

Reconsidering Six Lines in the *Hymn to Ninurta as Savior*

ELI TADMOR
NEW HAVEN, CT

This paper reconsiders the current interpretations of six lines in the *Hymn to Ninurta as Savior*, known in Akkadian as *ana išdih nēber kāri ša šuḫmuṭat alaktu* (To the business of the quay, where traffic is brisk), offering new translations of ll. 43–44, 53, and 55, and calling into question past renditions of ll. 48–49 while favorably reappraising a discounted variant.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lyrical and challenging text known in Akkadian as *ana išdih nēber kāri ša šuḫmuṭat alaktu*, “To the business of the quay, where traffic is brisk,” in German as *Ein Hymnus auf Ninurta als Helfer in der Not*, and in English as *A Hymn to Ninurta as Helper in Misery* or *A Hymn to Ninurta as Savior*, has received three editions: Lambert 1959, Mayer 1992, and Mitto 2022a (with a translation by both Mayer and Mitto and commentary by Mitto).¹ This paper reconsiders previous interpretations of six lines in the text (below, the *Hymn*): 43–44 (§1), 48–49 (§2), 53 (§3), and 55 (§4). Each section opens with normalization (adapted) and score edition from Mitto 2022a, with the witnesses labeled there as given in Table 1.

Table 1

			Mitto 2022a	Mayer 1992	Lambert 1959
A	SU-1951.46.A	=	HuzNA1	D	no. 70
a	BM.40802 +? BM.40832 +? BM.40935+? BM.40988 +? BM.41254	=	BabNB1		
b	BM.41296	=	BabNB2		
c	BM.35757 + BM.113241	=	BabaLBSch1	a (only BM.113241)	
d	BM.95480	=	BabaLBSch2	c	
e	BM.32467 + BM.32911 + BM.40077	=	BabLBSch1	b	

1.1. Lines 43–44

43 *bēl nabnīti šikin āni tupšar² bandē el(ī)šu tašakkanma*

A rev. 7' [b]e-^rel*¹ ^rnab¹-^rni¹-^{tú} šī-kīn ^da-nim | ^rDUB¹.SAR *ba-an-de-e* e[l-šu o o o o]
a rev. 11' [o o o o o ^da-ni]m? ^rDUB¹.SAR *ba-an-de-e* ^rUGU¹-šú ^rta¹-šak¹-kan¹-ma¹

Author's note: For abbreviations, see *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago*, vol. 10 (U–W) (2010), vii–xxix, and add eBL (Electronic Babylonian Library) (<https://www.ebl.lmu.de/>) and The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature (<https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>).

1. Each of these editions draws on yet more manuscripts, all school copies. The text's sole Assyrian manuscript is from Sultantepe (Gesche 2001: 163–64).

2. Following Streck 2009: 136–40, eBL generally reads *tupšarru* rather than *tupšarru*.

- b** rev. 9 [o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o UG]U-^ršú^r ta^r-^ršak^r-^rkan^r-^rma^r
c i 39b–40b *be-lu nab-nit ši-kìn* ^dr a^r-nim | ^lUMBISAG *ba-an-de-e* UGU-šú ta-šak-kan-ma
d ii 14 EN *nab-nit ši-kìn* ^da-nim ^lUMBISAG *ba-an-de-e* UGU-šú ta-šak^r-^rkan^r-^rma^r
e ii 21–22 [o o o o o o o ^d]r a^r!^r-^rnim!^r | [o o o o o o o t]a-šak-ka[n-(ma)]

The stanza as a whole (ll. 41–44) concerns a master of the cuneiform arts. Mayer translates, “O Herr der Lebewesen, die Anu geschaffen, über ihn setzt du einen in Quotientenbildung versierten Schreiber”; Mayer and Mitto, “You, O lord of (all) the creatures fashioned by Anu, deploy an (ordinary) *accountant* over him.”

Two emendations may be made. The first concerns *bēl nabnīti šikin āni*. Considering such phrases as *ipiq-eštar šikin ea damqina*, “Ipiq-Eštar, appointed by Ea (and) Damkina” (Frayne 1990: E.4.11.1.1:2) and *ummannigaš šar elam šikin qātēya*, “Ummannigaš, king of Elam, appointed by me (lit. my hands)” (Novotny and Jeffers 2018–22: no. 11 iii 136), *šikin āni* may be taken to refer to Ninurta, with *bēl nabnīti šikin āni* then meaning “Lord of creatures (alt. creation), appointed by Anu.” This change would also make sense in light of the absence of documentation attesting to Anu acting as a deity of creation.

