.

king's status. This view has been challenged by W. Sallaberger and K. Schmidt,<sup>12</sup> who have remarked that the ritual text uses terms for “loop” (*kippatu*) and “mace” (*mittu*) which are normally only used for the insignia of gods, not kings. This feature, combined with the fact that the ritual text is not fully preserved, and what exactly happens to these insignia is ambiguous, led Sallaberger and Schmidt to conclude that the insignia are those of Marduk, not the king, though C. Ambos has rejected this theory in favor of the traditional view.<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, Ambos is correct in his claim that that the insignia are taken away and then returned to the king. The principal justification for Ambos' view is that the removal and return of royal insignia in the ritual of the “negative confession” is analogous to the temporary removal and return of the king's insignia in the autumn *Akītu* festival in the month of Tašrītu. The temporary removal of royal insignia in both rituals played a central role in rites of passage in which the king's status was reversed and then (re-)confirmed.

The following accepts the view that the “negative confession” was, on one level, a ritual which aimed to monitor the king's power on behalf of Babylonian elites. However, as I will discuss at the end of this article, I consider this aspect to represent a late addition to an already ancient ritual model. According to the interpretation offered below, this ritual was primarily a (re-)coronation, in which lament played a central role at the point at which the king was temporarily reduced to the status of a normal man. However, the king's acts of lament, which include prostration, penitential prayer, and ritual weeping, were not an act of atonement by the king for the benefit of humanity. Instead, such acts of lament were a form of ritual purification, the ultimate goal of which was to neutralise any potential offenses committed by the king and, by extension, to assuage the potential rage of Marduk.<sup>14</sup> The ultimate aim of such acts of lament was to affirm the king's relationship with the deity and to obtain divine endorsement and (re-)confirmation of his royal status.

12 Sallaberger and Schmidt 2012.

13 Ambos 2013a: 295 (Addenda).

14 In this article, terms such as “confession,” “penitence,” “repentance,” “atonement,” and “sin” are used without reference to their highly charged associations in the Christian tradition. For example, in many cultures, the acts of confession and penitence are inherently cathartic acts, where the sincerity of the penitent is irrelevant (Aune 2005: 7755). In this connection, the evidence suggests that confession and penitential prayer in Mesopotamia were formalised ritual acts, not expressions of individual belief and emotion.

## 2 The King's Prostration and Penitential Prayer in the "Negative Confession"

As the above argument has attempted to establish, when the king is led into the *Esaġil*, the high priest takes away his royal insignia and strikes the king on the cheek for the first time. Following these actions and immediately before the king recites his "negative confession," the high priest brings the king before Marduk, grabs him by the ears, and makes him kneel on the floor before Marduk.<sup>15</sup> At this point in the ritual, the king is reduced to the status of an ordinary man, pleading for divine mercy. This change in status is signalled by the removal of his royal insignia, combined with his prostrated position, his recitation of penitential prayer, and his performance of ritual weeping. Kneeling on the floor before the deity is a well-known act of submission and a display of humility.<sup>16</sup> Demonstrating humility is a means of obtaining the favor of the gods. This is shown in various sources from Mesopotamia. For example, the physiognomic omen series *Šumma kataduggû* states:

When he behaves very humbly, the mercy of the god is determined for him.<sup>17</sup>

The king's protestation of his innocence in the "negative confession" begins with the phrase [*ul aḥ*]-*tu bēl(EN) mātāti(KUR.KUR) ul e-gi ana ilūti(DINGIR-ti)-ku* ("[I did not s]in, Lord of the Lands. I was not neglectful of your divinity"). The sequence of verbs *ḥaṭû* ("sin, offense") and *eġû* ("to be(come) negligent") are typical of prayers which aim to absolve the transgressor of sins committed, whether known or unknown. The principal categories of prayers that utilize this precise sequence of verbs are those

15 This description follows the edition of the passage by Sallaberger and Schmidt 2012: 573, lines 413–421. It is possible that this action of the king is reflected in the first line of the Prostration Hemerology (Jiménez and Adalı 2015), where the king is said to prostrate himself before Marduk on the 4th day of Nisannu. This line, which is also quoted in a letter by Nabû-aḥḥē-erība to Esarhaddon, can now be corrected according to a new manuscript (p.c. E. Jiménez): *ina Nisanni ūmi 4 ana Marduk liškēn ittašu lišēdi [pa]ṭār lumni išdiḥu iššakkanšu* ("In the month of Nisannu on the 4th day he should prostrate himself to Marduk. He should make his *condition* known (to him). Then [re]lease from misfortune, and profit, will be granted to him"). However, if this line does indeed refer to the "negative confession," I am unable to explain why the 4th instead of the 5th of Nisannu is specified.

16 The relevant line (421) reads *ina KI ú-šá-kam-su* ("He (the high priest) makes him (the king) kneel on the ground").

17 *DIŠ li-bi-in KIR4 ma-a-du re-mu šá DINGIR GAR-šú* (Böck 2000: 134: 63).

named Dingiršadaba and *šigû*.<sup>18</sup> The ubiquitous phrase which occurs in such prayers is *ēgi aḥṭi ašēṭ/ešēṭ ugallil* (“I have been neglectful, I have committed an offense, I have acted sinfully, I committed a sacrilege”). In some instances, this phrase is repeated using forms of abbreviation, suggesting it was widely known and thus did not always need to be written in full.<sup>19</sup> Dingiršadaba and *šigû* prayers both explicitly address potential offenses against the gods, and the recitation of both categories of prayers was explicitly intended to neutralise the effects of such offenses. This function is clear from the full rubric of Dingiršadaba prayers, namely KA-inim-ma dingir šà-dab<sub>(5)</sub>-ba gur-ru-da-kam (“incantation formula for returning the knotted heart of a god”). A similar function for *šigû* exclamations/prayers is shown by the positive prognoses in an appendix to this article. This function is confirmed by a passage in an Old Babylonian dialogue between a father and his son. In this section of the text, the father reprimands his son, telling him it is not too late to (utter/recite) a *šigû* and admit the error of his ways, and thus to be absolved:

(Although) so far you have felt no shame, (the) god has established the *šigû* for men, and he who said “I am guilty,” (the) god has absolved him.<sup>20</sup>

In order to assuage the potential anger of the gods which could have arisen as a result of an offense, whether known or unknown, it was important to confess to general offenses, as a means of protesting one’s innocence and to

18 For this sequence of verbs in *šigû* prayers, see Mayer 1976: 111–4. *Egû* and *ḥatû* also occur in personal names such as *Mi-na-a-i-gu-a-na-DINGIR* (“How have I been negligent against the god?”), or *Mi-na-aḥ-ṭi-a-na-AN* (“How have I committed an offense against the god?”); see Jaques (2015: 221; see also p. 136 for the general phenomenon of “Satzklagen” in personal names). Similar sequences are also known in Dingiršadaba prayers (Jaques 2015: 80: 121–3, with commentary on p. 102). The exclamation *šigû* also occurs within a Dingiršadaba prayer (Jaques 2015: 80, line 121). For Dingiršadaba prayers in general see Jaques 2015; for *šigû* exclamations/prayers in general, see Van der Toorn 1985: 117–54; Fadhil and Hilgert 2011. It remains unclear whether *šigû* constitutes a category of prayer as well as an exclamation; on this question see Van der Toorn 1985: 117–20; Jaques 2015: 12–3.

19 The phrase also occurs elsewhere, as in a *Lipšur* prayer (Reiner 1956: 142, line 48’). The prayers from Assur published in Jakob 2018 (nos. 41 and 42) include the repeated phrase, where it is marked by KI.MIN “ditto.” At each repeat, the phrase is directed to different great and personal gods. In a Sippar tablet of a *šigû* prayer to Marduk (Fadhil and Hilgert 2011), the phrase is continuously repeated, in addition to the repeated exclamation “*šigû*.” In two instances, the last two verbs in the sequence are abbreviated to KI.MIN (rev. 24 and 25). “*šigû* (Marduk)” also seems to be abbreviated to *ši-* throughout the reverse.

