

Literary Text About Ur-Namma

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[Edition and study of an Ur III tablet, from a private collection, with a laudatory text addressed to Ur-Namma, the first king of the dynasty. The text ends with the goddess Nin-sumun holding the king against her chest, as a symbol of legitimation.]

During the examination of an otherwise unremarkable small group of administrative Ur III tablets in private hands, it turned out that one of the texts was a sort of hymn mentioning Ur-Namma. Approximately the lower half of the tablet is preserved. The break has been flattened out by some dealer with the naive purpose of giving the impression of a complete tablet. The present maximum dimensions are 80 x 76 x 26 mm. The surface is heavily pitted and quite difficult to read, the enclosed copy by the author would have to be heavily shaded all over. Almost all signs, however, can be identified with confidence. The writing is unmistakably that of Ur III times.¹

Text

col. i

- 1' [. .] / dingir-ra-na-kam
 - 2' inim-ma-an-ni / kúr-kúr-re / bí-in-SI.A
 - 3' inim šà-ga-na-ke₄ sa bí-in-dug₄
 - 4' nam-mah-a-ni / ki-en-gi-re / bí-in-[x]
 - 5' ^dutu lugal / igi-ni-šè ba-DU
 - 6' [é?] in-nun-na-ke₄ / [ki? mi x x]
- (end of col.)

col. ii

- 1' (traces)
 - 2' KÁ.GAL [x] [x (x)] / u₆ [ba-ni?]-[x]
 - 3' lugal mes babbar / ur^{ki}-ma / ki dùg-ge / mú-a
 - 4' ŋiš an-dùl / pa gal-gal-la / [igi] an-na gub-ba
 - 5' gissu-zu-uš / mu-ri mu hé-gál-la / kúr-kúr-ra dul₄-la
 - 6' an-né igi-sag₉ / [x]-bar / [KA húl-la] ma?-[x]-[x]
- (end of col.)

col. iii

- 1 ur-^dnamma / dumu ^dnin-sumún-ke₄
- 2 lugal ^den-líl-le / á sum-ma
- 3 ^dnin-líl-le / mí zi-dè-eš / dug₄-[ga]

1. Another contemporary copy of a Ur-Namma text is published in Or 59 (1985) 34ff. It seems now likely that that text, with its OB duplicate TCL 38 (see A. Cavigneaux ASJ 9 [1987] 49ff., 60), was originally an independent, complete, short piece, later incorporated into Ur-Namma's hymn B:52-68.

- 4 ^dnin-hur-^lsa₁ inim^l / ma <x>-ga-na / ^lhur^l-^lá
 5 ^den-ki-ke₁ / ^leštú ma[h (x)] / sum-ma[a?]
 6 ^dnin-x x^l [. . .]
 (rest of col. broken)

col. iv

- 1 ^lama tu-da^l-zu / ^dnin-sumún / é-kiš-nu-^lál-la / gaba-na hé-im-tab
 (end)

Translation

col. i

- 1' He is the [. . .] of his god(dess).
 2' All the foreign countries are full of his fame.
 3' He accomplishes his projects.
 4' Sumer is [...]ed by his greatness.
 5' The Sun marches before the king.
 6' . . .

col. ii

- 2' [At] the gate [of . . .] is object of admiration
 3' Oh King, white cedar growing in a pleasant spot in Ur.
 4' A canopy of very large branches, facing the sky.
 5' I(?) will keep close to your shade. Years of abundance extend over all foreign countries.
 6' An is looking with a favorable eye, . . . a joyful sound.

col. iii

- 1 Ur-Namma, son of Nin-sumun,
 2 the king given strength by Enlil,
 3 tenderly loved by Ninlil,
 4 enthroned by the designs of Nin-hursag,
 5 provided with a gre[at] intelligence by Enki.
 6 The goddess(?) x [. . .]

col. iv

- 1 May Nin-sumun, the mother that gave you birth, hold you against her chest in the Ekišnugal.

Remarks

In the first column, the king appears in the third person, while he is directly addressed in the rest of the text. The occasion for the composition of this text cannot be inferred from its preserved parts.

col. i

- 2'. An interpretation reading an-né, instead of -an-ni, seems forced, but of course the writing -an-ni for the 3rd person possessive is most unusual. The tablet writes kúr instead of kur; taking kúr literally as "enemy" does not seem to fit the context since, especially in ii 5', there is no implication of hostility.

3'. "Project" translates *inim šà-ga* "the words of/from the heart"; one could equally well translate "intentions" or "thoughts", see also iii 4. The writing *sa--dug₄* instead of *sá--dug₄* is sparsely attested elsewhere, see P. Attinger, *Éléments de linguistique sumérienne* 632ff.; note also *sa-gar* for *sá-gar* in the Ibbi-Suen inscription UET 1 125:10.

4'. There is a deep hole in the place of the last sign, and no restoration is possible from the tablet alone.

5'. The position of *lugal*, after ^dutu, precludes taking it as an epitheton of the Sun ("The Sun, king, marches before him [Ur-Namma]"), and it is better to take the -ni as anaphoric of the immediately preceding *lugal*.

col. ii

3'. The tree *mes-babbar* = Akk. *tijā/ru*, "Weisszeder" (AHw 1353), "conifer" (CAD T, forthcoming), with a synonym *erin-babbar*. The latter is found in Pre-Sargonic (En I 2 ii 2, 6), in Gudea Cyl A xiv 15, xxii 4; B xii 22), and in Lugalbanda II 59. The translations above are based on this synonymy. One wonders, however, if the cones of a tree of the pine family would be called *gurun* by the scribes, as in the following passage: [x x¹ ^{gis}mes babbar-gin₇ *gurun il-la sig₇-ga-àm* "they bear fruit and are green like a *mes-babbar*-tree" (Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 27) and therefore the identification as a conifer is not valid. However, the fact that a true cedar would hardly have prospered in the Ur climate (its lumber was imported, according to En I 2 ii 2) cannot be used to bolster this objection; the passage is likely to be purely metaphoric and based, not on a local tree, but on a semi-legendary, exotic one.

