Abhandlung

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Bīt mēseri at Aššur

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Abstract: A 191, a Neo-Assyrian tablet from the Haus des Beschworungs priester in Aššur, preserves instructions for the performance of an apotropaic ritual called Bīt mēseri (“house of enclosure”). The tablet, which is edited here for the first time, offers a version of the ceremony that is markedly different from the standard Bīt mēseri ritual known from other first-millennium sources found at Nineveh, Aššur, and various Babylonian sites. Whereas the core rites with their apotropaic images (figurines and paintings) are far less complex than their counterparts in the standard ritual, the ceremony attested on A 191 also includes elements that are absent in other Bīt mēseri sources. These elements include a Pazuzu rite, ointments, and the burning of incense, all of which are known from other āšipūtu (exorcistic) text series, such as Muššuʾu, Qutāru, the Zi-pà Compendium, and the Pazuzu Compendium.

1 Bīt mēseri: The ‘standard ritual’

The recitations and ritual instructions of a ceremony called bīt mēseri (“house of enclosure”) by Babylonian and Assyrian scholars are well known from first-millennium cuneiform manuscripts.¹ The overall reconstruction of the ritual, whose main purpose was the expulsion of demons from a patient’s house, relies to a large extent on the relevant fragments that have been identified and rejoined among the remains of the royal tablet collections at Nineveh.² All Bīt mēseri manuscripts from Nineveh known to me at present are written in the Neo-Assyrian script. They can be attributed to a ritual tablet, counted as the first tablet of the series (here referred to as Bīt mēseri RT [Ritual Tablet]),³ and probably three different types of tablet sequences that contained the wording of the recitation texts⁴ (here referred to as Bīt mēseri IT [Incantation Tablet IT], Bīt mēseri IAF [Incantation Tablet Aššur], and Bīt mēseri IAT [Incantation Tablet Akitu]),⁵ although it is uncertain whether this specific reference to a “house of (ritual) enclosure” is directly related to the ritual of the same name or rather to other types of ritual confinement that the king had to undergo (see Ambos 2013a).

¹ The name of the ritual is attested in several colophons of Bīt mēseri manuscripts, always in the spelling ḫ me-se-ri; see VAT 13666+ r. iv 23’ (Meier 1941–44), BM 13513 r. 6’ (frg., CT 51, 191), 1882–3–23, 67 r. 6’ (Geers, Heft D 38, https://cdli.ucla.edu/downloads, last accessed 1 vii 1941); Sm 1939 r. iv 9’ (Frank 1925), A 191 o. 1, r. 8 (edited here). The Exorcist’s Handbook mentions Bīt mēseri in l. 11, side by side with the ritual Bīt rimki, as ḫ me-se-ri (A 366 o. 11, coll.), ḫ me-se-ri (Rm 717+ o. 11, Geller 2000, 249), ḫ me-se-ri (BM 55155+ o. 11, Geller 2000, 267), [Ḫ me-se-ri]² (SpTU 5, 231 o. 11), and ḫ me-se-ri²³ (KAR 44 o. 11, Geller 2000, 245). The addition of the plural determinative in KAR 44 is influenced by the preceding entries and therefore represents an inferior variant (the transliterations in Geller 2000, 264, and Jean 2006, 65, indicate the plural determinative also for Rm 717+, but this is in contradiction to Geller’s handcopy). Alternatively, the incipit of tablet I (TUkum.Bi) served as series title; see W 22762/2 (SpTU 2, 8) r. iv 28’: TUkum.Bi AL.TI:L an-nu-û né-pe-šu šalmu[(nu)]⁴ ustātu(giš, ẖur)USES śipātu(ex)USES ʃa ‘le-šu-er be-ši vi-vi, the final phrase should probably be restored as sa eser bīti “of enclosing the house”. A ceremony (or possibly institution) ẖ me-se-ri² is already attested in the MB document PBS 2/2, 65 o. 2 (delivery of two sheep and a goat). The Eclipse Hemerology recommends that the king sit in the ẖ me-ser for two days in the event of a lunar eclipse in Du’uzu (CT 4, 5 o. 14, ed. Livingstone 2013, 196); it is uncertain whether this specific reference to a “house of (ritual) enclosure” is directly related to the ritual of the same name or rather to other types of ritual confinement that the king had to undergo (see Ambos 2013a).

² For a provisional overview of the manuscripts, see Borger (1974), with additions and corrections in HKL II 195–96 and Wiggermann (1992, 106–13). Borger’s full edition of Bīt mēseri was never published, and I have no information on how far his work on the text advanced when he passed away. In any case, Borger’s work will remain foundational to any editorial work on Bīt mēseri.

³ Only two manuscripts of the Nineveh ritual tablet of Bīt mēseri (tablet I) have been identified so far: K 6310 + Sm 263 + 678 (+) K 6390 + 6668 + 8189 + 8980 + Sm 2004 (+) Sm 1939 (+) 1881–7–27, 279 and the small fragment K 9738 (identification T. Mitto). The following fragments have been published: K 6310 (BRR 2, 53); K 6390 (AMT 34/2); K 8189 (AMT 2/5); K 8980 (AMT 94/9); Sm 263 (AMT 71/a); Sm 1939 (Frank 1925); Sm 2004 (BRR 2, 48); 1881–7–27, 279 (AMT 96/5). Photographs of all fragments are available on https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection and https://cdli.ucla.edu (last accessed 12 vii 2021).

⁴ Bīt mēseri includes 20 ritual-specific recitations with the following incipits: (1) Gašru Śipā etel Eridu; (2) Lugal-ıṣ-ra alan suḥ-
Whereas the details of the proceedings during the first and second day of the ritual are still largely unknown, the Nineveh ritual tablet preserves a fairly full account of the agenda of the third day and, in a more fragmentary passage, of the following night.

Important information not least on the proceedings during that night and the final rites on the morning of the fourth day is provided by first-millennium manuscripts from Babylonian libraries, in particular from Babylon and Uruk. The Babylonian subdivision of the text into serialized tablets differs from the tablet sequences attested in Nineveh and seems to have transmitted the final ritual instructions together with the text of the first seven incantations, followed by incantations 8–20 on a final tablet. Some tablet types are, as yet, known only from Babylonia, most importantly a tabular inventory of the ritual’s figurines and paintings from Uruk and a tablet containing only the incantations addressed to the urigallu-standards. The fragment of a school text, presumably from Babylon, shows that at least some of the recitation texts of Bit mēseri found their way into the curriculum of scribal education.