20 YBC 2394 iii 55’–58’: *a-di-ni at-ta la tab-ba-aš a-na a-wi-lu-tim ši-gu DINGIR iš-[ku-u]n ù ša ar-ni-mi iq-b[u-ú] DINGIR ip-ṭu-ur-šum*’ (Foster and George 2020: 45).

appeal for mercy. The confession of sins does not refer to any specific actions. Instead, the sins described are generic; they are intended to cover any potential transgression.

At least for the first millennium BCE, Dingiršadaba and *šigû* prayers were particularly closely associated with the king, who performed both categories of prayers himself on specific important occasions. The king's "negative confession" utilises the language of penitence known especially from *šigû* prayers. More precisely, the king recites a protestation of innocence, which takes the form of a litany of acts which the king has not committed. The protestation is a characteristic of Dingiršadaba prayers.<sup>21</sup> In the royal ritual *Bīt rimki*, the king performs Dingiršadaba prayers to the great gods and personal gods, namely "Ea, Šamaš, and Asalluḫi/Marduk, what is my sin?" (*Ea Šamaš u Asalluḫi/Marduk mīnû annī-ma*), "My god, I did not know, your penalty is severe" (*ilī ul ide šēretka dannat*), and "My god, my lord, creator of my name" (*ilī bēlī bānū šumīya*).<sup>22</sup> In the ritual *Bīt salā' mē*, performed as part of the *Akītu* festival on the 8th day of Tašrītu, the king recites the last two cited Dingiršadaba prayers immediately before he is given back his royal insignia and, thus, "reinstated" as king.<sup>23</sup>

*Šigû* seems to refer primarily to an exclamation; but it also seems to refer to a category of prayer. The instruction to utter a *šigû* occurs frequently in hemerologies. In such instances, it is unclear whether an exclamation or a prayer is intended. It is possible that only the stereotypical phrase "I have been neglectful, I have committed an offense, I have acted sinfully, I committed a sacrilege," followed by "*šigû* {dx}" is intended.<sup>24</sup> The *šigû* is often associated with royal contexts. The king is explicitly referred to as the subject in the hemerological series *Inbu bēl arḫi*; however, a royal or high status is also implied in other

21 Jaques 2015: 147–60, 192–4.

22 A widespread first millennium BCE compilation of Dingiršadaba prayers features these three compositions in succession (Jaques 2015: 66–73, composite lines 1–53). For discussion of each three prayers, including their ritual contexts, see Jaques 2015: 123–7. For the performance of these prayers in *Bīt rimki* see Schwemer 2019: 41.

23 Ambos 2013a: 168, y+11'-12'; see discussion in pp. 65–6.

24 A comparative almanac of hemerological references for the utterance of a *šigû* is included as an appendix to this article. This appendix illustrates the royal nature of the *šigû*, and the positive effects of uttering a *šigû* on specific dates only. On the other hand, the utterance of a *šigû* on an unfavourable date leads to a negative prognosis. Rituals were performed in order to counter the negative effects of such an inappropriate utterance of a *šigû*. Paradoxically, such a ritual prescribes the utterance a *šigû* amongst other ritual actions; however, the *šigû* is to be uttered on the 16th day of Tašrītu, which also appears to be a favorable date for a *šigû* according to the positive prognosis for this date (see appendix below). For an edition of this ritual, see Stadhouders 2018: 170–3.



hemerological sources concerning the utterance of a *šigû*.<sup>25</sup> The king also utters a *šigû*, together with Eršahunga prayers, in a “Ritual for a Repentant King.”<sup>26</sup> In this ritual, the king kneels down before each respective god before reciting a *šigû* or Eršaḫūga prayer. In the context of a building ritual,<sup>27</sup> the king cleanses and purifies himself<sup>28</sup> and utters a *šigû*, together with an Eršaḫūga (Eršemšaḫūga) and *takribtu* ritual.<sup>29</sup> In a ritual for warding off the enemy, the king also utters a *šigû* before Marduk.<sup>30</sup>

### 3 The Function of the King’s Tears in the “Negative Confession”

Humans shed tears in a wide variety of contexts, such as mourning a death or a calamity, but also in response to pain; tears are also shed in response to eye irritation and eye diseases. Thus, crying is a physiological phenomenon, but it is also a culturally conditioned activity. The cultural contexts for crying are also diverse. Ritual weeping is not only a feature of mourning after death, but also in some cultures at greeting rituals, weddings and initiation rites.<sup>31</sup> Weeping on such occasions may be interpreted as an important component in social acts, and especially the affirmation of social bonds. In several cultures, lamenting at funerals is also considered to benefit the deceased in the process of burial and the afterlife.<sup>32</sup> Crying and the sight of tears seem to stimulate

25 For example, according to *Inbu bēl arḫi*, on the 16th day of Araḫsamna, the king releases a slave in combination with the utterance of a *šigû*; according to the Offering Bread Hemerology, the same combination of actions is performed on this day, with a similarly positive result; however, the king is not mentioned. I am aware of the debate concerning the extent to which *Inbu bēl arḫi* was truly royal, or whether it mechanically copied other hemerologies, replacing “king” for “man” (see Jiménez and Adalı 2015: 185). Indeed, as argued by Livingstone (2013: 200), one cannot claim that this hemerology automatically reflects (Assyrian) royal practice.

26 The ritual is entitled *enūma šarru šigû ana dX išassû* (“When the king utters a *šigû* for X god”). It is last edited in Jensen, KB 6/11: 56–67; see Maul 1988: 30 for full sources and bibliography; also Matini and Ambos 2009: 260 with n. 26 for prayers cited in this ritual.

27 TU 45 = AO 6472; see Linssen 2004: 283–92; Ambos 2004: 190–2.

28 Obv. 17: LUGAL *li-tu-lil li-te-bi-ib* (“may the king cleanse and purify himself”).

29 Obv. 17–19; rev. 23–24.

30 Mayer 1988: obv. 9’.

31 I do not know of any clear Mesopotamian evidence for ritual weeping at weddings; however, note the possible role of the gala (lamentation) priest and weddings in Ur III texts (Michalowski 2006: 55–7).

32 Vingerhoets 2013: 139–61. It is well known that in Mesopotamia, funerary offerings (*kispu*) served to assuage the spirits of the dead (*etemmu*), which were considered to be a potential threat to the living. The content of such *kispu* rituals does not emphasize the role of lamentation; instead, they generally employ incantations. However, the role of lament



certain hormones in observers that promote feelings of social bonding, especially nurturing.<sup>33</sup>

In many cultures of the world, professional mourners are hired in order to weep and perform laments at funerals or following the death of a spouse or family member.<sup>34</sup> Such professional mourners do not generally know the deceased; their laments are therefore not “sincere” according to the dominant conception of weeping in contemporary Western culture. Indeed, in many traditional cultures, weeping is not necessarily understood as the expression of one’s inner emotional state. However, in the contemporary West, where traditional mourning rites have mostly died out, weeping is commonly understood as the spontaneous expression of one’s inner emotions; the production of tears in ritual contexts is often considered as inauthentic or insincere.<sup>35</sup>

With regard to the “negative confession,” relatively few scholars have commented on the function of the tears themselves. J. Z. Smith interprets such tears as a means of ensuring rain for the New Year;<sup>36</sup> however, this approach is based on anthropological models for which there is no evidence from Mesopotamian sources. C. Ambos understands weeping in this instance as a sign of humility (*Demut*).<sup>37</sup> W. Sallaberger and K. Schmidt interpret such weeping as an act of devotion (*Zuwendung*) and a reminder to the king of his obligations towards his subjects.<sup>38</sup> I consider the display of tears not as a reflection of the king’s

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(*sipittu*) features in at least one *kispu* ritual for a kid that is buried after it is described as absorbing the illness of a patient by means of sympathetic magic; the purpose of the ritual is to remove the illness from the patient by attaching it to the kid who then transports the illness to the netherworld (Tsukimoto 1985: 126, line 20). The yearly laments for the banishment of Dumuzi to the netherworld may also be mentioned in this context. At least in the first millennium, annual mourning for Dumuzi was an opportunity for the performance of rituals, designed to transport illnesses to the netherworld together with Dumuzi by means of sympathetic magic (Schwemer 2007: 215–7).

