

A síró magzat: A torzszületésekkel foglalkozó mezopotámiai ómenek értelmezési lehetőségei

The Crying Foetus: On the Theory and Methods of Omen Interpretation in the Teratological Series of ancient Mesopotamia

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The Mesopotamian omen series *Šumma izbu*, also known as the – using a modern medical term – teratological compendium, an emblematic scientific handbook from the first-millennium B.C., dealing mainly with observations of malformed human and animal births, represented the one of the highest levels of science for the scholars of the Assyrian royal court, and was considered among the revelations of Ea, the god of wisdom. However, it can often seem a diffuse, haphazard set of incomprehensible, strange phenomena and even more confusing correlations in the eyes of the readers inexperienced in contemporary Mesopotamian science. This is particularly true for the first four tablets of the handbook, which previously formed a separate unit and is also known as the subseries *Šumma sinništu arâtma* (*If a woman is pregnant*), dealing with human births.

The present paper focuses on the opening section of the latter text, approximately 50 omens in the first tablet, listing real and possible „birth” material born of women. Both Assyriology and medical history have paid little attention so far to this initial section of the teratological series. Apart from the more or less successful identification of a few pathological cases, the passage was not considered suitable for or worthy of detailed analysis. Such opinions and attitudes were already largely inspired by the opening lines, which indeed seem slightly fairy tale-like, and give the impression that folkloristic „city-state legends” dominate the beginning of the compendium, rather than serious scientific observations. Namely, the first four lines of the initial tablet outline what it means for the future if the foetus of a pregnant woman cries (in various modes).

It is beyond doubt, that a crying foetus is a complete nonsense, and as such, a real prodigy, in the full sense of the word. In the light of this fact, and considering that the canonical *Šumma izbu* series, as already mentioned, occupied a prominent place among Mesopotamian scientific compendia, a few interesting and thought-provoking questions can be asked.

Why was very phenomenon of the crying foetus discussed in the beginning of the series in question, as a kind of introduction, through the first four lines of the initial tablet? How these introductory omens, and furthermore, their wider context, the many similar, seemingly impossible *protases* of the first, some half hundred omen entries of the first tablet can be associated with the essential scientific nature of this text?

The aim of this paper is, after reviewing the basic known and some more sophisticated possible methods of Mesopotamian omen interpretation, to shed light on the proper scientific

value that can be attributed to the ostensibly fabulous introductory lines, in other words, it tends to reveal, what they might have "meant" for the Mesopotamian scholar.

Kulcsszavak: Mezopotámia, ómen szövegek, ómen értelmezési technikák, *Šumma izbu*, teratológiai ómensorozat, a magzat által kibocsátott hangok, nőgyógyászati hallgatózás, *vagitus uterinus*

Keywords: Mesopotamia, omen texts, omen-interpretation, *Šumma izbu*, teratological omen series, sounds produced by the foetus, gynecological listening, *vagitus uterinus*

ina UGU-hi ša iz-bi ša LUGAL

iš-pur-an-ni ma-a sa-me

a-ki-i ša ina ^{GIŠ}le-’i

ša-ṭir-ú-ni a-na LUGAL be-lí-ia as-sap-ra

Concerning the *izbu* omen, about which the king wrote to me:

„It is *obscure*” – I sent to the king, my lord, exactly
what is written on the tablet!

(SAA X 276 (ABL 53) Rv. 9–13)

1. Introduction

Upon reading the first tablet of the canonical *Šumma izbu* omen series one can soon become aware of the problem of Esarhaddon (681–669 BC), King of Assyria. The handbook, also known as – using a modern medical term – the teratological compendium, dealing mainly with observations of malformed human and animal births, represented one of the highest levels of science for the scholars of the Assyrian court, and was considered among the revelations of Ea, the god of wisdom.¹ However, it can often seem a diffuse, haphazard set of incomprehensible, strange phenomena and even more confusing correlations in the eyes of the readers inexperienced in contemporary Mesopotamian science. This is particularly true for the first four tablets, which previously formed a separate unit and is also known as the subseries *Šumma sinništu arâtna* (*If a woman is pregnant*), dealing with human births.²

¹ Lambert 1962, mainly 64 (K 2248 Obv.1–4, „Catalogue of Texts and Authors”, 2. line: sag-iti-nu-tila, „*Not completing the months*”). See more on this text (among others): Leichty 1970, 7, Veldhuis 2010, 77–79. On the „authorship” (i.e. that while Ea was the source, he is not the actual author): Rochberg 1999, 419–420.

² The canonical omen series from the first millennium consists of 24 tablets, from which the first four deal with omens of human malformations, odd births and other peculiarities. From tablet V., which is considered the most archaic and treated by many as an independent text unit (see: Leichty 1970 25–26), until tablet XVII. the omens are related to malformed lamb-births. Tablets XVIII–XXIV. concern odd, malformed births and other abnormalities among goats, cows, pigs and other animals. For the thematic division see: Leichty 1970, 25–26, Stol 2000, 159, Maul 2003, 62–63. and more recently Rochberg, 2004, 88–90.

The interpretation of malformed births as (spontaneous) omens is an ancient notion, presumably dating back to the concept of messages sent by the gods, and therefore the omen literature of such nature can also be traced back to earlier textual traditions. Teratological omens, which can be regarded as the forerunners of the *Šumma izbu* are already known from the Old Babylonian period, when omens and interpretations, formerly part of an oral tradition were written down (on the publication of the texts in question see: Goetze 1947 (= YOS X) text 56 and 12, and also: Leichty 1970 201–207 – transcription, translation and commentary). Their popularity and the general cultural demand for them are well reflected by the fact that several versions, unambiguously imported from Mesopotamia, turned up from Ugarit and also from the Hittite capital. For further reconstruction and sources of the textual tradition of the series known from the first millennium, and canonized at some point during the Middle Babylonian period, see: Leichty 1970 20–23, and for newer publications: Biggs 1996, Frahm 1998 and Maul 2003, 63.

A study by N. De Zorzi (De Zorzi 2011), which became available to me only after the present study had been completed, deals with the structure of *Šumma izbu* and the (primarily symbolic) correlations of the various omens. Furthermore it mentions, that in her doctoral dissertation in preparation the author includes several, yet

The approximately 50 omens under discussion list real and possible „birth” material born of women, presumably originating from abortions, premature births, and on occasions clear-cut pathological cases, which can generally be classified into the ancient, classic *mola*-category.³ To avoid confusion, it must be emphasized that only a slight overlap exists between the ancient and modern concepts of *mola*. Today in medical science *mola* means the product of a disorder called *molar* pregnancy, a placenta manifesting anomalies and most aptly resembling a bunch of grapes (Fig. 1). In such cases the placenta can develop in the woman’s womb for months producing gravidity-like symptoms, until (in lack of treatment) it is spontaneously aborted.

The boundaries of the ancient concept are not that strict. In the classic gynecological writings all shapeless or largely deformed „masses” developing in the uterus or passing through the vagina, which do not even with the best of intentions resemble a newborn, are called *mola* – thus beyond abortions showing deformities, various cysts, benign or malignant tumors, membranous formations, placenta detachments, ectopic pregnancy products, and of course *molae* in the modern sense can all be ranked here.⁴

unpublished fragments of the omen series as well as significant results regarding the reconstruction of certain fragmentary, and thus unclear and problematic segments. Since this work is not currently at hand, I can only report on the availability of these newly published texts.

As the above quoted letter passage reflects, correct interpretation of the *Šumma izbu* omens required appropriate expertise, and therefore explanatory texts, commentaries accompanied the series. For the basic and for the most part reconstructed version of the latter (the Principal Commentary) see: Leichty 1970, 211–231; on the characteristics of this commentary texts: Leichty 1970, 22–23. and Frahm 2011, 203–210.

Translated as „anomaly” in Erle Leichty’s publication (Leichty 1970), the remarkably important expression *izbu*, which presumably lives further in the arabic word ‘*izb*’ (monster, distorted figure), refers to the abnormally born and the bearer or source of the abnormality, respectively (for example, the lamb which kicks about during birth, or its sound is heard in the mother’s womb is also called *izbu* – Tablet XVII, lines 82 and 84–85). Therefore, since the expression can not be precisely translated with one word, the Akkadian version will be used hereinafter. For further readings on the determination and etymology of *izbu* see (among others): Stol 2000, 159, Rochberg 2004, 89.

³ For comparison: Scurlock–Andersen 2005, 391: „wide variety of material delivered from a woman’s uterus.” On the ancient *mola*-concept: Taussig 1907, mainly 250–252 (descriptions of Hippocrates and Galenus). Also worthy of mention is the theory of Ann Kilmer, according to which the approximately 50 lines of the text discussed in the present essay deal primarily with human placentas (Kilmer 1987, esp. 212–213). Although symptoms explicable in this way may probably be found in here, in the majority of cases the descriptions of the *protases* (i.e. the signs themselves) allow for several different interpretations to be made – naturally, even one according to which non-real observations are recorded.

⁴ See note 3. The clarification of these differences is also essential since the original meaning of the latin word *mola* (millstone) can be misleading. With most probability, inspired by the latter, Marten Stol identifies the *lithopaedion*, i.e. the stone foetus or baby as one of the subtypes of *mola*, marking it a millstone in line 44 – let’s be honest, in a rather subjective manner. In reality, the *lithopaedion* has nothing to do with *molar*-pregnancy – and cannot be classified under the ancient sense of *mola* either. The fossil fetuses deriving from ectopic pregnancies, which can otherwise remain in the mother’s body for decades without causing any effects that are detrimental to health, occur almost exclusively in the abdominal cavity, and can therefore, owing to their physical characteristics, never leave the body by way of the vagina and in general by natural means, respectively. The earliest knowledge about the phenomenon (16th–17th century C. E.) derives in all the known cases from autopsies (and it must be added that the mother’s death was years after and independent of the death of the foetus). For cultural history research on the phenomenon and for the earliest accounts, respectively, see: Bonderson 1996. Thus, in short, a *lithopaedion* is what a woman can never give „birth” to. There is similar confusion as regards the linkage of brick and „vesicular *mola*” which appears in line 45.

In all probability, Stol uses the *mola*-concept here in its narrow, modern sense, keeping in mind that it basically refers to the hydatid *mola* (= *lithopaedion*, in Stol’s reading) and regarding the rarely used vesicular *mola* as some sort of variant. It was possibly overlooked by the author that “hydatid” and “vesicular” *mola* are in fact one and the same, the latter simply being an alternative denomination referring to the characteristic, water-filled

Consistent with the brilliant observation of Marten Stol, the ominous list of such (premature) births and abortions, according to Mesopotamian categorization forms a separate, well defined unit within the *Šumma sinništu arātma* subseries, involving its beginning, just about 50 lines. The borderline is set up by the 46th omen of the first tablet, which by means of *paranomasia* clearly signifies that from then on the handbook deals with pregnancies carried to term.⁵ Both assyriology and medical history have paid little attention so far to this initial section of the *Šumma izbu* series. Apart from the more or less successful identification of a few pathological cases,⁶ the passage was not considered suitable for or worthy of detailed analysis. Such opinions and attitudes were already largely inspired by the opening lines, which indeed seem slightly fairy tale-like, and give the impression that folkloristic „city-state legends” dominate the beginning of the compendium rather than serious scientific observations. Namely, the first four lines of the initial tablet outline what it means for the future if the foetus of a pregnant woman cries (in various modes).

