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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE SOLUTION OF THE DREAM: A NEW INTERPRETATION OF BILGAMES' DEATH

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The excavations in Tell Haddad (ancient Meturan) have added significantly to our knowledge of the Sumerian Bilgames narratives.¹ The fragments of Bilgames' Death from Tell Hada (Meturan) were recently published and edited by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000).² Since Kramer's publication of some Nippur fragments (1944), little progress had been made on this composition for more than half a century. Although the Meturan version differs in many details from the Nippur fragments, Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi succeeded in establishing the correct order of all scenes and in presenting some version of the text for nearly all passages.

Notwithstanding the dramatic progress in textual reconstruction, the basic story line remains largely unclear. Given our imperfect knowledge of the grammar and lexicon, the reconstruction of a Sumerian literary text is always fraught with uncertainties. In the present case, however, the fragmentary nature of some of the pivotal passages and the unusual orthography of the Meturan texts render all interpretations provisional. I hope to

demonstrate that my reading is plausible from a philological point of view and produces a coherent story line. I will begin with my conclusions: the plot (§1). This new reconstruction of the narrative is justified through the discussion of some key passages in §2. Finally, the new translation (§3) is meant as a general orientation aid for the reader, and as a means to demonstrate my understanding of the narrative. The Appendix presents a previously unrecognized fragment that could be joined to the main Nippur source.

In many ways this article takes the edition of Bilgames' Death by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000) as its point of departure, or as the giant's shoulder on which to stand. The editors have provided a solid textual basis from which every future discussion has to start. Moreover, they have collected and edited the most important texts and passages that elucidate one or another aspect of the composition. If in the following pages one encounters more criticism than praise, this does not adequately represent my appreciation of the book.

1. The Plot of Bilgames' Death

My understanding of the narrative differs in one central point from previous ones. Bilgames has a dream in which he is told that he will die. This dream is then repeated word for word. We then learn that the "solution" of the dream was revealed to Urlugal. This "solution" was interpreted by pre-

1. See Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (1993a; 1993b).

2. A translation of Bilgames' Death appeared in George (1999: 195–208). George's translation largely follows the understanding of the text by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi. The ETCSL translation of Bilgames' Death (Black et al. 1998), appeared in October 2000, after the present article was finished.

vious scholars as referring to an explanation of the dream. The “second dream,” according to this reading of the text, is in the voice of Bilgames, who recounts his dream in order to obtain an exegesis. The building of the hero’s tomb follows the dream interpretation.

There are several problems with this reconstruction of the narrative. First, Bilgames’ dream does not seem to require an interpretation, as it is clear enough by itself. Furthermore, the narrative function of the dream and its interpretation, and their relation to the tomb building remain unclear. It will be argued instead that the repetition of the dream is the dream come true. Furthermore, the “solution” of the dream and the building of Bilgames’ tomb is equivalent. The tomb will guarantee that the name of Bilgames will not be forgotten. The hero’s anguish in the face of imminent death, a recurring element in the dream, is thus resolved. In the closing passage, when he enters the underworld, we learn that Bilgames has accepted his fate and is in peace.

This interpretation produces a much more coherent story line, which may be summarized as follows:

1. Introduction: Bilgames on his deathbed
2. Bilgames’ dream: he learns that he will die
3. The dream comes true
4. Urlugal builds Bilgames’ tomb
5. Bilgames enters the underworld in peace

My reading is based on the analysis and interpretation of several passages. They will be discussed in detail in §2.

2. Commentary on Some Key Passages

M80–86 and 120–125: Bilgames’ Despair

Bilgames’ dream has two clearly distinct parts. The first part (M49–87 // M140–177) refers to the past: Bilgames’ accomplishments and the story of the Deluge. It takes place in the heavenly council.

The second part (M[92]–125 // M182–[216]) refers to the future. It is a speech directed to Bilgames about the burying and mourning rituals that will be performed on his behalf. The identity of the speaker is unfortunately unclear. In the Nippur version it appears to be Enlil (N v 12). In the Meturan version it may be the ghost Sisig (see below), but that remains uncertain. A few lines in the first part of the dream are repeated almost verbatim in the second part. These lines are crucial for the understanding of what the dream is all about.

Enki answers An and Enlil, who apparently proposed to save Bilgames from death. In his answer Enki reminds his peers about the flood story, and he concludes that whatever his credentials, Bilgames has to die. However, he will be made an important person in the underworld (80–86):

- 80 (Enki:) “Bilgames, among the spirits, dead in the underworld let him be the governor of the underworld, let him be the foremost of its spirits!” He (= Enki) rendered the verdict, he made the decision: “When you speak it will be as important as the word of Ningišzida and Dumuzid.” Then the young lord, lord Bilgames
- 85 (like?) all of humanity, all that has life, was heart-stricken! He was in despair, he was heart-stricken.

Previous translations took the subject of 82 to be Bilgames (“He [= Bilgames] will pass judgement, he will render verdicts”). Though this makes good sense in translation, there are two problems. First, the verbal forms in 82 are indicatives with *mu-* and *ba-*, not precatives as in 81. Second, line 83 suddenly changes to the second person. This was explained as a *lapsus* by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000: 43), but it may as well be understood as the *ipsissima dicta* by Enki in his verdict concerning Bilgames.

The structure of line 85 is uncertain and remains so in my rendering. Line 86, however, is crucial.

The Meturan version has ur_5 nam-ba-ug₅-ga šag₄ nam-ba-sag₃-ga. In the Nippur version the line appears as ur_5 nam-ba-e-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-e-sag₃-ge (N v16).³ In both versions the expression is interpreted by the editors as a second person negative modal form: “*Ne te meurtris pas le sein, ne t’afflige pas le coeur!*” Or, in George’s version: “Be not in despair, be not heart-stricken.” In none of the attestations of this expression, however, is the second person expressed. It seems more natural, therefore, to translate a third person, and to understand /na/ as the positive modal prefix.

