

Two British Museum Fragments, Possibly of a Royal Decree

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The inscription published here is preserved on two fragments of a stone amulet found near the Ištar Kadmuri temple at Nimrud by Hormuzd Rassam and now in the British Museum. Although the text is fragmentary and its content puzzling, it is clearly not a royal inscription, as one would expect on stone. The inscription is published courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. For their generous co-operation the authors wish to thank the museum's staff and in particular Dr Edmond Sollberger and Mr C.B.F. Walker.

Rm. 863 and 864 (copy below) are two non-joining fragments which seem certain to belong to a single limestone slab, inscribed on both faces. Rm. 863 is a piece from the lower part of the obverse and the top of the reverse, measuring ca. 31 × 7 cm; Rm. 864 must therefore come from the top of the obverse and the bottom of the reverse – it measures ca. 14 × 11 cm. Both fragments are about 6.8–7.5 cm in thickness, swelling towards the centre. Unfortunately there is no way of telling how much of the slab is missing between the two pieces, but it is clear from the curvature of the surface and from the text itself that little is missing from the right edge of Rm. 863; the estimated position of the original edge is indicated on the copy.

On the top edge of the slab (i.e. on Rm. 864), there remains a trace of a projection, which must have resembled those familiar from stone amulets designed for suspension (cf. Reiner, JNES 19 [1960], pp. 148–55), as well as from a few other clay items, e.g. the Khorsabad King List (Gelb, JNES 13 [1954], pp. 209–30 and pls. XIV–XV) and the Nimrud hemerology (Hulin, Iraq 21 [1959], pp. 42–53 and pls. XIV–XV). There is no sign of a perforation through the projection, however.

The text is written in lapidary script (e.g. the form of *lu*, cf. Grayson, *Iranica Antiqua* 11 [1976], p. 32), as one would expect, and in Assyrian dialect (*mugirru*, *ma-a*, *ibattuqu*, *lu tuhalliq*, and subjunctive in *-ni*), albeit with the non-colloquial *šuat*. Although it is obviously of Neo-Assyrian date, we cannot define any criteria which would enable us to date it more precisely.

Obverse Rm. 864

- 1) [... ..] PA X [...]
- 2) [... ..]'a⁷-na^mŠEŠ.GAL-A-[X (X X)]-X-A
- 3) [... ..] L]Ú.X.DU *lu-ú* LÚ.A.X
- 4) [... ..] *lu-ú* DUMU.MEŠ
- 5) [... ..] *lu-ú* LÚ.NAGAR *mu-gir-ri*
- 6) [... ..] L]Ú.ĤAL *lu* LÚ.MAŠ.MAŠ *lu* LÚ.A.⁷ZU⁷
- 7) [... ..] *lu* LÚ.SIMUG AN.BAR *lu* LÚ.[X X]

Lacuna

Obverse Rm. 863

- 1') *lu* GAL LÚ.A.⁷ZU *lu* GAL LÚ⁷.NAR *lu* [X X X X]
- 2') *šá* UGU LÚ.um-*ma-ni* KUR.aš-šur-*a-a* LÚ.e-*r*[*ib-te*]
- 3') LÚ.a-*lik il-ki* *ṭé-e-mi-šu-nu a-n*[*a* X X X]
- 4') *ú-ta-ru-ni ma-a* LÚ.um-*ma-nu šá qa*-[X X X X]
- 5') *⁷MAŠ-ez-zi-iš *lik-kil-mu-šú* ⁷ŠKUR[X X X X]

Reverse Rm. 863

- 6') [*in*]a *bir-qi-šú liš-ši-šú* ⁷NIN-É.GAL *kib-s*[*i-šu u*]
 - 7') *ta-lak-tu-šu* TA* É(*).GAL *lu tu-ḥal-li-iq*[-šú⁷ (X X)]
 - 8') EME-šú *i-bat-tu-qu a-na* EGIR UD-*me a-na* UD *ša-a*-[*ti*]e]
 - 9') *ina šá* LÚ.um-*ma-ni* KUR.aš-šur-*a-a* LÚ.e-*rib-te* LÚ.a-[...]]
 - 10') *šu-a-tu* X [X X X X X]X-*pa-ra pa-nu-šu ni*-[X]
- Lacuna

Reverse Rm. 864

- 1') [] *lu ni* []
 - 2') [] EN(?) ⁷LÚ⁷GAR *šú*(?) []
- (remainder uninscribed)

1–7)] to Nergal-aplu-[.....] ... whether] a ... -man, or a scribe(?), [or] or sons of [...], or] or a chariot-carpenter, [or], or a diviner, or an omen-reader, or a doctor, [or], or an iron-smith, or a [.....]