33 Vingerhoets 2013: 132–3.

34 For the phenomenon of professional lamentation in cross-cultural comparison, see Ajuwon 1981. Our knowledge of Mesopotamian funerary rites is limited and mostly restricted to descriptions in literary texts (Maul 2005). However, there is clear, early evidence for professional mourners in Mesopotamia (Katz 2014: 429–32). In the case of Old Babylonian Mari, we know of the *sipittum*, which was a public festival of mourning for the deceased; it may be contrasted with “private” mourning (*hidirtum*), which took place in the home or palace (Jacquet 2012). As discussed by J. Cooper (2006), gala priests performed at funerals during the third millennium.

35 On the cultural role of tears, especially with regard to the Western perception of “real” tears as the spontaneous expression of one’s inner emotional state, see Ebersole 2000; 2005.

36 Smith 1982: 93.

37 Ambos 2005.

38 Sallaberger and Schmidt 2012: 576.

emotional state but rather as a means of obtaining divine favor; if such tears were induced by means of a slap to the cheek, this does not make the tears less “real” or effective. The king’s tears are described as flowing down the king’s cheek(s), as indicated by the verb *alāku* (“to go”) with reference to *dimātu* (“tears”). Crying in reaction to pain is often described using the same combination of noun and verb.<sup>39</sup> The production of ritual tears as a physiological reaction to the striking of the body may seem foreign to the dominant Western perception of the cultural role of tears. However, in many cultures, including Mesopotamia, acts of lament include self-mutilation, tearing one’s hair, and tearing one’s clothing. The striking or scratching of the cheek as an act of lament is described in Sumerian literature.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, self-mutilation as an act of lament was widespread in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean, although it was sometimes condemned.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4 The Role of Lament in the Audience Model of Human-Divine Interaction

In ancient Mesopotamia, any negative event in one’s life, whether it was physical, psychological, or social, could ultimately be attributed to the anger of the gods. In order to counter the potential anger of the gods, one had to perform correct ritual actions, to behave according to certain moral conventions, and to exhibit a humble and conciliatory attitude to the gods.<sup>42</sup> Not all negative events were attributed to the gods; demons were also blamed for negative events. However, demons, unlike gods, were permanently angry. Unlike gods, demons could not be assuaged by prayer, supplication and lament.<sup>43</sup> An offense against the gods could be attributed to oneself or one’s ancestors. In addition, an individual may have been aware or unaware of having committed an offense or of having inherited the blame for an offense from one’s forefathers. Ultimately, the gods were considered to be unfathomable and mysterious in their decisions.

39 Fincke 2000: 75, 223–4.

40 Alster 1983; Gabbay 2019.

41 Traditional lamentation was condemned in early Islam, together with Greece and the early church (El-Cheikh 2015: 38–58). Such traditional lamenting actions included striking the cheek, as well as scratching the face with the nails, tearing the front of a garment, and wailing (El-Cheikh 2015: 42–3). Biblical mourning sometimes includes laceration and shaving, practices which are also forbidden in some parts of the Hebrew Bible (Olyan 2004: 111–23).

42 This basic assumption about human actions and divine rewards was sometimes questioned in Mesopotamian literature, in both early and late periods (Cohen 2015).

43 See Rendu-Loisel 2011.

Therefore, the gods could potentially be angry at any time and it was essential to be proactive. The gods were thought to respond to prostration, offerings, lament, and penitential prayer.<sup>44</sup>

The model of human-divine interaction in which the deity may be assuaged by such acts may be equated to the model of an audience between a human and an earthly ruler. The anthropomorphic conception of the deity was dominant in ancient Mesopotamia. In this conception, the human individual treated the deity as a king or ruler. Like a king, the deity lived in his temple where he was fed, given drink and clothed. Like a king, the deity would also receive requests for an audience from individuals in which they would petition the deity in order to address whichever grievance. As discussed by A. Zgoll with regard to Akkadian *Šuila* prayers,<sup>45</sup> the model of an actual audience with the king serves as an illuminating analogy for the performance of prayer before a deity.<sup>46</sup> Zgoll outlines the stages of such an audience, featuring prostration, an audience gift, and a petition, amongst other actions.<sup>47</sup> The audience gift may be equated with the offering presented to the deity. The acts of prostration and petition in a royal audience may be equated with prayer. There is no explicit evidence that weeping was a normal part of the royal audience; however, it would not be an unexpected component in the acts of prostration and petitioning the king.

Although Zgoll outlines this model specifically with regard to Akkadian *Šuila* prayers, I consider it to have a broader application to Mesopotamian laments and penitential prayers. If this model is accepted, lament and penitential prayer represent the display of humility and an attempt to elicit the mercy of the king/deity. For example, lament is a feature of letters to gods, followed by supplication.<sup>48</sup> The following treats ritual weeping and lamentful prayers as two manifestations of a singular phenomenon. Ritual weeping is the simple

44 Rituals could also be performed in order to counter a negative omen. This was a form of protection for the individual that complemented lament; see Delnero 2016.

45 Zgoll 2003b.

46 Our knowledge of the details involved in an actual royal audience are best known for the Neo-Assyrian period, where it is clear that acts of prostration such as a low posture and kissing the ground were commonplace. Audience gifts were probably also included (Portuese 2020: 110–22).

47 Zgoll's audience concept is formulated through references to such procedures in the Babylonian narrative "The Poor Man of Nippur." See C. G. Frechette 2012, esp. pp. 11–106 for a detailed and expanded discussion of the audience concept with reference to Akkadian *Šuila* prayers.

48 See Jaques 2015: 200–2 for discussion of letter prayers to the individual god, and comparative themes of *Dingiršadaba* prayers.

act of weeping, whereas lamentful prayers utilize poetic metaphor and musical performance as rhetorical devices.<sup>49</sup>

## 5 The Function of Lament and Ritual Weeping in Ancient Mesopotamia

In ancient Mesopotamia, “lament” encompasses a spectrum, ranging from ritual weeping, to penitential prayer and prostration, to sung lament. The unity of the Mesopotamian concept of lament is shown by the fact that all of these activities or types of prayer are conceived as a means by which individuals or communities can promote divine favor.<sup>50</sup> This function of lament is well known in the case of Emesal prayers, encompassing the large corpora of Balaġ, Eršema, Šuila and Eršaġuġa prayers.<sup>51</sup> Balaġ and Eršema prayers were sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. In the same way that humans respond to music as a means of calming one’s emotional state, the musical aspect of these particular prayers enhanced their function as a means of assuaging the potential anger of the gods.<sup>52</sup> In addition to Emesal prayers, lament is an important component in Akkadian Šuila prayers. In such prayers, lament is also a means of achieving a positive result from the deity.<sup>53</sup> The Mesopotamian conception of penitential prayer as lament is suggested by the fact that the various genres of penitential prayers are equated

49 In this article “lamentful prayers” is used to avoid confusion with “lamentation prayers.” The latter term is often used to refer to Emesal prayers, whereas “lamentful prayers” is a much broader category, as discussed below.

50 Although outside of the scope of this paper, it is of interest to note that ritual weeping was understood as a means of promoting divine favor in other parts of the ancient Near East. In the Hebrew Bible, ritual weeping was used to counter events such as drought or disease (Hvidberg 1962: 138–46). One particularly illustrative example from 2 Sam. 15ff. illustrates an instrumental attitude to ritual weeping. Here David mourns for his sick son when he is alive and pleads for divine aid. However, David stops mourning as soon as his son dies (see Hvidberg 1962: 138–9; Ebersole 2000: 241–3). Mourning as represented in the Hebrew Bible includes mourning for the dead, with the involvement of professional mourners (Olyan 2004: 28–61), but also in various other contexts. These include mourning as a means of promoting divine favor at times of crisis, such as famine, or to avoid a personal or communal calamity (Olyan 2004: 62–96).

51 On the function and theology of Emesal prayers, see Löhnert 2011; Gabbay 2014: 15–62; Delnero, Forthcoming. Note the suggestion by U. Gabbay that Emesal laments and the “negative confession” are united by a common ideology of “anti-hubris” (Gabbay 2020, section IX).