A very similar passage appears at the end of the second part of the dream. Bilgames is told that all his relatives will come to his funeral, but this fails to ease his mind (lines M120–125 //M211–216):

- 120 He was in despair, he was heart-stricken!
Now the Anuna counted him in their midst.
They counted him only second to the great
gods! He (Enki) made him governor of the
underworld. He rendered the verdict, he made
the decision:
- 125 “When you speak it will be as important as
the word of Ningišzida and Dumuzid.”

This is the end of the dream after which Bilgames wakes up. The significance of the heroes’ anguish in the lines translated above becomes clear in the final passage of the story (see below M296–305).

The expression ur_5 nam-ba-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-sig₃-e appears in a few other places in Sumerian

3. Meturan: 86 (M₂) ur_5 nam-ba-ug₅-ga šag₄ n[am-...]; 120 (M₁) ur_5 nam-[ba-ug₅-g]a’ šag₄ nam-ba-sag₃-g[e’]; (M₆) ur_5 [na]m-u₂-ga šag₄ nam-ba-sag₃?(U₂)-ge; 176 almost completely lost; 211 (M₂) ur_5 nam-ba-ug₅-ga šag₄ nam-ba-sig-[ga/ge]. Nippur: N v16 (N₁) [ur_5] nam-ba-e-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-e-sag₃-ge; (N₂) ur_5 nam-[...]-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-e-sag₃-ge. The preverbal -e- in the Nippur version (discussed by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: 20) may be a form of the locative-terminative infix: “he was in despair because of this.” The realizations of this infix in writing are studied systematically in Karahashi (in press).

literature, often in a context where death or the dead plays a prominent role. To bolster our argument, therefore, we will study those attestations to see whether a positive interpretation is possible in those contexts, too.

The Incantation to Utu was recently re-edited by Alster (1991).⁴ The structure and interpretation of the text was elucidated by Geller (1995: 107): “The central theme of this incantation is quite clear: the man is falsely accused by ghosts before Utu, although he is innocent, and as a result the dead have caused him problems. The incantation is a plea to Utu to make a correct judgement regarding the human victim.” I follow Geller in his general interpretation of the text, although in detail my understanding occasionally differs from his.

The structure of the incantation is as follows: 1) praise to Utu; 2) description of different types of ghosts; and 3) plea to benevolent gods to act in favor of the patient. The middle part, the list of ghosts, begins with two rather lengthy sections, both introduced with *tukum-bi*: if it is a ghost of such-and-such a type. The first of these sections begins (127): “if it is a hostile ghost who has not been released from the pit” (see Geller 1995: 105). This ghost receives a most negative treatment: as long as he does not leave the victim’s body, he will be cut off all supplies, and the Anuna are asked to erase his name (128–33). The next section begins: “if it is a benevolent family spirit”⁵ (134). Funeral offerings are to be prepared, he is to be supplied with bread, water, honey, beer and butter, and his name is to be invoked (135–41). This is the case of a benevolent ghost who is causing trouble because of negligence on the part of the survivors, and all that is needed is to restore the proper supplies. The section, however, does not end here. It continues until line 170, where we find

4. See also Alster (1993, photographs), and a partial parallel in Wasserman (1997).

5. Reading u_3 *tukum-bi gidim im-ri-a dug₃ dim₂*, with Geller (1995: 104).

the next *tukum-bi*. In between are three subcategories, all belonging to the section “benevolent family spirit.” Each of the subcategories is introduced by *lu₂ ug₇-e*: the dead man. The first is 145: *lu₂ ug₇-e nam-ba-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-sig₃-e*. This is our expression, for which see below. For him the text prays that Utu will release his angry heart (*šag₄ zu₂ keš₂-da-ni*). The next (149) reads: *lu₂ ug₇-e ibila-ni-ra niğ₂-gig-ga in-ak-e*: “the dead man causes trouble for his heir.” For this dead man the text prays that Utu may release his angry heart, and that he may have his food, drink, and rest. Finally, in 156, there is “the dead man who [...] for his heir.” This may regard a family spirit who has turned into an evil ghost. The language has turned to a negative tone: “By perjury [the ghost] caused evil to the man being present at (his) trial. He (the ghost) crossed over the boundary of the gods, and causes evil and trouble” (161–63; translation Geller 1995: 107). The reaction is equally negative: the ghost is to be cut off from his supplies, his name is to be erased (166–68), all in the same wording as the treatment for the hostile ghost that was not released from a pit.

We may now look again at the expression that interests us here. Line 145: *lu₂ ug₇-e ur₅ nam-ba-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-sig₃-e* does not mean “The dead man should not be discouraged, should not lose heart” (Alster 1991: 76), but rather: “this dead man, he is in despair, he is heart-stricken!” The following prayer, that Utu may release his angry heart makes good sense in context.

The other attestations of our formula will be dealt with in a briefer fashion. Two texts similar to the Incantation to Utu both contain the expression: YBC 9875 (Cohen 1977),⁶ and TRS 37 (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: 66–67). In the first the context is unclear. In particular the identity of the second person (-zu and za-e) throughout the text remains elusive, and may in fact refer at places to Utu and at other places to the dead

man. Our line appears in 61: *ğarza niğ₂ kur-ra zu ur₅ nam-ba-ug₇-e šag₄¹(MA) sig₃-ge*. Here the negative-modal translation is impossible, because the nominal form of the second verb does not allow such an interpretation.⁷ “The one who knows(?) the rules, the ways(?) of the underworld, he is in despair, he is heart-stricken!” The text continues: “Being that your intention is not to take trouble (*niğ₂-gig*) away to the Netherworld, as for that man, may he not have anything causing him trouble (*niğ₂-hul-dim₃(sic!)-ma*). You (Utu)—your gaze is on that man” (translation Geller 1995: 109). This interpretation again provides a nice opposition between the initial condition of the dead man (he is in despair) and the plea to Utu. The context of our line in TRS 37 (line 20) does not allow any conclusion, since the preceding passage is entirely broken away.

