

Texte und Materialien

der Frau Professor

Hilprecht Collection

of Babylonian Antiquities

im Eigentum der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Herausgegeben von
Manfred Krebernik

Band 14

2023

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

The Frau Professor Hilprecht
Collection of Babylonian Antiquities

Essays dedicated to Manfred Krebernik
during the Colloquium Held on March 17–18, 2022
at Friedrich Schiller University Jena

Edited by
Jacob Jan de Ridder and Peter Stein

2023

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Love of Enemies, Love of Strangers and Love of Neighbours in Mesopotamia and in the Bible

Michael P. Streck¹

1. Love of Enemies

The Babylonian wisdom text published by Lambert, 1960: 96–107 under the title “Counsels of Wisdom” contains a remarkable passage:

- 36 *ina pan šāltimma puṭur ē takpuḍ*
Detach yourself from dispute and do not care (about it)!
- 37 *lū šāltakama napiḫta bulli*
Even if it is your dispute,² extinguish the (dispute) that has been kindled!
- 38 *šāltumma šuttatu šefītum*
The dispute is a laid out trap,
39 *dūru abru mukattimu gārīšu*
a wall, a woodpile(?)³ that covers its opponent.
- 40 *mašīssu iḥassasamma amēlu (LÚ // [a]-me-lu) ubbar*
(Otherwise) the man (the enemy) remembers what he (himself) had forgotten and
accuses (you).⁴
- 41 *ittī bēl šāltika ē tulammin*
Do not cause evil to a man who disputes with you!
- 42 *ana ēpiš lemuttika damiḳta rībšu*
Requite with kindness your evil-doer!
- 43 *ana raggika mišāra killaššu*
Maintain justice to your ill-wisher!

1 Altorientalisches Institut der Universität Leipzig, Germany.

2 I.e., a dispute concerning you. The lines before (ll. 31–35) admonish not to involve in disputes of others.

3 Foster, 2005: 413. Von Soden, 1990: 165 translates ad hoc “eine nicht stabile Mauer”, connecting *abru* with the literary word *abrātu* (so correctly instead of “*abrūtu*”) for “mankind”. It follows that the latter would mean “the unstable”, which is in my eyes improbable.

4 In my interpretation *amēlu* is subject of both sentences. Older translations: “They remember what a man forgets and lay the accusation” (Lambert, 1960: 101, ignores the syntax), “an von ihm Vergessenes denkt er und bezichtigt den Menschen” (von Soden, 1990: 165, unclear to whom “er” and “den Menschen” refers), “It brings to mind what a man forgot and charges him” (Foster, 2015: 413, again against the Akkadian syntax).

- 44 *ana šerrika [ka]battaka limmiršu*
Let your mood be bright to your enemy,
45 *lū ḥādūka šuta'iraššu (šu-ta'-i-raš-šú // šu-t[a-] // [-r]a-āš-šú)*⁵
even if he sneers at you, make (it) always bright(?) to him!
(Lambert, 1960: 100: 36–45)

The significance of these lines for Babylonian ethics has not yet been sufficiently appreciated in Ancient Near Eastern studies. In his edition, Lambert (1960: 96), succinctly speaks of “pacification of enemies”. Von Soden (1990: 164), characterized the Counsels of Wisdom as a text that “only rarely deals with genuine ethical demands” and that “little is felt of the seriousness of very differentiated ethical demands”.⁶ Far from it! Although the Akkadian verb *ra'āmu* “to love” is not used, the text is in fact about nothing less than the commandment to love one’s enemies, which is expressed in the New Testament as follows:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you. (Matthew 5: 43–44)

Who is the enemy in the Counsels of Wisdom? The lines preceding the quoted passage warn against being drawn into litigation. L. 35 immediately preceding the passage uses the word *dīnu* “trial”. The following ll. 36–40, and perhaps also l. 41, continue the topic: the words *šāltu* and *bēl šālti* may stand for “litigation” and “litigant”. In l. 43, the word *mīšāru* “justice” is used, which also belongs to the semantic field of law. However, it would be too short-sighted to refer the passage solely to the opponent in litigation. The expressions *lummunu* “to do evil” (l. 41), *lemuttu* “evil” (l. 42), *raggu* “evil” (l. 43), *šerru* “enemy” (l. 44), and *ḥādū* (l. 45) “laughing, envious” do not refer specifically to the opponent in litigation but speak abstractly of any evil and evil-doing. Therefore, the legal context is to be only understood as an example, and the passage switches from the concrete to the abstract. The situation is similar to the Old Testament commandment to love one’s neighbour in Leviticus (§ 3), which is also deduced from a legal context.

