

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO

# **Plants, Animals, and Bodies of Water**

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*The significance of color terminology in the nature omens of the  
omen series Šumma ālu ina mēlê šakin*

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## Tiivistelmä

Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee väriterminologian käyttöä ennesarjassa *Šumma ālu ina mēlē šakin* ("Jos kaupunki on asetettu korkealle"). Työ on tekstitutkimus ja se keskittyy ennesarjan hermeneuttisiin pääpiirteisiin. Ennesarja on kirjoitettu akkadin kielellä ja se on koottu kuningas Assurbanipalin hallintoaikana (669–627 eaa.), mutta sen vanhimmat osat ajoittuvat jo toiselle vuosituhannelle ennen ajan laskun alkua.

Tutkielma sisältää analyysin taulujen 1-40 eläin-, kasvi, ja vesienteistä ja työ pohjautuu Sally Freedmanin vuosina 1998 ja 2006 julkaisemiin käännöksiin ja translitteraatioihin. Tutkimukseni osoittaa, että Mesopotamian oppineilla oli systemaattinen tapa yhdistää tietty väritermi joko negatiiviseen tai positiiviseen enteeseen. Luonnon värimuutoksia tarkkailemalla he kykenivät nopeasti tulkitsemaan, oliko kyseinen enne luonteeltaan positiivinen vai negatiivinen ja tarvitsiko tämän pohjalta suorittaa rituaali (*namburbû*), joka kumoaisi mahdollisen negatiivisen enteen.

Mesopotamialaiset uskoivat jumalten kommunikoivan ihmisille asettamalla enteitä kaikkialle kosmokseen. Oppineet ymmärsivät tämän kommunikaation toimivan nuolenpääkirjoituksen tavoin ja he kuvasivatkin tähtiä "taivaan kirjoitukseksi". Samalla tavoin kuin nuolenpääkirjoitus, myös jumalten kommunikaatio vaati kokeneen oppineen tämän ilmiön tulkitsijaksi. Tutkimukseni osoittaa, että Mesopotamian oppineet ajattelivat eläinten värieroavuuksien tarkoittavan muutosta niihin viesteihin, jotka pystyttiin lukemaan eläimen ulkonäöstä.

Työni loppupuolella pohditaan myös mahdollista syytä siihen, miksi tietyn väriset eläimet ajateltiin pahaenteisiksi ja miksi toiset olivat luonteeltaan positiivisia. Kykenemällä tulkitsemaan luonnon sattumanvaraisia ilmiöitä oppineet lievittivät jännitteitä, joita syntyi ihmisten ja luonnon välille. Tietämättömyys siitä, miksi luonnonilmiöt ja eläimet olivat sellaisia kuin olivat, aiheutti epätietoisuutta ja pelkoa näitä ilmiöitä kohtaan. Tällä tavoin systemaattiset kategoriat, kuten värit, olivat tärkeässä roolissa kun sattumanvaraista ilmiömaailmaa tehtiin ymmärrettäväksi. Lopputuloksena oli ymmärrettävä, rationaaliseen ajatteluun perustuva maailma, missä jokaiselle ilmiölle kyettiin antamaan rationaalinen ja ymmärrettävä selitys.

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# Abbreviations:

A	Tablets in the collections of the Chicago Oriental Institute.
ABZ	Borger R., Assyrisch-babylonische Zeichenliste.
AHw	Soden W., Akkadisches Handwörterbuch.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament.
BiOr	Bibliotheca Orientalis.
BM	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica.
CAD	Gelb Ignace et.al. The Assyrian dictionary of the University of Chicago.
CDA	Black, Jeremy et.al. Concise dictionary of Akkadian.
CHANE	Culture and history of the ancient Near East.
CT	Cuneiform texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum.
CTN	Cuneiform texts from Nimrud.
DIRI	Lexical series diri = watru.
DT	Tablets in the Collection of British Museum.
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record.
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik.
Hh	Lexical series HAR.ra = <i>hubullu</i> (= MSL 5-11).
K	Museum siglum of the British Museum in London (Kuyunjik).
KAR	E. Ebeling, Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts.
LB	Tablets in the de Liagre Bohler Collection.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library.
Malku	Akk. lex. series malku = šarru.
MDOG	Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orientgesellschaft zu Berlin.
MEA	Labat, R. Manuel d'épigraphie akkadienne (signes, syllabaire, idéogrammes.).
MSL	Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon/Materials for the Sumerian lexicon.
NCS	Noyes classical studies.
ND	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Nimrud.
OBC	Orientalia Biblica et Christiana.
OED	Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite. Concise Oxford English dictionary.
OIS	Oriental Institute seminars.

OPKF	Occasional publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer fund.
Or	Orientalia, commentarii de rebus Assyro-Babylonicis, Arabicis, Aegyptiacis.
RIME	The royal inscriptions of Mesopotamia, early periods.
Rm	Museum siglum of the British Museum (Rassam).
SAA	States archives of Assyria.
SAAS	States archives of Assyria studies.
SAM	Studies in ancient medicine.
SANTAG	Karl Hecker und Walter Sommerfeld (eds.), Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde.
SBTU	Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk.
Sm	Museum siglum of the British Museum in London.
TCL	Textes cunéiformes, Musées du Louvre.
VAT	Museum siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.
W	Field numbers of tablets excavated at Warka.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Aim of This Study

This work investigates the use of color terminology in the omen series *Šumma ālu ina mēlē šakin* (“If a city is set on a height”). My goal is to illustrate the manner by which Mesopotamian scholars use color terms in this omen collection. The role of color terms as part of this omen series has not been the subject of systematic investigation.

I will conduct a text-centered study that focuses on the hermeneutics of Mesopotamian scholars. The omen texts contain information concerning a wide variety of natural phenomena. From the modern perspective, the information attained is no more valid. In the Mesopotamian perspective, however, the texts were highly regarded and they formed the basis for knowledge. Because of the high status that the omen texts enjoyed in Mesopotamia, the investigation has to begin by accepting that these texts demonstrate serious efforts made by the scholars to understand the world that surrounded them. Even more, the omen texts were used as tools in the communication between gods and people.

My research hypothesis is that color terms are used in a systematic and logical manner throughout the omen collection and that the positivity and negativity of a specific apodosis is not constructed in an arbitrary manner. I will argue that the colors independently affect the following apodoses; the appearance of a specific color term in the protasis will lead to the appearance of a specific response in the apodosis.

The omens in the *Šumma ālu* have an important social dimension and they disseminate information concerning what is and what is not suitable behavior. This study will illustrate that also the color terms may be seen through similar perspective; by interpreting colors, the people of the ancient Near East were able to reflect their own behavior and alter it accordingly.

The study will be conducted by analyzing the aspect of negativity/positivity of all the appearances of color terms in the discourse. Emphasis will be placed on the correlations between a specific color term and the negative or positive apodosis attached to it. When the textual material allows a more specific analysis concerning the hermeneutic principles used by the scholars, it will be brought to discussion. However, in the

majority of the cases the specifics of a single omen cannot be unequivocally explained. For this reason, it is justified to remain on a more general level.

A study focusing solely around the concept of color, without any further demarcation, would be insufficiently defined. The appearances of color terms are too sporadic and their appearance here and there makes them difficult to handle. The focus of the study is constructed around a homogeneous group that includes numerous attestations of color terms, thus the study will provide a well-defined topic for the investigation. For this reason I have chosen the title “*The significance of color terminology in the nature omens of Šumma ālu ina mēlē šakin*”. In this definition, the concept of nature includes geology (solid and liquid matter that constitutes the Earth; an earthquake), atmosphere, climate and weather (rainbow, lightning), the bodies of water, plants, animals, planets, and stars. The selection of the concept of nature also highlights the absence of human influence. The study is concerned with color terminology in the unprovoked omens and illustrates the significance of color terminology in the observation and categorization of the natural world.

## 1.2 Research History

Texts belonging to this omen series were published for the first time already in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These were isolated tablets appearing in H. C. Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia III* (1870); F. Lenormant, *Choix de textes cunéiformes inédits ou incomplètement publiés* (1873-1875); and S.A Smith, *Miscellaneous Assyrian Texts of the British Museum* (1887). From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1928 isolated texts were published in numerous publications (cf. Freedman 1998, 3-4). First attempt to publish the whole text series was made by F. Nötscher (1928-1930). His threefold publication focused on the tablets located in the British Museum (CT 38-40). After Nötscher, no further attempts were made to publish the series as a whole, until the publications of Sally Freedman appeared in the late 90s.

Isolated tablets and text fragments have emerged in the recent publications. The earliest examples already appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One important publication was the *Babylonische Tieromina nebst griechisch-römischen Parallelen* by Johannes Hunger. This publication included many examples of the animal omens. Some

of these texts are now available in Freedman's publication – but not all. More recently, important texts have appeared also in articles and text publications.<sup>1</sup>

I will begin my work by providing a general outline of the history of Mesopotamian divination and of the series *Šumma ālu*. At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> section, I will discuss the hermeneutic dimension of Mesopotamian divination. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> section, the five Akkadian color terms that form the unit under investigation will be introduced in a detail. The 4<sup>th</sup> section will begin the analyzing part of this study. The 5<sup>th</sup> section will continue the analysis. In this section, the research hypothesis will be tested against the findings from the 4<sup>th</sup> section. The 6<sup>th</sup> section will conclude this study.

## **2. “If a City is set on a Height” – The Omen Series *Šumma ālu ina mēlē šakin***

For thousands of years, divination was a crucial aspect of the Mesopotamian culture. Divination was used to communicate with deities and to gain information from them. The omens fell under two different basic categories – provoked and unprovoked omens; in the provoked omens a person sought actively through some ritual setting to receive an answer to a specific question, whereas the occurrence of unprovoked omens was not regulated. (Koch-Westenholz 1995, 10) The provoked omens include, among others, lecanomancy (pouring oil on water), attested already in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. Extispicy (the inspection of the entrails of a sacrificial sheep) and more precisely hepatoscopy (inspecting the sheep's liver) that attained great importance during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium and became one of the most trusted and practiced form of divination. (Starr 1989, 4-5; Freedman 1998, 1) The unprovoked omens also attained a prominent role, seen in the vast collection of the Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The unprovoked omens were collected in large text editions; the omen series *Šumma ālu* contained at least 120 tablets, each containing approximately 100 omens adding up to the total of 12 000 omens. The terrestrial omens had their heavenly counterpart in the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil* (“When Anu and Enlil”), which constituted one

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<sup>1</sup>Two important publication concerning bird omens have appeared: E. Leichty and B. Kienast published 79<sup>th</sup> tablet of the *Šumma ālu* in 2003 (Leichty, E., Kienast, B., 2003, 259-284). Nicola De Zorzi published a text BM 108874, which contained bird omens from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. (Zorzi 2009)

of the most important corpora of all times, seen in the frequent references made to it in the Neo-Assyrian period. (Freedman 1998, 1; Maul 2007, 365-366)

## 2.1 Origins of Divination

In Mesopotamia the mythological beginning of divination is related to Enmerkar, who was the legendary early ruler of Uruk<sup>2</sup>, to whom the credit for the invention of writing is given, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*. (Jacobsen 1987, 311-312) From the third millennium onwards he remained related to writing and especially to divination. (Frahm 2010, 93) The recorded history of divination begins in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium and the first indisputable evidence for a divine sign sent by a god to a mortal comes from Gudea, king of Lagaš (2144-2124).<sup>3</sup> (Annus 2010, 1)

Even though omens are recorded already in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, the birth of omen literature took place during the Old Babylonian period (2000-1595). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, the omen tradition must have been an oral one, because the first Old Babylonian texts already reveal highly sophisticated omen corpora, which indicates a long preceding history. (Frahm 2011, 20-21) The omen literature is written down in a style of lexical lists – a text tradition characteristic of the Sumero-Akkadian culture from the very beginning. (Veldhuis 1995, 113-114, 132-133)

In the theistic worldview of the Mesopotamians, everything was connected with each other and all the terrestrial phenomena were seen originating from the divine sphere. Omens were warnings from the gods – not a fixed fate. The Mesopotamian worldview was not fatalistic by nature. The omens represent a possibility that could still be averted. (Maul 2007, 362-363) Omens were interpreted, and in some cases the unfavorable readings were neglected, in order to please the king – in this manner omens validated the status of the people holding power. The king had various officials dedicated to omen interpretation. (Maul 2003, 48-49)

A king wanted to be in a situation where he could be aware of any sign that could have portended evil to his land, or to his person. In order to do this he needed scholars trained

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<sup>2</sup> Sumerian king list mentions Enmerkar. “En-me(r)-kar, son of Mes-kiaĝ-gasher, king of Uruk, the one who built Uruk, became king and reigned 240 years. (Jacobsen 1939, 87)

<sup>3</sup> A good omen was needed from the god Ningirsu as a sign of approval so that a new temple could be built in the city Lagaš. (Annus 2010, 1)

to observe and interpret the omens. Astrology became increasingly popular in the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, because the expanding empires required a divinatory form that had significance to a much larger geographic area than the empires' core land. Astrology is filled with public omens that refer to other parts of the world and to other kingdoms. The logic was based on an idea of the heaven connecting the different parts of the world together, and for this reason the omens that were observed in the night sky had wider scope. Astrology had another important feature that separated it from the other forms of divination; the night sky and the stars could be observed every night, therefore, all the omens could be written down. (Koch-Westenholz 1995, 19; Maul 2003, 49) Because the ruler wanted to be aware of all the signs that were written in the sky (*šitir šamê/burûmê*, "the heavenly writing"), it mandated that observation post had to be placed all over the empire. If the sky was cloudy in Aššur, then the chance would remain that in another city the sky was clear and the possible ominous sign could be written down. (Maul 2003, 54-55)

In the same manner as the writing of the sky, the writing of earth (*šitir eršeti*) had to be observed continuously. The ominous events that occurred on earth were much more demanding to keep an eye on than the omens happening in the sky. One could not predict where in the realm the omen would take place and all the places could not be systematically guarded by the scholars. (Maul 2007, 364) Therefore, the correspondence includes letters from other parts of the empire addressed to the king informing about ominous incidents that they had observed and seen important enough to write the king about. For example, from the city of Aššur a letter was sent to the king stating that a fox had fallen into the well in that city. This incident was clearly considered ominous; otherwise it would not have been reported. A similar incident is also reported on a Babylonian astronomical diary. (Parpola 1970, 63; Parpola 1983, 86)

The important status of omens remained constant from the Old Babylonian period onwards all the way to the end of the cuneiform culture. The practice of divination played an equally significant part in the royal correspondence of Mari (ca.1800-1750) as it did in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium in the Neo-Assyrian times. In the reigns of Neo-Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (681-669) and Assurbanipal (668-c.627) the kings had an increasingly important relationship to the practice of divination seen in the extensive amount of letters dedicated to this topic. In the inner circle of these kings, a bulk of specialists were

dedicated to the interpretation of the ominous signs of heaven and earth. (SAA X, xxv-xxvi)

One important duty that these scholars had was to inform and even educate the king on the proper action in case of inauspicious omens. The scholars were aware that one should not worry the king for nothing, and for some instances it was better for the scholar to bend the truth a bit in order to spare the feelings of the king. Balasî, who was a crown prince's *ummânu*<sup>4</sup>, acted in this fashion when serving under the king Assurbanipal.

As to what the king, m[y lord, wr]ote [to me]: “ [In] the city of H[ar]ihumba lightning struck and ravaged the fields of the Assyrians” – why does the king look for (trouble), and why does he look (for it) [in the ho]me of a tiller? There is no evil inside the palace, and when has the king ever visited Harihumba? (SAA X, 42)

As an omen, the struck of lightning was strongly inauspicious and for this reason Balasî decided to mislead the king on this matter. He altered an omen from the *Šumma ālu* omen collection and created an interpretation that was more auspicious.

Now, provided that there is (evil) inside the palace, they should perform the (ritual) “Evil of the Lightning” there. In case the king, my lord, says: “How is it said (in the tablets)?” – (here is the relevant interpretation): “ If the storm god devastates a field inside or outside a city, or if he puts down a . . .of (his) chariot, or if fire burns anything, the said man will live in utter misery for 3 years.” This applies (only) to the one who was cultivating the field. (SAA X, 42)

What Balasî was doing in this letter is quite clear; he melts the apodoses of three different omens in order to create one that was more favorable to the king, and neglects the apodoses that would have portended a more malefic future.<sup>5</sup> (Parpola 1970, 44-45)

This kind of holistic worldview where everything could be seen as a possible threat would have been unbearable if there had not been a way to averse this. For this purpose there existed a *namburbû*-ritual which could interact and reverse the malignant omen. (Maul 1994) This letter from Balasî illustrates the logic behind divination and the role of Ea as the source of it all.

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<sup>4</sup> Scholar, sage; expert in secret knowledge (CAD U, 114).

<sup>5</sup> If Adad devastates a field of a city, the man concerned will live 3 years in utter misery.

If during the devastation lightning burns anything, this man will die in his field.

If he (Adad) puts down a . . . of (his) chariot, the heir concerned will be carried away and the said man himself will die. (LAS 38)(CT 39 pl.1ff) (Parpola 1983, 44-45) (*Šumma ālu* LV)

He (Ea) who made the earthquake also made an apotropaic ritual (*namburbû*) against it . . . the god has opened the ears of the king. (Parpola 1970, 35)

The majority of bad omens could be counteracted in this manner. The Akkadian term *namburbû* (“Löseritus”, AHW, 726) is derived from the word BÚR and it means “its release<sup>6</sup>”, equivalent to the Akkadian *paṭāru* (“to loosen”, “release”) and with this ritual the majority of the inauspicious omens could be counteracted. Numerous texts concerning this crucially important ritual have been preserved and they have been most recently published by Stephan Maul (1994).

The Mesopotamian practice of divination became well known throughout the Mediterranean and Western Asia and India. Numerous parallels exist between a variety of divinatory branches including omens from *Šumma ālu*, *Šumma izbu*, dream omens, *Alamdimmû* and *Enūma Anu Enlil* and their Indian, Aramaic, and Greek counterparts. The so called wandering Chaldeans were frequently mentioned in texts originating from the Aegean world. According to one legend, Chaldeans even visited Plato by his death bed. (Annus 2010, 9-11) Diodor describes the Chaldeans in his writings dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE.