It was said that *Šumma izbu*, or more precisely *Sag-iti-nu-tila* is one of the foundation stones of the intellectual science archives of the Mesopotamian diviner, or more generally of the first millennium; a peak achievement by contemporary standards and an indispensable source, which, as we have seen, the most prestigious scientists of the Assyrian court could refer to. Serious scientific works do not often begin with the enumeration of absurd, out of place, worthless data, but rather, such works are very consciously edited – and it is presumed that the *Šumma sinništu arātma* is just such a composition.

The key to the problem lies in asking the right question. On the one hand, we could ask what real content, i.e. modern scientific value could we of the 21st century attribute to the *Šumma izbu* descriptions, at the same time however we must seek answer to why the Mesopotamian scholars ranked these descriptions among their most prestigious scientific works. In other words, we need to distinguish between the scientific values of the present and ancient times, since it is clear that the two are not the same.

The modern medical historian instinctively looks for concrete, empirical factual information among this gigantic collection of data, which would form the basis of the scientific or fictive nature of the statements and descriptions.⁷ From such an approach the extrapolated, seemingly unrealistic, occasionally even fairytale-like omen-*protases* (i.e. the omen descriptions themselves) can at most be of cultural-historical interest only. From a scientific, and specifically from a medical historical point of view they are completely uninteresting; it could even be said that all they testify is that there were people many thousands of years ago, as well, who excelled in wasting their time – moreover, within a formal framework.⁸

vesicular structure of the placental material (see Figure 1). For the general modern description of *molar* pregnancies see: Benirschke – Kaufmann 1990, 782–815.

⁵ *Šumma sinništu malî ulid*: If a woman gives birth to „matted hair” (*malî*) – for comparison: the verb *malû* : „to be full, to fill, be filled,” see: Stol 2000 161. Thinking further, it cannot be excluded that the compendium’s alternative denomination (*Sag-iti-nu-tila*, see the first note) refers to the same concept – and the first section (consisting of 46 lines), respectively.

⁶ Adamson 1984, note 5 – contra(!) Stol 2000, note 161, 91.: dermoid cyst (I 40); Scurlock–Andersen 2005, 390 (17.27): *hydatid mola* (I 22).

⁷ The work of Julio C. Pangas, (Pangas 2000) a Spanish physician for instance, was written exactly in this spirit, pairing certain descriptions taken from the *Šumma izbu* with well known pathological diseases, and thus giving the layman the feeling, that the series is in fact none other than the first pathology textbook in history that summarizes accurate medical observations.

⁸ For comparison: „*It is not a waste of time to find out how other people wasted theirs*” – cites Morris Jastrow the statement of Bouché-Leclercq made in connection with Greek astrology (Jastrow 1914, 42.), which he clearly adopted, since the Assyriologist of the turn of the century was mostly preoccupied with the real

The Mesopotamian scholar however viewed this differently, for him, the text held a reality radically dissimilar to the modern scientific context of today. Beyond the bodily deformities which could actually occur in nature, he took into account every possibility arising from the theoretical framework of scientific thinking (such as numerological relationships for example), and therefore taking hypothetical cases into account meant a real scientific theory for him, based on systematic extrapolation and conclusions.⁹ One of the most important elements of Mesopotamian scientific activity involved investigation and detection of correlations between and concerning, so to say, the underlying contents of the divine signs and predictions in question. Accordingly, upon interpreting the references made to crying foetuses in the *Šumma izbu* – before dealing with the first question presumably raised by the modern reader, that is, whether the analyzed section reflects real observations, theoretical possibilities, or perhaps real fiction – it would be very useful to analyze the text both philologically and structurally. In order to understand this correctly, however, it is necessary to shortly summarize the main methods of Mesopotamian omen-interpretation.



1. Figure: product of a molar pregnancy

2. The methods of omen interpretation: correlation between *protasis* and *apodosis*

The omens of conditional structures, subdivided as a rule into *protasis* (sign) and *apodosis* (prediction)¹⁰ are not pronouncements of *post hoc*, *propter hoc* logic, the *apodosis* is therefore not the consequence of the phenomena described in the *protasis*. The direction of the consequences is actually the reverse, it can thus be said that the omens are readable vice versa: in the messages or warnings referring to the future, which were worded in the *protasis* (in case of the *Šumma izbu* in the [malformed] births) the future, arising from the divine judgements relays a message, and in some form often also manifests itself. The incarnation, naturally, refers to the source, i.e. to the pronouncement of the *apodosis*.¹¹ This statement is essential because it predicts that prediction and sign are in associative connection, and those who compiled the omens had numerous means by which they could clearly signify this association. In the followings we would like to overview these means, from the simplest,

observations on which the extrapolations the *Šumma izbu* descriptions were based. Jastrow saw the scientific value of the work in its originality and outlined at length the seeds sown for later sciences (Jastrow 1914, 42–78).

⁹ For Mesopotamian scientific thinking and theoretical sciences see: Robson 2004, mainly 46–48, 55–58, 63–68, 70–73, and 77–78, and for the justification of their definition as science, see among others and recently: Rochberg 2010, mainly 23–25.

¹⁰ For further details on the structure of omens in general see (among others): Maul 2003, esp. 46.

¹¹ For more readings on the association of events of *protasis* and *apodosis* see among others: Hurowitz 2000, esp. 80, Annus 2010, 2–3, Rochberg 2010.

most clear associative schemes to the more complex associational processes requiring higher qualifications.¹²

2.1 Association based on synonyms

In the simplest terms *protasis* and *apodosis* can be associated semantically, under the law of similarity. Fine examples of such interconnection of ideas are the following two liver-omens:¹³

1. be ud^{meš} nun díd-da^{meš}
šumma manzāzu arik
ud^{meš} nun díd-da^{meš}
ūmū rubê arkū
„If the „station” is **long** (*arik*),
the days of the king will be **long** (*arkū*)”

(Rm 301: 2)

2. be [išid² manzā]zi kīma ziqit zuqaqīpi ikpup
rubê zuqaqīpu izaqqi[ssu]
If the [base(?) of the] „station” curves around like the tail of the **scorpion**,
The prince will be **stung by a scorpion**.

(MS 3176/2:15)¹⁴

In the following omen of the *Šumma izbu* series, similar associative ideas can be discovered, with the difference that here the association is not clarified by the word usage. The sign of the foetus riding on his brother’s back is associated with struggle for the throne, the ruler’s oppression of the rival, under the law of similarity:

3. be iz-bu 2-ma šeš ugu šeš rak-bu
šumma izbu šinama ahu eli ahi rakbu
taš-nin-tu aš-te aš-te i-dar-ri-is
tašnintu kussû kussâ idarris
If two *izbus* (are born), and one **brother rides on (the back of) the other**,
rivalry; **one throne will overthrow the other**.

(*Šumma*

izbu

VI

31)

¹² To clearly reflect the ideas, the Sumerian and Akkadian expressions and the cuneiform signs, which could form the basis of the associations respectively (emphasized both in the transliterations and translations), the cited omen-text lines are given one after the other according to two different transcriptional conventions. First comes the transcription reflecting the exact text with Sumerian logograms (independent word signs), determinatives (not independently standing, not to be read explanatory signs) and phonograms marking the Akkadian syllables, resp., as well as the phonetic complements, then comes a normalized (Akkadian) version that resolves these, purely in italics.

¹³ For publication of the first text see: Koch-Westenholz 2000, 441. For more details about omens of similar wording see: Starr 1983 10 (K 4231 i 39), as well as Hurowitz 2000, 79 (STT 2 308 ii 62). It is to be noted that in cases of omens using the wording of the above example, the latter two authors regard the association in question between *protasis* and *apodosis* a wordplay („*paronomasia*”), which is incorrect since these texts use the same roots in the same sense, thus in this case it is the meaning and not the phonetic form that is decisive.

¹⁴ George 2010, 330. Although similar roots appear in the *protasis* and *apodosis*, we cannot speak of *paronomasia* here either, because these are used in the same sense again, as the characteristic expressions of the scorpion’s weapon and sting (*zaqātu* = to sting (scorpion), *ziqtu* = scorpion tail, scorpion sting), see CAD Z 56–57 and 132–133.

2.2 Association based on opposition

A further expression of the association of ideas is based on paradigmatic oppositions, such as right – left, below – above, etc., where the various localizations and colours, respectively, are given positive or negative values. For example, if the anomaly appears on the left side (i.e. on the side of the enemy = *pars hostilis*), the sign is favourable, but appearing on the right side (*pars familiaris*, on „our” side) it is unfavourable.¹⁵ In case of the omens using such oppositions the semantic link between *protasis* and *apodosis* is also based on associative ideas, which however do not concern the specific content of the latter, but are limited to the above paradigms. An excellent example of the opposite meaning of left side and right side, that is, the left-right symbolism, is the following sign-pair:

4. be *iz-bu* geštu 15-šú *pa-ar-sà-at* tūr-bi bir-ah
šumma *izbu* uzun **imittišu** parsat **tarbašu** šû issappah
be *iz-bu* geštu 150-šú *pa-ar-sà-at* tūr-bi dagal-iš tūr kūr bir-ah
šumma *izbu* uzun **šumēlišu** parsat **tarbašu** šû irappiš **tarbaš nakri** issappah
If the **right** ear of the *izbu* is divided, **the cattle pen will scatter**,
If the **left** ear of the *izbu* is divided, **the cattle pen will expand, the cattle pen of the enemy will scatter.**

(Šumma *izbu* XI 3–4)

Similar principles of interpretation are observable in case of the above–below opposite pair. In such cases „above” is associated with unfavourable, and „below” with favourable *apodoses*:

5. diš uru sag-su ana šâ an-e il
šumma *ālu* **rēssu** ana **libbi** **šamê** ittanašši
uru-bi šub
ālu šû **innaddi**
If a city's **head rises into the sky**,
that city **will be abandoned.**

(Šumma *ālu* I 15)¹⁶

6. diš ša-pat-su ki-ta ú-na-šak
šumma **šapassu** **šaplīta** unaššak
im-ma-gar
immagar
If someone (during talk) bites into his **lower lip**,
then (what he says) **will be accepted.**

(PUM 4507 Rv. 53)¹⁷

The following sign-pair of the Šumma *izbu* is also based on the above–below opposition. Accordingly, if the abnormality involves the upper lip of the foetus (which basically bears negative connotation), the *apodosis* is favourable, in the opposite case however, it will be unfavourable, based on the same considerations:

¹⁵ The phenomenon was discovered quite early, see e.g.: Jastrow 1914, 19–20, and for a more detailed discussion: Leichty, 1970, 24–25 (in connection with the Šumma *izbu* omens); Starr 1983, mainly 10, as well as Guinan 1996, and in Hungarian: Komoróczy 1992, 33. For the omens cited here, originating from the Šumma *izbu* series, see: Guinan 1996, page 8.