The advice to love one’s enemy in the Counsels of Wisdom has a parallel in the Sumerian Counsels of Wisdom:

du-da₁₄ izi-gin₇ lu₂ ba-an-gu-e₇ te-en-te-en-bi ḥe₂-en-zu ...

A quarrel eats a man like fire. You should know how to cool (him) down ...

5 The verb, still broken in the edition in Lambert, 1960: 100: 45, is fully preserved in the duplicate VAT 17157 (Lambert, 1960: pl. 75). The restoration by von Soden, 1990: 165, *šu-t[a-am'-r]a-aš(sic)-šú* “gib ihm überreichlich” (*Št marū*, also followed by Foster, 2005: 413 and 415), is wrong. But the verb cannot be derived from *warū* (*pace* Lambert, 1960: 314). I rather understand *šuta'iraššu* as *Štn* from *naw/māru*. It seems that *šutawwiraššu* developed into *šuta'iraššu* along the lines of *awīlu* > *a'īlu* (de Ridder, 2018: 115f. § 180) and some forms with original m that developed via w to ' as well (*ibid.* 155f. § 233, note especially *ga'urūte* < *gammurūte* with original double mm). If that interpretation is correct, l. 45 repeats the verb of the preceding line in a different stem.

6 “In den Mahnungen geht es ... nur selten um echt ethische Forderungen ... von dem Ernst sehr differenzierter ethischer Forderungen ... ist in den Mahnungen dieser Textgruppe nur wenig zu spüren”.

niġ₂-kur₂ ḥa-ra-ab-be₂ gaba-ri na-an-na-ab-be₂ ki-bi dugud-da-am₃

Should someone utter hostilities towards you, do not reply to him! This(?) would be too serious.⁷ (Alster, 2005: 248: 94–96)

Again, the legal context is the starting point of the advice which is then extended to the “near enemy” par excellence.

Another parallel in the Neo-Babylonian version of the Cuthean Legend of Narām-Sîn leads us to further considerations.⁸ Ll. 149–174 of the text, reproduced here in abbreviated form, advise a future ruler: he should secure his fortress, his possessions and himself, and retreat in the face of the enemy rather than engage in battle:

*dūrānīka tukkil ḥirātīka mē mulli ... littaggiš mātkā ē tūšīšu ... ana gullultišunu rīb dumqī ana dumqī qīšāti u tašbāti ana maḥrišunu etettiq (e-te-et-ti-iq)*⁹

Strengthen your fortresses! Fill your trenches with water ... May he (the enemy) pass to and fro through your land, but you shall not go out to him ... Repay their (the enemy’s) sin with benefits! For benefits, gifts and rewards go over and over again (across your trenches) before them! (Westenholz, 1997: 329–331: 160–174)

The words for “enemy” used in Counsels of Wisdom refer to the near enemy, the hostile neighbour who wishes the individual ill. The absence of the term *nakru* “stranger, enemy” shows that the foreign, remote enemy is not included in the advice. This is consistent with the Old and New Testament commandment to love one’s enemy and neighbour, which does not include the national, non-Israelite or non-Jewish enemy.¹⁰ The Cuthean Legend, on the other hand, clearly speaks of the king’s enemy, the foreign enemy, even though it does not explicitly mention him anywhere.

The fulfilment of an ethical demand is not free of self-interest. On the contrary, self-interest is the actual reason for all ethical commandments, even if only indirectly because society needs an ethical basis that makes living together possible. The advice to love one’s enemies in the Counsels of Wisdom addresses one’s own benefit in lines 38–39: to prevent the dispute from destroying oneself, which is made explicit in l. 40 as the avoidance of a counter-accusation by the opponent of the dispute. Self-interest is also the reason for the advice in the Cuthean Legend: although this is nowhere stated verbatim, the enemy is obviously so overpowering that combat would be futile and it is better to appease him by paying tribute — the text avoids the word *maddattu* and says “gifts”. One of the world’s oldest examples for appeasement!

