

PRE-SARGONIC RIDDLES FROM LAGASH*

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WITHIN the corpus of known Sumerian wisdom compositions, riddles occupy a very small place.¹ The text published here is therefore of more than ordinary interest, for it is not only a collection of riddles, but it dates to the time of Enannatum I or Entemena, i.e., about the twenty-fourth century B.C. It was found at al-Hiba² in a building (tentatively identified as administrative) excavated by the joint expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University in the 1970-71 season, when the writer was serving as epigrapher. With the permission of Vaughn E. Crawford and Donald P. Hansen, it is published here separately from the rest of the al-Hiba inscriptions.

The tablet, bearing the field number 2H-T25, is fragmentary, but it apparently included six columns on each side. For ease of reference, the columns are numbered consecutively for both obverse and reverse. For the sake of completeness, two small fragments which could not be joined to the tablet are included as fig. 3.

The structure of the text is very simple, consisting of an enumeration of a canal, a divine name, the name of a fish and the name of a snake, each qualified as "its." "It" obviously refers to the name of the town which is suggested by the clues. The names of the canals and deities are obviously essential in identifying the towns, since the names of the fishes and snakes, presumably their totems (or at least thought to be associated with the town in some way), are not helpful clues at the present time. I am inclined to assume that the connections of the fish and snake with various cities was real and not merely a literary invention.³ Each separate riddle is marked off by a line marker (corresponding to *diš* in the later lexical tradition).

The composition is obviously a product of a local literateur of the Lagash region, since the first city to be referred to is Nina/Sirara. It does not appear, however, that the sequence in the text reflects geographical proximity of the towns described. It is possible that some of the information may contribute eventually to identification of some Mesopotamian sites. Particularly noteworthy is that Adab (assuming the clues are correctly interpreted) is on the Kesh Canal. Consequently Kesh, whose location has often been guessed at,⁴ will lie on a canal beyond Adab.

The names of a number of the fishes occur in the list of names of fishes from the Fara period, some from the pre-Sargonic administrative texts from the Lagash area, and some

* The abbreviations are those of the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, except that Fara 2 refers to A. Deimel, *Die Inschriften von Fara*, vol. 2, *Schultexte aus Fara* (Leipzig, 1923). I am grateful to M. Civil and I. J. Gelb for helpful suggestions on several points.

¹ See Edmund I. Gordon, *Bi.Or.* 17 (1960): 142. The Chicago catalogue of Sumerian literary texts lists the following riddles: CBS 9814 + 9815, N 3759, UET 6 340 (duplicates 341 and 346), 342, 343, 344

(duplicate 345), 347 and 348.

² For the identification of al-Hiba with the city of Lagash, see the evidence gathered by Falkenstein, *AnOr.* 30, pp. 17 f.

³ See T. Jacobsen, "Some Sumerian City-Names," *JCS* 21 (1967): 100-103, for the suggestion that some cities had specific birds as emblems of their cities.

⁴ See Hans J. Nissen in Robert McC. Adams and Hans J. Nissen, *The Uruk Countryside: The Natural Setting of Urban Societies* (Chicago, 1972), p. 52.