The same expression is found in different context in the Eridu Lament (Green 1978: 140). Kirugu 7,5–9 read:

*den-ki lugal abzu-ke₄
šag₄ ba-an-sig₃ u[r₅-r]a-ni ba-ug₇ inim
nitalam-na-še₃
ni₂-te-a-ni i-si-iš mi-ni-ib-la₂ šag₄ ka-tab-ba
ba-an-na₂
lugal-ğ₁₀ ur₅ nam-ba-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-
sig₃-ge
a-a den-ki ur₅ nam-ba-ug₇-e šag₄ nam-ba-
sig₃-ge*

Enki, king of the Abzu
was heart-stricken, he was in despair. At
the word of his beloved
he wailed over himself. He lay down and
fasted.
My king is in despair, he is heart-stricken!
Father Enki is in despair, he is heart-stricken!

6. See Geller (1995: 107–9) and Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000: 71–73).

7. The grammatical problem was ignored by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000: 73). Cohen: “Your netherworld rites are not distressing; [they are not(?)] depressing.”

In the next lines Enki is invoked to return his attention to his city, Eridu. This seems to be a more appropriate sequence than the somewhat paternalizing: “O! My master! You must not be distressed. You must not be anxious. O! Father Enki! You must not be distressed. You must not be anxious.”

The expressions ur_5 — ug_7 and $\check{s}ag_4$ — sig_3 occur in other grammatical constructions, not relevant for the discussion here (see Tinney 1996: 138).

M88-91//178–181: The Role of Sisig

Sisig, the son of Utu, is a dream god. Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000: 44–45) understand the Meturan text as saying that Sisig reveals or explains something to Bilgames in his dream. It should be noted, however, that Sisig’s role in dreaming and dream explanation is very restricted, and may be a consequence of his primary character as an underworld god with ghostly characteristics (see Butler 1998: 77–83).⁸ His role in the narrative is not entirely clear, and may even differ in the versions from Nippur and Meturan. The Meturan version seems to construct an opposition between the “young men” who do not make light, and Sisig who does (M88–[91]//178–81):

88 $\check{s}ul \check{g}urur\check{s} igi-du_8-a u_4-sakar-ra [...]$
 $e-ne-da nu igi-bi u_4 n[am-ba-\check{g}a_2-\check{g}a_2]$
 90 $si-si-ig dumu^d[utu-ke_4]$
 $[k]i-bi ku_3-ku_3-ga u_4-\check{s}e_3 mi-ni-in-\check{g}a[r]$

88 The youths and the strong men, on seeing the lunar crescent, without him they should not make light!
 90 Sisig the son of Utu makes light in its dark places!

8. Sisig appears in the Old Babylonian version of Bīt Rimki (Geller 1995: 117: 13) and in Bilgames, Enkidu, and the Netherworld (Shaffer 1963: 86: 243).

The ritual(?) alluded to here remains opaque (see the discussion by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: 19), but perhaps the text may be understood as saying that the task of light making is to be carried out now by Sisig, the ghost, rather than by the young men.

M[116]–119 (//M207–210): Bilgames’ Relatives Come to Visit Him

The second half of Bilgames’ dream details the burial and mourning rituals that will be held for him. It relates how relatives, friends, and the elders of the city will come to visit him. These lines contain the verb $me-\check{s}i-du-un$ (variant $mu-\check{s}i-du-un$). For instance, line [116]//207: $e_2 nin_9-a-ta nin me-\check{s}i-du-un$ was translated in Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000) as, “*De la maison de la soeur, la soeur ira vers toi.*” This translation is problematic, since the verbal form contains an explicit second person suffix.

The expression is elucidated by VS 17, 49 (+) 46, edited by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000: 67–71). This very difficult text has our expression in a bilingual fashion (section b 23’–27’):

$[e_2 ni-na-ta] ni-in me-\check{s}e-du-u_2-ul$
 $[i\check{s}-tu bi-t]i a-ha-ti-\check{s}a a-ha-tu$
 $[i]-li-ka-ku$
 $[e_2 s]i-sa-ta [()] si-e\check{s}_3 me-\check{s}e-d[u-u_2-ul]$
 $[i\check{s}]-tu bi-ti a-he_2-\check{s}u a-hu i-li-ka-k[u]$

The editors argue that $-du-u_2-ul$ corresponds to $-du-un$, and give other examples of the n/l alternation. The Sumerian, therefore, expresses the second person by a pronominal suffix associated with the ergative, thus producing a causative: “you make the sister come to you from the house of the sister.” In the Akkadian, however, the second person is expressed in the ventive plus dative suffix: “the sister came to you from the house of her sister.” This phenomenon may tentatively be explained by a difference in the two languages in the treatment of semantic roles. It has been argued that

in Sumerian grammar the concept of “control” plays an important part (see Michalowski in press). In many languages different causative constructions are related to the degree of control exercised by the causee (see Comrie 1989: 180–83). Presumably, the Akkadian does not use the Š-stem here, because that would imply too much control by the causee (the dead person), as if he actually made or ordered his relatives to come. On the other hand, the level of control may be higher than what is expressed in Sumerian by the directive infix -ši-. They come “because of him” rather than simply “for him.” There may have been some kind of confusion about the interpretation of the verbal form already in ancient times. In N₆ reverse 8–14 (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: 22) the -un in mu-e-ši-du-un is erased in several lines. This is probably a hypercorrection, due to interference with the Akkadian. Line 118//209 is paralleled in Home of the Fish 14–15, where we find similar variation in the verbal forms (he₂-em-du; hu-mu-un-ši-du-un).