Now the Chaldaeans, belonging as they do to the most ancient inhabitants of Babylonia, have about the same position among the divisions of the state as that occupied by the priests of Egypt; for being assigned to the service of the gods they spend their entire life in study, their greatest renown being in the field of astrology. But they occupy themselves largely with soothsaying as well, making predictions about future events, and in some cases by purifications, in others by sacrifices, and in others by some other charms they attempt to effect the averting of evil things and the fulfilment of the good. They are also skilled in soothsaying by the flight of birds, and they give out interpretations of both dreams and portents. They also show marked ability in making divinations from the observation of the entrails of animals, deeming that in this branch they are eminently successful... Moreover, they also foretell to men in private station what will befall them, and with such accuracy that those who have made trial of them marvel at the feat and believe that it transcends the power of man. (Oldfather 1946, 445-447, 453)

Diodor’s account testifies that the fame of Babylonian divination was well known to the later writers still in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. He describes the most important branches of divination including augury, oneiromancy, extispicy, and astrology. The full extent of how the Mesopotamian divination influenced the surrounding cultures requires further investigation. However, the similarities between, for example, the Mesopotamian animal

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<sup>6</sup> Halloran, 40: BÚR = to open, release, to dissolve, to interpret (a dream).

omens and their Greco-Roman parallels were already noted by J. Hunger in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (cf. Hunger 1909)

The animal omens played an important part in Anatolia from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium onwards and they are widely attested in Hittite and Lycian sources. (Collins 2002, 238-234, 334) The significance of animal behavior is also attested in the biblical sources and the texts originating from Ugarit. (Foster 2002, 294)

## 2.2 The History and Contents

Approximately 90 percent of the 120 tablets of *Šumma ālu* can be identified and new text fragments are identified continuously. There seems to be an organization principle that first discusses the animals seen in the city and in the house that spent time underground (snakes, scorpions, mice, lizards, mongooses, and insects)<sup>7</sup>. Next the focus is given to animals that wander above the ground (domestic and wild animals) and then proceeds to the aquatic animals. Finally the focus is directed upwards to the sky (birds). The internal structure of the tablet goes as follows:

- 1-18 are concerned with houses.
- 19-21 include demons and supernatural entities.
- 22-49 are concerned with different kinds of animals.
- 50-52 are concerned with the appearance of a fire.
- 54-59 include fields and gardens.
- 60-62 include rivers and marshes.
- 63 is concerned with aquatic creatures.
- 64-79 are concerned with different kinds of birds.
- 80 is concerned with the sexual behavior of animals.
- 81-86 are concerned with behavior while sleeping and at the moment of waking up.
- 87 is concerned with human behavior.
- 88 is connected with the affairs in the country.
- 92-94 are concerned with strange lights.
- 95-96 include ominous incidents that happen while going to pray.
- 103-106 are connected with human sexual behavior.
- 120 Marduk's procession. (Freedman 1998, 2; Sallaberger 2000)

The identification of text fragments in this series is difficult because the similarities between the *Šumma ālu* and other omen series are numerous. The standard text was developed by the scribes of the first millennium. The text corpora went through a process of standardization from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium and relevant topics were

<sup>7</sup> The only exception is the tablet 2:28-31.

grouped together systematically. The “official” omens belonging to the series were called by the name *ša iškari* (“of the series”) in Akkadian. Alongside this tradition there were omens that were labeled as *aḫu*, “additional”. The real meaning of the *aḫu* and its connection to the *ša iškari* is not entirely clear, because in some instances, *aḫu* omens are identical with the latter. Beside these there also existed a tradition that was neither *ša iškari* nor *aḫu*. (Freedman 1998, 8)

### 2.2.1 Chronology and Geography

The known history of *Šumma ālu* begins in the Old Babylonian period. These forerunners include omens of birds and various animals. These omens cannot, however, be identified with omens found in the standard series. There exists a parallel between the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium *Šumma ālu* and its sleeping omens and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium physiognomic omens, known also from Anatolia. The existence of an omen tradition in the Middle Hittite Kingdom seems to speak in favor of an Old Babylonian *Šumma ālu* tradition, because in large extent all the Akkadian material that was borrowed to Anatolia originates from Old Babylonian prototypes. (Freedman 1998, 13)

The earliest tablet belonging to *Šumma ālu*, and containing 25 *aḫu*-type omens, comes from the reign of the Kassite king Meli-šipak (1186-1172). Most of the first millennium tablets that belong to the *Šumma ālu* were found in Nineveh in the Kuyunjik mound. These tablets date to the reign of the 7<sup>th</sup> century king Assurbanipal and they formed a part of the royal library. The Neo-Assyrian tradition continued in the Neo-Babylonian period through 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. The last tablet found is the tablet 36 of the series and it has the date 2<sup>nd</sup> of Šabatu, (ITI.DU<sub>6</sub> UD.2.KÁM) Seleucid Era 84 (MU.60+20+4.KÁM *si-lu-ku* LUGAL). This date corresponds to February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 228 BCE. There are texts from Babylon, Sippar, and Borsippa. Outside Mesopotamia, the attested textual finds come from Anatolia and Susa. (Freedman 1998, 14)

### 2.2.2 Commentaries to *Šumma ālu*

Omens created another text genre – commentaries. In commentaries, scholars were trying to unravel the secret meaning embedded in the cuneiform tablets. It has to be kept in mind that some of these texts were handed down in the scholarly tradition from generation to generation, and the cryptic cuneiform writing was a challenge even to the educated scribes, who sometimes were unable to understand the obscure omens of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, in which case the scholar could simply write *ul īdi* “I do not know” in the column. (Frahm 2011, 200)

Scholars created explanations for the omens they found difficult or obscure. The scholars also commented on literary works like *Enūma eliš* (Frahm 2011, 112-116), the Babylonian Theodicy *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (Frahm 2011, 119-120), and ritual texts like *Šurpu*, *Maqlû*, *Tummu bītu*, and also *Namburbû* (Frahm 2011, 121-122, 127). In addition to these examples, commentaries were devoted to a wide variety of omen texts. They were written for astrological omens (*Enūma Anu Enlil*) (Frahm 2011, 129-159), terrestrial omens (*Šumma ālu*) (Frahm 2011, 191-202), extispicy (*bārûtu*) (Frahm 2011, 169-191), teratological omens (*Šumma izbu*) (Frahm 2011, 202-210), physiognomic omens (*Alamdimmû*) (Frahm 2011, 210-214), moneological omens (*Iqqur īpuš*) (Frahm 2011, 214-218), medical texts (*sakikkû*) (Frahm 2011, 218-241). Furthermore, there is a commentary for the Codex Hammurapi (Frahm 2011, 241-242), and for the lexical texts Aa, Diri, *Nabnītu* and HAR-ra. (Frahm 2011, 242-253)

The *Šumma ālu* commentaries do not generally explore the hidden meaning of the text; instead, they normally restrict themselves clarifying the obscure and difficult words. The commentaries are labeled as *mukallimtu*<sup>8</sup> or *šātu*<sup>9</sup>. The latest known commentaries date to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, and they were written by members of the Egibatila family living in Babylon. (Frahm 2011, 194)

### 2.3 The Sign and its Semiotics

As exemplified above, Mesopotamians were considered masters in the ancient Near East when it came to divination and to the interpretation of signs. In the modern discourse divination is often placed in a strict opposition with science and named superstitious behavior. However, this is not an accurate position to adopt. As noted by many authors, divination was based on logic and reason, just like science, even though the chain of reasoning is not valid when observed with the modern standards that science has. (Rochberg 2010, 24)

Nevertheless, in full awareness of the anachronism, ancient divination, astrology, and magic are now readily classified as sciences on the grounds that some characteristic of science are considered to be continuous over the course of history, even while its content or aim is discontinuous, the thousands of

<sup>8</sup> "The one that shows/demonstrates", from the verb *kullumu*, that in some occasions is used in the meaning to teach, to clarify scribal knowledge. (Frahm 2011, 42)

<sup>9</sup> A word that derives from the (w) *ašû* "to go out", has been discussed extensively and its precise meaning is still unclear. It is used in lexical list and in the omen texts. Frahm gives the word translation "lemmata". (Frahm 2011, 48-50)

conditional statements compiled in omen series are of the essence for understanding how Babylonian and Assyrian scribes perceived and conceived the world in which they functioned, how they thought about what connected or related the propositions comprising conditionals, and, consequently, what for them constituted knowledge, skill in reasoning, and even truth. (Rochberg 2010, 25)

The Mesopotamian divination is a result of a long process of development finally manifesting the highly abstract and systematized divination corpora of the first millennium. (Manetti 1993, 1) The empirical observation that is visible in the terrestrial omen series, where ominous phenomena are interpreted through the specific cultural contexts, supplies the phenomena its unique nature – different people interpret the observed phenomena differently depending on the individuals' expectations and history. This process brings together experience, observation and thinking in order to form a unique interpretation. (Veivo & Huttunen 1999, 14)

Semiotics can be divided in to two main branches; theoretical and empirical semiotics. Where the theoretical semiotics is concerned with signs on a more abstract and general level, the empirical semiotics endeavors to enlighten the question how the signs and sign system function in a specific time and space. It does not seek to answer the question what X mean, but rather how the meaning is created and to what is the meaning based on. (Veivo & Huttunen 1999, 20) Of course these two questions do not rule themselves out and they may be investigated simultaneously, and one needs to have an understanding what something means before the question how the meaning is created may be approached.

Signs play an important part in the investigation of Mesopotamian divination. For this reason it is necessary to open this term to theoretical observation and to illustrate what is actually meant by it. A sign has traditionally been understood as something that replaces or refers to something else – expressions for emotions and so on. (Veivo & Huttunen 1999, 23-24) In this discourse, meaning is the relationship between a sign and its referent. The closeness of the modern semiotics and the foundation in Mesopotamian divination is highlighted by Manetti:

From the point of view of a historical reconstruction of the discipline of semiotics, the most significant aspect of Mesopotamian divination is that it is centered precisely on a distinctive and individual notion of the *sign*, which is a scheme of inferential reasoning that allows particular conclusions to be drawn from particular facts. (Manetti 1993, 2)

When talking about Mesopotamian divination, the sign is understood as a written sign. The connection between divination and writing is an important feature and an important characteristic in the Mesopotamian divinatory tradition opposing, for example, the Greek tradition of divination that was part of the oral tradition. (Manetti 1993, 3) The significance of the written text became increasingly important during three millennia long tradition of the cuneiform culture. The scribes were an important social group in Mesopotamia that underwent a long scribal education, and among these scribes became the specialists that learned the secrets embedded in the writing itself and the true meaning of ominous phenomena. This whole intellectual endeavor was founded on the pictographic writing system that created an opportunity to observe the chains of interconnections between things that would not necessarily have been connected otherwise.

It trains the mind to see secret relationships and unexpected links in things. It encourages a mental attitude that sees the objects of the real world as containing triggers of an analogous semiotic process. (Manetti 1993, 5)

I would argue that colors are also triggers that awaken the observer to consider the symbolic value of the sign more than the phenomena observed. The colors are seen together listed in a systematic way; the sequences of colors are not identical, but rules exist that are normally maintained in this omen collection. Color terms are clearly organized in a way that highlights the importance of paradigmatic<sup>10</sup> analysis; a specific color is compared with another in order to highlight the contrasting interpretations. In the syntagmatic<sup>11</sup> analysis, the appearance of triggers in the protasis brought to mind specific things observed in the following apodosis. In the same fashion as TI, “arrow”, also has the meaning “life”, the signs used to write the color terms created a plurality of possibilities. These triggers come very close to the definition of symbols by Victor Turner.

In the first place, Ndembu regard symbols as articles or actions that “make visible” or bring into play the powers inheriting in the objects they signify. Thus, to employ a black symbol would be to evoke death, sterility, and witchcraft. (Turner 1967, 79)

Highlighting the significance that symbols have in a society, Turner describes them as elements that evoke the thing they signify. In the omen literature, the same tendency can

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<sup>10</sup> The paradigmatic aspect in divination focuses on the relationship between different protases.

<sup>11</sup> The syntagmatic analysis focuses on the relationship between protasis and the following apodosis.

be witnessed in the color usage and the reason for the selection of certain terms in a specific context is precisely this – the exploitation of their symbolic value.

## 2.4 Divination as a Part of Mesopotamian Worldview

In Mesopotamia the demarcation of different literary genres was not established in a strict manner and examples of intertextuality are also found in the omen collections. A number of similarities between the legal codes and the omen series have been noted by a number of scholars (Lawson 1994; Rochberg 2004; Annus 2010; Guinan 2014). For example, in the same manner that Ḫammurapi received the commission for his codex from Šamaš, the same god is seen behind divination giving his judgments (*dīnātu*). Also the inner structure of individual laws resembles the structure of omen clauses and the same principle, if x then y, may be detected in both of them. Similarity between omens and legal texts was not coincidental but intentional. (Lawson 1994, 82-83; Rochberg 2004, 53; Guinan 2014, 105-119)

The *Šumma ālu* was, in contrast to *Enūma Anu Enlil* and *bārūtu* texts, written to the common man rather than to the high society. The aspect of correct social behavior is also clearly visible in the *Šumma ālu*. For this reason, it is important to note the similarities between the legal texts and the omens, linking these two text genres together. It is well known that the Codex Ḫammurapi was not used as a manual in the daily court proceedings, and instead, it was regarded as a “lasting model of ideal justice” (Frahm 2011, 241), and it provided an example of divine instructions for a correct social behavior; a life without angering the gods.

Divination was used as a means of achieving a specific kind of information concerning the important aspects of an individual or a given social group (health, safety, happiness; ecological, political, and military). The most efficient way to gather this kind of information was through communication. The reason why the communication between gods and mortals was considered possible relates to the idea of gods as anthropomorphic entities. (Koch 2013, 4) This is an important observation that illustrates the importance of anthropomorphism, a concept without which the whole system would not work. Koch (2013) tackles the idea that divination is connected with the idea predetermination (cf. Lawson 1994, 79). It is true that the concept of predestination is incorrectly connected

with divination. First of all divination functions in a way it does because people were able to understand the signs and their function.

... hermeneutic rules linking sign and referent forwards and backwards in time... That is why divination is effective, why omens are called divine laws, and why it is possible to influence the future and correct past wrongs. (Koch 2013, 20)

The second important aspect is that divination is ultimately an ongoing discussion between gods and mortals. Gods communicate to people their attitude towards them and people endeavor continually to read these messages. If the message changes from benevolent to uncharitable then the reason for this lays not in the predetermined world, but in the very acts of the individual to whom the message was disseminated. Later this individual may consider in retrospect that a past action has caused this bad omen. (Koch 2013).

The etiology underpinning the diagnostic omens, that your present misfortunes basically are down to you, or maybe to an evil agent, is found everywhere in prayers, literary texts, apotropaic rituals and prayers and is also inherent in extispicy. Divination is a means of getting to know and correcting the effects of events that happened in the past, changing the course you are settling on now, and a means to make sure you stay on track in the future. (Koch 2013, 22)

Koch produces a very important notion by questioning the validity of the attachment of *šīmtu* (“fate”) in the sphere of divination and that fate and future should be regarded as synonyms in the Mesopotamian context. In fact, it is *šīmtu* that can be said to be (pre)determined by the gods, which is not identical with the future predicted in the omens.

If the fate that gods decreed upon mortals was the same as the one people tried to change in *namburbû*-rituals, then the whole basis for divination becomes futile. It would be a battle between the decreeing power of the gods and the ability of the mortals to change it. However, this is not the case. *šīmtu* has to mean something more general than the fate of the people, or the blueprints (Koch 2013, 22) where the bad omens are fractions that the people attempt to repair by using the *namburbû*-ritual.

If, moreover, the lists of omens were viewed as collections of divine “verdicts,” as indicated in prayers, incantations, and in the use of the term *purussû* “verdict” in the omens themselves to mean “apodosis,” the parallel formulary between omens and laws is significant in more than a strictly formal way. (Rochberg 2004, 55)

The key word on divination should be change that has happened in the relationship between the two realms caused by the individual or group actions – and these actions are

judged by the gods and informed to people through inauspicious omens. The omens are then nothing more than the verdicts of the divine court handed down by the gods to humans.

## 2.5 Typology of the Omens in the *Šumma ālu*

Only few attempts have been made to compare the nature of the omens in the *Šumma ālu* omen collection. This should be done, because not all the omens are alike. In the previous section, I already discussed the *Weltanschauung* behind omens in Mesopotamia, and concluded that they should be viewed as communication between the gods and mortals and that omens are references to the past actions of individuals that are then judged by the gods paralleling the Mesopotamian legal traditions, by sending the ominous sign to the mortals to interpret. This makes perfect sense in omens where members of *flora* and *fauna* are depicted and they can easily be viewed as carriers of messages to the realm of people. This, however, is contrasted sharply in the first tablet.

1. If a city is set on high, living in that city will not be happy.<sup>12</sup> (Freedman 1998, 26-27)

The reference point clearly departs from the above mentioned model. The structure of this omen is something completely different when compared with, for example, the animal omens, where active creatures appear in the sphere of the people and this manner transmit the ominous sign. This omen is not targeted to a single person or to a household; it does not contain the reference point to the person's past or to a misdeed that caused this sign to be appointed. The omen is rather disseminating information concerning the correct social behavior.

If the appearance of a house is shady on the outside, its inhabitants will be happy. (Guinan 1996a, 64-65)

It could be said that a good person lives in a modest house and that this does not anger the gods. These omens, however, cannot function as a direct tool for transmitting messages to people. If the person who has a red house (positive as an omen) does a misdeed, it is quite clear the house remains red, and does not change to yellow-green (negative as an omen) as a sign for his misdeed. This is something that could be said concerning the animal omens and others where active elements are seen. If a person

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<sup>12</sup> 21. DIŠ URU *ina me-le-e* GAR KU.A ŠÀ URU BI NU DÙG.GA.

made a misdeed, it could have caused a sign sent in a form of ants, fungi and so on, to be sent as a warning.

Providing knowledge of future events was, apparently, not the only function of *Šumma ālu*. The series also sought to disseminate social and moral values. This is particularly obvious in the first tablet, which states, for instance, that an excess of learned men would contribute to the downfall of a city, and in tablets 103-104, where we find rules, presented in the form of omens, on what was acceptable and what was not in sexual encounters between human beings. (Frahm 2011, 192)

There are at least two different kinds of omens present in the *Šumma ālu*: ones that are concerned with accidental incidents, and the ones that are concerned with the proper code of conduct. The basic difference between these two is that one gives updated information concerning the relationship between the realm of the gods and mortals and the other that is describing a more general behavior code honored in Mesopotamia. This dualistic demarcation is already pointed out by a number of scholars (cf. Guinan 1989; Annus 2010; Frahm 2011).

Walter Sallaberger (2000) suggested a threefold typology for the Mesopotamian omen tradition. The 1<sup>st</sup> category consists of omens occurring in the nature that do not have a direct influence over people; for example, signs in the sheep's liver, the stars in the heaven, teratological occurrences, and small animals. (Sallaberger 2000, 242)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> category consists of phenomena occurring in nature that has a direct influence over people: the sun, rain, fauna and flora in the agriculture, and dangerous animals. The accidental omens seen in this omen collection that provide the material for this study belong to this category. (Sallaberger 2000, 242)

In the discourse of this study, the focus is on the behavior of partridges (*iššūr hurri*), ants (*kulbābū*), snakes (*šēru*), scorpions (*zuqaqīqu*), lizards (*šurārū*), geckos (*pizallurtu*), skinks (*šakkadirru*), mongooses (*šikkū*), mice (*arrabu* and *harriru*), moths (*sāsu*) and crickets (*šaširu*). Most of these animals would belong to the 1<sup>st</sup> category on their own. The reason why they belong to the 2<sup>nd</sup> category is that they appear in the urban environment (e.g. a city and a house) and in this manner they have influence over people. (Sallaberger 2000, 242-243)

The omens concerned with *flora* also belong to this 2<sup>nd</sup> category. Most importantly fungi (*katarru*) and grass (*sassatu*) are seen associated with colors in this discourse. Also the changes in the color of plants could disseminate information from an altered relationship

with the divine sphere. In the first group the ominous signs are created in a somewhat arbitrary manner exploiting the cultural conventions. Small animals do not have direct influence upon people when they remain in their own sphere (e.g. nature). When they cross this boundary and appear in the city or in the house of a man, their activities are seen something that can influence the life of individuals. (Sallaberger 2000, 242-243)

The third group is focused on the human activities (house-building, social rules, and the cult activities). (Sallaberger 2000, 242-243) These are not concerned with the accidental ominous events; rather, they are directed to highlight the social norms and boundaries seen in a society.

## 2.6 Traditions of Interpretation

There are patterns that may be identified linking the protases and apodoses together. The first important way to connect these was *paronomasia*<sup>13</sup> and synonyms (Frahm 2010, 96) very often attested in the literature. The second important way is to use idea association. From this, an example could be that *rapāšū* (“to be broad”, “expand”) in the protasis<sup>14</sup> means wealth in the apodosis<sup>15</sup>. The third way was to use contrasting sides: the opposition of right and left, dark and bright, threefold division of top-middle-base (*rēšū-qablu-išdu*) or right-middle-left (*imittu-qablu-šumēlu*). (Starr 1983, 10-11) Closely linked to these are the interpretations using an etymographic approach. In this model, the interpretation rises from the cuneiform sign category. The scribes were well trained in both Sumerian and in Akkadian and they had the ability to compare the words used to write with the same cuneiform sign and reflect their positivity or negativity in a specific omen. (Frahm 2010, 96)

Omen clauses are constructed normally by inserting *šumma* in the beginning followed by a noun and a verb normally in a past tense, forming the ominous sign to be interpreted. In the apodosis, the verb is normally in the present tense and used in reference to the future. (Manetti 1993, 6) These omen texts are structured after their protases and the objects found in them. The other important classification method is the listing of similar attributes together. There are basic clauses in all the omen collections (also seen in the lexical tradition) that can be expanded by inserting attributes (i.e. color). (Sallaberger

<sup>13</sup> A play on words a pun.

<sup>14</sup> The clause expressing the condition in a conditional sentence. (OED, 1153)

<sup>15</sup> The main clause of a conditional sentence (OED, 60).

2000, 243.244) The language in omens is based on binary oppositions: high – low, front –back, right – left. (Guinan 1989; 229; 1996, 6). In the omens where color terms appear also other kinds of attributes may be present; the placement of two or more colors in the same clause – very often seen in the tablet 37 where ants are described<sup>16</sup>, or connecting other elements like “winged” to the clause, or changing the actions performed by the ominous animals.

In Mesopotamian divination the left and right formed a binary system where right was *pars familiaris* and the left was *pars hostilis*. This can be seen systematically in extispicy, but for example, in the omen series *Šumma izbu* the pattern is reversed. In *Šumma ālu* these pairs appear, but the meaning is not so straightforward. (Guinan 1989, 230-231; Guinan 1996b, 5-6)

It is important to investigate both the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic association. The former means the connection between a specific protasis and the following apodosis, and the latter means the organizational model that has been used to list the protases to form a sequence. (Sallaberger 2000, 240) The same idea is expressed by Veldhuis in terms of horizontal and vertical dimensions. (Veldhuis 1999, 133)

## 2.7 The Scholars as Interpreters of Color

The knowledge concerning the Mesopotamian color terminology comes almost exclusively from the educated segment of the society (*ummānūtu*) and therefore the colloquial understanding of colors cannot be investigated. The compilers of the Mesopotamian omen series were highly educated, scribal elite, who were working under the royal orders. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the scribes compiled and gathered texts originating from different parts of the realm in to the royal library of Assurbanipal. As a rule, no information concerning the compilers of these collections has been preserved, with one exception. Esagil-kīn-apli was a late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium scholar active under the reign of Adad-apla-iddina (1068-1047 BCE), appearing as an editor of the medical corpora SA.GIG, in catalogs found in Babylon and Kalhu. (Heeßel 2000, 109)

The chief scholars of the Assyrian court represent the five scholarly disciplines: *āšipūtu*, “exorcism”, *asūtu*, “medicine”, *bārūtu*, “divination”, *kalūtu*, “lamentations”, and

<sup>16</sup> Tablets 6:32; 12:53,84; 37: 33-34, 56, 59-60, 64-66, 69-70, 74-78, 162.