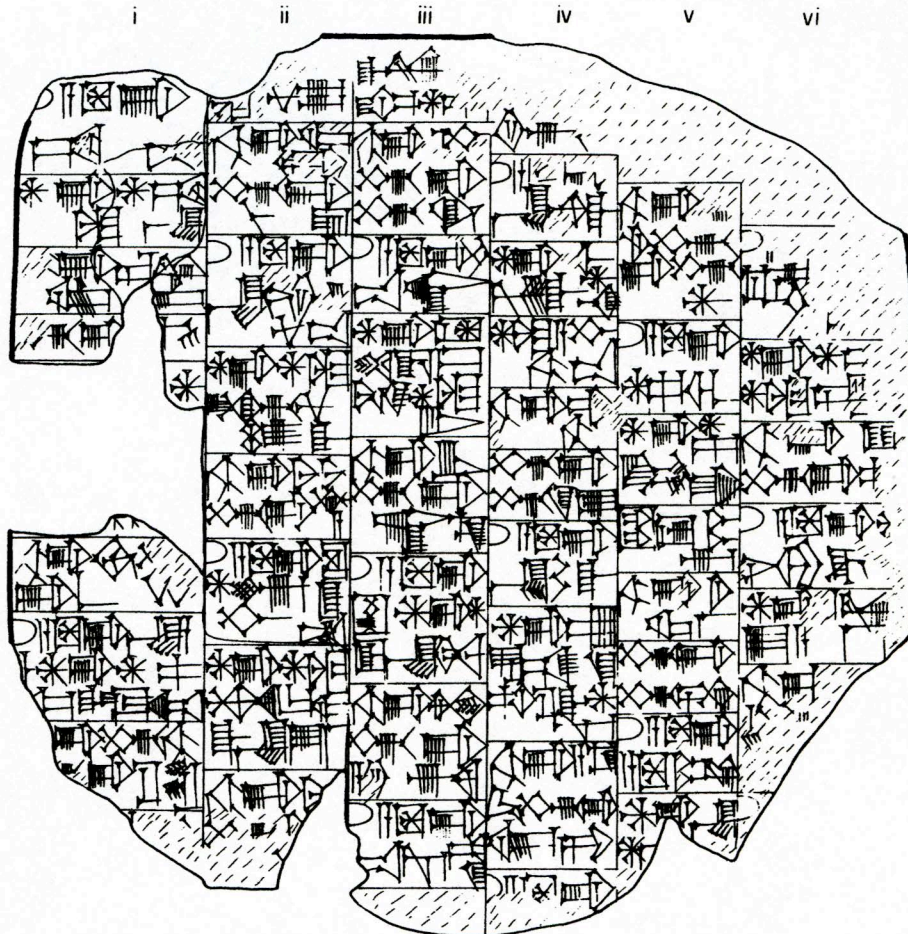


Fig. 1.—2H-T25 obverse

in a Sumerian literary composition, "The Home of the Fish" (edited by M. Civil, *Iraq* 23 [1961]: 154-75). Such parallels as I have noted are remarked on below. Since there are no comparable lists of snakes from the Fara period, parallels were not so readily available. Those I have noted in 𒄩AR-ra = *hubullu* have been cited as parallels.

In several instances names of deities are written without a determinative. Since this does not appear to be a scribal error, no attention is called to it in the transliteration. Brackets have not been used in the translation to indicate restorations, except for those which are conjectural.

col. i

- (1) *íd-bi* Nina-gin
- (2) *dingir-bi* "Nanše nin-uru_x(EN)
- (3) [*kju*]-bi u_x(GIŠGAL)-lú kú-kú
- (4) [*mjuš*]-bi [*x*] x

col. i

- (1) Its canal is Nina-gin ("Going to Nina");
- (2) Its deity is Nanše, the mighty lady;
- (3) Its fish is "the man-eater";
- (4) Its snake is

- (5) [íd-bi] an [x x (x)]
 (6) [dingir-bi x x] x x
 (7) ku₆-bi x m[uš]-bi bar-GAM + GAM
 (8) íd-bi en-a-me/[g]al dingir-bi
^aHendur-sag gal-nimgir-abzu
 (9) [ku₆]-bi muš^{ku₆} [mu]š-bi si-mú

- (10) [íd-bi 'íd¹ [x x (x)]
 rest of col. destroyed

col. ii

- (1) [dingir-bi ^a]'Nin¹(?)-nu-nir
 (2) ku₆-bi sag x x
 (3) muš-bi TAR-luḫ
 (4) íd-bi en-libiš-[š]e(?) -nu-DU
 (5) dingir-bi ^aNin-gur₇ ^{nu}nunuz-ú-gal
 (6) ku₆-bi SAL. SAL
 (7) muš-bi sud-a
 (8) íd-bi e₅ ^aŠE.NUN.ÉŠ.BU.KAŠ₄
 (9) dingir-bi ^aNin-gír-su ur-sag-gal-
 En-líl-lá
 (10) ku₆-bi SAL.[x] muš-bi(?) x [x x]
 rest of col. destroyed

col. iii

- (1) lugal-ne an x
 (2) ku₆-bi x gíd muš-bi muš-gur₈
 (3) íd-bi UD. DU pirig
 (4) dingir-bi ama-tu-da GIŠ. ùḫ. KI
^aNin-ur₄
 (5) ku₆-bi ur₄ muš-bi pirig-dar
 (6) íd-bi LAGAB × MUŠ dingir-bi ^aLAGAB ×
 GAL En-DI-ba
 (7) ku₆-bi DIM × ŠE muš-bi a-šà-tùr
 (8) íd-bi DU INANNA. AB^{ki}
 rest of col. destroyed