M126–139: Bilgames Awakes

The reconstruction of the Meturan version is only slightly helped here by a parallel in the Nippur sources (N₄ and N₆). Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi recognised the well-known narrative formula that follows dream reports (126–28). The contents of 129–33 cannot be restored. The lines 134–35 were again identified by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi as being formulaic (note that the Nippur recension has a slightly variant text). This is similar to Bilgames and Huwawa A90 and may express the hero’s feeling of vulnerability and weakness (thus Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: 47).

126 Then the young lord, lord Bilgames
 woke up. [It was a dream! He shuddered.
 He had been asleep!]
 He [rubbed] his eyes with his hands.
 [There was a desolate silence.]
 The dream [...]

130 The dream [...]
 ?
 Counsel [...]
 ?
 On [this?] day [...] as if the mother who
 bore me
 135 the goddess Ninsun held me in her lap,
 should I become like that again?

The broken lines 129–133 may contain the hero’s reflection on the dream, perhaps seeking counsel. It is not quite sure whether Bilgames speaks to somebody or is rather talking to himself. It is therefore equally unclear whether the following lines (136–139), again badly broken, are in the voice of the narrator or constitute the answer of Bilgames’ unknown discussion partner:

136 [...] the great mountain ... (?)
 N[amtar who has no hands] and no feet,
 who [cannot be] escaped.
 ?
 The [contents] of this dream were revealed
 by lord Nudimmud!

The preserved parts of the lines 136 and 138 are incomprehensible to me. Line 139 I read [ma-mu-da] [šag₄]-bi en nu-dim₂-mud_x igi-bi ba-ni-ib-tu.⁹ The introduction of Nudimmud (Enki) here I understand as saying: the contents of the dream are inescapable. Immediately following this line the dream comes true and the section 49–125 is repeated word by word.

M235–239: Urlugal Undoes the Dream

The fulfilment of the dream occupies the lines 140–216. The section immediately following (217–229) is entirely lost, and where the text is extant again it is fragmentary and difficult to understand. Line 235 may perhaps be understood as:

9. MUD is written ^{mu}HI, instead of the usual ^{mu}senHI; tu is for du₈, as elsewhere in this text.

235 X-a-ni [šu]-tag-ga-a-gin₇ ki-¹mah¹-a-ni i₃-
hur²
His [...] designed his tomb as an
[adorn]ment.

But the reconstruction is uncertain. What follows, however, is crucial for the understanding of the passage (236–238):

236 diḡir-bi ^den-ki saḡ-[d]u niḡ₂ niḡin₂-na-a-ba
237 ma-mu-da ki-bur₂-[n]i igi-bi ba-ni-ib-du₈
238 maš-ḡi₆-bi ur-lugal-la bi-in-bur₂ lu₂ na-me
nu-bur₂-bur₂

236 Their god Enki, while they were dizzy(?)
237 revealed to them his¹⁰ solution of the dream.
238 Urlugal solved this nightmare while no man
was able to solve it.

Line 236 is frustratingly unclear. Niḡ₂-niḡin₂ (*šidānu*) is “vertigo.” This makes good sense with saḡ-du, but its function in the larger context remains opaque. Perhaps one may read saḡ-[u]_{s2} instead of saḡ-[d]u and relate niḡ-niḡin₂ to niḡin = *pahāru/napharu*: “Their god, Enki, the attendant of everything”(?). Admittedly, saḡ-us₂ is not a likely epithet of Enki.

The interpretation of the function of this passage in its larger context hinges on the understanding of the verb bur₂ in line 238. Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi translate, “*Ce rêve, (seul) le chien du roi l’avait interprété, nul autre n’avait su l’interpréter.*”

This translation naturally leads to the conclusion that the verbatim repetition of Bilgames’ dream that precedes this passage is part of his consultation with a dream expert. In that case the lost lines 217–30 might contain the answer of the dream expert. This interpretation raises a number of prob-

lems. First, Bilgames’ dream is rather straightforward. Unlike Dumuzid’s dream, the message of his death is not delivered in symbolic images. The need for an interpreter, and the narrative function of such an interpretation are obscure.

The verb bur₂ was discussed by Oppenheim (1956: 217–20). He argued that where used in connection with dreams it has three closely related meanings: 1) to tell a symbolic dream, in order to obtain an interpretation; 2) to interpret a symbolic dream; 3) to remove (ritually) the evil consequences of a dream. The latter meaning, according to Oppenheim, is the more basic one and is implied in the others. In the meaning “to undo,” or “to make harmless,” the verb is also used in connection with sin, or with charms. The passage quoted above is followed by preparations for building Bilgames’ tomb. The end of the composition demonstrates that this tomb *is* the solution of the main problem that the narrative addresses: that Bilgames’ name will not be forgotten. The “solution” of the dream in 238, therefore, does not refer to a (lost) preceding section that contained an interpretation of Bilgames’ dream, but rather to what follows: the building of a monument.

