Babylonian Witchcraft Literature: Case Studies

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Chapter One

Problem, Hypothesis and Illustration

A study of all published and many unpublished Akkadian prayers and incantations containing witchcraft-related terminology reveals that most of the texts deal primarily with witchcraft and can be typed and assigned to distinct categories on structural and thematic grounds. In a number of texts, however, these terms occur as members of a much larger group of evils and stand in no causal relationship to the non-witchcraft terms. While this creates no essential difficulty for the interpreter in those instances where the text has as its object the combatting of evils of all types (as, for example, in the General Namburbi group represented by JAOS 59 11ff. (13:6-8) and parallels: LKA 128 (obv. 10f.) // (?) KAR 120 and KAR 282 (Frag. 1:3) and the related KAR 286 (15)1), it does pose problems of an internal and/or contextual nature in a number of texts belonging to a wide range of prayer and incantation types.

It is the purpose of this study to demonstrate that many of these texts are not made of whole cloth, but have undergone a series of changes, that these texts are often best understood as recensional stages in the development of a composition and that an understanding of these texts, be it for purposes of interpretation, literary or religious history or translation, requires the application of "higher critical" methods. We propose to examine examples drawn from two text groups. These text groups were chosen because they are characterized by structurally different types of enumeration. The examples drawn from these groups were chosen because they exemplify different processes of development and require different types of analysis.

However, before turning to these texts, it will be of some benefit to illustrate the differences between "manuscripts" of one com-

1Cf. JNES 19 153, where all these texts, save for the last one, are listed. A witchcraft entry occurs in all General Namburbi incantations of the JAOS 59 13 group sufficiently preserved to permit judgment and in almost all the texts influenced by it. See below Chapter 2, Sec. D, 4, Position of Witchcraft Entry, 1), and notes 3, 53 and 54. The appropriateness of the inclusion of this entry in this General Namburbi type will be discussed elsewhere.
position, each of which must be classified as a different recension. K 2467 + 80-7-19, 116 obv. r. col. 12' - rev. r. col. 2, KAR 78:1'-5' and KAR 226 IV 3-13 provide us with an excellent example; for the genetic relationship between these texts is undeniable and their differences probably exemplify the simplest form of expansion of a short list of evils. These incantations are particularly relevant to our study because they relate to the General Namburbi, \(^2\) demonstrate the secondary nature of the witchcraft theme and occur in witchcraft contexts. \(^4\)

\(^2\)These texts have been identified as duplicates by Reiner, Šurpu (AfO Beiheft 11) [Henceforth: Šurpu], p. 54, and the first two lines of our incantation have already been transliterated and translated there. For KAR 78:4'-5', cf. RA 36 31 n. 4. In K 2467 + and KAR 78, as well as in Šurpu, p. 12 II 9f., the incantation aktabsakka is followed by the incantation īpuš \(^d\) Ea īpuš \(^d\) Ea (cf. Šurpu, p. 54). In KAR 226 IV, however, the incantation aktabsakka is followed not by īpuš \(^d\) Ea but by two fragmentary lines (14-15), the first of which ([xx(x) Ū.IN\(]_\nu\) US GIš. \(\ldots\) ]; cf. possibly JCS 21 10:6+ and references there) probably contains a ritual. Therefore, although it still remains possible that the incantation īpuš \(^d\) Ea occurs also in KAR 226, there is no evidence for this (modify accordingly the statement in Šurpu, p. 54). (For lists of occurrences of the incantation īpuš \(^d\) Ea, cf. RA 36 31f., OrNS 8 306f. and especially 307 n. 3, Šurpu, p. 54, and Caplice, The Akkadian Text Genre Namburbi [Diss., University of Chicago, 1963] pp. 172f.)