col. iv

- (1') [muš-bi] šà-tù[r]
 (2') íd-bi En-gír-gal
 (3') dingir-bi igi-zi-gal-an-na

- (5) Its canal is . . . ;
 (6) Its deity is . . . ;
 (7) Its fish is . . . ; its snake is
 (8) Its canal is En-a . . . ; its deity is
 Hendur-sag, the great herald of abzu;
 (9) Its fish is "the snake fish"; its snake is
 "the horned snake."
 (10) Its canal is

col. ii

- (1) Its deity is Nin(?) -nu-nir
 (2) Its fish is . . . ;
 (3) Its snake is
 (4) Its canal is En-libiš-[š]e(?) -nu-DU
 (5) Its deity is Nin-gur₇, the . . . ;
 (6) Its fish is . . . ;
 (7) Its snake is the "water sprinkler(?)."
 (8) Its canal is the ŠE.NUN.ÉŠ.BU.KAŠ₄-
 Canal;
 (9) Its deity is Ningirsu, the great hero
 of Enlil;
 (10) Its fish is . . . ; its snake is

col. iii

- (1) [Its deity is] Lugal . . . ;
 (2) Its fish is . . . ; its snake is the . . . -
 snake.
 (3) Its canal is È(?) -pirig;
 (4) Its deity is the birth goddess of Umma,
 Nin-ur₄;
 (5) Its fish is . . . ; its snake is
 (6) Its canal is LAGAB × MUŠ; its deity is
 LAGAB × GAL-En-DI-ba;
 (7) Its fish is . . . ; its snake is
 (8) Its canal is "Going(?) to Zabalam";

col. iv

- (1') Its snake is "the vulva(?) snake."
 (2') Its canal is En-gír-gal;
 (3') Its deity is the great true-eyed one
 of heaven,

- | | |
|---|---|
| (4') ^a Nin-A. BU. ĦA. DU | (4') Nin-girim; |
| (5') ku ₆ -bi eštub ^{ku₆} | (5') Its fish is the carp(?); |
| (6') muš-bi muš-ki-x | (6') Its snake is "the . . . snake." |
| (7') íd-bi en-zalag ₂ -gal | (7') Its canal is En-zalag-gal ("Great Shining Lord"); |
| (8') dingir-bi Pisan ₂ -sanga-unug ^{ki}
ensi ₂ -gal ^a Inanna | (8') Its deity is Pisan-sanga-unug, the great ensi of Inanna; |
| (9') ku ₆ -bi a-dar-ĥúb muš-bi KA-geštin | (9') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is ". . . of wine." |
| (10') íd-bi [x x]
rest of col. destroyed | (10') Its canal is . . . ; |
| col. v | col. v |
| (1') ku ₆ -bi 'ka ¹ -sur muš-bi muš-an | (1') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is "the snake of heaven." |
| (2') íd-bi ^a Lama-igi-bar | (2') Its canal is Lama-igi-bar; |
| (3') dingir-bi ^a Lama-ša ₆ -ga | (3') Its deity is Lama-ša ₆ -ga, |
| (4') u ₆ -ganun-tur-nun | (4') The . . . ; |
| (5') ku ₆ -bi níg-sag-lá | (5') Its fish is . . . ; |
| (6') muš-bi muš-tag | (6') Its snake is |
| (7') íd-bi íd-dumu-lú | (7') Its canal is the Dumu-lú Canal; |
| (8') dingir-bi en ^a x [x x]
rest of col. destroyed | (8') Its deity is . . . ; |
| col. vi | col. vi |
| (1') [íd-bi] má-gín ud x | (1') Its canal is . . . ; |
| (2') dingir-bi ^a N[anše(?)] ^a Nin-du[b(?)] | (2') Its deity is N[anše(?)], Nin-dub(?); |
| (3') ku ₆ -bi lù muš-bi x | (3') Its fish is "the roiler(?)" ; its snake is |
| (4') íd-bi An-né-pà-d[a] | (4') Its canal is Annepada; |
| (5') dingir-bi lugal-é-duru _x (A)-lá-x | (5') Its deity is Lugal-é-duru _x -lá . . . ; |
| (6') ku ₆ -b[i x] 'mus ¹ -[bi] x [x]
rest of col. destroyed | (6') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is |
| col. vii | col. vii |
| (1') dingir-bi [^a Ig]-alim | (1') Its deity is Ig-alim; |
| (2') ku ₆ -b[i x x]
rest of col. destroyed | (2') Its fish is |
| col. viii | col. viii |
| (1') ku ₆ -b[i] suĥur [mu]š-bi muš-a | (1') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is "the water snake." |
| (2') íd-bi íd-nun | (2') Its canal is the Nun-canal; |
| (3') dingir-b[i x x]
rest of col. destroyed | (3') Its deity is |

