

# A Text of Shalmaneser III on an Amulet-shaped Stone

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A fragment of stone in the British Museum is the remains of a tablet in the shape of an 'amulet' and it contains a dedication to Ninurta of Calah followed by a narrative of military activity of Shalmaneser III. The form of the object suggests that it was on display in the Ninurta temple at Calah, possibly to celebrate the end of a campaign from which the king brought back cedar beams from the Amanus range to decorate the holy shrine. Unfortunately most of the stone and its inscription are missing and much is left to speculation.

Tablets of clay, stone, and even bronze with an 'amulet shape' are known in ancient Mesopotamia and, while some have inscriptions indicating that they were actually used as amulets, others do not. Among those which were real amulets are a group known as 'house blessings', the most famous being some copies of the *Erra Epic*.<sup>1</sup> These tablets have a tab-like protrusion at the top with a horizontal hole through which a cord could be passed in order to hang up the tablet in the house.

But tablets with this shape were not always used as amulets and the similarity in shape is really coincidental. Some examples of amulet-shaped tablets which were not amulets are copies of the Assyrian King List, a hemerology, a commemorative inscription of Aššur-uballiṭ I, and now the present text.<sup>2</sup> These, like the real amulets, were intended to be suspended in various structures, but not as amulets. The copies of the king list and hemerology were obviously hung up for easy reference. The Aššur-uballiṭ I text and our text were hung up so that they might be read easily. Our text was presumably hung up somewhere in the Ninurta temple at Calah.

A further indication that it was meant for display is the fact that it turns like the page of a

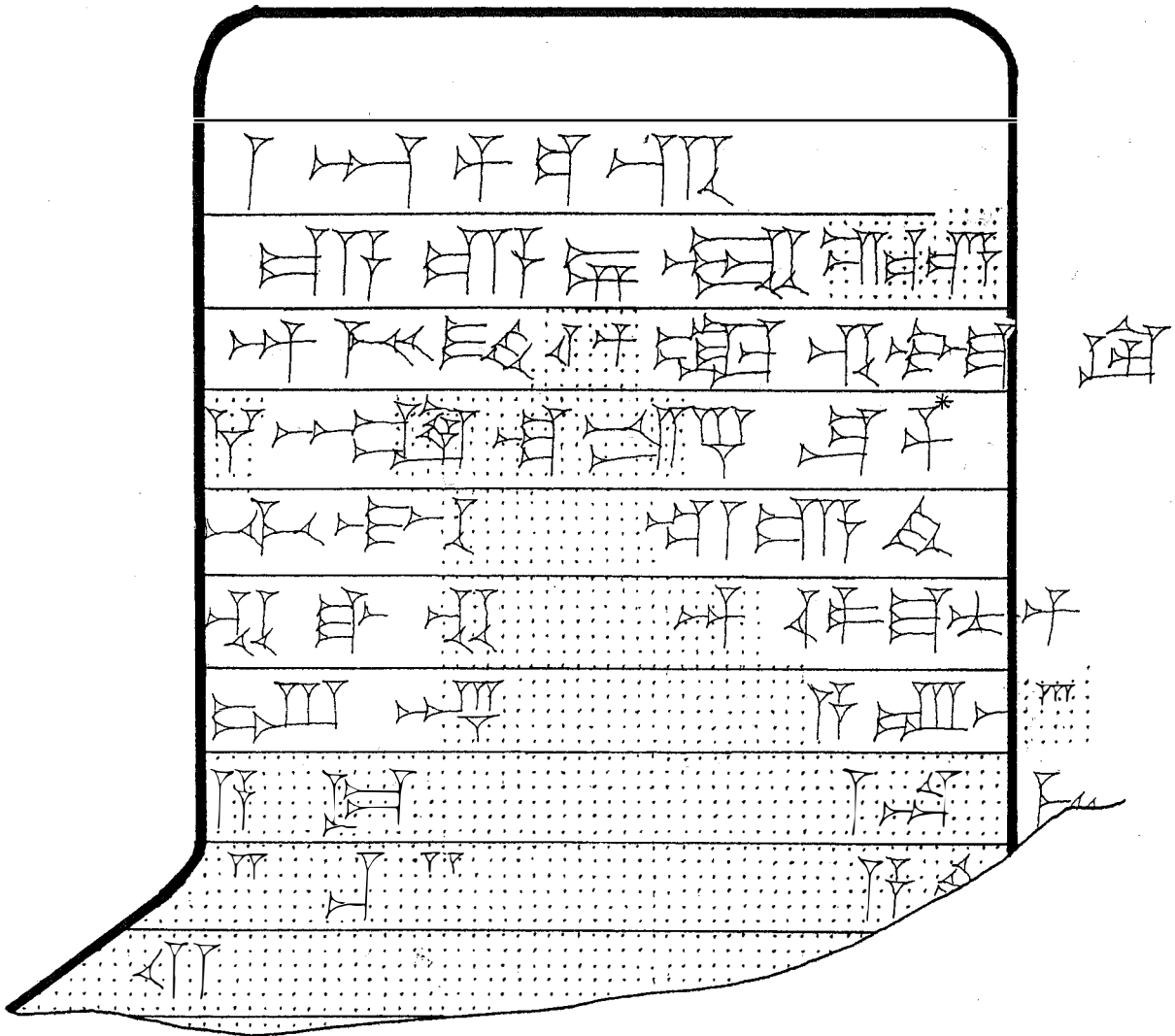
book. To read most cuneiform tablets, one must flip them from the bottom in order to read the reverse; but this stone tablet simply turns on its axis. The same is true of the copies of Esarhaddon's 'Vassal Treaties', as Watanabe has observed (*Acta Sumerologica* 10 [1988] pp. 265–66). This seems to represent a practical advance for, when a tablet is on display, it is easier to turn it this way than to flip it up in order to read the other side. This is especially the case when the tablets are large, as in the case of the treaties, or of heavy stone, as with the present object.