52 Mirelman, Forthcoming a.

53 See Mayer 1976: 67–118; Zgoll 2003a: 30–1.

with Sumerian *ér* (“lament, tears”) in lexical texts.<sup>54</sup> Lament was not only a central component in temple rituals; it was also a feature of public lamentation, such as on the occasion of an eclipse.<sup>55</sup>

A recent survey of the motif of ritual weeping in Akkadian prayers concludes that this motif is often associated with divine anger and that it is most prevalent in Eršahuğa prayers (which are in fact bilingual), as well as some Dingiršadaba and Šuila prayers.<sup>56</sup> A contribution to the topic of ritual weeping by A. Zgoll and K. Lämmerhirt makes a distinction between reactive and active (supplicatory) lament. According to this theory, so-called “active lament” is not resignatory or depressive. Instead, “active” lament should be understood as a means of effecting immediate results, in a manner that is not incomparable to the nature and purpose of incantations.<sup>57</sup> An example of such “active” lament is Ashurbanipal’s prayer to Ištar concerning the misdeeds of Teumman, in which the king kneels down and prays with tears. According to Ashurbanipal’s account, Ištar has mercy on Ashurbanipal as a direct result of the king’s hand-lifting and his display of tears.<sup>58</sup> Zgoll and Lämmerhirt convincingly describe the role of Ashurbanipal’s lament to Ištar concerning the enemy Teumman, the role of lament in dream incubation rituals, and the role of lament in literary texts. As with the various forms of lamentful prayer discussed above, the performance of ritual weeping was conceived as a means of promoting divine favor. Take for example, the combination of lament and offerings in a Sumerian proverb:

Lamentation dissolves sins.  
Offerings add to life.<sup>59</sup>

The 120th tablet of the terrestrial omen series *Šumma ālu* includes a section describing the *omina* concerning the statue of Marduk in the Esağil and the procession of the statue during the *Akītu* festival of Babylon.<sup>60</sup> One manuscript

54 See the lexical entries of the *CAD* s.v. *šigû* and *unnīnu*. Like the *šigû*, *unnīnu* prayers were conceived as a means of assuaging divine anger (Ziegler 2016: 223–4, with earlier literature).

55 Mirelman, Forthcoming b.

56 Bosworth 2019.

57 Zgoll and Lämmerhirt 2009: 460.

58 Whilst I agree with Frechette on the effect of tears on the deity, I do not agree that tears are a display of “sincerity” (Frechette 2012: 100); instead, I propose to interpret such ritual tears as a performative ritual display. See Frechette 2012: 44–6 with references and discussion of these passages within the “audience concept.”

59 SP 26, Section A, 12: *ér nam-tag al-duḡ-<sup>r</sup>àm<sup>1</sup> siskur nam-ti ba-ab-dah-e* (Alster 1997: 279).

60 Sallaberger 2000.

of this section of *Šumma ālu* includes a passage concerning the “day of the city god.” The two relevant lines present a dichotomy between weeping and laughing, as well as their perceived effects on the deity:

If (on the day of the city god) he laughs in front of his god, the god will become angry with him.

If (on the day of the city god) he weeps in front of his god, his god will have pity on him.<sup>61</sup>

Our knowledge of the “day of the city god” is limited. In this context, this day possibly refers to the 11th of Nisannu, when Marduk reentered the city in what must have been the festive highlight of the spring *Akītu* festival. If this proposition is correct, we may suggest that these lines refer to the ordinary male inhabitants of Babylon, who must have been able to witness the procession. It is also possible that these lines refer to the king and to the “negative confession.” However, this is less likely due to that fact that this ritual took place on the 5th day of Nisannu, well before the procession out of Babylon on the 8th and the procession back on the 11th.

Ritual weeping does not always take the form of explicit tears; it can also be expressed in the form of a cry of woe. For example, in the physiognomic omen series *Šumma kataduggû*:

When (he says) “woe for me”, his god will have mercy on him.<sup>62</sup>

In two similar Old Babylonian Eršaḫūga prayers, the raising of hands, combined with tears, are intended to pacify the deity. In the relevant lines, tears are described as an audience gift (Sumerian *kadra*):

61 TCL 6, 9, rev. 4–5: DIŠ KI.MIN (U<sub>4</sub>-um DINGIR URU) ana IGI DINGIR-ŠÚ i-ši-il<sup>h</sup> DINGIR e-zi-is-su DIŠ KI.MIN (U<sub>4</sub>-um DINGIR URU) ana IGI DINGIR-ŠÚ ÉR DINGIR-ŠÚ i-rem-ŠÚ (Thureau-Dangin 1922).

62 Line 7: DIŠ a-ḫu-la-pi-ia-mi DINGIR-ŠÚ i-rem-ŠÚ (Böck 2000: 130). In other lines of the same text, weeping seems to be associated with a negative prognosis. See, for example, line 18: DIŠ ŠĀ-ŠÚ ib-ta-na-ki [ina<sup>2</sup>] É<sup>2</sup>-ŠÚ i-ḫal-liq (“If he continuously weeps inwardly<sup>(?)</sup>, he will disappear [from] his house<sup>(?)</sup>”) (Böck 2000: 132). See also similarly, lines 20 and 21 of the same text. Since these examples do not involve straightforward weeping or lament, they should probably be understood as indications of abnormal behaviour or eye disease. The production of tears as a symptom of eye disease was well known in medical texts (see Fincke 2000: *passim*, and 22–3, 75–6, 83, 119–20, 129). The overproduction of tears is also a well-known symptom of eye disease (see Fincke 2000: 135–6).

May my hand-raising be my offering, I shall present it to you,  
 may my tears be my gift (kadra), you will receive them.

During the daily ritual lament, by day may it be an offering, by night may  
 it be a supplication.<sup>63</sup>

Tears are also referred to as a gift (Sumerian kadra) in the Sumerian literary text known as Gilgameš and Huwawa. In this text, before Gilgameš and Enkidu go on campaign to the cedar forest, Gilgameš requests approval from Utu. Gilgameš makes an animal offering to Utu and explains his reason for the campaign, namely, to seek fame as a means of overcoming death. Utu accepts Gilgameš' petition and decides to help him, but first he responds to Gilgameš as follows:

Utu accepted his tears as a gift (kadra),  
 like a man of compassion he showed him pity.<sup>64</sup>

Sumerian kadra has the connotation specifically of an "audience gift." Thus, it serves an appropriate function within the audience concept.<sup>65</sup> These Sumerian examples are directly comparable to the so-called "grievance formula," a widespread theme in Akkadian literature. This formula is characterised by an aggrieved character addressing a god, usually Šamaš, god of justice; in such instances, weeping is intended as a means of obtaining divine favor. Examples include Ĥumbaba's plea to Šamaš concerning Gilgameš and Enkidu's plans to end his life in the Epic of Gilgameš. Other instances include the serpent weeping before Šamaš in the Epic of Etana or Papsukkal's weeping before Šin and Ea in order to plea for Ištar's release from the underworld in the Descent of Ištar. In these and other examples, the description of weeping features the phrase *illakā dimāšu* "his tears were flowing," as in the "negative confession."<sup>66</sup>

63 BM 29632, lines 28–30 (rev.): ṛš<sup>1</sup> ṛl-la-ḡu<sup>10</sup> máš-ḡu<sup>10</sup> dè-a ga-ba-e-da-an-ku<sup>4</sup>-ku<sup>4</sup> a i-bí-ḡá kadra-ḡu<sup>10</sup> dè-a šu im-ba-e-ti ér u<sup>4</sup>-da u<sup>4</sup> siskur<sup>2</sup> dè-a ḡi<sup>6</sup> a-ra-zu dè-a (Michalowski 1987: 43). A similar Old Babylonian bilingual prayer also refers to tears (a-i-bi = *dimtu*) as a gift (kadra = *erbum*); see Maul 1998: 13, line 15'.

64 Gilgameš and Huwawa Version A, lines 34–35: <sup>d</sup>utu a-igi-na kadra-ḡin<sup>7</sup> su ba(-an)-ši-in-ti lú-arhuš-a-ḡin<sup>7</sup> arhuš ba-ni-in-ak/tuku (Edzard 1991: 178–9).

