

Le Journal des Médecines

2020 n°36



Atelier Médecine Mésopotamienne
65^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Paris
Journée du 9 juillet 2019
Seconde Partie

Page 1	Pros and Cons of Mesopotamian Medical Texts Strahil V. Panayotov
Page 10	Engendering Healthy, Royal Heirs Some Notes Francesca Minen
Page 23	How to manage the hallow art of crafting strings of amulet beads? Krisztián Simkó, Henry Stadhouders
Page 37	Dreck-, Deck-, or What the Heck? Maddalena Rumor
Page 54	Healing substances and therapies in Mesopotamian women's health care texts Ulrike Steinert
Page 73	Abstracts des Communications

Cunéiformes

How to manage the hallow art of crafting strings of amulet beads? Answers from a Late Babylonian tablet in the Toronto Royal Ontario Museum

Krisztián Simkó and Henry Stadhouders

Abstract

This paper focuses on a previously unedited Late Babylonian tablet inscribed with fifteen lines of text. The inscription merits particular attention for two reasons: first, as a consecratory spell for amulet stones it is a precious addition to the small group of such incantations currently known; second, its subject matter makes it a prime source of information on the actual process of chain amulet crafting. Although related texts offer clues as to how such chains of stone beads were created and applied as amulets, this information is usually couched in a narrow set of stock phrases. The new incantation thus broadens our outlook on the ancient art of charm making, and allows for evaluating some of its aspects afresh. A full edition of the tablet is presented in the first part of this paper. In the second part, the data gathered from the text will be assessed in the light of a variety of sources relevant to the topic.

Introduction

Housed in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the cuneiform tablet ROM 910.209.531 of Late Babylonian date and unknown provenance is fully published here for the first time.¹ The small tablet (5.8 × 4 cm) is written in portrait format, bearing twelve lines on its obverse side and another three on its reverse. The text on the reverse is ruled off by a single line, with the remainder of the tablet left blank, in all likelihood deliberately so. The absence of scribal remarks such as a rubric or colophon leaves us without any formal clues to contextualise the tablet generically, historically and geographically. Nevertheless, the only paratextual feature of the tablet, the blank space occupying most of its reverse, seems to point to the fact that it was prepared in order to accommodate this single piece of text which, at some point, might have been part of a larger collection of similar text material. As to what this collection might have looked like, we may venture a guess on the basis of the evidence the Toronto tablet has preserved: a hitherto unknown incantation designed to mobilise the magical potential of precious stones. As this is about the utilisation of stones in a so-called chain amulet – describing how they were created, processed, consecrated and put to use – the Toronto spell may reasonably be understood to belong to the broader corpus of amulet stone texts.²

The documents that make up the broader corpus of amulet stone texts do not constitute a uniform group. In addition to the chain amulet texts, such diverse texts as inventories,

¹ The authors of this paper would like to express their gratitude to the Royal Ontario Museum staff for their kind permission to publish the tablet ROM 910.209.531. They are likewise greatly indebted to Frank Simons for his valuable comments on the draft of this paper and his help in improving its English. The distribution of labour has been such that text edition and philological annotation are essentially the work of the second author who identified the cuneiform artefact for what is in the first place, shortly after images of it had become available on the CDLI platform under no. P417279, while the first author created the line art copy and wrote the introductory and most of the commentary parts, as well as the excursus.

² The name chosen here to describe this particular type of magico-medical device is admittedly a modern one and has no counterpart in ancient terminology that utilises distinct designations to denote (1) single chains of amulet stones (*takšīru*, from the verb *kašāru* ‘to tie, bind, knot’), (2) multiple chains of amulet stones that were combined to form a strip or band (DUR, Akkadian *ṭurru* with the general meaning ‘string’ or ‘band’), and (3) multiple bands of amulet stones which, when put together, are called *GÚ* (Akkadian *kišādu*, the word for ‘neck,’ used here in the sense ‘necklace’ or ‘complete ensemble’). In this connection it must also be noted that the semantic fields of *takšīru* and *ṭurru* are not sharply demarcated from one another and have some overlap (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 59-62; for *takšīru* see also Kraus 1970: 59-61). The designation ‘chain amulet’ has been introduced here on account of the most characteristic feature of this type of magico-medical device which sets it apart from other types, such as the small pouches of wool and leather bags that were filled with a vast assortment of substances, including bits of minerals, to be hung around the client’s neck. For the question of what precisely constitutes an amulet in ancient Mesopotamia, see Reiner 1987, drawing on both literary and iconographic sources, with an emphasis on the astrological aspects. For the various forms of Mesopotamian amulets see also Van Buren 1945; Goff 1963: 162-211; Reiner 1960; Heeßel 2014.

catalogues, and prescriptions detailing stone-based therapies belong to the corpus, since they share a common topic: together they treat in varying levels of detail the numerous problems stones can help solve, ranging from simple physical troubles like headaches to complex issues that have to do with the social standing or religious interests of the client.³ As a group, these documents overwhelmingly attest also to the practice of employing not just a single piece of a single mineral, but a well-defined set of different kinds of stones for any given problem. Applied in the form of beads and strung on a cord of wool or linen, these chain amulets were frequently used by healing specialists to combat both natural and supernatural forces.

Turning now to the creation and application of chain amulets, it is important to note that even within the class of amulet stone texts proper there exist divergencies. Some restrict themselves to the most basic information only, providing a bare list of the necessary stone types and a brief summary section where the total number of the listed minerals and their magico-medical utilisation are specified.⁴ Other texts are more elaborate, and describe the finer points of the preparation and application of amulet chains, as well as their ritual context. The elaborate texts vary considerably in that sometimes they merely specify the material of the cord or string that must be used for threading the stones, and the body part to which the chain should be applied.⁵ Other texts include still more methods in the chain making process for enhancing the apotropaic or healing properties of the artefact. One such practice is the tying of knots between each of the stone beads, which is mentioned quite often.⁶ In other cases, small pouches of wool and leather bags were filled with all sorts of healing substances, and attached to the chain. It was common practice for incantations to be recited at successive stages in the ritual process with the aim of calling the magical potential of the chain into effect. This is shown by the more elaborate amulet stone texts that abound with references to the practice, quoting the pertinent Sumerian and Akkadian spells either by incipit or full length verbatim.