¹⁶ Freedman 1998, 26–27.

¹⁷ Kraus 1936–37, 223.

7. be mí ù-tud-*ma* nundun-*su* an-ta ki-ta u₅
šumma sinništu ulidma šapassu elītu šaplīta irkab
sig₅ gar-ši
dumqu iššakkanši

be mí mí ù-tud-*ma* nundun-*su* ki-ta an-ta u₅
šumma sinništu ulidma šappassu šaplītu elīta irkab
lu-úp-nu é lú dib-bat
lupnu bīt amēli išabbat

If a woman gives birth, and the child's **upper lip covers (lit.: rides on) the lower lip**,
(the woman) **will be in luck**.

If a woman gives birth, and the child's **lower lip covers (lit.: rides on) the upper lip**,
that man's house **will be overwhelmed by poverty**.

(*Šumma izbu* III 40–41)

2.3 Association based on intertextual reference

A further independent category is formed by omens in which the association is based on an external text. The literary aspect of the following example is unequivocal, but naturally only to those who are familiar with the story of Etana, the legendary king who ascended into the sky on the back of an eagle:

8. be šà-nigin gim tig^{mušen}
šumma tīrānu kīma erī
bà-ut^d *E-ta-na* lugal šá an-e èd-ú
amūt^d Etana šarru ša šamē ītelū

If the (coils of the) intestine look like an **eagle**:
the omen of **Etana**, the king **who ascended to heaven**.

(Clay 1923 No. 13. 33)

Similarly, the internal context of the following omen can only be interpreted if the reader is familiar with the literary topos of humans making too much noise and therefore disturbing the gods, the earliest version of which can be read in the Old Babylonian Atra-hasis.¹⁸ According to the epic Enlil, who wanted to suppress the noise of humankind, decided to destroy them, and his attempts to do so culminated in the best-known disaster of world literature: the Flood. Without the knowledge of this story it would be difficult to understand why the „clamorous city” of the *Šumma ālu* omen series was scattered:¹⁹

9. diš uru ka-šú gù-dé-dé
šumma ālu rigimšu ištanassi
uru-bi bir
ālu šū issappah

If a city is **repeatedly crying out**, that city will be **scattered**.

¹⁸ „Enlil, heard their noise, and addressed the great gods: ‘The noise of mankind has become too intense for me, with their uproar I am deprived of sleep.’ (Atra-hasis II i 5–8). See: Lambert–Millard 1969, 72–73.

¹⁹ On this intertextual reference see: Annus 2010, 4.

(Šumma ālu I 11)²⁰

Even more thorough literary and textual knowledge is necessary for the interpretation of certain omens of similar nature. In the omen text that follows, the association between *protasis* and *apodosis* was also inspired by the description of the catastrophe which destroyed mankind, it refers indirectly to the Atra-hasis and directly to the adapted story of the Gilgamesh Epic. Here, however, it is not enough to be acquainted with the main stream of events, since the focus is on a concrete passage, and its characteristic imagination and wording. The reader has to know that before the Flood, i.e. as a foretoken of the devastation, according to both epics certain foodstuffs,²¹ and specifically in the Epic of Gilgamesh *kukku* breads²² fell from the sky – otherwise the association of the cited omen remains hidden.

10. be ki-[gub ki-ma k]u-uk-ki

šumma manzāzu kīma **kukki**^dEn-líl a-na kur a-na hulⁱ ú- Lšar^d**Enlil ana māti ana lemutti uššar**If the „station” is like a **kukku bread**,**Enlil will descend to the land, with evil intention.**(MS 3176/2:10)²³

*

The latter examples further clarify the already surmised difficulty in interpretation, that is, the culture-specific nature of the conceptual associations. Beyond the fact that the omen compendia, similarly to the manner described above, may refer to several texts²⁴ which are not known to us, there may be numerous associations between *protases* and *apodoses* which were quite clear to the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia (e.g. matted, uncared-for hair linked to mourning, see below), but mean nothing to us today. This must be taken into account under all circumstances, before we state – if no point of connection is found – that the scribe „randomly” assigned an *apodosis* to a *protasis* from the „stock.”²⁵

2.4 Association based on homonyms

In case of certain omen texts the internal connection is not established by the content of the *protasis* and *apodosis*, but rather by the formulation, that is, a wordplay can unambiguously be discovered between them. The scribes operated primarily with the tool of *paronomasia*, in which cases the Sumerian and/or Akkadian words appear in the same or

²⁰ Freedman 1998, 26–27.

²¹ OB Atra-hasis III 34-35: large quantities of birds and fish, see: Lambert–Millard 1969, 88 and George 2010, mainly 323.

²² For details on the *kukku* bread or cake, a characteristic Mesopotamian pastry, see: George 2010, 325–326. SB Gilgamesh XI 42-47, in more detail: George 2010, 323-325.

²³ Middle Babylonian liver-omen, see: George 2010 325.

²⁴ For further, unequivocal literary references see: Annus 2010, 4, while for other types of intertextual connections see below.

²⁵ For comparison: Leichty 1970, 24–25, as well as Starr 1983, 9. Naturally, we can find numerous other *apodoses* in the *Šumma izbu* (as well), which are assigned at many places to many different *protases*, apparently without any observable consistency („stock *apodoses*”, see later, in connection with I 1–4.) – it can not therefore be assumed that the internal associations of the omens are always and everywhere demonstrable.

similar phonetic forms, but with differing meanings,²⁶ as illustrated in the following examples:

11. diš uga_x(Ú.NAGA)^{mušen} kú

šumma āriba ikkal

ir-bu tu-[ub]

(amēlu šû) irbu irrub

If a man eats a **raven** (*āribu*),

(that person) **will have income** (*irbu*).

(Assyrian Dreambook, Obv. iii (K 6611) line y+10.)²⁷

12. diš iz-bu sag ur- ᵀmah-ᵀ ša-ki-in ᵀlugal da⁷-an-nu-um

šumma izbu qaqqad nēšim šakin šarrum dannum

ib-ba-aš-ši-ma ma-tam sa-ti ú-na- ᵀaš-ᵀ

ibaššima mātam šāti unnaš

If the *izbu* has the head of a **lion** (*nēšim*)

there will be a mighty king,

and he will **weaken** (*unnaš*) the land.

(YOS X 56 i 26–27)²⁸

In the following omen text the association of the *protasis* and *apodosis* is built on the same scheme, but is more complicated in that the Akkadian word *hammā'u*, which is paronymous with the Sumerian ᵀHum-hum, does not occur in this form in the cuneiform text. To recognize the wordplay, first the appropriate Sumerian logogram (im-gi) must be read in Akkadian:

13. be šà-nigin gim igi ᵀHum-hum

šumma tīrānu kīma pāni ᵀHum-hum (Huwawa)

lugal im-gi šá kur dū-a-bi i-be-el

amūt šar hammā'i (im-gi) ša māti kalama ibēl

If the (coils) of the intestine are like the face of **Huwawa** (**ᵀHum-hum**):

it is the omen of the **throne usurper king** (im-gi = *hammā'u*), who

ruled all the lands.

(Clay 1923 No. 13, 65)²⁹

2.5 Hermeneutical interpretation procedures

Hermeneutical procedures are interpretations based on complex associations which are characteristic to the cuneiform writing system, where the form, name and phonetic values of a given cuneiform sign, as well as poliphony and polysemy all play role. Such interpretation of the virtually „coded” associations between *protasis* and *apodosis* requires thorough scholarly education and knowledge and remains hidden before those who are incompetent, thus it can be stated that at this point we have arrived to an exalted (if not the most exalted) sphere of Mesopotamian scientific thinking, approachable only by professionals. It is therefore

²⁶ Several authors have referred to this kind of wordplay in the omen series, emphasizing a number of cases, e.g.: Leichty 1970, 6, Starr 1983 9–10, Greaves 2000, Hurowitz 2000, mainly 78–87, and most lately Noegel 2007, mainly 9-11. and 20-21, as well as Rochberg 2010.

²⁷ Oppenheim 1956, 316. For discussion see: Noegel 2007, 11. and 20, Annus 2010, 9.

²⁸ From the Old Babylonian version of *Šumma izbu*, for comparison see Leichty 1970, 202.

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this omen see: Rochberg 2010, 20–21.

predictable that such (modern) analysis of the omen texts is still in its infancy, and often the proposed interpretations might only be considered speculative.³⁰

2.5.1 Etymographic interpretation

This associative method is based on a given „key-grapheme” of the *protasis*, to be more exact, the connection between sign and prediction is established by the latter's form or Akkadian name. Accordingly, in case of the first cited omen, beyond the elementary Akkadian reading of the PAB/KÚR sign (*nakru*, „enemy”), the sign form itself is associative, because the two crossing wedges can also be interpreted as a visual reference to the battle of enemies:

14. be šà-nigin gim PAB/KÚR

šumma tīrānu kīma PAB/KÚR

ki-tuš-ka a-na ki-tuš kúr-ka si-sá

šubatka ana šubat nakrīka iššir

If the (coils) of the intestine look like a **PAB/KÚR-sign**,
your camp **will charge** the camp of the **enemy**.

(Clay 1923 No. 13, 28)³¹

In contrast, the following examples focus on the Akkadian designations of the cuneiform signs:³²

15. be igi-bar ki-ma pa-ap-pi-im

šumma naplastum kīma pappim (=PAB)

ᵗug-ba-ab-tam dingir i-ri-iš

ugbātam ilum irriš

If the lobe of the liver is like the *pappum* (named) grapheme (=PAB),
the god wants the (inauguration of) an *ugbātam*-priestess.

(YOS X 17, 47)

16. be igi-bar ki-ma ka-aš-ka-aš

šumma naplastum kīma kaškaš (=KASKAL)

ᵀIškur i-ra-hi-iš

ᵀAdad irahhiš

If the lobe of the liver is like the *kaškašum* (named) grapheme
(=KASKAL),

Adad will devastate.

(YOS X 17, 48)

The Akkadian sign-names appearing in the *protases* (*pappum* and *kaškašum*, respectively) are accompanied by associations of various character. In the first case it is clear that the phonetic value of the sign name is the standard, on which the *pappum*/PAB –

³⁰ For a detailed overview of hermeneutic interpretation techniques, and for the „pseudo-etymologic” and etymographic interpretations see: Maul 1999, 1–18 and Frahm 2010, mainly 96–98. On the same techniques used in the text commentaries see Frahm 2011, 70–76.

³¹ For more on these texts, and other examples of a similar nature see: Frahm 2010, 111, and 102–103. The associative value of sign forms is demonstrable in several sophisticated writing methods from the first millennium, see: Maul 1999, mainly 7–10, and Frahm 2010.