65 Zgoll 2003b: 197.

66 On the "grievance formula," including full attestations and further examples, see Jiménez 2017: 94–7.



## 6 The Role of Lament in Royal Rituals of Status Reversal and (Re-)Investiture

As argued by C. Ambos, the “negative confession” is a rite of passage and of status reversal and (re-)confirmation, which is directly comparable to the *Akītu* festival in Tašrītu. In the latter ritual in which *Bīt salā’ mē* is performed, the Akkadian Šuila prayers recited on behalf of the king during the night and Dingiršadaba prayers recited by the king himself on the morning of the 8th day of Tašrītu are intended to assuage the anger of the great and personal gods. In *Bīt salā’ mē*, the lamentful, penitential prayers are a central feature of the reduced status of the king, as shown also by the prison of reeds in which the king spends the night and the reed mat on which the king sits prostrated in the morning.<sup>67</sup> However, in *Bīt salā’ mē* such lamentful prayers are not of a royal nature; instead, they are generic prayers which could be recited for or by any individual. By contrast, the “negative confession” in the *Akītu* Festival of Babylon on the fifth day of Nisannu can only be recited by a king, since it addresses the responsibilities of the king, namely caring for Marduk, his temple, and the privileged citizens of Babylon.

Like *Bīt salā’ mē*, the ritual *Ilī ul īde* (“My god, I didn’t know!”) also features a reed hut and a “prison” (*bīt šibitti*), in which the client recites penitential prayers before being released from the prison as a form of reconciliation with the god(s).<sup>68</sup> In the case of *Ilī ul īde*, the identity of the client is not specified; however, it is of interest that, as with the king, the client is made to perform in this ritual.<sup>69</sup> Whilst inside the “prison” of flour, the client is made to recite the Dingiršadaba prayer “My god, I did not know, your penalty is severe” (*ilī ul īde šeretka dannat*); as discussed above, this prayer is also recited by the king in the royal rituals *Bīt rimki* and *Bīt salā’ mē*. In this ritual, the prison is a symbol for the underworld and the individual’s abandonment by his personal god.<sup>70</sup> Thus, although *Ilī ul īde* is not a royal ritual, it also follows a pattern of status-reversal combined with penitential prayer, followed by the client’s reconciliation with

67 Ambos 2013a: 63–6, 135–8. The royal ritual *Bīt rimki*, for which see Schwemer 2019, also follows a pattern of status reversal and (re-)legitimation. Our knowledge of the ritual is limited; however, it is clear that in this ritual, the king recited Dingiršadaba prayers (see above), and there are suggestions concerning the removal and reinstatement of royal insignia in the ritual (Ambos 2013b: 44, 49–53).

68 *Ilī ul īde* is edited in Jaques 2015: 258–72. For discussion of the prison theme in this ritual, and comparison with *Bīt salā’ mē*, see Ambos 2013a: 73–4.

69 For the direction *tušadabab* (“you make him recite ...”) in *Ilī ul īde* see KAR 90, obv. 17, rev. 3; Jaques 2015: 261–2.

70 See discussion in Ambos 2013a: 73–85.

his personal god; the client's reconciliation with his personal god replaces the act of (re-)investiture which characterises *Bīt salā' mē* and the "negative confession."<sup>71</sup>

## 7 Conclusion

A primary function of both the spring and autumn *Akītu* festivals was to (re-)legitimize the king as a ruler who was fully endorsed by the gods.<sup>72</sup> In both festivals, the king undergoes a ritual of status reversal and (re-)investiture. As discussed above, the king's temporary reversion to the status of an ordinary man is signalled firstly by the removal of his royal insignia. In addition, the king's temporarily lowered status is marked by the performance of acts of lament, the aim of which is to plead for the consequent divine endorsement and (re-)legitimation that would follow.

However, whilst both the spring and autumn *Akītu* festivals represent a similar underlying ritual model, the "negative confession" conceives of lament in a way which may reflect the concerns of the Late Babylonian priesthood and elites. The "negative confession" features the element of compulsion in the form of grabbing the king's ear and forcing him to kneel as well as in the two instances in which the high priest slaps the king's cheek. This element of compulsion implies temporary domination of the king by the priesthood and elites. However, it is of interest that as a general rule, the performance of the king is directed by the priest in charge in ritual texts. Thus, the "negative confession" takes this element of priestly compulsion from regular ritual practice and accentuates it.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, in the "negative confession," the king

71 Less direct comparisons may also be made with the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual, which clearly indicates the king prostrating himself before Assur. For a critical comparison of our ritual with *Bīt salā' mē* and the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual, see Debourse 2019. Debourse concludes that despite the problems in such a comparison, it is clear that there was a tradition of royal humiliation, or "humbling" in royal Mesopotamian rituals.

72 Ambos 2013a: 22–7, 135–8.

73 In general, Mesopotamian ritual texts are directed to the priest, who either performs an action himself or makes the king perform that action. For example, when the king performs Dingiršadaba or Eršaḫūga prayers, the direction is often *tušadbab* ("you make him (the king) recite ..."). See references in Maul (1988: 26, n.83); see also Gabbay (2014: 173 with n. 173) for the interpretation of this direction as the *kalû* priest making the king recite from dictation. This direction is not consistent in all cases and manuscripts. For example, in the relevant lines from *Bīt salā' mē*, two manuscripts indicate *tu-šad-bab*, but in another manuscript it is *šID-nu* (Ambos 2013a: 168, y+12'). The latter writing most likely indicates "you recite," although a causative (*Š* stem) is possible.

performs acts of lament and ritual weeping which conform to established patterns of royal penitential prayer and ritual. As discussed above, such established patterns are especially evident in *šigû* exclamations/prayers (see appendix), Dingiršadaba prayers, and the royal ritual of status reversal and (re-)investiture in the autumn *Akītu* festival.<sup>74</sup> However, by contrast with such established modes of penitential prayer and lament, the “negative confession” accentuates the aspect of lament by introducing induced ritual weeping and by adapting the content of the king’s penitential prayer to Late Babylonian priestly ideology.

Recent arguments by C. Debourse have been made in favor of a Hellenistic date of composition for the “negative confession.”<sup>75</sup> M. Jursa and C. Debourse consider the “negative confession” as an example of Late Babylonian “priestly literature,” which may never have actually been performed and which served as a means of asserting the priesthood’s importance.<sup>76</sup> G. De Breucker<sup>77</sup> as well as Jursa and Debourse have identified three important motifs which are characteristic of Late Babylonian historical-literary texts and letters, as well as the “negative confession.” Firstly, these include “Marduk ideology,” by which is meant the emphasis on the worship of Marduk and the Ešaġil; secondly, the motif of the hero-king fighting against foreign domination, and protecting the temples, including especially the Ešaġil; thirdly, the motif of the king who sins and repents, and thus restores his relationship with the deity.

This last motif is of particular interest here, as it relates closely to the “negative confession.” The king repents his sins to Marduk as a means of obtaining divine favor, in both ritual and literary sources. Indeed, such historical literary texts seem to reflect a Late Babylonian Marduk ideology, including an example where Amīl-Marduk is described as raising his arms (in prayer) and weeping before Marduk.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the Adad-šumu-ušur epic contains what seems to be a quote from a confessional prayer of the king to Marduk; this prayer features the verb *haṭû* (“to sin”), as in the case of the “negative confession”

74 In this regard, it is perhaps relevant that the “negative confession” is only known from the late first millennium BCE, whereas the autumn *Akītu* festival is attested in Neo-Assyrian manuscripts.