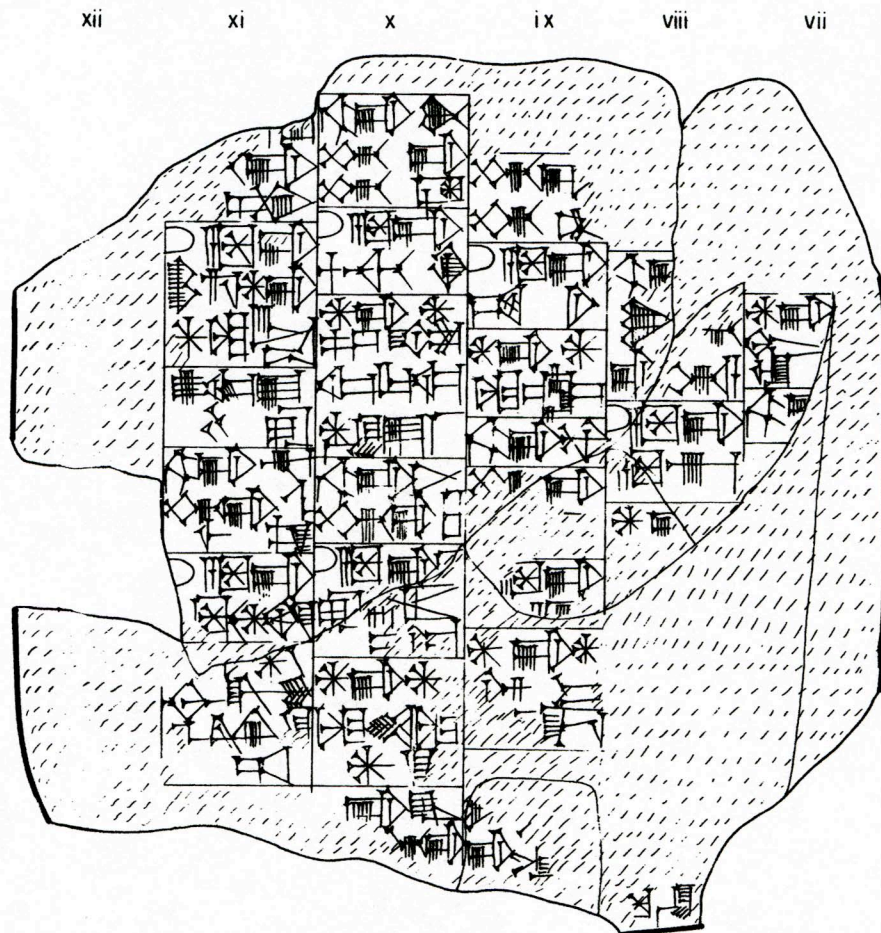


Fig. 2.—2H.T25 reverse

col. ix

- (1') muš-bi muš-kaš₄
 (2') íd-bi AB × ĦA-gar
 (3') dingir-bi ⁴Nin-gublaga
 (4') ku₆-bi gír
 (5') muš-bi [x] x [x x]
 (6') íd-bi x x bi
 (7') dingir-bi ⁴Im(?) - Amar(?) - [ba]n₃(?) - da
 (8') [ku₆-bi su]maš(?) [muš]-bi 'ĥuš¹(?)

col. x

- (1') ku₆-bi sumaš muš-bi muš-dagal

col. ix

- (1') Its snake is "the running snake."
 (2') Its canal is Nina-gar;
 (3') Its deity is Nin-gublaga;
 (4') Its fish is . . . ;
 (5') Its snake is
 (6') Its canal is . . . ;
 (7') Its deity is . . . ;
 (8') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is

col. x

- (1') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is "the broad snake."



