The Tamarisk, the Date-Palm and the King: A Study of the Prologues of the Oldest Akkadian Disputation

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The Babylonian poem Tamarisk and Date-Palm is rightly described as "perhaps the best known of all Akkadian disputations" (Jiménez 2017: 28).[1] It has had the benefit of one hundred years of scholarly attention, during which the periodic accrual of new fragments has sustained interest.[2] As in some other disputations, the action in Tamarisk and Date-Palm is retrojected into the remote past, when the gods first organized human life on earth. In the garden of the first king, a tamarisk and a date-palm fall to quarreling over which is more useful to man and god. According to the usual pattern of a disputation, each in turn states his own importance and derides his opponent. A judgement would have followed, in favour of one or the other, but the end of the poem is missing and so prevents us knowing both judge and verdict. Probably the king was the judge, and probably his verdict fell in favour of the date-palm, for a Babylonian fable reckons it *šar iṣṣī* "king of trees."[3]

With a composition that is so well known, it would seem otiose to add another general study to those that already exist. However, like many Babylonian literary compositions the text of Tamarisk and Date-Palm still contains passages in need of clarification. It also retains, upon close reading, a capacity to spring surprises. One such surprise is an outcome of this contribution.

Tamarisk and Date-Palm is written in poetry. Babylonian poetry is marked by considerable formality.[4] Ideas are presented in units of sense that coincide with units of verse: cola, half-lines, lines, couplets and, sometimes, larger stanzas. This structural architecture is carefully composed, so that meaning comes not only from the semantic load of a poem's vocabulary but also from its formal structure. While a general study of the congruence of prosodic structure and meaning in Babylonian poetry is not yet written, individual case studies (e.g. George 2010) have revealed some of the gains to be made by paying close attention to a poem's architecture. The

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[1] I owe more than this quotation to Enrique Jiménez: as organiser of the Madrid conference he was instrumental in making it a success, and as co-editor of this volume he made valuable comments on this paper.

[2] The *editio princeps* of Ebeling (1917: 32–34; 1927: 6–12) was brought up to date first by Lambert (1960: 151–64) and then by Wilcke (1989). Further studies by Cavigneaux (2003), Streck (2004), Cohen (2013) and Jiménez (2017) have added to the understanding of details and contributed to knowledge of its subject matter.

[3] Wilcke (1989: 169). See in addition the many entries gišimmar (^{giš}nimbar) "date-palm" = *šarru* "king" in lexical texts collected by *CAD* Š/2, the sign's use as a logogram for *šarru* "king" in a Nineveh colophon (Borger 1973: 171 iv 48; Roaf and Zgoll 2001: 286), and the date-palm's epithets in an incantation that records its function in exorcism (*Udug-ḫul* XIII–XV 124, ed. Geller 2016: 469): bala níg-kèš-da me-te nam-lugal-la-ke$_4$ // *markas palê simat šarrūti* "bond of sovereignty, symbol of kingship." Other grounds for the date-palm's triumph are adduced by Cohen (2013: 196).

[4] On some of the many formal features of Babylonian poetry see most recently Lambert 2013: 17–34 and Wisnom 2015: 487–89.

new knowledge claimed in the present paper arises in part from a close reading of structure as well as language.

The prologues of Tamarisk and Date-Palm

Tamarisk and Date-Palm opens with a prologue, which sets the scene in remote antiquity, when the world was young. This prologue survives in three different versions on three different tablets: (a) an Old Babylonian tablet of the mid-eighteenth century BC, from Tell Harmal, a site in modern Baghdad (Fig. 1); (b) a Middle Assyrian tablet of about the thirteenth century BC, from Assur on the river Tigris below Mosul; and (c) another tablet of about the thirteenth century BC, from Emar in Syria, on the river Euphrates upstream of Raqqa. The existence of these versions allows study of the evolution of the composition as a whole over time and space. More importantly for the present purpose, it allows a comparison of the different versions of the prologue, their vocabulary, prosody, structure and other formal features. Parts of the two prologues of (a) and (b) have already been compared as examples of prosody by Jiménez (2017: 35); the verse structure of the prologue of (c) has not been subjected to examination.

In many periods and places those who wrote out Babylonian poetry on clay tablets did so in such a manner that the ends of lines on the tablet coincided with boundaries between units of verse. This custom makes it easy to identify the poetic line or verse. It so happens, however, that none of the three surviving witnesses to the prologue of Tamarisk and Date-Palm is so organized. Accordingly, the first task of one studying their prosody is to identify where the beginnings and ends of the lines of verse fall on the tablets. Enough is known of the formal features of Babylonian poetry to make this a productive exercise, though there are some places where debate might remain open.

