

PBS 1/2 63
A Middle-Babylonian Irrigation-related Letter

Matthew Petersen

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1 Transliteration

Likely one or two lines missing

1. [a]-[na¹ be-[li₂]-[ia] [x x x]
2. [x x x] [x¹ ša en [x x x]
3. [x] [be-li₂]-ia ul aš-[pu-ra¹ KI ia¹ [x¹ [x x x]
4. [ERIN₂].ĪI.A ša^{uru}pa-[da-an¹-ki ù^{uru}za-an-[ba-an^{ki} x¹ [x x x]¹
5. [x¹ šu KI IA NA^{uru}lu-ub-di^{ki} A LA šu-lu-um BE ú ki-i ša [x x x]
6. ÍD ša URU-^{md}É.A-MU ša ša-ab-ta-šu-ma e-ḫe-er-ru ú a [x¹ [x] [x x x]¹
7. [a¹-na ka-le-e ša^{uru} [x] [x¹ -RU-AŠ-KAK^{ki} e-ki-ir-ri-ib aš-šum ka-le-e ša [x x x]
8. [ša¹ be-li₂ e-pe-šu iš-pu-ra ta-al-ga-ab ḫar-ru šu-ú i-na ta-an-[zi¹-[lam]² [x x x]
9. [ša¹?^{ÍD} qá-ab-la¹-at-URU ù ÍD ša URU-^{md}É.A-MU a-šar 1 KÙŠ a-šar 2 KÙŠ a-[šar¹ [x x x]
10. [a-ka]-an-na i-qá-ab-bi um-ma-a e-ne-en-na-ma^{ÍD} qá-ab-la-at-URU [x x x]
11. [x¹ ki-ma ta-an-zi-lam i-ba-aš-ši ÍD ša URU-^{md}É.A-MU me-e ul i-[din¹?³ [x x x]
12. [ta]-an-zi-lam-ša a-a-i-ka-a ul-tu₄ ÍD ep-tu-ma mi-ik-ra en-gi-[rù¹ [x x x]
13. [x] ú [x¹ ta-an-zi-lam ša ÍD.DIDLI ki-la-at-te-e in-da-la
14. [ki¹-ša-ad-su 20 ŠE.NUMUN 1 UŠ ka-lu-ú ša e UD ti a a ú a KIMIN ma-du-ma
15. [e¹-né-en-na a-ša-bat-ma ep-pu-uš i-na un-di mi-ik-ri lu-uš-bat-ma lu-pu-uš
16. ša URU-^{md}É.A-MU ta-mi-ir-tu₄ il-te-et na-da-at ša BÀD^{d+} EN.LIL₂⁴
17. ša URU-DUMU-^{md}30-APIN ù ša URU-^mDINGIR-mi-na-a-e-pu-uš ta-mi-ir-tu₄ ga-[ab¹-bi-ša na-[da-at]
18. an-na-ti-ma⁵ ta-mi-ra-ti na-da-ti lu-uš-bat ma lu-uš-é-em

¹Line cited in RGTC V, p. 213

²Lines 8-14 after van Soldt, 1988, p. 114.

³van Soldt is unsure here, but the reconstruction does make semantic sense.

⁴Lines 16 through 17 from RGTC V, p. 12

⁵CAD A II, p. 138

19. am-mi-ni an-na-a ḥar-ra a-ša-bat-ma es-si-iḥ⁶ X₁ be-li₂ i-ša-ap-pa-ra
20. du-ul-la ša pa-an EDIN.†NA¹⁷ lu-up-uš ù X₁⁸ an-na-ti ta-mi-ra-ti na-da-ti
21. ù ša be-li₂ iš-pu-ra um-ma-a am-mi-ni ar-ki ḥa-al-qí la ta-ša-ap-pa-ar
22. iš-tu U₄-um⁹ be-li₂ a-na BÀD-ku-ri-gal-zu¹⁰ iš-pu-ra an-ni-im-ma-ti ERIN₂.ḪI.A i-na le-†qí¹
23. ù-lu ḥa-al-qu-ti eš-šu-ti ša il-qu-ni a-na be-li₂-ia ul aš-pu-ra
24. ù la-bi-ru-ti a-na be-li₂-ia al-ta-ap-ra pa-šu-ta [x x x]
25. ul-tu₄ U₄-um be-li₂ ir-ku-su-šu-nu-ti ḥa-al-qu a-na †x¹ [x x x]
26. ri-šu-ti ki-i al-tap-pa-ru a-di-na ma-am-ma [x x x]
27. ù aš-šum gi-iš-ra-ni ša be-li₂ iš-pu-ra 40 gi-iš-ra-[ni] [x x x]
28. ša i-na URU-KA-RI-X₂^{11ki} i AŠ ša a i-na BÀD-ku-ri-gal-zu [x x x]
29. ù GIŠ.ḪI.A ša gi-ne-e ša È.DINGIR.DIDLI ša MU.AN.NA ki-†i¹ [x x x]¹²
30. ù [x] †x¹ [x] †x¹ †a¹-na ma-ḥa-al-ti al-ta-pa-ru ù ERIN₂.ḪI.A-†šu¹ [x x x]
31. [x x x] MU.AN.NA GIŠ.ḪI.A a-na na ka É Ú †x¹ [x x x]
32. [x x x] †x¹ be-li₂ †iš¹-pu-ra †x x be-li₂¹ la i-ša-ap-[pa-ra x x x]
33. [x x x] †U₄¹-um be-li₂ [x x x]

