

An “Egyptianising” Underworld judging an Assyrian prince? New perspectives on VAT 10057

Alexandre Alexandrovich Loktionov¹

Introduction: past scholarship and summary of content

This paper offers some new perspectives on VAT 10057, also known as *The Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince*: a composition often regarded as somewhat mysterious (Foster 2005: 832). The possibility of some of its peculiarities being somehow connected to Egypt has already been proposed in passing by Ataç (2004: 69, 71) and Radner (2009: 226), but neither has gone on to explore this matter in depth. This article proposes a more detailed analysis of the evidence.

One must begin by providing some background information on VAT 10057 and its unique content. The tablet was excavated at Assur, very probably in the library of an incantation priest (Köcher 1957-58: 87)². It was found alongside two omen tablets, four lexical lists, and a range of incantation texts including tablets of the *Šurpu* series against curses and the *Maqlû* series against witchcraft (Pedersén 1986: 81-82). VAT 10057 was originally published by Ebeling (1931), but this initial work was soon improved upon by von Soden (1936). An English translation was subsequently produced (Speiser 1969), followed two decades later by an updated English edition in SAA 3 (Livingstone 1989: 68-76) which serves as the basis for this study.

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Martin Worthington of St. John's College, University of Cambridge, for invaluable advice during the initial preparation of this paper. My thanks also go to the Division of Archaeology of the University of Cambridge, which provided an excellent environment for conducting this research. Finally, I am grateful to St. John's College, Cambridge, Robinson College, Cambridge, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for their financial support.

² The exact nature of the findspot was not recorded, but can be deduced from the overall excavation plan and studies of the corpus of other tablets from the same findspot, which have collectively been categorised as “Texte der magischen Literatur” (Köcher 1957-58: 87).

There can be little doubt that VAT 10057 is late Neo-Assyrian in date, as it refers to Nineveh as the preeminent *āl bēlūti* (“city of lordship”) and alludes to Sennacherib’s work on the Babylonian Akitu Temple (von Soden 1936: 3). The text, which is not known from any other tablets, is highly fragmentary in the beginning. The opening (*obv. 1-9*) may involve a divination and offering ceremony, after which an unnamed character apparently neglects the gods and begins hoarding royal wealth. This is probably Kummâ, the Assyrian prince who subsequently descends to the Underworld. The ensuing description of events in Nineveh and Assur is almost entirely lost (*obv. 10-19*), but after it the character becomes deeply upset and some evil affects him (*obv. 19-24*). Eventually Kummâ, now mentioned by name, enters a temple and invokes Allatu, a chthonic goddess seemingly synonymous with Ereskigal (*obv.29-30*). His aims are unclear, although he does mention the “day of my destined death” (*obv.33*). Kummâ apparently then incubates a very negative dream (*obv. 35-36*), again poorly preserved but culminating in Ereskigal offering him help. On awakening, he weeps bitterly and prays to Ereskigal (*obv.37-38*).

The reverse of the tablet is much better preserved. Kummâ has a second dream, now recounted in the first person, where he sees the Underworld. He recognises and salutes multiple composite beings (*rev. 2-9*), which has been interpreted as evidence of him possessing prior knowledge of what the Underworld contains (Wiggermann 1997: 224). Next he encounters Nergal, ruler of the Underworld. Kummâ is terrified as Nergal initially intends to kill him, but his adviser Isum intervenes (*rev. 14-17*). Nergal then accuses Kummâ of insulting his wife Ereskigal (*rev. 18*), threatens Kummâ with utter destruction if he forgets him, and promises distress, oppression and sleeplessness (*rev. 20-21*). Next, a corpse of a great ruler located in the Underworld is said to be Kummâ’s father (*rev. 22-26*). Kummâ is then dismissed, and wakes up. The narrative switches back into the third person, and Kummâ is shown to be more upset than ever before, scooping up street dust into his mouth and lamenting his harsh fate (*rev. 29-32*).

The narrative concludes with three more lines about a corrupt scribe changing his ways after seeing Kummâ's suffering. It is very unclear where the connection between this scribe and Kummâ lies, although it is tempting to suggest that this ending may be designed to give the composition a clear didactic function relevant to the scribal, scholarly environment in which it may have originated. How this might relate to its place in the library of an incantation priest is open to many interpretations, although naturally teaching and learning do seem appropriate for such a setting.