³² On the Akkadian names of cuneiform signs see: Gong 2000, and for examples of the sign names discussed below: cited work, 84–85.

ugbābtum wordplay is based.³³ In contrast, the second omen represents a more complex connection, since the expression *kaškaššum* can be associated with the homonymous adjective *kaškaššu(m)* („overpowering”), which – not incidentally of course – is one of the frequent adjectives of Adad, the Stormgod, thus it can also be semantically associated with the *apodosis*.³⁴

2.5.2 Interpretation based on the phonetic values of logograms

It seems that occasionally the scribes connected the associated Akkadian concepts on the basis of the phonetic values/pronunciation of certain Sumerian logograms.³⁵ The logic of the inner association of the following omen, originating from the *Šumma izbu*, is greatly similar to the previous example built on the word *kaškaššum*, but the key here is not the Akkadian name of the given cuneiform sign, but rather the phonetic value of the Sumerian reading.

17. be mí **muš** ū-tud é lú al-ge₆
šumma sinništu šīra ulid bīt amēli šalim

If a woman gives birth to a snake, that man's house will become dark.

(*Šumma izbu* I 16)

The association between sign and prediction is based on the emphasized Sumerian, or rather the equated Akkadian readings, with the complication that the latter are not identical to those which appear in the above represented, normalized transliteration. If we regard the phonetic value (/muš/) of the MUŠ sign, and not the basic „snake” (*šīru*) reading as standard,³⁶ i.e. we project the former onto the Akkadian lexicon, we can immediately associate it with the word *mūšu* (night). The appropriateness of this is verified by the using of **GE₆** in the *apodosis*, since the primary Akkadian reading of this grapheme is the same: *mūšu*, that is, night.³⁷ The meaning of the above used „become dark” refers to this as well, with the same origin.

Thus: P: MUŠ → /muš/ → *mūšu* (night)
A: GI₆ → *mūšu* /muš₉ (→ *šalāmu*)

2.5.3 Association based on an alternative, potential orthography

These interpretations are based on the well known characteristic feature of cuneiform writing that the given words can be written in various ways, with the aid of different logograms and phonograms. Therefore, in theory it is possible to write down the keywords of the *protases* and *apodoses* in alternative ways and in certain cases it seems the scribes did indeed associate sign with prediction on the basis of such theoretic spellings (that is, spellings which do not appear on the tablet itself).

18. diš ka₅-a i_š-bat

³³ Frahm 2010, 101, Noegel 2010, 150.

³⁴ Frahm 2010, 101, Noegel 2010, 150.

³⁵ Even the Mesopotamian commentaries used interpretations of such nature, for example the equation šū = *kiššatu* appearing in column I, line 8 of the Principal Commentary on *Šumma izbu* follows the same principle (see Leichty 1970, 211). The word *kiššatu* („totality”) is represented in the cuneiform sources – beyond the šar and šār ideograms – traditionally by the šu₄ (U) grapheme, it is clear therefore that its identification with the šū sign is on the basis of phonology (šu₄ = šū = /šū/).

³⁶ Numerous Sumerian loanwords indicate that the pronunciation of this logogram really sounded likewise, e.g.: muš-mah = *mušmahhu*, muš-huš = *mušhuššu*, muš-gal = *mušgallu*, etc.

³⁷Note also the rare syllabic reading *muš₉* of ge₆(MI), originating from the same Akkadian equivalent.

šumma šēleba iṣbat^dLama(AN.KAL) dab-bat^dLamassu iṣabbat

If someone (in his sleep) catches a fox:

He will seize a Lamassu.

(Assyrian Dreambook (Sm 801) Rv. iii 9)³⁸

As Scott Noegel pointed out, the word „fox” (Akkadian *šēlebu*) which appears in the *protasis* of the cited dream-omen, and written in the text with the ka₅-a Sumerogram, can also be written down syllabically, as *še₇-līb-bu*,³⁹ using the following signs: (A).AN(=še₇).KAL(=līb)-bu(=su₁₃).⁴⁰ Therefore, in this case the association is based on speculative reading (**lama**(AN.KAL)-su₁₃), in which the Lamassu (AN.KAL) expression of the *apodosis* is reflected.⁴¹

In connection with associations based on alternative spellings a further possible associative technique is also to be mentioned, which is based on the similarity of the form of the cuneiform signs, since it cannot be excluded that a such tendency of interpretation is also observable in the following omen of the *Šumma izbu*:

19. be mī anše ù-tud*šumma sinništu imēra ulid*lugal šú *ina* kur gál-ši*šar kiššati ina māti ibbašši*

If a woman gives birth to a donkey,

The land will have a powerful king (lit: king of the universe).

(Šumma izbu I 13)

In the case of this omen, a hidden association can be assumed between the word ‘donkey,’ written with the sign ANŠE in the *protasis* and the sign ŠÚ, appearing in the *apodosis*. We have already referred to the fact that the Principal Commentary interprets ŠÚ as

³⁸ See: Oppenheim 1956, 281. and 326, as well as Noegel 1995, 101, Noegel 2007, 21-22, and Noegel 2010, 151, respectively.

³⁹ It is to be noted that the spelling is strictly theoretic, since, as mentioned also by Scott Noegel, the word in this form does not appear in the known cuneiform text corpora, see: Noegel 1995, 102.

⁴⁰ The theoretical reading of Scott Noegel should be briefly supplemented, since he declassifies the syllabic *še₇-līb-bu* form as (A).AN.KAL-*u* (Noegel 1995, Noegel 2007, 22. and Noegel 2010, 151). In contrast, the last theoretic sign, BU, has a frequent Old Babylonian (thus archaic) reading, *su₁₃* which can also be applied here, and which moreover seems a more plausible phonetic complement of the word Lamassu.

⁴¹ The graphemic principle works in a reverse direction as well, thus the theoretical logographic spelling of an Akkadian keyword written syllabically in the text can also serve as the basis of interpretation, as demonstrated in the following omen of the *Šumma izbu*:

be mī *qá-ti* ù-tud lugal **šú** *ina* kur gál^{L₅₇-J}*šumma sinništu qāti ulid šar kiššati ina māti ibašši*

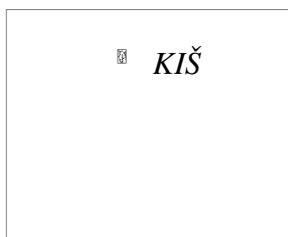
„If a woman gives birth to a hand,

the land will have a powerful king (lit: king of the universe).

(Šumma izbu I 37)

Traditionally, the Akkadian word *qātu* (hand) corresponds to the logogram šu, the phonetic reading of which /šu/ concurs with the šú sign used here (see note 35 on this latter), therefore the association is based on the phonetic value of the theoretical Sumerian reading (for comparison see: interpretations based on phonetic values, 2.5.2)

kiššatu,⁴² and the word *kiššatu* can alternatively be written with the sign KIŠ, the Middle Babylonian (and earlier) form of which largely resembles the ANŠE sign.⁴³



𒀭

ANŠE

2.6 Joint use of differing associative techniques

Finally, a separate category is formed by such omen texts in which, from the above discussed principles, more than one is used at the same time, i.e. in which several (different) associative schemes were applied. In the next citation, beyond the evident wordplay, association involving the semantic fields of sign and prediction is also demonstrable:⁴⁴

20. [be] u₈ ur-mah ù-tud-ma ma-li-i na-ši
šumma lahru **nēša** ulidma **malī** naši
bal ma-li-i kur ma-la-a i-na-áš-si zi [kūr]
palē **malī** mātu **malâ inašši** tīb [nakri]

If an ewe gives birth to a **lion**, and it has **matted hair**,
It is the time of **grief**; the land will **fall into mourning**; attack of an enemy.
(Šumma izbu V 39)



2. Figure.: Clay mask showing the face of Huwawa, from the Old Babylonian Period (British Museum)

The omen of the Šumma izbu cited above is a real scribal feat, because besides using Akkadian words of identical phonetic pattern (*nēšu – našû*), it also plays with the two different, but interconnected meaning of the word *malû*, since in the Mesopotamian cultural milieu „matted, uncared- for hair” counted as the unambiguous sign of mourning.⁴⁵

Such dichotomy can also be discovered in the case of the intertextual references discussed earlier, if we take a closer look at the sixth omen of the first tablet of the Šumma sinništu arâtma:

⁴² See note 37.

⁴³ For sign forms see: Labat 1976, 118 (ANŠE) and 192 (KIŠ), and for the process of canonization, which took place in the Middle Babylonian period see note 2.

⁴⁴ This entry is also mentioned by Erle Leichty (Leichty 1970, 6), but only as an example of wordplay. For symbolic interpretation see: Noegel 2007, 17, with note 56.

⁴⁵ For comparison see the following SB commentary text from Uruk, presumably written on tablet 43 of the Šumma ālu series (see Weiher 1983,158): [... *ma-la-a* ÍL-šī : *ma-la-a* : *bi-ki-tu* : *ma-la-a* : *ki-ri* x [...] wearing matted hair; **matted hair** = **mourning**; matted hair (is a synonym for): binding?... [...] (SpTU 2 36 Obv. 10).

20. be mī ur-bar-ra ù-tud*šumma sinništu barbara ulid*

umuš kur ᵀnišᵀ -ni

ṭēm māti išanni

If a woman gives birth to a wolf:

„the land will go mad.”

(Šumma izbu I 6)

For the sake of simplicity, the translation of Erle Leichty is used, however, he also notes that the expression ‘*ṭēm māti išanni*’ is rather problematic in this context. The above interpretation is only one possible variant, the *apodosis* could also refer to some kind of defiance, rebellion, since the basic meaning of the compound *ṭēmu šanû* is: „to change one's mind, to reconsider a decision.”⁴⁶ The *apodosis* in question occurs at several places in the *Šumma izbu*,⁴⁷ in this case however an interesting phenomenon is observable if we call up a cultic commentary text (KAR 307),⁴⁸ in which the wolf is associated with the god Anu.⁴⁹

KAR 307 Rv. 11: ur-bar-ra (= *eṭemmu ša Anim* (the ghost of Anu)Ši I 6: ur-bar-ra – *ṭēm māti išanni*

The existing *paranomasia* between the two texts is unequivocal, and apart from the fact that the consonantal pattern of the lines in question are exactly the same, we can also clearly observe the well known wordplay between *ṭēmu* and *eṭemmu* (that is „intelligence, conscience” – „dead spirit, ghost”).⁵⁰

Although it might be said that this is only incidental, it must not be ignored that both sources are associated with the wolf, actually explaining its „meaning” as a sign or abstract entity, respectively. As we could see, the compendia may contain intertextual references and if this assumption is correct in the present case as well, we are dealing with the most sophisticated connection so far, since the scribe, apart from referring to a scientific work associated with the wolf, also plays with its wording – and does so brilliantly.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Leichty 1970, 32, in note 6. According to the above, E. Frahm for instance translates the *apodosis* in question, appearing in other series as well, differently: „the political situation of the land will change.” See Frahm 2010, 111.