75 Debourse 2020.

76 Jursa and Debourse 2017.

77 De Breucker 2015.

78 Amīl-Marduk is described as entering the *ká-sikil-la*, which was the outer gate of the Ešaġil precinct, probably on his way to the Ešaġil. See BM 34113, obv. 15’–18’: *il-lik ina ká sikil-l[a] ú-sap-pa-a* EN.EN *iš-ši-m[a šu.ii-šú] ‘i’-bak-ki šar-piš ana* <sup>4</sup>šú <EN> DINGIR. MEŠ G[AL.MEŠ] *‘il’-la-ku su-pu-ú-šú ‘e’-l[i ...]* (“He went into Kasikila to pray to the lord of the lords. He raised [his hands (in prayer)], weeping bitterly, (and) his prayers went forth to Marduk, <the lord> of the great gods [...]”) (Debourse and Jursa 2019: 171).

discussed above.<sup>79</sup> Most importantly, a Late Babylonian tablet (BM 32655) contains an extraordinary address from a deity to a high priest (<sup>lú</sup>ŠEŠ.GAL), exalting the priest's status. The text includes what appears to be a clear reference to the "negative confession":

Let neither king nor governor strike your cheek,  
 May your work be a work for eternity.  
 The king or the governor who strikes your cheek,  
 may a king who is their enemy defeat them.<sup>80</sup>

In the "negative confession," the king is struck on his cheek twice; more importantly, the king asserts that he has not struck the cheek of the *kidinnu* citizens. In the above text, the striking of the cheek is made with reference to the high priest, who was almost certainly a member of the Esaġil. Thus, the theme of the repentant king and the exaltation of Marduk and the priesthood of the Esaġil, do indeed seem to be Late Babylonian features in both the "negative confession" and in Late Babylonian "priestly literature." However, the theme of the repentant king was borrowed from an earlier ritual model. In the autumn *Akītu* festival, which is known from the Neo-Assyrian period, the king recites generic penitential prayers during the period of his status-reversal. Conversely, in the spring *Akītu* festival, the king's status-reversal is marked by the Late Babylonian "negative confession." Here, the king recites aspects of penitential prayer with the addition of features known from Late Babylonian "priestly literature." Thus, I consider it likely that the "negative confession" represents an adaptation of the late first millennium BCE. This adaptation reflects such additional elements that were imposed upon an ancient, established ritual pattern of status reversal and (re-)legitimation in which lament played a central role.

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79 BM 34104+ iii 27': *aḫ-ta-ṭa-a-ku* EN [EN].MEŠ *ḫi-tu-ú* [ ] ("I have continually sinned against you, o lord [of lord]s, sins [ ]") (Grayson 1975: 72).

80 Lines: 14'–17': LUGAL u GÌR.NÍTA *la i-maḫ-ḫaṣ* TE-ka lu *ši-pir ši-pir-ku ana u<sub>4</sub>-mu ṣa-a-tu<sub>4</sub>* LUGAL u GÌR.NÍTA *šá 'i-maḫ-ḫaṣ'* TE-<sup>r</sup>ka' [L]UGAL KÚR-šú-nu *ma-am-ma liš-<sup>r</sup>kun* BAD<sub>5</sub>. BAD<sub>5</sub>-šú-nu' (Jursa and Debourse 2017: 90).

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## Appendix

### *The Performance and Prohibition of šigû Prayers/Exclamations: A Comparative Almanac*<sup>81</sup>

The following compiles published sources for the performance or prohibition of a *šigû* according to hemerological texts. B. Groneberg (1989) and J. C. Fincke (2009: 125) have compiled similar tables. However, they did not include the full prognoses, and in addition newly published sources may be added. In general, the 6th, 16th, 26th and 28th are relevant days for the utterance of a *šigû*. The comparative almanac below demonstrates a remarkable degree of homogeneity across the available sources, with some notable divergences. For example, in the month of Elūlu, the two available sources are entirely contradictory. Tašritu 26 gives a negative prognosis, which is unexpected, as the rest of the month includes positive prognoses. One source (SH) specifies a prognosis for Tašritu 29 where Tašritu 28 is expected. Ayyaru is positive in the Ḫattuša hemerology, whereas the other sources are negative for that month. The *šigû* hemerologies from Ḫattuša suggest two conflicting traditions. In a summary instruction included within a Hittite ritual (CTH 432), which itself includes a *šigû* prayer in Akkadian, the utterance

81 This comparative almanac aims only to offer an overview of the topic. Ms. Saki Kikuchi is preparing a comprehensive study of hemerological texts concerning the *šigû* as part of her PhD dissertation on hemerologies.

of a *šigû* is specified on the 5th, 8th, 16th, 26th and 28th day of favourable months.<sup>82</sup> However, in a hemerological list, named Ḫattuša Šigû Hemerology below, the utterance of a *šigû* is specified or prohibited only on the 15th day of the month.<sup>83</sup> A Late Babylonian tablet inventory indicates the performance of a *šigû* on the first day of Nisannu,<sup>84</sup> which does not accord with the hemerological sources.

Some hemerologies concerning the *šigû* specify only months, not precise days. A Neo-Assyrian compilation of hemerologies, which includes a famous rubric concerning Nazimaruttaš, includes the series *Iqqur ipuš*, in which the utterance of a *šigû* and the cleaning of garments is specified. In this tablet, a *šigû* is specified for Nisannu, Simanu, Abu, Tašritu, Araḥsamna, Šabātu and Addaru.<sup>85</sup> Two Neo-Assyrian tabular exemplars of *Iqqur ipuš* mostly list the same favorable months for performing a *šigû*.<sup>86</sup> This generally agrees with OBH and IBH, except for the month of Elūlu. The hemerologies from Emar similarly do not specify precise days, only months. Where preserved, the specifications for the utterance of a *šigû* correspond to the other known hemerological sources. Many of the entries concerning the *šigû* in sources from Emar are not well preserved.<sup>87</sup>

The verb used for the utterance of a *šigû* is almost invariably *šasû* (“to call out”). However, I follow Livingstone’s neutral “utter” in the following translation. This is due to the fact that it is unclear whether the *šigû* in hemerological contexts is intended to refer to a simple exclamation, or whether it refers to a prayer. Where transliterations are given, they harmonise the different manuscripts and sources. In cases with minor orthographic differences between sources, only one source is indicated. Not all months are attested in all sources.

82 The Hittite passage in question does not specify a *šigû*. Instead it prescribes that “He cries out for mercy in his offence” (*nu ūa-aš-du-li du-ud-du ḫal-za-i*) (see Beckman 2007: 70, line 8). This is immediately followed by the prescriptions for certain propitious days and months in which to cry for mercy. The verb used for the utterance of a *šigû* in Mesopotamia is almost invariably *šasû* (“to call out”). This, combined with the fact that the Hittite ritual includes a *šigû* prayer itself, makes it almost certain that the recitation of a *šigû* is intended here.

83 Day 15 is only written for the first three entries. However, since it is a list of instructions for the utterance of a *šigû* which follows the months of the year, day 15 is also implied for the other entries.

84 TCL 6, 12, col.v: 9: *ina* <sup>111</sup>BAR UD 1.KAM *ši-gu-u is-si*. See Finkel 2018: 38.

85 KAR 177, obv. ii: 25–29. On this tablet, see Jiménez 2016.

86 These are from Nineveh (MS 2226+K.98; George 2016: no.76, obv. 3') and Tell Tayinat (T-1701+1923; obv. 28; Lauinger 2016). The Nineveh exemplar adds Ayyaru.

87 One exception includes an Emar version of *Iqqur ipuš*, where a negative prognosis is given for Kislimu: “If he uttered a *šigû*, he will be unhappy” (D1Š [še-g]u-ú il-si šĀ NU ṭā-ab; Arnaud 1987: 210: 137').

## Abbreviations

IBA = *Inbu bēl arhi* “Fruit, Lord of the Month”<sup>88</sup>

OBH = Offering Bread Hemerology<sup>89</sup>

ŠH = Šigû Hemerology<sup>90</sup>

HC = Hemerological Compilation<sup>91</sup>

ḪŠH = Ḫattuša Šigû Hemerology<sup>92</sup>

### Nisannu

- 6 OBH (109: 46–47)/ŠH: He should utter a *šigû* (and) clean [his garment]: that man will grow old (*ul-tab-bar*).
- 15 ḪŠH: [A man] should utter [a *šigû*] (and) clean his garment: that man will grow old (*ul-tab-bar*).
- 16 OBH (112: 32–33): He should utter a *šigû* (and) clean his garment, or he will be unhappy (ŠÀ.BI NU DÛG-*ab*).  
ŠH: He should utter a *šigû* (and) clean his garment: joy ([Š]À.ḪÚL.LA)
- 27 OBH (115: 12–13)/ŠH: He should utter a *šigû* (and) clean his garment: he will be happy (ŠÀ.DÛG.GA).<sup>93</sup>
- 28 OBH (116: 36)/ŠH: He should utter a *šigû*: his household will expand (É-ŠÚ DAĜAL).

### Nisannu II

- 6 OBH (118: 8–9) /ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû*, or he will be unhappy (ŠÀ.BI NU DÛG.GA/ ŠE.GA).
- 16 OBH (119: 20–21)/ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû*, or his heir will no longer be the master of his house (IBILA-ŠÚ É-ŠÚ NU *i-be-el*).<sup>94</sup>
- 26 OBH (119: 32–33)/ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû*. An order<sup>(?)</sup> will be given (INIM *iz-za-kar*).
- 28 OBH (120: 36)/ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû*, or sickness will seize him (GIG DAB-*su*).