It has been highlighted that this text seems to have "no other parallel" in Assyrian literature (Tadmor *et al.* 1989: 41), which raises profound questions about both its origin and function. Attempts have been made to link the narrative of VAT 10057 both to other literary traditions (e.g. West 1997: 156, 187, 292, 537; Sanders 2009) and to historical figures. Most notably, it has been suggested that this text was the forerunner of subsequent Jewish revelation literature and the Vision of Daniel in particular (Kvanvig 1981; Day 1985: 155, 159). In terms of historical connections, Kummâ has been viewed as representing a son of Esarhaddon, most likely Assurbanipal (von Soden 1936: 7-8; Livingstone 1989: xxviii; Foster 2005: 833), although it has been observed that the description of the royal corpse better matches Sennacherib (von Soden 1936: 7; Livingstone 1989: 74). If so, it is possible that the corpse is not *stricto sensu* the father of Kummâ, but rather a forefather – which would fit Sennacherib. In this case, the mention of the father of Kummâ (*rev.* 26) is likely to allude not to the corpse, but to the living king reigning at the time – probably Esarhaddon (von Soden 1936: 7). In any case, should Kummâ indeed represent an historical ruler, interesting questions arise regarding the purpose of the composition: whether it was written by the king's supporters emphasising his supreme wisdom and divine connections, or by opponents highlighting his loss of divine support. Finally, the scribe mentioned in the final lines has been tentatively linked to Urad-Gula

(Foster 2005: 833), a leading scholar in the court of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, who was eventually dismissed from court but then vainly tried to regain royal favour. Proposals of this kind can neither be proved nor disproved, but they do illustrate the wide scope for interpretation inherent in the work.

The Egyptian dimension

In his analysis of the content, Ataç (2004: 69, 71) remarks that the royal corpse in the Underworld is strikingly Osirian and hence evocative of Egypt, as is the presence of chthonic deities wielding knives. Radner (2009: 226) does not identify specific “Egyptianising”³ passages in the work, but instead suggests a broader relation of the plot as a whole to the emergence of an Egyptian community of scholars in the late Neo-Assyrian palace context. This last phenomenon is of considerable importance: with Neo-Assyrian expansion reaching, and eventually entering, Egypt, interaction between the two cultures was becoming ever more fluid. Senior Egyptian figures, including children of the Pharaoh Taharqa, arrived in the Assyrian homeland (Borger 1956: 98-99; Kahn 2004: 109-12; Zamazalová 2011). Shortly before this time, Egyptian scholars were already recorded among the recipients in the Nimrud Wine Lists (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 63) and several detailed studies have shown that their numbers may have increased shortly thereafter (Huber 2006; Radner 2009). Furthermore, a number of high-ranking Egyptian scribes, military figures and nobles had apparently settled in Nineveh after originally being brought there as prisoners by Sennacherib after the battle of Eltekeh in 701 BCE (Radner 2012). Owing to their high status, it is likely that some of these figures would have enjoyed access to the royal court and the highest echelons of Assyrian society.

Perhaps resulting from this arrival of Egyptian people or military plunder, the late Neo-Assyrian period also witnessed apparent Egyptian influences on royal

³ Throughout this article, “Egyptianising” is used very broadly to refer to any aspect of the composition which may have links to Egyptian culture, either on a purely descriptive or conceptual basis.

representational art (Feldman 2004: 145-49), amulets, and other forms of material culture (Pedersén & Troy 1993; Thomason 2004: 157-61). Indeed, the god Nabû is believed to have on occasion been worshipped as Horus in 7th century BCE Assur (Radner 1999: 74), a city where evidence of a notable Egyptian presence has been established both through analysis of administrative documents (Pedersén 1986: 125-29; Radner 2000: 101; Radner 2015: 59) and through studies of artefacts, such as Egyptian alabaster vessels found on the site (Onasch 2010). It is thus perhaps no coincidence that this city was also the findspot of VAT 10057.

The “Egyptianising” features of VAT 10057

The following section will analyse specific sections of VAT 10057, which appear to have Egyptian parallels. Of these, the first instance is considered principal evidence, as the similarities between this very specific description and Egyptian scenes are such that pure coincidence must be considered very unlikely. The subsequent instances cannot be identified as connected to Egypt with the same degree of confidence, but a link still seems quite possible in the light of the principal evidence.

The god upon a *kušû* – an Assyrian “Horus on the Crocodiles”?

When Kummâ looks around the Underworld during his second vision, one of the deities he observes is described as follows⁴:

*rev.4 šēdu lemnu qaqqadu qātā ša amēlī agû apir šēpā erē(?) ina šēpī
šumēlišu kušē kabis*

The Evil Genie (had) the head and hands of a human, was crowned with a tiara (and had) the feet of an eagle(?). With his left foot he was standing on a *kušû* (crocodile).

⁴ Normalization by the present writer, after transliterations in Livingstone 1989: 68-76.

Central to the interpretation of this passage is the identity of the *kušû*, which has long been mysterious. The translation first suggested was crocodile (von Soden 1936: 22); by far the best fit to the available lexical evidence which points to a predatory aquatic animal with sharp teeth and a useful hide (e.g. Farber 1974: 204; Loktionov 2014⁵). However, as crocodiles are not native to Mesopotamia (van Buren 1939: 96), many scholars considered this unfeasible. Translations of “shark” (Landsberger 1962: 89-94), “turtle” (Cohen 1973: 203-10) and “crab” (Labat & Malbran-Labat 1994: 231) have all been proposed, but none gained wide acceptance.

