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*Edubba'a Rhymes:  
A New Sumerian Textual Genre?*

GIANNI MARCHESI

The excavations at al-Hiba, which were conducted by a joint expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, provided a small group of Pre-Sargonic tablets – *Al-Hiba* (= Biggs 1976; <sup>2</sup>1992) 26-31 – that can be regarded as products of a local scribal school.<sup>1</sup> The tablets come from a large administrative building in area C;<sup>2</sup> more precisely, nos. 26, 28, 29, 30, and 31 were recovered from room 7/18 on the Level IA floor,<sup>3</sup> while no. 27 was found in Room 4 in the fill of the earlier Level IB, which also contained *Al-Hiba* 3, a tablet bearing a royal inscription of En-anna-abtum I.<sup>4</sup> Because of this association, Biggs dated *Al-Hiba* 27 to the period of En-

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Holly Pittman, Director of the Lagash Archaeological Project, for kindly providing me with photographs of the tablet 2H-T 7 = *Al-Hiba* 29 and granting me permission to publish them. Federica Proni processed the pictures; Glenn Magid offered valuable feedback and editing assistance. I am grateful to both of them.

<sup>2</sup> Studied in detail by Bahrani (1989).

<sup>3</sup> Biggs 1976: 6-7; Bahrani 1989: 113-115.

<sup>4</sup> Biggs 1976: 7. For the reading En-anna-abtum (rather than Enannatum) of the personal name written en-an-na-tum<sub>2</sub>, note the more accurate spelling en-an-na-ab-tum<sub>2</sub> in Nisaba 11 7 rev. i 7 (Ur III). The name in question is to be analyzed as {en-'an.'a-'a(l).b(i).tum}, «The lord befits heaven» (cf. Marchesi 2004: 191 with note 216; id. 2006: 2-3 note 7).

anna-abtum I.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, however, that the colophon of *Al-Hiba* 3 mentions a scribe by the unusual name of <sup>d</sup>sul-MUŠ×PA-gana<sub>2</sub>-zi-en-mete-na-ka, which also occurs in the colophon of *Al-Hiba* 27, though abbreviated there as <sup>d</sup>sul-MUŠ×PA-gana<sub>2</sub>-zi.<sup>6</sup> Since the name <sup>d</sup>sul-MUŠ×PA-gana<sub>2</sub>-zi-en-mete-na-ka has the form of a standard “reverential name” (*i.e.* one that extolls the ruling sovereign as the person who enjoys divine support),<sup>7</sup> its occurrence in both texts suggests that they date to the time of En-metênnâk,<sup>8</sup> instead. If this is true, then the En-anna-abtum I text recorded on *Al-Hiba* 3 must either be a posthumous composition that was commissioned by En-anna-abtum I’s son and successor En-metênnâk,<sup>9</sup> or a later copy of a royal inscription from the reign of En-anna-abtum I.<sup>10</sup> Be that as it may, both *Al-Hiba* 3 and *Al-Hiba* 27 were sealed by the Level IA floor that contained the other school tablets. Those tablets should therefore be dated later, though not much later.<sup>11</sup>

The dating and content of *Al-Hiba* 26-31 are very interesting. However, except for *Al-Hiba* 31, which is a fragmentary collection of Sumerian incantations,<sup>12</sup> all of these texts are very difficult to categorize, and their interpretation is controversial.<sup>13</sup> This is especially true of *Al-Hiba* 29 (figs. 1-5).

The text in question is divided into sections consisting of four or more lines (henceforth referred to as “paragraphs”), each be-

<sup>5</sup> Biggs 1976: 7.

<sup>6</sup> Marchesi 1999: 4.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Selz 1990: 112 with note 8 (on pp. 137-138); *id.* 1995: 14 with note 75; and Bauer 1998: 519-520.

<sup>8</sup> For this, more accurate, reading of the personal name that is usually read Entemena or Enmetena, see Marchesi 2006: 83 with notes 469-470; and Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 178. Cf. also Jagersma 2010: 216 and 237-238. For the PN <sup>d</sup>sul-MUŠ×PA-gana<sub>2</sub>-zi-en-mete-na-ka, «(The god) Sul... is the fertile ground of En-metênnâk», see Marchesi 1999: 4.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cooper 1983: 30; *id.* 1986: 48 with note 10; and Selz 1995: 143 with note 592.

<sup>10</sup> As the unusual presence of a colophon may suggest. For the practice of copying royal or private inscriptions as part of the training of apprentice scribes, see Kraus 2020: 112-126.

<sup>11</sup> See Bahrani 1989: 50-51.

<sup>12</sup> See, most recently, Rudik 2011: 16 and 414-416 (with previous literature).

<sup>13</sup> See Biggs 1976: 6-7; Alberti 1980; Marchesi 1999; Michalowski 2013: 16 with note 3; Wagensonner 2016: 340 with note 1169; and 397-398.

ginning with a semicircular DIŠ (transliterated in the present article as ¶) followed by a sign or sign group. Miguel Civil offered a preliminary transliteration of the text (also based on collations he made from photos of the tablet<sup>14</sup>) and commented on select lines.<sup>15</sup> Noting that *Al-Hiba* 29 contains several syllabic spellings,<sup>16</sup> Civil provisionally classified it as «a school exercise dealing with sign values».<sup>17</sup> At a later date, Civil referred to this tablet as an early example of an explanatory text:

The exercise tablet is divided into paragraphs devoted to a particular sign or sign group. Within a paragraph there are obvious examples of logogram readings, but there are also short phrases exemplifying the use of the sign. The following paragraph [*i.e.* § 5 = col. ii 10 – iii 3], for instance, deals with the sign DU:

NI-DU,  $\text{r}^1\text{-}\eta\text{e}_6\text{-né}$ ,  $\text{i}^1\text{-}\eta\text{e}_6\text{-[x]}$ , eren-A, i-DU, u<sub>5</sub>-du, «What is written with the signs NI and DU is read /i $\eta$ en(e)/, ..., (but in another instance like) “Mr. Eren-A comes (i-DU)”, (the imperfective form is pronounced) /u-du/».<sup>18</sup>

However ingenious, this interpretation is not without flaws. Civil interpreted the sign group NI.MI.NI (=  $\text{i}_3\text{-}\hat{\text{g}}\text{e}_6\text{-ne}_2$ , according to Civil) as syllabic writing of NI.DU with the reading  $\text{i}_3\text{-}\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}$ .<sup>19</sup> However, it should be noted that in the Sumerian dialect that was spoken in Lagash during the Pre-Sargonic period, «he went» was not pronounced /'i $\eta$ en/ but rather /'e $\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}/, due to the so-called Old Sumerian vowel harmony.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, in the Pre-Sargonic texts from Lagash both «he went» (= /'e $\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}/) and «he came» (= /'em $\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}/) were not spelled NI.DU =  $\text{i}_3\text{-}\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}$ , but rather e-DU = e $\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}$ .<sup>21</sup> Moreover, «Eren-A» is a rather unlikely personal name; in$$$

<sup>14</sup> Civil 1983a: 560-561 (§ 3).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 562-564 (§ 4.4).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 562 (§ 4.3).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 559.

<sup>18</sup> Civil 2009: 64.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Civil 1983a: 563: «The reading  $\text{i}_3\text{-}\hat{\text{g}}\text{e}_6\text{-né}$  is a good rendering of i $\hat{\text{g}}\text{en}$ , except for the final e».

<sup>20</sup> See Jagersma 2010: 57-60 (§ 3.9.3).

<sup>21</sup> See, *e.g.* 4H-T 38 ii 1-3 (Crawford 1977: 219-220): PA.TE.SI /  $\hat{\text{G}}\text{E}\check{\text{S}}\text{.DU}_3$   $\text{tug}_2$   $\text{na}\check{\text{n}}\text{še-ka}$  /  $\text{i}\check{\text{u}}_2\text{-de}_3$  e $\hat{\text{g}}\text{-na}^1\text{-a}$ , «when the ruler came/went to erect the mast of the sail of Nanše('s boat)»; CUSAS 26 171 ii 1-3: mu lugal-eden-ne<sub>2</sub> /

fact, nowhere else in Sumerian documentation is a personal name EREN.A attested. Nor is there any other evidence that the verbal prefix  $i_3$  was ever pronounced /u/ before a verbal base with an /u/ vowel sound.

The same passage was interpreted by Theo Krispijn as a paradigm of the verb  $\hat{g}en$ , ‘to go’:

$\dot{i}.DU - \dot{i}.\hat{g}e_6.n\acute{e}$  (second or first person?) –  $\dot{i}.\hat{g}e_6.[ ]$  –  $a:eren$  (plural base?) –  $\dot{i}.DU - u_5.DU$ .<sup>22</sup>

However, the first and second person perfective form of the verb ‘to go’ in the Pre-Sargonic dialect of Lagash can confidently be reconstructed as /’e $\hat{g}enen$ /, which one would expect to see written syllabically as  $e-\hat{g}e_6-ne_2$ ,<sup>23</sup> not  $i_3-\hat{g}e_6-ne_2$ . Moreover, EREN.A can in no way be interpreted as a plural form of  $\hat{g}en$ . Even assuming that the two signs could be read in reverse order as  $a-eren$  and that  $eren$  could be understood as a sort of rebus writing for the plural stem of  $\hat{g}en$ , namely /’er/ or /’ir/, in combination with the very rare plural suffix {en},<sup>24</sup> one would have to explain why the stative verbal prefix {’a(l)} was, in this instance, erroneously affixed to a perfective verb of motion in a main clause.<sup>25</sup> In other words, a verbal form  $a-eren$  analyzed as {’al.’er.en}, ‘they went’, is grammatically impossible. Further damning, in the Early Dynastic period, the EREN sign did not have the reading /eren/, but rather /(h)urin/.<sup>26</sup>

kaskal-ta / e- $\hat{g}en$ -na-a, ‘in the year in which Lugal-edene came back from the expedition»; *DP* 261 ii 2 – iii 1:  $sag_9-sag_9 e_2-ud-sakar ni\hat{g}en_6^{ki}-(na)-\acute{s}e_3$  e- $\hat{g}en$ -na-a, ‘when Sassag went to the E-udsakarak (“House of the lunar crescent”) of Ni $\hat{g}en$ »; etc. For additional occurrences of e- $\hat{g}en$  in Pre-Sargonic texts from Lagash, see Steible 1982: 238, Ent. 28 iii 28-33 = 29 iv 18-23 (cf. Marchesi 2006: 125-126 note 636); and Selz 1995: 237 note 1152 *sub* (4) (cf. Sallaberger 2000: 256). In contrast,  $i_3-\hat{g}en$  never occurs in these texts.

<sup>22</sup> Krispijn 1991-1992: 19.

<sup>23</sup> The phoneme /n/ in syllable-final position first began appearing in writing in the Ur III period; see Jagersma 2010: 22 and 345.

<sup>24</sup> See Jagersma 2010: 322-323 (§ 12.5; note, especially, example 52).

<sup>25</sup> In the Pre-Sargonic dialect of Lagash, in main clauses, perfective forms with {’a(l)} express a state, not an action. See Jagersma 2010: 535-537 (§ 24.4.2).

<sup>26</sup> See Civil 1983b: 3. Cf. Bauer 1987: 4.