88 Livingstone 2013: 199–248.

89 Livingstone 2013: 103–59.

90 Labat 1962 = Labat 1965: 96–101 (§35).

91 BM 34584+35349; Jiménez 2016.

92 KUB 4, 46 (+) KUB 43, 1; Fincke 2009.

93 This is probably a mistake, as we would expect a *šigû* to be recited on the 26th, not the 27th (Stol 1988; Livingstone 2013: 153). The precise day is not preserved in ŠH.

94 Livingstone's reading [NÍĜ.G]A-ŠÚ cannot be correct when compared to the parallel in ŠH, where IBILA is clear in place of Livingstone's proposed NÍĜ.GA, as already remarked by Labat (1962: 5, n. 8).

## Ayyaru

- 6 OBH (121: 57–58)/šH: He does not utter a *šigû*. Something found will become lost (*mim-ma a-tu-u ZÁH*).
- 15 ḤŠH: A man should utter a *šigû* (and) clean his garment: he will be happy (*šÀ.BI [ ] DÛG-ab*).
- 16 OBH (122: 71–72)/šH: He does not utter a *šigû*; attack of a god against a man (*ZI-ut DINGIR ana NA*).
- 26 OBH (122: 85): He does not utter a *šigû*: that man will die.<sup>95</sup>  
šH: [He does not utter a *šigû*]: that man, ..., he will die (*MAN DAB BA.ÚŠ*).<sup>96</sup>
- 28 OBH (123: 3)/šH: He does not utter a *šigû*: quarreling will follow him constantly (*DU<sub>14</sub> ir-te-ne-ed-di-šú*).

## Simanu

- 6 OBH (124: 20–21)/šH: He should utter a *šigû*. He should not clean (his garment). What he makes(?) he will acquire (*šÁ DÛ i-ra- aš-ši*).<sup>97</sup>  
IBA (206: 18'): [The king should] utter [a *šigû*].
- 7 IBA (207: 29'): (The king) does not utter a *šigû*.<sup>98</sup>
- 15 ḤŠH: A man should utter a *šigû* (and) clean his garment: the man's household will expand (*É LÚ [D]AGAL-eš*).
- 16 OBH (125: 46): He should utter a *šigû*. He will be happy (*šÀ.BI DÛG.GA*).  
šH: He should utter a *šigû* (and) he should clean (his garment): joy (*šÀ. ḤÚL.LA*).  
IBA (208: 15'): The king should carry out a purification (*li-bi-ib*) (and) he should utter a [*šigû*].<sup>99</sup>
- 26 šH: He should utter a *šigû*. He should not change his garment. His life will be long (*NAM.TI.LA GÍD.DA*).  
IBA (210: 20): [(The king) should utter] a *šigû*.

95 Livingstone reads NA.BI SUMUN // ZA.BI SUMUN-*bar* (KUB 4, 44). However, the parallel for this day in šH understands the BAD sign as úš (“to die”). I therefore propose that BAD is read as ÚŠ in OBH, and the Boghazköy manuscript contains a mistaken phonetic complement (-*bar*). In addition, the prognosis “he will grow old” is unexpected here. A prohibition against the utterance of a *šigû* is normally followed by a negative prognosis.

96 One may suggest “the king will arrest(?) him” for MAN DAB. However, as pointed out to me by E. Jiménez (p.c.), although it is sometimes attested at Assur, MAN is not a writing for *šarru* (“king”) in divination texts from Nineveh. The only attestations occur in colophons.

97 The prognosis is based on HM. The reading of the prognosis in OBH is uncertain. Note Livingstone’s suggestion “that man will have [a female pro]tective spirit (?)” (NA.BI [d<sup>4</sup>LA] MMA<sup>2</sup> TUK). I restore “not” with reference to cleaning of the garment in OBH; this harmonises with šH and is equally possible.

98 Note the correction of this line in Marti 2014: 183.

99 Note the correction of this line in Marti 2014: 183.

- 28 OBH (127: 28–29)/šH: He should utter a *šigû*. He should change his garment. A good name will be established (for him) (MU SIG<sub>5</sub> ĞÁL).<sup>100</sup>  
 IBA (210: 33): (The king) should utter a *šigû*. He will have a good name (MU MUNUS.SIG<sub>5</sub> TUKU-<sup>r</sup>šī<sup>r</sup>).<sup>101</sup>

## Du'ūzu

- 6 OBH (128: 21–22)/šH: He does not utter a *šigû*. That man will become very distressed (NA.BI *ul-ta-ša-[aš]*).<sup>102</sup>  
 15 ḥšH: A man does not utter a *šigû* (and) he does not clean his garment, or that man will be rip[ped apart from his family]? (*ina k[i-im-ti-šu<sup>2</sup> in-n] a-sah<sup>1</sup>*(SIG)).  
 16 šH: He does not utter a *šigû*. His day(s) will be short (UD.BI LÚGUD.DA).  
 26 OBH (130: 60)/šH: He does not utter a *šigû*. That (man's) estate will be confiscated (É.BI *ir-re-ed-di*).<sup>103</sup>  
 28 šH: He does not utter a *šigû*. That (man's) estate will turn to ruin (É.BI AL.BIR.RI).

## Abu

- 6 OBH (130: 10'): [He should utter a *šigû*]. He will be happy ([š]À.BI DÛG.GA).<sup>104</sup>  
 šH/HC: He should utter a *šigû*: joy (šÀ.HÚL.LA).  
 15 ḥšH: A man should utter a *šigû* (and) cle[an his garment]: the man [will be happy] with<sup>2</sup> his wife<sup>(?)</sup> ('KI<sup>1</sup> DA[M-šú šÀ-šú DÛG-ab]?).  
 16 OBH (131: 4): *šigû* [ ]  
 šH/HC: He should utter a *šigû*. He will build the house of his desire (É *la-li-šú i-ip-pu-uš*).

100 Livingstone reads MU SIG<sub>5</sub>-t[e] (“The name with beneficen[ce ...]”). However, the parallel line in šH shows that the broken sign must be ĞÁL. The reference to the garment is only preserved in šH.

101 Note the correction of this line in Marti 2014: 183. In addition, from collation of the photograph of K.4068+ on CDLI (P395381), I do not see a NU sign between *ši-gu-u* and GÛ-<sup>r</sup>šī<sup>r</sup>. In any case, the positive prognosis does not suggest a prohibitive direction here.

102 My reading follows CAD A/2, 424b; AHw, 79b in understanding the verb here as the Št stem of *ašāšu* (“to be(come) worried, distressed”). Livingstone leaves the line unrestored and without comment.

103 For this meaning of *redû*, see CAD R, 245b. The prognosis is only preserved in MšH.

104 Livingstone leaves this line unrestored. My suggested restoration is based on analogy with šH.



- 25 OBH (132: 34–52): (Ritual with *šigû* laments to the personal god and goddess, to be released from one's father's sins, by means of a ritual involving a figurine.)
- 26 OBH (132: 53–55)/ŠH/HC: He should utter a *šigû* (and) he should perform a *takribtu* lament: the knotted heart of the god will be released (for (that) man) (*ki-šir šÀ DINGIR (ana LÚ) DU<sub>8</sub>(-su)*).<sup>105</sup>
- 27 OBH (132: 56) *šigû* (?)<sup>106</sup>
- 28 OBH (132: 2)/ŠH: He should not perform a *takribtu* lament: he will be happy (*šÀ DÙG.GA*).<sup>107</sup>  
 HC: He should utter a *šigû* (but) he should not perform a *takribtu* lament: he will be happy (*šÀ.BI DÙG.GA*).<sup>108</sup>

## Elūlu

- 6 OBH (133: 19–20): He should utter a *šigû*. He will triumph over his adversary (*EN INIM-šú el<sup>l</sup>-šú GUB-[az]*).<sup>109</sup>  
 ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû*: he will starve (*i-bir-ri*).
- 15 𐎶𐎲𐎠: A man does not utter a *šigû*. [ ]
- 16 OBH (134: 52): He should utter a *šigû*: his heir will grow old (*IBILA-šú SUMUN*).  
 ŠH: [He does not utter a *šigû*]: his heir will die (*IBILA.BI BA.ÚŠ*).
- 26 OBH (135: 71): He should utter a *šigû* or he will be unhappy (*šÀ.BI ʾNUʾ ŠE*).  
 ŠH: [He does not utter a *šigû*]: his heir will be unhappy (*[I]BILA.BI šÀ.BI NU DÙG.GA*).
- 28 OBH (135: 81): He should utter a *šigû*: [his] sin will be [released] (*a-ra-an-šú DU<sub>8</sub>*).<sup>110</sup>  
 ŠH: [He does not utter a *šigû*]: he will be made to suffer the punishment of the god (*NAM.TAG.GA DINGIR TUKU*).