A further problem with the interpretation of the passage in question is the identity of ur-lugal-la. I propose to read this as a (common) abbreviation of ur-lugal-la-(am₃), with the copula functioning as an emphasizing device. Ur-lugal is not “the king’s dog” but rather Bilgames’ son. Urlugal the son of Bilgames appears in at least one version of the Sumerian King List (Jacobsen 1939: 90: 21)¹¹ and in the Tummal Inscription (12–16): “Bilgames built the Numunbura in Enlil’s temple. Ur-lugal, son of Bilgames, made the Tummal flourish and brought Ninlil into the Tummal. Then the Tummal fell into ruins for a third time.”¹² In line 239 (“The

10. Grammar requires ki-bur₂-[b]i. Inspection of the photograph reveals that the transliteration is correct. There may be some confusion of gender in the text in question (tablet M₇).

11. Another version has his name as ur-^dnun-gal. The form of this name in the new fragment BT 14 (Klein 1991) is unknown to me.

12. Translation by Black *et al.* (1998: no. 2.1.3, with bibliography).

lord levied a workforce in his city”) en-e refers to Urlugal, rather than to Bilgames. This removes the problem that Bilgames seems to organize his own funeral: his son “undertakes” the job.

M 296–305: Bilgames’ Relief

After the completion of the funerary monument the text reads (M296–305):

- 296 Now lord Bilgames,
his mood was full of joy, his heart was happy.
Men, as many as are given names,
their statues have been fashioned since days
of old,
300 and stationed in chapels in the temples of the
gods,
so that their names, being read aloud, cannot
be forgotten.
Aruru, the older sister of Enlil
made his offspring as numerous as saplings.
Because of these statues built from days of
old, and read aloud in the land,
305 Ereškigal, mother of Ninazu, your praise is
sweet!

Bilgames’ anguish is resolved once he realises that his name will be remembered from the statues erected for him. The Sumerian of 297 is ambiguous:

M₂: [ur₃-ra-a-ni ba]-hul šag₄-ga-a-ni ba-sag₉

M₁: [ur₂-ra-a-ni] ba-hul šag₄-ga-a-ni ba-sag₃

This may as well be translated: “his mood darkened, he was heart-stricken.” In the context of the narrative, however, this seems to make little sense. The writing conventions of the Meturan texts allow for the substitution of standard Sumerian hul₂ for hul. The second verb equally causes confusion. I have chosen sag₉ as the correct reading. This provides a nice opposition to the expression šag₄ nam-ba-sig₃-e so that the confusion here may well be intentional.

3. Translation

The Death of Bilgames is attested in several tablets and fragments from Nippur and Meturan. None of the sources is complete. Moreover, they do not always duplicate each other, so that we are left with several incomplete versions. The following translation is a hybrid. It follows as far as possible the Meturan text, which offers the most complete version. Where Nippur tablets are available, they are used to improve the understanding of obscure passages. Occasionally, Nippur fragments are inserted to cover a gap in the Meturan version. The order of the narrative passages was established in the edition by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000)¹³ to which the reader is referred for the Sumerian text in copy, transliteration and photographs. Where I agree with George’s recent translation I have freely borrowed from his native English. Note that the division in sections has no physical basis on the original tablets but follows from my understanding of the text. Plain philological matters—in particular syllabic spellings¹⁴—are discussed in footnotes.

1: Bilgames on his Death Bed

- 1 O, the great wild bull lays down, he will never be able to rise.
- 2 Lord Bilgames lays down, he will never be able to rise.
- 3 He who brought the perfect tree¹⁵ lays down, he will never be able to rise.
- 4 The hero, girt with a shoulder-belt,¹⁶ lays

13. Followed in the translation by George (1999).

14. Those matters that are discussed in the commentary by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000) are not resumed here.

15. Reading ḡiš ša₃-aš-ša₄ de₆. In structure this parallels niḡ₂-erim₂ du₇-du₇: “the one who knocks down the wicked” (Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven, Meturan version, line 6, Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 1993b: 105). “The perfect tree” may refer to the Haluppu tree in the opening section of Bilgames, Enkidu, and the Netherworld. Note that this latter tree is called “unique” (Shaffer 1963: 50: 27: ḡiš diš-am₃).

16. Da-ra: syllabic for dara₂.

down, he will never be able to rise.
 5 He who was perfect in strength lays down,
 he will never be able to rise.
 6 He who belittled evil lays down, he will never
 be able to rise.
 7 He who spoke wisdom lays down, he will
 never be able to rise.
 8 The thief of the land lays down, he will never
 be able to rise.
 9 He who knew how to climb a mountain lays
 down, he will never be able to rise.
 10 The lord of Kulab lays down, he will never
 be able to rise.
 11 On the bed of Namtar he lays down, he will
 never be able to rise.
 12 On the bedding of mourning he lays down,
 he will never be able to rise.
 13 He *cannot* stand, he *cannot* sit, he is mourn-
 ing.
 14 He *cannot* eat, he *cannot* drink, he is mourn-
 ing.
 15 Namtar's bolt has caught him, he *cannot* rise.
 16 Like a ... fish that is ... in a well ... he is
 hoisted.
 17 Like a gazelle caught in a trap he ... the bed-
 ding.
 18 [Namtar], who has no hands, has no feet, who
 [snatches] a man at night,

N₂ fragment (N 6856)

2'' The Sage [...]
 3'' In the sky the pure first fruit offerings [...]
 4'' for six days he lay sick [...]
 5'' something like sweat [spread over his body]
 6'' Lord Bilgames is ill ..
 7'' Uruk and Kulab [...]
 8'' the spoken word of the land [...]

