

98) YBC 11431, a draft letter or an exercise? — This small tablet in landscape format (measurements: 33.7 × 50.0 × 15.2 mm) is almost completely preserved with its upper right corner broken off (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Two thirds of the tablet's obverse are inscribed with five lines of text; the reverse remained uninscribed. The scribal hand is Late Babylonian with slightly slanted wedges. Due to the collection's acquisition history, a provenience in Uruk and the Eanna appears rather certain.

The text inscribed on this small tablet is noteworthy, as it reads as a partial letter to a high official or the king, who is addressed with the logogram EN (lines 2–4).¹⁾ A letter address and a blessing, however, are completely missing.²⁾ Also the format of the tablet is rather unusual for a letter bearing in mind that the text's phraseology does not conform to administrative letter orders.³⁾ The content of the text can be divided into two parts: Lines 1–3 contain a wish for prayer to the gods (Akk. *sullû*); the two remaining lines are intriguing because of their mention of an eclipse (AN.MI). Due to the lack of parallels, these lines remain rather enigmatic.

All in all, these few lines of cuneiform text appear like a draft of a letter. Another possibility is to see in these lines a scholarly exercise. Letter extracts are found among Neo-Babylonian school exercises. A number of examples originate from Kiš (e.g., *OECT* 11, 110 with extracts from two letters).⁴⁾ Usually, however, these extracts are combined with other exercises (e.g., extracts from lexical texts, extracts from legal and administrative texts, etc.). Therefore, the nature of the present tablet may not be explained sufficiently by interpreting it as a school exercise.

Obv. 1 ^{lu}₂IR₃^{mes}-ka ^u₃^o mu-šal-li-i^l
 2 ša₂ DINGIR^{me} a-na UGU EN -ia DINGIR^{me}
 3 a-na muḥ-ḫi-i-ni EN lu-še-el-lu
 4 ^lat¹-ta EN i-de ša₂ mim-ma i-na AN. MI
 5 ina IGI-i-ni la pa-ar-su
 (remainder of obv. and reverse uninscribed)

³May ¹your servants and the ones praying ²to the gods
³pray ²on behalf of my lord (and may) ³(my) lord (pray)
²to the gods ³on our behalf. ⁴You, my lord,
 know that whatever *happens* in an eclipse,
⁵is not *clear/definitive* to us.



Fig. 1. Handcopy of YBC 11431 Fig. 2. Photo of YBC 11431

Comments

(1–3) It is clear that both *mušallû* and the precative form in line 3 derive from the same verb. The CAD refers to a number of lexemes for the former: (1) *mušlalu* (*mušallu*), “midday, afternoon” (CAD M/II, 243–245), (2) the rarely attested *mušallû*, “liar, evildoer” (CAD M/II, 241), and (3) *muššālu*, “quarrelsome, hostile” (CAD M/II, 245). The word for the evildoer also occurs in the *Šamaš Hymn* (Lambert 1996: 121–138), and is reminiscent of *mušallî ša ilî* in our text: (143) *mut-taḫ-li-lu šar-ra-qu mu-šal-lu-u₂ ša₂* ⁴UTU-ši (144) *ina su-le-e* EDIN *mut-tag-gi-šu₂ i-maḫ-ḫar-ka*, “The prowling thief, the enemy of Šamaš, the marauder along the tracks of the steppe confronts you.” The context of the present text, however, shows that the participle in line 1 derives from the verb *sullû* (*sullû*), “to pray to, to implore (gods)” (CAD S, 366–368). The recipient of the prayer may be preceded by the preposition *ana* as *nota accusativi* as in YOS 3, 22: (22) *a-na* DINGIR^{mes} *a-na muḥ-ḫi* (23) *AMA-ia u₂-šal-li*, “I pray to the gods on behalf of my mother.” Examples without preposition are YOS 3, 157: (20) DINGIR^{mes} *a-na muḥ-ḫi* EN-ia₂ (21) *u₂-šal-la*, “I pray (daily) to the gods on behalf of my

lord,” or YOS 3, 62: (18) DINGIR^{mes} *a-na muḫ-ḫi* (19) EN-*ia u₂-ṣal-lu-u₂*, “(until I come and) pray to the gods on behalf of my lord.” The use of the verb *sullū* (*ṣullū*) reminds of the well-attested blessing *ūmussu* DNN *ana balāṭ / bulluṭ napšāti ša bēlīya / abīya uṣallā*, “Daily I pray to the gods... for the well-being of my lord’s / father’s life.” As noted by E. Frahm and M. Jursa, this blessing occurs in letters addressed to a superior individual (Frahm and Jursa 2011: 8).