*tupšarrūtu*, “the science of the scribes”. (Jean 2010, 267) Naturally, before they could become experts of these disciplines they had to undergo a long scribal education. The observance of the changes in color was one factor that made the scribal knowledge. In divination, the interpretation of changes in color constituted an important part. The scholars found a rational and systematic way to explain the color changes in a manner that combined the general attitudes towards colors (folklore) and the scribal classification of colors (scholars).

Because of their background, the scholars could have had a crucially different understanding of what colors meant from a layman’s; they could have had different interpretations of a specific omen from others because of their education. There must have been a rich oral folklore existing simultaneously with written omen tradition, in which omens were probably treated in a different manner. It is only natural that scholarly tradition would have wanted to separate itself from the everyday knowledge.

The more esoteric a man’s knowledge, the more he will tend to regard that item as a sign, and more readily he will be able to allocate meaning to it. This association certainly holds good for Ndembu diviners. The experienced diviner can allocate more meaning to the items of his divining apparatus than the novice diviner, and the latter can interpret them far more fully than the uninitiated villager. (Turner 1975, 208)

If this is analogous with Mesopotamia, it should be acknowledged because it changes the approach that one adopts when unrevealing the meaning in the omen traditions. The polysemy of the cuneiform writing system was used to create a holistic system of meaning; inside which the rules were understandable to the scholars but not for a layman. (cf. Frahm 2010, 94)

The scribes of the Old Babylonian times used 62-82 syllabic signs<sup>17</sup> and the signs were used with only minor value alteration. In administrative texts, the amount of logographic signs was higher but, nonetheless, they were modest in number. In fact, in extispicy only the fifteen most important *terminus technici* were written by using logographic signs. The scribes did not reduce the number of cuneiform signs, even though they had all the opportunity to do so. On the contrary, the number of logographic signs increases in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium onwards and the readings became more complex. In the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium omen series *Šumma ālu* an average tablet contains 84% logograms. Also the

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<sup>17</sup> Less than 10 % of the 954 graphemes of all time.

CV signs that were used most frequently in the earlier times changed to the more complex CVC values<sup>18</sup>. (Frahm 2010, 94-95)

It seems that the main reason why the Babylonian and Assyrian scholars continued to cultivate this graphemic *embarrass de richesse*, and even added to it in later periods, was that they regarded the overabundance of possible meanings associated with the polysemy of the cuneiform writing system as an inexhaustible source of knowledge and wisdom. (Frahm 2010, 95)

This activity clearly points out the attitude that the scribes had towards signs and words. Against this background, the scribes compiled lexical lists in order to preserve the complexity, and simultaneously, the wisdom of the signs. (Frahm 2010, 95)

In Mesopotamia, the textual material was unavailable for the majority of the people for two reasons. Firstly, only a handful of people could read the complicated cuneiform script making it impossible to use these texts and secondly, the texts were considered a secret that could be revealed only to scholars. There are frequently passages in texts stating that the scholar should not reveal or teach the tablets to people other than scholars, because they were considered “the secrets of the gods”<sup>19</sup>. It is important that even in the terrestrial omens, which are closely connected with the folk knowledge of Mesopotamia (Annus 2010, 5), could be regarded as part of the guarded scholarly knowledge. (Lenzi 2008, 183-184)

44. This according to Amel-Papsukkal and Taqiša, scholars

45. ...secret lore of Šulgi, arcane knowledge of the scholars.

46. Written and collated according to its original, a tablet belonging to Nabu-ahaidin, scribe

47. son of Nabu-šuma-ibni, Assyrian scribe.<sup>20</sup> (Freedman 2006, 122-123)

This passage is part of the tablets 25-26 of the *Šumma ālu*. The tablet contains snake omens and exemplifies that even the tablets which seem mundane were studied and read under strict rules.

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<sup>18</sup> Frahm underlines this aspect as important because simultaneously in the first millennium the alphabetically written Aramaic had become widespread, and this creates a sharp contrast with this scholarly attitude. (Frahm 2010, 94-95)

<sup>19</sup> *mu-du-ú mu-da-a li-kal-lim la mu-du-ú la im-mar* AD.HAL DINGIR<sup>meš</sup> GAL<sup>meš</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> 44. [*an-nu ki p*]i-i <sup>m</sup>LÚ-<sup>d</sup>PAP.SUKKAL *u* <sup>m</sup>ta-qi-ša UM.ME.A.

45. [. . ni]-šir-ti <sup>m</sup>šul-gi AD.HAL UM.ME.A.

46. GIM TIL-šú SAR-ma bà-ri DUB <sup>md</sup>PA.KÚR.AŠ A.BA.

47. DUMU <sup>md</sup>PA-MU-ib-ni A.BA BAL.TIL-u.

### 3. The Akkadian Color Terms

#### 3.1 *arāqu* –Yellow-Green-Blue

In Sumerian and in Akkadian, the colors yellow-green (and blue) are expressed with a single term SIG<sub>7</sub><sup>21</sup>/ (w)*arāqu*/(w)*arqu*. This combination of colors under a single term remains in a minority among the world languages. However, there is a sufficient amount of information from the anthropological accounts<sup>22</sup> that this category is known to exist also in the modern times<sup>23</sup>. (Kay, Berlin, Merrifield 1991, 18-20)

The color green is often connected with vegetation. In Akkadian *arāqu* is used to describe, for example, fresh wood<sup>24</sup> and (yellow) gold<sup>25</sup>. As a noun, it has a connection with vegetables<sup>26</sup>. (CAD A II, 300-301) The color yellow has a dual nature where it is on the one hand connected with warm hues (reddish yellow) and on the other hand it is connected with cold hues (greenish yellow). Because yellow is usually considered a warm color, its connection with (cold) green has been seen problematic. This color category illustrates how culture specific a language can be by creating this category, which from our perception seems highly problematic. (Kay, Berlin, Merrifield 1991, 18-20; Foulger 2006, 49)

In Akkadian the word *arāqu* has an important aspect of brightness (paleness) seen in the connection with gold, a rainbow, stars, the sun(set), and (pale) face. (AHw III, 1463-1464) Already in the Sumerian times the color yellow-green is used to describe the sky. (Landsberger 1967, 139; Foulger 2006, 53) For this reason Foulger adds the color blue to the boundaries of yellow-green<sup>27</sup> in Sumerian. (Foulger 2006, 65) In a few instances *arāqu* is used in the same manner; in a direct reference to the sky. Even though the

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<sup>21</sup> si<sub>12</sub>(-g) ( Foulger 2006, 50).

<sup>22</sup> Mary Haas and Dale Kinkade had been studying Muskogean (South-western USA) and Salishan (Pacific Northwest USA) languages which had Y/G color category.

<sup>23</sup> The combination of yellow and green together did not occur among the material that was analyzed in 1969 by Berlin & Kay. Soon after the publication Berlin & Kay received information from a field linguist, working with Native American languages, where this color category exists. (Kay, Berlin, Merrifield 1991, 18-20)

<sup>24</sup> *išum warqum* (CAD A II, 300).

<sup>25</sup> *hurāšu arqu* (CAD A II, 300).

<sup>26</sup> *arqa dešūtu lalā musarē*, “abundant vegetables”, “the delicacies of the gardens”. (CAD A II, 301).

<sup>27</sup> This kind grouping can be found also from Salishan Sechelt, where all the blue is added to the yellow-green category. (MacLaury 1991, 27)

sources are somewhat difficult to interpret on this matter, I would argue that the Sumerian understanding of SIG<sub>7</sub> is also valid for *arāqu*.

As Sumerian and Akkadian made no distinction between green and blue (Landsberger 1967: esp. 139), the notion of a “green” Venus is arguably confirmed by the intimate association of the goddess of Venus, Inanna-Ištar, with lapis lazuli, a blue mineral that was valued in the cults of the gods generally, but among the planetary deities especially so with Ištar. (James and Sluijs 2008, 67-68)

Probably the best example of this connection is a text dating to a Neo-Assyrian times where the (blue) stone is directly linked to (yellow-green) Venus, and therefore to the goddess herself.

15. <sup>na4</sup>*uqnû* (za.gìn) (lapis lazuli) : <sup>d</sup>dili.bat (Venus)  
CBS 6060 obv. (Livingstone 1986, 176-179)

The description of Venus as a yellow-green planet (MUL.SIG<sub>7</sub>) and the above seen association with lapis lazuli and Venus could indicate that the boundary of *arāqu* should extend to cover at least to some extent the blue spectrum.

Landsberger was convinced that Akkadians were suffering from blue blindness (Blaublindheit). (Landsberger 1967, 139; Foulger 2006, 20-21) He argued that, *uqnû* (lapis lazuli), could not have been a color term for the Akkadians because it was not sufficiently abstract. However, *uqnû* is clearly occasionally used as a color term. (Winter 2010) Landsberger’s argumentation was based on a notion that modern color categorization is the norm against which the ancient languages should be compared. The position adopted by him is surprising because he is defending the uniqueness of the Mesopotamian conceptual universe in his prior writings<sup>28</sup>. (Fink 2010, 136)

sondern er geht, in krassem Gegensatz zu den in seinem oben besprochenen Artikel dargelegten Überlegungen, von unserer gewohnten Begrifflichkeit aus und vergleicht diese mit dem sumerisch-akkadischen Farbsystem. Da diese zwei Systeme kaum in Einklang zu bringen sind, wenn man von unserem System als dem „richtigen“ ausgeht, und die sumerisch-akkadische Einteilung demselben gegenüberstellt und Abweichungen rügt, kommt man notgedrungen zu dem erstaunten Fragen Landsbergers... (Fink 2010, 136)

To say that the Mesopotamians were color blind, because they did not have a separate word denoting blue, does not value the Mesopotamian understanding of color. It does not matter that the words they use to describe the blue spectrum are not identical with the modern terminology. *uqnû* (<sup>NA4</sup>ZA.GÌN) is used most frequently in reference to

<sup>28</sup> Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt (1926).

objects made out of lapis lazuli. Still, it should be pointed out that it is also used in reference to different plants and the sky. (Foulger 2006, 55-62)

When returning to *arāqu*, one of the most important aspects of this color is its connection with emotions. This practice is attested among literature (for example, *The Epic of Gilgameš/ Ištar Descent to the Underworld*) and personal letters in Mesopotamia. When used to describe emotions, it is normally connected with anger, fear and unwell. (Streck 1999, 71; Sallaberger 2008, 250)

When I heard this friendly speech and saw the kind deed that the king, my lord, had done, my heart became happy and grew as strong as a bull's, and my green face turned red (with pleasure)<sup>29</sup>. If only the king, my lord, lets me grow old in exactly this way during the eternal life of the king, my lord! (SAA X, 227: r.3-9)

In the above mentioned letter, the red face is contrasted with a yellow-green one and where the former is the positive and the latter negative one. This is noteworthy, because in almost every tablet in the *Šumma ālu* yellow-green follows red. It could be that they form an antithetical pair, where red is the auspicious and yellow-green the inauspicious one.

### 3.2 *barāmu* – Multicolored/ Variegated

The word *barāmu* (GÜN) is used in the *Šumma ālu* collection only with certain animals and never in reference to animated beings. (speckled cat tablet 27, CT 39:8; skink and gecko, Freedman 2006, 204-213; scorpions Freedman 2006, 134-135; and ants Freedman 2006 tablet 37: 154). Its basic meaning is offered by von Soden as “bunt”, “mehrfarbig sein”. (AHw I, 105)

The real question is how this color category is- to be seen? In the omens, this color seems to be used when no other color matches the object depicted. In the *Šumma ālu* Tablet 37, containing ant omens, several examples may be identified where more than one color term appears. One can observe that to be multicolored is different from being red and white (37:57); red and reddish (37:59); black yellow-green (37:66); and red and black (37:60). In the line 65 black and multicolored refer also to separate colors because they are written together.

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<sup>29</sup> *pa-ni-ia er<sup>1</sup>-qu-tú<sup>1</sup> i-sa-a-mu.*

The logographic writing of *barāmu*, GÛN (DAR) is identical with the signs SL<sub>4</sub>, SU<sub>4</sub> that were the Sumerian readings for red and they were later on changed to SA<sub>5</sub> (*sāmu*, red) (Landsberger 1967, 140).

As a derivate from *barāmu*, *burûmû* (*pl.tantum*) is attested in the literary context of the Standard- and Neo-Babylonian dialects. Von Soden offers a translation “(Funkelnder) Sternhimmel” (AHw I, 142) and CAD translates it as the “firmament (of the heavens)”. It is used in a context of *kakkab burûmê* (“the stars of heaven”) and *šītir burûmê* (“the heavenly writing”). In the lexical series Malku it is equated with *šamû*<sup>30</sup> (“sky”). (CAD B, 344) It is intriguing, that the meaning originates from the association of the variegated appearance of this color and the (night) sky. The use in connection with the stars of the heaven and to the heavenly writing would indicate that this word denotes especially the night sky and the stars visible against the black background.

### 3.3 *pešû* – White

The cuneiform sign UD<sup>31</sup> that is used to write the word *pešû* has many meanings. The sign in itself is the Sumerian word for the sun, and if preceded by the divine determinative, the word is connected to the sun-god Šamaš. The scribes of Sumerian and Akkadian have attached a multitude of meanings to this sign and it forms a large number of subordinate categories from the original superordinate category of the sun. These subordinate categories are day, bright, shiny, pure, dry, arid, and white – expressed in both Akkadian and Sumerian.

In Akkadian the color white is connected to bleaching<sup>32</sup>, seen also on the professional designation for a launderer in Neo Assyrian and Neo Babylonian periods, *pūšaja* (LÚ TÚG.BABBAR) (CAD P, 538) and it also carries the idea of something cleared or emptied. (CAD P, 328) It is noteworthy that in Akkadian and in Sumerian the color yellow is not connected to the sign UD and to the sun, even though this seems to be the fundamental basis for the color category yellow in many languages. However, one has to keep in mind that the English word yellow carries a connection not with the sun but with

<sup>30</sup> *bu-ru-mu* = *šá-m[u-u]* (Malku II, 99).

<sup>31</sup> UD-category: Sumerian, u<sub>4</sub> (day), babbar (white), dadag (shiny, radiant, pure), zalag<sup>31</sup> (bright), and hád (dry, arid); Akkadian, *pešû* (white, pale), *ebbu* (bright pure shiny), *ūmu* (day). (ABZ, 153; Foulger 2006, 28-29)

<sup>32</sup> Work assignment, the bleached (BABBAR-ú) (apparel) for the ceremony of clothing Šamaš (and the gods of Sippar), PN the weaver has given to Sippar. (CAD P, 330)

the color green, and vegetation, in the PIE root \**ghel*, “yellow”, “green”. (Wierzbicka 1996, 306, 316-317)

Because the writing of the name of the god and the color is identical, one would expect this relationship to be evident also in divination. In *Šumma ālu* the connection between the color white and Šamaš does not appear. It should, however, be noted that in the medical diagnostic series (SA.GIG) this connection is made.

Tablet 9, line 48: “If his face is covered with white boils: Hand of the sungod Šamaš, he will recover.”

Tablet 4, line 131: “If his forehead is white (and) tongue is (also) white: His illness will last long (but) he will recover.” (Heeßel 2004, 108)

This quote illustrates the idea that colors may represent deities in divination is not absent from the documentation entirely and this leads one to ponder upon the possibility that even in the omen collections where it is not irrefutable present, the possibility that the connection was made by the scholar who interprets the omens remains.

The color white appears also as a color used during the mourning rites. Marduk- šakin- šumi, chief exorcist, writes to king saying:

If it is convenient, let the king, my lord, put on white clothes on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and ask for food at a polished table.

(As) the king, my lord, knows, it is a house of mourning.<sup>33</sup> (SAA X, 187)

The next text (235) states that the ritual behavior should last for two days. After which, the king may gird himself with normal clothing and resume his normal activities. (SAA X, 187) In this passage, a connection may be seen between mourning and the color white. The color white is also used to describe emotions in Akkadian, and it refers to a deathly pale color when linked to a person’s face. (Sallaberger 2000, 250)

<sup>33</sup> (ABL 26) r.3-12: *šum-ma ta-ri-iš* / UD-20-KÁM *ku-zi-pi* / BABBAR.[MEŠ] LUGAL *be-lí* / *li-in-tu-uh* / *ina* UGU GIŠ.BANŠUR / *šu-up-pi* NINDA.HI.A / [*l*]*e<sup>1</sup>-ri-ši<sup>1</sup>* / LUGAL *be-lí ú-da* / É *ta-dir-ti*.

### 3.4 *sâmu* and *pelû* – Red(s)

*sâmu* is one of the few color terms frequently used in reference to the gods – and the only one used as a name for a deity.<sup>34</sup> In the *Šumma ālu* omen collection the connection between *sâmu* and a god is made in occasionally, but no god is named. In the *Babylonian Diagnostic Handbook*, the term is associated with the moon god Sîn.

Tablet 9, line 47: “If his face is covered with red boils: Hand of the god Sîn, he will recover.” (Heeßel 2004, 109)

It should also be noted that the colors in a medical treatise are not entirely comparable with the terrestrial omens. The reason for this is that a single disease is attributed to be workings of a particular god, and they are for this reason so clearly present in the texts. (cf. Heeßel 2004, 109-110) In the omen collection *Šumma ālu* the connection does not necessarily arise so clearly and omens are not so directly attributed to a specific deity.

*sâmu* is by no means the only word denoting red in Akkadian; in fact at least five other terms are used: *pelû*, *da’āmu*, *ḫuššu*, *ruššu*, and (*šarāpu*). All of these terms are used to denote some kind of aspect of red. *pelû* is the most important of these and this term is also used in this omen collection. In S<sup>a</sup> (Silbenvokabular A) the color is connected with Ištar and Tišpak<sup>35</sup> (Sollberger 1965, 24). This connection between the color and the deities demonstrates how the red spectrum was fluently associated with deities. The use of the colors *ḫuššu* and *ruššu* also illustrate this connection.

The pair of *ḫuššu*, *ruššu* are seen together often in the lexical tradition. The former of these terms is clearly a Sumerian loanword written 𒄩𒍪.A in Sumerian. (Foulger 2006, 45-46; CAD H, 261-262) The latter should probably be considered an Akkadian synonym for the former. *ruššu* is associated with pigs, wool, the garments of Marduk, Šamaš, and Ea, gold, bronze, and fruits. The most important referent it has in the divine sphere, are the divine and royal garments and *melammû*. Šamaš is said to be *agû ruššû ša šamê* (“the red-glowing tiara of the sky”, CAD R, 427-429). In addition to Šamaš also the appearance (*zīmu*) of Marduk, Nanâ, and Gula are described with this word. (CAD R, 427-429)

<sup>34</sup> Stones, gold, red gold for the garments for Marduk and Šarpānītum, garments of a exorcist, and officials, fruits, horses, wine, face, flame, morning glow, Jupiter, Venus and other planets, personal name, a name for a god in the Marduk temple in Aššur, (a god called <sup>d</sup>*Sāmu*), wool, tongue and other body parts, fungi, moths and so on. (CAD S, 126-131)

<sup>35</sup> 123. sa<sub>11</sub> : <sup>d</sup>inana : *pe-lu-ú*; 124. [sa<sub>11</sub>-s]a<sub>11</sub>-a : <sup>d</sup>tišpak : *pe-li-tum* (Sollberger 1965, 24).

According to Landsberger *da'āmu* does not even refer to a chromatic color and he translates it with dull, and in some cases with gray. (Landsberger 1967, 148) The word may have a connection to the word *damu* blood, which would explain the CAD translation of the word as dark red. It is used to describe blood, body parts earth, flame and light of the sun or moon. (CAD D, 74-75) This word could even be considered a salient color term alongside *sāmu*. It has a wide range of usage and the etymological connection with blood has parallels among the anthropological linguistics for words in the red spectrum that are considered primary color terms. (Berlin 1969, 27) *da'āmu* seems to be in many cases understood through the aspect of brightness more than hue. The reason why *da'āmu* does not seem to be a primary term is that it is not listed in the sequence of colors in the lexical tradition. Occasionally this connection, however, is made:

If the flame of a fire is dark red (preceded by BABBAR, SA<sub>5</sub>, and followed by SIG<sub>7</sub>) [CT 39 35:76 *Šumma ālu*] (CAD D, 75)

At least in this Standard Babylonian text and a few other texts the word *da'āmu* is seen together and treated like the other color terms. The word has a functioning verbal root in the Old Babylonian period and it seems to be used and understood in an abstract manner. (CAD D, 1)

### 3.5 *šalāmu* – Black

The Akkadian word for black is *šalāmu*. It is normally written with the sign MI/ GE<sub>6</sub>. The sign is attested already in the Old Akkadian period<sup>36</sup>. (cf. Frayne 1993, 76) For the term black there is the Proto-Semitic root *\*θ'lm*, which may be translated “to be black”, “dark”. In Akkadian also the aspect of darkness is closely connected related to the color. It originates already from the cuneiform sign GE<sub>6</sub><sup>37</sup> which depicts a shadow in the mountain hill. (MEA, 192)

It seems that the color categories UD and GE<sub>6</sub> are the outcome of a primary division between day and night. In some languages (Australian Aboriginal language Luritja,

<sup>36</sup> And aft[er] he [roused them (his troops)], plundered as far as the Silver Mines. He quarried the black stone (NA<sub>4</sub>.NA<sub>4</sub>-*su-nu* GI<sub>6</sub>) of the mountains across the Lower Sea, loaded (it) on ships, and moored (the ships) at the quay of Agade. (Frayne 1993, 76)

<sup>37</sup> GI<sub>6</sub> category: Sumerian words: *ĝi<sub>6</sub>* (night), *kukku<sub>2</sub>* (dark), *ĝi<sub>6</sub>* (black); Akkadian: (*mūšu* (night), *šalmu* (black), *eṭū* (dark), *eklētu* (dark, cloudy, gloomy), *dā'amu* (dark) and *tarku* (CAD T, 234) (dark coloured?).