4'f. The passage nicely illustrates the difference between *an-dùl* "canopy, awning" giving shelter from above (and of course shade) and *gissu*, simply "shade." It is not clear who is the subject of *mu-ri*: I, or: one = they = people? If the translation of the first half of the line is correct, the "logical" connection with the second half is not apparent.

6'. The x before bar may be an optical illusion. I cannot restore the verb, but if *ma-* includes here the 1st person dative, then one would have to assume that the subject of *mu-ri* in line 5' is "I."

col. iii

2. The pattern of the reduced clauses is here: *Agent-e Verb-a*, favored by the Ur III kings (cf. ^den-líl-le *mu-pà-da* in Amar-Suen 8, 9, 10, etc.),² against the pattern *Verb-a Agent-ak* used in Pre-Sargonic and Gudea (e.g. *šà-ge pà-da* ^dnin-gír-su-ka-ke₄ Gudea St. B ii 8ff.).

4. Without assuming that a sign has been omitted before *ga-na*, the line does not make sense. The translation assumes that the missing sign is *šà* (cf. i 3'), but then the -*ma* seems unwarranted. The sign before *ga-* is clearly MA, not DA.

col. iv

1. The construction *gaba--tab* "to hold against the chest" is normally used with a small animal, a lamb or a kid, as the object, in which case it has the verbal prefix *im-mi-* or *i-im-*. It describes the actual presentation by a king or a hero (Gilgameš, e.g.) of the animal to a deity, or, symbolically, in the formula *máš-kadra*, "gifts and presents." Visual representations of the scene are frequent in cylinder seals and elsewhere (C. Suter, *JCS* 43-45 [1991-93] 66ff.). Here, however, the agent is a mother goddess and the patient (despite the uncertainty created by the preceding lacuna) in all probability the king. The presentation of Ur-Namma by Nin-sumun to another deity, in keeping with the common meaning of the verbal construction and along the lines of Eannatum I iv 24ff., seems here far-fetched³. The exceptional

2. Note, however, (en) *ki-ág* ^dnanše-ka-ke₄ in Šulgi 29:10.

3. A scene in a questionable cylinder seal from Susa: M. Böhmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik* (1965) pl. xli no. 483, can hardly be interpreted this way.

use of gaba--tab in: gaba im-ma-an-tab ne im-ma-an-sub "(Enki) embraced her and kissed her" (Enki and Ninhursag 100 = 120, ZA 74 [1984] 18),⁴ with overt sexual connotations, is not suitable here neither. It does not seem likely that gaba--tab would be used here in the sense of "to nurse", "to suckle".⁵ It may be a simple equivalent of "sitting on the lap;"⁶ but if so a connection with adoption seems excluded since Nin-sumun is explicitly qualified of ama-tu-da "biological mother."⁷ The only viable interpretation left by elimination is that "holding against the breast" is here, exceptionally, a symbol of legitimization. The image of the king held against the chest of a goddess is not found in Mesopotamian iconography, while it is frequent in Egyptian art.⁸

4. Source C (ibid. 18 C 13) writes dab, instead of tab.

5. Allusions to the king being nursed by a deity are well-known, e.g., Ean. 1 iv 27f.; Lipit-eštar D 6 (Römer *SKIZ* 6:6). Closer to our text, there are references to suckling or at least to the holy breasts (ubúr kù) of Nin-sumun in Šulgi P b 16, 25 (Klein *PAPS* 71/1 [1981] 35).

6. Cf. úr kù-mu-a mu-ni-ib-bulùg-èn "I (= Nin-sumun) have raised you (= Šulgi) on my holy lap," Šulgi P b 24 (Klein, *op. cit.*). See, for the visual representations, J.V. Canby "The Child in Hittite Iconography" in J.V. Canby, et al., eds. *Ancient Anatolia* (M.J. Mellink Festschrift) 1986, 68 note 25.

7. See Å. Sjöberg "Die göttliche Abstammung der sumerisch-babylonischen Herrscher" *OrSu* 21 (1972) 87-112; and C. Wilcke "Zum Königtum in der Ur III-Zeit" *CRRAI* 19 (1971) 177-232, for the divine filiation and legitimization of Ur III kings.

8. In the upper register of the Ur-Namma stele, one can see two small feet of a child(?) sitting on the lap of a male deity, and there is a fragmentary relief from Tello with an adult female deity sitting on the lap of a male deity (reproduced in J.V. Canby, *Expedition* 29/1 [1987] 59, fig. 8, and 61, fig. 11, respectively), but they contribute nothing to illustrate the present text. Terry Wilfong kindly informs me that in Egypt there are a number of representations of kings sitting in the laps of either goddesses or their mother, an outstanding example is an alabaster statue of Pepy II and his mother (ca. 2350 B.C.) in the Brooklyn Museum (R. Fazzini, *Images for Eternity: Egyptian Art from Berkeley and Brooklyn* [1974] p. 31, no. 19). Reliefs of kings being suckled on the lap of a goddess are not uncommon and appear as early as the Fifth Dynasty. Such images seem to occur most frequently when the reigning king is a minor.

