

Epic of Gilgamesh, Prelude

(Source Sandars 1964: 59)

In the beginning, after the great creator deity, Enlil, had separated earth from heaven and fashioned plants and animals and humans, he benevolently ruled the world, from the Tigris in the East to the Euphrates in the West, from his throne in the splendid temple at Nippur. Enlil then appointed a god of wisdom, Enki, to superintend the great land for Sumer through which gold and silver were to flow in ships to his temples at Nippur. Great, too were the deeds of Enki and many also were his gifts to man, for he taught agriculture and herding, and built granaries and filled them with grains and fruits. He also moulded square bricks from the clay of the rivers and taught craftsmen how to construct walls and lofty cities adorned with precious cedar wood and lapis lazuli.

The greatest city of Sumer was Uruk, long famed for the deeds of its great king, Gilgamesh, mighty hunter of lions and wild bulls, peerless wrestler, and dauntless leader in war. "When the gods created Gilgamesh they gave him a perfect body. Shamash, the glorious sun endowed him with beauty, Adad the god of the storm endowed him with courage, the great gods made his beauty perfect, surpassing all others. Two thirds they made him a god and one third man. In Uruk he built walls, a great rampart, and the temple of blessed Eanna for the god of the firmament, Anu, and for Ishtar the goddess of love. Look at it still today: the outer wall where the cornice runs, it shines with the brilliance of copper; and the inner wall it has no equal...

Letters from Old Babylonia

Letter 1: (Oppenheim 1967: 84-5.)

Tell the Lady Zinû: Iddin-Sin sends the following message:

May the gods Šamaš, Marduk, and Ilabrat keep you forever in good health for my sake.

From year to year, the clothes of the (young) gentlemen here become better, but you let my clothes get worse from year to year. Indeed, you persisted(?) in making my clothes poorer and more scanty. At a time when in our house wool is used up like bread, you have made me poor clothes. The son of Adad-iddinam, whose father is only an assistant of my father, (has) two new sets of clothes while you fuss even about a single set of clothes for me. In spite of the fact that you bore me and his mother only adopted him, his mother loves him, while you, you do not love me.

Letter 2: (Oppenheim 1967, 87).

Tell Uzālum: Your son Adad-Abum sends the following message:

May the gods Šamaš and Wēr keep you forever in good health.

I have never before written to you for something precious I wanted. But if you want to be like a father to me, get me a fine string full of beads, to be worn around the head. Seal it with your seal and give it to the carrier of this tablet so that he can bring it to me. If you have none at hand, dig it out of the ground where (such objects) are (found) and send it to me. I want it very much; do not withhold it from me. In this I will see whether you love me as a real father does. Of course, establish its price for me, write it down, and send me the tablet. The young man who is coming to you must not see the string of beads. Seal it (in a package) and give it to him. He must not see the string, the one to be worn around the head, which you are sending. It should be full (of beads) and should be beautiful. If I see it and dislike(?) it, I shall send it back!

Also, send the cloak, of which I spoke to you.

EA 34: The hand of Nergal (Amarna letter)

(Moran 1992: 107-08)

1-8 Say to the King of Egypt, my brother: [message] of the King of Alašiya, your brother. For me all goes well. For my household, my wives, my sons, my magnates, my horses, my chariots, and in my country, all goes very well. For my brother

6-9 may all go well. For your household, your wives, your sons, your magnates, your horses, your chariots, and in your country, may all go very well. My brother, I herewith send my messenger with your messenger to Egypt.

10-15 I herewith send you 500 (talents) of copper to you. As my brother's greeting gift I send it to you. My brother, do not be concerned that the amount of copper is small. Behold the hand of Nergal is now in my country; he has slain all the men of my country, and there is not a (single) copper-worker. So, my brother do not be concerned.

16-18 Send your messenger with my messenger immediately, and I will send you whatever copper you, my brother request.

19-22 You are my brother. May he send me silver in very great quantities. My brother, give me the very best silver, and then I will send you, my brother, whatever you, my brother, request.

23-26 Moreover, my brother, give me the ox that my messenger requests, my brother, and send me, my brother, 2 *kukkubu*-containers of "sweet oil", my brother, and send me one of the experts in vulture-augury.