The second concerns *tupšar bandē*. Mayer’s “einen in Quotientenbildung versierten Schreiber” and Mayer and Mitto’s “(ordinary) *accountant*” both match the CAD’s definition of *bandū*—a loanword from Sum *banda*, “child” (Cohen 2023: 152)—as “quotient” (B, 79). The CAD appears to have derived that meaning exclusively from Old Babylonian mathematical texts. Yet, more relevant than OB mathematics to the *Hymn* is *Diri* I 288 (Civîl 2004: 114), cited in CAD *bandū*’s lexical section, which gives the reading [ba-an]-da for TUR.DA and glosses it with the Akkadian *bandū* as well as, among others, *šerru*, *šeḫru*, *lā’u*, and *lāku*, all meaning “baby” or “infant.” In light of this lexical evidence, as well as the Sumerian meaning of *banda*, *tupšar bandē* should rather be taken as “junior (lit. young) scribe.” The line would then mean “Lord of creatures, appointed by Anu, you appoint a junior scribe over him.” Note the repetition *šikin-tašakkan*, “Appointed by”—“you appoint.”

44 *ūma ištēn manā(ma) uššab urqa*

- A** rev. 8’a ^ru₄^r-mu^r! ¹! MA.NA-a uš-šab ur-qa
a rev. 12’a [o o o o o o o o o o] ur-qu
b rev. 10 [o o o o o o o u]š^r-šab^r ur^r?-q[u^r?]
c i 40b–41a u₄-mu 1 MA.NA.TA.ĀM uš-ša-ab | ur-qa
d ii 15 u₄-mu 1 MA.NA.TA-ma uš-šab ur-^rqa^r
e ii 23 [o o o MA.NA.T]A.ĀM uš-šab ur-qa

Mayer translates: “dann fügt er (jeden) Tag pro Mine ein *Goldstück* hinzu,” later explaining (p. 41) that, in light of the context as well as the term *hurāšu arqu*, “yellow gold” (e.g., Bottéro 1949: 4 [“Inventaire I”], with other references in CAD A/II, 300 d) and the listing in *malku = šarru* V 165 (Hrůša 2010: 118) of *arqu* as a synonym of *hurāšu*, he takes *urqa* in this context to be a “Deckwort” for gold. Mayer and Mitto translate “And the same day the latter will collect ever more *gold* with every mina.” (To clarify, “latter” here corresponds to *ištēn*, with the complement *šūatu*, “that one,” supplied in l. 45, where it refers to the master scribe.) Mitto comments on l. 44, “I follow Mayer . . . in understanding *urqu* ‘sth. yellow’ as a poetic word for gold.”

Two comments may be offered. First, that *urqu* is indeed a poetic word for gold appears all but certain, because Ugaritic *yrq*, Epigraphic South Arabian *wrq*, and Geʿez *warg* all

question *mannu šāninka*, “who is your rival?”—which, *pace* Mayer, cannot be translated as *Der dir gleichzukommen sucht* merely on account of *mannu ša* meaning “whoever”—would be expected to imply that Ninurta has no rival, not that, should a god dare rival Ninurta, Ninurta would make swift work of him. The third is that, since *šāninka* is a part of the complete sentence *mannu šāninka (ina ilī)*, one would not expect it to be the object of *tušemme* without said verb having an object referring back to it. (The verb [*t*]u-še-^rme¹-šú in **b** has such a suffix, yet as part of the dittography [*t*]u-še-^rme¹-šú tu-še-^re¹-[*me*] should be regarded with caution.) This third problem may be related to the first: versions of l. 49 diverge wildly, and manuscript A’s own may have contained no such incongruence.

These problems call into question the current interpretation of ll. 48–49. The variant attested in **A**, and forming the basis for present renditions, may indeed be the preferable one, yet that cannot at present be determined, for one cannot be sure what its version of l. 49 was. Pending the discovery of more manuscripts, how best to interpret the couplet remains unclear. For the time being, it may be observed that **d**’s variant—*mušte*²ū *muntalku aḫiz riddi mannu šāninka // ilī kīma ḥašikki tummumiš tušemme*, “‘Ever-searching’, circumspect, noble of conduct, who is your rival? // (Even) gods you render deaf-like mutes!”—seems best among the LB versions (notwithstanding its mistaking of *muštāmū*, “considerate,” for *mušte*²ū, “ever-searching”; that is, if *mušte*²ū is not simply an LB spelling for *muštāmū* replacing *m* with ² as in *tu-še-e²-e* for *tušemme*). Grammatically sound, and thematically coherent—note that the very virtues ascribed to Ninurta, all having to do with proper social conduct, are those he denies gods by making them mute—it also fits with the poem’s repeated exaltation of Ninurta’s power to abase whomever he chooses, however mighty. And that this variant perfectly fits the fragmentary beginnings of **a** ([*o o ki*]-*ma*) and **b** ([*(o o) G*]IM) suggests that they opted for it as well.

