

Two Middle Babylonian Atra-ḫasīs Tablets from Babylon

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[Sixteen years ago Barbara Böck and the present writer published the Atra-ḫasīs fragment MM 818 in this very journal, namely volumes 17-18 honoring Gregorio del Olmo Lete's sixty-fifth birthday. Then MM 818 was described as written in a coarse Late Babylonian script, possibly in Babylon. As it happens, in the course of research work on the Middle Babylonian omen tablets from Babylon the present writer chanced upon a Babylon excavation photograph showing the very same fragment MM 818. The main aim in this paper is on the one hand to present the new readings of signs legible on the photo but no longer preserved on the fragment, and on the other to briefly (re)consider the Middle Babylonian Atra-ḫasīs.]

Keywords: Myth of Atra-ḫasīs; Middle Babylonian; Babylon.

Almost two decades ago Barbara Böck and the present writer identified MM 818 as a new piece of Tablet I of the Babylonian story known to the ancients as “When gods were man” and eventually published the Montserrat fragment in *AuOr* 17-18 (1999-2000) (= *Fs. G. del Olmo Lete*) 167-177.¹ The authors pointed out that the ductus, far from elegant, indeed cursive and coarse, is Late Babylonian and that the text possibly comes from Babylon. The latter suggestion was based on the fact that a number of the Babylonian tablets in the Montserrat collection originate from the excavations carried out in the ancient city of Babylon by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft under the direction of Robert Koldewey. The suggestion has been recently confirmed by a surprising and unexpected find. In the course of work on the Middle Babylonian omen texts from Babylon, the present writer chanced upon a Babylon excavation photograph showing among a group of fifteen cuneiform tablets the very same fragment of Atra-ḫasīs kept today in the Museum of Montserrat.²

Thanks to the Babylon Photos nos. 1602 and 1603 and to Olof Pedersén's thorough catalogue work on the epigraphic finds from Koldewey's excavations at Babylon, MM 818 can now be identified as Bab 36669,18. The tablet was reportedly discovered in 1908 together with 153 other tablets and over a

1. “MM 818: A New LB Fragment of Atra-ḫasīs I”.

2. It is my pleasant duty to thank Profs. J. Marzahn and O. Pedersén for the permission and encouragement to study together with B. Böck the Middle Babylonian omen texts kept at the Vorderasiatisches Museum and for providing the available Babylon excavation photos of these texts for study. I am also indebted to the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft and its present Director Prof. A. Otto for permission to publish the results of the study of MM 818 from the Babylon Photos nos. 1602 and 1603. Permission to collate MM 818 has been given by P. Pius-Ramon Tragan and the Benedictine Community of the Abbey of Montserrat. To all of them I express my especial gratitude. My work on the Berlin and Montserrat materials has been helped by research funds, namely the Spanish project FFI2011-23981.

thousand tiny fragments from among the ruins of a Late Kassite habitation level in the Merkes area; most of them were dug up from the same grid square 25n1.³ Oscar Reuther described the find as follows: “Auf dem Lehmestrich [in 25n1] lagen in einer 30 cm dicken Tonschicht viele ungebrannte Tontafeln. Der Ton, aus dem wir sie herausschälten, war von gleicher Art wie der, aus dem die Tafeln selbst bestehen. Unter diesen sind viele, die man absichtlich zerhackt oder zerschnitten hat. Auf anderen ist zu erkennen, daß die Schrift ausgewischt oder durchstrichen worden ist. Uns machte es den Eindruck, als habe man hier ‘Makulatur’ aufgehäuft, um daraus durch Einstampfen und Einschlämmen neues Schreibmaterial herzustellen, und vielleicht darf man den Raum in 25m1, in dem man mit Wasser hantiert hat, mit diesem Betrieb zusammenbringen. Der Inhalt der Tontafeln –he then concluded– wird vielleicht einmal weitere Anhaltspunkte bieten”.⁴ According to Pedersén’s study, virtually all the tablets, which include lexical, mathematical, divinatory and literary texts, are school exercises. The contents of the tablets, published almost eight decades after Reuther raised the issue, thus agrees with or confirms the preliminary archaeological assessment. All the evidence indeed suggests that the room to which the square 25n1 belonged served as a scribal school some time in the last third of the second millennium BC. Miguel Civil wrote in 1979 that “the closing down of an é–dub–ba–a in an orderly fashion, and even the forced, but not sudden, emigration of the masters, are likely to have left no exercise tablets behind”.⁵ The late Kassite school at Babylon seems then to be an exception to Civil’s persuasive rule. According to Reuther’s report, there is no archaeological evidence of destruction or violent end of the Merkes late Kassite level, including the area covered by the squares 25n1 and 25m1.⁶ Whatever the reason for the abandonment of his house and school, the Babylon master apparently closed it down in an orderly fashion, after having placed all the discarded exercises of his pupils on the “garbage” heap of clay where they would have normally been recycled into new writing material.

The archaeological record provides substantial information too on the chronology of the texts. Pedersén has pointed out that none of the tablets bears any explicit, precise date and that the Kassite chronology he has assigned to all the pieces is based on both archaeological and paleographical grounds.⁷ One has to mention, however, that the case of M6, as Pedersén has eventually named the “Große Sammlung von Schülertafeln (Merkes 25n1)”, is illustrative of the enduring lamentable state of cuneiform paleographical studies. Of the 154 identified and numbered tablets belonging to Babylon’s M6, only six are published so far. On the basis of the script, half of them (nos. 68, 115 and 151) have been identified as Old Babylonian and the other half (nos. 39, 129 and 136) as Late Babylonian; moreover, it is significant that one of the texts, namely no. 136, first published as Late Babylonian (by Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard) was copied anew (by Jan J.A. van Dijk) as Old Babylonian.⁸ This tablet (no. 136), kept today at the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin with the inventory number VAT 17099, and MM 818 (no. 129)

3. See O. Pedersén, *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon. Die Tontafeln der Grabung Robert Koldeweys 1899-1917* (ADOG 25), Saarbrücken 2005, pp. 85-92.