27-29 Moreover, my brother, men of my country keep speaking with me about my timber that the king of Egypt receives from me. So, my brother, give me the payment due.

30-34 Moreover, here is the situation: a man from Alašiya has died in Egypt, and [his] things are in your country, though his son and wife are with me. So, my brother, look to the things of the Alašiya people and hand them over, my brother, to the charge of my messenger.

35-39 My brother, do not be concerned that your messenger has stayed 3 years in my country, for the hand of Nergal is in my country and in my own house. There was a young wife of mine that now, my brother, is dead.

40-42 Send your messenger immediately along with my messenger, with safe passage, and then I will send my brother's greeting gift to you.

43-48 Moreover, may my brother send to me in very great quantities the silver that I have asked you for. Send, my brother, the things that I have asked you for. My brother should do quite everything, and then whatever things you say I will do.

49-53 You have not been put (on the same level) with the King of Hatti or the King of Šanhar. Whatever greeting gift he (my brother) sends me, I for my part send back to you double.

54-55 May your messenger come to me as of old, and may my messenger go to as of old.

Glossary

- Alašiya: ancient Cyprus
- *kukkubu*: a small container (Akkadian)
- Nergal: (southern) Mesopotamian god of death, pestilence and plague, and Lord of the Underworld
- Šanhar = country in northern Syria

Akkadian text: notice of tribute to be paid to Hatti by Ugarit;

Coogan 2013: 94-5, text 440

Thus says His Majesty, Suppiluliuma, Great King, King of Hatti, Hero:

When all the kings of the land of Nuhashshi and the kings of the land of Murkish were hostile to His Majesty, Great King, their lord, Niqmaddu, king of the land of Ugarit, was at peace with His Majesty, Great king, his lord, and not hostile. Then the kings of the land of Nuhashshi and the kings of the land of Murkish oppressed Niqmaddu, king of the land of Ugarit, saying: "Why are you not hostile to His Majesty along with us?". But Niqmaddu did not agree upon hostilities against His Majesty, Great King, his lord, and His Majesty, Great King, witnessed the loyalty of Niqmaddu. Now Suppiluliuma, Great King, King of Hatti, has thus made a treaty for Niqmaddu, king of the land of Ugarit: Your tribute for His Majesty, Great King, your lord, is as follows:

12 minas and 20 shekels of gold and one golden cup one mina in weight as the primary portion of the tribute; four linen garments, one large linen garment, 500 shekels of blue-purple wool, and 500 shekels of red-purple wool for His Majesty, Great King, your lord.

One golden cup 30 shekels in weight, one linen garment, 100 shekels of blue-purple wool, 100 shekels of red-purple wool for the Queen.

One golden cup 30 shekels in weight, one linen garment, 100 shekels of blue-purple wool, 100 shekels of red-purple wool for the crown prince.

One golden cup 30 shekels in weight, one linen garment, 100 shekels of blue-purple wool, 100 shekels of red-purple wool for the chief scribe.

One golden cup 30 shekels in weight, one linen garment, 100 shekels of blue-purple wool, 100 shekels of red-purple wool for the *huburtanuri*.

And the same for the second *huburtanuri*.

One linen garment, 100 shekels of blue-purple wool, 100 shekels of red-purple wool for the vizier.

One golden cup, one linen garment, 100 shekels of blue-purple wool, 100 shekels of red-purple wool for the *andubsalli*.

There is no one else to pay among the noblemen in the entourage of His majesty, Great King, his lord. On the day when Niqmaddu brings his tribute, Niqmaddu shall not be obligated for any other gift.

And His Majesty, Great King, witnessed the loyalty of Niqmaddu, when he himself came and threw himself at the feet of His Majesty, Great King, his lord. And His Majesty, Great King, his lord, thus gave him this treaty. The Thousand Gods beginning with the Sun God of Heaven, the Sun Goddess of Arinna, the Storm God of Heaven, and the Storm God of Hatti

shall be aware of the words written on this tablet. They will punish whoever alters the words of this tablet.

Glossary

Huburtanuri: a high royal official.

mina: unit of weight (silver/gold) divided into 50 shekels

Nuhashshi: MB and LB region in north Syria, east of the Orontes (variously controlled by Egyptians, Mitanni, Hittites).

shekel: unit of weight (silver/gold) ca.10g