The prologue of the oldest witness, Old Babylonian tablet (a), is set out on the first six lines of the tablet as follows:[5]

1 [*i-n*]*a ú-mi-*{*im*} *ul-lu-tim i-na ša-na-tim ru-qa-tim i-nu-ma*
2 [*i-lu*] *iz-zi-qú ù-ki-nu ma-tam i-ta-an-ḫu i-lu a-na* ˹*a-we*˺*-lu-tim*
3 [*ú*]*š-bu ip-ša-ḫu ù-*<*še*>*-ri-du-ši-im nu-uḫ-ša-am da-i*[*a*]*-*<*na*>*-ni*
4 [*a-n*]*a šu-te-ši-ir ma-tim gu-šu-úr ni-ši i-bu-*<*ú*> *ša-ra-am*
5 [*ma-t*]*a-am ki-ši a-na ša-pa-ri-im ṣa-al-ma-at qa-qa-di ni-ši ma-da-tim*
6 [*ša-ru-u*]*m i-na ki-*˹*sà*˺*-li-šu i-za-qa-ap gi-ši-*˹*ma-ra*˺*-am i-ta-tu-ša*
7 [*um-ta-al-l*]*i bi-na-am . . .*[6]

[5] IM 53946 obv. (cuneiform text Lambert 1960 pl. 39).

[6] Philological notes: l. 2 *iz-zi-qú* with the copy (so too Bottéro 1991: 14 n. 18); others have sought here the name of the Igīgū-gods, emending to *i-gi*!*-ku* (Wilcke 1989: 183; Heimpel 1997: 556; Jiménez 2017: 35), which would be an unconventional spelling, even for an Old Babylonian manuscript. l. 3 [*ú*]*š-bu*: Wilcke suggested [*pu-u*]*ḫ-rum* "in einer (Rats)versammlung;" *ušbū ipšaḫū* exhibit asyndeton: with similar vocabulary cf. OB Etana i 2 *ušbū imlikū* "they sat, they took counsel," Agušaya B vi 23 *inūḫ ipšaḫ libbaša* "her mood grew calm, became at ease." l. 3 *ù-*<*še*>*-ri-du-ši-im*: emended in the light of the mythology elaborated in Ewe and Grain, where the gods "sent down" sheep and cereals from the Holy Mound (Alster and Vanstiphout 1987: 17; Wilcke 2007: 22). l. 3 *da-i*[*a*]*-*<*na*>*-ni*: Wilcke "am Anfang," i.e. reading *i+na*! *p*[*a*!]*-ni*, at the start of a new clause. *dayyānāni* is less serious an emendation; if it is correct it joins the growing number of adverbs in *-āni* (most recently Mayer 2015: 192). l. 5 [*māt*]*am* not [*āl*]*am*, with the Emar version's prologue, (c) l. 8: *ša māt*(KUR) *kiš*.

When the sequences of syllabic signs are interpreted as words and those words placed in units of verse, the following passage of ten lines of poetry emerges:

[1] [*in*]*a ūmī* | *ullûtim* || *ina šanātim* | *rūqá tim*	*-ātim*	2:2
inūma [2] [*ilū*] | *izziqū* || *ukinnū* | *má tam*	*-tam*	2:2
ītanḫū | *ilū* | *ana awēlú tim*	*-tim*	3
[3] [*u*]*šbū* | *ipšaḫū* || *ušēridūšim* | *núḫšam*	*-šam*	2:2
dayyānāni | [4] [*an*]*a šutēšur* | *má tim*	*-tim*	3
gušūr | *nišī* || *ibbû* | *šárram*	*-ram*	2:2
[5] [*māt*]*am* | *Kiši* | *ana šapá rim*	*-rim*	3
ṣalmāt | *qaqqadim* || *nišī* | *mādá tim*	*-ātim*	2:2
[6] [*šarru*]*m* | *ina kisallīšu* || *izzaqap* | *gišimmá ram*[7]		2:2
itātušša | [*umtalli*] | *bí nam*		3

The first eight lines of poetry make a set of four couplets of two verses each. Each line ends with the most characteristic feature of Babylonian poetry, the "trochaic" pattern of stress, in which stress (´) falls on a long penultimate syllable (C V̄, CV́ C). As can be seen from the data presented to the right of the transcription, other formal patterns are present. The passage opens and closes with lines ending in the bisyllable *á tim*. The ends of the six lines inside this frame repeat three times the pattern *am—im*. Rhyme is a very rare feature of Babylonian poetry, but it is impossible to deny that here the composer imposes a deliberate pattern of sounds on the final syllables of his verses.