4. *Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Babylon. III. Die Innenstadt von Babylon (Merkes)* (WVDOG 47), Leipzig 1926, pp. 58-59.

5. In *MSL* 14, pp. 7-8.

6. See *Die Innenstadt von Babylon*, pp. 60-61.

7. See *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon*, p. 86.

8. Nos. 68 and 115 are published by J.J.A. van Dijk as *VAS* 24 41 and 123 respectively; no. 151 is edited as CDLI no. P235146; no. 39 is published by M. Civil in *MSL* 15 as MS E of Tablet V; no. 129 is published by B. Böck and the present writer in *AuOr* 17-18 (1999-2000) 167-177; and no. 136 was first published as MS y by W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard in *Atra-ḫasīs. The Babylonian Story of the Flood*, Oxford 1969, and copied anew by J.J.A. van Dijk as *VAS* 24 93.

are both inscribed with a Middle Babylonian excerpt of the myth of Atra-ḫasīs. As their twin excavation numbers indicate (Bab 36669,24a and Bab 36669,18 respectively), they were found side by side in the heap of allegedly discarded school tablets in the square 25n1.

1. MM 818

The tablet is now known to be a school exercise, indeed the work of an apprentice scribe, a fact that definitely explains the coarse hand and the frequent lapses and mistakes that had been observed in the *editio princeps*. Note for example the haplographies and other omissions in obv. 2', 6', 7', 9', 10', rev. 1, 2; the dittography in obv. 2' (cf. also obv. 10'); the conspicuous break of the line of poetry at the end of rev. 5; or the aberrant use of *ditto* in rev. 11 to avoid writing a full, repeated verse, breaking as a result another line of poetry. The already coarse enough shape of the signs is further marred by the student's use of a split stylus.

The Babylon excavation Photos nos. 1602 and 1603 show the two sides of fifteen cuneiform tablets of different shape, contents and state of preservation, all of them belonging to M6 except for two pieces.⁹ The third in the second row is Bab 36669,18, MM 818. Photo no. 1602 shows the reverse and Photo no. 1603 the obverse of the tablet. Despite the fact that Bab 36669,18 was not yet cleaned when photographed by the DOG archaeological mission, the tablet was then in a slightly better state of preservation than it is now and presumably also than it was when P. Bonaventura Ubach purchased it together with other antiquities in Iraq back in 1923.¹⁰ The readings from the photographs of signs and traces of signs that are no longer preserved on the tablet as well as suggested new readings from a fresh collation of MM 818 make it appropriate and useful to present a new edition of the text. The beautiful handcopy by B. Böck published in the *editio princeps* resists the passage of time without losing its accuracy.

In the transliteration that follows, signs or traces of signs that are no longer preserved but are still seen on the photographs (in obv. 5', 8', 10', rev. 1, 2, 11, 12) appear in bold type.

Transliteration

Obverse

(break)

1'	DINGIR.MEŠ 'x' []
2'	< ^d >50 <i>ir</i> {-ir}{-te-e}[<i>q</i> ?]
3'	<i>i-lu du-ul-la i-za-^rbi^r-l[u]</i>	

9. The other twelve tablets belonging to M6 are nos. 99, 103, 110, 111, 115, 119, 133, 137, 143, 146, 150 and 154. The exceptions are Bab 36692, that was found isolated in a nearby trench of the same late Kassite period (M10 no. 28), and Bab 36762, that comes from a later Neo-Babylonian layer (N13 no. 148); see Pedersén's catalogue (*Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon, ad loc.*). These two stray texts, especially the latter, seem to have found their place in the photograph probably and partly because their shape and size suited the empty space left by the M6 pieces once placed within the usual, standard framework of the German mission's photographs.

10. See now http://cdli.ucla.edu/collections/montserrat/montserrat_en.html for the Montserrat cuneiform collection and its history (MM 818 has the CDLI no. P432850). Note that at least one other M6 tablet eventually found its way in the antiquities market: Bab 36740 (no. 151) is now kept at the Kesley Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan (for its contents and history, see <http://cdli.ucla.edu/collections/kelsey/kelsey.html>). See O. Pedersén, *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon*, p. 8.

- 4' *aš-bu-ma ik-ka-lu kar-ši ut-ta-[(az-)za-mu]*
 5' *tup-ši-ik-ku-ma GAZ-na-ši ka-^r bit^r du-ul-l[u]*
 6' *<ma>-a-^r ad^r šap-ša-aq-ni*
 7' *al-ka-ni^{giš} gu-za-la-ni i ni<-ni>-ri-am-ma*
 8' *ù ka-ab-ta du-ul-la-ni i-ni-iš-bir₅ ni-ir-[ni]*
 9' *<^d>e ša i-šu-ú i-lu ʔe-ma*
 10' *^rpa^r-a-^ršu^r <i>-pu-ša¹-^rma^r ana DINGIR.MEŠ [i]z-za-qar*

Reverse

- 1 *^ri^r ^rni^r-im-ḥa-aš-ma^{giš} gu-za-la <la>-bi<ru>-ti*
 2 *[i²-š]u²-tu² ^rx (x) ^rx^r i-ša¹-ka-an <^d>en-lil*
 3 *i-šu-t[u] i-ša-ka-an{-nu}*
 4 *^rx^r ^rx^r [x] ^rx^r ^ri^r-na maḥ-ri-ni DINGIR ^rlem²-na*
 5 *^rx^r ^rx^r ^ri²-[še]m²-mu-u un-ni-ni {al-ka-ni}*
 6 *^ral²-^rka² <-ni>² [i² n]u²-šal-bi-ra ni-ir-ni*
 7 *^rù^r ^rka^r-ab-ta ^rdul^r-^rla^r-ni nu^r-ka^r-an-n[i]*
 8 *^rdap²-ni-iš ma-lik DINGIR.MEŠ qú-ra-[da]*
 9 *al-ka-ni i ni-iš-[š]i-^ra^r-^ršu^r i-na šu[b]-t[i-šu]*
 10 *^den-lil ma-lik DINGIR.MEŠ ^rqú^r-[ra-da]*
 11 **KI.MIN DINGIR.MEŠ**]
 12 *^rù^r tup-ši-i[k-ki-šu-nu]*]
 13 *^rx^r ^rx^r []*]