The “crocodile” translation endured throughout this period of dispute (e.g. Livingstone 1989: 71; Foster 2005: 835; Cohen 2011: 50-51; 218), gradually eclipsing the alternatives. It has now been firmly rehabilitated, as depictions of crocodiles have been discovered in a range of Mesopotamian settings (Civil 1998: 12-13; Loktionov 2014: 166). This shows that there was an awareness of the animal, removing the only impediment for suggesting this logical translation.

While not confirmed for Mesopotamia, it is noteworthy that crocodiles were certainly seen as symbols of Egypt in the Classical world. For instance, they occur on coins of the Roman Principate representing Egypt (e.g. Levi 1948: 30; Carson 1980: 8), as well as in Latin literary sources describing Egypt (Glare 1982: 460). Cicero mentioned the crocodile first in his discussion of animals revered in Egypt, emphasising the importance and honour attached to it (Rackham 1967: 78), while centuries earlier Herodotus had already emphasised the unique role of crocodiles in Egyptian culture (Godley 1920: 356-57). It seems highly likely that crocodiles had a similar “Egyptianising” reputation in Mesopotamia, as depictions of them were

⁵ This is the latest and most comprehensive article addressing the *Kušû* debate, and can be used to obtain further references.

commonly found on explicitly Egyptian or Egyptian-influenced material culture (Civil 1998: 12-13; Loktionov 2014: 166).

However, the picture becomes much more firmly Egyptian when the crocodile is considered in the wider context of the description: namely, a part-human part-avian deity standing atop it. One well-known part-human part-avian deity from Egypt is Horus⁶ – who seems to have been worshipped at Assur (Radner 1999: 74), and who, most strikingly, is known to stand atop crocodiles in Egyptian iconography (Seele 1947; Ritner 1989). Examples of *cippi-stelae* showing Horus in this position have been discovered at Susa (Abdi 2002: 209) and Nippur (Johnson 1975: 146)⁷. This combination of factors makes it very difficult to posit that this scene is entirely devoid of Egyptian influence.

The nature of this influence remains elusive. Egyptians saw Horus as a benevolent deity, and the scenes of him standing on crocodiles are apotropaic (Ritner 1989). This is obviously very different to the *šēdu lemnu* (“evil genie”) described here, but perhaps this can be expected as an Assyrian composition would probably re-interpret initially Egyptian motifs in its own way. Indeed, a transformation from beneficent god to evil genie might be unsurprising considering the wars between Assyria and Egypt, where Horus was closely linked to Pharaoh. In any case, the argument here is merely that an Egyptian influence is present – any attempts to go further necessarily descend into speculation.

An Egyptianising “smiting scene”?

⁶ This match is not perfect, as Horus was generally portrayed with a human body and avian head, not feet (Wilkinson 2003: 202).. Indeed, when treading on crocodiles he could be portrayed as entirely human. Nonetheless, the composite human-bird nature of both may be more than coincidence (especially considering the broader implications of the crocodile).

⁷ Admittedly later in date, probably late Achaemenid/ early Ptolemaic. However, it might be a sign that the Neo-Assyrian uptake of Egyptian motifs was proved profound enough for the same material culture to still be imported much later. Note that the crocodile on this stela has not survived, but the remaining iconography indicates its presence beyond doubt.

Considering the strength of the evidence above, it seems logical for one to be open to other instances of “Egyptianising” influence in this composition. One contender is found but two lines above the previous example, and describes an apparent smiting scene:

*rev.2 [N]amtar šukkal eršeti banû terēt[i] āmurma amēlu ina pānišu ūšuz
šārat rēšišu ina imittišu šabit ina šumēlišu namš[ār]u [šabit xxxx]⁸*

*I saw Namtar, the vizier of the Underworld, who fashions the visceral omens;
a man stood before him, while he grasped the hair of his head in his left hand
and in his right hand he [grasped] a dagger(?)...*

The scene of the triumphant victor, usually the Pharaoh, grasping a captive by the hair in one hand and brandishing a weapon with the other is quintessentially Egyptian, already present on the Predynastic Narmer palette and subsequently common throughout the Pharaonic period (Śliwa 1974: 98-104). Such scenes are however much less typical for Assyria, where ritualised smiting is not emphasised. When Assyrians are shown defeating enemies, a much greater variety of methods is displayed (Barnett 1960⁹). While there are several cases which may fit the description in VAT 10057, usually associated with severing the heads of defeated enemies¹⁰, these always have secondary importance in complex battle scenes, and are carried out by non-descript soldiers rather than leading individuals. Thus, they merely highlight the intensity of conflict by introducing an additional scene of death alongside many others, without being symbolic statements of a given leader’s authority.