*Al-Hiba* 29 was later treated by Niek Veldhuis, who described it as a «sign list with explanatory glosses»,<sup>27</sup> and placed it in the textual category of “syllabaries”.<sup>28</sup> According to Veldhuis, «Each section of this text treats the various readings of a sign that heads the section. ... The section TUM ... is the clearest example».<sup>29</sup>

Veldhuis suggests the following transliteration and interpretation of col. v 5'9' (§ 8):

5'. ¶ TUM	
6'. du-u <sub>2</sub>	(du <sub>4</sub> /dum)
7'. da-ma-am <sub>6</sub>	(dam <sub>3</sub> )
8'. e-gi-ir	(egir <sub>4</sub> = back)
9'. ha-aš <sub>2</sub>	(haš <sub>x</sub> = thigh) <sup>30</sup>

He goes on to comment:

The readings dum (or du<sub>4</sub>) and dam<sub>3</sub> ... are straightforward; ... In modern sign lists the word for thigh (haš<sub>2</sub>) is usually represented by NINDA<sub>2</sub>×EŠ, but in origin, the sign belongs to the TUM family and is still written that way as late as the Old Babylonian period ... In third millennium writing the sign is TUM×AŠ<sub>2</sub> or TUM.AŠ<sub>2</sub> ... and the present entry suggests that a simple TUM could do, too. The word for back (egir) is also written with a TUM-related sign and could be written TUM = egir<sub>4</sub> in the Early Dynastic period.<sup>31</sup>

Admittedly, the passage quoted by Veldhuis from *Al-Hiba* 29 bears some resemblance to lines 634-639 of the Old Babylonian Nippur syllabary Proto-Ea, especially as regards the sequence TUM (= /<sup>(o)</sup>ib/ or /tum/), /<sup>(o)</sup>eger/, /ḥaš/; see MSL 14: 56:

634. ib	TUM (= ib <sub>2</sub> )
635. tu-um	TUM (= tum)
636. el/il	IL (= el <sub>2</sub> /il)
634. e-ge-er	EGIR (= eger)

<sup>27</sup> Veldhuis 2010: 386 note 33.

<sup>28</sup> Veldhuis 2014: 126-127.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

635. 𒄩a-aš/aš <sub>2</sub>	ZIK (= 𒄩aš <sub>2</sub> )
636. zi-ib	ZIK (= zib <sub>2</sub> )

However, things are not as straightforward as Veldhuis claims. First, the spelling du-u<sub>2</sub> (col. v 6') can hardly be understood as representing /du/ or /dum/;<sup>32</sup> more likely, du-u<sub>2</sub> represents /du'u/, /duhu/, or /duwu/.<sup>33</sup> Second, both du<sub>4</sub> and dam are not Sumerian values but Akkadian *Lautwerte*, which, furthermore, are only attested much later.<sup>34</sup> Third, in third-millennium texts, there is no evidence that TUM alone could be used to write the word for 'thigh', that is, /ḥaš/.<sup>35</sup> The spelling 𒄩a-aš<sub>2</sub> (v 9') more likely provides the reading of the compound logogram TUM.AŠ<sub>2</sub> or TUM×AŠ<sub>2</sub>,<sup>36</sup> which is the ancestor of 𒄩aš<sub>2</sub>(ZIK). In short, of the various syllabically written words in this paragraph of *Al-Hiba* 29, only e-gi-ir (v 8'), or rather e-ge-er,<sup>37</sup> certifiably represents a value of the TUM sign (*i.e.* eger<sub>4</sub>) in Old Sumerian

<sup>32</sup> Note that *Pleneschreibungen* representing long vowels were introduced into the writing of Sumerian only in later periods; see Krispijn 2000: 159-160 with note 30; and Jagersma 2010: 25-26.

<sup>33</sup> The existence of a bilabial glide (= /w/) in third-millennium Sumerian is revealed by occasional syllabic spellings of Sumerian words, such as a-wu-zu for LAK 384 (Civil 1982: 4, line 41); ru<sub>12</sub>-wu for RU (Pettinato 1982: 352, 055; and 359, 0161); u<sub>3</sub>-wa/wu for U<sub>8</sub> (Krecher 1983: 182, lines 37 and 38); etc. See also Krispijn 2000: 161. For the glottal phonemes /' / (glottal stop) and /h / (glottal fricative) in early Sumerian, see Jagersma 2010: 38-41 and 48-49, respectively. All these phonemes disappeared in Sumerian before the Old Babylonian period, when the syllabaries that provide the phonemic values (so-called "readings") of Sumerian signs first occur; but they were still present in Old Sumerian, sometimes modifying the syllabic structure of words known from later syllabaries; see Civil 1984: 80-81.

<sup>34</sup> See von Soden, Röllig 1991: 25 *sub* TUM.

<sup>35</sup> TUM sometimes occurs in the place of ZIK = 𒄩aš<sub>2</sub> in texts from the Old Babylonian period; see N 6467 + N 3295: 14 = "Dumuzi's Dream" 75 source V (Alster 1972: pl. VIII; cf. Mittermayer 2006: 55 *sub* 140); "Sumerian Proverb Collection 22" col. ii 19 (Alster 1997: 265 and pl. 89); SLT 179 (= CDLI P227751) rev. iv 2-4 (= Nippur Forerunner to Hh XVI 129-131; see MSL 10, 59). Such few cases are probably to be regarded as scribal mistakes.

<sup>36</sup> See Westenholz 1987: 150; and Alster 1991-1992: 14, line 78; and 48, fig. 3a, col. v 5.