(break)

Translation

Obverse

(break)

- 1' The gods ...
 2' Enlil was free of w[ork]² ...
 3' The gods had been bearing the work;
 4' then they sat down and began to complain (and) gru[mble]:
 5' "The toil is killing us, hard is the work,
 6' too much our distress!
 7' Come, let us slay the steward
 8' and break our heavy work, our yoke!"
 9' (Then) E, the god who had a shrewd mind,
 10' opened his mouth and addressed the gods:

Reverse

- 1 "Let us smite the steward of old time!
 2 [Conf]usion? ... will beset Enlil,
 3 confusion ... will beset (him).
 4 the hostile? god before us;
 5 ... will [lis]ten? to (our) plea. {Come,}
 6 Co[me?], should w[e] prolongue our yoke?
 7 And shall we preserve our heavy work?
 8 In a warlike? manner, the counsellor of the gods, the hero,
 9 come, let us fetch him from his dwelling!
 10 Enlil, the counsellor of the gods, the hero,
 11 ditto." The gods [heard what he said.]
 12 [They put fire to their work] baskets.
 13 ...

(break)

Notes

The following notes are meant to complement the commentary in the *editio princeps* in *AuOr* 17-18, pp. 173-175.

Obv. 2'. The usage of the number 50 to write the name of Enlil is attested already in the Old Babylonian period (see A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, Oxford 2003, pp. 150-151). In Middle Babylonian times, the usage is often found in the orthography of the divine name in theophoric PNN. The odd and inconsistent use in a literary text like this one (the normative orthography is found in rev. 2 and 10) can be explained on account of the unproficiency and idiosyncrasy of the apprentice scribe; the same holds true for the omission of the divine classifier (note that it is also omitted before the divine names in obv. 9' and rev. 2) and the dittography that follows. For the restoration of the verbal form *irtēq*, cf. the LB Sippar manuscript IM 24646 line 19 (A.R. George and F.N.H. Al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library VI. Atra-ḫasīs", *Iraq* 58 [1996] 153), and the relevant antithetic parallelism with *izabbilū* in the next line.

Obv. 3'. In contrast to the preterite form in the OB version, the MB text uses a present of continuing action (*izabbilū*), also attested in the later Assyrian recension (MS S) lines 10-13 (see Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*, p. 45); cf. also the verbal forms in OB I 21, 23, and the parallel LB Sippar manuscript SB I 20-23 (George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, p. 158).

Obv. 4'. As stated in the *editio princeps*, MM 818 helps restore the first word in the OB verse (OB I 39). The translation "they sat down" of *ašbū* is to be understood in the sense of "sitting down in conference" suggested by *CAD A/2*, p. 390. There is no need to alter the literal meaning of "sitting" as a traditional expression, still in use in modern times, to refer to the congregation or parliament of Arab tribesmen.

Obv. 5'. The use of the dative suffix (-*nāši*) instead of the expected accusative is now easily explained on account of the Middle Babylonian date of the text (see below *sub* 3). The photograph shows that the excavated tablet preserved more text at the end of the line.

Obv. 8'. Thanks to the photograph the verb can be fully restored, as well as part of a second complement at the end of the line. The sandwiching of a verb between two accusatives, although not very common, is well attested in Babylonian literature, including the SB Atra-ḥasīs (see the remarks of George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, p. 184). Note that the end of this line as preserved in the SB version of MS J from Ashurbanipal's libraries, namely K 10082:2, agrees with the MB text, so that the beginning of the line in the Kuyunjik text can now be tentatively restored in the light of the Babylon tablet (see below *sub* 5).

Obv. 9'. The reading of the god's name who led the revolt is now clear upon collation, following Manfred Krebernik's study "Geschlachtete Gottheiten und ihre Namen", in O. Loretz *et al.* (eds.), *Ex Mesopotamia et Syria Lux. Festschrift für Manfred Dietrich zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (AOAT 281), Münster 2002, pp. 289-298. MM 818 proves that the awkward word order of the apposition describing the leader of the rebellion in the SB version (II 103) goes back at least to MB times (see below *sub* 5). George and Al-Rawi (*Iraq* 58, p. 187) thought that the syntactical disorder was the result of a corruption of the original OB text (I 223). Because there are other instances in the SB version of deviations from normal or logical word order (note e.g. the following line SB II 104), literary motivation could be an alternative explanation (cf. hyperbaton in Classical rhetoric); George and Al-Rawi themselves (*ibid.*) conceded that if the line SB II 194 is not corrupt, then an intention on the part of the author to highlight the deed described in the verse is possible (cf. also George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, pp. 433-435). In addition to, or instead of, a rhetoric device, the disarrayed syntax in *ša išû ilu/a tēma* could also be interpreted as the Babylonian editor's deliberate way to avoid the ambiguity of the reading of the rebel god's name, an ambiguity that has caused debate and speculation among modern and ancient scholars alike (as is well known, Lambert and Millard, and also Foster have read the OB version of the god's name as Wê-ila or Aw-ila; see George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, pp. 149-150; Foster, *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, Bethesda Maryland 2005, p. 231 n. 1; D. Shehata, *Annotierte Bibliographie zum altbabylonischen Atramḥasīs-Mythos* [GAAL 3], Göttingen 2001, pp. 9-11, 68-69). The word *tēmu* is translated here with its alleged basic sense, instead of one of its metonymic meanings "command, plan, initiative" (as suggested for example in the *editio princeps*) or a periphrastic rendition "capacity to reason" (as in George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, p. 171); cf. Foster's subtle translation "inspiration" (see *Before the Muses*, p. 236 with n. 1). See also the recent discussion by Ulrike Steinert, *Aspekte des Menschseins im Alten Mesopotamien. Eine Studie zu Person und Identität im 2. und 1. Jt. v. Chr.*, Leiden, Boston 2012, pp. 324ff. and Ch. 12; note, however, that she missed Krebernik's relevant study in her discussion of the name of the god who led the rebellion and with whose flesh and blood mixed with clay mankind was made.

