

"SIGNET OF STEEL"

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Ludingirra was a considerable Sumerian-language poet of Babylon, with a *terminus ante quem* in the reign of Hammurabi's successor Samsuiluna, thus ca. 1700 b.c.e. He rates as the author of two dirges or elegies over the deaths of his father and wife respectively, which Kramer (1963: 208-217) discovered in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow in 1957 and subsequently edited. Ludingirra is also credited with a poem known (in *Sa nagba imuru* or *Arma Virumque* fashion) as *Lú-kaš₄-e-lugal-la har-ra-an-na gin-na* 'Royal courier, begin the journey!', preserved entire and edited from several tablet pieces by Civil (1964). The poet instructs the messenger to deliver greetings to his mother in Nippur, adding that "if you do not know my mother, I shall give you some signs". Her name is Sat-Istar; instead of street directions Ludingirra then pours out in 42 lines an exaltation of his mother in extravagant poetic similes (grouped into five "signs"), concluding with a two-line clincher: "When, with the help of the signs I have given, you stand in her luminous presence, say to her: 'Ludingirra your beloved son greets you'!".

Pieces of an Akkadian and Hittite version (*KUB IV 2 and 9= 97*) turned up at Boğazköy, followed by the discovery of a large tablet fragment at Ugarit (*RS 25.421*), edited by Nougayrol and Laroche in *Ugaritica V* (1968: 310-319, 444-445, 773-779). By all external characteristics this tablet originates at Boğazköy and is thus an import item at Ugarit. Its four narrowish parallel columns contain the text in standard Sumerian writing, then in the kind of "phonetic Sumerian" transcription which is otherwise known at both Boğazköy and Ras Shamra (proving that Sumerian was still being verbalized, not merely written), next in Akkadian, and finally in Hittite. The lines total 80, 40 on each side, thus frequently two lines are used up for one "verse". Of the standard Sumerian only six lines survive (44-48), of phonetic Sumerian lines 32-69, of Akkadian pieces of 4-14, and 15-77 mostly entire, and of Hittite the beginnings of 6-14, and 15-66 in fairly good shape, with varying truncations at line-ends. Thus the Ras Shamra version has the bulk of "signs" 2, 3 and 4 in both Akkadian and Hittite, and of 3 and 4 in phonetic Sumerian as well. There is some variation of semantic detail between Civil's version and the Ras Shamra one, but essentially we have

a faithful trilingual edition of Ludingirra's poem. I present here a translation of the Hittite text, taking into account the Sumerian and Akkadian for a more nuanced comprehension, but in cases of divergence giving precedence to what the Hittite says:

For the second time yet of my mother by sign I shall speak.

My mother is the bright [light] in the sky, she [is a doe of the
mountain].

Like the morning star she shines in daylight.

She is lapislazuli, she is the gem of Babylon.

Of a king's daughter she is the ornate [decking].

She is striated onyx, she is precious vessel.

She is a pewter ring, she is a signet of steel.

She is a piece of gold, [pure] silver.

She is like reed necklaces clanging on the bosom.

She is an alabaster statue mounted on a base of lapis.

She is like a perfect ivory pillar full of splendor.

For the third time yet of my mother by sign I shall speak.

My mother to me is the rain, first [water] in the sowing season.

She is the bountiful harvest, she is the flour of wheat.

She is like a lovely garden filled with luxuriance.

She is like an irrigated pine-tree full of good [cones].

She is the first-fruit of the year, the greenery of the first month.

She is like a trench where waters rush copiously to garden-beds.

She is the honoyed date of Dilmun (=Bahrein), imported from the island.

For the fourth time yet of my mother by sign I shall speak.

My mother [is like a festival] filled [with jubilation].

She is an *akitu*- offering that is sweet to behold.

She is like sons of kings arriving in joy and abundance.

She is dancing wedded to merriment.

She is like a lover not satiated with desire.

She is like good tidings of a captive son returning to his mother.

Here the Hittite text begins to fade and pretty soon the Akkadian fails as well, but Civil's Sumerian original finishes up, the final simile being "She is a phial of ostrich shell filled with aromatics".

This effusive poetic conceit may have been slim specifics for finding Mom in Nippur, but the tablet is a valuable enchiridion for a distant posterity. It is evidence of multilingual international culture, of literary luxury items current amongst the intelligentsia 3400 years ago. The Akkadian version is not surprising, but apparently the translation trade at Hattusas extended well beyond such staples as *Gilgameš* and Hurrian saga literature. Such material in turn found its way to libraries at Ugarit. All the while the literati not only in Mesopotamia but in Hattusas and Ugarit were still concerned with what passed for the proper articulation of Sumerian, taking pains to work up "recitation texts" on top of the traditional logographic originals.

For the Anatolian philologist this unusual text is a source of Hittite lexicographic oddments. The word for 'ivory', *lahpa-*, occurs here and has had an impact on the etymology of 'elephant' (Puhvel 1993: 188). Here I shall consider another item, viz. lines 21-22: "She (is) a pewter ring, she (is) a signet of steel".