2: *Bilgames' Dream*

Meturan-version

45 Then, the young lord, lord Bilgames
 46 [lying] on the bed of Namtar,
 47 ?

48 In that dream [
 49 In the assembly, the place of the gods' cer-
 emonial
 50 when lord Bilgames had drawn nigh
 51 they said to him, while lord Bilgames sat
 down:
 52 "In this case: having traveled each and every
 road,
 53 having fetched that cedar, that unique tree
 down from its mountain,
 54 after you smote Huwawa in his forest,
 55 having erected stelae for future days, for
 ever(?),
 56 having founded temples of the gods,
 57 you reached Ziusudra in his abode.
 58 You brought to the land the *mes* of Sumer
 that were forgotten forever,
 59 the commandments and the rites
 60 Hand washing and mouth washing you put
 in good order.
 61 [...] the flood that [destroyed] the inhabited
 regions¹⁷ as well as all the foreign lands [...]
 62–65 [...]
 66 now, Bilgames should not be taken away just
 like that."
 67 That was Enlil's advice that they gave to
 Enki.
 68 Enki answered An and Enlil:
 69 "In yonder days, in far-off days,
 70 in yonder nights, in far-off nights,
 71 in yonder years, in far-off years,
 72 after the assembly had made the Deluge
 sweep over
 73 so that we could destroy the seed of man-
 kind (we said):
 74 "in our midst, you are the only man living,
 75 Ziusudra is the name of humanity living."
 76 From that day I swore by the life of heaven
 and earth,
 77 from that day I swore that mankind will not

17. For *gu₂-kin* (*dadmū*) see Civil (1987: 237), with discussion of variant writings.

- have eternal life.
- 78 Now they (= An and Enlil) have set their eyes on Bilgames,
- 79 but I cannot save him because of his mother!
- 80 Bilgames, among the spirits, dead in the underworld
- 81 let him be the governor of the underworld, let him be the foremost of its spirits!”
- 82 He (= Enki) rendered the verdict, he made the decision:
- 83 “When you speak it will be as important as the word of Ningišzida and Dumuzid.”
- 84 Then the young lord, lord Bilgames
- 85 (like?) all of humanity, all that has life, was heart-stricken!
- 86 He was in despair, he was heart-stricken!
- 87 that what lives, death [...]
- 88 The youths and the strong men, on seeing the lunar crescent,
- 89 without him they should not make light!
- 90 Sisig the son of Utu
- 91 makes light in its dark¹⁸ places!
- 92 “What my evil magic of humanity brings will now be brought for you.
- 93 What my cutting of the umbilical cord brings will now be brought for you.
- 94 The darkest day of humankind arrived for you.
- 95 The loneliest place of humankind has arrived for you.
- 96 The flood-wave that cannot be breasted has arrived for you.
- 97 The fight that has no equal has arrived for you.
- 98 The battle from which there is no fleeing has arrived for you.
- 99 The evil from which there is no escape has arrived for you.
- 100 Your angry heart should not go down to the Great City.
- 101 Before Utu it should say: “he will solve for me.
- 102 Like a palm-fibre cord it may be loosened, like an onion it may be peeled.”
- 103 Ahead to the funeral offerings in the presence of the Anuna, the great gods!
- 104 To the place where the *en*-priest lies, where the *lagar*-priest lies,
- 105 where the *lumah* and the *erešdiġir* lie,
- 106 where the *erešdiġir* lies, where the “true-one” lies,
- 107 where the *guda* lies, where the *gada* lies,
- 108 the place where your father lies, your grandfather,
- 109 your mother, your sisters, your *siblings*,
- 110 your precious friend, your buddy,¹⁹
- 111 your friend Enkidu, the young man, your companion,
- 112 to the governor that the king has appointed in the Great City,
- 113 to the place where the foreman of the army lies
- 114 where the commander of the troops lies,
- 115 to the great city, the Arali, where a man is sought [...]
- 115a those who enter²⁰ it [...],
- 116 (to that place) you will make the sister come to you from the house of the sister,
- 117 you will make the *sibling* come to you from the house of the *sibling*,
- 118 you will make your own come to you, you will make your precious ones come to you,
- 119 you will make the elders of your city come to you.”
- 120 He was in despair, he was heart-stricken!
- 121 Now the Anuna counted him in their midst.
- 122 They counted him only second to the great gods!
- 123 He (Enki) made him governor of the underworld.

18. Ku₃-ku₃: syllabic for ku₁₀-ku₁₀; see Nippur version (N v5).

19. Tu-us₂-sa: syllabic for du₁₀-us₂-sa

20. Su-na: syllabic for sun₅-na. Sun₅ = *erēbu* may be specialized for the plural (Civil 1976: 150 with n. 44).

124 He rendered the verdict, he made the decision:
 125 “When you speak it will be as important as the word of Ningišzida and Dumuzid.”
 126 Then the young lord, lord Bilgames
 127 arose. [It was a dream! He shuddered. He had been asleep!]
 128 He [rubbed] his eyes with his hands. [There was a desolate silence]
 129 The dream [...]
 130 The dream [...]
 131 ?
 132 Counsel [...]
 133 ?
 134 On [this?] day [...] as if the mother who bore me
 135 the goddess Ninsun held²¹ me in her lap, should I become like that again?
 136 [...] the great mountain ...(?)
 137 N[amtar who has no hands] and no feet, who [cannot be] escaped
 138 ?
 139 The [contents] of this dream were revealed by lord Nudimmud!

3: *The Dream Comes True*

140 In the assembly, the place of the gods' ceremonial
 141 when lord Bilgames had drawn nigh
 142 they talked to him, while lord Bilgames sat down:
 143 “In this case: having traveled each and every road,
 144 having fetched that cedar, that unique tree down from its mountain,
 145 after you smote Huwawa in his forest,
 146 having erected stelae for future days, for ever(?),
 147 having founded the temples of the the gods,
 148 you reached Ziusudra in his abode.