Obv. 10'. This line is clumsily written. The signs differ in size and are not lined up or spaced in an orderly way. Note, furthermore, that the writing of *tīpuša* is full of errors: the first sign (*i*) is omitted and the first wedges of the last one (*ša*) are written twice. Traces of the first sign of the line and the second sign can be seen on the excavation photo. One should correct the transliteration of the full MM 818 line in Krebernik's contribution to *Fs. M. Dietrich*, p. 290.

Rev. 1. The Babylon Photo shows that, although also damaged when the tablet was discovered, the upper left corner of the reverse was better preserved and some traces of signs could still be seen. Both the head of a low horizontal wedge at the beginning of the line and the space before the traces of *ni* do support the restoration suggested in the *editio princeps*. The alternative restoration proposed by Benjamin Foster

(who translates “let us [not] strike” in *Before the Muses*, p. 231 n. 2) seems less likely in view of the epigraphic traces and the context, particularly the exhortation to violence of the instigator of the rebel gods. As a matter of fact, the verbal form in the LB Sippar manuscript spelled *ni-x x x* (SB I 44) should probably be understood in the light of the OB and MB versions either as a first-millennium Babylonian cohortative or as a scribal mistake for the earlier form, emending accordingly the modal marker <*i*> before the preterite form, as suggested by Böck and Márquez Rowe in *AuOr* 17-18, p. 170 (Foster, *Before the Muses*, p. 231 n. 2, prefers instead to translate “we will smite” or the like, following George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, pp. 158-159).

Rev. 2-3. The legible words and traces of signs strongly suggest that the second line in this couplet repeats almost literally the first one. Unfortunately no other extant manuscript preserves the text entirely. The Babylon Photo shows the sign *i* at the beginning of rev. 3. George and Al-Rawi (*Iraq* 58, p. 158) also read *i* as the beginning of the word in the first line of the couplet in the LB manuscript (SB I 45): *i-x x x x*. On a closer look at the published photographs of the obverse of the LB Sippar tablet IM 124646 (especially figs. 1 and 3 on *Iraq* 58, pp. 152 and 155 respectively), it is possible to read also the signs that follow and as a result the full word *i-šu-tu* at the beginning of line 38 (= SB I 45), as well as *i-šu-ú²-x* at the beginning of the next. The word *išûtu* “confusion” was so far only attested in one entry of the lexical list Erimḫuš (V 233; see *MSL* 17, p. 77); as stated in *CAD I/J*, p. 293, the noun is listed there together with the synonyms or semantically related words *ikiltu* and *uṭṭātu* (*CAD* has *uṭṭatu*) both meaning “darkness” or the like (note that the relevant entry “*uṭṭatu*” is paradoxically missing in *CAD U and W*; the editors of volume 20 of the Chicago dictionary seem to have followed instead the reading in *AHW* p. 1443 and listed the word as *utātu*, of unknown etymology and meaning, on p. 333). The noun *išûtu* derives like its synonym *tēšû* from the verb *ešû* “to confuse, trouble” (cf. also the substantive *ešitu* / *išitu*). According to the context in which the word appears (see *CAD T*, pp. 375-376) and the lexical entries in which it is equated with *qablu* and *saḫmaštu* (see e.g. *LTBA* 2 1 iv 44, 47 and 2 110, 113), the noun *tēšû* seems often to denote “confusion” resulting from or related to violence, rebellion, battle or anarchy. This meaning agrees well with *išûtu* and the present context in these lines of Atra-ḫasīs. Note furthermore that both *tēšû* and *saḫmaštu* appear occasionally constructed with the verb *šakānu* in N-stem (see examples in *CAD sub vv*). The context and the consistent orthography of case vowels in MM 818 (see below *sub* 3) indeed require a reading *iššakkan*; note that defective spelling of double consonants also occurs in obv. 3’ (*i-za-bi-lu*). The couplet and the shrewd plan (cf. *ṭēmu*) to cause Enlil’s fear is clearly paralleled in E’s later harangue in the repeated couplets rev. 8-9 and 10-11; there is possibly a wordplay between the verbal form *i nišši(a)* in rev. 9 and *i nīši* (< *ešû*>); see the commentary to this line below.

Rev. 4. The suggested, collated reading of the ŠI-sign (instead of the MÍ of the *editio princeps*) before *na* at the end of the line allows an interpretation of the last three signs as *ila lemna*. To the possible objection that this solution, admittedly tentative, would have Enlil qualified in the text as a “hostile god”, one can reasonably argue that the designation is actually placed in the mouth of the god who instigates conflict and rebellion against Enlil; on the other hand, in a later passage of the myth, the annihilation of mankind by means of the deluge is literally qualified as “a wicked thing (*šipra lemna*) Enlil will do to the people” (OB II viii 35; see now also the OB manuscript recently published by George in *Babylonian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection* [*CUSAS* 10], Bethesda Maryland 2009, no. 2 iv 3’ where the assertive statement is pronounced by the god Ea).

Rev. 5. Note the possible haplography *un-ni-ni*<-*ni*>.

Rev. 6-7. The traces at the beginning of rev. 6 suggest that the scribe decided to write the word *alkani* again, this time at the proper place opening the line of poetry (see the end of the previous line). The

collated new reading of the first half of the next line and the structure of the poem make clear that rev. 6 and 7 constitute a couplet of parallel, chiasmic verses. The two accusatives in obv. 8' (*kabta dullani* and *nīrni*) are taken up here and presented each in one verse in chiasmic order. Because the forms of the respective parallel verbs, as part of E's persuasive exhortation, are different (preterite in rev. 6 and present in rev. 7), it is here assumed that one should restore a cohortative in the first verse. There is probably an intentional wordplay between *i nušalbira nīrni* here and *i nišbir nīrni* mentioned earlier in obv. 8'. Both verses in this couplet are rhetorical questions. The interrogative clauses possibly account for the use of the ventive in the first verb and the *überhängende* vowel of the second. Note the use of the wordpair *šulburu // kunnu* "prolongue // consolidate".