<sup>37</sup> For GI = /ge/ (and not /gi/) in Pre-Sargonic Lagash, see Meyer-Laurin 2011: 40-41.



texts.<sup>38</sup> It is, thus, clear that the text in question is not a syllabary of the type known from the Old Babylonian period onwards.<sup>39</sup>

The last scholar to deal with *Al-Hiba* 29 was Klaus Wagensonner, who remarked that «andere Abschnitte ... bieten neben Zeichenlesungen auch kurze Phrasen, in denen das jeweilige Zeichen verwendet wird. Somit gehört dieser Text zu den frühesten Beispielen von Kommentarliteratur».<sup>40</sup>

The «kurze Phrasen» to which Wagensonner refers are copular clauses of various types, such as [ř]e<sub>6</sub>-dal-am<sub>6</sub>, «it is ashes» (col. iii 13);<sup>41</sup> [t]u-š[a<sub>4</sub>]-am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>, «he is sitting» (rev. v 4');<sup>42</sup> tir en-na-kam, «the forest belongs to (lit. 'is of') the lord» (i 5); im<sup>1</sup>zur<sup>1</sup>-re<sub>2</sub>-dam<sup>1</sup>, «clay is to be broken» (i 9);<sup>43</sup> etc.

Indeed, most of the lines of *Al-Hiba* 29 contain copular clauses.<sup>44</sup> At times, copular clauses appear to play with the values of a sign; for instance, in col. iii 4-8 (§ 6), we read:

<sup>38</sup> eger<sub>4</sub>(TUM) is regularly used in the place of eger in the Pre-Sargonic texts of Lagash.

<sup>39</sup> See Veldhuis 2014: 177-187.

<sup>40</sup> Wagensonner 2016: 340.

<sup>41</sup> Assuming that ře<sub>6</sub>-dal is an older form of dedak(NE)/de<sub>3</sub>-dal (for which, see Crisostomo 2019: 314). Cf. Civil 1983a: 562 *sub* § 4.3.

<sup>42</sup> Assuming that tu-ša<sub>4</sub> is a syllabic writing of tuš-ša<sub>4</sub>. Although Sollberger (1961) does not list it in his “syllabaire présargonique de Lagas”, ša<sub>4</sub> is the standard syllabogram for /ša/ in the Pre-Sargonic texts from Lagash; see *DP* 126 rev. i 3: aš<sub>10</sub>-ša<sub>4</sub>-ne<sub>2</sub> (cf. Balke 2017: 99); 418 rev. iii 4: a-tuš-ša<sub>4</sub>; 482 rev. ii 2: ba-uš<sub>2</sub>-ša<sub>4</sub>-ta; *RTC* 29 rev. i 3: ... ḥaš-ša<sub>4</sub>; etc.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. zur-zur, ‘to break to pieces, to shatter’, in Proto-Diri Nippur 93 (MSL 15, 16); and “Lugalbanda and Enmerkar” 320 and 386 (Wilcke 1969: 120-121 and 124-125; ETCSL 1.8.22). However, the connection between this very rare verb and zur in *Al-Hiba* 29 i 9 is not completely certain, as the former always occurs in a reduplicated form. If zur-zur belongs to the reduplication class (as P. Attinger [*GSF* 1176] has tentatively suggested), then zur in our text must be a different verb. It could be the same as /zer/, ‘to break (to pieces), to destroy’ (*GSF* 1155 s.v. ze-er, ze-r), pronounced /zur/ in Lagash. In this connection, note that (1) several words containing an /e/ vowel in standard Sumerian occur in the local dialect of Lagash with an /u/ vowel instead (see Krispijn 2000: 161; and Marchesi, Marchetti 2011: 240 with the literature in notes 27-28); (2) /zer/ does not seem to occur as such in the Pre-Sargonic texts from Lagash.

<sup>44</sup> 39 out of 63 lines of which the last sign is preserved end with signs that represent the copula {am} (that is, am<sub>6</sub>, dam, kam, or nam). Relatively little attention has been paid to this point, which is crucial, in my opinion. Civil (1983a: 561-562) commented on this as follows: «I assume that -am<sub>6</sub> represents

4. ¶ ĠIR<sub>2</sub>-am<sub>6</sub>
5. ġeš-er-am<sub>6</sub>
6. su<sub>4</sub>-ma-am<sub>6</sub>
7. tab<sub>2</sub>-ba-am<sub>6</sub>
8. tum<sub>3</sub>-ġa<sub>x</sub>(SAĠ×ĤA)-am<sub>6</sub><sup>45</sup>

While lines 5 and 8 are uncertain (5) or obscure (8), lines 6-7 consist of copular clauses with past participles as predicates: {sum.'a.'am} = /summa'am/, «he was slaughtered», {tab.'a.am} = /tabba'am/, «he was burnt». In both cases, the employed verbal bases – that is, sum<sub>x</sub> and tab<sub>2</sub> – are values of the ĠIR<sub>2</sub> sign,<sup>46</sup> which occurs two lines above, just after the semicircular DIŠ that marks the beginning of the paragraph.

On the other hand, if we look at col. ii 1-5 (§ 3):

1. [¶] ṚKUL-am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>
2. ṚX<sup>1</sup>-am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup> (or: ṚX<sup>1</sup>(.)[X]-am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>)
3. ra-ba-am<sub>6</sub>
4. ġenbur ša<sub>4</sub>-ra-am<sub>6</sub>
5. mes a ede<sub>x</sub>(E<sub>3</sub>.E<sub>3</sub>)-dam<sup>47</sup>

a completely different picture emerges. In this instance, in the only two intelligible lines – that is, lines 4-5: «the shoots are abundant;<sup>48</sup> the *mes*-tree is to be watered»<sup>49</sup> – none of the quoted words is a value of the sign that occurs at the beginning of the

the copula which frequently has simply a topic-making function. The presence of -am<sub>6</sub> cannot be accounted for by its position in the section (some “headings” have it, others not) or by any discernible criteria. Hypothetically, it may represent phonological information» (see also *idem* 2009: 64); while according to Veldhuis (2014: 127), «the significance of -am<sub>6</sub>, which is added to many entries in(!)[Text: is] this list, remains unclear».