⁴⁷ T I 130, T II 18, etc. (among other *apodoses*).

⁴⁸ = SAA 3 99–102. For more details on this tablet, containing secret knowledge (*piširti ilāni rabûti*), which counted as „taboo” (*ikkibu*), see: Horowitz 1998, 5–19, Lenzi 2008, 173. On the passage in question: Livingstone 1986, 82–83, and 88–89 (in connection with a commentary text, which also refers to the frequent wordplay between *ṭēmu* – *eṭemmu*, on the latter see also below).

⁴⁹ This is in obvious association with the following identification of the wolf-star: ^{mul}Ur-bar-ra = ^dA-nu (5R 46 No. 1:2.), for comparison: Livingstone 1986, 89.

⁵⁰ From the viewpoint of the individual, the *ṭēmu* (conscience, intelligence) unifying the periods of life on earth and the existence after that, does not cease after death, but lives further in the „deadly spirit, ghost” (*eṭemmu*), both theoretically and phonetically. A later commentary text also dissolves and interprets the word as „*e-ṭemmu*”, accordingly: e- ᵀṭemᵀ -me: qa-bu-ú ṭè-e-me / E: qa-bu-ú : KA^{de-em4-ma} HI : ṭè-e-me, i.e.: *eṭemmu* = to say the command, (since E (means) to say (*qabû*), (and) *dīmma* = command (SpTU 1 49, Rv. 36b-37). For a well known alternative interpretation of the logogram *gidim* (Akk. *eṭemmu*) see lately Frahm 2011, 74. For more recent information on the former wordplay see: Abusch 1998, mainly 367–369 (with earlier references).

⁵¹ The following example illustrates that such an intertextual reference operated by wordplay was not alien to Mesopotamian scientific practice. According to the excerpt tablet of NAM.giš.hur.an.ki.a (*nishu*, K 170 +, see: Livingstone 1986, 17–18, 34–35, and Lenzi 2008, 174), a „mystical” mathematical and philological explanatory series, *inbu* (fruit) became one of the denominations of Sîn, the moon god (specifically as the new moon), because his father, Anu „called him” (*aššu^dAnu imbû šumšu*, K 170+ Obv. 1', see: Livingstone 1986, 30, and see also: K 2164+ Obv. 13 and K 2670:2, op. cit. 22 and 28, respectively). According to the interpretation of

3. Šumma izbu I 1–46

The fundamental thematic principles and patterns of arranging omen entries one behind the other based on the *protases* (for example direction from head to toe, succession of colours, etc.) are well known, and several researchers have dealt with the expansion of the variations of the different phenomena (multiplication of various limbs, of number of births, etc.) – often into the realm of the impossible – as a systematic editing technique.⁵² Little attention has been paid, however, to the fact that the above sketched associative methods, which are largely based on wordplay, beyond the inner correlations of the various omens, may also involve the sequential order of the entries in smaller or larger structural units as well.

3.1 Editorial principles

With respect to the target of our examination, in the first 46 lines of the first tablet of the *Šumma izbu*, we can discover omen sequences which are based on the similar phonetic pattern of the keywords of the *protases*, for example: *lipištu* (scrotum) – *libittu* (brick) in lines I 32–33, or *ipi ša* („membrane, which...”) – *apišalâ* (from *Apišalû*)⁵³ in lines I 29–30.⁵⁴

As already mentioned in the introduction, the homonymous expressions located at the border of the various thematic sections may refer to the content of the next section – as it was demonstrated by Marten Stol in connection with the word *malû* appearing in line 46.⁵⁵ Similar wordplay can be detected in line 40 as well, where a woman „gives birth to a 'blood vessel' covered with wool”⁵⁶ (*ušultam ša sig₅ lahmû*). Since in the 5-line long section that follows the word „clay” (*im/īdu*) also occurs (in line 45), it is presumably not accidental that the word *ušultu* was placed right here, as apart from „blood vessel” it could also mean „clay.” The expression „(a kind of) membrane/amnion” (*ûš^{še-li-tû} = silītu/šelītu*) occurring in line 35, which also has an Akkadian gloss, is even more unambiguous, since from line 36 on the handbook deals with the „births” of various body parts (head, hand, etc., lines 36–39), and from the root *š/slt (basic meaning: „to cut, split off”) another expression, similar to *šelītu* can be formed: *š/si/elittu*, i.e. „split piece.”⁵⁷ *Lipištu*, mentioned above, can be similarly associative, because it appears in line 27, which also seems to be a border of two thematic sections. Namely, in lines 28–35, based on more or less identifiable phenomena (up until the former *šelītu*), various membraneous formations are listed,⁵⁸ and from phonetic viewpoint the

Alasdair Livingstone (1986, 45), the latter expression evokes line 142 of the Gula-Hymn of Bulluṣarabi, where the same wordplay appears in an even more expressed form. Accordingly: ^d*A-num a-bi ki-ma mu(šumī)-šū-ma im-ba-an-ni* (Lambert 1967, 124, line 142): „Anu, my father called me with his name.” Here the wording „with his name” refers to speculation with the name of Anu, and accordingly the form *imbanni* („He called me”) can be perceived in the sense *imbi(=inbi) Ani*, „Anu called me.”

⁵² See among others: Jastrow 1914 mainly: 7–8, 13–28, Leichty 1970, 24–25. More on such data found in the *protases*, which are not based on real observations, but rather represent the creation of theory and the attempt to cover all possibilities: Komoróczy 1992, 25–31 (in Hungarian), and more recently: Annus 2010, 2-3, and Rochberg 2010, mainly 20.

⁵³ In more detail see: Leichty 1965, and Leichty 1970, 34, note 30.

⁵⁴ Bottéro 1972-1973, 115, Stol 2000, 159, with note 83. It is possible that on the basis of their consonantal pattern the two mentioned examples may be connected, i.e. in lines I 29-32 the use of the roots *pšl-lpš* and their reverse arrangement, respectively are the consequence of conscious editing, for details see: De Zorzi 2011, 71.

⁵⁵ See note 6.

⁵⁶ The expression clearly refers to a dermoid cyst, see note 5.

⁵⁷ See CAD S 263 and CAD Š/II 44.

⁵⁸ I 28: *ipu*, which, according to the commentary corresponds with *šišītu* („membrane”), and with further membranes, respectively, (*Izbu* Principal Commentary VII 274–278, see: Leichty 1970, 220). See I 29: „membrane (*ipu*) filled with blood,” and the closing element of the section: *šelītu* (I 35, see above).

word *lipištu* is an "express image" of the verb *labāšu*, which apart from the basic meaning („to clothe (oneself)”) can also be used in the sense „to cover, to wrap.”⁵⁹

Thematic division of the opening section of the <i>Šumma sinništu arātma</i> subseries (I. tablet, lines 1–46.)	
1–4	Sounds of the foetus
4: <i>issi(ma)</i> → ? <i>našû/nešû?</i> (to cut up, to rip out)	
5–18	animals (embryos deriving from early abortions?)
18: <i>šelepû</i> (tortoise) → ? <i>šalāpu?</i> (to rip out, to pull out)	
19–27	Clear theme can not be determined
27: <i>lipištu</i> → <i>labāšu</i> (to cloth, cover)	
28–35	Membraneous formations
35: <i>silītu/šelītu</i> (placenta) → <i>š/selittu</i> (cut-off piece)	
36–40	Human body parts
40: <i>ušultu</i> = blood vessel and clay, respectively	
41–46	A section hard to interpret, however contains the word „clay”
46: <i>malû</i> = matted hair and to fill out, respectively	

To be able to discover and understand such kinds of associative references, we need to know the exact logic of the *protasis*-based thematic editing and classification, and therefore we are confronted with the same problem as in the case of the culture specific associations. Certain expressions mentioned in the above Table indicate thematic groups clearly distinguishable by the modern reader (human body parts – pieces, membraneous formations, clay-like material), which are easy to interpret. In other sections, however (mainly in lines 19–27 and 41–46), several unidentifiable, from a modern medical viewpoint incoherent, and in many places presumably “theoretic” elements occur, which even make the determination of text units, listing tightly associated phenomena difficult. Thus for the present, the above defined sections based on semantics can rather be regarded as extraordinary than regular.

3.2 Analysis of the initial section (*Šumma izbu* I 1–4):⁶⁰

⁵⁹ CAD L, sub. *labāšu*, 17–22, mainly: 19. The previous can best be translated as „overlay” if regarded as a noun of „*pirist*” pattern, formed from *labāšu*.

⁶⁰ A variant = The composite-text compiled by Leichty, based on text „e” and „G”(excerpt), see : Leichty 1970, 31. The basis of the above main text is formed by this recension.

B variant: SpTU III 90, SB tablet from Uruk.

protases, apodoses and structure

In the following, we analyze the opening section of the discussed text dealing with the interpretation of omens related to the „crying” of the foetus. In light of the foregoing, an attempt should be made to find answer to what the (contemporary) scientific considerations were, according to which the seemingly quite unrealistic text unit had become the first, introductory section of the collection, occupying a highly privileged position among the revelations of the God of Wisdom.

1. be mí *a-rat-ma šá šâ-šá* (B: šà šâ-šà) *i-bak-ki* (B: ér(A.IGI)
*šumma sinništu arâtma ša libbiša **ibakki***
*kur níg-gig **igi-mar***
*mātu **ikkiba** immar*
If a woman is pregnant with child, and her foetus (lit.: interior) **cries**,
The land will experience „**taboo**”.⁶¹
2. be mí *a-rat-ma šá šâ-šá* (B: šà šâ-šà) *i-ha-zu* (B: *i-ha-az-za*)
šumma sinništu arâtma ša libbiša ihazzu/ihazza
kùr-rum(B:-rù) lal-al é lú bir-ah
kurru(m) išaqqal bīt amēli issappah
If a woman is pregnant with child, and her foetus (lit.: interior) *blows*,
The *kurru(m)*-measure will be weighed; the man’s house (i.e. household) will be scattered.
3. be mí *a-rat-ma šá šâ-šá* (B: šà šâ-šà) *i-dam-mu-um*
*šumma sinništu arâtma ša libbiša **idammum***
*é lú é-gal **uš-di***
bīt amēli ēkallu iredi
If a woman is pregnant with child, and her foetus (lit.: interior) **sobs/whirs**,
The palace will confiscate the man’s house.
4. be mí *a-rat-ma šá šâ-šá* (B: šà šâ-šà) *is-si-ma še-mu-ú iš-me*
*šumma sinništu arâtma ša libbiša **issima šēmû išme***
kúr kalag-ga (B: dan-nu) zi-ma kur ú(B: ù)-šal-pat
nakru dannu itebbima māta ušalpat
níg-ha-lam-ma ina kur gar-an bu-ša-ša sig₅ kúr gu₇
šahluqtu ina māti iššakkan bušâša nakru ikkal
kimin é lú bir-ah
bīt amēli issappah
If a woman is pregnant with child, and her foetus (lit.: interior) cries out,
and those who can hear, will hear,
a strong enemy will rise and desecrate the land,
there will be devastation in the land, its assets will be consumed by the enemy,
the same (i.e. the same sign): the man’s house will be scattered.