1.3. Line 53

53 *ālka nippuru ša uggatuk innepšu*

53 **A** rev. 14’ [U]RU-ka NIBRU^{ki} šá ug-ga-tuk in-né-e[*p*-šú]

a rev. 20’ [o o o o o u]g-^rga¹-tu[*k i*]n-né-ep-[šú]

b rev. 20 [O O NIB]U [^{ki} o u]g-gat-^rtuk¹ ^rin¹-^rné¹-^rep¹-[šú]

c i 48a URU-ka NIBRU^{ki} šá ug-ga-tuk in-né-ep-šú

d ii 26 [o o N]IBRU^{ki} ^ršá¹ ^rug¹-^rga¹?-^rtuk¹? ^rin¹-^rné¹-^rep¹-^ršú

e ii 38 [o o NIB]RU^{ki} ^ršá¹ ^rug¹-gat-<tuk> in-né-^rep¹-šú

The line is part of a couplet:

53 *ālka nippuru ša uggatuk innepšu*

54 *ezib zerāšu lā iḥallaq rēḫu*

which Mayer translates as:

[53] Deine Stadt Nippur, die in deinem Zorn gebaut worden ist:

laß Samen von ihr (STT: von uns)⁴ übrig

[54] damit nicht auch noch der Rest (STT: die Hei[ligtümer])⁵ zugrundegeht!

4. The Sultantepe variant referred to here is *zērāni*, “our seed” (*ze-ra-ni*, **A** rev. 15’). It is here disregarded because it does not fit the context of the couplet. Likewise disregarded is the variant [NUMUN²-š]á-^rma¹ (**d** ii 27), whose fragmentary signs, if read *zērāša*, “her seed,” may be explained by a student’s Aramaic-induced misapprehension of the masculine noun *ālu* as being, like Aram. *qiryā/qiryata*, feminine.

5. This variant is *eš*-[*re²-e²-tu²*] (**A** rev. 15’), here disregarded because it fits the context less and only its first sign is preserved.

Listing (1992: 28 ad 48) *ina* ¹*ug-ga*¹-*tuk* as a variant based on one manuscript (d), Mayer later comments regarding l. 53 (1992: 44), “*uggatuk* (für *uggatukka*) bzw. *ina uggatuk*: Daß Ninurta die Stadt Nippur ‘in seinem Zorn’ gemacht (= gebaut) habe, ist eine mythologische Anspielung, die ich vorerst nicht einordnen kann. Unklar ist auch, gegen wen sich dieser ‘Zorn’ des Gottes gerichtet hat: gewiß nicht gegen die Stadt selbst, sondern gegen andere Städte bzw. gegen Feinde.”

Mayer and Mitto translate: “(53) Your city, Nippur, once built in your fury: (54) Preserve its progeny lest (its) remnants should perish as well!”

Regarding Mayer 1992’s recorded variant of *ina uggatuk*, Mitto comments (2022a: ad 53 **BabaLBSch2**), “Mayer . . . reads *ina* ¹*ug*¹-¹*ga*¹-*tuk*, which is doubtful. Note, however, the manuscript’s poor state of preservation, which impedes a safe identification of the signs in question.” On the meaning of the couplet, Mitto writes (2022a: ad 53), “The rather unexpected *ša uggatuk innepšu* ‘which was built in your fury’ might be explained as an exegesis of the city’s (Sumerian) name: *nibru*^{ki} → *ni*(NIG₂) + *íb* + *rú*(DU₃) → *ša* + *uggatu* + *epēšu* (suggestion courtesy of E. Jiménez).”