There is also a pattern in rhythm. Much Babylonian poetry is constructed in a combination of two basic structures: lines of four cola ("Vierheber" lines) divided midway by a caesura (1 | 1 || 1 | 1 = 2:2), and lines of three cola (1 | 1 | 1 = 3). Each colon is defined by a single stress. Variation between lines of three and four cola has the effect of slowing and accelerating the rhythm. In the present passage the first couplet comprises two equal lines, each of four cola and each divided by a caesura (2:2). The next three couplets alternate three-cola lines (3) and four-cola lines (2:2). This is very carefully structured poetry.

Translation reveals further patterning:

In the far-off days, in the far-away years,
when [the gods] suffered pain,[8] they established the people.

[7] This word, a loan from Sumerian ĝis-nimbar, is booked in the Akkadian dictionaries as *gišimmarum*. The dictionaries are inconsistent in normalizing loanwords ending in /ar/. Examples with a long vowel include *appārum* "marsh" from ambar, *igārum* "wall" from é-gar$_8$, and *ugārum* "arable land" from a-gàr. These suggest that the word conventionally rendered *gišimmarum* might just as probably be normalized *gišimmārum*, with the penultimate stress suited to line-final position in poetry.

[8] The verb *nazāqum* "to squeak, creak etc." is a verb of noise most recently discussed by Mayer (2017: 20–21). It often denotes mental anguish and emotional suffering, but can also describe physical suffering, particularly of those who bear a heavy burden; see Veenhof 2005: 94–95 no. 105: 22–24 *aššum* GUD.EGIR *lā tegga ukullâm damqam šukunma šīrūšu lā inazziqū* "don't neglect the rear ox: give it good fodder so it doesn't suffer physical harm;" Nabopolassar C12: 18 // 32 i 31 *aššurû ša . . . ina*

The gods had toiled instead of mankind,
they sat down (and) rested, they <sent> down to them plenty.

To bring justice to the people <like> a judge,
they named as king Gušūr-nišī —
To govern the [people] of Kiš,
the black-headed race, the numerous folk.

The [king] planted a date-palm in his courtyard,
around it [he filled in with] tamarisk . . .

It can be seen that the first two couplets of the Old Babylonian prologue (a) are bound together by their subject matter. They introduce an episode in mythical time and make reference to well-known mythology (see already Cohen 2013: 193). In the first couplet the gods had "ached with pain, they established the people," a very clear allusion to the mythology of human creation. After eons of doing hard labour in the fields, suffering under their elders' yoke, the junior deities had mutinied, and the senior gods had to create mankind to take over the burden of work. The second couplet clarifies the import of the first, that the gods had originally done mankind's work, but then moves on to what they did in their newly idle state: they ensured that mankind had enough to eat and drink. The mythical episode referred to here is also found in the Sumerian disputation between Ewe and Grain, which begins with a prologue in which the gods, dwelling high up on their holy *tell* (city mound), send down to mankind these two staples of the Babylonian economy (n. 6).

Being united by the theme of the creation of human society the first and second couplets may be considered a four-line stanza or quatrain. Four-line stanzas are a prominent feature of other Babylonian poetry.[9] The next two couplets are also united by theme, and so form a second four-line stanza. The topic is now the creation of a king. His name is sandwiched between two infinitive constructions that act as purpose clauses describing his function. That function is to bring just government to the people, so that they will serve the gods effectively. Here again, the statements tally with well-known mythology, in this case the idea that that the gods created kingship subsequent to the first creation of mankind, and gave the people into the new king's care, so as to organize human labour in the service of the gods.[10]

The two opening quatrains of highly structured poetry are followed by a couplet in which the king plants a date-palm in his palace garden and surrounds it with

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nīrīšu kabti ušazziqu nišī māti "the Assyrian who . . . made the people of the land suffer harm under his heavy yoke;" Poor Man of Nippur 103 // 134 *minâtēšu urassiba nazāqu ēmissu* "he thrashed his limbs, inflicted pain on him."