\(^3\)KAR 78 has been classed in RA 48 7 as a Namburbi text written on an amulet. It is interesting to note the connections between the incantation found in K 2467 +, KAR 78 and KAR 226 and the General Namburbis. Three essential elements in this incantation have parallels in that group: (a) the request that the exiting periods carry off evils and the entering ones bring goodness is found in KAR 37 rev.(!) 2f. (cf. RA 36 31 n. 4) and JAOS 59 14:27f.; (b) plants, in their releasing and purifying role, are mentioned in contiguity to the aforementioned motif in KAR 37 rev.(!) 1 and JAOS 59 14:24-26; and (c) the evils listed in KAR 226 IV 8-10 recur in JAOS 59 13:3-10, LKA 128:5-10 // KAR 120:5-8, KAR 282 frag. 2:6-8, AnBi 12 284:56f., KAR 286:10-13 and in texts influenced by this genre (KAR 26 obv. 41 f., Maqlû VII 123ff., KAR 269 rev. 2'-4' and JNES 15 142:60f.). [Note that a witchcraft sequence almost always occurs in these texts in the larger list of which these lines form part; the only exceptions are AnBi 12 and JNES 15. See above note 1 and below Chapter 2, Sec. D, 4, Position of Witchcraft Entry, 1), and notes 53 and 54.]

\(^4\)See below note 10.
K 2467 + 80-7-19, 116

obv. r. col.
12' [ÉN ak-tab-sa]-ka šá-ad-da-ak-ka GIŠ.Š[INIG]
13' [GIŠ.SIKIL.LA Ú].[IN].NU.ÜŠ GIŠ.ŠÁ.GIŠ[IMMAR]
14' [im-tu-ia ta-n]i-hi-ia ta-di-ri-ti-[ia]

rev. r. col.
1 U₄-mu ITU¹ [MU.AN.NA šá it-tal-ku lum-ni lit-ba-lu]
2 KIMIN šá [ir]-[ru-bu-ni TI.LA li/lu-bi/bil-lu-ni ÉN]

KAR 78

[ÉN ak-tab-sa-ka ša-ad-da-ak-ka GIŠ.ŠINIG]
1' [GIŠ.SIKIL.LA]AI? ŠIJ.IN.NU.ÜŠ ŠÁ-bi gi-[šim-ma-rí]
2' [im-tu-iá] ta-ni-hu-iá ta-dir⁵-[ti?]-[iá]
3' [(x x)] [(x x)] [u]-<a> a-a hu-Us-su GAZ ŠÁ-bi ta-[x] [x x]
4' [U₄-mu ITU] MU.AN.NA šá it-tal-ku lum-ni lit-[ba]-[lu]
5' [U₄-mu ITU] MU.AN.NA šá ir-ru-bu-nu TIN lu-bil-lu-ni É[N]

KAR 226 IV

3 ÉN ak-tab-sa-k[a ša-ad-da-ak-ka GIŠ.ŠINIG]
4 GIŠ.SIKIL.LA Ú.I[NU.ÜŠ GIŠ.ŠÁ.GIŠIMMAR ( ... )]
5 im-tu-ia ta-ni-hu-ia ta-[di-ra-ti-ia⁶]
6 'la¹-a tU-ub ŠÁ-bi-ia [la-a tU-ub UZU.MEŠ-ia⁷ (HUL?)]
7 [kis]-[pi³] ru-he-e ru-se-e up-ša-še-e [HUL.MEŠ-te ša LU.MEŠ-te]
8 [HUL MÁŠ].[GIš!?].MEŠ Á.MEŠ-te GISKIM.MEŠ-te
   HUL.[MEŠ-te NU DÜG.GA.MEŠ]
9 [UZU.MEŠ ha]-[tu]-[ú-te⁸ H]UL.MEŠ-te pár-du-ú-[te

⁸Can DIR have the value dira? Note Renger’s objection (ZA 61 37f.) to the assignment of CVCV values to CVC signs.
⁶Perhaps this line is to be further restored according to KAR 78:3⁴.
⁸Similar lists seem to require this restoration of 9a. The major difficulty is that the normal form of this line in these lists is (HUL) UZU.(MEŠ/ME)
ha/haftu/te/LAL? MEŠ par/pár-du-ti/te lem-nu-ti/HUL.MEŠ NU
A simple comparison of these texts reveals that the group of evils which is limited to one line in K 2467 + 80-7-19, 116 has been expanded by a further line in KAR 78 and by six lines in KAR 226.10