As a consecratory incantation that appears to have been recited over the stone beads of a chain amulet, the text on the Toronto tablet might be related – generically, at least – to the corpus of amulet stone texts, especially to the more elaborate sources with instructions on the preparation, consecration, and application of such chains. Interestingly, the same tripartite operation forms the leitmotif of the incantation itself, revealing facets of the bead-making process not known from elsewhere in the corpus. Starting with the creation of the stones, the

³ The standard work on the corpus of amulet stone texts is Schuster-Brandis 2008; for reviews of this book see Abrahams 2010, Couto Ferreira 2010, Böck 2014a and Geller 2015. In her book, Schuster-Brandis gives a systematic and in-depth analysis of the source material; however, she does not edit all texts, but a selection intended to illustrate, among other things, the typological differences between the sources. In this respect, it must also be noted that the number of texts has increased considerably since 2008. Around 150 texts and fragments have been collected recently within the framework of a project aimed to make editions of the corpus of amulet stone texts.

⁴ See, e.g., the Late-Babylonian tablet UET 4 150 from Ur which contains two prescriptions enumerating 41 and 34 stones, respectively. After the stones are listed, the quantity of the necessary materials and the relevant magico-medical problems are specified: 41 NA₄.MEŠ ŠU.GIDIM¹.MA *šim-mat* ŠU.II *u* GİR.II ‘41 stones (against) Hand of Ghost (and) paralysis of hands and feet’ (obv. 10); ‘34’ NA₄.MEŠ ‘*mim-ma*¹ *lem-nu* *u* ŠU GIDIM.MA ‘34 stones (against) Anything Evil and Hand of Ghost’ (rev. 9). For this text see Oppenheim 1950: 188; Limet 1984: 330-332; Scurlock 2006: 484-486 and 551-552; Schuster-Brandis 2008: 373-390 Text 17D.

⁵ For instance, in UET 4 150 the last fragmentary line might be read as [*ina* G]Ú⁷-šú GAR-*an* ‘you place it around his neck’ (rev. 10). On the other hand, the Neo-Assyrian tablet BAM 361 from Ashur has a sequence of paragraphs consisting of two units: the list of necessary stone types and the corresponding set of instructions pertaining to the preparation and application of chains. The first set of instructions in BAM 361 is concerned with a chain of 14 beads: [14] NA₄.MEŠ Á.MEŠ HUL.MEŠ / *ana* LÚ NU TE-*e* *ina* DUR GADA *ina* GÚ-šú GAR-*an* ‘14 stones for the evil signs not to approach the person. You place it around his neck on a cord of linen’ (obv. 6-7). For this text see Köcher 1963: 157; Maul 1994: 108-111; Schuster-Brandis 2008: 358-372 Text 16B.

⁶ See, e.g., AO 17614 (TBER pl. 42) ll. 22-27: 21 NA₄.MEŠ / ŠU.GIDIM.MA / *ina* ^{sg}HÉ.ME.DA È-*ak*¹ / 7 KA.KEŠDA KÉŠ *e-ma* KÉŠ / ÉN *mu-šal-lim* <é>-*kur-ra* *ana* UGU ŠID / KI GÚ-šú KÉŠ ‘21 stones (against) Hand of Ghost. You string (them) on red wool, (and) tie seven knots. Each time you tie (the knots), you recite the incantation ‘The one who provides well-being for the Ekur’ over (the knots). You bind it where it hurts him’.

successive steps in the crafting of a string of amulet beads are described in a logical order. With the information pertinent to the ritual process, the Toronto tablet could also be understood as a self-contained unit and a composition in its own right, sharing in the tradition of those incantations that have the healing procedure embedded in the wording of the spell, amalgamating dicenda and agenda into a single text unit labelled ÉN (*šiptu*). The older incantations, up to and including the OB period, are commonly structured this way, the most representative of which are those that feature a Marduk–Ea dialogue, with the former instructing the latter how to go about his healing job. As a matter of logic, a separate section telling the practitioner how to proceed need not be appended.⁷