Only the tab of the Shalmaneser III tablet, with a hole drilled horizontally through the middle, is preserved; just the beginning of the curvature for the 'shoulders' is extant (see the copy). Thus what we have is the beginning of the text in the obverse and roughly the middle on the reverse. The text opens with a dedication to the god Ninurta and this is almost an exact duplicate of the dedication of the so-called annals of Ashurnasirpal II which were found in the Ninurta temple at Calah (*RIMA* 2 pp. 193–94 and cf. p. 355). This is followed by the royal name, title, and genealogy. Thereafter the obverse is illegible and then totally missing. When the text is again preserved, on the reverse, we are in the midst of a military narrative which may be of the eleventh campaign (848 BC). This preserved portion ends with a description of climbing Mount Amanus, presumably to cut down building timber. Perhaps the text continued with details of bringing these beams back for construction of the Ninurta temple. Alternatively, it may have gone on to further campaign reports. In any event, the inscription probably dates to 848 BC or later. I have been unable to find a join for this stone tablet among the known texts of Shalmaneser III.

The tablet fragment is in the British Museum (BM 104410 = 55–12–5,460) and is published with the permission of its Trustees. I am grateful to Christopher Walker for drawing my attention to it and to the staff of the Department of Western

<sup>1</sup> See Reiner, *JNES* 19 (1960) pp. 148–55.

<sup>2</sup> Besides the article by Reiner see also Weidner, *AFO* 14 (1941–44) p. 363 n. 7, who refers to various unpublished tablets of this type from Aššur. The Aššur-uballiṭ I text is copied as *KAH* 2 no. 27 and most recently edited in *RIMA* 1 pp. 109–10.



BM 104410, Obverse

Asiatic Antiquities, particularly Terence Mitchell and John Curtis, for allowing me every facility to study the inscription. The fragment measures c. 7×9 cm.