<sup>45</sup> The sign SAĠ×ĤA was studied in detail by Civil (1983a: 564-566). The evidence he quoted suggests that when used as a syllabogram, the sign in question should be read /ġa/. As for tum<sub>3</sub>, its only attested use as a syllabogram outside this text is in the writing of the DN <sup>d</sup>ġa<sub>2</sub>-tum<sub>3</sub>-dug<sub>3</sub>.

<sup>46</sup> For the use of ĠIR<sub>2</sub> as a variant of sum<sub>6</sub> (Old Sumerian) / šum (later) = *tabāġum*, ‘to slaughter’, see Lambert 1981: 85; Bauer 1987: 2; and Sjöberg 2003: 554 with note 40.

<sup>47</sup> For ede<sub>x</sub>(E<sub>3</sub>.E<sub>3</sub>), see Krecher 1995: 166; and Meyer-Laurin 2010: 4 note 11.

<sup>48</sup> Assuming that ša<sub>4</sub>-ra is a syllabic writing of šar<sub>2</sub>-ra (cf. note 42 above).

<sup>49</sup> For the expression a e<sub>3</sub>, ‘to let the water out, to water’, see *GSF* 330.

paragraph: KUL. Therefore, the clauses in this paragraph (at least the last two) cannot be interpreted as illustrations of the uses and meanings of the KUL sign.

In sum, none of the interpretations of *Al-Hiba* 29 that have been proposed to date are adequate; the question remains: what kind of text is *Al-Hiba* 29? A simple answer presents itself upon closer inspection of the only fully intelligible paragraph in the document, that is, § 2 (col. i 6-10), which reads as follows:

6. ¶ amar-<sup>d</sup>iškur
7. amar-am<sub>6</sub>
8. amar <sup>d</sup>iškur-kam
9. im <sup>r</sup>zur<sup>1</sup>-re<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>dam<sup>1</sup>
10. im [ur<sub>3</sub>]-r[e<sub>2</sub>]-<sup>r</sup>dam<sup>150</sup>

Civil had the following to say about this passage:

The topic is a personal name. Line 7 gives the first element of the name; line 8 repeats the whole name making the genitive element explicit; line 9 has the two constituents of the name in inverse order. Since both zur and amar end in r, the actual reading of the sign is uncertain.<sup>51</sup>

However, Civil's analysis was biased by his assumptions about the nature of this text (see above), which led him to focus overly on the text's supposed explanatory features. In doing so, Civil failed to note the passage's most salient feature, namely that it seemingly functions as a nursery rhyme. The passage has a clear rhythmic structure and it contains the sorts of puns and nonsense verses that are usually encountered in nursery rhymes.

This paragraph demonstrably plays with the meaning of the personal name Amar-Iškurak, «Calf of (the god) Iškur», and its two components (*i.e.* amar and iškur); the values of the AMAR sign (*i.e.* amar and zur); two of the values of the IM sign (*i.e.*

<sup>50</sup> For this restoration, see below, with note 54. Lines 9-10 may alternatively have to be read: im <sup>r</sup>zur<sup>1</sup>-ru<sub>9</sub>-dam / im [ur<sub>3</sub>]-<sup>r</sup>ru<sub>9</sub>-dam (cf. Lambert 1992: 257). However, the assimilation of the /e/ vowel of the morpheme {ed} to a preceding /u/ with certain verbal bases (see Jagersma 2010: 659-660) is only attested in later periods.

<sup>51</sup> Civil 1983a: 562.

iškur and im);<sup>52</sup> and, finally, the phonetic resemblance between the antithetic expressions im zur, «to break clay (to open)».<sup>53</sup> and im ur<sub>3</sub>, «to smear clay (to seal)».<sup>54</sup> All of this word-play results in a brief, playful rhyming text akin to a nursery rhyme:

6.	'amar'iškurak	He is Amar-Iškurak
7.	'amar'am	he is a calf
8.	'amar'iškurakkam	he is a calf of Iškur
9.	'im zureddam	clay is to be broken
10.	'im'ureddam	clay is to be smeared

However, while it shares all the telltale features of nursery rhymes (nonsense content, wordplay, rhyming), this short composition was not intended for children.<sup>55</sup> Rather, it originated in a school setting for didactic purposes. Therefore, lacking an exact equivalent in English, we could call this kind of composition an “*edubba'a* rhyme” (modeled on the designation “nursery rhyme”), from the Sumerian term for scribal school: e<sub>2</sub>-dub-ba-a.<sup>56</sup>

§ 2 of *Al-Hiba* 29 suggests the possibility that *Al-Hiba* 29 is, in fact, a collection of such *edubba'a* rhymes, which were specially devised for scribal training, exploiting the mnemonic techniques and compositional mechanisms that are typical of nursery rhymes. Although too little of this intriguing text is understood to make a definitive case, the portions of it we can make sense of seem to support this hypothesis. For instance, the above-quoted § 6 in column iii, although only partially intelligible, looks like a rhyme playing with the values ĝiri<sub>2</sub>, sum<sub>x</sub>, and tab<sub>2</sub> of the ĜIR<sub>2</sub> sign:

<sup>52</sup> For the attested meanings of the IM sign as a logogram with the value /'im/ in the Pre-Sargonic texts from Lagash, see Meyer-Laurin 2011: 60.

<sup>53</sup> See note 43 above.