2 Bit mēseri at Aššur

The reconstruction of the series of tablets into which ancient scholarship subdivided the texts of the agenda and recitanda of Bit mēseri was much influenced by G. Meier’s (1941–44) edition of what he considered “Die zweite Tafel der Serie bit mēseri”. Meier provided an edition of recitations 1–6 of Bit mēseri, establishing his reconstruction of the text on the basis of the Nineveh fragments known to him at the time and, as the main source, the two-column Aššur tablet VAT 13666 + 13680. While the article included neither a handcopy nor a separate transliteration of VAT 13666+, the scope of the edition was determined by the fact that VAT 13666+ originally comprised recitations 1–6 (extant: 2–6). The tablet ends with a catchline to recitation 7 (A-ru-ub maškim ūlu) and a fragmentary catchline that states: [DUB X]. Since the Nineveh series was known to count the ritual tablet as the first tablet of the series, Meier restored the tablet
number in VAT 13666+ as the second tablet. This conclusion is still valid, even though the extent of the Aššur tablet II, covering recitations 1–6, does not agree with any of the tablet sequences that can be reconstructed for the Nineveh manuscripts (cf. supra with fn. 5), and also does not conform with the tablet subdivision of the text attested in Babylonia (cf. supra with fn. 7).

Meier further argued that the Aššur incantation catalogue VAT 13723+ (Ass. 13956 ak, Pedersén 1986, 66, N4: 291) provided evidence confirming the following tablet sequence: ritual agenda (tablet I), recitations 1–6 (tablet II), recitations 7—… (tablet III). He further argued that the catalogue proved the Bīt mēseri series at Aššur to comprise four tablets in total. Meier, who perished in World War II, never published a full edition of the catalogue VAT 13723+, which was finally edited by M. J. Geller based on the original fragments (2000, 226–34). Geller, however, read the lines identified by Meier as catalogue entries for Bīt mēseri differently and considered Meier’s identification “questionable”. According to Geller, the restoration of the incipit of the recitation A-ru-ub maškim ūl was “unfounded” (2000, 234). Since Geller was not able to propose a convincing alternative identification of the incipits and, in contrast to Meier, did not use the excavation photograph of the tablet (Ph. Ass. 4580), the passage bears renewed scrutiny. The relevant lines are preserved on a small fragment that was inventorized as VAT 14097 and has been detached from the main tablet since its transport to Berlin. Geller published the fragment separately (“cannot be placed”), but as already indicated by Meier, the excavation photograph shows the fragment still attached to the main tablet and in its original position.12

Accordingly, the side published by Geller as VAT 14097 “o. ii” actually belongs to r. iii and should be placed near the bottom of the reverse with a distance of 2–3 lines to the first line extant on the fragment VAT 14096 + 14101, which preserves the bottom edge of r. iii. Collation of VAT 14097 and VAT 14096 + 14101 in conjunction with the consultation of the excavation photograph confirms Geller’s corrections and the accuracy of his handcopy, but also lends plausibility to Meier’s (1941–44, 139) basic reconstruction, even though the traces and text indicated by him for the fourth incipit and the summary line can neither be verified on the excavation photograph nor on the originals. I would propose to reconstruct the passage as follows:13

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12 I thank Stefan M. Maul for the kind permission to study Ph. Ass. 4580 at the Forschungsstelle “Edition literarischer Keilschrifttexte aus Assur”, Heidelberg. For permission to collate the original fragments at the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, I thank the director Barbara Helwing as well as Julia Eule for facilitating my research there.

13 VAT 14097 ‘o. ii’ 1’ in Geller’s copy is r. iii 23 according to the excavation photograph. The lines quoted here correspond to VAT 14097 ‘o. ii’ 4’–6’ and VAT 13723+(+) r. iii 20’–22’ in Geller’s edition.
According to this reconstruction, the Aššur catalogue VAT 13723+ subdivided the text of Bit mēseri, as argued by Meier, into four tablets. The first of these tablets represents the Ritual Tablet with the incipit TUKUM.BI LÚ.Ü,14 which is otherwise attested at the beginning of the Nineveh Ritual Tablet.18 Since the reading in r. iii 28 remains unclear, the further subdivision of the tablets according to VAT 13723+ is unknown, though it cannot have matched (contra Meier) the subdivision evidenced by the Aššur tablet II manuscript VAT 13666+ (recitations 1–6, tablet III beginning with recitation 7 = A-r ū-u b maškim ḫu l). It also seems to differ from the subdivisions of the recitation texts as found at Nineveh and in the manuscripts from Babylonian libraries. In VAT 13723+, the Bit mēseri entries are immediately followed by the series Saĝ-ba, which comprised two incantations for drawing apotropaic flour lines. In this regard it is worth noting that the recitation of Saĝ-ba I and II forms part of Bit mēseri according to the ritual instructions of A 191 (see infra, notes on o. 56–r. 5).

### 3 A 191: A new Bit mēseri ritual tablet from Aššur

Apart from VAT 13666+, no Bit mēseri manuscript from Aššur that can be directly related to the catalogue entries in VAT 13723+ has become known so far. O. Pedersén, however, drew attention to the tablet Ass. 13955 xy (Ph. Ass. 4128), which he listed as “bit mēseri?” among the tablets from the Haus des Beschworungspriesters (Pedersén 1986, 65, N4: 254). Study of the Aššur tablet A 191 in the collections of the Arkeoloji Müzeleri in Istanbul19 revealed that

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<tr>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Recitations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tablet I = Ritual Tablet</td>
<td>1–28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tablet II, recitations 1–3</td>
<td>29–31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet III, recitations 3–20</td>
<td>31–33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet IV, recitations 20–33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tablet to be identical with “Ass. 13955 xy” on the excavation photograph Ph. Ass. 4128, whereas Pedersén (1986, 64) had catalogued A 191 as N4: 175 (Ass. 13955 gm, Ph. Ass. 4127, “literary?”). The tablet A 191 itself only bears the excavation number Ass. 13955, but the note in the box specifies the number as Ass. 13955 gm, with “gm” being an apparently secondary addition in blue ink to the original record in black ink, which simply read “Ass. 13955”.

A 191 is a single-column tablet inscribed in Neo-Assyrian script and written, according to its colophon, by the well-known ašipu-expert Kišir-Aššur in the course of his studies when he was still an apprentice scribe (r. 19–25). The text contains instructions for the performance of a ritual that is explicitly referred to as bit mēseri in the opening line of the text (o. 1) and, once more, at the beginning of the final part of the instructions (r. 8). The more than thirty incantation texts to be recited during the performance are quoted by incipit. The ritual instructions indeed exhibit many similarities and parallels to the Bit mēseri ceremony as known from the Nineveh RT and from the ritual instructions included in the various IT manuscripts. The first line of the text, however, is different from that of the Nineveh RT (TUKUM.BI LŪ ḪUL; see section 2), and only three of the incantations of the Bit mēseri standard ritual are also included in A 191. The tablet should therefore not be considered a manuscript of the standard Bit mēseri RT, but rather represents the agenda of another Bit mēseri ceremony, which, in many ways, is less complex and much shorter, but also includes elements that are absent (or go unmentioned) in the standard Bit mēseri ritual. These elements include a Pazuzu rite, ointments, and the burning of incense, all of which are known from other ašipūtu text series, such as Muššu’u, Qutāru, the Zi-pa Compendium, and the Pazuzu Compendium.