[9] e.g. Ammiditana's praise-poem to Ištar (Thureau-Dangin 1925), Old Babylonian Gilgameš (George 2003: 163), *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (George and Al-Rawi 1998: 194–97) and *Enūma eliš* (Talon 2005: ix–x; otherwise Lambert 2013: 29–30); cf. Hecker 1974: 146–51.

[10] As recorded in the Sumerian Flood Story (now Peterson 2018), the bilingual Dynastic Chronicle (Finkel 1980: 66–67), and a late narrative in Akkadian (Mayer 1987, Cancik-Kirschbaum 1995; otherwise Jiménez 2013).

tamarisks. This passage acts as a narrative bridge to the disputation, in which the two brother trees, having grown up together, engage in their quarrel.

The king Gušūr-nišī in the second quatrain is the surprise advertised at the outset of this paper. His emergence is supported by the verse division. As understood here, the phrase written *gu-šu-ur ni-ši* is the first half of a 2:2 line that ends *ibbû šarram* "they named the king." Previously it has been taken as an infinitive construction, *guššur nišī*, governed by the preposition *ana* that introduces the infinitive construction *šutēšur*[11] *mātim* in the previous line. Lambert (1960: 155) translated *ana šutēšur mātim guššur nišī* as "to guide the land and establish the peoples." Others followed, but with more literal translations of the putative *guššur*: Wilcke (1989: 183) "auf daß er das Land in Ordnung halte, das Volk stärke;" Heimpel (1997: 556) "who would keep order and strengthen the people;" Streck (2004: 255) "[z]ur Leitung des Landes, zur Stärkung der Menschen;" Cohen (2013: 191) "to govern correctly the land and strengthen the people." Despite this unanimity a reading (*ana*) *guššur nišī* "to make the people strong" is semantically implausible. It was not a function of Babylonian royal ideology that the king should make his people *gašrum* "strong": the adjective describes a violent state, and was used of all-powerful kings and gods, of fierce enemies and of wild animals like lions and wild bulls. The dominant ideology was quite the opposite: the people were to be a docile flock, and a king's duty was to protect and lead them like a shepherd, and to give them peace and justice. To turn his people into a violent force would not be in a king's interests, and that is probably why Lambert sought a way out by translating *guššur nišī* as "establish the peoples."

As set out above, a verse boundary falls between *šutēšur* and *gu-šu-ur* in the Old Babylonian prologue, which makes the rather awkward twinning of infinitives improbable on structural grounds and commends to the reader the understanding of *gu-šu-ur ni-ši* adopted here: it is the king's name. The matter is clinched by the variant wording of the prologue preserved on the Middle Assyrian tablet, where *ana šutēšur mātim* is lacking entirely and *gušūr niš* occurs without a preposition.

The Middle Assyrian prologue (b) reads as follows:[12]

[1] *ina* u_4*-me-el-lu-te* <*ana*> ÙG.MEŠ *ru-qat-*{*u*}*-te*[13]
[2] ÍD.MEŠ *iḫ-re-ú* ZI KUR.MEŠ
[3] UKKIN *iš-ku-nu* DINGIR.MEŠ KUR.MEŠ ^{d}*a-nu* ^{d}IDIM ^{d}*é-a*
[4] *iš-*˹*ti*˺*-ni-ši id-da-al-gu*
[5] *ina be-er-šu-nu a-ši-be* ^{d}*šá-maš*

[11] *šutēšur* is erroneously written *šu-te-ši-ir*.
[12] VAT 8830 (cuneiform text Lambert 1960 pl. 43).
[13] Wilcke (1989: 171) emended to *ru*!*-qe*!*-te*, which matches the Emar prologue (c) but not Middle Assyrian. A masculine adjective in *-ūte* (Cohen 2013: 192) is ruled out because the preceding noun ÙG.MEŠ = *nišī* is feminine. Accordingly the *u* is rejected as a corrupt insertion arising from a misreading of the sign *qat* in its more common value *šu*. The resulting spelling *ru-qat-te* for *rūqāte* is so far unparalleled in Middle Assyrian but not unexpected. In discussing "metathesis of quantity" (v:C > vC:) in Middle Assyrian, de Ridder (2018: 73 §113) notes that since the affix *-ūt*V- is commonly written *-ut-t*V, "the feminine plural marker *-āt* > *-att* would be expected, but is not attested." It seems to be now.