Rev. 8. The literary adverb opening the couplet is syntactically awkward and is possibly the result of a corruption: *ni* and *iš* could well be corruptions of *en* and *lil* respectively (cf. nevertheless the commentary to obv. 9' above on syntactical disorder). The SB text of the LB Sippar manuscript has *ilu* instead (SB I 49'), and the same word is to be presumably restored in the broken space at the beginning of OB I 43 and emended in OB I 57 where the absence of any word before *malik ilī* deranges the metre of the verse and couplet. On the more violent nature of E's speech in the MB version, especially as compared to the OB text, see below (*sub 5*).

Rev. 9. Lambert and Millard wrote that "the most obvious derivation of *i ni-iš-ši-a*, from *našû*, 'let us carry' [in OB I 44, 46, 58, 60] gives so poor a sense that it can hardly be right", suggesting instead a meaning "unnerve, confuse, distress" with reference to the relevant adjective *šāšû* in Gilgamesh SB IV 100 (*Atra-ḫasīs*, p. 149). Their interpretation finds now support in the word *išûtu* used in the earlier related passage (in MM 818 rev. 3 as well as IM 124646:38; see the commentary to rev. 2-3 above) in which E describes his plan to his fellow humiliated gods against their boss Enlil. Although a derivation from *našû* seems still preferable because of the spelling with a double consonant, there is undoubtedly an intentional wordplay between *i nišši* and *i nīši*, and possibly also with the expression *ina šubti nāšu* "to quake (someone's) seat" attested in other Babylonian literary works in the context of threat or violence (cf. Enūma eliš VI 146, Erra I 5). Cf. also the use of the semantically related verb *adāru* "to be worried, distressed, restless" to describe Enlil's ensuing reaction upon hearing about the cause of the rebellion in SB II 53, 55.

Rev. 11-12. Thanks to the excavation photograph, one can restore the text of the last lines in MM 818. After the scribal aberrant writing of the word K1.MIN instead of the whole verse in rev. 9, the MB Babylon version skips the following couplet in OB I 61-62 // SB I 53'-54', and merges OB I 63-66 // SB 55'-58' omitting lines OB I 64, 65 // SB I 56', 57'.

2. VAT 17099: Babylon MS y of *Atra-ḫasīs*

Lambert and Millard published the Babylon text as MS y in their edition of *Atra-ḫasīs*. Promptly identified as a Late Babylonian school exercise, the piece, which preserves about the left half of the tablet, was published in handcopy (on pl. 5) and transliteration (on p. 116) from the Babylon Photo no. 1601, the original not having been located at that time. After its discovery at the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin, the fragment was reedited in handcopy by van Dijk in *VAS 24* as no. 93; the last line of the text, which is written on the lower edge of the tablet and therefore not to be seen on the photograph, was newly published, and the tablet was redated to the Old Babylonian period on the basis of the script (see *VAS 24*,

p. 13).¹¹ As previously mentioned, thanks to Pedersén's catalogue work, VAT 17099 is now known to be of Middle Babylonian date. The tablet is inscribed only on one of its sides ending on the lower edge; the other side preserves a few traces of inscribed and erased signs that suggest the remains of an earlier exercise.¹² In contrast to MM 818, VAT 17099 is not the product of a clumsy apprentice scribe, despite the presence of erasures (perhaps also from an earlier exercise) and the irregular division between the first and second paragraphs. The calligraphy is neat, there are no haplographies or dittographies, and the lines of poetry are each on a line of tablet. The fourteen-line excerpt, divided into three ruled paragraphs, corresponds to the transition from the second to the third column of OB II, as already pointed out by Lambert and Millard (*Atra-ḫasīs*, p. 41), and later confirmed by the LB Sippar manuscript (= SB V 53-63). As a matter of fact, the lost ends of the lines are restored in the following transliteration of the MB Babylon text on the basis of the later Sippar Standard recension.

Transliteration

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 1 | <i>š</i> i-ga-ru na-aḫ-ba-lu [<i>tâmti</i>] |
| 2 | ^d é-a ʿli- <i>iš-šú-ru</i> [<i>qadu laḫmīšu</i>] |
| 3 | <i>iq-b</i> [<i>i-m</i>]a [<i>iššurū Anu</i>] |
| 4 | ù ^d IŠKUR [<i>elēnu</i>] |
| <hr/> | |
| 5 | ^d en-lil [] |
| 6 | <i>iš-šú-ru</i> [<i>eršetu qablītu</i>] |
| 7 | <i>š</i> i-ga-ru na-aḫ-[<i>b</i>]a-l[<i>u tâmti</i>] |
| 8 | ^d é-a <i>iš-šú-r</i> [<i>u qadu laḫmīšu</i>] |
| 9 | ù ʿšú-ú <i>at-ra-ḫ</i> [<i>a-si-is amēlu</i>] |
| 10 | DINGIR-šú ^d é-a-ma ʿx [] |
| <hr/> | |
| 11 | [<i>u-m</i>]i-šam-ma [<i>ibtanakki</i>] |
| 12 | [<i>maš-š</i>]ak-ka i-za-ab-[<i>bi-il</i>] [] |
| 13 | ʿe-nu-ma mi-iṭ-r[<i>a-tu šaḫurrat</i>] |
| 14 | [<i>m</i>]u-ša i-zu-uz-ma n[<i>i-ḳú-ú[?] iq[?]-ḳi[?]</i>] |

Translation

Obverse

- 1 “(Command that) over the bolt, the trap of [the sea]

11. Unlike most scholars (such as George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, p. 175, or Shehata, *Annotierte Bibliographie*, p. 193), Claus Wilcke was not convinced about the new dating of the text and followed Lambert and Millard's interpretation of VAT 17099 as a LB copy (*NABU* 1997/120, pp. 114-115); see, however, the commentary to line 5 below.