Based on our earlier learnings, first it is expedient to study the possible associative references in the passage in question. The wordplay appearing in the first line is conspicuous: the homonymous *ibakki* – *ikkibu* word pair represents a sophisticated *chiasmus* (mirrored, reverse arrangement), partially involving the vowels as well.⁶² Further, similar phenomena are

⁶¹ The translation as „catastrophe” proposed by E. Leichty (Leichty 1970, 32) is not exactly precise here. The *apodosis* refers to the consequences, that is, the punishment of the transgression of a taboo, thus instead of paraphrasing, the translation remains literal for the sake of simplicity. For more on the general concept of taboo, which also corresponds to the concept of the Sumerian *níg-gig*, see (among others): Douglas 1969, and for a brief summary: Buckser 1997.

⁶² On *chiasmus* in the Akkadian language see: Hurowitz 2000, 68–69. It should also be noted that this *apodosis* occurs only once, here, in the compendium.

unfortunately not detectable within the omens themselves,⁶³ thus the next step would be to look at the structural relationships.

The thematic nature of the section is explicit, since, however impossible it may seem, the various sounds given by the foetus are taken into account. The sequence of the different lines is less clear. If the phenomena are regarded as being theoretical, it would be expected that in the following omens the text gives a list of the expressions most closely related to the verb *bakû* („to cry”), appearing in the first line, or recalls certain lists from the lexical corpus.⁶⁴ Since apparently neither conditions are met, furthermore the Sumerian equivalents of the keywords of the *protases* do not follow acrographic principles of arrangement (based on the form of cuneiform signs) either,⁶⁵ it is worthwhile to examine more thoroughly the meanings and connotations of the expressions involved.

The verb *hasû/azû* appearing in line 2 is translated as „to hiss” in the CAD,⁶⁶ and also interpreted accordingly by Erle Leichty.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the situation is not so unambiguous since both translations are based on *Šumma ālu* entries in which a „salamander/lizard” *hisses* in the bedroom.⁶⁸ In respect to punctual meaning, the commentary text on the latter compendium is of no help either, as *hasû* is explained here with the verb *šasû*,⁶⁹ which has several meanings, and beyond shouting, crying and calling, it can also refer to ear ringing, blowing and to whistling sounds⁷⁰ – therefore all we get to know is that this certain salamander gave out some sort of sound. Moreover, since we are dealing with omen texts, it is by no means certain that this is a typical „salamander sound” (i.e. hissing). The same can be said for the sounds produced by various animals, humans and inanimate objects appearing under the heading *azû* of the CAD.⁷¹ We cannot be certain that the dog associated with this expression „yelps”⁷² (since it can also growl or even whine), and it is utterly impossible to define the sound heard by a „ghost above the bed,”⁷³ or by the wall of a house.⁷⁴ A certain text use the expression in question for the description of the ringing of the ear, which is at places

⁶³ In line 3 an association based on the Sumerian phonetic value (2.5.2) may emerge, if we consider it possible that: UŠ = ÚŠ = /uš/ = *damu* (blood), which then would be paired with the verb *damāmu*. In this case the association would only involve the Akkadian phonetic form, since the two words can not be likened either etymologically or semantically, thus it is less explicit (and likely), than the one described earlier in the case of /muš/.

⁶⁴ Such or similar compilation can not be found in any of the known lexical lists, in the latter only the verbs *bakû* and *damāmu* can appear together, either as synonym or in parallel, see: Erimhuš II 124: še₈: *ba-ku-ú*, 125: še₈-še₈: *dim-ma-tu₄*, 126: še₈-še₈: *da-ma-mu*, and also Igituh I 214–217, Idu I 146–148. For the parallel use of the two verbs in Akkadian and other Semitic languages see the more detailed discussion of *damāmu* below.

⁶⁵ *bakû* = ér/šeš_x (A.IGI), šeš₄(ERIN), šeš (AxIGI), še₈ és še₈-še₈, the exact Sumerian equivalent of (*h*)*azû* is unknown, *damāmu* = generally še ša₄(DU), and še₈-še₈, respectively, whereas the Sumerian equivalents for the verb *šasû* are gū dé, and gū rah.

⁶⁶ CAD H 166, sub. *hazû*.

⁶⁷ Leichty 1970, 32, note 2.

⁶⁸ CT 38, 39:23.

⁶⁹ CT 41, 27 Rv. 9: *i-ha-az-zu* = *i-šá-as-su*.

⁷⁰ CAD Š/II sub. *šasû*, mainly 147–151. It is to be noted that the verb *šasû* occurs in regard to a sheep foetus at one place in the *Šumma izbu*, almost in the same context: *šumma izbu ina libbi ummišu issima* (XVII lines 83–85, *protases*). Unfortunately, no information is provided here either regarding the nature of the sound, the only clarity is that it can be heard clearly, since: *lahrum ahîtum îpulšu* (another sheep answered, see XVII 85).

⁷¹ see: CAD A/II 528–529.

⁷² CT 39, 2: 92, 93 and 94 (*Šumma ālu*), for the above proposed translation see: CAD A/II 529.

⁷³ CT 38, 26: 28 (*eṭemmu ina elēn majāli ihazzu*), also from the *Šumma ālu* compendium. Here, the CAD uses the translation „moaning,” see: CAD A/II, 529. The sound of the spirits is no less elusive than they themselves, it seems that in the rituals this is also referred to by the verb *šasû*, for more details see: Scurlock 2006, 8 („to shout”), and Text No. 1. (=AfO 29/30.4, 10–18) as well as No. 2. (AfO 29/30. 4, 19– Lo.E. 2’, OrNS 39 Tab. 5 = Rm 99, and SpTU 4 137).

⁷⁴ CT 38, 15: 48, the CAD translates as „groans” (see *ibid.*).

traditionally expressed with the verb *šasû*,⁷⁵ and it can also be used as a synonym of the latter when a person, suffering from a nightmare „screams, but no one hears,”⁷⁶ however, even these sources do not help in narrowing down the exact meaning. It is the examination of the words which can be brought into etymological connection with the verb *hasû/azû*, which brings us a little closer to understanding the expression. Thus, for example, the nominal *hasû* refers to „a person with speech defect,” the Sumerian equivalent of which (^{lú}*zê-za*)⁷⁷ appears in a Sumerian diatribe, where a certain Engardug, the object of abuse is „zê za among the singers.”⁷⁸ Furthermore in the work entitled *Competition Between Bird and Fish*, it appears as the sound of the marsh (*zê za engur-ra*).⁷⁹ The latter may refer to two types of sound phenomena: on the one hand to the sound of the water (perhaps some kind of bubbling), on the other hand to the rustling of the reeds.

The next related word is the homonymous *hasû*, which is the name of a water bird (Sumerian *šû-lú^{mušen}*, „bird with human hands,” i.e. bird with palm-shaped feet), and the same bird can also be designated with the Akkadian word *hūqu*.⁸⁰ The latter most probably refers to the bird’s characteristic voice, and this at last can give us some clue, since the akin word *hūqu* („C”)⁸¹ is the name of some kind of breathing difficulty,⁸² a symptom which signaled the imminent death of the patient. In addition to laboured breathing, or rattling, this raises several possibilities (chronic coughing, throat clearing, chest wheezing, etc.),⁸³ but it also starts to outline the layers of the meaning of the verb *hasû/azû* in question.

The translations „hissing” and „moaning” of the CAD, though most probably based on other associations, are not far from the rustling sound appearing here in connection with the reeds. It is more than likely that in the mentioned diatribe the singer was mocked because of a speech defect and not because he continuously „rattled” and „coughed,” since (unless he was dying) this could not have been his constant characteristic feature – thus, beyond lisping it would not really fit into the context. The water bird may also give a screeching sound and the „ringing of the ears” may also refer to a similar, sharp sound effect, however, it must be added that the possibility can not be excluded completely, that the concepts of „throat clearing, cawing” are the basic associatives. In any case it is certain that the exact meaning is not tangible, merely approachable.

We must not forget the context either, since it is interesting and none of the above sources explain in a satisfying manner how and why a verb with such a special meaning became one of the expressions referring to the sounds of crying or mourning. Unfortunately we are unable to give a certain answer, but there might be a possible explanation, namely, that the editors related it (perhaps owing to the phonological similarity) to *nahāsu*, since the expression *ithusu* formed from this appears in several places together and paired with a

⁷⁵ TDP 70:17 (*šumma uznāšu ihazzā*), for comparison: CAD A/II, 529.

⁷⁶ AfO 18 67 iii 29 (OB omen text) – *ihazzūma lā išemmūšu*, see: CAD A/II, 529.

⁷⁷ OB Lú B v 8, and A 138, see: CAD H 129.

⁷⁸ Diatribe B, 3. (= ETCSL 5.4.11).

⁷⁹ ETCSL 5.3.5, line 30.

⁸⁰ *šû-lú^{mušen}* = *ha-zu-ú* = *hu-u-qu* (Hg B iv 284 és 250a, as well as Hg C I 1), see: CAD H 244.

⁸¹ CAD H 244.

⁸² See: TDP 150:47 and TDP 150:43, as well as the commens of the CAD (H 244).

⁸³ It is to be noted that the CAD questionably associates the word with the verb *huqu* as well, interpreting it as „to croak, to caw,” since it refers to the sound of a crow (*āribu*), which of course would shift the balance towards the meaning „coughing, clearing of the throat.” The problem is that beyond the uncertainty of the etymological link, the verb occurs only twice, and in both cases in the *Šumma ālu*, thus, although there is no doubt that it refers to a sound given by a crow, in the absence of other attestations, the interpretation can not be completely certain.

Sumerian equivalent of *bakû*, that is, with *ér pād*.⁸⁴ The word *ithusu* can be equated with the Sumerian *sig₇-sig₇ gar*, actually meaning „to produce ‘sig₇(-sig₇)sounds/noises,’ an onomatopoeic expression referring to sobbing (and perhaps to the gasping of air).⁸⁵ The verb in such form is unknown to the ePSD, but *siġ-siġ*, which is interchangeable with *sig₇-sig₇* is a well-known Sumerian word,⁸⁶ with the following meanings: wind, breeze, spirit, soul (*mehû, šāru, ziqīqu*). If our assumption is correct, ie. the sequence indeed used the Sumerian *ér pād – sig₇-sig₇ gar* analogy,⁸⁷ a semantic correlation can also be presumed in addition to the phonological similarity, because the association in question makes it clear that in line 2 the verb *hasû* was used in the sense „to blow, rustle, hiss, etc.” Naturally the translation „to blow” based on the latter conclusions is still questionable and only of approximate nature. The discussed assumptions, furthermore, do not explain everything, since they do not give an answer to why the special and rather rare verb *hazû/azû* was used (and why not *nahāsu*, basically arising from the above word pair), and what was attempted to be conveyed through that.