Even though much of the text in the bottom half of the obverse has been lost, the overall structure of the Bit mēseri ceremony according to A 191, which seems to stretch over one day from morning till nightfall, can be conclusively established from the extant text passages.

The house of the patient is protected by painting seven apotropaic apkallu-sages on its exterior walls, four on the corners, two on the door jambs of the entrance gate, and one on the gate’s lintel and the wall above (o. 4–5). The same apotropaic paintings form part of the standard Bit mēseri ritual, but there they are only one of seven sets of seven apkallu images and figurines. The gate is further protected by paintings of five watchdogs (o. 6–8), again a feature shared with the standard ritual, even though there eight dogs are employed and distributed between the main entrance and the door of the patient’s room. At the patient’s bed, the exorcist erects a single apotropaic reed standard (urigallu, o. 2). Further paraphernalia near the bed include the lamp, i.e., the god Nuska (o. 10–11), and possibly the figurine of a corpse that represents a personification of Death (o. 12). All these elements are also included in the standard ritual, even though there paintings of standard bearers are used (14 on the walls of the patient’s room and another 14 or 7 in the doorways). The bed is protected with pegs of ēru-wood and surrounded with an apotropaic ulînu-cord (o. 8–10). Then the mouth-opening and mouth-washing rites are performed on the images of the sages and the dogs (o. 11), Nuska is provided with offerings in the morning and evening (o. 13), whereas the apkallu-sages receive incense offerings and are addressed with the incantation “Enmegalama, who entered [the house]” (o. 14–15).

After the house and the bedroom have been thus prepared, the exorcist turns to the patient and performs a maššulduppû (‘scapegoat’) rite on him, which probably included covering the patient with the goat’s hide and wiping him with its meat. The incantation “Evil udug-de demon in the wide steppe” is recited, which is regularly employed in the context of this rite (o. 16–20). Finally, the exorcist takes the impure ritual materials out of the house and afterwards protects the entrances with apotropaic flour lines (o. 21–22). The following fragmentary passage may suggest that a second maššulduppû-rite followed before the site of the wiping rites is ritually cleansed.

20 Ur bābbar ur gege ur sa₞ₚ, ur s₁ₜ-s₁ₜ (o. 13; Bit mēseri recitation 15 or 16); Nūru ana Marduk kurub (r. 11; Bit mēseri recitation 18); Nuska šar mūši munammir uktī (r. 12; Bit mēseri recitation 19).
21 For more detailed references, see the notes on the individual incantation incipits.
22 In the following, the parallels in the standard Bit mēseri ritual are only briefly summarized; for detailed references, see the notes on the relevant passages of A 191.
23 The present text does not specify which type of apkallu is to be used. In the standard Bit mēseri ritual, the apkallu images that are painted on the corners and entrance of the house represent fish apkallu-sages; see SpTU 3, 69 o. 14: šamtī(na)ₙₙₙₙ apkalluₙₙₙₙ apkalluₙₙₙₙ puriₙₙₙₙₙₙₙₙ “Images of the sages, the carp.” For a discussion of the fish apkallu, see Wiggermann 1992, 76–77; for the apkallu tradition more generally, cf. also Kvanvig 2011, 136–58.
24 For a discussion of the urigallu, including its use in Bit mēseri, see Seidl and Sallaberger 2005–6.
25 The choice of wood is not accidental: ēru is a hardwood native to Mesopotamia that is used for sticks and also serves as the material for the weapon of the exorcist (cf. here note on o. 46). In the standard Bit mēseri ritual there is a clear pattern: Pure tamarisk wood (binu) is employed for figurines with a mainly purifying function, whereas figurines of warlike, apotropaic forces are made of ēru-wood.
The hypothesis of two scapegoat rites finds support in the fact that the standard Bīt mēseri ritual too prescribes the use of two different mašḫulduppû.

After the evil besetting the patient has thus been expelled, the following ritual actions, which are described in the very fragmentary part of the obverse, all have the common purpose to protect the body of the patient from any further harm. Various materials, including amulet stones, pure palm leaflets, and tufts of wool are attached to or laid out around the patient, who then undergoes a series of rubbings with ointments and fumigations with incense (o. 27–53). The text summarizes these measures in r. 6 as “ritual procedure for rubbing and incense burning” and deems them effective against all illness (r. 7). Like the ritual arrangement before Nuska, the rubbings and fumigations are performed twice in the same fashion, once in the morning and once in the evening (r. 7).

As soon as the body of the patient has been protected in this way, the patient’s bed and house are surrounded with apotropaic flour lines. The drawing of the lines, possibly to be performed in the morning and evening, is accompanied by the recitation of the two Saĝ-ba incantations, which represent the standard recitations for this rite. This is followed by another set of standard āšipū-tu-recitations for the final stages of a ritual performance. Then the exorcist prepares the patient for the night with the two Nuska prayers that also form part of the standard Bīt mēseri ritual. The prayers invoke the divine lamp as the protective light during the night and, like in the parallel passage in the Nineveh Bīt mēseri RT (95”–97” = K 6390+(+) r. iv 14–16), the exorcist recites the first prayer, whereas the patient speaks the second prayer while facing the lamp that is standing at his bedside:

r. iv 14 [ÈN ʰnūru(IZI.GAR) ana ʰ]marduk(AMAR.UTU)
ku-ru-ub tamannu(Scene)[³][³]v
15 [kīma(GIM) tamtaniu(SID)³ lūmar][ša][g](G) ana
maḥar(IGI) ʰnūr(IZI.GAR) ta-tar-ra-a[š]
16 [ÈN ʰnuska šar(LUGAL)] mūši(GE₃) tu-šam-
[m[a-šu]
You recite [the incantation “Divine lamp],
greet Marduk!” [As soon as you have recited (this)], you direct [the patient] to face the lamp. You have him recite [the incantation “Nuska, king] of the night”.

Transliteration
The handcopy (figs. 2–3) and colour photographs (figs. 4–5) of A 191 reflect the present state of the tablet. The excavation photograph Ph. Ass. 4128 (figs. 6–7) shows the tablet in a slightly more complete state of preservation before its transport to the museum, though in o. 18–30 many of the signs still visible on the excavation photograph remain undecipherable due to their insufficient preservation or encrustation with dirt. Any signs only visible on the excavation photograph and not preserved any more today are marked by underlining in the following transliteration.