149 You brought to the land the *mes* of Sumer that were forgotten forever,
 150 the commandments and the rites.
 151 Hand washing and mouth washing you put in good order.
 152 [...] the flood that [destroyed] the inhabited regions as well as all the foreign lands [...]
 153–155 [...] ²²
 156 now, Bilgames should not be taken away just like that.”
 157 That was Enlil's advice that they gave to Enki.
 158 Enki answered An and Enlil:
 159 “In yonder days, in far-off days,
 160 in yonder nights, in far-off nights,
 161 in yonder years, in far-off years,
 162 after the assembly had made the Deluge sweep over
 163 so that we could destroy the seed of mankind (we said):
 164 “in our midst, you are the only man living,
 165 Ziusudra is the name of humanity living.”
 166 From that day I swore by the life of heaven and earth,
 167 from that day I swore that mankind will not have eternal life.
 168 Now they (= An and Enlil) have set their eyes on Bilgames,
 169 but I cannot save him because of his mother!
 170 Bilgames, among the spirits, dead in the underworld
 171 let him be the governor of the underworld, let him be the foremost of its spirits!”
 172 He (= Enki) rendered the verdict, he made the decision:
 173 “When you speak it will be as important as the word of Ningišzida and Dumuzid.”
 174 Then the young lord, lord Bilgames
 175 (like?) all of humanity, all that has life was heart-stricken!

21. Di-ip-pa: syllabic for dib-ba.

22. Note that the line count in Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi (2000) has one line less for this gap than for the parallel passage 62–65.

- 176 He was in despair, he was heart-stricken!
 177 that what lives, death [...]
 178 The youths and the strong men, on seeing
 the lunar crescent,
 179 without him they should not make light!
 180 Sisig the son of Utu
 181 makes light in its dark places!
 182 “What my evil magic of humanity brings will
 now be brought for you.
 183 What my cutting of the umbilical cord brings
 will now be brought for you.
 184 The darkest day of humankind has arrived
 for you.
 185 The loneliest place of humankind has arrived
 for you.
 186 The flood-wave that cannot be breasted has
 arrived for you.
 187 The fight that has no equal has arrived for
 you.
 188 The battle from which there is no fleeing has
 arrived for you.
 189 The evil from which there is no escape has
 arrived for you.
 190 Your angry heart should not go down to the
 Great City.
 191 Before Utu it should say: “he will solve for
 me.
 192 Like a palm-fibre cord it may be loosened,
 like an onion it may be peeled.”
 193 Ahead to the funeral offerings in the pres-
 ence of the Anuna, the great gods!
 194 To the place where the *en*-priest lies, where
 the *lagar*-priest lies,
 195 where the *lumah* and the *erešdiġir* lie,
 196 where the *guda* lies, where the *gada* lies,
 197 where the *erešdiġir* lies, where the “true-one”
 lies,²³
 198 the place where your father lies, your grand-
 father,
- 199 your mother, your sisters, your *siblings*,
 200 your precious friend, your buddy,
 201 your friend Enkidu, the young man, your
 companion,
 202 to the governor that the king has appointed
 in the Great City,
 203 to the place where the foreman of the army
 lies
 204 where the commander of the troops lies,
 205 to the great city, the Arali, where a man is
 sought [...]
 206 those who enter it [...],
 207 (to that place) you will make the sister come
 to you from the house of the sister,
 208 you will make the *sibling* come to you from
 the house of the *sibling*,
 209 you will make your own come to you, you
 will make your precious ones come to you,
 210 you will make the elders of your city come
 to you.”
 211 He was in despair, he was heart-stricken!
 212 Now the Anuna counted him in their midst.
 213 They counted him only second to the great
 gods!
 214 He (Enki) made him governor of the under-
 world.
 215 He rendered the verdict, he made the deci-
 sion:
 216 “When you speak it will be as important as
 the word of Ningišzida and Dumuzid.”
 217–230 lost
 231 ?
 232 ?
 233 ?
 234 ?
- 4: *Bilgames’ Son Builds his Tomb*
 235 His [...] designed his tomb as an
 [adorn]ment.
 236 Their god Enki, while they were dizzy(?)
 237 revealed to them his solution of the dream.
 238 Urlugal solved this nightmare while no man
 was able to solve it!

23. The line order in 196–197 is reversed compared to the parallel passage in 106–107. Note that M₁₂ has a variant order in 104–107.

- 239 The lord (= Uruk) raised a levy in his city,
 240 the herold sounded the horn in all the land.
 241 Levied Uruk opened the Euphrates.
 242 Levied Kulab emptied the Euphrates of water.
 243 The levy of Uruk was a deluge!
 244 The levy of Kulab was a heavy cloud.
 245 Half a month passed by,
 246 not even five not even ten days it was.
 247 They opened the Euphrates, they emptied it of water,
 248 so that its shells could admire the sun.
 249 Then, in the middle of the Euphrates, its water was gone!
 250 He built this tomb of stone,
 251 he built its walls of stone,
 252 he made the door wings of the gate of stone.
 253 The bolt and the threshold were strong diorite,
 254 its pivot²⁴ was diorite.
 255 They made its crossbar of gold.
 256 ... he moved a heavy block of stone,
 257 ... black earth of all kinds was spread out(?),
 258 [so that the tomb] in far-off days
 259 [nobody would] discover.
 260 [So that] the one who searches its façade will not discover it.
- N₃
 1 his beloved wife, his beloved children,
 2 his beloved first wife, second wife,
 3 his beloved singer, steward, [...],
 4 his beloved barber [...],
 5 his beloved attendants, standing ready in the palace,
 6 his beloved creations(?),²⁵
 7 they were laying at their place, as in his palace, in the sheepfold²⁶ in Uruk.
 8 Bilgames the son of Ninsun
 9 set out these audience-gifts for Ereškigal.
 10 He set out these presents for Namtar.
 11 He set out these surprises for Dimpikug.
 12 He set out these gifts for Bitti.
 13 He set out these gifts for Ninġišzida and Dumuzid,
 14 for Enki and Ninki, Enmul and Ninmul,
 15 Endukuga and Nindukuga,
 16 Endašurima and Nindašurimma,
 17 Enmu-utula and Enmešarra,
 18 the female and male ancestors of Enlil.
 19 Šulpae, the lord of the Table,²⁷
 20 Sumukan and Ninhursaġa

