

Gone with the Wind?

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In this note I discuss an interesting verb form attested in a letter of Yarim-Lim, king of Yamhad.¹ According to the common opinion, the letter was written during the reign of Zimri-Lim (Charpin–Durand 1985: 310, following previous scholarship, date the death of Yarim-Lim to the year ZL 9’).

Syria 33, 65:14–18 reads as follows:

14b. *šum-ma la* D.IM

15. *u₃ Ia-ri-im-li-im*

16. *a-lam Di-ir.KI iš-tu MU.15.KAM na-ši-ip-ta-ma-an*

17. *ki-ma pe₂-e-em u₂-la-ma-an u₂-ta-šu*

18. *u₂-ul at-ta-ma-an ki-a-am te-pu-ša-an-ni*

What concerns us here is the grammatical interpretation of *na-ši-ip-ta-ma-an* in l. 16. I believe that the main thrust of these lines is ‘Had it not been for the help of Adad and Yarim-Lim, the city of Der² would have been lost fifteen years ago, and you could not treat me like this.’

In the literature, the sign string *na-ši-ip-ta* was related to a rare verb *našāpu* AHW. 758b *weg-*, *durchblasen*; CAD N₂ 56f. *to blow away, to winnow*.³ The translation of CAD sub voce, ‘GN *would have been winnowed* fifteen years ago, so that, like the chaff, no one would have been able to find it,’ is hardly tenable in its italicized part for a number of reasons: (1) the assumed subject, *a-lam*, is in the accusative; (2) *a-lam* is resumed by the masculine pronoun *-šu* in l. 17, so here this noun has to be masculine, as in the rest of Akkadian; (3) it is difficult to account for the deviant phonological shape of the assumed 3 fs Stative; (4) from this interpretation it would follow that the string *na-ši-ip-ta-ma-an* contains a ventive, yet in OB the ventive is not used with the 3 fs Stative.

¹ A.1314, *editio princeps* is Dossin 1956.

² Its ruler was Iašub-Yahad, the addressee of the letter.

³ AHW suggests the following Semitic cognates: ‘he., aram. *nšb/p* blasen, ar. *nsf* durchblasen.’

The difficulties of this interpretation are too grave to be surmounted by its defence in Charpin–Durand 1985:310 fn. 78: ‘1.16: *a*-LAM: toute une série de lettres de Mari atteste la graphie *a*-LAM pour *a*-LUM. *na-ši-ip-ta-ma-an* devrait donc être analysé *našip(a)tam-man*, ventif + permansif. Pour une traduction identique, cf. CAD N₂ 56.⁴ Une forme féminine se rapportant à *alum* n’est pas de l’usage de Mari. Il s’agit, sans doute, d’un ouest-sémitisme. Cf. à El Amarna, URU *rabîtu* (VAB 2 147, 62).⁵

J. Sasson devotes to this parsing a single word of dissent: ‘unlikely’ (Sasson 1985:252). On p. 243, he translates this passage as follows: ‘Were it not for Addu and Yarim-Lim, 15 years ago, the city of Dêr could have been windblown (matter?); as if it were chaff, one would never have found it,’ i.e. he cautiously accepts the interpretation of the string in question as a substantivized adjective, partly following an earlier CAD translation (A₂ 519b): ‘the city of Dêr would have been but windblown dust.’ Retroversion of Sasson’s rendering into OB would probably yield a form **našiptum-man* < ****našiptum-ma-man*, i.e. the nominative case would be required.⁶

Thus, as far as *na-ši-ip-ta-ma-an* goes, the approach of the *editio princeps* is nearer the mark: ‘... la ville de Dîr, depuis quinze ans, *tu aurais pu souffler sur elle...*’ (p. 66, italics added).⁷

Outside of lexical texts, *našāpu* G happens to be attested only in the Stative (according to the dictionaries, two more examples are known, in

⁴ Charpin–Durand 1985 translate the crucial clause as ‘La ville de Dêr, depuis quinze ans, aurait été vannée comme de la paille.’

⁵ This line of reasoning is reproduced in LAPO 16:395.

⁶ In AHW. 758b, von Soden comments on this form: ‘bildl. aB kan. St.’ He supplies neither parsing nor translation, however. In ZA 66 (1976) 293, von Soden notes correctly that the rendering of CAD A₂ 519b is ‘falsch, weil bei der Übersetzung der Nominativ *našiptum* zu erwarten wäre. Es muß eine Verbalform vorliegen, wie auch G. Dossin schon übersetzt hat.’

⁷ It is followed in Krebernik–Streck 2001:60: ‘... *hättest du* die Stadt Der seit 15 Jahren wie Spreu *weggeblasen...*’ They observe in fn. 53 ‘*naš(š)ipta-* statt *našpāta-*: der Brief stammt aus Aleppo!’ In spite of the parallels from Maqlû to be cited presently, I would suggest that the epistolary word order favours relating *kîma pêm* ‘like the chaff’ to the right (as in CAD A₂ and N₂): ‘So (now) I/nobody would be able to find it, like the chaff,’ though this suggestion cannot be proven beyond doubt. In the subject matter, the Aramaic text Dan 2:35 gives the same simile and a comparable wording: ‘<substances representing different kingdoms> were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that *not a trace of them could be found*’ (RSV).

jB and NA). Passive meaning of the corresponding N stem makes a basic active-transitive meaning of *našāpu* G quite plausible: cf. the examples from Maqlû cited in CAD N₂ 57b: [*li-in*]-*ne₂-eš-pu kišpīša kīma pē* ‘may her spells be blown away like chaff,’ *li-in-na-aš₂-pu kišpīša*.