Mayer’s “Deine Stadt Nippur, die in deinem Zorn gebaut worden ist” and Mayer and Mitto’s “Your city, Nippur, once built in your fury” present two thematic problems. First, one intuitively takes such translations to mean that Ninurta built Nippur while he was in a rage (*uggatu*), yet fury is generally associated not with construction but with destruction; angry deities decimate cities rather than build them. Therefore, whether Ninurta’s wrath was aimed at Nippur or rather at “andere Städte bzw. gegen Feinde,” it seems unlikely that he would express it by engaging in urban development. (Jiménez’s above-quoted interpretation, apud Mitto, of *ša uggatuk innepšu* is one way to deal with this thematic incongruity and is taken up again below.) Second, was Nippur not already built by the time Ninurta was old enough to fly into cataclysmic rage?⁶

Were the variant *ina uggatuk* present, such objections would be nullified. Clearly having a locative (or instrumental) sense, and parallels aplenty among “pseudo-locative-adverbial” constructions collected by Mayer in his article on the topic (1996: 431–32, under “Genetiv”), it would have all but confirmed that the preposition-less *uggatuk* likewise stands in this context for *uggatukka* and means “in your fury.” Yet the use of a standalone noun with a shortened possessive as a locative-adverbial (GAG §6f) would itself have grammatical parallels,⁷ with one of them (*Hymn to the Queen of Nippur* D + 4–5, ed. Földi 2021) especially important in this context:

[*ālu*² *n*]ippur lamū rēšēti ašū qerbīšu⁷

[*īp*]ušma enlil ramānuš ašāba⁸

[The city² N]ippur, girt with preeminence,⁹ coming forth from within it,

[Ma]de Enlil by/for himself to dwell (*ramānuš ašāba*).

6. The question of Nippur’s origins is taken up again below; on the city’s antiquity, George 1992: 245–47, 442.

7. Such constructions are common in *Enūma eliš*: e.g., *qerbuš* for *qerbuššu* (both attested as parallels for VI 52, 54. For an edition, see Heinrich 2021). On the uses of, and confusion regarding, locative and terminative endings in *Enūma eliš*, see Lambert 2013: 34–44. In GAG §66f, von Soden has as his example for “Suffix-verkürzungen nach dem L.–A.” *irtuš* < *irtuššu* “an seiner Brust,” likewise from *Enūma eliš* (I 157 = II 43 = III 47, 105; IV 122).

8. Földi normalizes the tablet’s *a-ša-ba* as *ašābu*, yet as Lambert observes (1982: 215), one would expect the locative *ašābum* (*ašābiš*, one might add, would also have worked). Because both *ašāba* and *ašābu* would be equally wrong, *ašāba* is opted for here.

9. Földi and Foster (2005: 596) translate “surrounded by splendor,” yet “preeminence” better fits the etymology of *rēšēti*.

Here it is Enlil who builds Nippur by—or, to follow Lambert (1982: 215), Foster (2005: 596), and Földi, “for”—himself to dwell in, with *ramānuš* standing in for *ramanuššu* (Lambert 1982: 215). Note that it is here Enlil, not Ninurta, who is said to build Nippur, and that he does so for the expected, non-fury-related reasons. Returning to grammar, to judge by *ina qibītukka širti*, “by your sublime command” (l. 24), the poet’s preferred pseudo-locative-adverbial construction was rather of an *ina uggatukka* type, yet he need not have been consistent in this regard. The question of *uggatuk*, and thus of l. 53, is therefore open.

One may propose an alternative interpretation, whereby the subject of *innepšu*, “was done,” is not *ālka nippuru*, “your city, Nippur,” but *uggatuk*, “your fury,” with the line then speaking not of a city “made” but fury “wrought”; and *ša* in *ša uggatuk innepšu* would mean not “which” but “where.” Applying these two reinterpretations, we have:

ālka nippuru ša uggatuk innepšu
ezib zerāšu lā ihallaq rēhu
 Your city, Nippur, where your fury was wrought—
 Spare its seed, that the remnant may not perish!

The poet would here be appealing to Ninurta, whose wrath had devastated his city Nippur, to spare its surviving inhabitants.