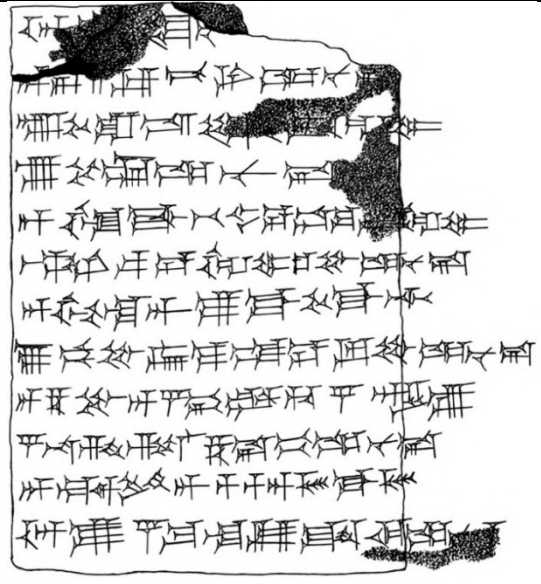
Text edition

Museum no.: ROM 910.209.531

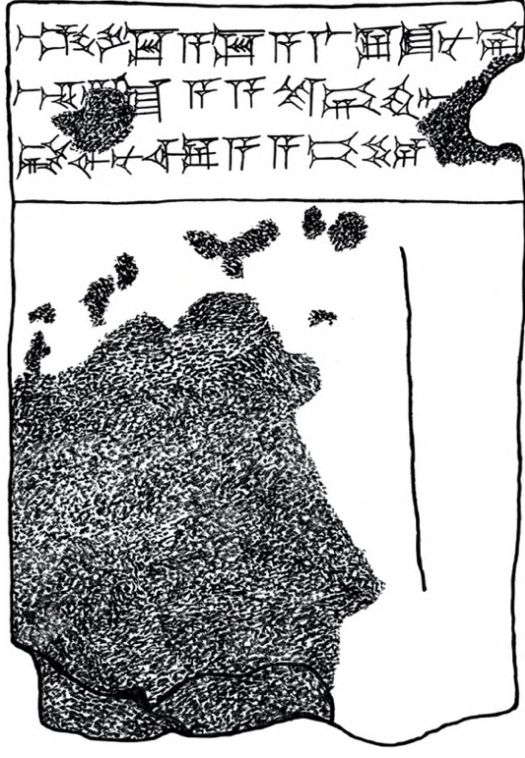
Measurements: 5.8 × 4 cm

Provenience: unknown

Date: Late Babylonian

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EN₂ ¹at-tu-nu¹ [NA₄.MEŠ] 2. ^dé-a¹ ib-bi-ni-ka-nu-¹uš¹ 3. ^{d+}nun-kur-ra iš-¹tu¹ ¹KUR-i¹ ¹el¹-lum 4. ú-še-rid-ka-nu-uš 5. ^dnin-ìmma be-let e-gub-ba-¹i[?] el-lum 6. ina DUR GADA-e el-lum iš-pu-ka-nu-uš 7. ^dgu-la an-zu-gal-lat GAL-ti 8. lu-up-pu sa-ma-at e-lu-pu-ka-nu-uš 9. ^dkù-su₁₃ ^dšá-ga-mah-ḥu šá ^{d+}en-líl 10. NÍG.NA GI.ZI.LÁ KÙ uš-bi-ka-nu-uš 11. ^dasal-lú-ḥi ^dMAŠ.MAŠ DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ 12. ÉN-su šá ba-la-tu id-di-ka-¹nu-uš¹
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⁷ See Finkel 1980: 51-52, with the important observation that in the first millennium BCE such self-contained units of incantations could be incorporated into longer collections of associated text material by separating the introductory, descriptive part of the text from the subsequent description of the magical praxis. In these late texts the descriptive part is kept as the actual incantation (ÉN), whereas the magical praxis is often expanded and becomes a separate activity.

	<p>13. <i>ina GÚ¹ NÉNNI A NÉNNI a-lal-lu-ku-nu-uš</i></p> <p>14. <i>ina EN.¹ NUN¹-ku-<nu> a-a te-ga-a'-[ma]</i></p> <p>15. <i>GABA lem-nu ù a-a-bi ter-[ra']</i></p>
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Bound text transcription	Translation
§1. ¹ <i>šiptu attunu [abnū]</i>	§1. ¹ <i>Incantation.</i> You [stones],
§2. ² <i>Ea ibbⁱnikanūš</i>	§2. ² Ea has created you;
§3. ³ <i>Nunkurra ištu šadī ellum</i> ⁴ <i>ušēridkanūš</i>	§3. ³⁻⁴ Ninkurra has brought you down from the holy mountain;
§4. ⁵ <i>Ninimma bēlet egubbē ellum</i> ⁶ <i>ina</i> <i>turri kitē ellum iṣpukanūš</i>	§4. ⁵⁻⁶ Ninimma, the lady of the holy water basin, has bathed you on a cord of pure linen;
§5. ⁷ <i>Gula anzugallat rabīti</i> ⁸ <i>luppu</i> <i>sāmāt ellupp^ukanūš</i>	§5. ⁷⁻⁸ Gula, the chief physician, has wrapped up a wrapping of red (wool) for you;
§6. ⁹ <i>Kusu šangamaḥḥu ša Enlil</i> ¹⁰ <i>nignakka gizillā ella ušbīkanūš</i>	§6. ⁹⁻¹⁰ Kusu, the chief purification priest of Enlil, has moved the holy censer (and) torch past you;
§7. ¹¹ <i>Asalluhi mašmaš ilāni rabūti</i> ¹² <i>šipassu ša balātu iddikanūš</i>	§7. ¹¹⁻¹² Asalluhi, the exorcist of the great gods, has cast his life-giving spell over you.
§8. ¹³ <i>ina kišādi annanna mār annanna</i> <i>allall^ukanūš</i>	§8. ¹³ I am hanging you around the neck of so-and-so, son of so-and-so,
§9. ¹⁴ <i>ina maššartiku<nu> ay tēgā'[ma]</i> ¹⁵ <i>irti lemnu u ayyābi ter[rā]</i>	§9. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Do not neglect your watch and ward off evil and enemy!

Philological notes

Grammatically, our tablet bears the distinct fingerprint of a post-classical type of Akkadian, as is evident from the following phenomena (GAG³ §§ 191b, 192a-b, 193a): epenthesis (*ibbⁱni*, 2; *allall^ukunūš*, 13); apocope of short vowels, entailing complete loss of case endings (*-kanūš*, passim; *anzugallat*, 7; *sāmāt*, 8); inconsistencies in the use of case endings and short vowels in end-position (*ellum* for genitive, 3, 5, 6; *lemnu* and *balātu* for genitive, 9, 13; *rabīti* for nominative, 7; *luppu* for *luppi*, construct state); suppression of strong aleph (*ušbīkanūš*, 10); paragodic aleph (*tēgá*’, 14). This is alongside the unorthodox features that may be attributed to scribal inaccuracy.