12. A photograph of VAT 17099 is available at the CDLI webpage: cdli.ucla.edu/P347212.

- 2 Ea stands guard [together with his *lahmu*'s]!"
 3 He commanded and then [Anu]
 4 and Adad [stood guard over the heights],
-
- 5 Enlil []
 6 stood guard [over the earth between],
 7 over the bolt, the trap [of the sea]
 8 Ea stood guard [together with his *lahmu*'s].
 9 Now Atra-ḫ[asis, the man]
 10 whose god was Ea, [].
-
- 11 Every day [he would weep],
 12 he would bring dream-offerings [].
 13 When the waterw[ay was quiet],
 14 [he made an offering] halfway through the night.

Notes

Line 1. The exclamation mark on top of the well-written sign NA in van Dijk's handcopy is very probably misplaced since it was presumably meant to call attention on the following sign Aḫ, which is indeed drawn with a few missing wedges. Upon collation, however, the sign-form here is hardly distinguishable from the Aḫ inscribed in line 7 (see below *sub* 3).

Lines 5-6. Because of the metre of the verse and the layout of the text, one expects a word or two at the end of the line (perhaps an epitheton of Enlil?). Instead of Enlil guarding the middle earth, it is Sin and Nergal who appear in this role in the LB Sippar manuscript (SB V 56) and Babylon MS x (rev. i 5, 9, [ii 10], 17). The fact that VAT 17099 follows the OB recension, according to which the earth in the three-decker universe is Enlil's realm (OB II v 17, 31), made Wilcke seriously consider van Dijk's dating of the Babylon tablet to the OB period (*NABU* 1997/120 p. 115); see the commentary below *sub* 4 and 5.

Line 10. As pointed out by George and Al-Rawi (*Iraq* 58, p. 189), this line is missing from the later SB text (see below *sub* 5).

Line 12. The parallel OB text (II iii 6) has *ina šērēti* at the end of the line; the SB text (V 61) has instead *gipar nāri*, possibly a corruption (see George and Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 58, p. 189).

3. Aspects of Middle Babylonian writing and grammar

Of all the signs preserved in MM 818 and VAT 17099, Aḫ (in VAT 17099:1, 7) clearly shows a distinct Middle Babylonian shape, namely "halfway" between the variant OB sign-forms and the later ductus as written, for example, on the Babylon Atra-ḫasīs tablet Bab 39099 (MS x) (see below *sub* 4).

Typical of Middle Babylonian orthography is the spread use of CVC signs as attested in both school exercises; in MM 818: *kar* (obv. 4'), *tup* (obv. 5', rev. 12), *bit* (obv. 5'), *šap* (obv. 6'), *bir*₅ (obv. 8'), *qar* (obv. 10'), *maḫ* (rev. 4), *lem*[?] (rev. 4), *šem*[?] (rev. 5), *šal* (rev. 6), *dul* (rev. 7, cf. the syllabic spelling *du-ul*

to write the same word in obv. 3', 5', 8'), *dap*² (rev. 8), *lik* (rev. 8, 10), *šub* (rev. 9); in VAT 17099: *šam* (l. 11), [*maš*] (l. 12), *šak* (l. 12). Note also the use of the sign-value *ana* to write the preposition in MM 818 obv. 10'. Logograms are also noteworthy. Although the use of the number 50 to write the name of Enlil (MM 818 obv. 2') is first attested in OB times, it is in MB that the usage becomes common and established especially in spelling theophoric PNN in administrative records. Note also the writing of GAZ in MM 818 obv. 5'. Contracted vowels are written *plene* in MM 818 <*ma*>-*a-ad* (obv. 6'), *pa-a-šu* (obv. 10'), and *i-šu-ú* (obv. 9'), but not in *-na-ši* (obv. 5'); cf. ²*i*-[*še*]²*m*-*mu-u* for long *ū*, if the reading and restoration are correct. Geminated consonants are written always *plene* except in *i-za-bi-lu* for *izabbilū* (MM 818 obv. 3'), and *i-ša-ka-an* for *iššakkan* (MM 818 rev. 2, 3).

As regards Middle Babylonian grammar, mimation is lost throughout, except before *-ma* in *ni<-ni>-ri-am-ma* (MM 818 obv. 7'); note, however, <*i*>-*pu-ša'*-*ma*' in MM 818 obv. 10' (although the example is probably hardly relevant given the aberrant writing). The noun consistently declines triptotically in the singular in both MB texts. Initial *w* is dropped, as importantly shown in the name of the god who led the rebellion, We > E in MM 818 obv. 9'; see also *ašbū* in MM 818 obv. 4'. Vowels are contracted in MM 818 in the pronominal suffix *-nāši* (obv. 5'), in *pa-a-šu* (obv. 10') and <*ma*>-*a-ad* (obv. 6'), but are not in the same text in the ventive verbal forms *ni<-ni>-ri-am-ma* (obv. 7'), *ni-iš-[ši]-a'-šū*' (rev. 9); for other non-contracted, archaising forms in MB literary texts, see Jussi Aro, *Studien zur mittelbabylonischen Grammatik*, Helsinki 1955, p. 40. A salient feature of MB grammar is the confusion between accusative and dative pronominal suffixes (see Aro, *Studien*, pp. 54-58), attested in MM 818 obv. 5. Other linguistic aspects are the use of the literary form with the terminative suffix in MM 818 rev. 8; the use of the modal marker *i* of the cohortative; the *überhängende* vowel with verbs II-weak (MM 818 rev. 7); perhaps the use of the ventive suffix (and the *überhängende* vowel) to mark (the stress of) an interrogative sentence (MM 818 rev. 6); the latter, like the sandwiching of a verb between two accusatives (MM 818 obv. 8') or the apparent syntactical disorder in a number of verses (e.g. MM 818 obv. 9', rev. 8-9) may actually be examples of literary, rhetoric devices. Atra-ḥasīs is indeed a poetic masterpiece where metaphors abound (the incipit and title of the poem, for one), and the same is true of wordplays, repetitions, wordpairs, metonymies, synonymous and antithetic parallelisms, chiasmic structures, or rhetorical questions such as the ones preserved in the Middle Babylonian tablet from Babylon MM 818 rev. 6-7.