<sup>54</sup> See *GSF* 1127 s.v. with note 3578 and the literature cited therein (especially, Huber 2000). For ur<sub>3</sub> in the sense of ‘to smear’, see also i<sub>3</sub>-be<sub>2</sub> ħe<sub>2</sub>-ma-ur<sub>3</sub>-e, «may he smear that fat on it (*i.e.* on Amar-Zuenak’s head)», in *TMH* 6 1: 18 (Ur III incantation; cf. Rudik 2011: 231 and 233).

<sup>55</sup> Incidentally, no nursery rhymes in Sumerian or Akkadian are attested, as far as I know.

<sup>56</sup> On this term, see most recently Attinger 2018 (with previous literature).

4.	ġiri'am	He was a dagger
5.	ġeš'er'am	he was a <i>tree-trunk</i> <sup>57</sup>
6.	summa'am	he was slaughtered
7.	tabba'am	he was burnt
8.	tumḥa'am	he was ...

This paragraph can perhaps be paraphrased as follows:

He was a warrior (lit., dagger), he was strong like a *tree-trunk*; nevertheless, he was slaughtered (as can happen to warriors) and (his corpse) burnt (for even the strongest of logs can be consumed by fire); ...

Admittedly, this interpretation is speculative and it depends on several assumptions, but it makes sense. The only viable alternative would be that the passage is a collection of copular clauses with no connection to one other that have been strung together for no obvious reason.<sup>58</sup> But the hypothesis that it represents, like § 2 above, a short rhyming text playing with sign values seems much more probable.

*Al-Hiba* 29 thus appears to attest to a new textual genre: the *edubba'a* rhyme, which provides didactic instructions on the readings of logograms in a playful way. But of course, more work on this difficult text will be required if we are to arrive at definitive conclusions about its content and the purpose it served. In the meantime, it is a great pleasure to dedicate the first study of *edubba'a* rhymes to Simonetta Graziani.

<sup>57</sup> Assuming that ġeš-er (= /ġeš'er/) is the same word as ġušur, 'beam, log' (etymologically, ġeš-ur<sub>3</sub> [= /ġeš'ur/], 'roof-beam'). If my hypothesis is correct, then the spelling ġeš-er could provide the pronunciation of the term in the Pre-Sargonic dialect of Lagash.

<sup>58</sup> It is true that some of these copular clauses are somewhat related by the fact of containing values of the ĠIR<sub>2</sub> sign (see above), but this characteristic does not apply to all of them.

Appendix

For the convenience of the reader, a revised transliteration of *At-Hiba* 29 follows:

- (§ 1)
- Col. i 1. [¶ ...]  
 2. [...]  
 3. [...]-<sup>r</sup>am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>  
 4. [r]i<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>da<sup>1</sup>-am<sub>6</sub>  
 5. tir en-na-kam
- (§ 2)
6. ¶ amar-<sup>d</sup>iškur  
 7. amar-am<sub>6</sub>  
 8. amar <sup>d</sup>iškur-kam  
 9. im <sup>r</sup>zur<sup>1</sup>-re<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>dam<sup>1</sup>  
 10. im [ur<sub>3</sub>]-r[e<sub>2</sub>]-<sup>r</sup>dam<sup>1</sup>
- (§ 3)
- Col. ii 1. [¶] <sup>r</sup>KUL(= nuġun?)-am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>  
 2. <sup>r</sup>X<sup>1</sup>-<sup>r</sup>am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup> (or <sup>r</sup>X<sup>1</sup>(.)[X]-<sup>r</sup>am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>)  
 3. ra-ba-am<sub>6</sub>  
 4. ħenbur ša<sub>1</sub>-ra-am<sub>6</sub>  
 5. mes a ede<sub>x</sub>(E<sub>3</sub>.E<sub>3</sub>)-dam
- (§ 4)
6. ¶ BALAĜ BALAĜ-*inversum*  
 7. AŠ GANA<sub>2</sub>  
 8. bu-ba-am<sub>6</sub>  
 9. bum<sub>2</sub>(BALAĜ)-ħa<sub>x</sub>(SAĜ×ĤA)-nam
- (§ 5)
10. ¶ NI.DU  
 11. <sup>r</sup>NI<sup>1</sup>.MI.NI  
 12. NI.<sup>r</sup>MI<sup>2</sup>.[X]
- Col. iii 1. <sup>r</sup>EREN<sup>1</sup>.A  
 2. NI.DU  
 3. u<sub>5</sub>-D[U]

*Edubba'a Rhymes*

(§ 6)

4. ¶ ġiri<sub>2</sub>-am<sub>6</sub>
5. ġeš-er-am<sub>6</sub>
6. su<sub>4</sub>-ma-am<sub>6</sub>
7. tab<sub>2</sub>-ba-am<sub>6</sub>
8. tum<sub>3</sub>-ġa<sub>x</sub>(SAĜ×ĤA)-am<sub>6</sub>

(§ 7)

9. ¶ NE-am<sub>6</sub>
10. NE-am<sub>6</sub>
11. NE-am<sub>6</sub>
12. ĜEŠ.ʽGIBIL<sup>L</sup>-am<sub>6</sub>
13. [ĩ]e<sub>6</sub>-dal-am<sub>6</sub>

- Col. iv
1. N[E...]
  2. ʽX<sup>1</sup>[...]
  3. da-ʽX<sup>1</sup>(.[X])
  4. lu<sub>5</sub>-ma-am<sub>6</sub>
  5. UD(.)NE-am<sub>6</sub>
  6. za-ġa-am<sub>6</sub>
  7. ġa<sub>x</sub>(SAĜ×ĤA)-ra-am<sub>6</sub>
  8. bu-bu-ul ʽA<sup>1</sup>(erased)
  9. a-NE
  10. AN(-)ġa<sub>x</sub>(SAĜ×ĤA)-be<sub>2</sub>
  11. a-mul
  12. a-NE

- Col. v
- 1'. [...]AN[...]
  - 2'. N[E...]
  - 3'. da(-)ʽAK<sup>1</sup>
  - 4'. NE

(§ 8?)