[6] KIMIN-*i-it be-la-at* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL *us-ʿbaʾ-at*
[7] *ina* IGI-*na šar-ru-tu ina* KUR.MEŠ *ul <ib>-ba-ši*
[8] *u be-lu-tu a-na* DINGIR.MEŠ *šar-ka-at*
[9] GIŠ.ÙR.MEŠ *niš* DINGIR.MEŠ *ra-mu-ni-šu*
[10] *ṣa-lam* SAG.MEŠ *iq-bu-ni-šu*
[11] LUGAL *ina* É.GAL-*lim-šu*
[12] *e-za-qa-ap* giš NIMBAR.ME[14]
[13] *e-da-te-šu* KIMIN *ma-li* giš *bi-nu*

Only slight adjustments are required to organize this thirteen-line passage in units of poetry. We get the following twelve verses:

[1] *ina ūmē* | *ellûte* || *<ina> nišē* | *rūqá te*	2:2
[2] *nārāte* | *iḫre'ū* || *napulti* | *mātá te*	2:2
[3] *puḫra* | *iškunū* || *ilū* | *mātá te*	2:2
Anu Ellil Ea | [4] *ištīniš* | *iddálgū*	3
[5] *ina bērīšunu* | *ašibe* | *Šámaš*	3
[6] *ina bērīt bēlat-ilē* | *rabītu* | *úsbat*	3
[7] *ina pāna* | *šarrūtu* || *ina mātāte* | *ul ibášši*	2:2
[8] *u bēlūtu* | *ana ilē* | *šárkat*	3
[9] *gušūr niš* | *ilū* | *rāmūníššu*	3
[10] *ṣalam* | *qaqqade* | *iqbûníššu*	3
[11] *šarru* | *ina ekallēšu* || [12] *ezzaqap* | *gišimmá ra*	2:2
[13] *edātēšu* | KIMIN || *mali* | *bí nu*	2:2

Previously this passage has been taken as more marred by corruption than it actually is. It can now be seen to be mostly in good order, leaving aside the omission of three whole verses (see below) and the obvious errors of the opening line.[15] It is not marked by a regular vocalic patterning comparable with the older prologue, but is organized in conventional lines of verse, each composed of three or four cola. Once again the number of cola forms a pattern, as can be seen from the summary at the right margin. This pattern will be analysed after the translation.

Translation reveals that the text is organized by theme. In the Old Babylonian prologue (a) we proposed a division of the text into stanzas that were coterminous with topics. If the same coincidence of topic and stanza occurs here, the passage falls into four stanzas:

In the far-off days, [among] the far-away folk,
they dug the rivers, the life of the lands.

[14] Singular, as in the Old Babylonian prologue (a). ME is an example of a redundant plural determinative, as found (rarely) in other Middle Assyrian texts (de Ridder 2018: 53 §80); see more generally the discussion of Worthington 2012: 284–87, citing this instance among others.

[15] *ūmē-ellûte* instead of OB *ūmī ullûtim* can be explained as crasis; *nišē rūqāte* for OB *šanātim rūqātim* is corrupt (Lambert 1960: 329).

The gods of the lands held a meeting,
Anu, Enlil and Ea took counsel together.
Among them was seated Šamaš,
between was seated the great Lady of the Gods.

Formerly there was no kingship in the lands,
and power to rule was bestowed on the gods.
The gods so loved him, Gušur-nišī,
they decreed for him the black-headed folk.

The king planted a date-palm in his palace,
around the date-palm, tamarisk was filled.

The first stanza is a couplet consisting of two lines of four cola each (2:2 lines). As in the Old Babylonian version it sets the scene in mythical time, but where the former dwelt on the creation of mankind as the result of the junior gods' mutiny, the Middle Assyrian prologue cites only the task that led to the mutiny: the digging of the rivers that irrigated the lands and made them fertile.

After this introductory couplet a new topic is presented in two couplets, i.e. a four-line stanza. The stanza consists of a single four-cola line (2:2) followed by three lines each of three cola. Its topic is a meeting at which the senior gods gathered for counsel, attended also by the sun-god and the mother-goddess. The 2:2 line puts across the bustle of gods' gathering; the three slower lines of three cola each describe the more stately process of their deliberations.

A second four-line stanza follows, constructed on the same pattern as the first: a single 2:2 line and three slower lines of three cola each. Again, the quatrain is coterminous with a topic, now the creation of kings to rule men. The first couplet states that power was formerly under the gods' control. The second describes the appointment of the king.