4. A note on Bab 39099: Babylon MS x of Atra-ḥasīs

As is well known, the DOG excavations led by Koldewey at Babylon unearthed a third tablet inscribed with part of the myth of Atra-ḥasīs. It was found in a trench dug up near the Late Kassite school that housed MM 818 and VAT 17099. According to Pedersén's study, the excavation of this trench, named after its coordinates Merkes 24/25, yielded five cuneiform tablets and fragments: apart from the Atra-ḥasīs tablet, there is an omen text, a memorandum and two fragments of unknown contents, all unpublished.¹³ Although the 115 cuneiform pieces that were found sparsely in various trenches during the excavation of the Late Kassite levels of the Merkes area are catalogued as Middle Babylonian (grouped all together under the collection label "M10"), Pedersén himself admits that a number of the tablets and fragments defy a MB or, for that matter, a definite chronology.¹⁴ In fact, of the five pieces found in

13. See *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon*, pp. 102-103.

14. See *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon*, pp. 102-106.

Merkes 24/25 none is dated beyond doubt, and three of them, including Bab 39099, bear the date MB/NB followed by a question mark.¹⁵

Lambert and Millard published the four-column tablet Bab 39099 as MS x of Atra-ḫasīs. Like MS y, MS x was edited in handcopy (*Atra-ḫasīs*, pls. 4, 9-10) and transliteration (pp. 116-120) from the DOG excavation photograph (Photo Babylon no. 1804). The location of the original is still unknown. The editors identified the large, fragmentary tablet as a Late Babylonian copy inscribed on the better preserved reverse with parts of the transitions from the second to the third column and from the fifth to the sixth column of OB II. With the publication of the LB manuscript from Sippar, George and Al-Rawi have established the correspondence of the text on the reverse with SB V-VI and the one on the obverse with SB II-III (see *Iraq* 58, pp. 148, 175; the transliteration of parts of the text are found on pp. 170, 176 and 182). The text thus partially duplicates the exercise VAT 17099.

Apart from the fact that Bab 39099 was discovered in a trench during the excavations of the Merkes Kassite level, there is no information about the exact archaeological context of the tablet and its precise date is difficult to determine. On the basis of internal evidence, the text must be dated later than MM 818 and VAT 17099. The ductus of the signs indeed belongs to a later period: as stated above, the sign AḪ (in rev. i 6, 10, ii 11, 22, 38) has the first-millennium form, in contrast to VAT 17099:1, 7; the same is true of other signs (e.g. ḪAR in rev. i 21). Although not exclusively diagnostic of first-millennium orthography, one should contrast also the use of sign-values such as *šá*, *šú* or *tú* with *ša*, *šu* or *tu* in MM 818 and VAT 17099 (Bab 39099 in fact makes use of both sets of sign-values). Comparing the duplicate passage in VAT 17099, Bab 39099 is less consistent with the triptotical declension of singular nouns (see *mūšu* in rev. i 16 instead of *mūša* in VAT 17099:14). A further indication of a later date of Bab 39099 may be the replacement of Enlil by Sin and Nergal as the guardians of the middle earth, as mentioned above. The publication of the tablets that were dug up from the same trench at Babylon or the find and study of the still unlocated original manuscript itself would possibly help establish a more precise date of MS x. For the time being, however, only a general relative chronology can be posited. Bab 39099 bears the unmistakable stamp of a (freshly?) standardized (SB) version of Atra-ḫasīs, unlike the (immediately?) pre-standard, Middle Babylonian exercises MM 818 and VAT 17099.

5. Notes on the Middle Babylonian Atra-ḫasīs

The history of the Babylonian myth of Atra-ḫasīs from the earliest Old Babylonian to the most recent Late Babylonian tablet is inextricably strewn with gaps despite the continuing surfacing of new tablets and fragments.¹⁶ No doubt, the most dramatic one covers the second half of the second millennium BC. Only two small fragmentary tablets, one from Nippur (CBS 13532) and another one from Ugarit (RS 22.421), constituted hitherto the so-called Middle Babylonian version.¹⁷ The evaluation of these two meagre manuscripts is further hampered by two other important factors. First, their recensional characteristics cannot be drawn out because what little has survived of their text does not correspond to any known passage from the more complete editions. And secondly, their classification proper is not beyond doubt.

15. Bab 39099 is catalogued as M10 no. 20.

16. See most recently, George, *Babylonian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection*, pp. 16-27.

17. See Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*, pp. 6, 34, 40; Foster, *Before the Muses*, pp. 228, 254-255.

The Nippur Atra-ḫasīs fragment could be of Old Babylonian date;¹⁸ and the Ugarit small fragment, which originally belonged to a four-column tablet, preserves an account of the Babylonian flood story and it could as well be a copy of a MB version of Gilgamesh or simply a tale from a different tradition.¹⁹ An additional alleged MB source of the myth was discovered also outside Mesopotamia, namely in the Hittite capital. Nevertheless, because the tiny fragment unearthed from the Late Bronze Age level of Boghazköy (Bo 819/z) preserves little more than the name Atram-ḫasīs, it is virtually impossible to place it or even establish that it is part of a version of the myth.²⁰

The importance of the identification of the Babylon tablets MM 818 and VAT 17099 as new sources of the MB Atra-ḫasīs therefore hardly needs emphasis. Although these school excerpts are by their very nature short and of inferior quality in terms of scribal proficiency, the texts were produced within a relatively defined historical, geographical, cultural, and linguistic environment, and their recensional characteristics, however limited, can be properly drawn up in the light of the OB and SB editions.

18. The Old Babylonian date of the tablet given by its editor Hermann V. Hilprecht was immediately challenged and discussed by George A. Barton (“Hilprecht’s Fragment of the Babylonian Deluge Story [Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series D, volume V, fasc. I]”, *JAOS* 31 [1911] 37-46), who concluded that it had to be dated to the Kassite period. Barton’s new dating relied exclusively on paleographic evidence, since his two other arguments, the archaeological and the linguistic, were admittedly neither definite for a MB chronology. The problem is, as already stressed above, that paleographic studies are far from satisfactory even today, especially regarding MB ductus; on the other hand, the linguistic evidence in support of Hilprecht’s dating, namely the presence of initial *w* and mimation in CBS 13532, later disproved by Barton, needs reconsideration.