### TRANSLITERATION

Obverse:

- 1) *ana* <sup>d</sup>MAŠ *geš-ri*
- 2) *dan-dan-ni* MAḪ SAG.KAL
- 3) DINGIR.MEŠ *qar-Γdi<sup>1</sup> šar-ḫu gít-ma-lu*
- 4) Γšá<sup>1</sup> *ina* MÈ *la iš-šá-na-nu*(\*)
- 5) *ti-bu-šú* [*a-šib*] URU *kal-ḫi*
- 6) EN GAL EN-[*ia* <sup>m</sup>] <sup>d</sup>šul-*ma-nu*-MAŠ
- 7) ŠID *aš-šur* [*apil aššur-nāšir*]-A ŠID *aš-Γšur<sup>1</sup>*
- 8) A *tukul-[ti-ninurta ...]* X X [X].MEŠ
- 9) X X X [...] A X
- 10) X [...]

Lacuna

Reverse:

- 1) [BAD<sub>5</sub>].BAD<sub>5</sub>-šú-[*nu áš*]-*ku*[*n*]
- 2) GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ-šú-*nu*
- 3) *pit-ḫal-la-šú-nu*
- 4) *e-kim-šú-nu*
- 5) *ina ta-ia-ar-ti-ia*
- 6) *a-na* KUR-*e* KUR *ḫa-ma-n*[*i*]
- 7) *e-l*[*i* X].MEŠ(?) X X X
- 8) X X [...] X
- 9) X X [...] X
- 10) KUR X [...] X X

Lacuna

### TRANSLATION

Obv. 1–6a) To the god Ninurta, the strong, the almighty, the exalted, foremost among the gods, the splendid (and) perfect warrior whose attack in battle is unequalled, [who resides in] Calah, the great lord, [my] lord:

Obv. 6b–8a) Shalmaneser, vice-regent of Aššur, [son of Ashurnasir]pal (II), vice-regent of Aššur, son of Tukul[ti-Ninurta] (II) (*who was*) *also vice-regent of Aššur*]:

8b–10) No translation.

Lacuna

Rev. 1–10) [I] brought about their defeat (and) deprived them of their chariots (and) cavalry. Upon my return I ascended Mount Amanus [...] ... [...] ...

Lacuna

### COMMENTARY

**Obv. 4:** The *-nu* at the end of the line looks more like PAP (or even MAŠ). Also note that the shape of the *-na-*, immediately preceding, is different from the shape of the same sign in rev. 6.