For Pazuzu figurines and the incantations associated with them, see generally Heeßel 2002.

Stefan M. Maul gave me access to Ph. Ass. 4128 at the Forschungsstelle “Edition literarischer Keilschrifttexte aus Assur”, Heidelberg. I thank the Vorderasiatisches Museum and the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft for the kind permission to include a reproduction of the photograph here.
Fig. 2: A 191 o.
(handcopy by the author)
Fig. 3: A 191 r.
(handcopy by the author)
Fig. 4: A 191 o., present state (photograph by the author)
Fig. 5: A 191.r., present state (photograph by the author)
Fig. 6: A 191 o., excavation photograph (© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum and Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, Foto: Ph. Ass. 4128)

Fig. 7: A 191 r., excavation photograph (© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum and Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, Foto: Ph. Ass. 4128)
Daniel Schwemer, Bit mēseri at Aššur

[RAW TEXT]

Very possibly the scribe would have read the list of dogs, which is derived from an incantation incipit (see note on o. 13), in Sumerian rather than Akkadian.

Akk. mis pi pit pi, but probably these two technical terms of "śīpūṭu" lore were simply read in Sumerian.

As is often the case in first-millennium manuscripts, the logogram Aagal is written without the plural determiner because the sign combination itself ends in 'mēš' (Aagal = NUN.ME).

For the uncertain reading of this logogram in the present context, see the pertinent commentary on this line in the notes section.
34 [ar(PA) ə][gišimmari(GIŠIMMAR) [ ] 1 ki]
35 [š]eš]inembar−su hu[š(TUR) dal ]a kū−ga ...]
36 [š][tiq(ÅKA) pužāṭti(KIR) ṭ][bitiq(ÅKA) munnuniq(ÅŠ.GAR) ...]
37 [š]in șipa] k i [kù−gai ...]
38 [qita−ri ebb[at(DAD)(AG)me ...]
39 [š]eš]en−k i−e1−ne ...]
40 qu−ta−ri ṣa x [ ...]
41 ŠEN lem−nu lem−nu 1 ŞEN [iš gaš−ri ...]
42 qu−ta−ri atrút(i(DIRI)me ...]
43 ŠEN e−du−tu la a−d(i−ru−tu ...]
44 q[u−t]a−ri ša AN. TA.[ŠUB.BA ...]
45 ŠEN me−šē b [a−a−ši i x x x ...]
46 t}[š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][š][ş][š][š][š][š][š][š][š]}
In order to perform the ritual of the ‘House of Enclosure’, you erect an urigallu-standard [in] a room whose entrance points towards sunrise. You open a pit and (in doing so) make (it) 7 fingers wide (and) 7 fingers deep. You draw a mottled dog. You put the scapegoat on the patient and wipe it with stones, you set upon (it) in a row. You recite the incantation “Evil udug-demon out into your steppe”. Afterwards, you make the ... for the head of the patient. Date palm (wood), ... stones ... . You recite the incantation “...”.

In the place where (you performed) the wiping rites, you sprinkle h[aš]ū-plant and water. You recite the incantation “I cast the incantation for the assembly of all the gods”, (up to and) including the end of the incantation “I am a pure man” up to the incantation “In order to provide water from the deep”. You recite the incantation “Enmegalama, who entered the house”.

The exorcist stands in front of the patient and recites the incantation “Pure spell”, the incantation “I am a pure man” up to the incantation “In order to provide water from the deep”. You recite the incantation “Evil udug-demon in the wide steppe”. You recite the incantation “I cast the incantation for the assembly of all the gods”. Afterwards, you make the ... for the head of the patient. Date palm (wood), ... stones ... . You recite the incantation “...”. You recite the incantation “... t)heir [ ... ]”. You recite [the incantation “... t)heir [ ... ]].

In the morning (and) in the evening you burn incense for the drawings of the images. You place the figurine of Šama on the door jambs of the gate, you draw 1 apkallu-sage on (the wall) above the gate. You recite the incantation “I am a pure man” up to the incantation “In order to provide water from the deep”. You recite [the incantation] “Evil udug-demon out into your steppe”.

You arrange a portable altar before Nuska. You recite the incantation “White dog, [bl]ack dog”. In the evening (and) in the evening you burn incense for the drawings of the images. You place the figurine of Šama on the door jambs of the gate, you draw 1 apkallu-sage on (the wall) above the gate. You recite the incantation “I am a pure man” up to the incantation “In order to provide water from the deep”.

On the right and left side of the gate, you draw a white dog, a black dog, a red dog, a yellow dog, (and) a mottled dog.

You put bronze [chalis], each weighing 7 shekels, [und]erneath (their) hips. You insert 4 pegs of ēru-wood [into] the sides of the bed. You surround the sides of the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed.

You open a pit and (in doing so) make (it) 7 fingers wide (and) 7 fingers deep. You draw a mottled dog. You put the scapegoat on the patient and wipe it with stones, you set upon (it) in a row.

In the morning (and) in the evening you burn incense for the drawings of the images. You place the figurine of Šama on the door jambs of the gate, you draw 1 apkallu-sage on (the wall) above the gate. You recite the incantation “I am a pure man” up to the incantation “In order to provide water from the deep”.

On the right and left side of the gate, you draw a white [dog], a black dog, a red dog, a yellow dog, (and) a mottled dog.

You put bronze [chalis], each weighing 7 shekels, [und]erneath (their) hips. You insert 4 pegs of ēru-wood [into] the sides of the bed. You surround the sides of the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed. You surround the bed.

You open a pit and (in doing so) make (it) 7 fingers wide (and) 7 fingers deep. You draw a mottled dog. You put the scapegoat on the patient and wipe it with stones, you set upon (it) in a row.
the head of the patient. You recite [the incantation “... evil ene]mies [...]”.

[... the incantation “Palm shoot, bright (and) pure” ... ].

A tuft of wool from a female lamb, a tuft [of wool from a female kid ... ].

[... the incantation “Shepherd in a pure place” ... ].

[... pur[e]fumigations ... ].

[... the incantation “They are those of Enki, [they are those of Ninki” ... ].

[... ] fumigations for ... [ ... ].

[... ] the incantation “The evil one, the evil one”, the incantation “B[ly the strong” ... ].

[... ] additional fumigations [ ... ].

[... ] the incantation “The fierce ones, the fear[less ones” ... ].

[... ] the incantation “Where do you go?” ... ].

[... ] the exorcist’s staff [ ... ].

You scatter barley seed. [ ... ] the incantation [ ... ].

You [ ... ] on the ground [ ... ].

The incantation “Girra, beloved son [of the exalted Ea” ... ].

the incantation “My friend is a witch, I am a releaser” ... ].

You recite. Then [ ... ] in ... [ ... ].