A translation of *ša* as “where” is highly unusual, yet is shored up by the incipit, and thus the ancient title, of the *Hymn* itself: *ana išdih nēber kāri ša šuḫmuṭat alaktu*.¹⁰ Mayer has “Zum Betrieb an der Einschiffungsstelle am Kai, wo der Verkehr rasch dahineilt.” Mayer and Mitto render this as “To do business at the quay where traffic rushes swiftly by.” And Lambert translates the syntactically identical line *ana išdih nēber kāri ša šitpurat alaktu* as “To the parade of the river crossing where the going is . . .”¹¹ Implicit in all three renderings is a construal of *ša* as a subordinating conjunction meaning “where,” and thus the equivalent of *ašar*, and this is explicitly argued for by P.-A. Beaulieu and Mayer (1997: 176): “In der Tat liegt es nahe, das Subjekt vor dem *ša* zu suchen; doch ist weder *išdihu* noch *nēberu* noch *kāru* nach den Wörterbücher Femininum. So bleibt man besser bei Lamberts Übersetzung ‘where’.” As comparanda, Beaulieu and Mayer point to the citations in GAG §165d, yet these are not genuine parallels;¹² and more compellingly, a Yaḥdun-Lim (1810–1794 BC) inscription (Frayne 1990: E4.6.8.1 35–40): *ina sawē qaqqar našmim ša ištu ūm šātīm šar šumšu ālam lā ippušu . . . ālam ēpuš*, “In a waste, a land of thirst, where from days primordial no king of (any) name had built a city . . . I built a city.”

Lambert’s “where” is further substantiated by parallelism between the poem’s opening couplet (ll. 1–2) and that immediately following it (ll. 3–4), for it serves to equate *ša* with *ašar*, as can be seen in Table 2.

10. That this was the composition’s title is confirmed by the text’s mention in l. 14’ of the Babylonian version of the *Catalogue of Texts and Authors* (ed. Mitto 2022b).

11. *Prayer to Marduk No. 2* “Column III, Lower Portion: 9” (Lambert 1960: 65), with *alaktu* taken from Lambert’s A. Lambert leaves *šit-pu-rat* untranslated. As Beaulieu and Mayer argue (1997: 176), one should take it as a “Dt des a/jB Verb *šuteppuru*, ‘sich beeilen, sich übereilen’.”

12. Of the four citations in GAG §165d, three involve uses of *ša* in *Zeitbestimmungen*, which does not quite match *šuḫmuṭat/šitpurat alaktu*; and the fourth is *ana bīt epri ša ērubu anāku* (now published as *Gilgamesh VII* 193, most recent ed. George 2022b). While von Soden takes *ša* here as an *Ortsbestimmung* and translates the line as “zum Staubhaus, in das ich eintrat,” George’s “In the House of Dust that I entered,” with its construal of *ša* as “that,” seems preferable.

Table 2

ll. 1–2	ll. 3–4
<i>ana išđih nēber kāri ša šuḫmuṭat alaktu</i>	<i>ina qereb tēši ašar šatāt anantu</i>
To the business of the quay, where (<i>ša</i>) traffic is brisk,	In the midst of battle, where (<i>ašar</i>) battle is weaved,
<i>šar kiššati lā maḫri lā tēbā tušahrap urḫa</i>	<i>bēl ilī pāšila ina maḫar lāsimi tašakkan</i>
Unrivalled king of the universe, you make the non-riser head out early.	Lord of gods, you set the crawler in front of the runner.

As understood in Table 2, *ša* in *ša uggatuk innepšu* is likewise synonymous with *ašar*. That *ša* is conventionally employed throughout the rest of the text (ll. 5, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 20, 25, 31), means that its use as “where” would be confined to the opening (l. 1) and near the conclusion (l. 53) of this 55-line-long hymn, perhaps for symmetry.

Returning to thematic considerations, it may be observed that Ninurta wreaking his fury upon Nippur would fit in well with broader Mesopotamian tradition. To point out two parallels: the Sumerian city laments concern the destruction of cities by divine fury,¹³ and in the Akkadian *Erra and Išum*, the raging Erra not only assaults the cities of Babylonia directly, but manipulates their patron gods into raging against and decimating them as well.¹⁴ For the poet to beg Ninurta to stop destroying his own city so that its remnant may survive would be redolent of Ashurbanipal’s plea to Marduk: *ḫusus bābili ša ina uggat libbika tābutūšu atta*, “Take heed of Babylon, which you yourself destroyed in your heart’s fury” (Novotny and Jeffers 2018–22, 2: no. 220, ii 29’).

Although par for the Mesopotamian course in that sense, the translation proposed here is highly unusual in another, for no other text of which I am aware speaks of fury (*uggatu*, *uzzu*, or otherwise) being “done” or “wrought” (*epēšu*). Would we not expect, in line with the above-mentioned Yaḫdun-Lim inscription, that the city of Nippur was “made,” and, in view of the just-cited Ashurbanipal excerpt, that Ninurta acted in his wrath rather than wrought it? And should the new rendition be abandoned because of these oddities of phrasing?