FIG. 3.—2H-T25 fragments

(2') íd-bi maš ti ħUR	(2') Its canal is . . . ;
(3') dingir-bi ^a Pa-GIŠ. bÍL-sag ur-sag ^a En-líl-lá	(3') Its deity is Pabilsag, the hero of Enlil;
(4') ku ₆ -bi dù muš-bi KU	(4') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is
(5') íd-bi x ra ḥé ¹ ne ¹ (?)	(5') Its canal is . . . ;
(6') dingir-bi ^a Nin-tu-nin-an-ki	(6') Its deity is Nin-tu, lady of heaven and underworld;
(7') [ku ₆]-bi kin muš-bi [x x] rest of col. destroyed	(7') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is
col. xi	col. xi
(1') [ku ₆ -bi] x [muš]-bi [x]-tag	(1') Its fish is . . . ; its snake is
(2') íd-bi URI-ri dingir-bi ^a Nin-ur ₄ -DU	(2') Its canal is . . . ; its deity is Nin-ur ₄ -DU;
(3') ú-ka-é-kur-ra	(3') the . . . of Ekur(?);
(4') ku ₆ -bi nun-QA-me(?) muš-bi igi-gùn	(4') Its fish is the nun-QA-fish; its snake is "the speckled eyed."
(5') íd-bi íd-Kèš ^{ki}	(5') Its canal is the Kesh Canal;
(6') [dingir-b]i ^a Aš-šIR-gi ₄ lugal KI.AB rest of col. destroyed	(6') Its deity is Ašgi, the lord of

COMMENTARY

i 1 Nina(or Sirara)-gin (or du) is the well-known canal leading to Nina-Sirara. See, for example, Sauren, *Topographie der Provinz Umma* (Heidelberg, 1966), p. 150, and now J. Bauer, *Welt des Orients* 6 (1971): 148. For the epithet of Nanše nin-uru_x "mighty lady," see Falkenstein, *Die Inschriften Gudeas von Lagas*, vol. 1, *Einleitung*, *AnOr.* 30 (Rome, 1966): 85.

i 5-7 The sign for the name of the fish transliterated x, is perhaps the same as that listed in Y. Rosengarten, *Répertoire commenté des signes présargoniques sumériens de Lagas* (Paris, 1967) no. 329 also indicating the name of a fish.

i 8 Hendur-sag is well known as a deity of the Lagash region. See Falkenstein, *AnOr.* 30, p. 76. The "snake-fish" is included in the Fara fish list, Fara 2 no. 10 iii 7 and v 4, also in *Iraq* 23 (1961): 174 ("Home of the Fish"). I know of no other occurrence of the name of the snake "growing horn(s)," though muš-si-gùr-ru, muš-si-gar = *še-er qar-nu* "horned snake" Hh. XIV 18 f. are parallel in sense.

ii 1-3 The reading of the first line is uncertain.

ii 4-7 The deity ^aNin-gur₇ occurs in Fara 2 no. 1 v 12, which appears to be the only other published reference; ^{an}nunuz-ú-gal appears to be an epithet. The fish SAL.SAL (reading unknown) occurs in Fara 2 no. 10 r. i 11. See also Civil, *Iraq* 23 (1961): 174.

ii 8-10 Since the tutelary deity is Ningirsu, one expects the town to be Girsu. The canal name occurs on the Plaque Ovale of Urukagina: fd-ki-ága-ni e_5 $^4\text{ŠE.NUN.ŠŠ.BU. KAŠ}_4$ al mu-na-dù "he dug out for him (Ningirsu) his beloved canal, the . . ." Sollberger, *Inscriptions Royales*, Ukg. 6 v 5-7. For other references see J. Bauer, *Welt des Orients* 6 (1971): 150.

iii 3-5 The deity, $^4\text{Nin-ur}_4$, clearly points to Umma as the name of the town, although the name of the canal is not known to me elsewhere. Its fish, ur_4 , occurs in Fara 2 no. 10 iii 9.

iii 6-7 The sign $\text{LAGAB} \times \text{MUŠ}$ is not otherwise known in pre-Sargonic texts. It may correspond to $\text{PISAN} \times \text{MUŠ}$ which occurs several times in inscriptions of the Fara period. The fish $\text{DIM} \times \text{ŠE}$ occurs in Fara 2 no. 9 iii 11 and no. 10 iii 14.