[After]wards [you recite] the incantation “I sprink[le the water of the exorcist of the gods” and]

[... ] the evening [ ... ] apotropaic flour [lines ... ].

[I]n the morning, you draw [ ... ] (at) the bed. In the evening ... ].

[You recite the incantation] “Ban, ban! Drawing that cannot be transgressed”.

If (rites) in the courtyard (are included), [you] recite the incantation “Ban, ban! Depart, depart, be [off, (be off)]!”

Afterwards you recite the incantation “Adjured is the house” (and)

[the in]cantation “Do not enter through the window!”

[After]wards you re[cite] the incantation “Enki, king of the subterranean ocean, counsellor”

over the patient.

This ritual procedure of rubbing (and) incense burni[ng]

is (effective) [f]or all illnesses. (It is the ritual procedure) for the morning; (the ritual procedure) for the evening (is) dit[t[o].

[If you perform (these rites as part of the ritual) ‘House of Enclosure’,

you arrange [af]ter (the recitation of) the incantation “Enki, king of the subterranean ocean, counsellor”

[i]n the evening a portable altar before Nuska.

You pour a libation of first-quality beer (and) recite the incantation “O lamp, greet Marduk”.

You have the patient declaim the incantation “Nuska, king of the night”.

You put a figurine of Pazuzu into the patient’s hands; the[n]

the patient recites the incantation “You, strong one” three times.

Afterwards [you recite] the incantation “Ferocious, furious” three times over the patient’s head.

Afterwards you recite the incantation “He truly smashed the body”.

You go [straight] home.

Written according to its original and collated.

erased line

u[‘il]tablet of Kiṣir-Aššur, the apprentice [scribe], son of Nabû-bêssun, exorcist of the Aššur temple,
son of Bābu-šumu-ibni, the zabardabbu-priest of Esarrā.

He copied (it) quickly for his study.

Whoever takes (it) away: Whenever he raises his hand to Nabû, let (the god) not listen to his prayers!

You [who fear Nabû and Marduk] shall not erase my inscribed name!

Notes

o. 1 The restoration at the beginning of the line remains uncertain, but we expect a word for “ritual” or “ceremony” that is connected to the following ritual title by ša. For the use of NA/NB dullu rather than SB nēpešu on the present tablet, cf. r. 6; also the limited space available in the break suggests the restoration of only two signs. At the end of the line, the break affords space for the restoration of two more signs, but since the initial purpose clause ends with ana epēši, it seems likely that the final horizontal wedge of -ši was simply drawn out to the end of the line.

2–3 It is uncertain whether bītu in this line refers to the house as a whole or to the specific room in which the bed of the patient is set up for the ritual proceedings. Consequently, it is also doubtful whether bābu, here neutrally translated as “entrance”, refers to the door of a room or the main entrance gate of the house. The instructions in o. 9–10 show that the one urigallu-standard employed in the present ritual is set up near the patient’s bed. Whereas the standard Bit mēseri ritual uses a group of 14 urigallu-standard bearers that are painted on the bedroom’s side walls, a single urigallu-standard is mentioned in Bit mēseri incantation no. 17, which is to be whispered into the ear of a scapegoat: [ši]pri-gal saŋ] gā šē mu-un-da-gu b gu-bu | ur[igallu] ina reššu u[zaqqip] “He erected an u[rigallu]-standard at his head” (IT 330’ = K 7664+ (+) r. v 2′ // K 8008 r. iii 9; cf. provisionally Gabbay 2015). It is therefore very likely that the urigallu-standard here was set up at the head end of the patient’s bed in one of the house’s rooms, and the instruction regarding the orientation of the entrance of the bītu in l. 2 may well refer only to that room.

3 The word šiplûtu “depression, pit”, which is attested here for the first time, should probably be interpreted as an abstract noun derived from the adjective šaplû (with variant šiplû in BAM III 248 r. iii 47); a derivation from an unattested pirs pattern noun *šiplû “(deep) vel sim.” > šiplûtu seems less plausible. For the usage of šakānu in phrases referring to the design of dimension, see CAD Š 1 130b; the literal translation here would be “you set 7 fingers width (and) 7 fingers depth”. The text is silent on the exact location and further use of the little pit. As pointed out to me by C. Ambos, it may have served as a receptacle for a libation (for a libation into a pit for the rising sun-god, cf. Ambos 2004, 168: 1–5).

4–5 The standard Bit mēseri ritual included several sets of paintings of seven apkallu-sages, among them one that is placed, like the paintings prescribed here, on the four outer corners and at the entrance gate of the house; see RT 74” = K 6310+(+) r. iii 25′; IT 245–46 = K 5119+ (+) K 1356+ r. iv 10′–11′ // 1882–3–23, 67 o. 1′–2′; SpTU 3, 69 o. 14.

5 For reš bābi, cf. igāru ša reš bābe in RIMA I A.076.1, 35. The entrance gate of the house is furnished with apotropaic images on the jambs and on (or above) the lintel. For a comparable marking of jamb, lintel, and threshold, cf. Bit rimki, ritual tablet, 176–77 (Schwemer 2019, 54–55. 74).

6 Like Bit mēseri RT 81” = K 6310+(+) r. iii 32′, the present text uses the logogram ur for the series of watchdogs instead of ur.g1, which is normally used in Akk. contexts. This spelling is inspired by the incipit of the pertinent Akk. incantation: [ēn ur] bab bar ur ge ge ur saš s| ī di idā [bita kiddā] (IT 302 = K 2538+(+) r. iv 5′).

The spelling there, in turn, is influenced by the incipit of the immediately following second watchdog incantation, which is in Sum.: ēn ur bab bar ur ge ge ur saš, ur s| ī di güm güm (IT 307 = K 2538+(+) r. iv 10′ // K 19957+ o. ii 1′ // 82–3–23, 67 r. 5′ // 82–5–22, 559 r. iii 3′; cf. here o. 13). For the use of paintings of watchdogs in the standard Bit mēseri ritual, see also SpTU 3, 69 o. 17.

7 The placement of the miniature ritual chains between the front and back legs of the the painted dogs probably imitates the place where chains for guard dogs would be found at the gate of a house. The fact that the dogs themselves are not depicted as being chained by the neck could be motivated by the intention to make them appear even more fearsome to possible (demonic) intruders.

9 The excavation photograph seems to show the sign ā at the beginning in a slightly better preserved state, with the upper rank of oblique wedges still extant, but possibly our eyes are misled by a deceptive shadow.

10–11 The god Nuska stands here, as elsewhere, for the lamp that the exorcist places at the head of the bed. The two prayers Nāru ana Marduk kurub and Nuska šar
mūši munammir ukli, which are recited in the last part of Bīt mēseri, are addressed to the divine lamp Nuska (see here r. 11–12). The text of the two prayers, which were also used in other ritual contexts, is found in Bīt mēseri IT 342′–60′ and 363′–75′ (see provisionally Mayer 1976, 482–84, 485–86).