Not necessarily, for two reasons. The first is that Jiménez’s aforementioned equation $ni(NIG_2) + ib + rú(DU_3) \rightarrow ša + uggatu + epēšu$ may explain Ninurta’s fury being “wrought,” just as it might account for Ninurta’s being said to have constructed his city in a fury. The second involves a heretofore unnoted parallel likewise concerning Nippur. The *Nippur Compendium* (George 1992: no. 18) explicates as follows the name Uzu-mua (l. 10’), a part of Nippur in which, according to a longstanding tradition (George 1992: 443), humans sprang out of the ground:

13. Editions ETCSL 2.2.2–2.2.6.

14. Editions of the five known Sumerian City Laments can be found in ETCSL 2.2.2–2.2.6. For an edition and analysis of the *Lamentation of Sumer and Ur*, see Michalowski 1989; of *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur*, Samet 2014. In *Erra and Išum* IV 1–74, Erra attacks Babylon, Sippar, Uruk, Dur-Kurigalzu, and Dēr, and Marduk, Ištar, and Ištaran (these are the patron gods of Babylon, Uruk, and Dēr, respectively), then these punish their own cities further because of the bloody chaos Erra has unleashed within them. For an analysis of this dynamic and its poetic manifestations, see Tadmor 2025: 374–76 (§3.1. Chiasm). An edition and analysis of *Erra and Išum* can be found in Taylor 2017. An updated edition of the poem is under preparation by eBL, with that of Tablet I already on the site (www.ebl.lmu.de/corpus/L/1/5/SB/I). On possible connections between Erra and Sumerian lamentations, see Wisnom 2019: 216–42; 2021.

ṛu.zu.mú.a ^{ki}	<i>ašar ina libbišu nišū</i> (UN ^{meš}) <i>ibbanā</i> <i>u ašar terēti šuklulu</i>
Uzu-mua	The place in which the people were created and where the oracles were perfected.

Bennett writes (2021: 57), “The scholar here derives the description from the name uzu-mú-a^{ki} itself: uzu equates to *nišū* ‘people’; mú is understood as ^{mu-ud}mud *banū* ‘to create’; ki as *ašru* ‘place.’” This is exactly the kind of etymologizing hypothesized by Jiménez for l. 53. The similarity goes further: *ašar ina libbišu nišū ibbanā* syntactically parallels *ša uggatuk innepšu* (as the latter is understood here) down to the use of a subordinative conjunction meaning “where” and the preterite N-stem verb. Based on these similarities, one speculates that *ālka nippuru ša uggatuk innepšu* inverts the *Nippur Compendium*’s *ašar ina libbišu nišū ibbanā*, flipping the creation of humanity (UN^{meš} = ÛG^{meš}) in Nippur into the wreaking of Ninurta’s fury (*ug-ga-tu*) within it.

Complicating the picture is another line in the *Nippur Compendium*, namely, its incipit. Only its Sumerian component is known: *nibru^{ki} ní-bi-ta dū-a*, “Nippur, built by itself.” George writes (1992: 441) that this is “perhaps an ‘etymological’ explanation deriving from analysis of it as *ní-bi*, ‘itself,’ and *rú*, ‘to build,’” and later comments (1992: 442), “As for the epithet itself, the idea of a city ‘built of itself’ does not conflict with Sumero-Babylonian cosmological thought. According to a well-known tradition, represented by the myth of Enlil and Ninlil, time was when Nippur was a city inhabited by gods not men, and this would suggest that it had existed from the very beginning.”

This incipit, which declares Nippur to be self-created, may be construed as evidence against the possibility that l. 53 speaks of Ninurta as having constructed the city. Yet that would not be convincing, as there may have existed any number of mutually contradictory traditions regarding Nippur’s construction—and indeed, the above-quoted *Hymn to the Queen of Nippur* D + 5 ascribes the deed to Enlil. The incipit may also be taken to strengthen the case for the line speaking of Ninurta doing precisely that: the Akkadian explication of *nibru^{ki} ní-bi-ta dū-a* does not survive but would presumably be *nippur ša ina ramāntšu innepšu*. Analyzing Nippur’s name as *nì + íb + rú* rather than *ní + bí + rú* and utilizing the pseudo-locative-adverbial construction proposed by Mayer, the poet may have transformed *nippur ša ina ramāntšu innepšu* into *nippur ša uggatuk innepšu*, “Nippur, which was built in/with your fury.” We are left, therefore, with two interpretations of *nippuru ša uggatuk innepšu*, each awkward in its own way—the current, with its strangely construction-inclined raging Ninurta; and the new, with its “wrought” wrath—and having a different intertextual connection to the *Nippur Compendium* that might help account for its strange phrasing.