iii 8-iv 1' The canal seems to be the canal which flows to Zabalam. The a-dar- hùb fish is known in administrative texts; see *VAS* 16 112:1: a-dar- $\text{hùb-ra}^{\text{ku}}$, usually written without ra, see *Orientalia* 21 (1926): 73.

iv 2'-6' The town referred to is probably Murum, the home of Nin-girim. (For the various pre-Sargonic orthographies of girim, see *JCS* 20 [1966]: 80, n. 55). The epithet of Ningirim is not attested elsewhere, as far as I know. The fish eštub is known in Fara 2 no. 10 iv 6, perhaps a kind of carp. See *MSL* 8/2 pp. 97-99. The reading of the sign transliterated as x in line 6 is unknown. Some occurrences from the Fara period are cited in the introduction to my forthcoming volume on the Abū Šalābikh tablets.

iv 7'-9' Because of the deity's name (see discussion in my forthcoming edition of the Abū Šalābikh tablets), the town is probably Uruk. I owe the reading pisan_2 for MES to W. G. Lambert, who pointed out the syllabic writing pi-sa-an-gu-nu-kum *AfK* 2 (1924-25): 13:15. The restoration 'ka'-sur is suggested by such occurrences as Nikolski 270 iv 1.

v 2'-6' Lama- ša_6 -ga is known as a deity of the Lagash region. See Falkenstein, *AnOr.* 30, p. 81.

vi 1'-3' Restoration of Nanše is uncertain, but is suggested by the possibility that $^4\text{Nin-du[b]}$ is an epithet of Nanše. Note her common epithet nin-in-dub-ba (see *AnOr.* 30, p. 86).

vi 4'-6' The deity is unattested elsewhere. There was a canal named Annepadda in the region of Larsa. See *RLA* s.v. Annipadda.

viii 1' The suhur fish is well known. See Civil, *Iraq* 23 (1961): 169 f. The snake muš.a "water snake" occurs in Hh. XIV 43.

viii 2'-3' fd.NUN is a famous canal. See Sauren, *Topographie*, p. 153, T. Jacobsen, *Iraq* 22 (1960): 183 f., also Jacobsen, *Sumer* 25 (1969): 104 ff., and G. Pettinato, "L₇-Idigna-ta L₇-Nun-šè: il conflitto tra Lagaš ed Umma per la 'Frontiera Divina' e la sua soluzione durante la terza dinastia di Ur," *Mesopotamia* 5-6 (1970-71): 281-320.

ix 2'-5' The reading Ningublaga (instead of the earlier reading Ningublam), is based on an explicit writing in an Ur III tablet discovered by David I. Owen of the University Museum, Philadelphia (see his review of S. Kang, *Sumerian Economic Texts from the Drehem Archive* to appear in *JNES*). The deity is associated with the town Kiabrig. See Sjöberg, *Temple Hymns*, p. 26. The fish gir occurs in Fara 2 no. 10 ii 14. See also *Iraq* 22: 172 f.

ix 6'-8' The sumāš fish is well attested in early Sumerian sources. See Civil, *Iraq* 23 (1961): 169 f. It also occurs here in col. iv 1.

x 2'-4' The deity Pabilsag suggests that the town may be Isin, where Pabilsag is known to have been worshipped.

x 5'-7' The deity Nintu suggests that the town is Kesh or Adab. The fish kin occurs in Fara 2 no. 9 ii 4, also *VAS* 14 25:1, etc. (see *Orientalia* 21 [1926]: 74).

xi 2'-4' Since ^dNin-ur₄ occurs earlier in this text, it seems unlikely that one should read ^dNin-ur₄-rá. It seems doubtful to me that ú-ka should be interpreted as ú-zuḫ (Akkadian *musukku* and *usukku*, "person under a (temporary) taboo"). The snake nun-qa occurs in Fara 2 no. 10 ii 10.

xi 5'-6' Because of the deity Aš-šir-gi₄ (for the possibility of reading the name Ašgi, see Biggs, *JCS* 24 [1971]: 1-2), the town is probably Adab. Since it is reasonably certain that Kesh is in the vicinity of Adab, the name of its canal as the "Kesh Canal" seems appropriate.



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