11–12 For the construction of ēpēšu Š with double accusative in the meaning of “perform a rite on …”, cf. AO 6460 o. 28–29 (ed. Linssen 2004, 245–51): gizzīlū rabū ša ... mīš pī šāpūšu “the great torch, ... on which the mouth-washing rite has been performed”. The mouth-opening rite for the images and figurines is also mentioned in Bīt mēseri RT 20′–21′ = K 6390+(+). r. iv 10–11.

12 The reading (pa)-ag-rim remains quite uncertain, not least because the second sign looks too narrow for Lagab (cf. the shape of Lagab in še-rim within the same line); consequently, the interpretation of the following fragmentary signs is also doubtful. The figurine prescribed here may be compared with the leaden figure of personified Death that was to be placed at the head of the patient’s bed according to the standard Bīt mēseri ritual: šalam(nu) mūṭī(UŠ) ša abārī(A.BĀR) (RT 43′–44′ = K 6390+(+). r. iv 33–34; SpTU 3, 69 r. 10; cf. Sibbing-Plantholt 2021, 350–53).

In light of this, and considering that šalam agri “figurine of a hireling” does not fit the present context, the emended reading šalam (pa)agri “figurine of a corpse” seems plausible. For indefinite idāt lā idāt (zu nu zu), see Mayer 1989, 167–69.

13 The incantation incipit could refer to either of the two watchdog incantations in Bīt mēseri. The Akk. incantation Kalbu peṣāt kalbu salmu kalbu aṣur ilda inā bita kiddā has only four lines (IT 302−5 = K 2538+(+) r. iv 5′–8′ // 82–3–23, 67 r. 1′–3′ // 82–5–22, 559 r. iii 1′). The longer Sum. incantation Ur baba bar ụr geggé ur sa, ur sī₂-sī₂ ur igi-bi gūnu-gūnu is still interrupted by a break in the available manuscripts. The beginning is attested in IT 307′–14 = K 2538+(+) r. iv 10′–13′ // K 19957+. o. ii 1′–8′ // 82–3–23, 67 r. 5′ // 82–5–22, 559 r. iii 3′–7′; the end of the incantation is found in IT 315′–23′ = K 5128 r. iv 1′–7′ // 81–2–4, 282 r. iv 1′–5′ // K 13506+(+) r. v 1′–3′ (cf. also RT 81′ = K 6310+(+) r. iii 32; SpTU 3, 69 o. 17).

15 I am not aware of any other attestations of an incantation with the incipit En·me·gal·am·ma lū [ē] kū₄·ra·bi. The apkkallu-sage Enmegalama is mentioned in three Bīt mēseri incantations. In all three passages, he is associated with the “house” (ē | bitu): en·me·gal·am·ma lū é-a ū·tu-ud·da | min ša ina biti ibbanū (IT 211 = K 2538+(+) o. iii 30 // SpTU 2, 8 o. i 4); [en·me·gal·am·ma lū] é-a ū·tu-ud·da | ša ina biti ibbanū (IT 239 = K 5119+(+). r. iv 4′ // K 19957+. o. i 6′); en·me·gal·am lū é-a gub·ba (IT 247 = K 5119+(+). r. iv 12′ // 82–3–23, 67 o. 3′). The restoration [ē] in the present incipit is based on this association of Enmegalama with the house in his other epithets. An emended reading En·me·gal·am·ma lū [ē] tu·da·i(‘fra’)-bi is worth considering, but should await confirmation by a duplicate.

16–17 For third-person references to the exorcist (masmaššu, ašipu) in ašipitu-rituals, see Abusch et al. 2016, 267–68.

The incantation Tū  Ėlla is the first entry in the incantation catalogue BM 6665+(+). (ed. Geller 2000, 237; in o. i 1 one should read [ēn T]u₄ el-lu). The same catalogue lists Ēge₂₆-e lū kū·g-a·me·en in o. i 5, an incantation that is well known as the first recitation in Šurpu and Muššu’u and is also attested in Uduŋ-ḥuł (Geller 2000, 238, note on i 3–5; idem 2016, 486 fn. 207). In o. i 8, BM 6665+(+ then includes the incipit A idim ē-gā·ē-dē. This suggests that the instruction of the present text to recite the incantation Ēge₂₆-e lū kū·g-a·me·en “up to and including” (adī muḫḫi) the incantation A idim ē-gā·ē·ē-dē implies the recitation also of the two incantations catalogued in between these two incantations in BM 6665+(+). o. i 6–7, namely Ir·bi en nam·ti·la and Ēge₂₆-e lū an·na 4+ en·li1-li₄₉.

18–19 According to Bīt mēseri RT 25′–27′ = K 6390+(+) r. iv 15–17 // K 9738: 3′–5′, the patient is covered with the hide of the scapegoat: (25′) ṭarṣa(gig) tat-tam(ul)-ma ēn uduŋ-ḥuł eđen·na dağal-[l]a (26′) ina muḫḫi(ugu)-šu tamānヌ(ši)dכל·ma kima(gim) tam(ul)-maška(ši)ša ina muḫḫi(ugu)-[ši] (27′) tu1·kā[t-ta]ł-ma “You cover the patient and recite the incantation ‘Evil uduŋ-ḥuł in the wide steppe’ over him, and, as soon as you have recited (it), you put the hide as a cover over [him].” The scapegoat incantation Āḫuṣ  ě-ga ra·ka ba·a·tub alludes to the same procedure: māš kū du₄₉ ga ugu·na ba·da·na | urša ella ṭabiš elišu šūlima “lay out the pure goat properly over him”; see Uduŋ-ḥuł XII 164, ed. Geller 2016, 431 (cf. also XII 81, ibid. 414); Bīt mēseri IT 33′ = K 6922+(+) and is also attested in Udug-ḫul (Geller 2000, 238, note on i 6–7, namely Ir·bi en nam·ti·la and Ēge₂₆-e lū an·na 4+ en·li1-li₄₉). Also the various scapegoat rites described in Á-sāg-gig involve covering the patient with the goat’s hide; see, according to W. Schramm’s unpublished edition, Á-sāg-gig IX 27–30 (K 7968: 20′–23′ // K 19379+: 7′–8′ // K 5210: 17′–19′ // Sm 1061+ o. 27–30); X 32–39 (Sm 922+: 13′–14′); and especially XII 16′–17′, 30′ (Sm 704 r. 8′–9′, 21′ // BM 35038 r. 14′–15′).

The incantation Uduŋ-ḥuł eđen·na dağal·la is regularly recited for the scapegoat rite and is best known as the first incantation of Udug-ḫul XII (ed. Geller 2016, 399–428).