(4–5) For the construction *attā bēl īde ša* (...) see also YOS 3, 8: (6) *at-ta* ^dEN *i-de ša₂* MU.AN.NA *a₄ ŠE.BAR ina* E₂.AN.NA *ia-a-nu*, “You, lord, may know that there is no barley available in Eanna this year” (see Streck 1995: 129, § 25b); see also CT 22, 175: (r,2’) *at-ta* EN *i-de* (3’) *ša₂*...; Jursa and Farber 2018: 75: (23) *at-ta* EN *i-de ša₂*...

The mention of *attalū*, “eclipse,” is intriguing within the corpus of Neo- and Late Babylonian letters. Compare UET 4, 168: (3) *ki-i aš-šu-ru* IM.DIRI (4) *i-ba-aš₂-ši* AN.MI (5) *it-taš₂-ki-na* (6) *hur-ša-am-ma šup-ra*, “I watched (but) there were clouds, write me an exact report telling whether the eclipse took place.”

The last line is still rather enigmatic. The words *attalū* and *parāsu* appear occasionally close together. The verb *parāsu* could be understood here as “to decide,” as in SAA 10, 71 (CDLI P334714): (6’) *ina* UGU *ma-šar-ti* (7’) *ša* AN.MI ^d30 (8’) *ša* LUGAL *be-li₂* (9’) ^riš^l-*pur-an-ni* (10’) [*mu-šu par-s*]*u ma-šar-tu-šu₂* [...*pa-a*]*r-su* (11’) [*šum-ma ina*] ^dša₂-*maš ra-^rbe₂-e¹* (12’) [*ma-šar*]-*tu-šu₂* (13’) [*la ni-ip*]-^rru¹-*us*, “Regarding the watch for a lunar eclipse, about which the king my lord wrote to me: its watch will be [on the decid]ed [night]. [We have not been able to dec]ide [whether] its [wat]ch should be [at] sunset.” Another possibility, probably the better choice here, is *parsu*, “definitive.” Compare, for instance, SAA 10, 168 (CDLI P237811): (a lunar eclipse) (10) *lum-nu* : *par-su ša₂* LUGAL MAR.KI (11) *u₃ KUR-šu₂ lu-[mun]-šu₂ par-su*, “a decidedly evil portent concerning the king of the Westland and his country. Its evil is definite.” For further attestations see CAD P, 195, 2.

Part of a small dossier from Uruk are texts dealing with apotropaic rituals against a lunar eclipse, which was performed by *kalū*-priests in Eanna. Michael Jursa recently published one of these texts, a letter also written on a tablet in landscape format (Jursa 2018: 74–80). To this corpus also belongs a deposition before an assembly, where it is reported: “On the 13 th day of the month Simānu, the 8th year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, king of the lands, after sunset, the *kalūs* of the Ebabbar played the copper kettledrum at the gate of the Ebabbar and declared as follows: ‘eclipse!’ (written AN.TA.LU₃), and all the inhabitants of Larsa saw with us the playing of the copper kettledrum” (RA 23, 15, lines 17–22; see Beaulieu and Britton 1994: 74).

Notes

1. I would like to thank the participants of the *Cuneiform* at the Yale Babylonian Collection for valuable suggestions.
2. For a discussion of the letter formula of Neo- and Late Babylonian letters from Uruk see the introduction in Frahm and Jursa 2011: 6–9.
3. See Frahm and Jursa 2011:
4. See Gesche 2001: 147–148.

References

- BEAULIEU, P.-A., and J. P. BRITTON. 1994. “Rituals for an Eclipse Possibility in the 8th Year of Cyrus,” *JCS* 46: 73–86.
- FRAHM, E., and M. JURSA . 2011. *Neo-Babylonian Letters and Contracts from the Eanna Archive*. YOS 21 (New Haven & London).
- GESCHE, P. D. 2001. *Schulunterricht in Babylonian im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* AOAT 275 (Münster).
- JURSA, M., & W. FARBER. 2018. “Die Keilschrifttexte des W.H. Over-Museums in Vermillion, S.D.,” *WZKM* 108: 49–80.
- LAMBERT, W. G. 1996. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Winona Lake).
- STRECK, M. P. 1995. *Zahl und Zeit. Grammatik der Numeralia und des Verbalsystems im Spätbabylonischen*. CM 5 (Groningen).

Klaus WAGENSONNER <klaus.wagensonner@yale.edu>