1.4. Line 55

55 *šīrūtka lū emūqā[?]ā(ma) da-lil-ka¹⁵ qātka lišbat*

A rev. 16’	[<i>ši-ru</i>]- <i>ut-ka la e-^rmu¹-qa-a-a-^rma¹ da-^rlil¹-ka</i> [<i>qa¹?</i> (aš)]-[<i>at-ka o o o</i>]
a rev. 22’	[<i>o o o lu</i>]- ^r ú ¹ <i>e-mu-qa-a-a da-lil-^rka¹ ^ršU¹+MIN ^rli¹-^riš¹-bat</i>
b i 49b	<i>ši-ru-ut-ka lu-ú e-mu-qa-a-^ra¹-ú da-lil-ka</i> ^r šU+MIN- <i>ka li-iš-bat</i>
d ii 28–29	[<i>ši-r</i>]- <i>ut-ka ^rlu¹-^rú¹ ^re¹-[<i>mu-qa</i>]-^ra¹-^ra¹ ^rdà¹-^rli¹-^rli¹-^rka¹ </i> [^r šU+MIN- <i>k</i>]- <i>a li-iš¹-[bat]</i>
e	<i>omitted</i>

15. On this form, see below.

Table 3

II.	Mayer 1992	Mayer and Mitto (Mitto 2022a)	New Translation
43	O Herr der Lebewesen, die Anu geschaffen, über ihn setzt du einen in Quotientenbildung versierten Schreiber	You, O lord of (all) the creatures fashioned by Anu, deploy an (ordinary) <i>accountant</i> over him	Lord of creatures, appointed by Anu, you appoint a junior scribe over him
44	dann fügt er (jeden) Tag pro Mine ein <i>Goldstück</i> hinzu	And the same day the latter will collect ever more <i>gold</i> with every mina	One (of them) will accrue a mina of gold a day
48*	wenn einer unter den Göttern dir gleichzukommen sucht	O considerate, circumspect, noble-mannered one, who (among the gods) rivals you?	Considerate, circumspect, noble of conduct, who is your rival?
49	machst du (ihn) hörunfähig wie einen Taubstummen!	(On the spot) you would turn (him) mute like the deaf!	(Even) gods you render deaf-like mutes!
53	Deine Stadt Nippur, die in deinem Zorn gebaut worden ist	Your city, Nippur, once built in your fury	Your city, Nippur, where your fury was wrought
55	Deine Erhabenheit sei meine Stärke! Dann soll deine Hand deinen Ruhmespreis (<i>dalilka</i>) fassen!	May your grace be my strength, that your hand receive (my) praise of you (<i>dalilka</i>)!	Let your sublimity be my strength: let your worshipper (<i>dalilka</i>) take your hand!

* Due to philological and grammatical considerations, previous translations of II. 48–49 are called into question and the strength of the variant based on d, already recognized by Mitto yet dismissed as inferior, is highlighted.

Mayer translates, “Deine Erhabenheit sei meine Stärke! Dann soll deine Hand deinen Ruhmespreis fassen!,” and comments (p. 44) “Was soll das heißen? Etwa: “Dann sollst *du persönlich* den Lobpreis für dich empfangen”? . . . Oder ist an etwas Konkretes gedacht, das man in die Hand nehmen kann: ein Emblem, ein Zeichen (der Anerkennung/Huldigung), eine Auszeichnung (für die Großtat)?” Mayer and Mitto translate, “May your grace be my strength, that your hand receive (my) praise of you!”

As Mayer’s comment reflects, the current understanding of the line—whereby Ninurta’s hand is the verb’s subject and “seizes” Ninurta’s praise as one might a physical object—is awkward. One should take *da-lil-ka* not as the noun *dālilka*, “Your praise,” but as the participle *dālilka*, “He who praises you (i.e., your worshipper),” with *dālilka qātka lišbat* meaning “Let your worshipper take your hand.” Here *qāta šabātu* would denote the weak relying on the strong. This is the exact way the phrase is used in its other appearance in the hymn (l. 15, variant based on A): *ša dādūšu šerrumma lā iṣabbatu qāssu*, “(He) whose hand not even his darling infant takes” (cf. *šubbi šeḫram šābitu qātka*, “Gaze at the little one holding your hand!,” OB *Gilgamesh* VA+BM a + 27, ed. George 2022a). The line would then be translated as “Let your sublimity be my strength: let your worshipper take your hand!” Both halves of the line would then speak of the worshipper drawing strength from Ninurta: a fitting ending for a hymn hailing Ninurta’s power as absolute.