The second quatrain is followed by the narrative bridge to the disputation. It is a couplet comprising two 2:2 lines, so making a structural frame with the opening couplet.

Where the Old Babylonian prologue (a) expressed the gods' choice of Gušūr-nišī as king with the clause "they named him king," the Middle Assyrian version (b) has "they loved him." The object is the king's name, restated as a pronoun. A former interpretation, that the gods loved the people and so gave them a king (unnamed), relied on a false word division and can be rejected.[16] The topos is thus one repeated over and again in ancient Mesopotamian royal presentation, from Enmetena to Cyrus:

[16] Wilcke 1979: 171 l. 7 Ac *ra-mu ni-šu* = 179 "Die Götter aber gewannen das Volk . . . lieb"; Heimpel 1997: 556; also Streck 2004: 255. But nominative *nišū* cannot express the object of such a clause.

the gods chose from the human crowd a righteous individual, whom they loved and made king to rule the others.

The topos of the gods' love for the chosen ruler recurs in the Emar prologue (c), which reads as follows:[17]

[1] *i-na u₄-mi-e*[*l-lu-ti*] *i-na mu-*[*ši ul*]*-lu-ti i-na* MU.ME[Š *ul-la-ti i-na*] ÙG.MEŠ *ru-qè-t*[*i*]
[2] *e-nu-ma* DINGIR.[MEŠ *ú-k*]*i-in-nu* KUR-*ta* URU.DIDLI *e-pu-šu* [*a-na* ÙG.MEŠ]
[3] *e-nu-ma uš-*[*ta*]*-*ʿ*ap*ʾ*-pí-ku* ḪUR.SAG.MEŠ ÍD.DIDLI *iḫ-*[*ru-ú na-piš-ti*] KUR-*ti*
[4] *pu-uḫ-ra iš-*[*k*]*u-nu* DINGIR.MEŠ *ša* KUR-*ti* [*Anu Ellil u Ea il-te*]*-ni-iš*
[5] *im-tal-ku-ma i-na bi-ri-šu-nu a-ši-*ʿ*ib* [d]UTUʾ [*Bēlet-ilī bi-ra*]*-a*[18] *uš-ba-*<*at*>
[6] *i-na pa-na-ma* LUGAL-*ut-tu i-na* KUR-*ti ul i-ba-aš-ši u* [*be-lu-ut-tu a-na* LÚ *u*]*l*[19] *šar-ka-a*[*t . . .*]
[7] DINGIR.MEŠ *ir-a-mu-š*[*u*]*-ma* ÙG.MEŠ *ṣa-al-ma-ti* SAG.DU *id-*[*di-nu-šu*[20] *. . .*]
[8] *ša* KUR *kiš ú-*[*g*]*a-am-mi-ru-ni-iš-šu a-na* ʿKÁ-*šu*ʾ[21] [*. . .*

These eight lines of tablet comprise sixteen lines of regular poetry in three or four cola:

[1] *ina ūmi* | *u*[*llûti*] || *ina m*[*ūšī* | *ul*]*lú́ ti* 2:2
ina šanāti | [*ullâti* || *ina*] *nišī* | *rūqé́ t*[*i*] 2:2
[2] *enūma* | *ilū* || [*uk*]*innū* | *má́ ta* 2:2
ālī | *ēpušū* | [*ana níšī*] 3
[3] *enūma* | *uš*[*ta*]*ppikū* | *ḫursá́ nī* 3
nārāti | *iḫ*[*rû* || *napišti*] | *má́ ti* 2:2
[4] *puḫra* | *iš*[*k*]*unū* || *ilū* | *ša má́ ti* 2:2
[*Anu Ellil u Ea* | *iltē*]*niš* | [5] *imtalkú́ ma* 3
ina bīrīšunu | *ašib* | *Šámaš* 3
[*Bēlet-ilī* | *bir*]*â* | *úšbat* 3
[6] *ina pānāma* | *šarruttu* || *ina māti* | *ul ibášši* 2:2
u [*bēluttu* | *ana amēli* | *u*]*l šárka*[*t*] 3
[*Gušur-nišī*] | [7] *ilū* | *ir'amūš*[*ú́*]*ma* 3
nišī | *ṣalmāti qaqqadi* | *id*[*dinú́ šu*] 3
[*. . .*] | [8] *ša māt kiš* || *u*[*g*]*ammerūniššu* | *ana bābí́ šu* 2:2