⁸ Partial restoration based on parallels with a later line (*rev.10*), where *namšāru* is undamaged and enough of *šabit* is visible to make it highly likely (the verb begins with *ša*, and no other alternatives are apparent).

⁹ For a representative range of examples showing Assyrians defeating enemies, see plates 10, 25, 40, 41, 108, 111, 118 and 130.

¹⁰ See especially plates 40, 41, 118, 130, but note that in all of these the motif is not the main focus of the image.

By contrast, the smiting scene does have pride of place in VAT 10057: it is what Kummâ sees first and foremost, and a senior deity is involved. Some kind of Egyptian connection therefore seems quite possible here. Considering the chthonic setting, there may be parallels with the Egyptian *Amduat* (Hornung & Abt 2007), a New Kingdom text where several gods symbolically smite demons at various points in the Solar Barque’s journey through the Underworld. If so, it may also be more than coincidental that the weapon used in the smiting scene is most probably a *namšāru*, which contains the same root letters (*mšr*) as the word for “Egyptian”, *muššuru*. Although the words are unlikely to be related etymologically, it is tempting to speculate that one could serve as a mental trigger for the other based on phonetic similarity. While none of this constitutes firm proof of an Egyptian link, the number of elements potentially linked to Egypt here does on balance strengthen the case.

The black bird-headed man, perhaps atop a snake

Multiple “Egyptianising” elements are possible in this line:

*rev.10 ištēn eṭlum zumuršu kīma ittê ṣalim ana ša Anzî pānūšu mašlū
 nahlapti samti labiš ina šumēlišu qaštu naši ina imittišu namšāru ṣa[bit ina]
 š[ēpi(?)] šumēli šīr[a uk]a[bbis(?)]*

(There was) one man; his body was black like pitch; his face matched that of the Anzû-bird; he wore red armour. In his left hand he carried a bow, in his right hand he grasped a dagger, while with his left [foot](?) he [trampled] a snake(?).

In the context of a composition with other “Egyptianising” elements, the presence of a pitch black man in the Underworld could be seen as reminiscent of Osiris, who was regularly portrayed with black skin (Wilkinson 2003: 120). Moreover, a face similar to Anzû would imply a bird-headed individual who is otherwise human: while this

could conceivably be Mesopotamian¹¹, it is also entirely typical of Egypt where bird-headed deities like Horus, Sokar, and Thoth all have important Underworld roles (*ibid*: 200-203; 209-10; 215-17). If so, the figure might be a mixture of Osiris and one of these other Egyptian avian deities. This could imply Assyrian alteration of Egyptian mythology to create a generic partly “Egyptianising” figure. Although highly unlikely given the broadly Mesopotamian nature of the whole composition, such a composite figure could potentially also suggest a strikingly good understanding of Egyptian theology. In Egyptian religious treatises like the *Amduat*, Osiris could merge with the bird-headed Sokar (Wilkinson 2003: 210; Hornung & Abt 2007: 113), or potentially even with the bird-headed Horus through the life and death of a single Pharaoh (Wilkinson 2003: 200-203). However, for this to be reflected in VAT 10057, the compilers must have had a truly advanced knowledge of the nuances of Egyptian religion.

Another interesting point here is that this figure is probably trampling on a snake, although sadly the poor state of preservation makes this reading uncertain. If valid, the description would be unique in Mesopotamian literature, much like standing on a crocodile. Although not as obvious, this may reveal another “Egyptianising” element – in the *Amduat*, the divine companions of the sun god Amun-Ra defeat the evil cosmic serpent Apep (Wilkinson 2003: 221-23; Hornung & Abt 2007), while the Egyptian *Apophis Book*, roughly contemporary with the Neo-Assyrian period, talks of apotropaic rituals involving the symbolic destruction of model snakes representing the cosmic trampling of Apep by Ra and his entourage (Kousoulis 1999: 176). Again, it may therefore be that several Egyptian ideas have been merged in *rev.10*, creating a single broadly “Egyptianising” deity.

The verdict of annihilation

¹¹ As one of a variety of *Mischwesen* motifs; see Wiggermann 1997 for more details. It is however noteworthy that even these may have Egyptian parallels (Ataç 2004: 75).

A few lines on, the threat of a “verdict of annihilation” (*dīn karašî*) implies that Nergal, god of the Underworld, has the capacity to make some sort of judgement:

rev.20 [lā ta]m[t]ašima(?) lā tumaššarannima dīn karašî ul ašâm

[Do not] forget(?), do not abandon me! (Then) I will not pass a verdict of annihilation on you.

