

Šalim-aḫum Revisited

WALTER T. FARBER
The Oriental Institute, Chicago

Three years ago, A.K. Grayson re-edited the only original record of the Old Assyrian ruler Šalim-aḫum,¹ first made known by W. Andrae in 1910,² and subsequently edited by B. Meissner in 1926.³ The cuneiform text of the inscription, however, remains unpublished to this date. As stated by Grayson, the stone block VA 8835 (= Ass 17186) could no longer be located in Berlin, and he thus had to base his rendering of the text directly on Meissner's work. Seemingly, he also did not have access to a photo of the object, although he repeated the number of the negative (Ass ph 5105) from Meissner's edition.

By a lucky coincidence, some time ago I discovered, in a second-hand copy of *IAK*, an original print of what seems to be the excavation photo which, however, does not bear any number. Dr. Liane Jakob-Rost, Director of the Vorderasiatisches Museum zu Berlin, informs me that the negative Ass 5105 is on file in the museum, but I cannot verify at this time if the print was actually made from it. She also very graciously allowed me to publish this photo before returning it to the museum's archives.

Most of the problems Meissner could not solve in 1926 remain obscure to me even with a photo of the original text finally at hand. The most unusual characteristic of the piece is the direction of the script. As noted already by Andrae, the one-column inscription is in mirror writing, i.e., all characters are mirrored left to right, and, if the inscription is held vertically, the signs within the individual cases run from right to left, with the base line at the bottom; if viewed horizontally (which is probably more appropriate for the period), the cases go from left to right, but the text inside each case points downwards, and the base line is to the right. Very few cases of similarly 'misarranged' cuneiform inscriptions are known.⁴ Mirror writing is, however, com-

mon with cylinder seals and other objects which are supposed to be read from an impression, as for instance brick stamps. Could it be that our text was copied faithfully from such a mold by an ancient stone mason who did not know very much about writing, as would also be indicated by the crude sign forms of the text? Stamped bricks are well attested for Irīšum, Šalim-aḫum's grandson,⁵ although until now no examples predating his reign have been unearthed in Aššur; but it is safe to assume that the technique was well known in Šalim-aḫum's time.

For the convenience of the reader, a new transliteration and translation of the text are offered here, in spite of the fact that only minor improvements on Meissner's and Grayson's editions could be made. A few remarks on single lines, signs, and readings follow.

TRANSLITERATION

- 1) *ša-lim-a-ḫu-um*
- 2) ÉNSI(!)
- 3) *a-šūr.KI*
- 4) DUMU *pù-zur^s-a-šūr*
- 5) ÉNSI
- 6) *a-šūr.K[I]*
- 7) *^da-š[ù]r*
- 8) É *i-ri-ís-sú-ma*
- 9) É BU.XX.MI
- 10) *a-na mu-ti-ma*
- 11) *i-pu-uš*
- 12) ù É(?) GAL
- 13) XX-NI(?)^d *da-ga(n)*
- 14) *šu-um-šu*
- 15) *i-sà-ri-šu LU(?) XX XX*
- 16) É *ḫu-bu-ri*
- 17) ù *a-bu-sí-šu*
- 18) *a-na ba-la-ti-(šu)*
- 19) ù *b[a]-la-aṭ*
- 20) «*q-[li-š]u*»

the alleged 'mirror writing' was due to an error in the original edition (see D.O. Edzard, *AfO* 24 p. 73). Another example where the order of the lines is reversed but the signs are written in the normal way is Ikūnum's inscription, *RIMA* 1 pp. 42f A.0.34.2.

⁵ See *RIMA* 1 pp. 23–25 A.0.33.3 and pp. 29–30 A.0.33.7.

¹ *RIMA* 1 p. 14 A.0.31.1.

² *MDOG* 44 p. 30.

³ *IAK* pp. 4–7 III 1.

⁴ Andrae referred to the two female statuettes with inscriptions by Gudea (de Sarzec, *Découvertes* pl. 22^{bis} nos. 2 and 3, 'Statuette A' and 'B' in A. Falkenstein's terms), which are partly inscribed in upside-down writing. Meissner's further reference to the rock inscription of Anubanini was, as we now know, incorrect, since



Figure 1: Photo of text

- 21) «q-[na] b[a-l]a-[ti]-šu»
 22) «ù b[a-l]a-[a]t»
 23) a-li-šu i[b(?)-ni(?)]
 24) a-na ^da-šur
 25) [...] (rest of inscription lost)

TRANSLATION

- 1-6) Šalim-aḫum is vice-regent of Aššur, the son of Puzur-Aššur, vice-regent of Aššur.
 7-11) God Aššur requested of him a 'house', and subsequently he (=Šalim-aḫum) built the ...-house (to last) forever.
 12-14) And (now), 'Palace ...-Dagan' is its name.
 15) Its shrine ...
 16-23) A house of beer vats and its storage area he bu[ilt(?)] for his own life and for the life of his city.
 24-25) For God Aššur [...]