[17] Msk 7480j=c+74143n+74158g(+)7490g(+)74345c (cuneiform texts Arnaud 1985–87, I).
[18] The restoration of *birâ* (not "everywhere" but "between," as in SB Gilgameš X 84; *AHw* 127) matches the probable intent of the counterpart line in the MA prologue (b). Arnaud and Cohen have instead Šamaš's bride, Aya ([d]*a*]-*a*). The Mother Goddess and Šamaš are attested participants in divine assemblies (Lambert 1960: 329; SB Gilgameš X 319–20); Aya not so.
[19] The trace in Msk 7490g l. 5 (Arnaud 1985–87, I: 224, coll. March 2001) is not the end of DINGIR.MEŠ, *pace* Wilcke 1989: 171; Dietrich 1995: 62.
[20] Compare the Dynastic Chronicle l. 5 (Finkel 1980: 66–67): ùg nam-sipa-e-dè mu-un-šúm-mu-[uš] // *ni-ši a-na re-é-*<*ú*>*-ti id-di-nu-*[*šu*] "they (Anu, Enlil and Ea) gave over [to him (the king)] the people to shepherd."
[21] So Msk 7480j=c l. 8 (Arnaud 1985–87, I: 212, coll. March 2001); cf. the sign KÁ in Msk 731064+ rev. i' 13'–15' (Arnaud 1985–87, I: 141, ed. IV: 23).

[. . .

Again, thematic stanzas—couplets and quatrians—emerge in translation:

In the far-[off] days, in the [far]-off nights,
in the [far-off] years, [among] the far-away folk —

when the gods established the people,
built towns [for the folk,]
when they heaped up the mountains,
dug the rivers, [the life of] the land,

the gods of the land held a meeting,
[Anu, Enlil and Ea] took counsel together,
among them was seated Šamaš,
[between] was seated [the Mistress of the Gods.]

Formerly there was no kingship in the land,
and [power to rule] was not bestowed [on a man.]
The gods so loved [Gušūr-nišī,]
[they] gave [to him] the black-headed folk.

They gathered at his gate the whole [. . .] of the land of Kish.

The kinship between this prologue (c) and the Middle Assyrian prologue (b) is near, for their texts are in close agreement after the phrase *nārāti iḫrû* "they dug the rivers." Before that the Middle Assyrian prologue lacks the lines describing the gods' fashioning of people, cities and mountains. The two prologues also differ in their elaboration of the formulaic invocation of mythical time. The formula is adapted from Sumerian literature, where the norm is a statement in a three-unit pattern (days—nights—years).[22] The two-unit version of the Old Babylonian prologue (days—years) is a reduction of these three units in order to fit a 2:2 line pattern. The Middle Assyrian text has only two units (days—folk), also in a 2:2 verse, but comparison with the Emar prologue would suggest that this is an incomplete rendering of the Emar text's four-unit pattern (days—nights—years—folk) in two 2:2 verses. Both post-Old Babylonian versions give space to *nišī rūqāti* "far-away folk." This is an improbable idea in itself, and a clear incongruity at the end of a sequence of units of time. Presumably it arose through corruption (n. 15). The error evidently become so embedded in the tradition that the verse structure of the Emar prologue has been adapted to accommodate it.

[22] Dietrich 1995. See also George 2009: 81–82 (Scholars of Uruk), Cavigneaux 2014: 17 (Adapa).

The couplet setting the poem in mythical time in the Emar prologue is followed by three four-line stanzas, each dedicated to a separate topic. The first relates the process by which the junior gods fashioned the surface of the earth. The second and third stanzas exactly match the Middle Assyrian prologue (b), respectively describing the meeting at which the gods had to find a solution to the mutiny (only implicit here), and reporting the institution of kingship.

The arrangement of the verses of the Emar prologue (c) in couplets and quatrains that coincide with units of meaning has the further ramification, that a new topic begins with the clause containing the verb *ugammerūniššu* "they gathered all for him." A break intervenes in the Emar tablet at this point, but it seems that this clause must introduce the narrative bridge which connected the mythological prologue with the disputation. In the other versions this bridge comprises the bare statement that the king planted a date-palm in his palace and surrounded it with tamarisks. The latter part of such a statement occurs in l. 9 of the Emar prologue, but the only secure word is *idātīšu* "around it." This is obviously the counterpart of *itātušša* and *edātēšu* in the other prologues, but the loss of much of the bridging passage in the Emar prologue precludes an analysis of its formal structure and content.

