
Available at:
http://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:121793

Disclaimer: layout of this document may differ from the published version.

The present volume constitutes the first study of the Babylonian disputation poems since Lambert’s pioneering work in 1960. 1) The book arose from the initial idea to publish two particular tablets (NBC 10917 and BM 64185) and developed into an exhaustive and brilliant study including precious editions of four compositions. In the first part (pp. 1-153) the author starts by defining his corpus (I.1 pp. 8-12) and presenting the Sumerian disputation poems (I.2 pp. 13-26) before turning to the Akkadian examples (I.3 pp. 27-68). He opens this chapter with a useful graph giving a timeline for the Akkadian disputation poems,

reflecting both the date of the manuscripts and the presumptive date of the composition’s origin. In the following subsections he describes the disputuation poems that are already edited: Tamarisk and Palm, the Series of the Fox, the Series of Ox and Horse, The Donkey Disputation as well as Nissaba and Wheat. For each composition he meticulously lists the literature and the (new) manuscripts before discussing the reconstruction and the contents of the texts. For Tamarisk and Palm he adds a reconstruction of the Emar tablet prepared by Andrew George in the National Archaeological Museum at Aleppo in 2001 that confirms the joins suggested by Wilcke in 1989. At the end of each subsection he offers new readings and textual improvements.

In the following chapter (I.4 pp. 69-108) the author discusses “The Place of Disputations Poems within Babylonian Literature”. He begins by studying the structure of the poems, taking up the classic tripartite structure (“a prologue, the disputuation proper, and an adjudication scene” (p. 69) described by van Dijk in 1953.) He then turns to verse and language before giving an interesting list of literary quotations within the disputuation poems. Both their language and explicit intertextuality lead the author to conclude that “disputuation poems should be classified as parodies” (p. 97). Consequently, he investigates “Parodies in Mesopotamian Literature” (I.4.d.1), “Parodies in Greco-Roman Literature” (I.4.d.2) and “Parody in Disputation Poems around the World” (I.4.d.3).

The important question of the “Sitz-im-Leben of the Disputation Poems” is answered in chapter I.5 (pp. 109-124). The author combines information from catalogues, inventories and from the manuscripts themselves to discuss the role of the Babylonian disputations in schools. He shows that they were used in education to a lesser extent than their Sumerian counterparts and that only Tamarisk and Palm, as well as the Series of the Fox, were studied at school.

One of the greatest achievements of this volume (apart from the text edition) is chapter I.6 (pp. 125-153), where the author traces the history of transmission of the “Mesopotamian Disputations in Later Tradition”. As he states himself, “such a history has not yet been written, and in consequence the student (…) is forced to consult a myriad of diverse publications in scattered books and journals from multiple disciplines” (p. 125). And that is exactly what the author did. He leads us from the Egyptian disputations over the Northwest Semitic literary traditions to Graeco-Roman times. He discusses the Middle and New Persian examples, the rich inventory of Syriac disputuation poems, and the Arabic muṣāẓara, he adds the Turkish tradition from the Ottoman Empire and finishes with the Latin and Vernacular disputations in Medieval Europe. He summarizes this chapter in a most useful diagram showing the attestation and transmission of disputuation poems in the different cultures (p. 150).

In part II (pp. 115-227) the author presents a new edition of the Series of the Poplar including the important new fragment MS c1-3 identified by Lambert. It is followed by first editions of Palm and Vine (part III pp. 229-287), the Series of the Spider (part IV pp. 289-323) and the Story of the Poor, Forlorn Wren (part V pp. 325-373). In part VI (pp. 375-399) eleven new manuscripts to the Series of the Fox are published. Two more fragments of uncertain content are added in transcription and copy.

The impressive bibliography (pp. 401-461) reflects the author’s extensive knowledge of the topic and the relevant literature. It is followed by a contribution by A.M. Butts “On a Syriac Dialogue Poem between the Vine and Cedar by Dawid bar Pavlos” (pp. 462-470). The book ends with a glossary and four useful indices.