One possibility is that this is retribution for Kummâ having allegedly insulted the wife of Nergal, which is mentioned briefly in the preceding lines (*rev.18-19*). However, the punishment does not appear to be certain – Kummâ apparently can still secure a favourable outcome based on his future behaviour. Thus, this appears to be a more complex Underworld judgement, and not simply a punishment neatly corresponding to one specific transgression. In Mesopotamia, Underworld judgement of this kind is not a major literary theme, but it is integral to Egyptian theological texts such as the *Book of the Dead* (Faulkner 1985: 27-34). In Egypt, the judgement definitely concerns the deceased, whereas here it is less certain, with Nergal perhaps referring to a future judgement made while Kummâ is still alive. However, this could simply indicate re-interpretation of an Egyptian motif within an Assyrian composition, rather than altogether denying the presence of an initial “Egyptianising” element. Moreover, the choice of word, *karašû* (annihilation, catastrophe) rather than just *mûtu* (death) may indicate a more profound death verdict, perhaps akin to the Egyptian model of ultimate destruction, a “second death”, handed down only in the Underworld (e.g. Brandon 1958: 111; Eyre 1976: 108-10).

The royal corpse in the Underworld

The mention of a dead king in VAT 10057 is also potentially significant:

rev.22 [pagru]¹² annû ša ina eršeti tamru ša rē'ê šitrahi ša abiya [Aššur] šar
ilānī ušamšû mala libbuš[u(?)]

*This [corpse] which is buried in the Underworld is of the splendid shepherd
who fulfilled all wishes of my father [Assur], king of the gods.*

Ataç (2004: 69) has compared the presence of this important royal corpse with the corpse of Osiris in the Underworld; the god's inert body with which the sun unites every night (Wilkinson 2003: 120, 206-207; Hornung & Abt 2007: 148, 179, 379). Initially, this is not entirely convincing, as it seems quite reasonable for an Underworld vision of an Assyrian prince to involve a king. Furthermore, this king's role in fulfilling the wishes of another god is not very fitting for Osiris; a very senior deity in Egypt. Nonetheless, the possibility of a veiled reference should not be altogether excluded, especially in view of other "Egyptianising" elements already being present. Indeed, Egyptian theology frequently identifies the deceased king with Osiris, and if the king in this passage does indeed represent a historical figure like Sennacherib, this could be an example of a dead ruler taking on Osirian attributes.

The king permanent like a thread?

To engage with a possible Egyptian influence here, a new interpretation of the following, admittedly fragmentary, line should be offered:

rev.23 [šarru š]a ultu ašê Šamši adi erēb Šamši mātāti napḥaršina [kīma
qê]¹³ uštabrûma ib[ē]lu gimru

¹² Note that von Soden (1936: 18) restores the opening word of the line as *ešimmu* (spirit-of-the dead; ghost). If this translation is accepted, the scene can be viewed as much more conventional from a Mesopotamian perspective. Ultimately, either restoration is possible as the first word is lost. However, the subsequent use of a stative from *temēru* (bury) appears to imply an inert entity which has been interred. A corpse seems to be the best match.

¹³ Note that von Soden (1936: 18) tentatively proposes that this should be read as *bilti* (load, tribute) and not as *qê*. Ultimately, the correct reading is impossible to ascertain as the tablet is heavily damaged at this point, but the suggestion of *qê* by Livingstone (1989: 74) remains

The translation suggested by Livingstone (1989: 74) is as follows:

*[The King wh]o from east and west made all the lands be looked upon as
booty, who ruled everything.*

This translation interprets *uštabrûma* as a Št-passive preterite of *barû* (“to look at”). While this is a valid interpretation, modifying it yields a compelling alternative. While *uštabrûma* is entirely appropriate for a Št-passive preterite, this form of *barû* is otherwise unattested (CAD 2: 115). This is not a major problem, but there is also another verb, *bitrû* (“to be continuous”), which has a relatively well-attested Št-stem (*ibid.*: 280; AHW 1: 132). If so, the subject of the verb can be the king, with the vowel contraction in *uštabrûma* resulting from a subordinative suffix following a 3rd person singular form of this 3rd weak verb. In this case, the line could refer to his permanence, as *kîma qê* can also be translated as “like a thread” based on an alternative meaning of *qû* (“thread”). The resultant translation reads:

*The King who was permanent like a thread from east to west, who ruled
everything.*

This can be interpreted as an all-encompassing thread simile, rare in Mesopotamia but important in Egyptian iconography, where pharaonic cartouches were seen as looped ropes without beginning or end, containing “all that the sun encircles” (Spieser 2010: 1)¹⁴. While cartouches did not necessarily run from east to west, the idea of a solar axis was highly significant in Egyptian theology (Hornung & Abt 2007: 18, 359), and so the combination of these two features could be in some way influenced by Egypt.

Discussion

Overall, while some are stronger than others, the large number of possible “Egyptianising” elements in VAT 10057 makes it difficult to attribute them all to co-

entirely plausible judging by the size of the gap and in view of the reinterpretation of the meaning of *uštabrûma* put forward below.