7 Alster translates “that’s the important thing”. *ki-bi* literally means “(at) this place”.

8 Foster, 2005: 348 n. 1 already pointed out the connection between the two passages in Counsels of Wisdom and the Cuthean Legend.

9 Westenholz, 1997: 329–331 translates “Requite their wickedness with kindness! And (their) kindness with gifts and supplementary presents(?)! Always precede them (i.e., do more than they ask!)” This translation is, however, problematic, because the enemy is not kind, and *etēqu* does not mean “to precede”. Also Foster’s (2005: 355) translation “avoid them whenever you can” is not covered by the meaning of *etēqu*.

10 Moenikes, 2012 §§ 2.2.2 and 3.2.1. Lang, 1990 locates the commandment to love one’s enemy in the small village community.

nakru, the foreign enemy, is also encountered in a bilingual proverb from Neo-Assyrian times:¹¹

tallik taššâ eqel nakri illik iššâ eqelka nakru

You went and took away the enemy's field. The enemy went and took your field away. (Lambert, 1960: 245 v 14–17)

These lines do not express an advice to love one's enemy, but they emphasize the reciprocity of action from which such an advice can be derived. Self-interest again plays a role: if you do not attack the enemy you protect yourself. It remains unclear whether this proverb is directed specifically at the king or whether royal action and the foreign enemy merely exemplify the behaviour toward any enemy in general.

2. Love of Strangers

Although the Bible does not include the foreign enemy in the commandments to love enemies or neighbours (§ 1), the Old Testament does know a commandment to love strangers, which includes the foreign fellow citizen, the foreign "neighbour":

If a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. He shall dwell with you as a native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19, 33–34)¹²

A similar advice does not exist in cuneiform literature. On the contrary, the text Advice to a Prince leaves the foreign fellow citizen without rights:

mār Sippir idāsma aḥām idīn Šamaš dayyān šamē u erṣeti dīna aḥām ina mātišu išakkanma
(If) he (the king) treats a son of Sippar unlawfully but gives justice to a stranger, Šamaš, the judge of heaven and earth, will issue foreign law in his land. (Lambert, 1960: 112: 9)

And a proverb says:

ubāru ina āli šanīmma rēšu

The foreign guest is a slave in another city. (Lambert, 1960: 259: 16f.)

Foreign fellow-citizens in Babylonia often enjoyed a worse position than the indigenous population. This can be inferred from numerous statements in letters and other cuneiform texts in which the contrast "stranger" – "relative" is emphasized, e.g.:

¹¹ Only the Akkadian version is quoted here.

¹² For similar passages s. Moenikes, 2012 § 2.2.3.

anāku aḥūka širka u damūka anāku nakrum nakarma anāku ana awātīka azzâz

I am your brother, your flesh and blood I am. Only the stranger is a stranger. I stand up for your affairs. (AS 22, 11: 3–8)

awīlum awīl bītiya ul nakar

The man is a man of my house, not a stranger. (AbB 6, 69: 12)

ana lā širišu iškunanni kimtī

My family treated me as if I were not a blood relative. (Ludlul I 92)

The harshest statement regarding foreigners is found in the Instructions of Šuruppak:

ur nu-zu ḥul-am₃ lu₂ nu-zu ḥuš-am₃

An unknown dog is evil, an unknown man is horrible. (Alster, 2005: 99: 276)

But the evidence is ambivalent. According to the Sumerian Counsels of Wisdom, travellers should be provided with food and a bed:

kas₄ tur lu₂-ra ḡiskim mu-un-e₁₁-de₃ ninda gu₇-ni-ib tukum-bi ki-na₂ nu-tuku ki-na₂ ḡar-i₃

A low ranking(?) traveller who makes himself known to a man, give him something to eat! If he has no bed, prepare him a bed! (Alster, 2005: 252: 174–175)

Similar advices to care for travellers are expressed in ll. 179 and 182 of the text. The Egyptian pharaoh even treats the messengers of Tušratta as "equals" and as "strangers", i.e., he treats them according to diplomatic conventions:

[kī] meḥrūti u kī [u]bā[r]ūti uktebbit

He honored (them) [like] peers and like strangers. (EA 29: 32)