2. *ibbⁱnikanūš*: the unusually spelt preterite of *banū* ‘to create’ (CAD B, s.v. *banū* A 3, 87-89) contains an epenthetic vowel which has entailed the reduplication of the first radical. Inserting an epenthetic vowel into a consonant cluster occasionally comes with the apparent reduplication of the preceding consonant, at least in writing; see, e.g., the Neo-Assyrian examples *id-di-bu-ub* (*iddⁱbub*) and *ad-da-bu-ub* (*add^abub*) in SAA 5 95 ll. 10’-11’, preterite tense forms of the verb *dabābu* (Hämeen-Anttila 2000: 34-35). See also Parpola 1983: 47, Huehnergard 1989: 115-118, and Stadhouders – Panayotov 2018: 680 for multiple examples from non-Neo-Assyrian sources. As for *-kanūš*, which – except for line 13 – is how the stones are spoken to throughout the text, it is evidently an apocopated by-form of *-kanūši*, which in turn has been defined as a rare Late Babylonian variant of *-kunūši*, the dative pronominal suffix of the second person plural masculine, being used in late texts for direct and indirect object indiscriminately (GAG³ §42k, with note 16 and *); as the stress is on the long *ū* in the final syllable, the short *a* may quite plausibly represent a reduced vowel (‘shwa’).

3. *Nunkurra*: an as yet unprecedented name-form, well-nigh certainly meant to refer to the deity Ninkurra, who as ‘Lord of the mountain’ oversees the mining of precious stones and, on occasion, their cutting and carving, as well. For details of this artisan deity see RIA 9, s.v. Nin-kur(a), ^dNIN-KUR, 451; all spellings of the name listed there have ‘nin’ as their first element, so the deviant one here may quite safely be branded as just another idiosyncrasy of our scribe.

6. *īspukanūš*: the mention of the holy water basin should weigh as a compelling argument for deriving this form from the verb *šapū* ‘to bathe, to soak, to dye’. In those who fail to see how soaking might have played a role in the stone-cutting process, the sequence of signs might prompt a hugely different normalisation, viz. *īspukkanūš* ‘she has polished you,’ from the verb *sapānu* ‘to polish’. They would have to assume, then, that upon assimilation the final radical *n* is exceptionally not expressed in writing (GAG³ §33h). A similar tendency to phonetic spelling in violation of the rules of standard orthography can indeed be observed in *uš-bi-ka-nu-uš* (line 10), from the verb *šubū* ‘u, for which it is most rare in any of its forms not to have retained the final radical, even when this aleph must be assumed to have gone silent (compare Schaudig 2001: 225 sub a).⁸

7. *anzugallat*: ‘chief (female) physician’ is normally *azugallatu*, with *azungallatu* and *azugallutu* as rare by-forms (CAD A/2, s.v. *azugallatu*, 529). The spelling *an-zu-gal-lat*, which appears to have the Toronto tablet for its sole witness, might have resulted from metathesis affecting the first part of the by-form *azungallatu*. As a bold alternative, it could be hypothesised that the phenomenon of aphaeresis had been at work, causing the noun to drop its initial vowel (GAG³ §14b); the first sign is then to be taken as a determinative marking a divine epithet: ^d*zugallatu*.

⁸ Syllabifying *is-sér-* = *issēr* < *istēr*, G-stem perfect from *sēru* ‘to coat, to scrape off, to rub, to wipe (off/clean)’ might be attempted as a last resort, were it not for the discontinuity of tense this reading would cause. Even so, we should not ignore the lexical equation *sēru* – *sapānu*, even though this seems to regard the destructive meaning ‘to wipe out, to crush’ which both verbs can connote, as may also be inferred from the equation *mēsu* (‘to crush, to trample’) – *sēru*; see CAD S, s.v. *sēru* and M/2, s.v. *mēsu*, lex. sections.

8. *luppu sāmāt elluppu^ukanūš*: the interpretation of this line's unorthodox grammar, which cannot be but tentative, starts from the premise that it is a mangled instantiation of the phrase *lippī lapāpu* 'to wrap (medicaments) in wrappings (of a certain kind of wool),' 'to wrap (woollen) burls (between beads on a string),' which is met with frequently in therapeutic and amulet stone recipes (CAD L, s.v. *luppu*, 200; Schuster-Brandis 2008: 66-67). First, our bizarre-looking normalisation *elluppu^ukanūš*, to be parsed as a G-stem preterite for what normally ought to be *ilpupkanūš*, is modelled upon the admittedly hardly less outlandish G-stem preterite form *akkarrūni* (*ak-kar-ru-u-ni*, SAA 9 1 i 14'), instead of regular *akrurūni*, which in GAG³ §101f is described as possibly revealing the existence of a weak conjugation pattern for a Verb II-geminate, *karāru* in this case. By the same token, *allallukunūš* in line 13 might have to be parsed analogously, instead of normal *ālulkunūš*, even though this Verb I-weak has its second radical affected by the mechanism. The unusual morphology of these G-stem preterites might reflect an interference from Aramaic in the reduplication of the first radical in prefix-conjugation forms of Verb II-geminate (Bauer – Leander 1927: 57). The lengthening of the final radical in tandem with the vowel attached (*-ppu-* and *-llu* respectively; *-ūni* in *akkarrūni* is subjunctive) can best be explained from the phenomena of shifted stress and epenthesis (GAG³ §§20g, 83d etc.)⁹; transcribing *elluppu^ukanūš* and *allall^ukunūš* would therefore approximate fairly closely to spoken reality.

If this is accepted, *luppu* might well be an idiosyncratic spelling of *lippu* (*lappu*) 'wrapping, wad, burl,' the noun we naturally expect as the accusative complement of the verb *lapāpu*. As for *sāmāt*, it has been understood here as the feminine plural of the adjective *sāmu* 'red,' qualifying an omitted *šipātu* 'wool'; the circumstance that *lippu*-wrappings were made almost exclusively of wool, red wool in particular, should count as a strong argument in favour of this interpretation.