¹⁴ For the looped rope serving as an ideogram for the verb *šn* (surround, encircle), see also Faulkner 1962: 267-68. This provides further references.

incidence. It is also significant that all potentially “Egyptianising” elements cluster together within the description of events in the Underworld itself, being densely packed into the first 26 lines of the reverse. While heavy damage to the obverse of the tablet means nothing is certain, the complete absence of “Egyptianising” elements in all other preserved parts of the composition does indicate clustering. This may point to a process of selective uptake whereby they were purposefully added only to the Underworld description, perhaps to give a more outlandish flavour. Indeed, it is not inconceivable that the Assyrians viewed Egyptian culture as *par excellence* “Underworld-focussed” in much the same way as it is perceived today. The far greater complexity of Egyptian funerary theology and preparation for death, when compared to Mesopotamia, would justify such a view and so might explain why the “Egyptianising” elements are localised.

One cannot tell whether the cases discussed above might illustrate knowledge of purely visual motifs, reflecting exposure to Egyptian material culture, or to conceptual themes, indicating awareness not only of iconography but also of the beliefs behind it. The presence of the former to some degree seems very likely, and is highly significant in itself, uncovering the first signs of Egyptian influence in the Mesopotamian literary record. Conceptual awareness seems less likely. However, if present it would indicate serious engagement with Egyptian belief structures, including the capacity to re-interpret them within an ostensibly Assyrian religious framework.

If the compilers of the *Underworld Vision* were themselves Assyrian, conceptual awareness would be improbable as it would require a thorough grounding in Egyptian intellectual culture and the texts needed to understand advanced theology. Another, more remote, possibility is that the work or parts of it were actually written by Egyptians working at the late Neo-Assyrian court – or indeed living in Assur, where

this tablet was found¹⁵. However, while those people would have had the requisite knowledge of Egyptian culture, it is unknown whether they had either the skill or the permission to write literary compositions in Akkadian. Perhaps more feasible is misunderstanding or perhaps even deliberate twisting of originally Egyptian concepts by Assyrians purposefully attempting to create a composition with generic “Egyptianising” elements surrounding a scene of Underworld judgement – a theme for which such elements may well have been considered appropriate.

At this point, it should also be noted that the Underworld description is by no means entirely dominated by the apparent connections to Egypt. Traditional Mesopotamian deities like Ereskigal, Nergal, Isum and Namtar are all involved. Moreover, Elamite deities are present too, and are in fact found guarding the body and descendants of the aforementioned deceased ruler:

Rev.25 Yabru Humban Naprušu zumuršu našrū ušallamū zērušu

Yabru and Humban-Naprušu are guarding his body; they are keeping his progeny healthy.

Although not very prominent in the textual record, Yabru may have been one of the most senior Elamite gods, referred to in *Šurpu* as the “Anu of Elam” (Koch 1995: 1961). Humban was a very significant Elamite deity, quite possibly the head of the pantheon (Hinz 1965), and on occasion equated to Enlil (van Koppen & van den Toorn 1999: 433). Naprušu seems to be a preserved Elamite epithet for “great god”, with *nap/napir* meaning “god” and *riša* “great” (Hinz 1965: 353). At the most basic level, one may suggest that this presence of non-Egyptianising foreign deities indicates that the Underworld description could have simply been a repository for the exotic and the unusual. However, one should note that these Elamite gods are also

¹⁵ For more on their presence and references, see earlier section on the “Egyptian dimension”.

mentioned, in exactly the same terms, in Tablet II (163) of the incantation series *Šurpu* (Reiner 1958: 17). This may be no coincidence, considering the aforementioned provenance of VAT 10057 in the library of an incantation priest (Köcher 1957-58: 87; Pedersén 1986: 81-82). In any case, the presence of these additional deities, alongside members of the conventional Mesopotamian pantheon, means that the significance of any Egyptian connection must not be overstated and that the text is highly diverse in its cultural references. Nonetheless, this should not undermine the potential importance of the findings discussed earlier.

Concluding comments

The presence of some kind of Egyptian influence in VAT 10057 seems highly likely. While it must be acknowledged that several of the potentially “Egyptianising” elements discussed earlier are far from certain in view of damage to the tablet and the scope for alternative interpretations, the overall number of possible allusions to aspects of Egyptian iconography and culture is too large to be fully attributed to chance in a convincing manner. Moreover, certain similarities, such as the god atop a crocodile, are exceptionally specific and a link to Egypt would be the only logical explanation. The fact that the tablet comes from Assur, a site known for Egyptian presence, fits this context well. However, the bulk of the composition remains firmly rooted in the Mesopotamian tradition, and indeed the presence of Elamite gods shows that it was open to more than one strand of non-Mesopotamian influence. This hybridisation of motifs in a single text seems a good fit for the multicultural nature of the contemporary Neo-Assyrian empire.

Notwithstanding the above, “Egyptianising” elements have not previously been located in Neo-Assyrian literature, and so this development should be seen as significant even if perhaps not entirely surprising. Taking into account the localised nature of the “Egyptianising” elements, and their interrelation with both Mesopotamian and indeed Elamite motifs, a trio of interesting questions emerge.