In contrast, *damāmu*, appearing in line 3 is a frequently used verb, which is clearly related to the concept of mourning, turning up with the same meaning in other Semitic languages as well, and traditionally also as a parallel to the equivalents of *bakû*.⁸⁸ The general translations („to cry, weep, mourn”) do not really specify its meaning, thus it is worth taking a look at the characteristic sounds it can be associated with. Similarly to its Hebrew equivalent, with which the cooing of doves, the sounds coming from the marsh, as well as „murmuring/muttering” can be expressed,⁸⁹ *damāmu* also primarily refers to the cooing of doves in non-divinatory texts, i.e. in those which may contain metaphors based on reality.⁹⁰ Whilst not connected in the CAD to the presently discussed verb, mention should be made of the expression *dummû* as well, because based on semantic considerations they can by all means be related: namely, *dummû* primarily refers to the murmuring, roaring of the sea.⁹¹

Accordingly, although in a wider sense the expressions have similar meanings related to crying, even a detailed etymological and semantic analysis does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the logical sequence of the key-words appearing in the first four lines. Relevant to the sequence is that the composers of the Nineveh tablet (*nishu*) (indeed) removed the second and third omens containing the discussed verbs, so lines 1 and 4 came directly behind each other. If we too place them likewise, the text will read as follows:

be mí *a-rat-ma šá šā-šá* (B: šà šà-šà) *i-bak-ki* (B: ér(A.IGI)
kur níġ-giġ igi-mar

⁸⁴ For the compilation of such sources see: George 2002, 141–142.

⁸⁵ George 2002, 142.

⁸⁶ Further to the above, it may occur in the form *si-si-ig/ga*, see: ePSD sub. *sisig*.

⁸⁷ This assumption may also be supported by a possible reference of the *apodosis*, because the commentary identifies *kurru* with *māhīru* (market price) (Kol. i 1, see: Leichty 1970, 211) and the Sumerian equivalent of the latter, *ki-lam* has a special *ki-siġ₇-lam* spelling as well, though it must be noted that this is quite rare and most probably exclusively Old Babylonian, therefore it is questionable whether it was known by the composers of the first millennium series. Regarding *ki-siġ₇-lam* see: CAD M/I (sub *māhīru*) 96.

⁸⁸ Thus the Hebrew *d-m-m* II generally appears as the pair of *b-k-y* in the Biblical texts, in more detail see: Levine 1993, mainly 90–93, and for Ugaritic examples: cited work, 95.

⁸⁹ See Levine 1993, mainly 102.

⁹⁰ Among others: *kīma summe adammuma gimir ūmēja* (Ludlul I 107), for further such examples see: CAD D 60.

⁹¹ Naturally, it cannot be neglected that it appears as the equivalent of the Sumerian compound *še ša4*, as also the expression *damāmu*, see: SBH 20:46–47: *šā a.ab.ba.gin še. ām ša4[.zu]: kīma libbi tāmtim tudammū*. For the further examples see: CAD D 179.

be mí *a-rat-ma šá šà-šá* (B: *šà šà-šà*) *is-si-ma še-mu-ú iš-me*⁹²

Let us start at the end: this *figura etymologica* formed from the verb „to hear” (*šemû*) is a relatively rare expression, which is limited to the corpus of the Neo Assyrian oracular queries and omen collections, respectively, it therefore basically seems to be a part of the professional terminology of divination. Although it was raised that the literal „those who can hear will hear” would be a reference to certain phenomena being revealed only to expert observers,⁹³ the opposite interpretation could also be true, which is supported by the *mātu išme* („the land hears”) variant of the expression.⁹⁴ Thus „those who can hear, (will) hear” – i.e. understand. In the oracular queries this is supplemented with a parallel phrase, as follows: *āmīru immar – šēmû išme* (those/he who (can) see, those/he who (can) hear). The phrase, though not belonging to the obligatory formula of such texts,⁹⁵ can be read at several places (mostly in the following form: **igi(-ru/ri) igi(-mar) še-mu-ú iš-me**), and typically as a question: „Will he who can see, see it, (and) he who can hear, hear it?”⁹⁶

It is perhaps not a coincidence, that the *Šumma izbu* text variant, originating from Uruk, uses the ér, i.e. the A.IGI signs for the visualization of *bakû*. Looking at the image of this Neo Babylonian tablet, the following tentative association can be revealed: 1. **igi igi-mar** 2. *šemû išme*. Assuming that we are dealing with the conscious use of signs and words for such purposes, a newer intertextual reference can be registered, since this phrase clearly recalls the wording of the oracle queries – the only question remaining is how it should be interpreted in this context and what should be regarded as its subject, that is, what should or could be seen and heard? Unfortunately at such level of „underlying” analysis, we can only speculate, but in any case it may not be incidental that with the mentioned *chiasmus*, the scribe purposely laid the emphasis on the word *ikkibu*, i.e. „taboo”. Several texts are known which are defined by the colophon as the „taboo of gods” – among others such is the earlier mentioned K 307 too, which also seems to be quoted by the *Šumma izbu*.⁹⁷ These texts kept the secrets of „privileged” knowledge only approachable by the experts, the insiders – i.e. such secrets, which could only be seen and understood by certain, worthy persons.⁹⁸ It can not be excluded therefore that the reference hidden behind the opening lines conveys a message similar to that of the mentioned colophons – however, in the absence of parallels this stays a presumption for the time being.

Whilst also only on the level of assumption, the next question is also worth considering: does this part of the text give reference to the content of the next section, and if so, in what form? From the fifth line onwards the compendium lists animals which can be „born of” women: included are the lion, the earlier mentioned wolf, dog, and even elephant and various tortoises – there seems to be complete confusion.⁹⁹ According to the assumption of Marten Stol, here the prematurely aborted embryos, resembling certain animal forms were studied, which seems fitting, particularly if we consider that disorders causing various distortions quite frequently end in spontaneous abortions, generally in the first trimester of

⁹² Since the associative reference in the case of the fourth omen, discussed further below, involves only the *protasis*, the lengthy enumeration of the *apodosis* will not be requested here.

⁹³ Schott 1938, mainly 293.

⁹⁴ Biggs 1967, 120:2, see note 104.

⁹⁵ For more on the terminology see: Starr 1990, 14–28, and on the expression in question, which may appear among the closing formulas of the actual request (but with optional use), see: cited work, 20.

⁹⁶ For example: SAA 4 3 (Obv. 9), 5 (Obv. 9), 7 (Obv. 7), 14 (Obv. 13), 18 (Obv. 13).

⁹⁷ See note 49.

⁹⁸ For more on such layers of meaning for *ikkibu* see: Lenzi 2008, mainly 157-160.

⁹⁹ I 5–18.

pregnancy.¹⁰⁰ Naturally, it should be kept in mind that the text may contain several hypothetical elements, furthermore it might even follow a certain defined pattern¹⁰¹ – this however does not necessarily alter the basic conception. In this regard the use of the verb *šasû* in line 4 is noteworthy, or rather that of the *issi(ma)* formed from it, which is the only past tense form among the four, and which is univocal with the G *praeteritum* Sg/3 form of several other verbs. One of these is the not too frequent *našû/nešû*, which has the meanings „to rip out, to cut up, to incise.”¹⁰² Based on the Akkadian phonological rules, owing to a possible /š/>/s/ change next to /n/, besides *išši*, theoretically the G *praeteritum* of this verb could also take the form of *issi*.¹⁰³ The possible reference makes sense if we consider that the embryos of premature abortions are situated within the so-called embryo sack, therefore to be able to study them, first the sac has to be opened up, so they have to be cut out.

A further association can also be made. We mentioned earlier that the expression *issi(ma) šēmû išemme* appears apart from its occurrences in the corpus of the oracle queries only and moreover exclusively in the *protases* of omen texts. It must be added here however, that the majority of these are astronomical omens, and the phrase is used to make references to astronomical phenomena.¹⁰⁴ Another observation is that the intertextual reference to the wolf appearing here (I, line 6) can presumably be associated with the Lupus Constellation. At this point it is worth recalling the so-called „Esoteric Commentary,” which explicitly associates the descriptions found in the teratological compendium with astronomical phenomena.¹⁰⁵ According to this commentary text, the *Šumma izbu*, the Diagnostic Handbook (*sa-gig/sakikkû*) and the Physiognomical Collection (*Alamdimmû*) can be brought into connection with certain constellations, in other words: „the secrets of heaven and earth should be observed (together)” (*niširtu šamê u eršeti ušur*).¹⁰⁶ Of course the assumption formed on these bases is not aimed at the fact that the *protases* appearing in Tablet I, lines 5–18 actually list constellations (though, we might add, almost all animals would have their astral counterpart), it is simply considered possible that the editors of the omen series, in knowledge

¹⁰⁰ See: Keeling 1993, 87–110, mainly 89–90 and 96–97 (the latter subsections containing studies on 12-week-old embryos, in which cases certain abnormalities are already visible).

¹⁰¹ Such animal lists also appear on several occasions in the *Šumma izbu* (II 1–8, V 42–56, VII 7–23, etc.), but these follow a somewhat different pattern. Leichty searched for the sources of these animal lists in the lexical tradition, however in the surviving lexical texts, such sequences are not found. See: Leichty 1970, 25.

¹⁰² See CAD N/II, 190, sub. *nešû*

¹⁰³ GAG 37, §30/c.

¹⁰⁴ Ach Supp. 2 63 iv 19–20: (*šumma kakkabu*) *rigimšu issima šēmû išme* „(If a star) gives a sound, which if someone can hear, will hear,” and also see line 25 (almost literally the same), for more on the text: Schott 1938, mainly 290–293. Furthermore: PRT 21:17, 25:5, as well as an alternative variant: Biggs 1967, 120:2: (*diš mul*) [*šam-r*]i^š *is-sa-a-ma kur iš-me* [...] *iš-mu-ú*, var: [...] *is-sa-a un^{meš} kur še ga X* „(If a star) gives a terrible(?) sound, and the country hears it, (... they hear). In more detail: Biggs 1967, mainly 120–124.

The only exception can be found in the *Šumma ālu*, and it refers to a ghost: *šumma ina bīt amēli ešemmu issima šēmû išme* (CT 38 26:26).

¹⁰⁵ For the edition see: Biggs 1968, and for the further commentaries: Böck 2000. The text can most likely be dated to the Persian era, but the temporal distribution of the similar, i.e. 5th century copies of the „esoteric/mystic” commentaries show that it might be traced back to (at least) Neo-Assyrian forerunners (for comparison see e.g. the scientific text involving the granaries of the Ekur

(= i.NAM.giš.hur.an.ki.a): Livingstone 1986, mainly 17, and see also note 52).