105 See Jiménez 2016: 206, n. 36; 214, lines 25–26.

106 See Marti 2014: 171–2 for possible restorations of this line.

107 See Jiménez 2016: 214, line 27.

108 HC adds *ták-rib-tú bi-ki-tum* which is probably a commentary (“*takribtu* (means) weeping”), as noted by Jiménez and Gabbay (see Jiménez 2016: 214, commentary to line 27).

109 This follows Labat's (1962: 6, n. 12) reading of this line.

110 The Ugarit ms. in Livingstone's edition (R.S.25.141) states that a *šigû* should not be uttered on what may be the 28th day.

## Elūlu II

- 6 ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû*: [his adversary] will triumph over him (EN KA-šú *eli-šú* GUB.BA).  
 IBA (213: 25): **The king** does not utter a [*šigû*].<sup>111</sup>
- 16 ŠH: He does [not] utter a [*šigû*]: a successful attack (against him) (*ti-bu kaš-du*).  
 IBA (214: 28): **The king** does not utter a *šigû*.
- 26 ŠH: [He does not utter a *šigû*: a god] will not listen to his [pray]er ([DINGIR *tas-lit-s*]u NU *i-še-em-me*).  
 IBA (216: 27): **The king** does not utter a *šigû*.<sup>112</sup>
- 28 ŠH: [He does not utter a *šigû*]: it will continually go [from bad to worse(?)]  
 ([ *i*]t-ta-na-lak).

## Tašrītu

- 6 ŠH/HC: [He should utter a *šigû*. Before] he begins (to utter) [the *šigû*],<sup>113</sup> he should approach (his) personal god:<sup>114</sup> the god will listen to his prayer (*te-és-li-it-su* DINGIR *i-še-em-me*).
- 15 𒄩ŠH: A man should utter a *šigû*. [ ]
- 16 ŠH/HC: [He should utter a *šigû*.] Before he begins (to utter) [the *šigû*, supplication] [to the god]: joy (ŠÀ.𒄩ÚL.LA).
- 26 OBH (139: 11–12)/ŠH: He does not utter a *šigû* nor perform a *takribtu*.<sup>115</sup> He will grow old (*ú-šal-bar*/ *ul-tab-bar*).<sup>116</sup>  
 HC: [He does not utter] a *šigû*, he should not hire anything, then [?] [ ] in front of the man (*ina* IGI NA [ ]).
- 28 OBH (139: 16)/ŠH: He should utter a *šigû*, he should nip off *something*, and then his days will be long (UD.MEŠ-šÚ GÍD.DA.MEŠ).<sup>117</sup>

111 Note Marti's (2014: 185) correction of this line.

112 Note Marti's (2014: 186) correction of this line.

113 AD Š II 414a understands "entering" (*erēbu*) with regard to a *šigû* in two different ways. Firstly, it can be understood as entering a temple in order to utter a *šigû*. However, there is no evidence that the *šigû* was regularly uttered in temples. I prefer to understand *erēbu* in this context according to the second interpretation offered by the CAD, namely "to enter into, to begin (to utter a *šigû*)."

114 This follows an unpublished manuscript provided to me by Ms. Saki Kikuchi. Instead of *ana* DINGIR *li*-[*sap-pi*?(?) (...)] (Jiménez 2016: 209, line 75), this phrase can now be read as *ana* DINGIR *le-te*<sub>4</sub>-[*he* ...] (BM 34206: ii 1–2).

115 See Jiménez 2016: 216, lines 91–92.

116 This is unexpected and may be corrupt. Usually, a prohibition is followed by a negative prognosis.

117 Restored according to HC. See Jiménez 2016: 216, lines 93–94.

- 29 HC: [He should utter] a *šigû*, he should nip off *something*, and then [his] days [will be long] (U[D.MEŠ-ŠÚ GÍD.DA.MEŠ]).

## Arašsamna

- 6 OBH (140: 34–36)/ŠH: He should utter a *šigû*. Before he begins (to utter) the *šigû* he should release a bondsman for silver<sup>(?)</sup>; he will be happy (ŠÀ.BI DÛG).<sup>118</sup>  
IBA (218: 24): **The king** should utter a *šigû*. Before he begins (to utter) the *šigû* he should release a bondsman for silver<sup>(?)</sup>; he will be happy (Š[À-ŠÚ] DÛG.GA).
- 15 𒄩ŠH: A man should utter a *šigû*. [ ]
- 16 OBH (140: 51–53): He should [utter] a *šigû*. He should shave a slave's hair (i.e. release him). He should release a captive: his misfortune [will be dispelled] (𒄩UL-Š[Ú DU<sub>8</sub>]).  
ŠH/HC: He should utter a *šigû*. He should shave a slave's hair (i.e. release him). That man will become old (NA.BI *ul-tab-bar*).  
IBA (220: 21–28): (During an evening ceremony, **the king** repeatedly utters a *šigû* (*ši-gu-u* GÛ. G[Û]), at the same time as freeing a slave and a prisoner, and making a bread offering for Marduk. This is followed by bread offerings for other gods in the morning. The combined result of these actions, is that “He will grow old, and his misfortune will be dispelled” (*ú-šal-bar-ma* 𒄩UL-ŠÚ DU<sub>8</sub>).
- 26 OBH (141: 64–65): He should utter a *šigû*. He should release a captive or he will be troubled (*ka-la-a lip-ṭar i-na-zig*).  
HC: He should utter a *šigû*. That man will become old (NA.BI SUMUN-*bar*).  
IBA (222: 20'–23'): (**The king** should utter a *šigû*.<sup>119</sup> Following a bread offering and prostration, the result is favorable: “a man will be safe on road and highway” (NA *ina* KASKAL *me-te-qi i-šal-lim*).
- 28 OBH (141: 69): He should utter a *šigû*. He finds something lost: joy (ŠÀ.HÚL.LA).  
HC: *šigû*. Nothing should go out: joy (ŠÀ.HÚL.LA).

118 This translation follows Labat's reading, *maš-ka-nam* (“bondsman”). Livingstone's reading of the rest of this line is also problematic. I have not been able to collate K.3269 (= IVR 33). However, it seems that IBA and OBH are parallels, and IBA should be read in light of KÛ.BABBAR *lip-ṭar* in OBH. HC lines 99–100 may also parallel this line. Only the prognosis is restored (NA.BI ŠÀ.BI DÛG.G[A]).

119 Note Marti's (2014: 187) correction of this line (20').

## Kislīmu

16 OBH (142: 19): He does not utter a *šigû*.

## Ṭebētu

6 OBH (143: 41–42): He should utter a *šigû*: his days will be long (UD.MEŠ-ŠÚ GÍD.DA).

16 OBH (144: 56–57): He does not utter a *šigû*.

26 OBH (144: 67–68): He does not utter a *šigû* or he will be unhappy (ŠÀ<sup>1</sup>.BI NU DÙG.GA).

28 OBH (145: 72): He does not utter a *šigû* or imprisonment will befall him (KI.ŠÚ DAB-su).

## Šabātu

6 IBA: (**The king**) should utter a *šigû*.<sup>120</sup>

16 OBH (146: 8): He should utter a *šigû*.

24 OBH (146: 17): He should utter a *šigû*.

IBA (228: 6): [**The king**] should utter a *šigû*.

## Addaru

6 OBH (147: 6'): He should utter a *šigû*.

120 K.7081+7082 (omitted by Livingstone): 24: *še-gu-u lis-si*; see Marti 2014: 190.