5: Bilgames Enters the Underworld in Peace

- 261 Now that a strong house in Uruk had been established
 262 his beloved wife, his beloved children,
 263 his beloved first wife, second wife,

Lines 264–94 are absent or fragmentary in the Meturan version. The Nippur text N₃ includes this section and continues to the end of the composition. Where the Meturan text is legible again it appears that the versions differ.

24. ^šNu-uk-ku!(TUG₂)-iš-bi: syllabic for ^šnu-kuš₂-u₃-bi.

25. For šu-dug₄ and niġ₂-šu-dug₄-ga see Attinger (1993: 696–703). The equation niġ₂-šu-dug₄-ga = šūbultu “(diplomatic) present” (Hh I 39; *MSL* 5, 12) would make good sense, but is rather suspect. The Sumerian appears only in a unilingual version from Ugarit. First millennium sources, Emar, and the Old Babylonian AO 7796 (probably Sippar; used in *MSL* 5 as V₄) have niġ₂-šu-tak₄-a and variants thereof.

26. For rig₇ as sheepfold(?) see Krecher (1966: 153–54), and Sjöberg (1993: 9).

27. In previous studies lines 19–25 were translated as if all the god names were in the dative case, continuing the list of gods receiving presents in 9–18. Lines 19 and 20, however, are explicitly in the ergative (^dŠul-pa-e₃ en ^šban[šur]-ke₄ / ^dsu-mu-gan₂(! DAG) ^dnin-hur-sa[ġ-ġ]_{a₂}-ke₄ (case markers in 21/22 lost). The dative NPs of this sentence are found in 23–25 (the dead priests), the verb in 26. The character of the list of gods changes (no longer typical underworld gods), and so does their role in this passage. Note that the verbal form changes, too (ba-an-la₂ in 9–13; mu-un-[...] in 26), indicating that this is not simply the continuation of an enumeration. The passage 19–26 perhaps describes an introduction scene, well-known from glyptic, in which one god introduces a king to another god.

21 the Anuna of the Holy Mound
 22 the Nungals (= Igi) of the Holy Mound
 23 for the dead *en*-priests and the dead *lagar*-
 priests,
 24 for the [dead] *lumah*-priests and *erešdiḡir*-
 priests,
 25 for the [dead] *guda*-priests and *gada*-priests,
 26 [*set out*] audience gifts.
 27 ?
 28 For(?) En-[...] he set out these presents.
 29 [...] he lay down.
 30 Bilgames, the son of Ninsun
 31 [...] poured out water?
 32 ?
 33 [...] blow their noses for him.
 34 Humankind [...] of [his] city
 35 do not place [...]
 36 they spread out [...] in the dust.
 37 Then, the young lord, lord Bilgames
 38 [...], ceaseless in the [care] of Enlil,
 39 Bilgames, the son of Ninsun
 40 [...] offshoot, a king who matched him [...]
 was never born
 41 [...] cannot be found, does not exist,
 42 Bilgames, [lord] of Kulab, sweet is your
 praise!

Meturan version

M₄ fragment (with parallel N₁ viii)
 [1–4 very fragmentary]
 5 [...] they enter, in its gate ...
 6 the Euphrates was opened, its water swept
 over
 7 its water was overflowing.
 8 Then, the young lord, lord Bilgames
 9 for him they blow the nose
 [for him they pull out their hair (N₁ viii 8)]

End of M₁ and M₂:²⁸

295 and smear ... with dirt.

28. The line count of this final section is based on the colophon in M₁: "total: 305 lines."

296 Now lord Bilgames,
 297 his mood was full of joy, his heart was happy.
 298 Men, as many as are given names,
 299 their statues have been fashioned since days
 of old,
 300 and stationed in chapels in the temples of the
 gods,
 301 so that their names, being read aloud, cannot
 be forgotten.
 302 Aruru, the older sister of Enlil
 303 made his offspring as numerous as saplings.²⁹
 304 Because of these statues built from days of
 old, and read aloud in the land,
 305 Ereškigal, mother of Ninazu, your praise is
 sweet!

Appendix: *STVC 87 B*

STVC 87 (CBS 14109) consists of three fragments, two of which (A and C) have been joined to several other pieces to form one of the main sources of the Ninegalla Hymn (Behrens 1998: 42).³⁰ Fragment B does not belong to the same tablet. It has a few lines of Bilgames' Death.³¹ It joins the obverse of the main Nippur source CBS 6966 (*SEM 24*) + CBS 7900 (*SEM 25*) + N 3189 + N 3190.³² The new fragment is to be located in the fourth column below CBS 6966 = *SEM 24* (see the reconstruction of the tablet in Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: fig. 1). It is the passage where Enki starts to recount the story of the flood (M157–162):

29. "Gave him saplings for the sake of offspring."

30. The description of text A is somewhat confusing. "CBS 14109" equals the obverse of CBS 14109C (= *STVC 87C*), but is listed as a separate join because this obverse is not copied in *STVC*. See Behrens' explanation (1998: 43 n. 57) and the diagram on pp. 44–45.

31. With due reservation the fragment was considered as perhaps belonging to the Sumerian Flood Story by Civil (1969: 138).

32. The join was kindly confirmed by Philip Jones.

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