Alice Spring Aboriginal English) the darkness terms are the same as the words designating the night. (Wierzbicka 1990, 114-116) The categorical connection between the night and dark and the day and bright may be perceived also in Akkadian – even though not directly. The Akkadian word for the night (*mūšu*) has in itself nothing to do with the words denoting darkness (*ekēlu*, *ṣalāmu*, *eṭû*). The connection can be seen in the writing of *mūšu* with the same cuneiform sign. The writing of the Akkadian word for day (*ūmu*) is the same as the writing of the words *namāru* (“to shine”, “be bright”), *ebēbu* (“to be bright”), and *peṣû* (“to be white”). This dualistic division should be kept in mind when the analysis of this omen collection begins. It could be that because of this relationship that white and black have at the level of cuneiform signs is the reason why they are treated as a pair.

I argue that it is important to see the five possible color categories expressing, not the exact colors, but rather as an attempt to organize the perceptual universe into color categories – representing all the possibilities that the gods had in the communication with mortals. An important shift happened when logograms increased in number creating possibilities for different kinds of interpretation models. In a completely analogous way to the understanding of the sign PAP as representing conflict (because of its cross like shape), or Marduk’s stars (Jupiter) in connection with kingship (Rochberg 2010, 20-21), one has to understand the color terms carrying more meaning than just the names. In the same way if PAP means obstruction or conflict it can be argued that UD/*peṣû* would have been connected with loss and death because the term is associated with mourning. Similar to that SA<sub>5</sub>/*sâmu* (“red”) is connected on the one hand with positivity (joy, relief) and on the other with negativity (blood and aggression) making it ambiguous as a symbol.

#### 4. Plants, Animals, and Bodies of Water

The animals seen in the discourse, fall roughly into two different categories. On the one hand there are animals and insects that are winged (*iššūr hurri* “partridge”, *sāsu* “moth”). It was considered significant that especially the birds occupied the space between heaven and earth and, therefore, were close to the divine sphere.

“Die Vögel: Diejenigen Tiere, die vor allem divinatorischen Zwecken dienen, sind schon bei den klassischen Völkern die Vögel, wohl deshalb, weil sie dem Himmel und somit den Göttern am nächsten kommen, also sich am besten zu “Boten der Götter”, wie sie oft genannt werden, eignen, aber auch deshalb, weil sie die lebhaftesten und mit der ausdrucksvollsten Stimme begabten Tiere sind.” (Hunger 1909, 18)

On the other hand there are animals and insects that may be characterized as “the children of the earth”. This designation is found in writings of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Greek writer Artemidorus, who refers with this designation to the animals that spent time underground and therefore, had a connection with the Underworld. In Akkadian there is no exact equivalent to this term, however, in a *namburbû*-ritual red ants are given the designation “the Boats of Ereškigal”<sup>38</sup>, which refers to the same basic principle. (cf. Maul 1994, 353; Scurlock 2002, 368) Artemidorus describes the ominous significance of ants in his work *Oneirocritica*:

Seeing winged ants is not at all a propitious sign. For they indicate death and perilous voyages. But the other types of ants [called workers] indicate good luck for farmers. For they prophesy fertility, since ants are not seen where there are no seeds. They are also a sign of good luck those who earn their living from crowds and for the sick, but only when they are not crawling around the body of the dreamer. For they are called “workers” and do not cease from their labors, which is a characteristic of men who are alive. But whenever ants crawl around the body of the dreamer, it portends death, because they are cold, black, and *children of the earth*. (White 1975, 160) (My italics)

This passage creates analogies with the ant omens seen in the *Šumma ālu*. As will be illustrated below the “winged ants” (*ša kappi*) are seen as an inherently inauspicious. I argue that the winged ants were viewed inauspicious because they had characteristics of

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<sup>38</sup> [(Beschwörung:) “E]eškigal, Herrin der ‘großen Erde’ (=Unterwelt), deine Boten, die du schicktest, seien zum Guten. An die Stelle, von der aus sie zu mir hervorkamen, mögen sie zurückkehren! “(Maul 1994, 353)

two opposing liminal animals; they were “the children of the earth<sup>39</sup>” and still they were “winged” at the same time.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4.1 Water – *mû* (Tablet 17)

Tablet seventeen concerns with incidents that happen during the opening of a well. First in the lines 7-15 different kinds of stones and precious metals are depicted that are found while opening a well in the middle of man’s house. Numbers 16-18 are concerned with ants that are found in the same scenario. Finally from the lines 25-33 onwards, the focus is on the appearance of water found in the well. The lines 34-45 tells the month that is suited, or not suited, for an opening of a well, creating clear parallels with *Iqqur ēpuš*. The text continues to describe blood a snake, a skull, and an apple that are found in the well. Colors are found in the lines 25-28 where the water is described.

- 25. If water is black, he will acquire wealth.<sup>41</sup>
- 26. If water is red, he will acquire grain.<sup>42</sup>
- 27. If water is green<sup>43</sup> – abandonment of [ . . ]<sup>44</sup>
- 28. If water is white, wealth [ . . ]<sup>45</sup> (Freedman 1998, 256-257)

In the line 25, the black water is connected with wealth. This is intriguing because black water does not necessarily kindle positive connotations. This part has to be analyzed together with the line 28 in which the color white appears. This order of colors is probably constructed because the compiler wanted to create a sequence from dark to bright, and therefore, a sequence of *šalāmu*, *sāmu*, *arāqu*, and *pešû*.

*sāmu* is connected with grain in the line 26. The apodosis (*še’um*) appears only in this context. Connecting red (*sāmu*) with grain (*še’um*) might seem strange, but it probably presents the first case of homophonic association, by which the sound similarity triggers the appearance of *še’um* in the apodosis. It seems to be fitting with the range of

<sup>39</sup> It is noteworthy that Artemidorus names also snakes as “the children of the earth”<sup>39</sup>. (White 1975, 97)

<sup>40</sup> *iššūr hurri* naturally as a bird belongs to the category of winged animals. The Akkadian name literally means “a hole bird”. Does this mean that in Mesopotamia this bird also belonged into two different categories?

<sup>41</sup> 25. DIŠ A-ša GE<sub>6</sub> NÍG.TUK TUK-ši.

<sup>42</sup> 26. DIŠ A-ša SI.A ŠE.AM TUK-ši.

<sup>43</sup> If water is cloudy, or sallow would make a better translation, because the listing seems to follow a sequence from dark to bright.

<sup>44</sup> 27. DIŠ A-ša SIG<sub>7</sub> ŠUB-e [ ].

<sup>45</sup> 28. DIŠ A-ša BABBAR NÍG.TUK [ ].

meanings associated with *sâmu*. Instead of richness (see below) the owner will acquire grain, which represents also a form of economic prosperity.

In the line 27 *arāqu* will lead to the abandonment (ŠUB-*e/nadê*) of something. Even though that the apodosis is badly preserved, it is obvious that the outcome was inauspicious. Freedman translates *arāqu* either with green (Freedman 1998, 29:42) or yellow (Freedman 1998, 91:30), but she does not consider translating it with a combine category yellow-green, which is the closest equivalent of the Akkadian understanding. Also the choice between yellow and green seems to be rather arbitrarily made in many instances.

The 28<sup>th</sup> line of this tablet includes the color white in the protasis. Unfortunately, the following apodosis is partially preserved, and only the signs NĪG and TUK are visible. The lines 25 and 28 should be analyzed together, because normally these colors follow each other in the sequence. The lines contain clear similarities in the protases – with the black water the man will acquire wealth, and with the white he will not. Even though the negation is not preserved in the latter apodosis, it may be reconstructed basing on the negativity of white exemplified elsewhere in this corpus. The antithetical pairing of white together with black creates a positive and negative pair. For this reason, this apodosis should be reconstructed as NĪG.TUK [NU TUK-*ši*]: “he will not acquire wealth”.

## 4.2 Fungus – *katarru* (Tablet 12)

The following example originates from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium Neo-Assyrian correspondence. Nergal-šarrani writes to the king concerning *kamunû* and *katarru* fungi that have been discovered from the temple of Nabû, and from the walls of the central storehouses.

To the king, my lord: your servant, Nergal-šarrani. Good health to the king, my lord. May Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord...

A certain *kamunû*<sup>46</sup>-fungus has appeared in the inner courtyard of the temple of Nabû and a *katarru*-fungus on the walls of the central storehouses. There is an apotropaic prayer against them, and there is a ritual Adad-šumu-ušur will perform tomorrow. He should perform them both together. (SAA XIII, 71)

<sup>46</sup> UZU.DIR is dealt in the 13<sup>th</sup> tablet of *Šumma ālu* (Freedman 1998, 207-216).

This example from the priestly correspondence points out the deep concern shown towards the appearances of fungi in the temple grounds. The very fact that Nergal-šarrani reported this incident to the king testifies that these matters were not treated lightly. There existed a known procedure determine how to proceed and the king's exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur, a scholar in the king's inner circle (SAA X, xxv-xxvi), had already prepared to nullify the inauspicious omen with a ritual. The existence of this letter could indicate that the appearance of a fungus was rather common and maybe for this reason the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet of the *Šumma ālu* is so extensive. It is also important to notice that both types of fungi, mentioned in the letter, have their own tablets (12-13) in the *Šumma ālu*. (Freedman 1998, 191-199, 207-216)

The 12<sup>th</sup> tablet contains omens related to the *katarru*-fungus. The original amount of 92 omens is at least partially preserved. The tablet is preserved in four text tradition. Text a<sup>47</sup> is a composition of tablets K.2376 (unpublished) and K.8020+ (CT 40, 15-18) and it contains the lines 17-68. Text b is the best preserved. It is also a Kuyunjik tablet (K.7749+, CT 40 15-18) and it contains the lines 1-92. Text C (82-5-22, 518, CT 40 15-18) contains part of the protasis and part of the apodosis for the first line. Text d (VAT 10781, KAR 436) contains the lines 3-9 and 11-12. It has only the protasis intact in most of the lines. In the lines 4-5, it gives some information concerning the apodoses.

The tablet contains numerous color terms. The lines 1-28 concern white fungus (*katarru pešû*) and the lines 43-54 black fungus (*katarru šalmu*). The lines 55-67 describe red fungus called *miqtu* (*katarru sâmu ša miqtu šumšu*), and 68-72 normal red fungus (*katarru sâmu*). The lines 73-85 are concerned with yellow-green fungus (*katarru arqu*). The tablet contains 66 omens where color terminology appears. The lines 1-15 are unfortunately badly preserved and only few apodoses are intact. It should be noted, however, that all these protases contain the term *pešû*.

#### 4.2.1 White Fungus—*katarru pešû*

Generally, an omen text begins by a basic clause (also seen in the lexical tradition) that is then expanded by inserting attributes. (Sallaberger 2000, 243-244) This is well-illustrated in the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet. The sequence of omens begins with the basic clause (white fungus in a man's house). This first line is then expanded with additional information. Lines 2-5 are focused on white fungus in the entryway (*ina nērebi*) of a man's house.

<sup>47</sup> The capital letters (A) indicate an Assyrian text and small letter (a) indicate a Babylonian text.

After the fifth line the lines 6-8 have fungus on the right (*imittu*), left (*šumēlu*), and right and left in the man's house. In the ninth line a sanctuary (*aširtu*) is added as a location, which is then expanded in the tenth line by adding the entryway of the sanctuary as a specifying location. In the 12<sup>th</sup> line the focus changes towards a cella. The lines 13 to 14 add the attributes on the right and on the left to the omen. The line 15 adds a warehouse (*išpikku*) as a location.

1. If white fungus a[ppears] in a man's house [. . .] will die.<sup>48</sup>
  5. If white fungus [. . .] in the entryway of the gate of the court[yard? . . .] grief in that house [. . .].<sup>49</sup>
  15. If there is <white> fungus in a warehouse, that house will be devas[tated].<sup>50</sup>
  16. [If there is] white fungus in the middle of [a man's] house, that house will be closed up.<sup>51</sup>
  17. If there is white fungus on the right in a man's residential quarter – dispersal of that house.<sup>52</sup>
  18. If there is white fungus on the left in a man's residential quarter, that house will be normal.<sup>53</sup>
  19. If white fungus appears in the pathway to a man's house, that house will have trouble.<sup>54</sup>
  20. [If] white fungus appears in a lower millstone, that house will be dispersed.<sup>55</sup>
  21. [If] there is white fungus inside a man's house, its profit will be lo[st].<sup>56</sup>
- (Freedman 1998, 192-193)

*katarru pešû* is considered an inauspicious sign seen in the negative apodosis in the basic clause in the 1<sup>st</sup> line. I argue that the negativity is related to the presence of *pešû* in the omen. This view is supported by the line 12:40, where “fungus is seen in a man's house” without a specifying color; and the following apodosis “the man will see an attendant spirit” (*mukīl rēši* “constant attendant”) is auspicious. In the lines 17-18 *katarru pešû* is “on the right in a man's residential quarter”, and “on the left in a man's residential quarter”. Even though both of the following apodoses are inauspicious, a normal divinatory pattern may be identified. As already stated, the right side was considered auspicious and the left side inauspicious. Two negative signs, produces a positive apodosis, negative and positive sign produces a negative apodosis, and two positive

<sup>48</sup> 1. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina É NA i[t-tab-ši. . .] UG<sub>7</sub>*

<sup>49</sup> 5. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina ne-rib KÁ T[ÛR . . .] SAG.PA.LAGAB É NA [. . .].*

<sup>50</sup> 15. DIŠ KA.TAR <BABBAR> *ina É iš-pik-ki<sup>50</sup> GAR É BI i-ḥar-[ru-ub]*<sup>50</sup>

<sup>51</sup> 16. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina qi-rib É [NA GAR] É BI ip-pe-eḫ-[ḫi?].*

<sup>52</sup> 17. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina šu-bat NA ZAG GAR BIR-ah É BI.*

<sup>53</sup> 18. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina šu-bat NA GÛB GAR sa-dir É BI.*

<sup>54</sup> 19. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina tál-lak-ti É NA it-tab-ši É BI ina-ziq*

<sup>55</sup> 20. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina um-mat NA<sub>4</sub>.HAR.HAR it-tab-ši É BI BIR-ah*

<sup>56</sup> 21. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina ŠÀ É NA GAR iš-di-iḫ-šu i-ḥal-[li-iq]*

signs produces a positive outcome<sup>57</sup>. (Koch-Westenholz 1995, 11) The addition of *pešû* into the omen makes the fungus an inauspicious sign and when it is complimented by *imittu* (“right”), the negative and positive signs should have a negative outcome. The pattern is confirmed, because *harābu* (“to be(come) deserted”) appears in the apodosis. In the line 18 the situation remains the same. The only difference is the addition of *šumēlu* (“left”) instead of *imittu* (“right”). Two negative signs on the line 18 should produce a positive sign, which is confirmed when *sadāru* (“to be regular”) appears in the apodosis.

22. [If] there is white fungus on the right in the entryway of a house, the owner of that house [will die?]<sup>58</sup>

23. [If] there is white fungus on the left in the entryway of a house, grief will be in [store] for that house.<sup>59</sup> (Freedman 1998, 192-193)

The lines 22-23 illustrates similar situation where the fungus appears on the right and on the left in the entryway of a house. With similar argumentation, the line 22, which have a negative and a positive sign should produce a negative outcome. The line 22 is unfortunately fragmented and in the apodosis only the prefix BA is visible. The reconstruction BA.[UG<sub>7</sub>] (*imât*, “he will die”) fits the context. Freedman states that the reconstruction is probably correct because BA is used normally only with the logogram UG<sub>7</sub> in the *Šumma ālu*. (Freedman 1998, 193) The line 22 is contrasted with the line 23, where the white fungus is on the left in the entryway of a house, and it portends that grief (*nissatu*, “grief, worry”) will be in store (*sadāru*, “to be regular”) for that house. The negative and the positive signs in the line 22 produce a negative apodosis – the death of the owner of the house. In the line 23, two negative signs lead to an apodosis that is inauspicious (*nissatu*, “grief”), but still, the more auspicious one of the two. Two negative signs do not make the omen auspicious, but instead, they alleviate the gravity of the more negative omen seen in the line 22. In this manner, the normal interpretative pattern works with *katarru pešû*.

<sup>57</sup> “ Expressed algebraically, the rule is also familiar to us: + + = +; + — = —; — — = +. An often quoted example of this rule is found in the astrological texts: if a well-portending planet is bright: favourable (+ + = +); if it is faint: unfavourable (+ — = —), if an ill-portending planet is bright: unfavourable (— + = —); if it is faint: favourable (— — = +). But the rule might also be illustrated from texts of extispicy or lecanomancy as early as Old Babylonian.” (Koch-Westenholz 1995, 11)

<sup>58</sup> 22. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina ne-rib* É ZAG GAR EN É BA.[UG<sub>7</sub>?]

<sup>59</sup> 23. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina ne-rib* É GÙB GAR SAG.PA.LAGAB *ina* É LÚ *sad*-[rat]

26. [If] there is much white fungus on exterior walls, that house will be devastated.<sup>60</sup>

27. If there is much white fungus on interior walls, the owner of that house [. . .] an evil report.<sup>61</sup>

28. If white fungi fill a man's house, the owner of that house will become poor.<sup>62</sup> (Freedman 1998, 194-195)

In the lines 26-27 a large amount of white fungus is on the exterior walls (*ša kīdānu mādū*) of a house and on the interior (*ša bītānu mādū*) walls of the house. The change from the outside to inside alters to whom the omen is directed to. In the line 26 the exterior walls directs the omen to the house itself, when in the line 27 the interior wall refers to the owner of the house. This seems to be based on quite understandable logic, where an inauspicious sign inside the house refers to the owner of that house.

Line 28 provides a possibility for comparing the first and the last white omen together. In the first line, the appearance of the white fungus in a man's house portends death [of the owner?]. The line 28 is similar in many ways and the only difference is the plural stative form (*malû*) that appears in the line. It would seem logical that when the white fungus in a man's house leads to a person's death, the appearance of many fungi that fill the man's house would be equally inauspicious. However, in the line 28 the owner of the house will become poor. It could be that the *malû* should be understood as a negative sign on its own and that two negative signs in the line 28 alleviate the gravity of the inauspicious omen, replacing the death with poorness.

#### 4.2.2 Black Fungus – *katarru ṣalmu*

Before turning to the black omens, the lines in between require a few comments. It seems that these omens are a later addition, probably by a different redactor, because in the lines 1-28 (white omens) the writing is logographic. The lines 29-42, omens with no color attributes, are, however, written syllabically *DIŠ ka-tar-ru*. After the line 42, where the color black appears to the end of the tablet the writing is logographic again. So the original tablet could have been organized as a sequence of colors, *peṣû, ṣalāmu, sâmu, arāqu*, without adding anything in between.

There are eleven omens where *ṣalāmu* appears independently and all of the omens are auspicious. The fact that all of the omens are auspicious exemplifies that the colors are treated as independent signs that have influence over the apodoses.

<sup>60</sup> 26. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina* É.SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *ša ki-di-a-nu ma-a-du* É BI *i-har-ru-[ub]*

<sup>61</sup> 27. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR *ina* É.SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ *ša É-a-nu ma-a-du* EN É BI INIM ḪUL-*t*[i . . .].

<sup>62</sup> 28. DIŠ KA.TAR BABBAR.MEŠ É NA *ma-lu-ú* EN É BI ÚKU-*in*.

Freedman translates the line 43 “the man’s house will become rich” even though it is clearly written in her transliteration EN É *i-šár-rù*. She takes the translation from the manuscript b, where it is written É NA *i-šár-rù*. The Text a and the Excerpt tablet 1 support the reading *bēl bīti* (EN É) “the owner of the house”. (Freedman 1998, 202)

43. If there is black fungus in a man’s house, there will be profit in the man’s house; the man’s house will become rich.<sup>63</sup>  
 44. If there is black fungus on the south, profit will be regular.<sup>64</sup>  
 45. If there is black fungus on the north – the same (profit will be regular).<sup>65</sup>  
 46. If there is black fungus on the east – the same (profit will be regular).<sup>66</sup>  
 47. If there is black fungus on the west – the same (profit will be regular).<sup>67</sup>  
 48. If there is black fungus in all four directions, right and left – the same (profit will be regular).<sup>68</sup> (Freedman 1998, 194-195)

The omens with *katarru šalmu* begin with the basic clause in the line 43. The text continues by describing cardinal directions south, north, east, and west that all produce the same apodosis – profit will be regular (*išdiha kayyamān*). The line 48 illustrates that where ever the black fungus is in the four cardinal/wind directions (*šāru erbetti*, “the four winds”), or whether the black fungus is on the right or left, the apodosis remain auspicious and the interpretation remains the same (ŠU.BI.DIL.ÀM, ”ditto”, ABZ, 146).