Our conclusions may be summarized in Table 3.

REFERENCES

- Beaulieu, P.-A., and W. R. Mayer. 1997. Akkadische Lexikographie: CAD Š² und Š³. *OrNS* 66: 157–80.
- Bennett, E. A. 2021. *The Meaning of Sacred Names and Babylonian Scholarship: The Gula Hymn and Other Works*. Zaphon.
- Bloch, Y. 2010. Etymological Appendix: Semitic Terms for Materials. [Apud N. Agmon, *Materials and Language: Pre-Semitic Root Structure Change Concomitant with Transition to Agriculture*.] *Brill’s Annual of Afroasiatic Languages and Linguistics* 2: 54–79.
- Bottéro, J. 1949. Les inventaires de Qatna (*suite*). *RA* 43: 137–215.
- Civil, M., ed. 2004. *The Series DIRI = (w)atru*. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon, vol. 15. Pontificium Institutum Biblicum.
- Cohen, M. 2023. *An Annotated Sumerian Dictionary*. Eisenbrauns.
- Földi, Z. J. 2021. Hymn to the Queen of Nippur. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/3/6>).
- Foster, B. R. 2005. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. 3rd ed. CDL Press.
- Frayne, D. R. 1990. *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)*. RIME 4. Univ. of Toronto Press.
- Gesche, P. D. 2001. *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* Ugarit-Verlag.
- George, A. R. 1992. *Babylonian Topographical Texts*. Peeters.
- . 2022a. Poem of Gilgameš, Old Babylonian VA+BM. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/1/4>).
- . 2022b. Poem of Gilgameš, Chapter Standard Babylonian VII. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/1/4>).
- Heinrich, A. C. 2021. Poem of Creation. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/1/2>).
- . 2022. The Poor Man of Nippur. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/1/11>).
- Hrůša, I. 2010. *Die akkadische Synonymenliste malku = šarru: Eine Textedition mit Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Ugarit-Verlag.
- Lambert, W. G. 1959. The Sultantepe Tablets: A Review Article. *RA* 53: 119–38.
- . 1960. Three Literary Prayers of the Babylonians. *AfO* 19: 47–66.
- . 1982. The Hymn to the Queen of Nippur. In *Zikir šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. G. van Driel, Th. J. H. Krispijn, M. Stol, and K. R. Veenhof. Pp. 173–218. E.J. Brill.
- . 2013. *Babylonian Creation Myths*. Eisenbrauns.
- Mayer, W. R. 1992. Ein Hymnus auf Ninurta als Helfer in der Not. *OrNS* 61: 17–57.

- . 1996. Zum Pseudo-Lokativadverbialis im Jungbabylonischen. *OrNS* 65: 428–34.
- Michalowski, P. 1989. *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*. Eisenbrauns.
- Mitto, T. D. N. 2022a. Hymn to Ninurta as Savior. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/3/10>). Accessed February 2026.
- . 2022b. Catalogue of Texts and Authors, Chapter Neo-Babylonian. eBL (<https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/1/0/0>). Accessed February 2026.
- Novotny, J., and J. Jeffers. 2018–22. *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC), Aššur-etel-ilāni (630–627 BC), and Sin-šarru-iškun (626–612 BC)*, RINAP, vol. 5. 2 vols. Eisenbrauns.
- Samet, N. 2014. *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur*. Eisenbrauns.
- Streck, M. P. 2009. Review of Martha T. Roth, ed., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago: Volumes T and Ṭ*. *ZA* 99: 135–40.
- Tadmor, E. 2025. Counting Lines in Erra. *JAOS* 145: 369–79.
- Taylor, K. 2017. *The Erra Song: A Religious, Literary, and Comparative Analysis*. PhD diss., Harvard University.
- Wisnom, S. 2019. *Weapons of Words: Intertextual Competition in Babylonian Poetry. A Study of Anzû, Enūma Eliš, and Erra and Išum*. Brill.
- . 2021. Implications of Intertextuality: Erra and Išum and the Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur. In *Ur in the Twenty-First Century CE: Proceedings of the 62nd Rencontre assyriologique internationale at Philadelphia, July 11–15, 2016*, ed. G. Frame, J. Jeffers, and H. Pittman. Pp. 503–24. Eisenbrauns.