COMMENTARY

2) The traces at the beginning do not resemble PA, and the final sign is GUR instead of SI (cf. the SI in line 5), but even so the reading énsi(PA[!].TE.SI[!]) seems unavoidable.

4) Here, the stone mason did not hesitate to continue his text beyond the frame of the case. Compare, however, line 13 where the final sign, GAN, is literally cut in half by the case line, and the overlapping portions have not been executed. In line 15, when running out of space within the case, the engraver seems to have started a sign outside but left it unfinished. In line 18, having no space left for the final -šu, he skipped the sign altogether,⁶ although in line 21, while mistakenly repeating line 18, he did write the -šu which thus cut through the limiting line.

6-7) The final signs, κ[ɪ] and š[ù]r, are badly damaged but safe to restore.

9) The sign between BU and MI (hardly LUM) defies identification. It looks somewhat like an UR with a protruding upper horizontal, but *bit *Burmi* makes no sense. LA looks decidedly different in lines 18ff, ṬU (as proposed by Meissner) is anachronistic,⁷ APIN and SU₄ might both be epigraphically conceivable but make no sense either. *Non liquet*.

12-14) Meissner read here *ékal šarri(?)* ^d*Da-gan ku-um-šu* which Grayson modernized to *É.GAL X⁸* ^d*Da-gan ku-um-šu*. GAL and ^d*Da-gan* are quite clear,

⁶ The same thing may have happened in line 16, where some scholars have argued that another -šu is missing at the end of the line (cf., however, van Driel, *Aššur* p. 33).

⁷ See already van Driel, loc. cit.

⁸ For a critique of Meissner's *šarrum*/LUGAL see again van Driel, loc. cit.

but *é* cannot be verified from the traces in the photo.⁹ In line 14, a reading *šu-um-šu* seems, on epigraphic grounds, equally possible, to replace the morphologically problematic construct form **kum-šu* 'its cella' generally posited for this passage only. The phrase can then be understood as 'Palace *x-Dagan* is its name'.¹⁰

15) The end of the line remains obscure; van Driel's suggestion (*Aššur* p. 33) to look here for a verb 'he built' is clearly excluded.

18) Cf. above, comments to line 4.

20ff) Meissner's statement that lines 21-23 were erased, and the text continued from line 20 directly to line 24, is not quite correct. The rather clumsy erasure actually affects lines 20-22 and spills over into line 23, which, however, obviously was meant to stay in the text as the direct continuation of line 19. For the -šu at the end of line 21, see above, comments to line 4.

23) Instead of Meissner's and Grayson's -*m[a]*, which would hardly fill the available space, the traces in the photo support a reading i[B] followed by sufficient space for another short sign. A restoration i[b-ni] thus seems possible, although no exact parallels to our phrase using **bnī* are known to date. Note, however, that the use of **bnī* instead of, or parallel to, its synonym **pš* is well attested from Šamši-Adad I onwards (*RIMA* 1 p. 49 A.0.39.1 line 36, p. 61 A.0.39.9 line 5, etc.).

⁹ ΚÁ.GAL = *abullum* thus might be an alternative reading here. Note that our passage, if É.GAL is taken as a word for 'temple', has no parallels (see B. Menzel, *Tempel* 1 p. 51). A connection to a 'palace' is, however, difficult in the given context, in spite of the relevant remarks by Menzel.

¹⁰ Or 'The palace, *x-Dagan* is its name.' The sign(s) preceding ^d*Da-gan* still defy interpretation. The strange cluster of wedges seems to end in a NI (or DÜ), but it is impossible even to say if it represents one long sign, or a group of shorter graphemes. Could it be conceivable, given the ambiguity in the preceding line, to interpret them as a completely misshapen U₈ (with the initial portion of the sign mistakenly turned by 90°?), followed by -ni, and to view this as a unique, and garbled, writing of (*abul*) *šēni*?