49. If there is black fungus on the path to a man’s house, it will be entirely favorable.<sup>69</sup>  
 50. If black fungus appears on the back of the residential quarter of a man’s house, the foundation of that house will be secure.<sup>70</sup>  
 51. If black fungus appears on the right in a man’s residential quarter, if he is poor, he will become rich.<sup>71</sup>  
 52. If black fungus appears on the left in a man’s residential quarter, the man will become prominent.<sup>72</sup>  
 54. If black fungi fill the interior of a man’s house, the owner of that house will become rich; its foundation will become secure.<sup>73</sup> (Freedman 1998, 194-197)

It remains quite speculative, whether the insertion of right and left in the lines 51-52 function in a similar fashion than the white fungus. The *watāru* (D-“to increase in wealth, prominence”) and *šarū* (“to be rich”) should be considered more or less synonyms in this context. Listing white and black consecutively highlights their role as

<sup>63</sup> 43. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina É LÚ GAR *iš-di-ha* É LÚ Ì.GÁL EN É *i-šár-rù*.

<sup>64</sup> 44. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina IM U<sub>18</sub>.LU GAR *iš-di-ha ka-a-a-man*.

<sup>65</sup> 45. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina IM.SI.SÁ GAR ŠU.BI.DIL.ÀM.

<sup>66</sup> 46. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina IM.KUR.RA GAR ŠU.BI.DIL.ÀM.

<sup>67</sup> 47. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina MAR.TU GAR ŠU.BI.DIL.ÀM.

<sup>68</sup> 48. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina IM.TATTAB.BA ZAG u GÙB GAR ŠU.BI.DIL.ÀM.

<sup>69</sup> 49. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina *tal-lak-ti* É NA GAR *ka-liš* AL.SA<sub>6</sub>.

<sup>70</sup> 50. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina GÚ.ĤAŠ *šu-bat* É LÚ *it-tab-ši* SUĤUS É BI GI.NA.

<sup>71</sup> 51. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina *šu-bat* LÚ ZAG *it-tab-ši lu* ÚKU NÌ.TUK.

<sup>72</sup> 52. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub> ina *šu-bat* LÚ GÙB *it-tab-ši* LÚ *ú-wa-at-tar*.

<sup>73</sup> 54. DIŠ KA.TAR GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ ŠÀ É NA *ma-lu-ú* EN É NÌ.TUK SUĤUŠ.BI GI.NA.

an antithetical pair, where the other is connected with death, grief, dispersal, poorness and devastation, the other portends profit, secure foundations, richness, and prominence.

### 4.2.3 Red Fungus – *katarru sāmu*

*katarru sāmu* follows immediately and occupies the lines 55-72. A red fungus called *miqtu* (*katarru sāmu ša miqtu šumsu*) begins the sequence in the lines 55-67. CDA translates it as “dry rot” (CDA 211) and CAD offers a translation “a red lichen which is called *miqtu*” (CAD M II, 105). The *miqtu*-fungus was seen as inherently negative and it does not appear with other colors. The meaning of the name *miqtu* (*maqātu*, “to fall”, “to die”, “to drop”) indicates that the fungus was considered harmful. It remains speculative to which extent the red appearance of the fungus contributed to the inauspicious nature. It seems clear, however, that the *miqtu*-fungus in a man’s house made it uninhabitable.

55-61. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears in a man’s house, that house will go into ruin.<sup>74</sup>

56. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears in the wing of a house – abandonment of the house.<sup>75</sup>

57. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears in the cella – abandonment of the house.<sup>76</sup>

58. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears in the pathway to a house, that house will go to ruin.<sup>77</sup>

59. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears in a window – abandonment of the house.<sup>78</sup>

60. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears on the right in a man’s house – abandonment of the house.<sup>79</sup>

61. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears on the left in a man’s house – abandonment of the house.<sup>80</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

The appearance of specific locations for this fungus does not alter the outcome positive; it only specifies whether it is the house of the man or the man himself to whom the inauspicious omen is targeted.

62. If there is a red fungus named *miqtu* anywhere in a house, that person will lose as much as he finds.<sup>81</sup>

63. If red fungi named *miqtu* fill a man’s house, that house will be dispersed.<sup>82</sup>

64. If red fungi named *miqtu* fill the roof of a man’s house, full storage-bins will

<sup>74</sup> 55. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É LÚ it-tab-ši É BI KAR-ta<sub>5</sub> DU-ak.

<sup>75</sup> 56. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É LÚ DA.HA.A it-tab-ši ŠUB-e É.

<sup>76</sup> 57. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É PA.PAḤ it-tab-ši ŠUB-e É.

<sup>77</sup> 58. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina tál-lak-ti É NA it-tab-ši É BI KAR-ta<sub>5</sub> DU-ak

<sup>78</sup> 59. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina ap-ti it-tab-ši ŠUB-di É

<sup>79</sup> 60. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É LÚ ZAG GAR ŠUB-di É

<sup>80</sup> 61. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É LÚ GÙB GAR ŠUB-di É

<sup>81</sup> 62. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É e-ma GAR NA BI ma-la ut-tu-ú ú-ḫal-liq.

<sup>82</sup> 63. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É NA ma-lu-ú BIR É.

become empty.<sup>83</sup>

65. If red fungi named *miqtu* fill the walls, that house will lose whatever it produces.<sup>84</sup>

66. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears on exterior walls – an end to health for the man.<sup>85</sup>

67. If red fungus named *miqtu* appears on interior walls, the owner of that house will be removed from his job.<sup>86</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

If it is targeted to the man some variations exist, even though it seems to be rather difficult to ascertain anything more from the logic how the protases are associated with specific apodoses. In the line 66 it could be that the fungus appearing on the exterior wall is associated with the private sphere as an example of reversed logic and the fungus on the interior wall in the line 67 is associated with the public sphere on the same grounds.<sup>87</sup> (cf. Guinan 1996a, 63-65)

The *miqtu*-fungus was considered an inauspicious type of fungus, and for that reason all the omens are negative. After the *miqtu* type of fungus a normal kind of red fungus (*katarru sāmu*), appears in the lines 68-72.

68. If there is red fungus in a man's residential quarter, there will be profit in the house.<sup>88</sup>

69. If there is red fungus in a cella, his property will be sold for money.<sup>89</sup>

70. If there is red fungus in an entryway, that house will be abandoned.<sup>90</sup>

71. If there is red fungus in right and left, that house will become poor until later days.<sup>91</sup>

72. If red fungi fill the inside of a house – dispersal of the man's house.<sup>92</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

The connection between red and richness could be sought from the cuneiform sign SA<sub>5</sub>. The sign category SA<sub>5</sub>/SI.A is translated in Sumerian as “addition”, “excess”; “overdraft”, “trouble”. As an adjective it is translated as “superior”, “outstanding”; “surplus”; “superfluous”; “additional” (Halloran, 53) It maintains these associations

<sup>83</sup> 64. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É ú-ri É NA ma-lu-ú Ì.DUB.MEŠ DIR.MEŠ SUD.MEŠ.

<sup>84</sup> 65. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É.SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ ma-lu-ú É BI ma-la ú-šab-šu-ú ZÁĤ.

<sup>85</sup> 66. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É.SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ šá ki-di-a-nu it-tab-ši ga-me-ri-it SILIM ana NA.

<sup>86</sup> 67. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ša mi-iq-tu<sub>4</sub> MU.NI ina É.SIG<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ šá É-a-nu it-tab-ši EN É ina KIN-šú ZI-ah.

<sup>87</sup> “If the appearance of a house is shady on the outside, its inhabitants will be happy. If the appearance of a house keeps changing on the outside, its owner will change. If the appearance of a house remains constant on the outside, its owner will grow old” (Guinan 1996a, 64-65).

<sup>88</sup> 68. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ina É šu-bat LÚ GAR iš-di-iĥ É GÁL-ši.

<sup>89</sup> 69. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ina É PA.PAĤ GAR NÍG.ŠU-šú ana KÙ.BABBAR i-pa-áš-ra.

<sup>90</sup> 70. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ina ne-re-bi GAR É BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>91</sup> 71. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A ina ZAG u GÙB GAR ana ár-kat u<sub>4</sub>-mi É BI ÚKU-in.

<sup>92</sup> 72. DIŠ KA.TAR SI.A.MEŠ ŠÀ É ma-lu-ú BIR-ah É LÚ.

even in Akkadian where it is used to write (w)atru (“in excess”, “additional”, “kept in reserve”, “oversize”, “excessive”, “superfluous”, “pre-eminent”, “foremost” CAD A II, 499). It is also used to write the word *malû*, “to be full”. (ABZ, 92) So, the connection between red and wealth is closest to the etymographic model of interpretation, in which the sign category is exploited accordingly to create idea associations. Even though it can be demonstrated that in many instances *sâmu* is clearly a positive term, it still has many inauspicious apodoses. This ambiguity is also visible in the cuneiform category SA<sub>5</sub> in a term such as *ašuštu*, “grief”. (ABZ, 92)

The basic omen with *katarru sâmu* is found in the line 68. The line 68 demonstrates that there is a scenario where *katarru sâmu* can be interpreted as an auspicious sign. The following lines illustrate that all the other locations where the fungus appears are considered inauspicious (*papāḥu*, “shrine”, “cella”, *nērebu*, “entrance”, *imittu u šumēlu* “right and left”).

#### 4.2.4 Yellow-Green Fungus – *katarru arqu*

After the varieties of red fungi last in the sequence is the yellow-green fungi (*katarru arqu*), occupying the lines 73-85.

73. If there is green fungus in a man’s house, the owner of the house will go about happily.<sup>93</sup>

74. If there is green fungus in a cella, ditto unhappily.<sup>94</sup>

75. If there is green fungus in a storage-bin, there will be no grain in the man’s house.<sup>95</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

The line 73 provides a basic clause for the yellow-green fungus (*katarru arqu*). This is rather remarkable because *arāqu* does not have many auspicious omens at all. When *katarru arqu* is seen anywhere else the outcome changes and becomes inauspicious.

76. If there is green fungus in the entryway, that house will soon be abandoned.<sup>96</sup>

77. If there is green fungus in the opening of the entryway, he will see an attendant spirit.<sup>97</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

In the line 77 the apodosis *mukīl rēši*<sup>98</sup>, “companion”, “attendant”, “a spirit accompanying a person” (CAD M II, 184), is connected with *arāqu*. Freedman translates

<sup>93</sup> 73. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA GAR EN É ina lib-bi DÙG.GA DU.DU.

<sup>94</sup> 74. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É PA.PAḤ GAR KIMIN NU DÙG.GA.

<sup>95</sup> 75. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina Ì.DUB GAR ŠE ina LÚ NU GÁL-ši.

<sup>96</sup> 76. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina né-re-bi GAR É BI ár-ḥiš ŠUB-di.

<sup>97</sup> 77. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> KÁ né-re-bi GAR mu-kil SAG IGI-mar.

<sup>98</sup> Also used in hepatoscopy (Koch-Westenholz 2000, 517).

it as “attendant spirit”. CDA also provides the same translation *mukīl rēši* “constant attendant”, *mukīl rēš damiqti* “good spirit”, and *mukīl rēš lemutti* “evil spirit”<sup>99</sup>. In the line 77 it seems possible that a (human) companion is meant. Also in the line 12:39 *nērebu* “the entrance” appears in the protasis<sup>100</sup>. *nērebu* could function as an allegorical sign that is responsible for the appearance of *mukīl rēši* in the apodoses. However, *nērebu* is a standard element in many omens (cf.12:2-5), and therefore, there has to be something in the nature of *katarru arqu* that triggers its appearance in the apodosis.

78. If there is green fungus right in a man’s house, that house will become poor.<sup>101</sup>

79. If there is green fungus on the left in a man’s house the owner of that house will die.<sup>102</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

The lines 78-79 describe yellow-green fungus in a man’s house. In the line 78, the fungus is located on the right and in the line 79 the fungus is located on the left. In the line 73, it becomes clear that *katarru arqu* is in itself an auspicious sign. Therefore, the line 78 includes two auspicious elements (*katarru arqu* and *imittu*), which should produce a positive apodosis. However, the apodosis in the line 78 is inauspicious and it portends poorness (*lapānu*). The inauspicious apodosis seems somewhat surprising in the context, because unlike the *katarru pešû* (“white fungus”), *katarru arqu* (“yellow-green fungus”) had an auspicious basic clause. The line 79 has otherwise identical protasis than the previous line, the only difference is the placement of *šumēlu* instead of *imittu*. The change alters the following apodosis and, instead of poorness, the omen portends death (*imât*) of the owner of the house. When the two omens are compared together, it becomes obvious that analogous to the left-right symbolism with white fungus, the standard interpretation pattern is visible behind the omen. Two positive elements in the line 78 provide a more auspicious omen than the positive and negative element in the line 79. The reason why the line 78 has a negative apodosis remains obscure.

80. If there is green fungus on the *giparu* in a man’s house, there will be profit.<sup>103</sup>

81. If there is green fungus inside storage-bins, full storage-bins will become empty.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup> This is the case in the 6<sup>th</sup> tablet line 27, where *mu-kil SAG HUL-ti<sub>4</sub>* appears in the apodosis, connected to *pūsu* in a protasis.

<sup>100</sup> 39. If a fungus is seen in a house in the entrance, he will see an attendant spirit.

40. If fungus is seen in a man’s house, he will see an attendant spirit.

<sup>101</sup> 78. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA ZAG GAR É BI ÛKU-in.

<sup>102</sup> 79. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA GÛB GAR EN É BI BA.UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>103</sup> 80. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA GI<sub>6</sub> PÀR GAR NÍG.ME.GAR AL.GAR

<sup>104</sup> 81. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina ŠÀ Ì.DUB.MEŠ GAR Ì.DUB.MEŠ DIR.MEŠ SUD.MEŠ

85. If green fungi fill a man's house, the owner of that house will become poor.<sup>105</sup>  
(Freedman 1998, 196-199)

The storage-bins are only (Ì.DUB) associated with *arāqu* and an appearance of *katarru*-fungus on the walls of the central storehouses was reported by Nergal-šarrani (SAA XIII, 71) in the above mentioned letter.

### 4.3 Grass – *sassatu pešû*

Only one color term appears in the 1<sup>st</sup> tablet that belongs inside the demarcation of this study. In the line 172 of the first tablet, white grass (*sassatu pešû*) is connected with devastation.

172. If white grass is seen in a city, that city will be devastated.<sup>106</sup> (Freedman 1998, 40-41)

The lines 168-174 describes different kinds of plants, weeds, and grass that appear in the city all leading to the same apodosis – that city will be devastated. The names of the other plants (“outside plant”<sup>107</sup>, plant of the plain”<sup>108</sup>, “mountain grass”<sup>109</sup>) indicate that they do not belong to a city and, therefore, they are seen harmful because they brake the barrier between nature and city.

### 4.4 Partridge – *iššūr hurri* (Tablet 2)

Bird divination (ornithoscopy) is a widely attested form of divination in Mesopotamia. The professional responsible for the interpretation of the birds' flight pattern was called *dāgil iššūrī* (“the observer of birds”). The title is mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian correspondence alongside other scholars. (SAA X, 7) The observance of birds' flight patterns is attested already in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. (Zorzi 2009, 87-88) The observance of the flight patterns was not the only form of bird divination. Bird-extispicy is attested already in the Old Babylonian times, frequently used by kings and generals. The observation focuses on the physical appearance of the dead, unopened, and plucked (sacrificial) birds. (Maul 2007, 370-371) The professional in charge was the *bārû-*

<sup>105</sup> 85. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ É NA *ma-lu-ú* EN É BI ÚKU-*in*

<sup>106</sup> 172. DIŠ KI.KAL BABBAR *ina* URU IGI URU BI *i-har-ru-ub*.

<sup>107</sup> Ú *ki-di* (Freedman 1998, 40).

<sup>108</sup> Ú.EDIN (Freedman 1998, 40).

<sup>109</sup> KI.KAL.KUR.RA (Freedman 1998, 40).

diviner, who was also in charge of the extispicy in general. The observation focused on color and disfiguration of the bird's body. In a Kuyunjik tablet (K 57) different kinds of divinatory practices are listed together. The text mentions hemerology, astrology, lecanomancy, augury or extispicy (*ina iššūri* "by means of a bird" and *ina iššūr hurri* "by means of a partridge"), and libanomancy. Noteworthy is that this text makes a difference between bird and partridge divination. (Zorzi 2009, 88)

The *Šumma ālu* omen collection contains numerous tablets dedicated to the observance of birds (tablet 54 to tablet 79). The birds mentioned in the *Šumma ālu* are eagles (*erû*), falcons (*surdû*), crows (*āribu*), partridges (*iššūr hurri*), swallows (*sinnuntu*), doves (*summatu*) and geese (*kurkû*). (Zorzi 2009, 89-90) Partridges are the only birds to appear in the discourse of this study (tablets 1-40). It seems clear that partridges were viewed important for divinatory purposes, seen in the above mentioned Kuyunjik tablet. The 2<sup>nd</sup> tablet of the *Šumma ālu* describes the behavior of the partridges when they are seen in the city and on the roof of a palace.

The reconstruction given by Freedman is based on text A (K.10359 and Sm. 915+) and text B (80-7-19, 81, CT 38 1, 7-8). The lines 25 to 28 are based on text A<sub>2</sub> (Sm. 915+). The text A<sub>2</sub> is unfortunately only partially preserved. The text is restored by using a parallel texts K.3811+ (CT 39 31-33) for the line 25; text K.6734 (CT 41 2) + K.9605 (unpublished) for the line 26; and K.3811+ (CT 39 31-33) for the line 28. (Freedman 1998, 63, 66-67, 73)

It is possible that the omens of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tablet were collected together, because of the similarities in the apodoses. The connecting element could be that the most of the apodoses are associated with the destruction or abandonment of cities. The number of the omens could have been 82, but this is based solely on the shape of the text A. (Freedman 1998, 63)

In the lines 25, 26 and 28 the terms *pešû* and *šalāmu* appear. The tablet is fragmented and the descriptive part of the line 27 is destroyed, nevertheless, the place between the colors could indicate a possible color term in this line. As stated already, the Akkadian word behind the logogram BUR<sub>5</sub>.HABRUD.DA.MUŠEN is *iššūr hurri* ("a hole bird?" ABZ, 80); most likely a partridge.

25. If a white partridge is seen in a cit[y, prices will diminish; destruction of Adab.]<sup>110</sup>  
 26. If a white partridge is seen on the roof [of the palace – a dark day for the king.]<sup>111</sup>  
 27. If a partridge [. . .] the property [of the pal]ace[. . .]<sup>112</sup>  
 28. If a [black] partridge [is seen in a city, in that month there will be an eclipse;] plague [. . .] an uprising of [locusts in the land].<sup>113</sup> (Freedman 1998, 66-67)

In the line 26 the connection between *pešû* and the king (*šarru*) could originate from the appearance of a partridge on the roof of the palace. The association could be sought also from the connection between the color white and kingship in general, because Marduk's planet Jupiter (white) is connected in the celestial omens to kingship. (cf. Rochberg 2010, 20) It is however more likely that *pešû* is responsible for the appearance of *ūmu da'mu* in the apodosis. In this case the location roof of the palace (*ūr ekalli*) would be responsible for the appearance of king (*šarru*) in the apodosis.

In the line eight the connection between *šalāmu* and the eclipse can be explained with an interpretive tradition mentioned earlier. The author has wanted to connect the signs GI<sub>6</sub> (=MI) and the sign MI from the sign combination AN.MI used to write *attalû*, (lunar or solar) “eclipse” (CAD A II, 505). On the one hand the *šalāmu* is in itself connected with anger<sup>114</sup> (Streck 1999, 71), which would explain the connection to an apodosis that portends divine wrath *par excellence*. On the other hand the phenomena of solar or lunar eclipse could even on an empirical basis be connected with the sign GE<sub>6</sub> that is connected with darkness and shadow.<sup>115</sup>

It is noteworthy, that if the reconstructions provided by Freedman are indeed correct, the compilation of these omens together is based on similarities in the apodoses. In the line 25 UD.NUN.KI/Adab (ABZ, 154) and in the line 26 UD.MUD.NUN.KI (*ūmu da'mu*) have three identical cuneiform signs, and the appearance of the former may have led to the addition of the latter. The reason why the city of Adab is mentioned could arise from the connection between the color white (BABBAR = UD) and the logographic name of the city where the same sign is repeated.

<sup>110</sup> 25. DIŠ [BUR<sub>5</sub>].HABRUD.DA.MUŠEN BABBAR *ina* UR[U I]GI [KILAM TUR-*ir* KIMIN UD.NUN.KI].

<sup>111</sup> 26. DIŠ BUR<sub>5</sub>.HABRUD.DA.MUŠEN BA[BBAR<sup>111</sup> *i*]na ÛR [É.GAL IGI *ana* LUGAL UD.MUD.NUN.KI].

<sup>112</sup> 27. DIŠ BUR<sub>5</sub>.HABRUD.DA.[MUŠEN ...] [. . .] NÍG.ŠU [É.G]AL [. . .].

<sup>113</sup> 28. DIŠ BUR<sub>5</sub>.HABRUD.DA.[MUŠEN GE<sub>6</sub> *ina* ŠÀ URU IGI *ina* ITLBI AN.GE<sub>6</sub> GAR] *mu-ta-nu* [. . .] *ti-bu-ut* B[UR<sub>5</sub>.HI.A *ina* KUR GÁL] .