Likely one or two lines missing. Reverse lost.

⁶Beginning of line through here from CAD Ḫ, p. 114

⁷CAD P, p. 86

⁸This sign was impossible for me to find. I am reading it as a ligatured form of *šum-ma*.

⁹CAD U/W, p. 138

¹⁰RGTC V, p. 93

¹¹RGTC V, p. 155. The reading of the final sign is unclear.

¹²Line from CAD I/J, p. 217

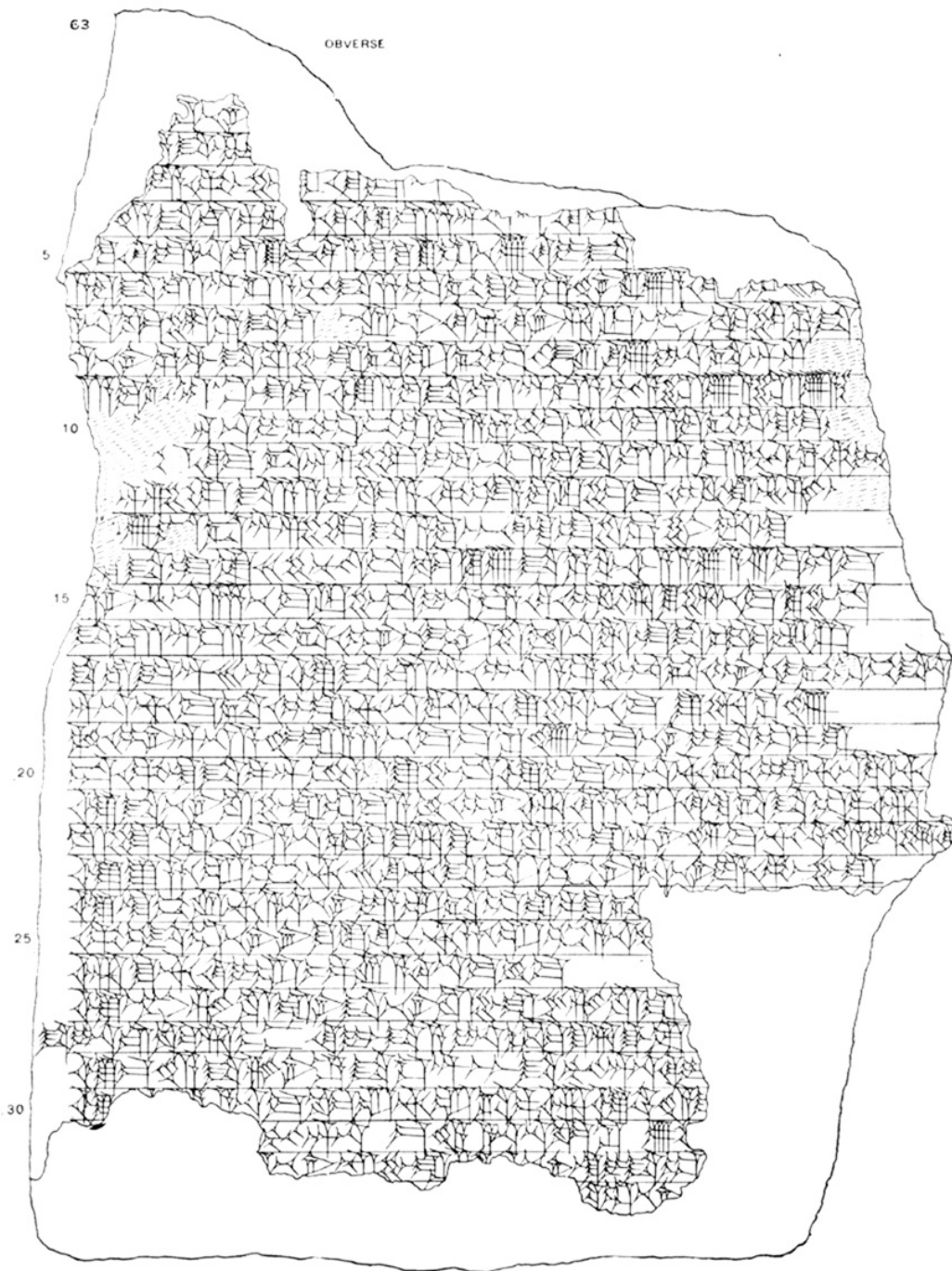


Figure 1: PBS 1/2 63

2 “Akkadlish”