A widely different explanation is possible by syllabifying the cuneiform as *e-tep-pu-ka-nu-uš* instead, apparently representing a G-stem present from *tepu* 'to attach, apply'. A present tense verb fits in badly with the overall narration pattern, though, and should therefore be tagged as faulty grammar resulting from scribal carelessness or lack of competence. Perhaps the spelling is the corrupted outcome of an intended preterite *et^uepukanūš* (for *it^uepi-*, with an epenthetic vowel after the first radical), unless the whole thing is the result of a trivial error by a copyist who mistook a preterite for a present.¹⁰ In this line of argument, *lu-up-pu* need not be revocalised, and could be taken as an instance of *luppu* 'leather bag, bellows'. This rare lexeme, however, is almost exclusively found in economic texts (CAD L, s.v. *luppu*, 252), and occurs only once in the magico-medical domain, namely, in an incantation as a metaphor for a bloated belly (BAM 574 iii 51; Collins 1999: 171 'Belly 28'); it is entirely alien to recipes. Moreover, *luppu*-bags could contain sizeable volumes and did not come in such tiny dimensions as to be suitable for being worn on the human body as talismans stuffed with drugs and amuletic minerals; in other words, there is no supportive evidence for a *luppu* ever being applied in the manner of a *mašku* or *mêlu*, as protective and apotropaic pouches and poultices are commonly called.¹¹ As a corollary, taking *sāmāt* as 'carneian stones' and translating the phrase as 'she has applied a bag of carneian stones on/for you' or 'has assigned to you' would appear to be a no-go, if it is indeed healing minerals that are addressed. The option of rendering 'she has

⁹ Not to be confused with the consonant gemination described in GAG³ §101g* and Kouwenberg 2010: 493.

¹⁰ The rules conditioning past reference for the present tense ('imperfective form') as summarised in Kouwenberg 2010: 93 can in no feasible way be brought to bear upon the case. A present tense form would oddly break the chain of preterite tense forms of lines 2-12 that each report a similar event from the same temporal and aspectual perspectives, and are to be categorised as relating a "präsens-perfektische Geschehen", i.e. "... soeben erst beendetes Geschehen (...), das noch eine Auswirkung auf die Gegenwart des Sprechers hat" (Metzler 2002: 330; equally relevant are the text samples pp. 331-333, 760-770, 813, and many of those discussed pp. 842-851).

¹¹ Its equation with *hindu* 'purse' (CAD L, s.v. *luppu*, lex. section, 252), however, should make us cautious not to rule out such application altogether.

applied a red-woollen wad (*luppu* for *lippu*) on you,’ on the other hand, cannot be dismissed definitively on the current evidence.

13. *allall^mkunūš*: if one were to go for an analysis of the verb as a preterite tense form, it might be taken to express current or performative action, and translate “I (herewith) hang you ...”; for examples of the preterite so used –‘Koinzidenzfälle’– see Metzler 2002: 341-343, 771. However, as a shift of person is not only prone to come with a change of perspective but also to entail a change of tense, and given that it is a well-established feature of grammar for the intended type of action to be rendered by the present tense as well, parsing *allall^mkunūš* as a present tense form is the likeliest and least complicated way to proceed; striking instances of the present tense reporting “unmittelbare Gegenwart ritueller Handlungen” come from *ikribu* prayers, where it is the dominant tense par excellence: Metzler 2002: 785-791; see also p. 835. The explanation of the deviant spelling of the final radical remains unaltered.

14. *ina maššartīkunu ay tēgā’ma*: an almost identically worded admonition has recently become known from a bipartite ritual for the protection of the king, at home first and on a military campaign next, the climax of which reads as follows: *ana maššartīkunu lā tēgā* (BM 98561 obv. 16-17; Schwemer 2012; reference courtesy E. Jiménez, who is to be credited for putting us on the right track by alerting us to it). The exhortation is from the second spell of the ritual, and is addressed to the south and west winds, as well as heaven and earth.¹² While in this text the prohibitive *lā tēgā* is spelled *la te-ga-a* in compliance with standard orthography, a counterpart to the plene spelling with an aleph-sign in Auslaut is on record from a Neo-Assyrian letter: *en-na a-na* EN.NUN-ku-nu / *la te-eg-ga-a* ‘now, do not be neglectful of your duties’ (said to the citizens of Nippur in ABL 287 obv. 8-9). Yet another attestation of the idiom and, what’s more, one that parallels our spell in *Sitz im Leben*, comes from the *Šēp lemutti* ritual, in which a newly fashioned protective figurine is instructed as follows: *attā šalmu sākip lemni u ayyābi* (...) *ullānu ana pān Ea abīka tazaz imnaka u šumēlka ušur ana maššartīka lā teggi* “you figurine of the one who repels evil and enemy (...), from the beginning you have been in the service of your father Ea; watch your right and your left, do not be lax about your watch!” (Wiggermann 1992: 18, lines 277-281); identically worded is an omen apodosis quoted in a scholar’s letter to the king: *ana maššartīka lā teggi šarru ūmu lemnu bāba lā ušši* “do not neglect your guard; the king should not go outdoors on an ill-omened day” (SAA 10 8 obv. 25-26).

Whereas for our late tablet to have the commandment couched in the vetitive mood as opposed to the prohibitive mood of the parallels just reviewed does not carry much weight grammatically (GAG³ §81i, end; Abusch 2018, reprinted in Abusch 2020: 139-145), the replacement of the vetitive particle allomorph *ē* with *ay* in combination with a t-prefix is an utter anomaly not to go unnoticed. A possible explanation for this anomaly can be sought in the poetic quality of our spell: a form like *ay tēgā’* mirrors nicely the following line ending *ayyābi ter[rā]*, which is why the vetitive particle *ay* would have appeared to be preferable to the grammatically sounder allomorph *ē*. The same poetic consideration might also be the reason that the vetitive was chosen in this spell instead of the more common prohibitive mood as in the above-discussed parallels.

For the sporadic incidence of the verbal plural endings *-ū* and *-ā* being highlighted by a paragogic aleph also in literary texts see Schaudig 2001: 187.

¹² BM 98561 is also discussed in Jiménez 2013: 123-124, with an edition of the second spell; a few of his readings diverge from Schwemer’s. For the sake of completeness, we quote the crucial lines:

(14) *[šul]-ū-tum a-na ma-ša-ra-ti-ki*

(15) *šadū* (IM.KUR.RA) *a-na ma-šar-ti-ka*

(16) *[qa]-qa-ru ša-mu-u ana ma-ša-ra-ti-ku-nu*

(17) *la te-ga-a a-[dī] i-na-pa-ḥa u-ḥu-ūḥ šamši^(d)UTU)-ši*

(14) ¡viento del sur, (no descuides) tus guardias!