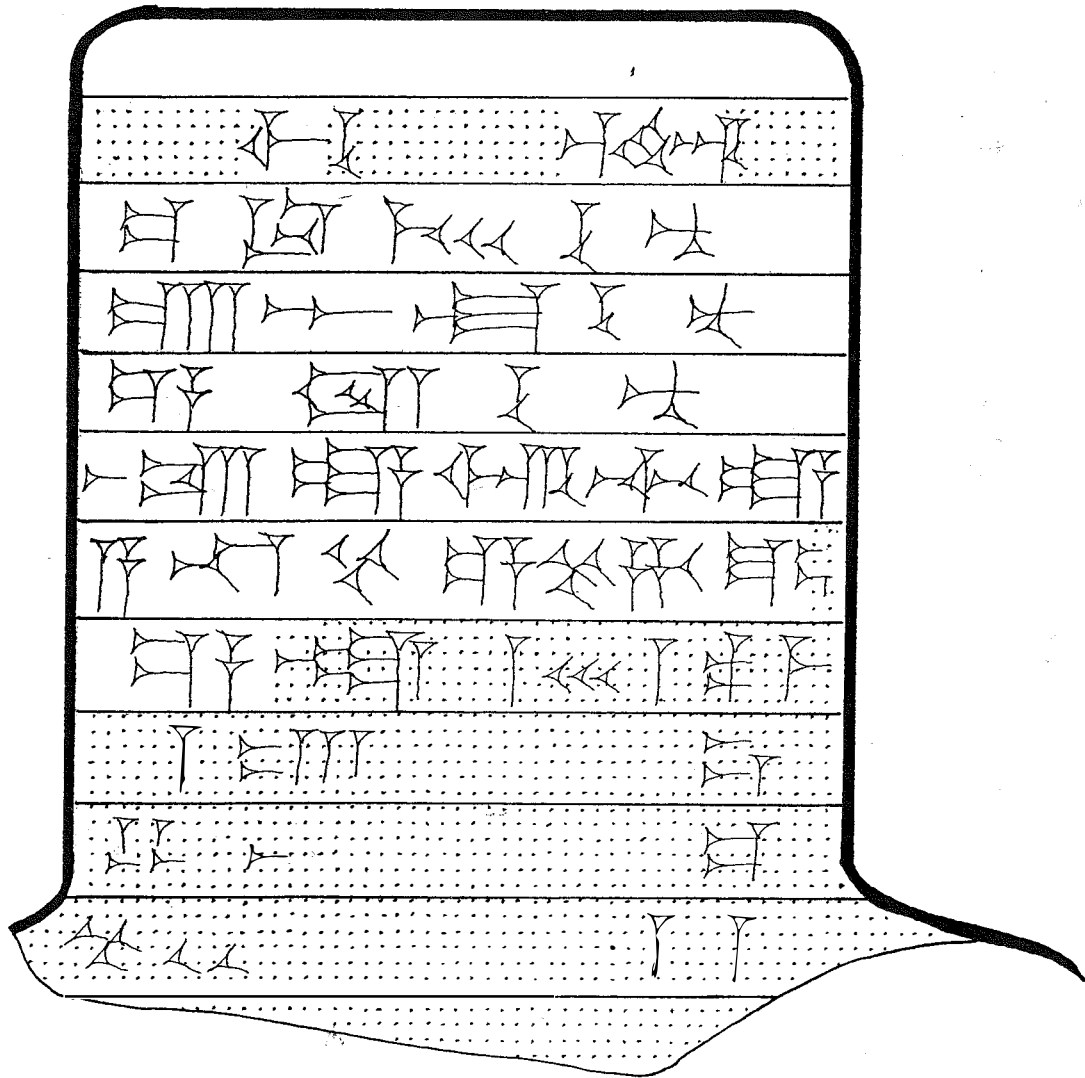
**Obv. 5b:** [*a-šib*]: for the restoration see *RIMA* 2 p. 194 i 9.

**Obv. 8b–10:** Since it is unknown how this text continued and the traces are very scanty, any restoration would be highly hypothetical. If it continued as a dedication, then one might restore on analogy with either the long formula (*Iraq* 24 [1962] p. 94 lines 34–36; *Sumer* 26 [1970] pp. 133–36 lines 5–7; etc.) or the short formula (*YOS* 9 no. 75 and *Iraq* 44 [1982] pp. 88–94). But it is equally possible that some other theme, such as military narrative, appeared here.

**Rev. 1–10:** There were several campaigns upon which the king ascended (*ēli*) the Amanus range (1, 11, 17, 19, and 26), and even more during which he crossed (*atabalkat*) over the Amanus, but the narrative most similar to that found here is in the eleventh year (848 BC) as described in Cameron, *Sumer* 6 (1950) pp. 6–26 and pls. I–III iii 7–15:

BAD<sub>5</sub>.BAD<sub>5</sub>-šú-*nu áš-ku-un* ... GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ-šú-*nu pit-ḫal-la-šú-nu* ... *e-kim-šú-nu ina ta-ia-ar-ti-ia* ... *a-na* KUR-*e* KUR *ḫa-ma-a-ni e-li*

This same text continues with a description of cutting down cedar beams; the scant traces in our text do not exactly match that passage although it may have continued with a variant version of the same event.



BM 104410, Reverse