1. To my lord
2. ...
3. ...to my lord, I did not send ...
4. Soldiers of Padan and Zanban ...
5. ...Lubdu ...¹³
6. the canal of Āl-Ea-iddina that is seized by him ...
7. for the dikes of GN¹⁴ I have prayed. Concerning the dikes of ...
8. that my lord instructed me to build, the watercourse is a *talgab*. In the *tanzilam*
9. of the Qablat-Āli Canal and the canal of Āl-Ea-iddina: one place 1 cubit, 1 place 2 cubit, 1 place ...
10. So, he says now: “the Qablat-Āli Canal ...
11. ...as its *tanzilam* exists, the Qablat-Āli Canal does not give water ...
12. it’s *tanzilam*, where is it?” After I opened the canal, and irrigated the land¹⁵
13. the *tanzilam* of the canals filled up¹⁶ the irrigation dikes¹⁷
14. its embankments: 20 *kor* of land, 1 UŠ of dike ...
15. Now, I have seized it, I have do it. When I seize the irrigated fields, I will do it.
16. Of Āl-Ea-iddina, the *tamirtu*: one of them is abandoned. Of Dur-Enlil,
17. Āl-mār-Sîn-eriš and Āl-īla-minâ-epuš, the *tamirtu*: all of them are abandoned

¹³This line was difficult to parse. It was especially hard to determine whether the IA sign was in fact an IA sign, or an I sign and an A sign.

¹⁴RGTC V is not clear on what city could be the one cited here, terminating in RU-AŠ-KAK.

¹⁵I am unsure how the reading in CAD T, p. 177 deals with the word *engiru* - perhaps I am simply missing something, but I cannot find the word in any resource, under any of the verbal or nominal forms it seemed to be originating from.

¹⁶The reading of “filled up” for *indala* comes from van Soldt, 1988, p. 114

¹⁷Word order is unclear here. Is the *tanzilam* the subject of *indala*? Or is the author referring to another actor who irrigated the *kilatû*?

18. All of these *tamirtu* that are abandoned: I seized them, and ...¹⁸
19. Why should I take over and administer this waterway? If my lord sends to me,
20. I will do the work of [Suburb of Nippur¹⁹] [or that of] these *tamirtu* that are abandoned
21. and of that which my lord sent to me, saying: "Why after it is lost, do you not send?"
22. after the day my lord sent to Dur-Kurigalzu, these soldiers, in taking
23. those newly lost fields that they took: to my lord, I did not send
24. and I have sent in the past to my lord ...
25. after the day my lord bound them, lost to ...
26. ...as I have sent. Until now, nobody ...
27. and concerning the logs about which my lord wrote to me, 40 logs ...
28. the in the city of GN2 ...in Dur-Kurigalzu ...
29. and wood of the regular annual temple offering
30. and ...for felling (trees) I sent and his soldiers
31. ...year wood for ...
32. [that] my lord sent to me ...my lord has not sent [to me]
33. ...the day my lord ...

3 Translation

The translation of this text is somewhat obscure, due to the fragmented beginnings and ends. The opening of the letter is almost completely lost, while the reverse of the letter is also lost entirely. The ends of lines are frequently gone, and there is frequent abrasion. I am only confident of coherent translation from the end of line 7 onwards.

¹⁸I am unsure of the reading of *lu-uš-é-em*. It may be a form of $\sqrt{w\bar{s}t}$, but the É sign could also be read *bit*, thus pointing towards $\sqrt{\bar{s}bt}$

¹⁹CAD P, p. 86

Concerning the dike of X that my lord instructed me to build, the watercourse is a *talgab*.

In the *tanzilam* of the Qablat-Āli Canal and the canal of Āl-Ea-iddina, in one place there is 1 cubit [of debris], in another place there is 2 cubits, in another place [3 cubits!] So, he says now, “the Qablat-Āli Canal, [even though] it has a *tanzilam*, does not provide water! Where is its *tanzilam*?” After I opened the canal, irrigated land [was watered], and the *tanzilam* of the canals filled up the irrigation dikes. Its embankments are 20 *kor* of land and 1 UŠ of dike ... Now, I have seized it²⁰, and I have done it. When I seize the irrigated fields, I will do it.