These are namely *why* “Egyptianisation” took place, *what* scale it was on, and *who* carried it out. Starting with *who*, possibilities range from Assyrians writing works like VAT 10057, equipped with only a basic knowledge of Egyptian culture but keen to interpret it as they saw fit, to highly trained Egyptians deploying specialist knowledge to produce theologically sound works for the court, to any combination in between. The fact that the tablet was found in the library of an incantation priest may potentially shed some light on the intellectual milieu in which the text operated, although naturally it is equally possible that the tablet was acquired by this individual after already being created and used elsewhere. As for the *what*, the scale might be a set of compositions with Egyptianising elements, either altogether undiscovered or studied previously but never interpreted with this in mind, or VAT 10057 may genuinely be unique. Finally, there is the *why*: was “Egyptianisation” a court fashion governed by aesthetic sensibility, a political tool inspired by foreign policy, a theological enhancement, an area of professional knowledge for incantation priests, something else entirely, or some combination of the above? As research in this area currently still has far to go, none of these can be discounted, but it is hoped that this initial study will at least pave the way for further work in any one of these directions.

Bibliography

Abdi, Kamyar. 2002. *An Egyptian Cippus of Horus in the Iran National Museum, Tehran*. *JNES* 61(3): 203-10.

Ataç, Mehmet-Ali. 2004. The “Underworld Vision” of the Ninevite Intellectual Milieu. *Iraq* 66: 67-76.

Barnett, Richard D. 1960. *Assyrian Palace Reliefs and their Influence on the Sculptures of Babylonia and Persia*. London: Batchworth Press.

Borger, Riekele. 1956. *Die Inschriften Assarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*. AfO Beiheft 9. Graz: E. Weidner.

Brandon, Samuel G. F. 1958. A Problem of the Osirian Judgement of the Dead. *Numen* 5(2): 110-27.

Carson, Robert A. G. 1980. *Principal Coins of the Romans: Volume II: The Principate 31BC-AD296*. London: British Museum Press.

- Civil, Miguel. 1998. "Adamdun," the Hippopotamus, and the Crocodile. *JCS* 50: 11-14.
- Cohen, Mark E. 1973. *The Identification of the Kušû*. *JCS* 25(4): 203-10.
- . 2011. *An English to Akkadian Companion to the Assyrian Dictionaries*. Bethesda: CDL Press.
- Day, John. 1985. *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ebeling, Erich. 1931. *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Eyre, Christopher. 1976. Fate, Crocodiles, and the Judgement of the Dead: Some Mythological Allusions in Egyptian Literature. *SAK* 4: 103-114.
- Farber, Walter. 1974. Von Ba und anderen Wassertieren: testudines sargonicae? *JCS* 26(4): 195-207.
- Faulkner, Raymond O. 1962 *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1985. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*. London: British Museum Press.
- Feldman, Marian H. 2004. Nineveh to Thebes and Back: Art and Politics between Assyria and Egypt in the Seventh Century BCE. *Iraq* 66: 141-50.
- Foster, Benjamin R. 2005. *Before the Muses*. Bethesda: CDL Press.
- Glare, Peter G. W. 1982. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Godley, Alfred D. 1920. *Herodotus: Books I-II*. Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library.
- Hinz, Walther. 1965. The Elamite God d. Gal. *JNES* 24(4): 351-354.
- Hornung, Erik M. & Theodor Abt. 2007. *The Egyptian Amduat: The Book of the Hidden Chamber*, trans. David A. Warburton. Zurich: Living Human Heritage Publications.
- Huber, Irene. 2006. Von Affenwärtern, Schlangenbeschwörern und Palastmanagern: Ägypter im Mesopotamien des ersten vorchristlichen Jahrtausends. Pp. 303-30 in *Altertum und Mittelmeerraum: Die antike Welt diesseits und jenseits der Levante: Festschrift für Peter W. Haider*, ed. Robert Rollinger & Brigitte Truschnegg. Stuttgart: F. Steiner.
- Johnson, Janet H. 1975. Appendix B: Hieroglyphic Text. Pp. 143-50 in *Excavations at Nippur: Eleventh Season*, ed. McGuire Gibson. OIC 22. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kahn, Dan'el. 2004. Taharqa, King of Kush and the Assyrians. *Journal of the Society of the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 31: 109-28.