20–22 Bit mēseri RT 26′–28′ = K 6390+(+) r. iv 16–18 // K 9738: 4′–6′ describes the purifying takprimu wipings in the context of the scapegoat rite in some more detail:
(26’) ... kîma(GIM) tamtanū ŚID maška(KU) šin muḫḫi (UGU)-[Śū] (27’) tuš-kāt-ta-ma réš(SAG)-ka ū-ššal šir(uzu) uriš(ŚMAŠ.ŠAL) (28’) īmašra(GIM) tuš-ka-pa-par tak-pir-ta is-an-niq-šu mānu “As soon as you have recited (it), you put the hide as a cover over [him].” Then it is ready for you: With the meat of the goat you wipe off the patient. The wiping comes close to him.” These instructions suggest that the patient, while covered with the hide of the slaughtered scapegoat, is wiped off with its meat. After the patient’s impurity has thus been transferred onto the goat, the meat and hide are removed from the house. The recitation of the incantation Uduugu ḫul e denim na dâlal la is regularly attested in the context of the removal of impure ritual materials outside the patient’s house (cf. Abusch/Schwemer 2011, 397; Abusch et al. 2020, 182; Schwemer 2017, 15). For the text of the incantation itself, see Schramm 2008, 84–85; 181–86; Geller 2016, 282–86 (Uduugu-uḫul VII).

The apparent plural KAniš shows that the apotropaic lines were not only drawn around the outer gate, but around several entrances to the house. It is unlikely that KAniko represents an otherwise not attested writing for bābānu “gate area; outer part of a house”, but note that in the course of the Bit mēseri standard ritual, flour lines are drawn around the inner and outer part of the house: [...] z[išurrā[Z].SUR.ŠA]-biṭānu(E)maššu bābānu(kā)4a₅a teṣṣir(ḤUR)6(See RT 886 = K 6390+(+) r. v 7).

23–24 The verbal forms that are crucial for the understanding of these two lines are largely lost. At the end of the first sentence, the excavation photograph shows two vertical wedges preceding what is probably -ma. Apparently further rites are carried out with a scapegoat, but the relationship of this mašḫulduppu to the one mentioned in o. 18 is not entirely clear. It should be noted, however, that also the standard Bit mēseri ritual includes two scapegoat rites, one on the roof (RT 23′–28′ = K 6390+(+) r. iv 13–18) and one at the patient’s bed (RT 82″–83″ = K 6390+(+) r. v 1–2). Unfortunately, both passages here give very little detail on the treatment of the mašḫulduppu. Also the phrase it-ti dalī ša bitti is difficult, since itti “(together)" usually refers to persons. The translation “at the side” assumes that itti here is a variant of idāt(possibly kād for idāti), as also seems to be the case in SpTU 3, 69 o. 6 (see Wallauberger 2005–6, 67, fn. 42). The verbal form of the second sentence is written with a one-sign logogram; DUL “you cover” is certainly possible, but so are many other restorations. A further difficulty is posed by the abbreviated incantation incipit in o. 24. If our restoration is correct, it seems most likely that the instruction refers to a repeated recitation of the scapegoat incantation Uduugu ḫul e denim na dâlal la (cf. o. 19). In this case, the phrase ana mahrišu would refer to the recitation of the incantation in front of the scapegoat.

25–27 The recitation of Anamdi šipta ana puḫur ili kalāma accompanies the ritual sprinkling of water in Muššu’u, Maqlû, and elsewhere (see Bök 2003, 10; Abusch/Schwemer 2011, 397–98). A combination with the final part of an incantation Gēṣek-e kū-ga-m-e-en is attested here for the first time. Whether Gēṣek-e kū-ga-m-e-en is really, as indicated above, intended to represent the same recitation as Gēṣek-e lū kū-ga-m-e-en (here o. 17) remains as uncertain as the correct translation of adī in the present context (“up to” or “including?”).

28 Anini6 is epigraphically clear, but otherwise unattested. The writing may be a simple variant of Anini6 (ašlu) “rush(es)”, though the object in question here seems to be put on or attached to the patient’s head. Hī XVII 57 (MSL 10, 85) lists kilīlu, an otherwise unattested designation of a kind of rush and apparent homophone of kilīlu “headband”, as one of the possible Akk. readings of Anini6, but this does not provide a sufficient basis for an interpretation of the present Anini6, as a logogram for kilīlu “headband”. Note that the reading of Dūṣ, traces of which are still recognizable on the excavation photograph, is particularly uncertain. Therefore, the overall syntactic structure in ll. 28–29 is difficult to ascertain.

29 At the beginning of the line, a reading ti-mi-ta1 “twine, yam” seems possible, but the third sign TA may also be interpreted as the beginning a verbal form. The two fragmentary signs after TA look like BA (not AN) and BAD (probably not NU). These two signs are covered with dirt and invisible on the excavation photograph, which shows, however, an undeciphered sign (perhaps TIM?) between the two fragmentary signs and the following NA₄₅. The two undeciphered signs following NA₄₅ are lost today; the photograph suggests NUMUN or MŪ for the first sign, and just enough is still visible of the second sign to exclude a reading MEŠ.

30 The traces visible on the excavation photograph in the middle of the line are too indistinct for decipherment without a duplicate manuscript. At the beginning of the line, one could read x₄₅₅-sū “his … s”, but it is not excluded that one should rather read sū-nu or even sū-nu-l[i ...].

31 An incantation incipit ending in ayyaši lemmūti seems to be unattested otherwise; the reading is therefore particularly uncertain.

34–35 For the incantation Gēṣnimbat-tur dalla kū-ga, see Uduugu-uḫul XIII–XV 122–42 (ed. Geller 2016, 469–74) and Muššu’u, ritual tablet 27–28 (Bök 2003, 6–7). According to the ritual instructions in Uduugu-uḫul and Muššu’u, palm leaflets are tied to the hands and feet of the patient. The text in l. 34 should probably be restored.
Accordingly, though a reconstruction of the exact wording is not possible at present (note that the traces at the end of the line do not match the expected tarakkas “you tie”). Following the incantation sequence in Udug-ḫul and Muššu’u, further instructions for the recitation of the incantation Mu ḫul-lu-bi sār-a are expected in the second half of l. 35.

36–37 For the incantation Sīpa bītu-ga, see Udug-ḫul XIII–XV 167–81 (ed. Geller 2016, 478–81) and Muššu’u, ritual tablet 29 (Böck 2003, 6–7); in both texts, the incipit is given as Su-ba ki kū-ga. According to the ritual instructions in Udug-ḫul and Muššu’u, the incantation is to be recited while the bed of the patient is surrounded with the wool of a female lamb and kid that have not yet mated. The text in l. 36 is to be restored accordingly, though a reconstruction of the exact wording is not possible at present.