- 5'. ¶ TUM
- 6'. du-u<sub>2</sub>
- 7'. da-m[a]-a[m<sub>6</sub>]
- 8'. ʽe<sup>L</sup>-ge-er
- 9'. ġa-a[š<sub>2</sub>]

(§ ...)

- Col. vi
- 1'. ¶ [...]
  - 2'. um-[...]

- 3' [X B]U 'X'  
 4' [X] BU [X]  
 (rest of column broken)

Reverse

- Col. i (broken)
- Col. ii 1. ri<sub>2</sub>-r[i<sub>2</sub>(-X)]  
 (rest of column broken)
- Col. iii 1. 'zi'-am<sub>6</sub>  
 (§ 1')  
 2. ¶ 'X'  
 (break: 2/3 lines)  
 1' za- [...]  
 2' e-er-'X'  
 3' ri<sub>2</sub>-'X'([...])  
 (rest of column broken)
- Col. iv 1. ([...])'da<sup>1</sup>(-)TU[N<sub>3</sub>]-am<sub>6</sub>  
 (§ 2'/3')  
 2. ¶ 'LAGAB×A<sup>1</sup>-am<sub>6</sub>  
 3. aš<sub>11</sub>(AŠ-*tenû*)-ti-am<sub>6</sub>  
 4. 'X' [...]  
 5. KU-nu<sub>2</sub>-am<sub>6</sub>  
 6. [X].DU-am<sub>6</sub>  
 (rest of column broken)
- Col. v 1' UŠ×KID<sub>2</sub>-am<sub>6</sub>  
 2' UŠ×KID<sub>2</sub>-'da<sup>1</sup>-am<sub>6</sub>  
 3' 'X(.)X<sup>1</sup>-[a]m<sub>6</sub>  
 4' [t]u-š[a<sub>4</sub>]-'am<sub>6</sub><sup>1</sup>  
 (rest of column broken)
- Col. vi 1. DU.DU  
 2. DU.'DU'  
 3. zi  
 4. ḫa-luḫ  
 (end)



*Abbreviations*

- 2H-T = Prefix for field numbers of inscribed objects from the second season of excavations at al-Hiba/Lagash.
- 4H-T = Prefix for field numbers of inscribed objects from the fourth season of excavations at al-Hiba/Lagash.
- Al-Hiba* = Biggs 1976; 1992.
- CDLI = Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (<https://cdli.ucla.edu/>).
- CUSAS = Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology.  
26: Westenholz 2014.
- DP* = Allotte de la Fuÿe 1908-1920.
- ETCSL = Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (<https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>).
- GSF* = Attinger 2021.
- LAK* = Siglum of signs in Deimel 1922.
- MSL* = Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon.  
10: Landsberger - Reiner 1970.  
14: Civil 1979.  
15: Civil 2004.
- N* = Museum siglum of tablets from Nippur in the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
- Nisaba* = *Nisaba. Studi Assiriologici Messinesi*.  
11: al-Rawi - Verderame 2006.
- P* = Prefix of CDLI numbers.
- RTC* = Thureau-Dangin 1903.
- SLT* = Chiera 1929.
- TMH* = *Texte und Materialien der Frau Professor Hilprecht Collection, Jena*.  
6: van Dijk - Geller 2003.

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*Figures*

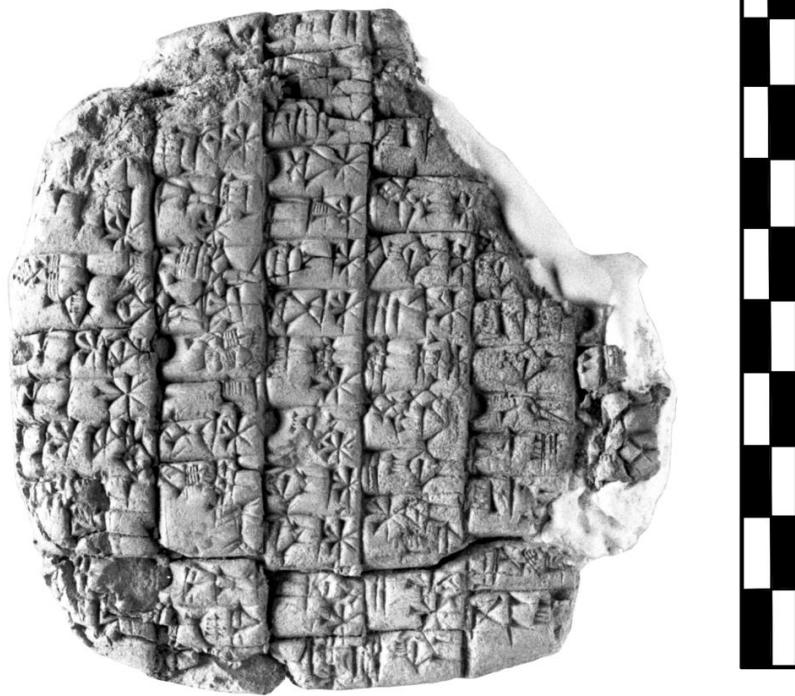
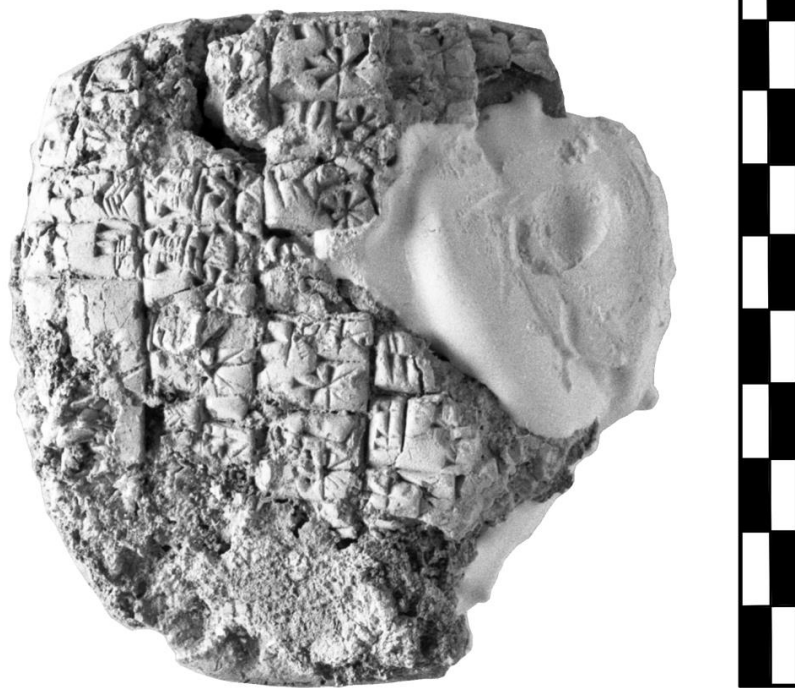