- Kinnier Wilson, James V. 1972. *The Nimrud Wine Lists: A study of men and administration at the Assyrian capital in the Eighth Century, BC*. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
- Koch, Heidemarie. 1995. *Theology and Worship in Elam and Achaemenid Iran*. Pp. 1959-69 in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Köcher, Franz. 1957-58. *Zum Assur-Fragment der Serie igi.duḥ.a = tāmartu*. AfO 18: 86-88.
- Kousoulis, Panagiotis. 1999. *Magic and Religion as Performative Theological Union: the Apotropaic Ritual of Overthrowing Apophis*. PhD dissertation (University of Liverpool).
- Kvanvig, Helge S. 1981. An Akkadian Vision as Background for Daniel 7. *Studia Theologica* 35: 85-89.
- Labat, René & Florence Malbran-Labat. 1994. *Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne*. 6th ed. Paris: Société Nouvelle Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
- Landsberger, Benno. 1962. *MSL VIII/2*. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico.
- Levi, Annalina C. 1948. Hadrian as King of Egypt. *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*: 6th Series: VIII: 30-38.
- Livingstone, Alasdair. 1989. *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*. SAA 3. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Loktionov, Alexandre. 2014. Kušû: Crocodile after all? *NABU* 2014(4): 164-67.
- Onasch, Hans-Ulrich. 2010. *Ägyptische und assyrische Alabastergefäße aus Assur*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag.
- Oppenheim, A. Leo *et al.* (eds.) 1965. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Volume 2: B*. Chicago: Oriental Institute. Cited as CAD 2.
- Pedersén, Olof. 1986. *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur: A Survey of the Material from the German Excavations II*. *Studia Semitica Upsaliensis* 8. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Pedersén, Olof & Lana Troy. 1993. Egyptians in Nineveh. *NABU* 1993(2): 39.
- Rackham, Harris. 1967. *Cicero XIX: De Natura Deorum Academica*. Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library.
- Radner, Karen. 1999. *Ein neuassyrisches Privatarchiv der Tempelgoldschmiede von Assur*. *Studien zu den Assur-Texten* 1. Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag.
- . 2000. Die neuassyrischen Texte der Münchner Grabung in Assur 1990. *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 132: 101-104.
- . 2009. The Assyrian King and His Scholars: The Syro-Anatolian and the Egyptian Schools. Pp. 221-238 in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-*

Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola, ed. Mikko Luukko et al. StOr 106. Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.

———. 2012. After Eltekeh: Royal Hostages from Egypt at the Assyrian Court. Pp. 471-479 in *Stories of Long Ago. Festschrift für Michael D. Roaf*, ed. Heather D. Baker, Kaniuth, Kai & Otto, Adelheid. *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 397. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.

———. 2015. *Ancient Assyria: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reiner, Erica. 1958. *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*. AfO Beiheft 11. Graz: E. Weidner.

Ritner, Robert K. 1989. Horus on the Crocodiles: A juncture of Religion and Magic in Late Dynastic Egypt. Pp. 103-116 in *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. James P. Allen. YES 3. New Haven: Yale Egyptological Publications.

Sanders, Seth L. 2009. The First Tour of Hell: From Neo-Assyrian Propaganda to Early Jewish Revelation. *JANER* 11/2009; 9(2): 151-69.

Seele, Keith C. 1947. Horus on the Crocodiles. *JNES* 6(1): 43-52.

Śliwa, Joachim. 1974. Some Remarks concerning Victorious Ruler Representations in Egyptian Art. *Forschungen und Berichte* 16 (Archäologische Beiträge): 97-117.

Speiser, Ephraim A. 1969. A Vision of the Nether World. Pp. 109-110 in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard. 3rded. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Spieser, Cathie. 2010. Cartouche. In *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Elizabeth Froid & Willeke Wendrich. Los Angeles: <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz001nf61t>.

Tadmor, Hayim, Benno Landsberger & Simo Parpola. 1989 The Sin of Sargon and Sennacherib's Last Will. *SAAB* 3/1: 3-51.

Thomason, Allison K. 2004. From Sennacherib's Bronzes to Taharqa's Feet: Conceptions of the Material World at Nineveh. *Iraq* 66: 151-62.

van Buren, Elizabeth D. 1939. *The Fauna of Ancient Mesopotamia as represented in Art*. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico.

van Koppen, Frans & Karel van den Toorn. 1999. *Humban*. Pp. 432-34 in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van den Toorn et al. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.

von Soden, Wolfram. 1936. Die Unterweltsvision eines assyrischen Kronprinzen. *ZA* 43: 1-32.

von Soden, Wolfram. 1985. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch. Band I*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag. Cited as *AHw I*.

West, Martin L. 1997. *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Wiggermann, Frans A. M. 1997. *Mischwesen A*. Pp. 222-46 in *Reallexicon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie: 8. Band: Meek-Mythologie*, ed. Dietz-Otto Edzard. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Wilkinson, Richard H. 2003. *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Zamazalová, Silvie. 2011. Before the Assyrian Conquest in 671 B.C.E.: Relations between Egypt, Kush and Assyria. Pp. 297-328 in *Egypt and the Near East – the Crossroads. Proceedings of an International Conference on the Relations of Egypt and the Near East in the Bronze Age, Prague September 1-3, 2010*, ed. Jana Mynářová. Prague: Charles University in Prague.