The Hittite reads *da-an-ku-li-is-ma-as ar-si-i[s?]* *ki-ik-lu-ba-as-sa-ri-is-[m]a-as[*, matching the Akkadian *ši-me-ir an-na-ak-ki un-qi* AN.BAR 'ring (or: bracelet) of tin (she is), seal (-ring) of iron (=parzilli) (she is)'. The Ras Shamra Sumerian is missing (both

kinds), but Civil's text (line 27) has *har-an-na šu-gur-an-ta-sur-ra* 'bracelet (*har*) of tin (*anna*), ring (*šugur*) of *antasurra*'. Akkadian and Sumerian imply both subject and copula, whereas Hittite in good Indo-European fashion suppresses copula alone (like Greek ἦ δὲ... ἦ δὲ...).

Line 21, *dankulis-ma-as arsi* [s?] contains an adjective *dankuli-* 'of tin', derived from a nominal use of the adjective *dankui-* 'dark' (connected since Forrer with German *dunkel*) as 'dark metal' (vs. *harkui-* 'white; silver' [KÜ.BABBAR] and *parkui-* 'bright; bronze' [ZABAR]). The other word, *arsi-*, of dubious completeness, is a hapax which, judging from the Akkadian and Sumerian, meant 'bracelet' rather than finger-ring.

In line 22 Hittite has the strange single word *kiklubassaris (-ma-as)*, evidently an animate nominative singular *i*-stem, matching the Akkadian *unqi parzilli* 'signet of iron'. Sum. *šugur* is 'finger-ring', but *unqi* means more specifically 'seal-ring' or even 'stamp-seal'. The Akkadian metal designation is unequivocal (sumerographic AN.BAR 'iron'), whereas in the Sumerian original *antasurra* is a rare term which elsewhere seems to designate some 'shiny' metal (*šugur antasurra* matching *unqi šāriri* [*sariru* 'shiny, sparkling']).

It is conceivable that something further followed *kiklubassaris-ma-as* [e.g. a term for '(signet-) ring', which would make of *kiklubassari-* a mere metal adjective. Such was the postulation of Starke (1990: 421-424) who derived *kiklubassari-* from a putative **kiklubassar-* 'iron', presumably a Luwian synonym for the Hattic-Hittite *hapalki-*.

Already Laroche suspected a compound, and Melchert (1983: 139-141) conjectured *kiklu-bassari-* assuming *kiklu-* 'iron' and *bassari-* 'ring' (same as *passari-* 'circumcised', allegedly 'ringed, circled'). But it seems difficult to discount for *passari-* a proto-form **pōsḡ* 'prepuce' (cf. Gk. πῶσθη), even at the risk of a "lucus a non lucendo" etymology.

Neither Melchert nor Starke knew quite what to make of the verb *kiklibai-* attested in the Luwoid participle (nom. pl. c.) *ki-ik-li-ba-i-me-en-zi* (KUB XII 1 IV 26 2 *kiklibaimenzi* 'two iron-coated [metal objects]'). Reconciling it with either *kiklu-* or **kiklubassar-* required Procrustean torture of one sort or another. If anything, a denominative verb *kiklibai-* 'coat with iron' (with a trivial phonetic variation of the Lat. *lubet: libet* type) shows that the underlying noun

stem is *kikluba-*. The suffix *-assa-* forms the Luwian adjective of appurtenance, and *-ri-* can be simply an "object" suffix, like e.g. (*kis (sa)-ri-* 'skein of carded wool'. Thus *kiklubassari-* by itself may well mean 'iron (seal)', just as we say '(branding) iron', 'iron in the fire', and the like. This explanation, like Melchert's, obviates the need to postulate a lost word at the end of line 22.

Anatolia was a frontier of the impending Iron Age. Although mined (as distinct from meteoric) iron was still a rarity, such sword-blades, tablets, and even statues were beginning to rate mention in the Hittite texts. The techniques of iron-working were not fully developed, but the means of purifying big-iron of carbon and thus the rudiments of tempered iron and even steel were emerging. Certainly something as small and hard as a seal-ring required a material that we can qualify as 'steel'.

It seems that *kikluba-* is therefore a specific term for 'steel' as distinct from ordinary iron (*hapalki-*), one that Akkadian could match only generically (AN.BAR= *parzillu*), and which the Sumerian original merely described as 'shiny'.

The Pontus region of northern Anatolia was the hub of iron production in the first millennium b.c.e., epitomized by its eponymous steelworkers, σιδηροτέκτονες *χάλεβες* (Aeschylus, Prometheus 715). Hence the Greek work for 'steel', *χάλυβος* (or *χάλυψ*) seems to be a match for *kikluba-* the latter showing a hypertrophied tendency to reduplication well known in Hittite.

A signet of steel must have been an object of beauty and strength, well suited to enter the lists of high-flowing similes exalting Ludingirra's mother. Its name forges another lexical link, *kiklubas*: *χάλυβος*, between Hittite and Greek.

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