Fig. 1 - 2HT 7, obverse, front view.





Fig. 2 - 2H-T 7, obverse, side view.



*Fig. 3 - 2H-T 7, reverse, front view.*

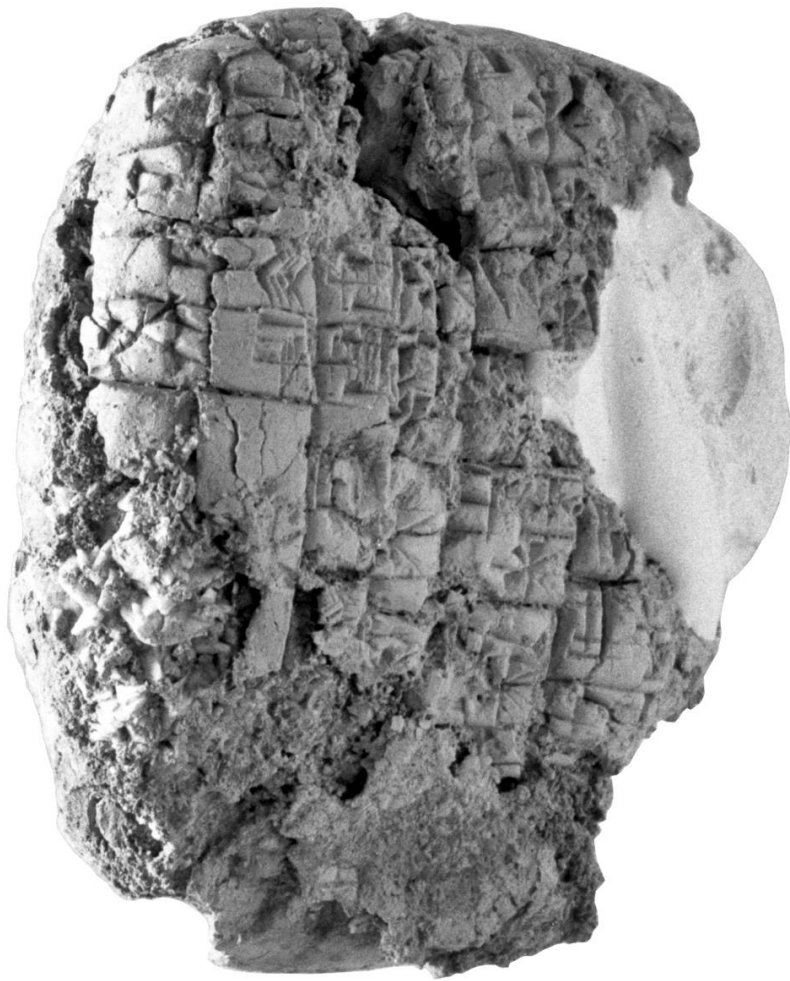
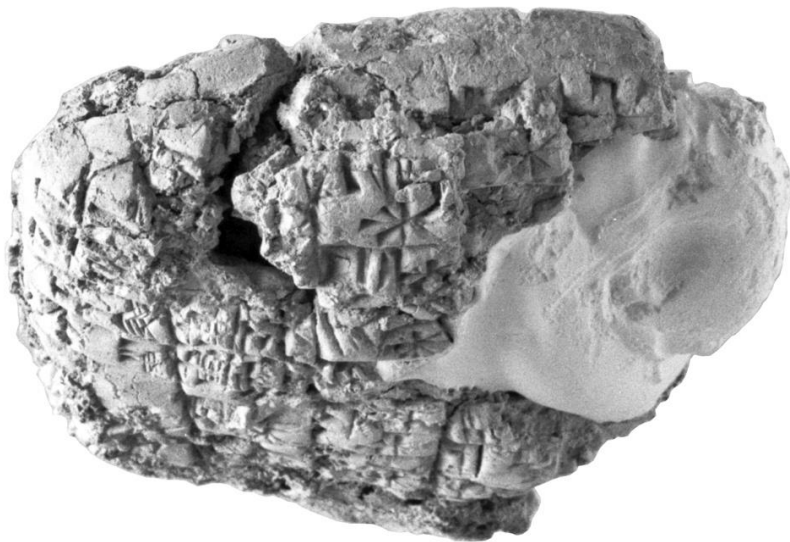


Fig. 4 - 2H-T 7, reverse, side view.

*Gianni Marchesi*



*Fig. 5 - 2H-T 7, reverse, view from above.*