(15) ¡viento del este, (no descuides) tu guardia!

(16) ¡Inframundo y cielo, (no descuidéis) vuestras guardias

(17) hasta que salga para mí *la saliva* del sol!

Crafting strings of amulet stones: evidence from the Toronto tablet

The incantation on the Toronto tablet exhibits interesting details about the preparation, consecration and application of chains. In addition, it makes telling remarks about the creation and transportation of stones, as well as about the purpose of the finished chain. This is in line with the incantation being of the consecratory type, with special emphasis on the material or the object used during ritual. While all other known consecratory incantations for stones mention specific minerals employed for specific purposes,¹³ the incantation on the Toronto tablet focuses on the chain itself, and it does not mention any specific substance. In fact, if the restoration of the first line is correct, the text starts by addressing the stones collectively (§1). From the second line onwards, the qualifier NA₄ is missing from the text; instead, the objects to be consecrated are indicated with the pronominal suffix of the second person plural *-kanūš* attached to each verb.

After the stones are addressed, the incantation gives an account of their creation (§2) in a similar way to how this topic features in an inscription of Esarhaddon. In both texts the god Ea occurs in connection with the creative task, obviously because of his prominent role as the god of magic, but also as that of arts and crafts. The latter association is particularly clear in Esarhaddon's inscription, where the refurbishment of the gods' statues is the reason that stones had to be created. According to the passage, the ruler supplied the craftsmen with the necessary raw materials, including 'precious stones that are not conquered by emery-abrasive yet (*lā kišitti šamme*), without number, products of the mountains, for which Ea magnificently fixed a destiny of splendour, (fit) for lordly works'.¹⁴ Among other purposes, stone beads were manufactured and used to adorn the statues as jewellery, not unlike the chain amulets that were placed around the neck, hip, wrists or ankles of the conjurer's clients. The preparation of stone beads was a creative craft in its own right,¹⁵ so not surprisingly Ea is mentioned in both the incantation and the Esarhaddon passage as the one who creates such a substance of magico-medical importance and, at the same time, presides over its turning into an appropriate work of craftsmanship.

As the next logical step, the stones are brought down from the mountains (§3). In the incantation this task is given to Ninkurra. It is hard to say if there was a reason for charging this deity with this particular task other than the divine name meaning literally 'Lady of the Mountain'. One explanation might be that genealogical considerations have played a role in assigning deities to the different tasks, since the first three gods mentioned by the incantation,

¹³ See, e.g., the incantation in SpTU 2 22 + SpTU 3 85 iv 32-35, where the materials used for the chain are treated in the same order as they are listed in the preceding line, giving *māmītu* (curse) as the reason for the preparation of the chain (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 247-264). A similar incantation can also be found in CT 51 89 i 17'-23', which is a Late Babylonian manuscript of the 'Kette Nārām-Sīns' (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 341-345). Note, further, the incantation to be recited over haematite in Rm 2 160 obv. 20-24 (Mullo-Weir 1929), as well as the two 'Insignienbeschwörungen' belonging to the series *bīt salā' mē* ('House of Sprinkling Water'), with the respective incipits NA₄ GAL NA₄ GAL NA₄ HĪ.LI MA.AZ.ZA.NA ('Great stones, great stones, stones rejoicing at the abundance') and NA₄ GAL NA₄ GAL ^{na4}ŠUBA GAL.GAL.LA ('Great stones, great stones, greatest *šubū* stones'); see Berlejung 1996 and Ambos 2013: 220-223. For the Sumerian spell in AMT 46/1 i 1'-9' which is similar to the Toronto tablet in that it relates how a chain amulet is to be prepared, see the excursus below.

¹⁴ NA₄.MEŠ *na-as-qu-ti / la ki-šit-ti šam-me šā ni-i-ba la i-šu-u nab-nit hur-šā-a-ni šā dé-a a-na ši-pir be-lu-ti ši-mat* ME.LÁM *ra-bi-š i-šim-šu-nu-ti* (RINAP 4 48 ll. 82-83). For this passage see Simkó 2015, with earlier literature.

¹⁵ The making of beads and inlays was the responsibility of the TIBIRA (Akkadian *gurgurru*) whose close connection to the most precious stones is already documented in the Sumerian literary texts *Nanše C* Segment A ll. 51-53 (ETCSL 4.14.3), *Copper and Silver* Segment D l. 58 (ETCSL 5.3.6) and *Dumuzid-Inana Y* ll. 42-47 (ETCSL 4.08.25). For understanding this craft as 'carver, sculptor' or 'inlay-maker' on the basis of the Old Babylonian and earlier text material, see Heimpel 1987: 54; Neumann 1987: 35 n. 87; Cavigneaux – Al-Rawi 1995: 30 and 38; Sallaberger 1996: 5; Sallaberger 1999: 277; Waetzoldt 1997: 91. On the other hand, Berlejung analysed the texts pertaining to the making of cult images in the first millennium and concluded that the *gurgurru* craftsmen were responsible for the tasks of 'Schneiden, Schleifen und Fassen von Edel- und Halbedelsteinen in Gold sowie (...) Anfertigen von Inlays' (Berlejung 1998: 124-125). For the discussion of *gurgurru* see also CAD G, s.v. *gurgurru* A, 138-139.

Enki-Ea, Ninkurra and Ninimma, represent three consecutive generations of deities in Sumerian mythology.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is also probable that a male deity under the name Ninkurra was meant here, who was the god of craftsmen entrusted with carving stone beads.¹⁷ Like the god Ea in the preceding passage, this deity might thus have a twofold part in our spell, featuring not just as the acquirer of the necessary substances, but also – on a more implicit level – as the actual craftsman who makes them into beads for the chain amulet.