Lacuna

1'–10') or the chief doctor, or the chief temple-singer, or [.....], who makes a report about an Assyrian master-craftsman, a member of the temple personnel(?), who performs *ilku*-service, saying: 'The master-craftsman who ... [.....]' – may [Ashur and] Ninurta look angrily upon him, may Adad take away [his sight(?)] from him with his thunderbolt, may Belat-Ekalli destroy his paths and ways from the palace [(...)]. They shall cut out his tongue for eternity and forever, and ... that Assyrian master-craftsman, a member of the temple-personnel(?), Lacuna

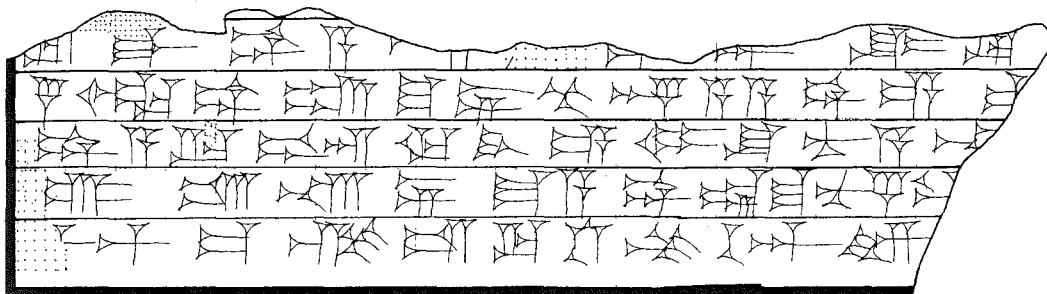
Commentary

Rm. 864

1) It would be tempting to read *UGULA-l[um]*, but the traces do not entirely support the idea.

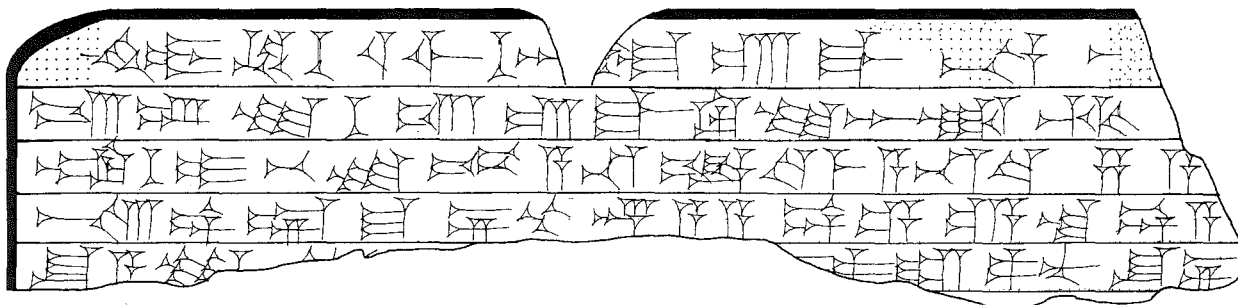
3) L]Ú.X.DU: The x is a problem. It lacks an upper horizontal needed for LAGAB. Postgate believes there may have been horizontals before it, now eroded, in which case one might read LÚ.SAR.DU (i.e. KEŠDA.DU),