¹⁰⁶ LBA 1601 Obv. 4., for translation of the above see: Böck 2000, 619, as well as Lenzi 2008, 165. The text hereinafter discusses astronomical phenomena which result in the birth of defined *izbus*. For more on the interconnection and inseparability of celestial and terrestrial signs see: KAR 44 (The Babylonian Diviner's Manual) 38–42. For the discussion of the latter text in detail see: Oppenheim 1974, for the relevant passage see esp. 200 (transcription) and 204 (translation).

of the paradigms of the era's scientific thinking,¹⁰⁷ (subsequently) could **also** have interpreted them in such manner, i.e. the text could **also** have followed a defined celestial pattern.

Whilst such a holistic interpretation stays only a theoretical possibility, it is absolutely certain that the *Šumma izbu* with its brilliant metaphors, its meaningful structure and its significant references should be considered more than a simple handbook—in a modern sense. In chapter two, regarding the connections between *protases* and *apodoses*, selected examples of certain omen series were analyzed, in which distinct associative techniques could be discovered. However, the examination of a longer, coherent text detail unfolded the slightly ungrateful nature of such a task, because the associations, references and structural principles that were clear to the Mesopotamian scholar, can by no means be recognized and understood by us in every case. Nevertheless, such studies are not at all „a waste of time,” not even in the case of the just analyzed first section. The few demonstrable associations and the vaguely, but still distinctively emerging structural concepts are indications that the exposed interpretational techniques played an important role even in the first few lines of the compendium, and, according to contemporary views, these lines were at least of such scientific value as any other part of the *Šumma izbu* – if not of greater.

Overall it can be stated, that the scribes gave a worthy written form to the „revelation of Ea,” thus the following statement is true to the word:

tušarrūtu bīt būni niširti ^d*Ammanki[ma]*
tadallipšimma niširtiša ukallam[ka]

The scribe's craft is a joyful thing, the secret lore of Enki (=Ea),
if you work ceaselessly, it will reveal its secrets to you.

(TCL 16, 96:7–8)¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ See for example: Maul 1999, mainly 6, and 12–13.

¹⁰⁸ nam-dub-sar-ra é-a níg-tuku ki-ùri ^dAm-ma-an-ki-[ke₄] / [igi]-DU um-ma-ra-ak-en ki-ùri na-an-da-ab-lá-en. For the edition of the whole text („Examentest D”) see: Sjöberg 1972, and for the cited line: 126.

4. Real observations?

As stated in the introductory part, from a Mesopotamian point of view the real experience of an omen is not inevitable. This though, does not attenuate the scientific value of the descriptions found in the *protases* based on non-experienced phenomena, the irrationalities are simply theoretical possibilities in a system attempting to cover every possibility and striving for perfection. In general however, the theoretical extrapolations derive from a certain empirical observation, which is modified and enhanced, respectively. In case of the first four lines, forming a closed thematic unit, this scheme seems invalid since seemingly every phenomenon is absurd. Nonetheless, before hastily stating that the descriptions of the first four *protases* give evidence of the vivid fantasy of Mesopotamians rather than of an empirical approach, it is worth exploring whether similar events have ever been reported.

It is not surprising that several references can be found according to which during the course of history, the crying or shouting of a foetus was also regarded as being an impossible, supernatural phenomenon, and in later times also being thought of as a divine sign or prodigy. Titus Livius for example mentions that in 214 B.C., during the critical days of the Second Punic War, several prodigious phenomena, predicting the victory of Rome, were reported, amongst the Marrucini for instance, a victory cry was heard from an infant „in the mother’s womb.”¹⁰⁹ According to tradition, St. John the Baptist whooped,¹¹⁰ prophet Muhammad cried out *in utero*,¹¹¹ while the Russian hagiography makes mention of an event when once St. Sergius of Radonezh burst out sobbing no less than three times during Sunday mass – well before his birth.¹¹²

After all these it seems all the more surprising, that when we search for further references later in time, a rather abundant material can be found in medical literature from the first half of the twentieth century: in the columns of modern scientific periodicals a number of well known, expert gynecologists and obstetricians wrote about the crying within the womb (*vagitus uterinus*), regarding the phenomenon as real and explainable. Such essays were frequently accompanied by case reports, in which the physicians realistically depicted and discussed their own astonishing experiences in connection with crying fetuses. Since these authors were professionals, it would be hard to believe that they would have wanted to put an end to their career and make fools of themselves before the entire profession. Some authors were stirred by the experience and started to collect data: R.S. Illingworth for example reported as many as 125 cases which could be found in the „literature” – and he only ventured as far as the beginning of the 19th century.¹¹³ Occasionally the ominous crying was heard by a smaller team (as in one case in a 19th century „operating theater”), inducing the superstitious astonishment of those present: for example, one of the nurses knelt down and prayed for several hours, until the birth of the baby.¹¹⁴ Scientific explanation to the phenomenon became an issue triggering heated debates, since as a prerequisite of *vagitus uterinus* air had to somehow enter the womb, which assumption was found by many to be nonsense and even

¹⁰⁹ Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, book 24 10. caput: *infantem in utero matris in Marrucinis 'Io triumphae' clamasse.*

¹¹⁰ According to the Gospel of Luke, upon the visit of Mary, Elizabeth’s „babe (lit. foetus) whooped (lit. leaped for joy) in her womb” (ἔσκιρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς), Lk 1, 41, and compare: Lk 1, 44 (ἔσκιρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου „the babe in my womb leaped for joy”).

¹¹¹ Illingworth 1955, 75, Pinkerton 1969, 482.

¹¹² Illingworth 1955, 75, Pinkerton, 1969, 482, Thyret 1994, 486.

¹¹³ Illingworth 1955, 75.

¹¹⁴ For a report of the case see: Clouston 1933, 201.

ridiculous.¹¹⁵ Others argued that in the majority of the reported cases interventions were necessary, which were carried out manually or with the use of forceps, during the course of which it was possible somehow for the air to reach the womb.¹¹⁶ Still others went further, and regarded the phenomenon of *vagitus uterinus* as real, to the extent that a specific classification was even introduced. For example, Ian M. Jackson differentiated between two types of cryings within the womb, a „weak, moaning” type mostly only heard by stethoscope and a „loud, gasping for air” type, associated with writhing movements and asphyxia in general.¹¹⁷

It is not up to us to decide which camp was right, and from our point of view it is not necessarily essential either – although it should be noted that from the second half of the 20th century there is no trace of such reports in the medical literature. It is an essential fact, however, that the mentioned physicians, together with many others of their colleagues, were witnesses or narrators of sound effects resembling crying from the womb in case of humans and occasionally also of animals.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, whatever the explanation is, there had and has to be a phenomenon which was sometimes perceived in ancient Mesopotamia too, and which could most accurately be described by the intellectuals of the ancient Land Between the Rivers in the same manner as by their descendants thousands of years later: as foetal crying.

What else can be said about the verbs „blowing, hissing” and „whirring” occurring in lines 2 and 3, in connection with which clear, logical structural principles were hard to detect? In the heroic age of the stethoscope, a good friend of the inventor René Laennec, a certain Jacques Kergaradec, who was the first to use the tool during the study of gravidae and who as a matter of fact could be thought of as the forefather of gynecological listening, outlined at length the characteristic sounds which could be heard from the abdomen of pregnant women. According to his report written in 1822, thorough listening to the abdomen of a pregnant woman at an advanced stage with a stethoscope, or even with just the ear, a characteristic, blowing kind of sound can be heard in the majority of cases in some part of the womb. He called it the „placental souffle,” because he thought that the sound could be heard the most clearly at the fixation point of the placenta.¹¹⁹ Several other gynecologists of the era also described the sound, comparing it to the blowing of the wind, the murmuring of the sea and also to blowing, respectively – worthy of mention is the association of Dr. Evory Kennedy, who in certain cases considered it to resemble to the „cooing of doves.”¹²⁰

In this case the sound undoubtedly exists: it is produced by the circulation of the placenta and is clearly heard during the modern doppler test, with contemporary gynecologists referring to it in general as „the sound of a snow storm”. Naturally with the naked ear it can only be detected (if detected) in case the individual knows precisely what to search for and why – although, it should be added, it is perfectly perceivable with a cone made of wood, bone, etc, resembling to the early tool of Laennec (Figs. 3–4.).¹²¹ It is understandable that in case of certain diseases involving pregnant women, like toxemia or autoimmune diseases,

¹¹⁵ See cited work, with the listings of pros and cons.

¹¹⁶ Among others: Peters 1929.

¹¹⁷ Jackson 1943, 266.

¹¹⁸ H. Matthiasson for example (Matthiasson 1933) reports on experiences related to *vagitus uterinus* in connection with pregnant cows – though in this case it can not be excluded that the obstetrician fell prey to the unique sense of humor of his „farmer friends.” The author, however, mentions an interesting literary reference (*Formanna sögur*, 1828, Bd. 11, 10), according to which the whining of puppies in the uterus of their mothers was regarded in the Saga as an omen of significant events.

¹¹⁹ Based on Lee 1844, 153–154.

¹²⁰ Based on Lee 1844, 154.

¹²¹ Based on oral reports and comments. It is to be mentioned that in Hungary a few decades ago the physicians and nurses still learned the listening to and observing of the foetal heart rate with such a wooden funnel.

such as SLE (*systemic lupus erythematosus*) or CLAS (*circulating lupus anticoagulant syndrome*) which are accompanied by hypertension,¹²² or in case of abdominal pregnancies, where the blood circulation becomes rather intensive in the placental arteries (which fundamentally do not serve this purpose), the „blowing noise” also becomes louder.¹²³ It might therefore be assumed that quite rarely (and naturally not from a great distance, though not when directly examining the abdominal wall either) the sound could be heard by the „unprofessional ear” as well.

Therefore, though it will never be completely verified, it is feasible that at the beginning of the teratological *Šumma izbu* series a description of this certain „placental souffle” is given, and additionally with a terminology strikingly similar to the definitions of the 19th century.¹²⁴ Based on all the above, the case of the first four lines is informative also from the viewpoint of analysis of the real observations found in the omen collection, since it points out that at times even the seemingly most absurd description may contain some truth – and can therefore be of interest both to the assyriologist and to the medical historian.



Figure 3–4.: Stethoscope of Laennec from the heroic age, and its cross section illustrated by J. Kergaradec

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¹²² For a review of diseases of such nature see: Benirschke-Kaufmann 1990, 499–529 (disorders associated with hypertension) and 530–541 (lupus).

¹²³ Studying the presence of the „blowing noise” in abdominal pregnancies, it was found that these noises are much louder than in case of normal pregnancies (Dixon – Stewart 1960, mainly 1105).

¹²⁴ Naturally this does not mean that the observations of the two periods can be grouped into the same category, since beyond the fact that the why and how of the phenomenon was evidently unclear in Mesopotamia, we cannot even talk of systematic observations, as for example in case of the pulse. In regard to the latter see: Oppenheim 1962, and on the scientific value (according to modern sense) of the observation: cited work, 30–33.

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