The goddess Ninimma¹⁸ may have been given a role here in reminiscence of the above-mentioned Sumerian tradition that makes her the daughter of Ninkurra – who in this filiation has female gender – and through her a grand-daughter of Enki. The deciding factor, however, is more likely to have been her marriage to Kusibanda, the goldsmith in the craft-guild which assists Enki-Ea in creating a god, amongst other things, and whose membership includes Ninkurra, too.¹⁹ According to myth, her husband's abode is located in Ea's *apsû*, which plausibly accounts for her having been assigned an epithet that surprisingly links her with holy water, an element she otherwise has no connection to at all. Our tablet is thus unique in conferring the title of *bēlet egubbê* on Ninimma (§4), the near unchallenged patentee of which is Ningirim. However, the occasional appropriation of this title by Nammu might also suggest the possibility that Enki-Ea's mother's name was originally intended here and that it ended up disfigured in the guise of a minor semi-namesake.²⁰ Being done either by Nammu or by Ninimma, the immersion of the stones in holy water is obviously the first step in the purifying process, paralleling the episode featuring Kusu (see below).

The most difficult part of the Toronto tablet is the passage following the soaking of the beads in holy water. Based on what we can infer from other amulet stone texts, it seems that once the chain was finished small pouches were made, filled with healing substances and tied to the cord between the beads (§5). There were two types of pouches, the woollen *lippu* and the leather *mēlu*.²¹ As discussed above, the unorthodox phraseology of the incantation might have something to do with *lippu* which occurs in such verbal and nominal phrases as *ina tabarri talappap* 'you wrap (the drugs) in red wool'²² or *ina uqnâti 7 lippî talappap* 'you wrap (the drugs) in seven wrappings of blue wool'.²³ The proposed interpretation also explains why Gula is named in this context: as the goddess of healing, she was closely associated with all sorts of healing substances,²⁴ and because of this she must have been the ideal choice when drug-filled pouches had to be prepared for chain amulets. Even so, as mentioned above, the incantation presents some very unusual grammatical forms, thereby making any interpretation conjectural to a certain degree.

As the final step in making chain amulets, a ritual had to be performed to call into action the magic potential of the object and to enhance its apotropaic and healing properties.²⁵ As already mentioned, references to such rituals can be found in the elaborate amulet stone texts

¹⁶ In the Sumerian literary text *Enki and Ninhursag* ll. 108-126b (ETCSL 1.1.1) Ninkurra occurs as the daughter of Enki. She is raped by her father, and gives birth to the goddess Ninimma. Interestingly, our incantation seems to follow the same genealogy by assigning the respective tasks of creating, transporting, and polishing stones to Enki-Ea, Ninkurra and Ninimma. For this passage see also Focke 1999/2000: 93-94 and 101-102.

¹⁷ Berlejung 1998: 124.

¹⁸ For a general discussion of Ninimma see Focke 1999/2000. See also Focke 1998, with the edition of a hymn to this goddess.

¹⁹ Focke 1999/2000: 108-109; Walker – Dick 2001: 60, ll. 105-106 with n. 90.

²⁰ Cf. Focke 1999/2000: 108. See also Lambert 2013: 431-432 and Simons 2018: 138-139.

²¹ Schuster-Brandis 2008: 66-67.

²² See, e.g., K 2542+ i 20 (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 373-390 Text 17A): 7 Ú.ĤI.A *an-nu-ut ina* ^{sig}ĤÉ.ME.DA *ina bi-ri-šú-nu tála-pap* 'You wind these seven drugs in red wool between them (i.e., the stone beads)'.

²³ See, e.g., AMT 46/1 ii 5'-6': *ga-bi-id* UR.BAR.RA / ^{sig}ZA.GIN.NA 7 *líp-pi tála-pap* 'You wrap wolf's liver plant (i.e., tamarisk) in seven wrappings of blue wool'.

²⁴ Böck 2014b: 129-165.

²⁵ Schuster-Brandis 2008: 68-70.

that often quote the incantations to be recited over the chain.²⁶ The Toronto tablet has clearly preserved such an incantation, the next section of which describes the performance of a purification ritual and the casting of a spell as the final procedure before the application of the chain. As a matter of course, it is the divine purifier Kusu who is said to have moved the censer and torch past the stones (§6), while Asalluhi recited the incantation (§7).

Once finished, chain amulets are put to the test. The method of application used in the incantation on the Toronto tablet was to place the object around the neck (§8). This is the most common method found in such texts, but in other cases the chain could be applied directly to the diseased body parts, most commonly the temples, hips, arms or legs.²⁷ As for the magico-medical problem this particular chain was designed to solve, the text first makes the general remark that the stones should not be neglectful of their duties (§9). A bit more specific is the instruction that comes next, pointing to an obvious apotropaic purpose as the amulet is ordered to ward off any evil or enemy.

Excursus on a Sumerian spell

The incantation on the Toronto tablet is a highly informative text, presenting an array of details about the preparation, consecration and application of chain amulets. In addition, the appearance of deities best suited to the discussed tasks renders a second layer of meaning to this text, which was probably meant to emphasise the divine origin of the chain, and lend authority to the corresponding ritual. Couched in such religious terms, and with the healing procedure embedded in the wording of the spell, the Toronto tablet can be understood as a composition in its own right that was concerned with the management of a particular type of magico-medical device. In this respect, there is a remotely comparable Sumerian spell known from a collection of magico-medical prescriptions against the neck disease GÚ.GIG.GA. As the rubric of this text, ‘wording (of the incantation) for a chain of ŠU.U stones,’²⁸ indicates, this spell deals with a specific mineral used in the form of a chain amulet. First, it prescribes the acquisition of ‘male’ ŠU.U stones that are to be strung on a cord made by spinning together three different types of wool with gazelle sinew. Then, the sulphur has to be wrapped; the text probably alludes here to the small pouches of wool or leather bags filled with healing substances and tied to the string in between the beads. Finally, an incantation is to be recited, and the chain is applied to an unspecified part of the person’s body as Asalluhi is said to tie the amulet simply ‘wherever it hurts the sick’.