Even though the present volume is an example of highly accurate philological research, some points merit further discussion. The author dedicates his first chapter (I.1) to the definition of the corpus, but the choice of texts for the Sumerian and Akkadian corpus is not without problems. He bases his definition on five universals he establishes for disputation poems around the world (p. 11-12). Following these universals he lists six Sumerian texts which all show the term a-da-min3 in the final doxology (Hoe and Plow, Ewe and Grain, Summer and Winter, Tree and Reed, Bird and Fish, Silver and Copper). He excludes three other texts that show (according to the author) the same doxology: Enmerkara and the Lord of Arata, Enmerkara and Ensukukešdana, Dumuzi and Enkimdu. Whereas the first must indeed be excluded from discussion, as it does not show the particular doxology, the final lines of the other two disputations qualify them as containing an a-da-min3 contest.

The author justifies his choice by three points (see p. 13): “First, none of them contains a cosmogonic prologue”, but neither does Hoe and Plow (mentioned by the author), even though he seems to accept this exception. “Secondly, the protagonists are human, and not inanimate objects”, but neither is the goddess Ezinam in Ewe and Grain (or better: Ezinam and Ewe). As a third point he lists narration that “is ubiquitous in the other three poems”, but it is as well in Bird and Fish (mentioned by the author). Furthermore, in his fourth universal he does not exclude humans as litigants, insisting that “they are usually types rather than actual people” (p. 11). This would be exactly the case for Enmerkara and Ensukukešdana (local ruler vs. foreign illiterate ruler) and Dumuzi and Enkimdu (shepherd vs. farmer).

The definition of the Akkadian corpus is of course much more difficult to establish as the compositions are all handed down in a fragmentary status. The author’s choice seems to be based on Lambert’s concept, who understood the contest literature as a “type of fable” (Lambert BWL, p. 150 see n. 1) although the author seems to reverse the definition, understanding fables as a subtype of disputations (as all the compositions are collected under the label “disputation poems”).

At the beginning of his book, the author discusses the Akkadian terms šālītāʾaḫāzā epēšu as being “the exact equivalent of the Sumerian a-da-min … ak” (p. 10). It is interesting to note that in Akkadian the term šālu (DU14) was preferred to tešēšu, which is attested as equivalent to the term a-da-min in lexical lists. The only disputuation poem where the term šālu epēšu is preserved as
introducing the following dispute is Ox and Horse.\(^9\) The composition seems to be rather close to the Sumerian “fore-runners”\(^8\) even though the manuscripts date from the 1\(^{st}\) millennium. It has a “cosmogonic” prologue and the main part presents the verbal dispute between Ox and Horse. The end with the judgment is not preserved. In Tamarisk and Palm Wilcke reconstructs ᵇᵃˡᵗᵃ in the Emar version in l. 13,\(^3\) which is part of the first transition leading over from the cosmogonic prologue to the dispute. Manuscripts of this composition date back to the Old Babylonian period and the text as a whole also resembles the Sumerian examples on a structural level.

In Palm and Vine, ᵇᵃˡᵗᵃ is reconstructed by the author in l. 28’ (p. 251) which is the last line in a speech by Palm. In Nisaba and Wheat, ᵇⁱˡᵉ ᵇᵉᵖᵉšu is used in Wheat’s speech referring to quarrels that Nisaba is supposed to have with every plant.\(^6\) In the Series of the Poplar II 15’ (p. 175) it is replaced by the term šitunut ᵇᵉᵖᵉšu, which appears in the introduction formula of Ash’s furious response. In the Series of the Spider (l. 13, 25 p. 305, 307) and the Series of the Fox (NinNA8 13’ p. 384), preference is given to the term taḫāz̄u ᵇᵉᵖᵉšu which might be explained by the fact that they show a development of the classical form by adding a third (or even fourth) party.

The author is very rigid in the choice of the Sumerian disputations excluding several texts showing exceptions to the standard format (see above). For the Akkadian examples he is less strict as he includes texts with hymnal parts (Nisaba and Wheat), with frequent narrative portions (Series of the Fox), and compositions with more than two contenders (Series of the Fox, Series of the Spider. maybe also Series of the Poplar). Nisaba and Wheat is, according to the author, an “eclectic approach to the genre of the hymns, which incorporates a short section composed after the model of the disputations” (p. 67). As mentioned above, the term ŝāḷ(ū)ta ᵇᵉᵖᵉšu refers to disputes with other plants but not to a dispute held with Wheat. The preserved text starts (obv. i) and ends (rev. iv) with a long list of precatives, which would be very unusual in disputations.