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *šarrum pānūšu lā iššalimūma* (Streck 1999, 71).

<sup>115</sup> Also in the 120th tablet of the series the association appears between *šalāmu* and *attalû*. (cf. Sallaberger 2000, 237)

#### 4.5 Ant Omens – *kulbābū* (Tablets 5, 17 & 37)

The extensive amount of ant related omens clearly demonstrates of their importance. In the lexical work *ḪAR-ra = ḫubullu*. (MSL 8 II, 39) they are described in a sequence of five colors. As stated already, their importance is related to an idea of ants as the minions of the Netherworld goddess Ereškigal who sent them up from the netherworld. (Maul 1994, 353; Scurlock 2000, 368).

The ant omens are spread over three different tablets. The 5<sup>th</sup> tablet is preserved written in Babylonian script in the texts a (K.196), and b (K.2307). The text C is written in Assyrian script and it contains the tablets K.1127, Sm.188+, and Sm.1990, which are all unpublished texts. The text D is preserved from a tablet BM 98980 and it is also unpublished. The transliteration and translation of the lines 28 to 32 are based on the texts a, b, and excerpt texts 1 and 2. The text b has all the lines preserved, where the text a has only the apodosis partially preserved in the line 32. The texts a and b are identical in the cuneiform script, and only variation is found in the line 28, where the sign BI is omitted from the protasis. The Excerpt 2 has a completely different protasis and apodosis in the line 29. (Freedman 1008, 87, 100-108)

Ex(2) 6. [. . .].MEŠ *lu* BABBAR.MEŠ *lu* SIG<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ ŠUB-[. . .]  
 “If X (plural) are either white or yellow-green – abandonment.” (Freedman 1998, 102)

Excerpt 2 (unpublished) contains the omens 27, 29 and 49. Even though the lines in this excerpt are fragmented, its placement in this context seems to be valid, because it matches the lines 27 and 49. There are no other color terms in the tablet so it seems to be fitting in the context of the lines 28-31.

The 5<sup>th</sup> tablet focuses mostly on houses under construction, and originally it contained 124 omens from which 114 are at least partially preserved. There seem to be numerous parallels to the omens series *Iqqur ēpuš*. (Freedman 1998, 87-89)

The first color terms appear in the lines 28-31 and they are connected with ants seen in the laid foundations of the house (*uššī nadûti*). The mixed order of color terms makes this sequence unique. They are listed in an order of *šalāmu*, *pešû*, *arāqu*, and *sāmu*. For some reason, the order of the colors is reversed; *šalāmu* precedes *pešû* and *arāqu* precedes *sāmu* (normally the opposite).

28. If black ants are seen in the laid foundations, that house will be built; the owner of that house will grow old.<sup>116</sup>  
 29. If white ants are seen in the laid foundations, the owner of that house will change / will demolish his house.<sup>117</sup>  
 30. If yellow ants are seen in the laid foundations – abandonment of the foundation; that house will not be built.<sup>118</sup>  
 31. If red ants are seen in the laid foundations – the owner of that house will die before his time.<sup>119</sup> (Freedman 1998, 90-91)

The sequence begins with *šalāmu* providing the only auspicious apodosis. It is followed by *pešû*, *arāqu*, and *sāmu*. *sāmu* is clearly the most inauspicious omen leading to a death of the owner of the house. This sequence seems to be highlighting the first and the last omen, where the former is the only auspicious and the latter is the most negative one. Two mildly negative omens appear in between.

In the line 29, *pešû* is connected with two outcomes; the owner of the house will change or he will demolish the house. It seems quite obvious that the scribe has taken advantage of the sound similarity of the words *nakāru* (“to be different”, “change”) and *naqāru* (“to demolish”, “pull down”). This homophonic association offered a wider range for the interpretation, and the milder apodosis (*nakāru*) is supplemented with a more malefic one (*naqāru*).

*kulbābū arqūtu* (“yellow-green ants”) when seen in the laid foundations portends that this house will not be built. *kulbābū sāmūtu* (“red ants”) is a more serious malefic sign and their appearance portends death for the owner of the house.

There are two ant omens in the tablet 17. The tablet demonstrates a unique sequence of colors, because this is the only place where *sāmu* precedes *šalāmu* in this omen series when they appear together.

17. If he discovers red ants, the owner of that well will die.<sup>120</sup>  
 18. If he discovers black ants, he will acquire profit.<sup>121</sup> (Freedman 1998, 254-255)

In both, tablet 5:31 and 17:17 *kulbābū sāmūtu* are connected with death, while black remains auspicious and is connected with *išdiḥu* (“profit”).

<sup>116</sup> 28. DIŠ ina APIN na-du-ti KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ IGI. MEŠ É BI DÙ-uš EN É BI ul-tab-bar.

<sup>117</sup> 29. DIŠ ina APIN na-du-ti KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ IGI. MEŠ EN É BI É-su ina-kir : -qar.

<sup>118</sup> 30. DIŠ ina APIN na-du-ti KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SIG<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ IGI. MEŠ ŠUB<sup>118</sup>-e APIN É BI NU DÙ- uš.

<sup>119</sup> 31. DIŠ ina APIN na-du-ti KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SI.A. MEŠ IGI. MEŠ EN É BI ina NU u<sub>4</sub>-mi-šú UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>120</sup> DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SI.A. MEŠ IGI. MEŠ IGI EN PÚ BI BA.UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>121</sup> DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>. MEŠ IGI. MEŠ IGI iš-di-ḥa TUK-ši.

The tablet 37 contains 164 omens, and in a large number of these (53 omens) color terminology can be found. The omens concern ants that are seen in different parts of the city. The colors are not listed in their standard sequence. The sequence observed is black, red, multicolored, black, red and white. The first appearance of white comes from the omen in the line 56 accompanying red and in the line 67 independently. (Freedman 2006, 243-247, 249)

The reason why the colors are organized in this manner seems to be related to the fact that in the lines 1-26 the focus is on occurring in a public space, and therefore, having public apodoses. The attested locations are a city (*ālu*), a city's gate (*abullu*), a wall (*igāru*), a dais (*parakku*), a temple (*bīt īli*), and a street (*sūqu*); the only exception is the line 22 where ants appear in a house. This line is, however, fragmented and therefore the exact meaning is obscure. (Freedman 2006, 244-245) From the line 27 onwards the omens are private ones. This organization is logical, but it does not provide an answer why only black, red and multicolored ants are seen in the public omens.

The tablet 37 is a compilation of five different text traditions, all written in Assyrian script. The text A (K.74, published in DA 1-5; K.4078, unpublished; K.12480, unpublished) contains the lines 29-47, 52-86, and 87-146. The text B (Rm.82 + Rm.479, unpublished) contains the lines 57-77, 94-102. The text C is a compilation of two texts: C<sub>1</sub> (ND 5439, CTN 4 no. 40), which contains the lines 116-127 and C<sub>2</sub> (ND 5466, CTN 4 no. 39) that contains the lines 67-87, 89. Text D (A 441, KAR 376) contains the lines 42-87, 88-132. The text E (no. unknown, KAR 377) contains the lines 1-46, 130-164, and a ritual and a colophon.

The malefic nature of *kulbābū* ("ants") is clear in the 37<sup>th</sup> tablet of the *Šumma ālu*. There are 164 omens in the 37<sup>th</sup> tablet, from which, only thirteen omens are auspicious. It is noteworthy that from these thirteen positive attestations nine include color terminology. The other positive omens are found in the line 37:91, 37:134, 37:137, and 37:148. (Freedman 2006, 250-255) The first three are connected with an idea of ants bringing something to the house and in this manner plays a benevolent role. In the last positive omen ants are in an abandoned house, which is interpreted as a sign for reinhabitation and wealth.

### 4.5.1 Black Ants – *kulbābū ṣalmūtu* (Tablet 37)

*kulbābū ṣalmūtu* (“black ants”) appears in fourteen omens from which five are auspicious and the remaining ten inauspicious. With five auspicious omens, *ṣalāmu* is the most auspicious term. In the lines 1-25, the organization of these omens seems to be basing on the comparison of the colors black and red. This can be witnessed especially in the line 19, where the black ants in the lock of the temple will ascertain that flour-offering will take place; the preceding lines have red ants in the same position leading to an opposite effect.

3. If there are black ants in the entryway of a city gate, traffic will be cut off.<sup>122</sup>

11. If black<sup>123</sup> ants with wings appear in a city – falling of rain and a flood will come.<sup>124</sup>

19. If black ants become numerous in the lock of a temple, in that temple there will be a flour-offering.<sup>125</sup>

61. If black ants are seen in a man’s house, the owner of that house will live a long time; all will go on normally. (?)<sup>126</sup>

62. If black ants with wings are seen in a man’s house, that house will be abandoned; his child will die.<sup>127</sup>

63. If small black ants with wings are seen in a man’s house, the man’s son will die.<sup>128</sup>

86. If white ants or black ones are seen in their hole in a man’s house, the owner of the house will die and that house will be abandoned.<sup>129</sup> (Freedman 2006, 244-245, 248-249, 250-251)

The line 11 demonstrates that winged ants (*ša kappi*) will lead to a death of a family member. It seems that the “wings” induce to his omen an idea of something taken away – a child in this example. In the following line another attribute is inserted (TUR/*ṣehēru*, “to be small”, “young”, “little”) to describe the ants that are small, black and with wings leading to an apodosis where the man’s son will die. The sign TUR has a natural connection to a man’s child (DUMU). The scribe uses the polysemy of the sign used to write the words small/child (TUR/DUMU), and for that reason the word appears in both –protasis and apodosis. Of course in itself the idea association between small – son/child, would function probably even without the polysemic cuneiform sign. The

<sup>122</sup> 3. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ina ne-rib KÁ.KAL it-tab-šu-ú A.RÁ.MEŠ KUD-as.*

<sup>123</sup> A connection with black clouds?

<sup>124</sup> 11. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ša kap-pi GAR-nu ina URU GÁL.MEŠ za-na-an IM.ŠÈG u A.KAL DU-kám.*

<sup>125</sup> 19. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub> *ina SI.GAR É.DINGIR im-te-du ana É.DINGIR BI ZÍD.MA.AD.GÁ GÁL-ši.*

<sup>126</sup> 61. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ina É NA IGI.MEŠ EN É BI ul-tab-bar sa-da-ru u DU-ku.*

<sup>127</sup> 62. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ša kap-pi GAR.MEŠ ina É NA IGI.MEŠ É BI ŠUB-di DUMU-šu UG<sub>7</sub>.*

<sup>128</sup> 63. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ TUR.MEŠ *ša kap-pi GAR-nu ina É NA IGI.MEŠ DUMU LÚ UG<sub>7</sub>.*

<sup>129</sup> 86. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ *ú-lu GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA ina ḪABRUD-šu-nu IGI. MEŠ EN É UG<sub>7</sub>.*

difference between a child and a son is illustrated in the text D where “son” is written DUMU.NITA (*aplu*, “heir”, “son”).

The line 86 describes a scenario, where either white or black ants are seen in a hole in a man’s house. As seen in the line 61 black ants are considered auspicious when they are seen in a man’s house. The premise changes to include a hole (*hurru*) in a man’s house as a location. On the account of this the apodosis changes to be inauspicious also with *kulbābū šalmūtu*.

162. If there are black ants and fungus in a man’s house – something unknown; los[ses].<sup>130</sup>

163. If in a man’s house, inside, black ants are seen, that house will last a long time as a residence.<sup>131</sup> (Freedman 2006, 256-257)

The ants and a fungus (UZU.DIR/*kamunû*) are both included in the omen 162 with *šalāmu*. The *kamunû*-fungus appears in the 13<sup>th</sup> tablet of the *Šumma ālu* omen series, and rather surprisingly, it is connected with ants. The line 163 provides another auspicious omen to *šalāmu. kulbābū šalmūtu* when seen inside (*ŠÀ/libbu*) a man’s house portends a long life to the house.

#### 4.5.2 Red Ants – *kulbābū sāmūtu* (Tablet 37)

The sheer amount of omens with *kulbābū sāmūtu* (“red ants”) asserts the importance that these small insects had in Mesopotamia– granted that it was mostly malefic by nature. *sāmu* appears independently 18 times in the ant omens and they are all inauspicious. These lead, for example, to the abandonment of a house, disruption in the cult, death, and difficult times.

12. If there are red ants in a city, that city will be abandoned.<sup>132</sup>

13. If there are red ants on a dais, that city will be abandoned.<sup>133</sup>

14. If there are red ants in a street, that city will be abandoned.<sup>134</sup>

15. If there are red ants in the entrance of a temple, that city will be abandoned.<sup>135</sup>

16. If there are red ants in a temple, that city will be abandoned.<sup>136</sup>

17. If red ants become numerous in the doorway of a temple, for that temple the flour-offering will be cut off.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>130</sup> 162. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub> ù UZU.DIR ina É LÚ GÁL-ši INIM NU ZU-ú I.BÍ.[ZA].

<sup>131</sup> 163. DIŠ ina É LÚ ŠÀ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ IGI.MEŠ É BI TUŠ.A ul-tab-bar.

<sup>132</sup> 12. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina URU GÁL.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>133</sup> 13. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina BÁRA GÁL.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>134</sup> 14. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina SILA GÁL.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>135</sup> 15. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina TU É.DIN[GIR] GÁL.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>136</sup> 16. KIMIN SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É.DINGIR GÁL.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>137</sup> 17. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina KÁ É.DINGIR im-te-du ana É.DINGIR BI ZÍD.MA.AD.GÁ KUD-as.

18. If there are red ants in the lock of a temple, the food-offering of the goddess of that temple will be cut off.<sup>138</sup> (Freedman 2006, 244-245)

The lines 12-18 depict important parts of the public space; a city, a shrine, a street, an entrance of a temple, and a temple. The intentional association of these elements together can be seen in the fact that they all have the same apodosis attached to them – that city will be abandoned (URU BI ŠUB-*di*). The lines 1-28 are preserved only in the text E.

47. If red ants are seen in a man's house, if (it is) a prominent person, he will die; if (it is) the owner of the house, he will become poor.<sup>139</sup> (Freedman 2006, 246-247)

The line 47 contains a basic omen for *sâmu*. The apodosis is constructed from two parts. The first part portends that if a prominent person (*āšû*) sees the sign it will lead to the death of this person. *āšû* is written with a cuneiform sign BAD. The sign has numerous readings and in the *Šumma ālu* the most frequent must be the one seen in the line 47, ÚŠ (*mātu*, “to die”). The first part seems to be constructed by exploring the meanings of the sign BAD and its appearance in the line 47 triggers an idea association where prominence (BAD) can be seen in a relationship with death (BAD).<sup>140</sup> The second part of the apodosis does not offer similar analogy between the owner of the house and the poorness. It should be noted, however, that the poorness predicted in the apodosis could be the outcome of the reversal of the most common positive apodoses for *sâmu* (e.g. richness).

48. If red ants with wings are seen in a man's house, that house will be dispersed and acquire another owner and then . . . of the man's house will die.<sup>141</sup>

49. If red ants [. . .] . . . – break.<sup>142</sup>

50. If large red ants [. . .], that [house] will be dispersed.<sup>143</sup>

51. If large red ants with wings are seen flying about in a man's house like gheeflies, they will kill the owner of that house (with) a weapon and appropriate his inheritance.<sup>144</sup>

52. If red ants in a man's house get up (and) stand (upright), traffic [will be cut

<sup>138</sup> 18. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *ina* SI.GAR É.DINGIR GÁL<sup>138</sup>.MEŠ PAD<sup>d</sup>U+DAR É.DINGIR BI KUD-*as*.

<sup>139</sup> 47. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *ina* É NA IGI.MEŠ *šum<sub>4</sub>-ma* IDIM UG<sub>7</sub> *šum<sub>4</sub>-ma* EN É ÚKU

<sup>140</sup> Similar interpretation is found associated with the sign BAD also in other divinatory branches. (cf. Frahm 2010, 100)

<sup>141</sup> 48. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *šá kap-pi* GAR-*nu ina* É NA IGI.MEŠ É BI BIR-*ma* EN MAN-*ma* TUK-*ši à* [...] É NA UG<sub>7</sub>

<sup>142</sup> 49. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ [...] *u hi-[pí]*

<sup>143</sup> 50. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ [É] BI BIR-*[ah]*

<sup>144</sup> 51. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *šá kap-pi* GAR-*nu ina* É LÚ GIM *zu-um-bu hi-mi-[ti]* DAL.DAL-*ma* IGI.MEŠ EN É BI GIŠ.TUKUL *i-duk-ku-š<sub>u</sub>-ma ri-du-us-su i-rid-[du]*<sup>144</sup>

off].<sup>145</sup>

53. If red ants in a man's house climb up and stand (upright) – abandonment of the house.<sup>146</sup>

54. If red [ant]s are very numerous in a man's house, the owner of the house will die and his house will be abandoned.<sup>147</sup>

55. [If] red [ant]s are very frequently seen in a man's house, that house, will be dispersed / that house will be abandoned.<sup>148</sup>

58. If red ants do battle in a man's house and kill each other – break; his property will be lost.<sup>149</sup> (Freedman 2006, 246-249)

The appearance of ants was, as stated already, considered negative. From the ants especially the *kulbābu sāmūtu* (“red ants”) were seen more vicious than the others, because of a special part dedicated to the “release” of the red ants in the *namburbû*-rituals. The question is, whether the ants being red is the reason why they are more inauspicious than the others, or whether this is based on empirical observation. Red is in itself considered a color to which powerful emotions, and powerful values (blood (=death?), richness, surplus, wealth) are being associated with.

#### 4.5.3 Multicolored Ants – *kulbābū barmūtu* (Tablet 37)

*kulbābū barmūtu* appear in five omens, and *barāmu* gets its other positive omen from association with ants (see below multicolored skinks). The tablet 37 contains the most numerous amounts of inauspicious omens seen in the entire omen collection. It is noteworthy, that *barāmu* is in this context connected with the richness and prosperity.

26. If multicoloured ants are seen in a city, that city will be abandoned.<sup>150</sup>

27. If multicoloured ants are repeatedly seen in a man's house, that house will be dispersed.<sup>151</sup>

28. [If] multicoloured ants are seen in a man's house, the owner of the house will become rich; that house will prosper.<sup>152</sup>

154. If multicolored ants are flying in a man's house, property that was found for him will be cut off.<sup>153</sup>

155. If multicolored ants are flying in a street, that street will be abandoned.<sup>154</sup> (Freedman 2006, 246-247, 256-257)

Multicolored ants in the city (public sphere) lead to an abandonment; if they are flying in the street (public sphere) the street will be abandoned and if they are flying in the man's

<sup>145</sup> 52. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA it-te-né-bu-ú GUB.MEŠ tal-lak-tu<sub>4</sub> [KUD-as]

<sup>146</sup> 53. DIŠ [KI]ŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA e-lu-nim-ma GUB.[MEŠ] ŠUB-e É

<sup>147</sup> 54. DIŠ [KIŠI<sub>8</sub>].MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA ma-gal ma-a-du EN É BI UG<sub>7</sub>-ma É BI ŠUB-di

<sup>148</sup> 55. DIŠ [KIŠI<sub>8</sub>].MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA ma-gal it-tan-ma-ru É BI BIR-ah : É BI ŠUB-di

<sup>149</sup> 58. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA MÈ DÙ.MEŠ-ma ŠEŠ ŠEŠ-šú GAZ<sup>hi-pi</sup> mi-im-mu-šú ZÁH

<sup>150</sup> 26. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.MEŠ ina URU IGI.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>151</sup> 27. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.MEŠ ina É NA IGI.IGI.MEŠ É BI BIR-aḥ.

<sup>152</sup> 28. DIŠ [KI]ŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.MEŠ ina É NA IGI.DU<sub>8</sub> EN É i-šár-rù É BI SI.SA.

<sup>153</sup> 154. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.GÙN ina É LÚ it-tap-ra-šu mi-im-mu ú-ta-šu KUD-[as].

<sup>154</sup> 155. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.GÙN ina E.SÍR it-tap-ra-šu SILA BI in-na-an-di.

house (private sphere) the found property will be cut off. But, if they are seen in a man's house the owner will become rich and the house will prosper. However, if they are repeatedly seen (IGI.IGI.MEŠ, *innamrū* Ntn.) in the man's house, the apodosis is altered to a malefic one.

#### 4.5.4 White Ants – *kulbābū pešūtu* (Tablet 37)

White ants appear in three omens independently and it clearly echoes the stereotypical meaning attached to this term – poorness, dispersal, and death.

67. If white ants are seen in a man's house, that house will be demolished; he will become poor.<sup>155</sup>

68. If large white ants with wings are seen in a man's house, that house will be dispersed.<sup>156</sup>

86. If white ants or black ones are seen in their hole in a man's house, the owner of the house will die and that house will be abandoned.<sup>157</sup>

The standard sequence of colors does not apply in this context and the first line where *pešū* is independent comes from the line 67, being preceded by *šalāmu*, *barāmu*, and *sāmu*.

#### 4.5.5 Yellow-Green Ants – *kulbābū arqūtu* (Tablet 37)

*kulbābū arqūtu* appear in three omens: twice independently and once together with *sāmu*. All the attestations are inauspicious. The lines 72-73 are preserved in four texts (A, B, C, and D) and from an excerpt text 1. All the texts are written without any major differences.