3. Love of Neighbours

The Old Testament derives the command to love one's neighbour from a legal context (§ 1):

You shall not deal unjustly in judgment: you shall not prefer the lowly, nor favour the great, but you shall judge thy neighbour aright ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself. (Leviticus 19, 15–18)

A corresponding advice using the verb *ra'āmu* "to love" is unknown in cuneiform literature. But the Counsels of Wisdom again express a similar idea by using a concrete image:

- 61 *šūkil akalu šiqi kuru[nn]u*
Give bread to eat and fine beer to drink!
- 62 *eriš kīttu* (var. *erišti qīš*) *epir u kubbit*
Seek righteousness (var. give what is desired), provide and give honour!
- 63 *ana annīmma ilu* (var. *ilšu*) *ḥadīš*
The (var. his, i.e. man's) god rejoices over this.
- 64 *īāb(i) eli Šamaš irābšu dumqu*
It pleases Šamaš, he will repay him (man) good.
- 65 *šubš(u) usātu gimil dūr ūm(u)*
Give help, grant favour all days.
(Lambert, 1960: 103: 61–65)

The satisfaction of elementary needs of life, eating and drinking, is a concrete image for help (*usātu*) and favour (*gamālu*) in general. The text refers to this behaviour as *kīttu*, translated as “righteousness”. *kīttu* means morally and ethically correct conduct, including conduct in accordance with law.¹³

A similar advice to love one's neighbour is also expressed in the Old Babylonian lament Man and His God:

u atta ē tepšī ubbulam pušūš emša šūkil šiqī šamiya māmī

And you shall not faint! Anoint the parched, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty to drink! (Lambert, 1987: 192: 62–63)

The reward for this love is “salvation and life” (*šulmim u balāṭim* l. 66).

4. Summary

Mesopotamian wisdom literature advises to love one's enemy and to love one's neighbour. Whereas the corresponding Biblical commandments are expressed by using the verb “to love”, cuneiform texts use concrete images to express similar ideas. Like in the Biblical book Leviticus, the advice to love one's enemy in the Counsels of Wisdom is derived from a legal context. As in the Bible, the words for “enemy” refer to the hostile neighbour. The foreign enemy, who does not occur in corresponding Biblical contexts, is appeased in the Cuthean Legend. The Biblical commandment to love one's foreign fellow citizens is not attested in Mesopotamia, but travellers and messengers are cared for and treated with respect.

These observations are significant for the history of ethics. They show that the Biblical commandments to love one's neighbour and to love one's enemy are not unique but were also known much earlier in the Ancient Near Eastern environment of the Bible.¹⁴

13 “sittlich und moralisch korrektes Verhalten unter Einschluss des Verhaltens entsprechend dem Recht” (Streck, 2007: 281).

14 For Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome s. Moenikes, 2012: § 2.2.2. Manfred Krebernik also pointed out to me parallels in the religions of India. See, e.g., the Upanishads: “He who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, he never turns away from It (the Self)” (Parminanda, 2004: 20).

Bibliographical References

- Alster, B., 2005: *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*. Bethesda.
- de Ridder, J. J., 2018: *Descriptive Grammar of Middle Assyrian*. LAOS 8. Wiesbaden.
- Foster, B., 2005: *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. Bethesda.
- Lambert, W. G., 1960: *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford.
- , 1987: “A Further Attempt at the Babylonian ‘Man and His God’”. In F. Rochberg-Halton (ed.): *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*. AOS 67. New Haven. Pp. 187–202.
- Lang, B. / Broer, I., 1990: “Feindesliebe”. *Neues-Bibel-Lexikon* 2, 664.
- Moenikes, A., 2012: “Liebe / Liebesgebot (AT). *Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*. www.wibilex.de.
- Parminanda, S., 2004: *The Upanishads*. 1st World Library.
- Streck, M. P., 2007: “Recht. A. In Mesopotamien”. *RIA* 11, 280–285.
- von Soden, W., 1990: “‘Weisheitstexte’ in akkadischer Sprache”. *TUAT* 3/1, 110–188.
- Westenholz, J. G., 1997: *Legends of the Kings of Akkade*. MC 7. Winona Lake.