It is in fact the god Asalluhi alone whom the Sumerian spell tasks with preparing chain amulets, as opposed to the whole series of deities appearing in the Toronto tablet. On first glance, therefore, as far as gods are concerned, the same topic seems to have been transmitted in two alternative versions. This can be easily explained, however, by the specific genre probably represented by the Sumerian text, which seems to be a Marduk–Ea dialogue. This is a type of incantation in which Marduk/Asalluhi visits his father, Ea/Enki, to tell him about a disease that affects his patient, and to ask what course of action to take. Ea/Enki responds that his son knows just as much as he does, but nonetheless informs him about the proper ritual to

²⁶ See, e.g., BM 56148+ i 1-ii 36 (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 276-318 Text 9A). This passage contains instructions pertaining to the making of two chain amulets: one to make a person remember what he has forgotten (*mašīta ḥasāsi*; i 1-ii 4), and the other for those who are about to enter the palace (*ērib ekalli*; ii 5-36). In both cases, long ritual descriptions occur, including verbatim quotations of the incantations that are to be recited over the chains.

²⁷ Schuster-Brandis 2008: 67-68.

²⁸ KA.INIM.MA *tak-ši-ru šá* ^{na4}ŠU.U (K 3612+ i 23’). The tablet has been copied as AMT 46/1, with the sign NA₄ drawn in a way that it looks like ‘kib’ (cf. CAD Š/3, s.v. *šū* b 2’, 162), thus leaving room for the alternative rendering *kib-šu-u* ‘a fungal mould’. While collating the tablet in July 2017, the passage was found in a fragmentary condition, with a deep break running across the middle of the sign. Even though this break makes it impossible to decide which sign occurs in the fragmentary passage, the alternative reading *kib-šu-u* should be abandoned on the basis of context.

be performed. Such incantations relate the details of the ritual one has to perform in order to combat the disease successfully, essentially acting as an embedded ritual within an incantation.²⁹ The Sumerian spell is likely an example of such an incantation, though due to its fragmentary state the actual dialogue between Marduk/Asalluhi and Ea/Enki is missing from the preserved part of the text. The only remaining part is the passage where Ea instructs his son about the necessary ritual, in this case the construction of a chain amulet.

K 3612 + K 8010 + K 8124 (AMT 46/1) i 1'-9'

- 1'. [......] x x [......]
 2'. [^dasa]l-lú-ḫi 'ušumgal an ki-bi¹-[da-ke₄]
 3'. [lú]-u₁₈-lu-bi su gíd-da su 'uš gál²
 4'. [ⁿ]^{a4}šu-u nita šu u-me-ti
 5'. [^{sig}g]a-ríg-ak-a ^{sig}ḫé-me-da
 6'. [^{sig}za-gìn]-'na¹ sa maš-dà u-me-ni-nu-nu
 7'. [piš₁₀]-^{rd1}íd-lú-ru-gú úḫ-^díd-lú-ru-gú
 8'. u-me-ni-nigin
 9'. 'mu₇-mu₇¹ dùg-ga-zu u-me-ni-sì ^{lu}tu-ra ki gig-ga-ni-ta u-me-ni-kéš

Preliminary translation	Corresponding paragraph in the Toronto tablet
i1'-3' [...] Asalluhi, the great dragon of heaven and earth, the one who <i>prolongs (life in) the body of mankind</i> ...	—
i4' acquire 'male' šU.U-stones	§2-3
i5'-6' spin carded wool, red wool, blue wool (and) gazelle sinew (into a cord)	§4
i7' wrap up <i>kibrītu</i> - (and) <i>ru'tītu</i> -sulphur	§5
i8'-9' cast your pleasant spell (and) tie (the chain) to wherever it hurts the sick	§7-8

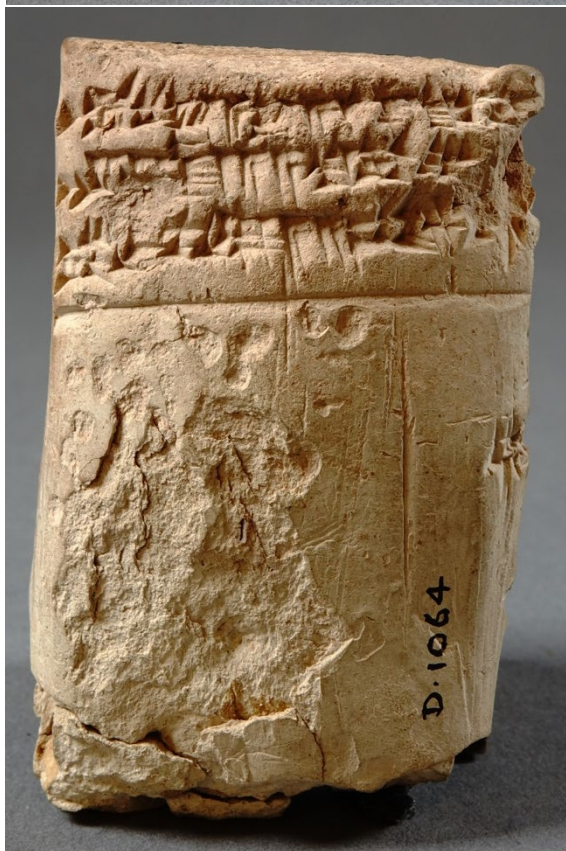
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²⁹ Falkenstein 1931: 44-67; Finkel 1980: 51-52; George 2016: 2-4; Zomer 2018: 38-39.

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Imprimeur : Cydergies, 208 avenue Roland Garros, BP 136, 78531 Buc Cedex. Dépôt légal : 01-2020. ISSN 1761-0583. Directrice de la publication : A. Attia, responsable de la rédaction : G. Buisson, secrétaire de rédaction : M. Worthington.