It has long been known that units of Babylonian verse, in particular the line and the couplet, coincide with units of sense, and that the identification of line and couplet in particular is fundamental to comprehension. This analysis of the formal structure of the three prologues of Tamarisk and Date-Palm shows that other techniques of prosody could also be used to organize the text. Among these are the grouping of couplets in larger units of poetry (four-line stanzas), patterns made by varying between lines of three (3) and four (2:2) cola, and (in (a) only) the construction of patterns of sound in line-final syllables (rhyme). The clarification that structural analysis brings to the three prologues has the additional result of bringing to light the name of the king in whose palace the disputation between tamarisk and date-palm took place. It is to him that we now turn.

The first king of Kiš

King Gušūr-nišī in the Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian prologues is to be equated with Gušur, in Babylonian tradition the first king of Kiš. In the Sumerian King List his name is written GIŠ.ÙR (i.e. ^{giš}gušur), but for many years it remained without clear decipherment because the first sign of the spelling was uncertain on what was then the sole extant witness, the Weld-Blundell prism. In his critical edition of the Sumerian King List, Jacobsen (1939: 76–77 n. 39) read gá(?)-[. .]-ùr, based on Langdon's copy (1923 pl. 1 i 43) and a photograph of the prism. The signs in question were correctly read by Hallo as GIŠ.ÙR in 1971, but his collation was not made public until nineteen years had passed, when Douglas Frayne and Lynne George (1990) cited it in their discussion of the omen apodosis *amūt gu-šu-ur ša māta ibēlu* "Omen of Gušur, who ruled the land" (cf. Weidner 1952: 74). Within two decades of their revelation, three more manuscripts of the Sumerian King List came to light. Two of

them exactly confirmed Hallo's reading of the Weld-Blundell prism and the third offered a variant. The four sources read as follows:

(a) kiš^{ki} ^{giš}gušur lugal-àm mu géš-u+géš-u ì-ak "(In) Kish Gušur was king and reigned 1,200 years" (Weld-Blundell prism i 43–45)

(b) kiš^{ki}-a ^{giš}gušur-e mu géš-u+géš-u+géš-u 6 ì-na "In Kish Gušur reigned 2,160 years" (Steinkeller 2003: 269 i 3–4)

(c) kiš^{ki}-a ^{giš}gušur-e géš-u+géš-u mu ì-ak "In Kish Gušur reigned 1,200 years" (Klein 2008: 80 i 4–5)

(d) kiš^{ki}-a lú-^{giš}gušur-ra lugal-àm mu géš-u+géš-u ì-ak "In Kish Lu-Gušurra was king and reigned 1,200 years" (George 2011: 203 ii 45–46)

The name of the first king of Kish thus exists in three variant forms: (i) Gušur, (ii) Lu-Gušurra, and (iii) Gušūr-nišī. The spelling GIŠ.ÙR (= ^{giš}gušur) points to an interpretation of these variants as: (i) Roof-Beam, (ii) Man of the Roof-Beam, and (iii) Roof-Beam of the People. The image is of the king as one who provides shelter for his subjects, a facet of Old Babylonian royal ideology apparent in Hammurapi of Babylon's epithet CH ii 48: *ṣulūl mātim* "roof of the land." An alternative etymology, obscured by the logographic spelling, would be Akkadian *guššur* (< *gašārum* II/1) "Most Powerful." As has often been observed, many of the names of the first kings of Kish are Semitic, and Guššur "Most Powerful" would be a suitable fit at the top of the list. The spelling GIŠ.ÙR would then be a secondary development.

King Gušur (or Guššur) of Kiš, previously attested in the Sumerian King List and the Babylonian omen tradition, now takes his place in Tamarisk and Date-Palm as the king who planted the eponymous trees and thus provided the arena for their quarrel. In one Babylonian understanding of history, in which kingship was not an antediluvian creation but was bestowed first on Kiš,[23] Gušur was the first king of all. He was thus the first to organize human labour in the service of the gods, not only through agriculture but also through arboriculture. Placing the disputation between tamarisk and date-palm in his reign has the effect of retrojecting their quarrel to the very first exemplars of their two species (so already Bottéro 1991: 20). The quarrel is accordingly inherent and innate in all later specimens. In the Babylonian imagination, wherever tamarisk and date-palm were planted together, the dispute between them continued.

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[23] Such is the view of the Ur III period copy of the Sumerian King List published by Steinkeller (2003).

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