19. Even though the protagonist’s name is Atra-ḫasīs (namely, Atram-ḫasīsum), there is no proof that the fragment belongs to a MB version of the myth (Daniel Arnaud still understands it, however, as such in his *Corpus des textes de bibliothèque de Ras Shamra-Ugarit (1936-2000) en sumérien, babylonien et assyrien* [*AuOrS* 23], Sabadell 2007, p. 128 sub no. 40). In his edition of the text (“Textes suméro-accadiens des archives et bibliothèques privées d’Ugarit”, *Ugaritica V*, pp. 300-304 no. 167), Jean Nougayrol remarked that judging from the parallels, the fragment seems to be a forerunner of the Standard recension of Gilgamesh (p. 301). In view of the Ugarit MB manuscripts of Gilgamesh, especially as compared to the Standard version (see George’s thorough study “The Gilgamesh Epic at Ugarit”, *AuOr* 25 [2007] 237-254), it is not impossible that RS 22.421 would belong to this epic, just like RS 94.2953 (= Arnaud, *Corpus des textes de bibliothèque*, no. 65); for the latter text, see now Antoine Cavigneaux’s brilliant reedition, “Les oiseaux de l’arche”, *AuOr* 25 (2007) 319-320. But, as stated by George in his addendum in *AuOr* 25 (2007) p. 254, it is also possible that RS 94.2953 and RS 22.421 were pieces of one and the same flood story different from Gilgamesh and Atra-ḫasīs; the so-called Ark Tablet recently published by Irving L. Finkel (*The Ark Before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood*, London 2014) has shown that different versions and tales about the flood did co-exist as far back as the early second millennium BC, all of them having Atra(m)-ḫasīs as protagonist.

20. The fragment is published in handcopy as KBo 36.26. Two or perhaps three other fragments from Hattusa are inscribed with a Hittite version of Atra-ḫasīs. As eloquently evidenced by one of them (Bo 403 = KUB 36.74) that has Kumarbi in the place of Enlil, the Babylonian story was locally retold and transformed after crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries; note that the second text (Bo 1718/u+ = KUB 8.63+KBo 53.5) seems to be a Hittite translation from a Hurrian version. See A. Polvani, “Hittite Fragments on the Atraḫasīs Myth”, in P. Marrassini (ed.), *Semitic and Assyriological Studies Presented to Pelio Fronzaroli*. Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 532-539; V. Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, Berlin-New York 2006, pp. 278-279; A. Archi, “Transmission of Recitative Literature by the Hittites”, *AoF* 34 (2007) 186, 197; and A. Bernabé, *Mitos hititas. Entre Oriente y Occidente*, Madrid 2015, pp. 116-118. The identification of a third small fragment (Bo 1233/v = KBo 47.147) allegedly preserving a few words of the Hittite version of Atra-ḫasīs, especially among them the name of the hero spelled *Wa-tar-ra-ḫa-ši-iš* (in rev. 9’), has been recently suggested by Oğuz Soysal in “On Recent Cuneiform Editions of Hittite Fragments (II)”, *JAOS* 133 (2013) 692, 698.

As is well known, four manuscripts preserve so far with more or less lacunae OB I 38-61 // SB I 38-53', corresponding to MM 818 obv. 3'-rev. 12.²¹ Generally, the MB version can be regarded as a descendant of the OB recension, but has a number of significant variations, of which some made their way into the SB recension. The couplet in obv. 7'-8' is a clear example of such deviations. Whether or not derived from a different OB version, the MB text, followed by the SB edition, uses different verbs and expressions from MS A to describe the mood and intentions of the striking gods. Indeed, in the later versions the rebel gods do not wish to "confront the steward" but rather to "smite him" and they do not seek to be "relieved from the heavy work" but instead to "break the heavy work and their yoke". It is in view of this significant variation that Foster wrote that this initial episode of the myth became "increasingly violent" in the development of the story through the centuries.²² It can now be said that the change in tenor took place at least as early as the Middle Babylonian period. Possible further evidence of this violent development of the episode is the suggested use of the adverb *dapniš* at the beginning of MM 818 rev. 8. As already observed, the line of the SB text in MS J from Kuyunjik (K 10082:2) corresponds to the MB version. As a matter of fact, what is preserved in this fragmentary SB source follows closely the MB text.²³ Another deviation from the OB recension that agrees with the wording of the first-millennium standard edition is the apposition in apparent syntactic disorder describing the god who led the rebellion, or the dropping out of the repeated couplets OB I 43-46. But not all the MB editorial changes attested in MM 818 were accepted in the SB recension. So, for example, the different word order in line OB // SB I 42, or the omission of some parts of sentences (if they are not scribal mistakes), such as the apposition "his brothers" in the very latter line, or the complement "in the ditch" in OB // SB I 40. The same holds true for the first and last two lines preserved in MM 818, which do not correspond wordly either to the old or to the late recension, and the couplet in obv. 5'-6', omitted in both recensions.

As mentioned above, the MB text of the excerpt VAT 17099 (MS y) is so far preserved in two later copies inscribed with the SB recension, the Sippar manuscript and MS x from Babylon. Although the SB text (SB V 53-63) runs close to the MB version, there are two important differences between them: one is line 10 in VAT 17099 which is missing from the later edition, and the other is the significant substitution of Enlil as the god who guards the middle-earth (very probably following the OB representation) by Sin and Nergal.

21. A score transliteration of these lines in the different sources was laid out in the *editio princeps* of the Montserrat tablet, *AuOr* 17-18, pp. 169-171. Note, however, the different readings and suggestions presented here from the collation of the Babylon Photos and the tablet itself.

22. See *Before the Muses*, p. 231 n. 2.

23. One could therefore suggest that the vertical wedge immediately following the break in K 10082:5 is the end of the sign *giš* prefixed to the noun *guzalā* written logographically.