In our document, the image of a king blowing his city away (by imprudent foreign policy?) looks perhaps more odd than that of a city blown away (by an enemy), yet everything seems to indicate that a clause ‘the city would have been blown away’ has to be rendered in Akkadian as *ālum innašīp/m_{pret}-man*, cf. e.g. *šumman lā D.UTU u D.AMAR.UTU I LU₂ ul-man iblut_{pret}* ‘Wenn nicht Šamaš und Marduk (gewesen wären), wäre nicht ein einziger Mann am Leben geblieben’ (AbB 5, 232:24f., cited in Kriebnik–Streck 2001:55).

Yet, in terms of semantic roles alone, an ‘active Stative’ would be acceptable in our letter, cf. another text found in Mari (cited with a commentary as ex. 41 in Loesov 2005:

[*a*]nāku-ma ka-ab-sà-ak-šu-nu-ti

‘It is I who will tread/is going to tread upon them’ (ARMT 10, 53:16 = ARMT 26/1, 195:16).

A major difficulty lies elsewhere. I believe (with CAD N₂ 57b) that *ištu* in l. 16 has the force of ‘ago’ and what the author means is ‘*našāpum* could have happened to the city 15 years ago.’ However, in our piece a past-time reference *for a Stative* looks problematic.

The vocable *ištu* as a preposition meaning ‘since’⁸ is known to be compatible with the Stative, cf. e.g. *še-e eqlim ša ištu MU.3.KAM šabtāku* ‘Die Gerste des Feldes, das ich *seit* drei Jahren in Besitz habe’ (AbB 4, 93:7f.), while *ištu* as the head of a prepositional phrase meaning ‘ago’ requires, to the best of my knowledge, a prefixing tense form with past-time reference, as in *ištu U₄.20.KAM ... aḫātka ... imūt_{pret}* ‘Your sister ... has died ... 20 days ago’ (AbB 1, 140:17–20, the Edition: ‘vor zwanzig Tagen’). In other words, the collocation ‘*ištu*-time adverbial + the Stative’ has to indicate that the situation in question fills the whole time span denoted by the respective temporal adverbial.

Thus, if our sign string does contain a Stative, *iš-tu MU.15.KAM na-ši-ip-ta-ma-an* cannot mean ‘you would/could have done *našāpu* 15 years ago,’ but rather means ‘(had it not been for Adad and Yarim-Lim,) ²you would

⁸ I.e. ‘in the intervening period between the time mentioned and the time under consideration’ (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*).

(have to) do the blowing away/the winnowing to the city for <the last> fifteen years,' an awkward and hardly gratifying sense.⁹

The grammatical difficulties discussed above will be resolved if we admit a bizarre possibility of *na-ši-ip-ta* being a stray WS 'Perfect'¹⁰ in the otherwise almost impeccably smooth OB text.¹¹ More precisely, *našipta* would be a hybrid form: the stem of the Akkadian suffix conjugation + 2 ms personal index of the WS suffix conjugation.¹² Whilst nothing certain is known about the WS 'new Perfect' in pre-Amarna times, the only thing that can be said about the semantics of the assumed WS *našipta* is that it would be a past-tense verb form.

This suggestion, if it is not implausible, will give a syntactically unproblematic reading: *šumma lā DN u KN ālam GN ištu MU.15.KAM našiptaman* 'If it had not been for DN and KN, you would have blown the city GN away 15 years ago.'

⁹ J.-M. Durand seems to be conscious of just this problem when he surreptitiously rearranges the order of Akkadian clauses in his last translation of the passage: 'N'eussent été Addu et Yarīm-Līm, la ville de Dêr eût été vannée, comme si elle n'était que paille. *Cela fait 15 ans qu'on ne la verrait plus* et tu n'aurais pu agir envers moi comme tu l'as fait!' (LAPO 16:394f., italics added).

¹⁰ Is this what von Soden's 'kan. St.' was meant to convey?

¹¹ If we disregard a couple of sign strings that are difficult to decode in terms of lexicon (this can happen in any Akkadian text), only two unusual features remain. (1) l.10 *ma-an-nu-um gi-mi-il-lum* apparently meaning 'what (is) the reward (for my help)?'; (2) ll. 27 ff.: *atma-kum ... šumma adi māt-ka u kâta uḫallaqu apattaru*_{subj} 'I swear to you (by Adad etc.): I shall not withdraw till I destroy your land and you!' I believe that *šumma*-oaths are extremely rare in the core OB. For OB, W. von Soden knows 'nur ein einziges Beispiel mit dem Ind. des Prt. im promiss. Eid' (GAG 293g) + GAG 293g* brings an example of the Perfect in a promissory *šumma*-oath. The verbs of the respective *šumma*-clauses have no subjunctive morpheme. *Contra* GAG 293h, *šumma*-oaths are not attested in OA (or at least they were unknown in 1968, cf. GKT 221 fn. 1). Thus, our *šumma* + Pres_{subj} oath might be unique in the whole of the first half II millennium BC Akkadian.

¹² Amarna tablets provide partial parallels. Cf. the following examples: (1) *a-WA-mi LU₂ ša a-lik iš-tu KUR.MEŠ Mi-iš-ri a-na ma-aḫ-<ri>-šu* 'Where is the man who has come to him from Egypt?' (EA 138.91f. as quoted and translated in CAT 2 301). In the vernacular Akkadian, *alik* could hardly mean 'he came/he has come,' so in this text it is used in the sense of the WS 'Perfect.' (2) *ERIN₂.MEŠ SA.GAZ.MEŠ u₃ GIGIR.MEŠ ša-ki-in₄ i-na lib₃-bi-<ši>* 'He placed 'apirû troops and chariotry in <its> midst' (EA 28.21f. as quoted and translated in CAT 2 303). In the vernacular Akkadian, *ša-ki-in* does not seem to be used as a transitive agentive stative *he (has) placed s. th.*

References

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