According to the author the Series of the Fox is a “hybrid of fable and disputation” (p. 51), as in this composition the speeches seem to be placed into a larger narrative with a “fully developed framework story” (ibid.). Nevertheless the text is integrated into the discussion about the classification of disputation poems as parodies and many citations can be found in the Series of the Fox (see below for the parody). The Story of the Poor, Forlorn Wren is “not properly a disputation, but rather a fable” (p. 330). For a study of Babylonian disputations it might be essential to exclude the “fables”, which are at least in later times a distinct genre. But this remains of course a difficult task and the reviewer will not be able to present a final solution.

But it might be worth trying to distinguish between proper disputations and hybrid forms, i.e. fables or hymns with only a passage of disputation or direct speech (already present in Sumerian literature\(^10\)).

---

\(^{9}\) Ox and Horse A obv. 23 (cf. Lambert BWL p. 179; see n. 1).

\(^{8}\) The text has a reference to a Sumerian disputation by mentioning “strong copper” in A rev. 3 (cf. Lambert BWL p. 179; see n. 1).


\(^{6}\) Nisaba and Wheat SU 1951 (…) obv. 1 28 (cf. Lambert BWL p. 171; see n. 1).

\(^{10}\) For example Goose and Raven or Heron and Turtle.

---

The attributions above made rest on the classification given by the author for each text. The places of the Series of the Spider, the Series of the Poplar and Palm and Vine are more difficult to establish due to their fragmentary status and/or their differing structure. The Series of the Spider starts with the usual cosmogonic prologue, but in the disputation speeches alternate between three contestants, the Spider and the two newly created insects. Furthermore, Spider seems to limit his speech to reproaches against esqapīzu’s speech, which does not correspond to the usual structure of the verbal dispute. For the Series of the Poplar and Palm and Vine the author mentions the possibility that the latter might be part of the Series. If this is the case we might perhaps have to reconstruct taḫāz̄a instead of ᵇᵃˡᵗᵃ in Palm and Vine l. 28’ as this seems to be the preferred term in “disputations” with more than two contestants. But this of course has to remain a hypothesis.

The author classifies the Babylonian disputation poems as parodies, giving a list with intertextual references to Akkadian epic and wisdom literature. The examples mentioned by the author all come from the Series of the Fox, the Series of the Spider and Palm and Vine. If we follow the hypothesis that Palm and Vine belongs to the Series of the Poplar, all parodist elements would be present in the texts that oppose more than two contestants to each other. As the Series of the Fox seems to be the oldest example (mB manuscript from Ugarit) one might perhaps suggest that the parodist element and the idea of opposing more than two contestants entered into the disputation poems through the Series of the Fox, thus creating a new type of disputation. The classic disputation poem would continue to exist alongside this new creation.\(^11\)

---

\(^{11}\) Palm and Vine is not included in this reconstruction as it might either belong to the new “disputation series” or the classical disputation.
states himself, in the Batrachomyomachia the epic formulae constitute “around 32% of its text” (p. 105). This is not the case for the Babylonian disputation poems.

Having said that, the reviewer does not deny that there might be paradigms elements in some of the texts, but they might only support the “ironic and humorous contents” (p. 99) of the disputation poems without turning them into parodies.

Another point that has to be discussed is the dating of the disputation poems. In Figure 1 (p. 27) the author provides a chronological overview of the Akkadian texts. He differentiates between the date of the manuscripts and the presumptively date of the composition’s origin. It is of course important to try to trace back the genesis of a text, but every dating should remain hypothetical without conclusions built up on the presumed origin of a composition. The Series of the Fox, for example, has manuscripts from Middle Babylonian (Ugarit) until Late/Neo-Babylonian times. According to the author, the filiation of the compiler’s name (Ibni-Marduk, son of Ludumununna) in the Catalogue of Texts and Authors from the 1st millennium (p. 111f.) “strongly suggests that the Ludumununna) in the filiation of the compiler’s name (Ibni-Marduk, son of Ludumununna) in the Catalogue of Texts and Authors from the 1st millennium (p. 111f.) “strongly suggests that the Series of the Fox in particular was transmitted for a period of over one and a half millennia” (p. 124) and as this composition enjoyed great popularity (reflected by the number of manuscripts) he concludes that the “Series of the Fox may have inspired all other Mesopotamian disputation poems” (ibid.). Combined with the fact that the Series of the Fox rather shows features of a fable than of a disputation poem, this statement becomes highly speculative.