72. If yellow ants are seen in a man's house – scarcities; that house will be demolished / the owner of that house will not prosper.<sup>158</sup>

73. If yellow ants with wings are seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will die and his house will be dispersed.<sup>159</sup>

If yellow-green ants are seen in the man's house, it will portend scarcities (*tamṭātu*, “reduction”, “loss”) and demolishing (*naqāru*, “to demolish”) of the house, or alternatively the owner of that house will not prosper (SI.SA<sup>160</sup>/ *ešēru*, “be successful” “favorable”). In the following omen, the yellow-green ants with wings (*ša kappi*) are associated with death and the dispersal of the house.

<sup>155</sup> 67. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ *ina* É NA IGI.MEŠ É BI *in-na-qar* ÚKU-*in*.

<sup>156</sup> 68. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *ša kap-pi* GAR-*nu* *ina* É NA IGI.MEŠ É BI AL.BIR.RI.

<sup>157</sup> 86. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ *ú-lu* GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ina* É NA *ina* ḪABRUD-*šú-nu* IGI. MEŠ EN É UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>158</sup> 72. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SIG<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ *ina* É NA IGI.MEŠ *tam-ṭa-tu<sub>4</sub>* É BI *ina-qar* : EN É NU SI.SA.

<sup>159</sup> 73. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SIG<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ *ša kap-pi* GAR-*nu* *ina* É NA IGI.MEŠ EN É BI UG<sub>7</sub>-*ma* É BI BIR-*aḫ*

<sup>160</sup> Normally written SI.SÁ (ABZ, 89).

#### 4.6 Snakes – *šēru* (Tablet 23)

A wide variety of snakes existed in Mesopotamia. They are depicted in art and they appear, for example, in the lexical work *ḪAR-ra* = *ḫubullu*. (MSL 8 II, 7-9) Their existence is attested from the end of the fourth millennium onwards. Snakes, painted black, are depicted on a pottery shreds dating to the Jemdt Nasr period. (Van Buren 1939, 97-98) The motif of entangled snakes was very common in Sumerian times and it is attested sporadically to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most famous attestations is dated to the time of Gudea, king of Lagaš, where a vase dedicated to Ningišzida, his patron god, bears this image. The snake god Niraḫ is identified also in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian ritual texts. (Black & Green 2006, 168)

In the *Šumma ālu* snakes appear in the tablets 22-27. The tablet 23 includes 117 omens, where mostly snakes are seen in a person's house. (Freedman 2006, 34-35) Unfortunately the preceding lines before the line 90, where the color red appears, are badly damaged and no other possible colors are visible. (Freedman 2006, 44-47)

87. [If a snake . . .] that man will experience difficulty.<sup>161</sup>

88. [If a snake . . .] is seen [in] a man's [ho]use, [. . .] will be regular.<sup>162</sup>

89. If a sn[ake . . .] is seen [in] a man's house – calamity<sup>163</sup>

90. If a red snake is seen in a man's house, that man will become rich.<sup>164</sup>

(Freedman 2006, 44-47)

Even though the protases are not well preserved, the apodoses have stereotypical outcomes already seen in this study: *pešû* – difficulty, *šalāmu* – (economical?) regularity, *arāqu* – calamity, and the actually preserved apodosis, associated with *sāmu*, portends richness. Basing on this, I argue that the lines 87 to 90 actually illustrate a normal color sequence. If this is so, the sequence was originally most likely *pešû*, *šalāmu*, *barāmu*, and *sāmu*, because in this omen series there is no incident where *arāqu* would be placed before *sāmu*. However, *barāmu* appears in this position once. (cf. Tablet 30:19-21, Freedman 2006, 134-135) *barāmu* is associated only with insects and lizards –at least in the first 40 tablets of the *Šumma ālu* omen series, which would make it suitable for this context.

<sup>161</sup> 87. [DIŠ MUŠ . . .] x-na-diš NA BI NÍG.GIG IGI-mar.

<sup>162</sup> 88. DIŠ MU[Š . . .] IGI É NA IGI [. . .] sa-da-ru.

<sup>163</sup> 89. [DIŠ MUŠ . . . ina É] NA IGI i-dir-tu<sub>4</sub>.

<sup>164</sup> 90. DIŠ MUŠ SA<sub>5</sub> ina É NA IGI NA BI i-šár-rù.

#### 4.7 Scorpions – *zuqaqīqu* (Tablet 30)

Scorpions appear also frequently in the art from the fourth millennium onwards. Scorpions had religious significance and in the 14<sup>th</sup> tablet of the lexical work *ḪAR-ra = ḫubullu* they are listed in a sequence of five colors (*pešû, šalāmu, sâmu, barāmu, and arāqu*). (MSL 8 II, 39-40) It is well known that scorpions had an important astral association and the Babylonian name for the constellation Scorpius was also named after this animal. (Black & Green 2006, 160-161; Van Buren 1939, 1100-111) The first clear indication of the religious significance of a scorpion comes from the late Kassite Period, where they appear in the *kudurru* (“boundary stone”) as a symbol for the goddess Išhara. Earlier, she was associated with the *bašmu*-snake, but this changed during the Kassite Period, when she became associated with the constellation of Scorpius. (Black & Green 2006, 110, 160)

Nothing is known from the tablets 27-29. The tablets 30 and 31 are concerned with different kinds of scorpions. The placement of this tablet as 30<sup>th</sup> tablet of this series is based on the Nineveh Catalog. The original number of omens is not known. (Freedman 2006, 132-133) Eleven omens depict scorpions in different colors, but unfortunately, because of the bad preservation, only two apodoses are intelligible.<sup>165</sup> (Freedman 2006, 134-143)

19. [If] multicolored scorpions that [have] win[gs . . .].<sup>166</sup>

20. [If] red scorpions that have wings are numerous in a city [. . .].<sup>167</sup>

21. If green scorpions that have wings fall [into] a man’s house, that city will be abandoned.<sup>168</sup> (Freedman 2006, 134-135)

The next sequence of colors comes from the lines 50-55. The apodoses are badly preserved. In the lines 98-99 two badly preserved colors appear.

50. If a white scorpion is seen in a man’s house [. . .].<sup>169</sup>

51. If a black scorpion is seen in a man’s house [. . .].<sup>170</sup>

52. If a black scorpion is seen in a man’s house and it h[as] no right horn [. . .].<sup>171</sup>

53. If black scorpions stab each other in a man’s house, the owner of the house

<sup>165</sup> Eponym year name was written in the colophons: “[Eponym] Šamaš-upaḫḫir, gover[nor of Ḫaburri, year 14 of Sargon the lat]ter, the kin[g of the land of Ashur]”. This would mean the year 708 BCE. (Freedman 2006, 142-143)

<sup>166</sup> 19. [DIŠ G]ÍR.TAB.MEŠ GÙN.MEŠ *šá ka[p-pi GAR-nu...]*.

<sup>167</sup> 20. [DIŠ G]ÍR.TAB.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *šá kap-pi GAR-nu ina URU im-te-du [. . .]*.

<sup>168</sup> 21. DIŠ GÍR.TAB.MEŠ SIG<sub>7</sub>.MEŠ URU BI ŠUB-di.

<sup>169</sup> 50. DIŠ GÍR.TAB BABBAR *ina É NA IGI [. . .]*.

<sup>170</sup> 51. DIŠ GÍR.TAB GE<sub>6</sub> *ina É NA IGI [. . .]*.

<sup>171</sup> 52. DIŠ GÍR.TAB GE<sub>6</sub> *ina É NA IGI-ma SI ZAG- šú NU G[ÁL. . .]*.

will die [. . .]<sup>172</sup> (Freedman 2006, 136-139)

Because *šalāmu* is often considered a positive color in this omen series it could indicate that a positive color and the negative action (*itakkipū* Gt. *nakāpu* “to stab each other”) produce the negative apodosis in the line 53.

54. If a red scorpion is seen in a man’s house, that man [. . .]<sup>173</sup>

55. If red scorpions open routes in a man’s house, that house [. . .]

98. If a multicolored scorpion that [has] wings [. . .]<sup>174</sup>

99. If multicolored scorpions [. . .]<sup>175</sup> (Freedman 2006, 138-39, 142-143)

All the five colors are seen in the 30<sup>th</sup> tablet. They are organized into three groups. The first group is formed with *barāmu*, *sāmu*, and *arāqu* and it depicts scorpions that have wings (*zuqaqīqu ša kappi*). The line preceding this group does not contain a color term, which makes this sequence unique. The transcription is based on the tablet BM 38876 (unpublished), which is marked in the text score as text f.

The question is what the “winged scorpions” actually are? The basic quality that separates the animal class Arachnida from the class Insecta is that they have four pairs of legs and that they do not have wings or antennae. (E. Ruppert, R. Fox & R. Barnes 1994)<sup>176</sup> The “winged scorpions” appear also outside Mesopotamia textual record. Aelian writes that in India and in Egypt there are winged scorpions.

Megasthenes states that in India there are winged Scorpions of immense size and that they give a sting somewhat like the Scorpions of Europe. He also says that there are Snakes there with wings, and that their visitations occur not during the daytime but by night, and that they emit urine which at once produces a festering wound on any body on which it may happen to drop... Pammenes in his work *Concerning wild animals* says that in Egypt there are Scorpions with wings and double stings (this, he says, is not mere hearsay, but professes that it is his personal observation). (Scholfield 1959, 319)

Even though the specific identification of these “winged scorpions” cannot be offered it remains important that they have this characteristic attached to them. In this manner, they can be seen to possess a quality characteristic of the birds and insects and that makes them related to the sky. This also illustrates that animals in the *Šumma ālu* are not merely animals observed in the nature, instead, the series contain animals that may be seen more mythological than real.

<sup>172</sup> 53. DIŠ GÌR.TAB.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA it-tak-ki-pu EN É UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>173</sup> 54. DIŠ GÍR.TAB SA<sub>5</sub> ina É NA IGI NA BI NÍG [. . .].

<sup>174</sup> 98. DIŠ GÍR.TAB GÙN šá ka[p-pi GAR-nu...].

<sup>175</sup> 99. DIŠ GÍR.TAB GÙN.MEŠ i-[. . .].

<sup>176</sup> E. Ruppert, R. Fox & R. Barnes (1994). *Invertebrate Zoology: A Functional Evolutionary Approach*.

The second group of colors (50-55) is marked as Ex(1) in the text score. (Freedman 2006, 145) In this group the terms *pešû*, *šalāmu*, and *sāmu* appear. *pešû* appears in one omen where *šalāmu* appears in three and *sāmu* in two omens. Finally in the lines 98-99 two multicolored scorpions appear. In the line 98 the designation “winged” is partially preserved. (Freedman 2006, 142-143). The last sequence is preserved in the text A<sub>2</sub> (K. 3956).

#### **4.8 Lizards, Geckos, and Skinks – *šurārû*, *pizallurtu*, *šakkaddirru* (Tablet 32 & 33)**

Lizards (*šurārû*) are depicted frequently in Mesopotamian art in a schematic manner that does not allow any further species specification. The earliest attestations are already from the early periods of Uruk, from cylinder carvings and they have been a common sight in the city scene of the ancient Mesopotamia. (Van Buren 1939, 96-97) They appear in the lexical series ḪAR-ra = *hubullu*. (MSL 8 II, 24-25) where also evidence of skinks (*šakkaddirru*) is found.

The tablet 32 concerns with lizards and it probably had 71 omens in its original form. There are three different text traditions to this tablet: Nineveh tradition, Assur tradition, and Sultantepe tradition. (Freedman 2006, 164) From the latter two traditions, no color terms are preserved.

The Nineveh tradition is preserved in the text A (K.2708+, unpublished), which preserves the lines i – 23-33 and 36-43; ii – 50-59; and iv – 66-71. None of the omens containing color terms are preserved in the text A. Instead, they are preserved in two excerpt texts. Ex (1) (K.3730+, CT 38 39 + K.4044, unpublished) contains the lines 1-2, 6-21, 32, 34-37, 40-41, and 43-52. In Ex (3) (K.6912+, CT 38 40) the lines 1-10, 34-37, 40-41, and 63-64 are preserved. (Freedman 2006, 164-165)

With lizards, the performed action is in itself significant. Lizards are listed falling on top of a man, falling behind a man, and falling in front of a man; climbing onto a man and giving birth. Clear pattern is visible and, for example, a lizard falling in front of a man was considered auspicious and a lizard falling behind a man was considered inauspicious. A lizard falling onto a man was also considered auspicious (Freedman 2006, 169). These following seven examples come from the Nineveh tradition.

5. [If] a white lizard that has two tails is seen in a man's house, that house [. . .] its [. . .] that has two tails [. . .] is seen, that omen is not [. . .].<sup>177</sup>  
 12. If a red lizard [falls (?)] on top of a man, he will be happy.<sup>178</sup>  
 13. If a red lizard falls on top of a man [and . . .], that house will become rich.<sup>179</sup>  
 14. If a white lizard that has two tails [. . .], that house will become poor.<sup>180</sup>  
 (Freedman 2006, 166-167)

*šurārû sāmu* (“red lizard”) is considered auspicious and it portends happiness and richness. *pešû* is again associated with poorness. The sequence of colors includes only *pešû*, *sāmu* indicating they should be seen as an antithetical pair.

In the fifth line the omen with the “white lizards with two tails” is unfortunately damaged and the apodosis is only partially preserved. The first line of the Nineveh tradition and the 60<sup>th</sup> line of the Sultantepe tradition exemplifies that a two tailed lizard that is seen in a man's house produces an auspicious omen. (Freedman 2006, 167, 187) Against this background the apodosis on the 5<sup>th</sup> line of the Nineveh tradition should produce a negative apodosis. It could be that the apodosis ends with the signs GIZKIM BI NU [DÛG.GA], paralleling the omen 65 in the Sultantepe tradition, where the similar omen ends GIZKIM [š*i*]-i *dam-qat*. Also Freedman suggests that these two omens should be viewed as parallel omens. (Freedman 2006, 167, 188-189). However, it is clear that they are not identical, even though they have many similarities. For example, the omen 65 in the Sultantepe tradition omits the É BI from the beginning of the apodosis, which is clearly visible in the Nineveh tradition.

43. If there is a white lizard in a man's house – dispersal of the house.<sup>181</sup>  
 44. If there is a black lizard in a man's house, that house will have a god.<sup>182</sup>  
 45. If [there i]s a red lizard in [a man's] house, that house will acquire wealth.<sup>183</sup>  
 (Freedman 2006, 170-171)

It is worth noting that the three omens cited above are the only ones in the tablets 32 where the protasis is constructed in this manner (*ina* É NA GÁL-š*i*), even though the pattern is quite common outside this tablet. These omens highlight that the action taken by the lizards is not important in these three omens and that the focus lies in the differences between colors. *šurārû pešû* brings unhappiness, and the dispersal of the house. *šurārû šalmu* will ascertain that this house will have a god, somewhat cryptic in

<sup>177</sup> 5. [DIŠ] EME.ŠID šá 2 KUN *ina* É NA IGI É BI [. . .] x-šú šá 2 KUN [. . .] IGI GIZKIM BI NU [. . .].

<sup>178</sup> 12. DIŠ EME.ŠID SA<sub>5</sub> *ana* UGU NA [ ] ŠĀ.BI DÛG.GA.

<sup>179</sup> 13. DIŠ EME.ŠID SA<sub>5</sub> *ana* UGU NA ŠUB-ut-[*ma*] É.BI *i-šár-ru*.

<sup>180</sup> 14. DIŠ EME.ŠID BABBAR šá 2 KUN.MEŠ-[šá. . .] É.BI ÚKU-*in*.

<sup>181</sup> 43. DIŠ EME.ŠID BABBAR *ina* É NA GÁL-š*i* BIR-*aḥ* É.

<sup>182</sup> 44. DIŠ EME.ŠID GE<sub>6</sub> *ina* É NA GÁL-š*i* É BI DINGIR TUK-š*i*.

<sup>183</sup> 45. DIŠ EME.ŠID SA<sub>5</sub> *ina* É [NA GÁL-š*i*]i É BI NÍG.TUK TUK<sup>1</sup>-š*i*.

its meaning, but auspicious by nature. *šurārû sāmu* is connected with wealth, paralleling the line 13.

In the tablet 33 the focus changes from the lizards to geckos (*pizallurtu*) and skinks. The tablet 33 is preserved in four texts. Text A consist of four Kuyunjik tablets (K.3731+, CT 40 28; K.6527+, CT 40 28; K.11563, CT 40 28; K.12447, unpublished). Text b is a British Museum tablet (BM 38418, CT 38 41-43), as is Text C (BM 98896, unpublished). Text D (LB 1322, BiOr 11 1994, 88-89) contains the lines 31-49, and 50-65.

The colors are divided into two separate sequences. The first sequence is formed with *pešû, sāmu, barāmu*, and *arāqu*. *šalāmu* is for some reason omitted from the first two sequences.

19. If a white gecko is seen in a man's house, hardship<sup>184</sup> will afflict the owner of that house.<sup>185</sup>
20. If a red gecko is seen in a man's house, prosperity will continue (for) the owner of that house.<sup>186</sup>
21. If a multicolored gecko is seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will die a violent death.<sup>187</sup>
22. If a green gecko is seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will die in that month.<sup>188</sup>
31. [If] a white gecko [. . .] in [a man's house], the owner of that house will not be happy.<sup>189</sup>
32. If a red gecko [. . .] in a man's house, the owner of that house will acquire wealth.<sup>190</sup>
33. If a multicolored gecko ditto in a man's house, the wife of [the owner of ] that house will die.<sup>191</sup>
34. If a green gecko ditto [in] a man's house, the foundation of the owner of that house will not be secure.<sup>192</sup>

*pizallurtu pešû* ("white gecko") seen in a man's house brings hardship and unhappiness. *pizallurtu sāmu* ("red gecko") brings prosperity and wealth. *pizallurtu barmu*

<sup>184</sup> Freedman translates SAL.KALAG.GA DIB-*su* (*nissatu išabbassu*) as "hardship will afflict the owner of that house". However, the basic meaning of *nissatu* given by CAD is "grief, worry, depression". The verb *šabātu* means "to seize", "to overcome" (CAD Š, 5). In my opinion the translation offered by Freedman is more concerned with economic decline and hard times in general. The text clearly points to a broader understanding of hardship in terms of personal loss. More suitable translation would be "grief will overcome the owner of that house".

<sup>185</sup> 19. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA BABBAR *ina* É LÚ IGI-*ir* EN É SAL.KALAG.GA.DIB-*su*.

<sup>186</sup> 20. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA SA<sub>5</sub> *ina* É LÚ IGI-*ir* EN É BI HÉ.GÁL *uš-ta-bar-ra*.

<sup>187</sup> 21. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA GÙN *ina* É LÚ IGI-*ir* EN É BI *ina šag-ga-aš-ti* BA.UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>188</sup> 22. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA SIG<sub>7</sub> *ina* É LÚ IGI-*ir* EN É BI *ina ITI BI* BA.UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>189</sup> 31. [DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GU]RUN.NA BABBAR *ina* [ ] EN É BI ŠÀ.BI NU DÙG.GA.

<sup>190</sup> 32. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA S[A<sub>5</sub>] *ina* É LÚ [...]EN É BI NÍG.TUK TUK-[ší].

<sup>191</sup> 33. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA GÙN *ina* É LÚ MIN [EN] É BI DAM-*su* UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>192</sup> 34. DIŠ MUŠ.GIM.GURUN.NA SIG<sub>7</sub>[*ina*] É LÚ MIN [E]N É BI SUHUŠ.BI NU GI.NA.

(“multicolored gecko”) ascertains that the owner is going to die a violent death and that the wife of the owner of the house will die. *pizallurtu arqu* (“yellow-green gecko”) brings death to the owner of the house inside a time frame of one month. It is also connected with insecure foundations of the house.

If a *šakkadirru pešû* (“white skink”) is seen in the man’s house, the owner of the house will die in famine. *šakkadirru šalmu* (“black skink”) is connected with wealth and a *šakkadirru sāmu* (“red skink”) entails profit. *šakkadirru barmu* (“multicolored skink”) is connected with regular commerce. *šakkadirru arqu* (“yellow-green skink”) will bring along an oath that will affect the owner. The lines 113-117 are only preserved in the Text b.

113. If a white skink is seen in a man’s house, the owner of that house will die in a famine.<sup>193</sup>

114. If a black skink is seen in a man’s house, the owner of that house will acquire wealth.<sup>194</sup>

115. If a red skink is seen in a man’s house, the owner of that house will acquire profit.<sup>195</sup>

116. If a multicolored skink is seen in a man’s house, the commerce will be regular in the man’s house.<sup>196</sup>

117. If a green skink is seen in a man’s house, an oath will affect [the owner of] that house.<sup>197</sup> (Freedman 2006, 204-213)

The color terms are grouped in three segments. First group contains the lines 11-22, the second group contains the lines 31-34, and the third contains the lines 113-117. These sequences illustrate how colors are treated in a systematic fashion inside one tablet. In the sequences, the order is the same, white, red, multicolored and yellow-green. *šalāmu* that was absent in the sequence with geckos appears on the line 144 again in association with skinks.