Rm. 863
Obverse



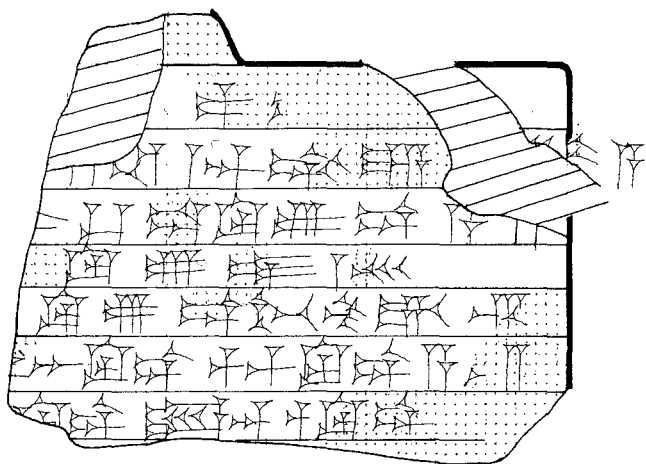
estimated
position
of right
edge

Rm. 863
Reverse

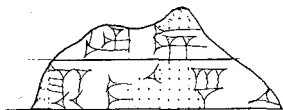


estimated
position
of right
edge

Rm. 864
Obverse



Rm. 864
Reverse



Remainder unscripted

conceivably a writing for *rakāsu*, e.g. *raksu*. But Grayson believes there is little evidence of anything missing.

4) There may be traces of a sign missing at the end of the line (‘ni’ or ‘LUGAL’?).

Rm. 863

2’) *ummānu* in Neo-Assyrian generally means a scribe, but it could still keep the meaning of craftsman; it is not clear which is right here. We translate as a singular, despite *-šunu* in l. 3’ and *ina libbi* in l. 9’ because the plural should be *ummānāte*. Until we know the precise meaning of *ummānu*, we cannot translate *Aššurāyu* precisely, since ‘an Assyrian scribe’ can mean a scribe who writes in cuneiform rather than Aramaic. *LÚ.e-rib-te* (restored after l. 9’) is apparently unknown. Our translation assumes a contraction of *ērib-bīte* ‘enterer of the temple,’ but this cannot be considered certain. It is equally uncertain whether the three designations (*ummānu*, *ēribte*, and *ālik-ilki*) are meant to apply to a single individual or not: we assume they are, because of the simple mention of *ummānu* in l. 4’.

3’) Although the person making the report should certainly be singular, as appears clearly from ll. 5’–8’, we prefer to take the *-šunu* here as referring to those officials or professionals listed above as possibly making the report. Otherwise the plural must be the recipient of the report, presumably named in the break at the end of l. 3’.

4’) The complete content of the report which is envisaged, and against which the entire inscription seems to have been composed, has to have been compressed into the end of l. 4’, and it is unfortunate that we cannot convincingly restore the end of the line. A sole, very tentative, suggestion: *ummānu ša qanni ēkalli šū* ‘He is a craftsman from the palace quarter,’ or *ša qa-[at]?*

5’) *likkilmūšu* is plural and therefore a DN must be restored at the end of 4’.

7’) É(*)*.GAL*: the scribe has mistakenly *LÍL.GAL*.

9’) Without the verb in this sentence, it is hard to suggest the precise meaning of *ina libbi*. The easiest translation is ‘from among,’ but this is difficult because it seems to be a singular which follows; otherwise *ina libbi* tends to mean ‘by means of’ – which is conceivable, but slightly odd. At the end one expects ^{lú}*a-[lik-ilki]* but there is not enough room unless it was written on the edge.

Conclusion

The text is now so mutilated that it is impossible to reconstruct its function with any confidence. However, we suggest the following. A high authority, quite likely the king, guarantees to Nergal-aplu- . . . (l. 2) that officials and employees of the palace (l. 7’) will not be allowed to interfere in his establishment by claiming that his employees are in fact due to work for the palace. These employees are Assyrians, craftsmen, performing *ilku* services, and, if we are right, classed as persons entitled to ‘enter the temple.’ It is therefore likely that Nergal-aplu- . . . was a temple official, probably *šangû*, and dare we suggest that he was priest of the Istar Kadmuri Temple? As for the presence of craftsmen performing *ilku* services for a temple, the only clear instance seems to be Johns, ADD 1, no. 640 (cf. Postgate, Taxation p. 78, l. 32 and p. 89 for comment). Nevertheless, it is entirely plausible that a king could make out a document of this kind protecting a temple from possible claims on it by the secular authorities, and this seems the most probable reconstruction at present. Thus it appears to be a kind of royal decree. Two other Assyrian royal decrees on stone are known: one of Adad-narari III published by Thompson, AAA 20 (1933), pp. 113–15 and pls. XCVIII–C, and Reade and Walker, AfO 28 (1981–2), pp. 117f. (cf. Postgate, Royal Grants pp. 115–17, and *Orientalia* n.s. 42, p. 444); the other known only from a fragment published by Dalley, Iraq 28 (1976), pp. 107–11.