Some additional remarks on Tamarisk and Palm: In general, it is assumed that Palm opens the debate and turns out to be the winner (p. 36-37). However, a study of the speech introduction formulas shows clearly that what is normally considered Palm’s first speech does not belong to the main part with the actual debate. Both opponents speak in the context of the first transition where their statements are introduced with “umma” (Tamarisk) and “šumma” (formerly “Palm 1”).13) The main part uses the classic, longer speech introduction formulas known from the other precedence debates (discussed by the author on p. 92-94). Although these formulas can vary from one manuscript to the other, the first one always refers to Tamarisk speaking to Palm. The simplest and most instructive form is handed down in the Old-Babylonian version from Tell Harmal:13)

Tamarisk (THb obv. 7’, rev. 2, 13, 24):
bi-nu-um pi2-ša i-pu-ša-am-ma i-sa qa-ra-am giši-ma-ra(a)-šu-(i)šum15)

Palm (THb rev. 7f., 17):
i-na ez-zi-ša i-pu-lam giši-im-ma-ru-um

Lambert BWL, p. 156 has read the beginning of Palm’s formula as i-na i2-li attributing the two words to Tamarisk’s speech. In analogy to the younger versions, Wilcke, ZA 79 (1989) p. 175 has corrected it to i-te-er̄ pi2-ša. A comparison with the Sumerian excerpt from Susa shows that the signs are perfectly copied and do not require correction:

Sb 12354 rev. 1: sumur-ra-ni-ta šešnimbar mu-un-ni-ib-ge-ge

“In her anger Palm answers.”

Tamarisk starts the contest by “speaking to Palm”. The latter is getting angry and “answers”. In all three versions it is always Palm that responds,15) which shows clearly that Tamarisk must have the first speech.

In the Emar version Tamarisk has five speeches whereas Palm is limited to four.16) The end of Tamarisk 5 is marked by a double line (see A. George’s copy of the reverse of the Emar tablet in Jiménez p. 33), which not only indicates the end of the speech but also the start of a new section. The following gap covers about 16 lines that are likely to have contained the conclusion of the dispute.

The Tell Harmal tablet (THb rev.) breaks off in the middle of Tamarisk 5. After a short gap of about two lines, THa rev. gives ten more fragmentary lines. The disputation ends with THa rev. 10’.17) The possessive suffixes in the preceding lines are feminine (e.g. THa rev. 3’ pi2-ki) which excludes the possibility of a fifth speech of Palm. It is highly probable that this section constitutes the outcome of the dispute.18) In THa rev. 3’ we can probably read [di-na-a-nam] q72-bi “give a verdict” followed by i-na pi2-ki li-im-x’- [. . .] “by your command … may […]”. This would refer to the moment when the two opponents turn to their judge who in this case should be female.

The following fragmentary lines are difficult to understand but they do not seem to introduce a direct speech. The very last line (THa rev. 10’) is again highly interesting as it might give the decision of the dispute replacing the judgment: [(x)](y) [e-ru] “by your command … may […]”. This would refer to the moment when the two opponents turn to their judge who in this case should be female.

The above made considerations would of course not have been possible without the present volume. We owe to the author an excellent book, which will constitute the basis for any further studies of the Babylonian disputation poems.

C. MITTERMAYER

15) The same is probably true for the Old-Babylonian version from Tell Harmal. The Assur tablet (Ab) adds another speech of Palm, in the middle of which the tablet breaks off.
17) According to the copy, the remaining space on the bottom of the tablet is not inscribed.
18) Of course it would be possible that Tamarisk continues her speech until the end of the tablet, but in this case, Tamarisk would speak about three times longer than in her previous speeches. In the Old-Babylonian the speaking time of the opponents is quiet equal (five to six lines per speech).