One of Āl-Ea-iddina’s *tamirtus* is abandoned. All of the *tamirtus* of Dur-Enlil, Āl-mār-Sîn-eriš and Āl-īla-minâ-epuš are abandoned. I seized all of these abandoned *tamirtus*, and ... Why should I take over and run this waterway? If my lord sends to me, I will do the work of [Suburb of Nippur], or that of these abandoned *tamirtus*.

And regarding that of which my lord sent to me saying “Why do you not send to me after it is lost?”: after my lord sent word to me at Dur-Kurigalzu, I did not send word to my lord about the soldiers taking the newly lost fields that they took. I have sent to my lord in the past ... After my lord bound them, they were lost to ... as I have sent. Until now, nobody ...

The remainder of the text is fragmentary, and deals with the collection of wood for temple offerings.

4 Commentary

The location of the author of this letter is unclear. While many letters from Nippur were once believed to be copies of letters sent to the king from Nippur²¹, letters such as this are believed by Van Soldt to have been sent to the *šandabakku* of Nippur²². This letter refers mainly to locations farther to the north of Nippur, closer to Dur-Kurigalzu, the location of the royal court, but does not mention a specific location as ‘here’ or ‘there.’ It is thus unclear where exactly the letter is being written from, a problem that the lack of opening statements only exacerbates.

The text paints a picture of a region with poorly maintained agricultural infrastructure that is frequently abandoned and lost. I chose to interpret the first passage regarding the *tanzilam* of the Qablat-Āli Canal and the canal of Āl-Ea-iddina as referring to a watercourse that had become silted up and unusable. The author opened the canal, and re-established regular function of the watercourses. The ending of this passage, damaged as it is, is difficult to parse, and seems to refer to something that is not preserved - the author states that they have seized something, and done something, but it is unclear what these are references to.

²⁰This reference is unclear. Is the author referring to a previous statement, or to something in the (admittedly brief) lacuna? I am unsure.

²¹Biggs, 1965

²²van Soldt, 1988, p. 105

By this point in the text, a couple of technical terms have been introduced. The first two are *tanzilam* and *talgab*, both appearing to be types of watercourse. *Tanzilam* is defined in CAD T as a “feeder canal”²³ (van Soldt’s “Verbindungskanal”²⁴), but, it is important to note, it is only known from this text. However, the context the word appears in makes the definition plausible. *Talgab* is more unclear; this text is also the only source for the word, and in context, it is unclear what the word is referring to. One possibility, albeit one that is not wholly supported by context, and one that may be implausible for linguistic reasons, would be that the word is related to the Sumerian-derived word *lagabbu*, meaning “block,” but also relating to the LAGAB sign, which is used to write *pahārum*, “to gather together.” What is possible is that these words, attested only during the Kassite period, are forms of Kassite words that were not translated into Akkadian or, at the very least, did not gain wider use in other periods.

The next passage continues the theme of abandonment, describing the poor state of the *tamirtus* around various cities presumably under the purview of the author. The author reports taking control of the *tamirtus*, a term which Van Soldt interprets as referring to a specific area in which irrigated agriculture (floral or faunal) could take place²⁵. The author then asks their lord why they would take over a waterway, and asks for instructions regarding what their next course of action should be.

The interpretation of lines 19 and 20 as a request for instruction hinges on the interpretation of the unknown signs (marked as X₁ in the transliteration) as a ligature form of *šum-ma*. This reading requires the deletion of the two diagonal wedges of the *šum* sign (as seen in line 7)²⁶.

The author next addresses a past question their lord sent to them, attempting to explain why they had not sent notice after something was lost. Unfortunately, this passage breaks up just as it might clarify the subject matter, and the remainder of the text deals with the collection of wood for temple offerings.

In summary, this text is a classic example of a report to the Kassite government during the Middle Babylonian period. Other texts similarly depict issues with irrigation, and while the concerns over irrigation were a constant feature of life in Mesopotamia, it is noted that canals became more important for the livelihood of southern Babylonia²⁷ than in previous times. While the unfortunate lacunae on this tablet prevent identification of the author or dating of the text, it gives a glimpse into the issues dealt with on a daily basis by persons such as this anonymous operative overseeing irrigation projects in the service of the Kassite kings.

²³CAD T, p. 176

²⁴van Soldt, 1988, p. 115

²⁵van Soldt, 1988, p. 110

²⁶This is not a familiar ligature, but that may reflect my lack of familiarity with Middle Babylonian orthography more than anything else.

²⁷van Soldt, 1988, p. 105

References

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