38–39 For the incantation En-ki-e-ne nin-ki-e-ne, see Udug-ḫul XIII–XV 232–70 (ed. Geller 2016, 490–97), Muššu’u, ritual tablet 33 (Böck 2003, 6–7), and Qutāru (Finkel 1991, 100–101). In all three texts the recitation of the incantation accompanies, as here, the burning of incense.

40–41 Both incantations in l. 41 are known from the Ḫulbazizi Compendium (see Finkel 1976, 134–37, nos. 64 and 65). The use of Lemmu lemnu in the context of incense burning is also attested in Qutāru and TCL 6, 34 o. i 3 (see Finkel 1991, 101, and, for a copy and partial edition of BM 60886+, Geller 2016, 681–82).

42–43 The incantation Eddūtu lā aḏīrūtū forms part of the Ḫulbazizi Compendium (see Finkel 1976, 132–35, no. 61). Its use as a recitation for incense burning is also attested in Qutāru (BM 45393+ o. i 1–15, courtesy I. L. Finkel).

44–45 The incantation Me-šē ba-da-ri is well known from a variety of contexts, including Udug-ḫul I 31’–37’ (ed. Geller 2016, 47–49), Muššu’u, ritual tablet 19, 22, 25 (ed. Böck 2003, 6–7), and TCL 24, 30 o. i 16 (see Finkel 1991, 103 with fn. 16), and a namburbi ritual against the evil indicated by a katarru fungus (ed. Maul 1994, 356, 363). Its use as a recitation for incense burning is also attested in Qutāru (BM 45393+ o. i 24–27, courtesy I. L. Finkel).

46 ṣīṭukul.m̄a.nu, lit. “weapon of ēru-wood”, designates an apotropaic staff or mace used by the exorcist. The Akk. reading of the logogram is unclear, but may be a univerbalized form of ḫaddik ērī “weapon of ēru-wood”. The writing of the logogram without a determinative ṣī preceding the second element ma.nu is not uncommon: The explanatory text CBS 6060 // associates ṣīṭukul.m̄a.nu with “seven storms, the weapon of Marduk” (Livingstone 1986, 178–79: 54). The NA administrative document SAA 7, 85 o. iii 3’ shows that the ṣīṭukul.m̄a.nu was not always made of ēru-wood: 1-te ṣīṭukul.m̄a.nu ḫū.babar “1 exorcist’s staff made of silver”. Note that the writing of the numeral as 1-te indicates that the Akk. reading of ṣīṭukul.m̄a.nu was a feminine noun here. For a lexical attestation, see LTBA 1, 78 r. vii 17 (ed. MSL 6, 150: 82a).

47 Read perhaps ‘[t]ē zēr(u)(NUMUN)[] i(li)(DINGIR) 1[1][1]st[a]r[1][1][5] bit[i](ē) ... “[... seeds of the god (and) goddess of the house ...]”. For the significance of the god and goddess of the house within the Bit mēseri ritual, cf. il bit[i] ištar bit[i] in IT 71 = K 2407+(+) o. 3’ // K 3622+(+) o. 18’ // K 4644+(+) o. i 62’. The association of apotropaic seeds with specific deities is attested in BM 42273 o. 11: riqqu(ŠIM‘) iš-zēru(NUMUN) šā (de)al(IHM) u asal-û-hi “aromatics (and) seeds of Ea and Ashallu” (ed. Matuszak 2012, 140).

50 Possibly an incantation incipit; if so, one should read [ē]n at the beginning of the line. Before the break, a reading ur₃,gîim may be considered.

54–55 The incantation occurs in the same ritual context in Muššu’u (ritual tablet 37, ed. Böck 2003, 6 and 8). The text of the incantation is partially preserved in Udug-ḫul I 54’ff. (see Geller 2016, 51).

56–58 The fragmentary passage gives instructions for the drawing of apotropaic flour lines (zisurrū) around the bed and includes the recitation of the incantation Sā-g-ba sa-g-ba geš-ḥur nu-bal-e (Saĝ-ba, tablet l) that regularly forms part of this rite. For the incantation and the associated rites, see Schramm 2001, with an edition of Saĝ-ba I on pp. 20–72.

58–r. 5 The sequence of incantations in this section is well known from the closing rites of various āšipūtu rituals (cf. Schramm 2001, 8–9). The final sequence of incantations in Lamaštu III represents an almost exact parallel, and the last incantation incipit there can now be fully restored based on the present text (cf. note on r. 4):

Lamaštu III (Farber 2014, 192–93):

- Sā-g-ba sa-g-ba (apotropaic zisurrū flour line around the patient’s bed)
- Tummu bitu (without explicit ritual instructions)
- Ab-ta nam-mu-un-da-ku_e -dē (without explicit ritual instructions)
- En-ki lugal abzu-ke_s sā pā-da (without explicit ritual instructions)

In Muššu’u, the final Enki incantation is absent from the sequence; there, the incantations Tummu bitu and Ab-ta
Daniel Schwemer, Bit mēseri at Aššur

The Bit mēseri ritual tablet from Nineveh prescribes the recitation of *Tummu bitu* for the evening of the third day, when the house is shuttered for the night and apotropaic *zisurrū* flour lines are drawn around the inner and outer part of the house (RT 86″–88″ = K 6390+(+) r. V 5–7). In Maqlü and one further anti-witchcraft ritual the incantation sequence *Saĝ-ba saĝ-ba* – *Tummu bitu* occurs in comparable ritual contexts (Schwemer 2017, 19; Abusch/Schwemer 1991, 397–98). In all these texts, only the first Saĝ-ba incantation (tablet I) is quoted, whereas here the recitation of the second Saĝ-ba incantation (tablet II) is indicated specifically if rites are performed in the courtyard (see the following note on r. 1).

r. 1 The conditional clause *summa ina tarbaṣi* “if in the courtyard” – or, indeed, *summa ina tarbaṣi ... tamanu* “if you recite ... in the courtyard” – is unexpected in the present context. Not least because of the distance and the intervening paragraph ruling, it seems unlikely that it should be coordinated with the conditional clause in r. 8 as a pair of disjunctive clauses. Rather the instruction indicates that the courtyard is not necessarily included in the ritual proceedings (possibly depending on the concrete architectural setting of a given performance). If there are no rites in the courtyard, a recitation of *Saĝ-ba* * Saĝ-ba* * Saĝ-ba* – *Tummu bitu* occurs in comparable ritual contexts (Schwemer 2017, 19; Abusch/Schwemer 1991, 397–98). In all these texts, only the first Saĝ-ba incantation (tablet I) is quoted, whereas here the recitation of the second Saĝ-ba incantation (tablet II) is indicated specifically if rites are performed in the courtyard (see the following note on r. 1).

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