#### 4.9 Mongooses – *šikkû* (Tablet 34)

This tablet is observing the behavior of mongooses. Mongooses (*šikkû*) appear also in the lexical series *ḪAR-ra = ḫubullu* (MSL 8 II, 23-24) and they were associated with Mesopotamian goddess Ninkilim. The word *šikkû* seems to be a Sumerian loan word to the Akkadian. The Sumerian word <sup>d</sup>NIN.KA<sub>6</sub> has gone a rather rare n/š alteration thus

<sup>193</sup> 113. DIŠ KUN.DAR BABBAR *ina* É NA IGI EN É BI *ina* SU.KÚ UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>194</sup> 114. DIŠ KUN.DAR GE<sub>6</sub> *ina* É NA IGI EN É BI NÍG.TUK TUK-*ši*.

<sup>195</sup> 115. DIŠ KUN.DAR SA<sub>5</sub> *ina* É NA IGI EN É BI Á.TUK TUK-*ši*.

<sup>196</sup> 116. DIŠ KUN.DAR GÙN *ina* É NA IGI *a-lak-tu<sub>4</sub>* *ina* É NA *sad-rat*.

<sup>197</sup> 117. DIŠ KUN.DAR SIG<sub>7</sub> *ina* É NA IGI [EN] É BI NAM.ÉRIM DIB-*su*.

changing to *šikkû* in Akkadian (Veldhuis 2002, 67-69). Unfortunately, the tablet is poorly preserved and the original length is not known. (Freedman 2006, 223)

13. If a yellow mongoose [. . .] an enemy will follow him<sup>198</sup> (Freedman 2006, 224-225)

In this badly fragmented text, only one color term appears and it does not seem likely that other color terms were present in the original text. The lines before this omen are preserved on the part where the color terminology normally appears. The color sequence never begins with *arāqu* and for this reason the lines coming after the line thirteen most likely did not originally contain colors. This is, however, an important tablet because it reveals that it was not necessary to write all the color terms in every occasion.

#### 4.10 Mice – *arrabu*, *harriru* (Tablet 35)

The tablet concerns dormice and other small rodents. Mice appear in the *ḪAR-ra* = *ḫubullu* (MSL 8 II, 22-23). These animals were not associated with any divinity. The reason why they are inserted in this position could be caused by the fact that they were eaten by mongooses. The original length of the tablet is lost and only 26 omens are partially preserved. The color terms are in two groups. First, *pešû*, *šalāmu* and *sāmu* appear in the lines 1-3. The basic nature of dormice and field mice seems to be inauspicious and all the preserved apodoses are negative.

1. If a [white] dormouse [is seen in a man's house . . .]<sup>199</sup>
2. If a black dormouse is seen in a man's house [. . .]<sup>200</sup>
3. If a red dormouse is seen in a man's house [. . .]<sup>201</sup>
14. If white field mouse is seen in a field of the common, that field of the common will lie fallow for one year.<sup>202</sup>
15. If a white field mouse whose tails are joined [. . .] is seen in a field of the common [. . .]<sup>203</sup>
19. [If . . .] a yellow [mou]se [. . .] will go to ruin.<sup>204</sup> (Freedman 2006, 232-233)

Unfortunately, the first three apodoses are not preserved and the information gained remains limited. It could be that the first list had originally more colors in this sequence in the lines 4-5, where only the ends of the apodoses are preserved. In the line 4

<sup>198</sup> 13. DIŠ MIN (=dNIN.KILIM) SIG<sub>7</sub> iš-[. . .] KÚR UŠ.MEŠ-šú.

<sup>199</sup> 1. DIŠ PÉŠ.GIŠ.ÛR [BABBAR] [ina É NA IGI] [...].

<sup>200</sup> 2. DIŠ KIMIN GE<sub>6</sub> ina É NA IGI [...].

<sup>201</sup> 3. DIŠ KIMIN SA<sub>5</sub> ina É NA IGI [...].

<sup>202</sup> 14. DIŠ PÉŠ.A.ŠÀ.GA BABBAR ina A.ŠÀ A.QAR IGI A.ŠÀ A.QAR BI MU.1.KÁM ŠUB-di.

<sup>203</sup> 15. DIŠ MIN MIN ša 2 KUN.MEŠ-šú ki-i[š-šu-ra . . .] ina <A>.ŠÀ A.QAR IGI [...].

<sup>204</sup> 19. DIŠ PÉŠ GÛN [. . .] ka-]ár-mu-ta<sub>5</sub> D[U].

(BA.GÁL), “will exist” can be observed: and in the line 5 (KUR-*su*) “will affect him” is visible. (Freedman 2006, 232-234) These could possibly be apodoses seen together with color terms.

#### 4.11 Moths and Crickets – *sāsu*, *šaširu* (Tablet 38)

The 38<sup>th</sup> tablet contains 105 preserved omens, but the original length is unknown. The color terms appear associated with moths (MSL 8 II, 58) and grasshoppers (MSL 8 II, 64). Moths were seen generally auspicious and only few omens appear with inauspicious apodosis. The other insect to which color terms accompany are crickets, which contrary to moths are more negative. The tablet is unfortunately not so well preserved in the parts of the grasshoppers, and many of the apodoses are too fragmented to decipher. (Freedman 2006, 273 – 281)

17. If a black moth climbs onto a man, that [man] will rejoice.<sup>205</sup>

60. If white crickets are numerous in a man’s house – dispersal [of the house.]<sup>206</sup>

61. If black crickets are numerous in a man’s house, that house will have enough food.<sup>207</sup>

62. If red crickets are numerous in a man’s house, that house will be dispersed.<sup>208</sup>  
(Freedman 2006, 278-281)

The colors white and red have the same apodoses (BIR/*šapāhu*) in connection with crickets, which is an interesting anomaly. Black is connected with *hadû*, “to rejoice”, “be joyful” (CDA 100). It is entirely possible that more color terms should be reconstructed to the lines 18-23 but unfortunately the protases are so badly preserved that this remains unknown.

There is some information available in the tablet that may provide some insight into the nature of the crickets (*šaširu*). There are in all the preserved lines either an iterative verbal form (lines 55-57) from *šasû*, “to shout” “call” (GÛ.DÉ.DÉ/ *ištassi*) or the word *mâdu* (“to be numerous”) either in a stative (60-62), or in a preterite (63-64). It could be that the insertion of the intensifying words makes the apodoses negative. The tablet

<sup>205</sup> 17. DIŠ UR.ME GE<sub>6</sub>ana UGU NA E<sub>11</sub> NA BI *i-had-du*.

<sup>206</sup> 60. DIŠ *ša-ši-ru* BABBAR.MEŠ *ina É NA ma-a-du* BIR-a[*h É*].

<sup>207</sup> 61. DIŠ *ša-ši-ru* GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ina É NA ma-a-du É* BI NINDA *i-šeb-bi*.

<sup>208</sup> 62. DIŠ *ša-ši-ru* SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *ina É NA ma-a-du* BIR-a*h É*.

could be compared with the ant omens where numerous ants in a temple's lock were positive when the color black appeared and negative with red.<sup>209</sup>

The basic nature of moths (*sâsu*) seems to be auspicious. In fact, the majority of the moth omens seen in the 38<sup>th</sup> tablet portend an auspicious future. The omen 17 is almost identical with the omen in the line 15.

15. If a moth climbs onto a man, that man will experience happiness in his time.  
17. If a black moth climbs onto a man, that man will rejoice. (Freedman 2006, 275)

This example shows that in this case the insertion of the color black does not alter the outcome in any significant manner. It seems that the moths were viewed to be so strongly auspicious on their own that the color of the moth did not matter. This is exemplified in the line 101.

101. If there is white, black, red (or) yellow moth in a man's house, it is fortunate.<sup>210</sup>

In the line 101 the omen describes white, black, red, (or) yellow moth (*sâsu*), which has here for some reason a writing *ša-a-šu*, illustrating a singular form which brings along the addition of “or” instead of “and”, seen also in the absence of plural marker MEŠ from the colors. So, in this case the moths are not observed in all of these colors simultaneously, instead, the omen disseminates a universal rule with the occurrence of moths in different colors and states that whatever the color is it will be auspicious as a sign. Significant is that white moths (*šašu pešû*) are also considered auspicious. This is the only attestation found in the tablets 1-40 where *pešû* is connected with unambiguously auspicious apodosis.

#### 4.12 More than One Color Term in an Omen

This part forms the most difficult part to analyze in this work; the omens which contain more than one color term and where active and passive elements may be isolated. From some of them, a pattern may be found but not in every case. The most important tablet

<sup>209</sup> 17. If red ants become numerous in the doorway of a temple, for that temple the flour-offering will be cut off. 18. If there are red ants in the lock of a temple, the food-offering of the goddess of that temple will be cut off. 19. If black ants become numerous in the lock of a temple, in that temple there will be a flour-offering.

<sup>210</sup> 101. DIŠ *ša-a-šu* BABBAR GE<sub>6</sub> SA<sub>5</sub> SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É LÚ GÁL SIG<sub>5</sub>.

including these kinds of omens is the 37<sup>th</sup> tablet of the series concerned with the behavior of ants. However, also the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet provides many examples.

#### 4.12.1 Fungus – *katarru*

In the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet numerous accounts of omens with multiple color terms exists. *katarru šalmu* (“black fungus”) is entirely favorable, when it appears independently. *katarru sāmu* (“red fungus”), however, has only one auspicious omen. If the fungus is half-black (*mišilšu šalmu*) and half-red (*mišilšu sāmu*) the outcome remains auspicious.

53. If half-black, half-red fungus appears in a man’s house, wealth will be paid in/to the man’s house.<sup>211</sup> (Freedman 1998, 196-197)

The situation with the half-yellow-green (*mišilšu arqu*) and half-red fungus (*mišilšu sāmu*) is similar. *katarru arqu* has a positive outcome in its basic omen; when other qualifiers appear some of the apodoses turn inauspicious. *katarru sāmu* is generally inauspicious when it appears in a specific location or it is called the *miqtu*-fungus. However, when normal *katarru sāmu* appear in the man’s living quarters it remains auspicious. So, here below all the elements are positive, hence the outcome.

84. If half-green, half-red fungus appears in a man’s house, the man’s son will enrich the father’s house.<sup>212</sup> (Freedman 1998, 198-199)

In the line 84 it is rather peculiar that combination of half-yellow-green (*mišilšu arqu*) and half-red (*mišilšu sāmu*), change the apodosis to include the man’s son (*aplu*, “heir”, “son”) to whom the enrichment of his father’s house is credited. The only connection that I can think of is that yellow-green is the color of growth, and freshness in plants and this could create an analogy between *arāqu* and *aplu* (DUMU.NITA), describing this fashion the change to a new generation (CAD A II, 300); in this case the element red would bring the richness (NÌ.TUK) in the apodosis.

82. If there are green, white and red fungi in a man’s house, the owner of the house will die and his house will be dispersed.<sup>213</sup>

83. If there are green and red fungi in a man’s house, the owner of that house will die; dispersal of the man’s house.<sup>214</sup> (Freedman 1998, 198-199)

If *katarru arqu*, *katarru pešû*, and *katarru sāmu* are all in the man’s house, the apodosis is negative. The following line is almost identical. The only difference is that the line 83

<sup>211</sup> 53. DIŠ KA.TAR BAR-šu GE<sub>6</sub> BAR-šu SIA ina É NA it-tab-ši ana É BI NÍG.TUK.SUM-in.

<sup>212</sup> 84. DIŠ KA.TAR BAR-šu SIG<sub>7</sub> BAR-šu SIA ina É NA it-tab-ši DUMU.NITA NA É.A.BA NÌ.TUK.

<sup>213</sup> 82. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> BABBAR u SIA ina É NA GAR.MEŠ EN É UG<sub>7</sub>-ma É-su BIR.

<sup>214</sup> 83. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> u SIA ina É NA GAR EN É UG<sub>7</sub> BIR-ah É LÚ.

omits the *katarru pešû* from the list. It is noteworthy that the apodosis remains the same. The line 83 demonstrates that the *katarru arqu* and *katarru sâmu*, which both had auspicious apodoses attached to them when they appeared independently, now produce an inauspicious apodosis when they are combined together. The table below illustrates the pattern seen in the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet.

fungus	half-black	half-red		in a man's house	pos.
fungus	half-yellow-green	half-red		in a man's house	pos.
fungus	yellow-green	white	red	in a man's house	neg.
fungus	yellow-green	red		in a man's house	neg.

It seems plausible that the scholars understood that one fungus that was in the spectral range of *sâmu*, *šalâmu*, or *arâqu* produced an auspicious apodosis when found in a man's house (or "in a man's living quarter", cf. *sâmu*). If two separate (or more) fungi were found and they were colored yellow-green, white, or red this lead to an inauspicious interpretation. The most noteworthy part is that if the fungus was only half in the sphere of *šalâmu* and half in the sphere of *sâmu* and in this manner producing one whole fungus, the positivity seen in the basic omens remains in this context. The situation remains the same in the case of half-yellow-green and half-red fungus.

#### 4.12.2 Ants – *kulbābū*

Most of the occurrences where more than one color appears are found in the 37<sup>th</sup> tablet. It may be that the ants manifest such a variety of different colors in nature that they had to be included in all the possible forms. The focus is with active living insects, unlike the fungi above, and for this reason it matters what the action performed by the ants is and to whom it is done to. For this reason I begin by grouping the ants based on who is the subject in the sentence.

34. [If b]lack [ants] kills red ones, prices will be stable.<sup>215</sup>

74. If black ants kill red ones in a man's house, there will be a favorable oracle in the man's house.<sup>216</sup>

33. [If red ants] kill black ones, there will be evil.<sup>217</sup>

75. If red ants kill black ones in a man's house, that house will not be a residence.<sup>218</sup> (Freedman 2006, 246-249)

<sup>215</sup> 34. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *i-duk-ku* KI.LAM GI.NA.

<sup>216</sup> 74. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *ina* É NA *i-duk-ku* INIM.GAR SIG<sub>5</sub> *ina* É NA GÁL-ši.

<sup>217</sup> 33. DIŠ [KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ] [SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ] GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *i-duk-ku* HUL GÁL-ši.

<sup>218</sup> 75. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ina* É NA *i-duk-ku* É BI KI.TUŠ NU GÁL-ši.

These four lines illustrate how the apodoses are rationally linked together. *kulbābū ṣalmūtu* (“black ants”) killing (*dāku*, “to kill”) *kulbābū sāmūtu* (“red ants”) equals a positive apodosis and *kulbābū sāmūtu* killing *kulbābū ṣalmūtu* makes the apodosis turn inauspicious. I argue that the reason for this behavior is linked to the fact that in connection with ants, *ṣalāmu* has a more benevolent nature than *sāmu*; the ones that survive have their nature reflected in the apodoses. In the lines 34 and 74 it is the more auspicious one of the two who survives; therefore the apodoses are auspicious. In the lines 33 and 75, however, the *kulbābū sāmūtu* are instigators and for this reason the apodoses are inauspicious as it is the case in the omens where *kulbābū sāmūtu* appears independently.

29. [If] black ants are seen killing multicolored ones in their (habitual) path – uprising.<sup>219</sup>

88. If ants are seen in a hole in a man’s house and black ones kill multicolored ones – with delivery, income.<sup>220</sup> (Freedman 2006, 246-247, 250-251)

In the above omens, the interpretation pattern is clearly visible. The line 29 provides the only exception where *kulbābū ṣalmūtu* killing other ants (e.g. *kulbābū barmūtu* kill) leads to an inauspicious apodosis. It should be remembered that also *kulbābū barmūtu* (“multicolored ants”) are considered auspicious when they appear in the man’s house. The reason for the negative apodosis could be sought out of the term *ḥarrānu* (“way”, “road”) which appears in the protasis. It seems that the *kulbābū ṣalmūtu* are disturbing the “(habitual) path” as translated by Freedman and in this manner instigate an uprising (*tību*, “attack”, “uprising”). The apodosis changes positive when the *kulbābū ṣalmūtu* kill the *kulbābū barmūtu* and this happens in a hole (*ḥurru*). The real trouble with *barāmu* is that the nature of the term is hard to establish because of the sporadic nature of its attestations.

76. If white ants kill red ones in a man’s house, there will be a matter of death in the man’s house; in that house a grave will be opened.<sup>221</sup>

77. If white ants kill black ones in a man’s house, there will be a noise (in) that house – occurrence of mourning.<sup>222</sup> (Freedman 2006, 250-251)

<sup>219</sup> 29. DIŠ KI.ŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ *a-šar ḥar-ra-an-šú-nu* GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.MEŠ GAZ.ME-*ma* IGI.MEŠ *tī-bu*.

<sup>220</sup> 88. DIŠ KI.ŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ *ina É NA ḤABRUD.DA in-nam-ru-ma* GI<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ GÙN.MEŠ *i-duk-ku ina maš-ši-ta ir-bu*.

<sup>221</sup> 76. DIŠ KI.ŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ *ina É NA i-duk-ku* INIM ÚŠ *ina É NA GÁL-ši ina É BI KI.MAḤ BAD-te*.

<sup>222</sup> 77. DIŠ KI.ŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ *ina É NA i-duk-ku É BI KA-mu GAR-an ŠUB-di KI.HUL*.

In the lines 76 and 77 the *kulbābū pešūtu* (“white ants”) are the subject and they are killing *kulbābū sāmūtu* (“red ants”) and *kulbābū šalmūtu* (“black ants”). The inauspicious nature of both types of ants was illustrated in section 4.7. In these lines it can be observed that, even though the only change is in the color in which the action is performed; the apodoses remain inside the same semantic field.

ants	black	killing	multicolored	(habitual) path	neg.
ants	black	killing	multicolored	in a hole in a man's house	pos
ants	black	killing	red	-	pos.
ants	black	killing	red	in a man's house	pos.
ants	red	killing	black	-	neg.
ants	red	killing	black	in a man's house	neg.
ants	white	killing	red	in a man's house	neg.
ants	white	killing	black	in a man's house	neg.

As seen in the table above there are four occasions when ants killing other ants produces an auspicious apodosis. All of the occasions are connected with *kulbābū šalmūtu*.

56. If red (and) white [ant]s in a man’s house establish th[eir] paths [on t]op of a sick man, that sick man will survive.<sup>223</sup>

57. If red (and) white [ant]s’ paths are seen in a man’s house; hard times (and) hardship will afflict the owner of that house.<sup>224</sup> (Freedman 2006, 248-249)

It is important to notice that red and white ants are not auspicious elements, but when red and white are connected with a sick man the prognosis changes to auspicious.

59. If red (and) reddish ants’ paths are repeatedly seen in a man’s house – break – if hard times afflict him or illness afflicts him, his property will not be taken.<sup>225</sup> (Freedman 2006, 248-249)

In the line 59 is found the only attestation of *pelû* in this discourse. *pelû* represents a specific spectral range; most likely a brighter shade from the *sāmu* which also has the color brown in its range. In order to avoid confusion with *sāmu* the term is written syllabically *pi-lu-tu<sub>4</sub>*. Because red ants were seen inherently inauspicious, this lead to a double negative sign and therefore to an omen that has, more or less, a neutral apodosis.

<sup>223</sup> 56. DIŠ [KIŠI<sub>8</sub>].MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ u BABBAR.[MEŠ] ina É NA KASKAL.MEŠ-š[ú-nu U]GU GIG GAR-nu GIG BI AL.TIL.LA.

<sup>224</sup> 57. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ u BABBAR.MEŠ ina É NA KASKAL.MEŠ-šú-nu IGI.MEŠ IGI.MEŠ EN É BI KI.KAL NÍG.GIG DIB-su.

<sup>225</sup> 59. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ pi-lu-tu<sub>4</sub> ina É NA KASKAL.MEŠ-šú-nu it-tan-mar<sup>hi-pi</sup> šum-ma KI.KAL DIB-su šum-ma GIG DIB-su mim-mu-šú NU ŠU.TI.

60. If red and black ants are seen in a man's house, the man's wife / the owner of the house will die.<sup>226</sup>

64. If black and red ants with wings are seen in a man's house, the man's wife will die; the house will be dispersed.<sup>227</sup> (Freedman 2006, 248-249)

It is good to compare these omens with the previous section where black ants were killing red ones, and the outcome was always positive. In this context, they just appear together and the outcome is inauspicious. It could be argued that black ants, while killing red ones, nullify their inauspicious nature.

The association between the color red in the protasis and the wife of the man in the apodosis is not based on the signs, but rather on the association between red and womanhood. This association can be seen in connection between *sāmtu* (a red stone, carnelian) and the goddess Ninlil.

14. <sup>na4</sup>*sāmtu* (gug) : <sup>d</sup>nin.líl (Livingstone 1986, 176-179)

The gender specific connection of *sāmtu* was also pointed by Winter (2010). In a bilingual Old Babylonian text, a reference is made to this idea. An unborn child is equated in the text to a boat that is filled up with both, carnelian and lapis lazuli – and states that it is not known whether the child is – carnelian or lapis lazuli.

Das Boot (für) Karneol und Lapislazuli hat sie mit Karneol und Lapislazuli beladen (Akk.: Wie ein Boot (für) Karneol und Lapislazuli ist sie mit Karneol und Lapislazuli beladen). Ob es Karneol ist, weiß sie nicht.<sup>228</sup> (Schuster-Brandis 2008, 413-414)

Of course these examples are based on stones and even though they were regarded to be colors *par excellence*, they are not color terms in themselves, and this leaves some doubt in the air concerning this matter. In this case, however, it can be argued that the scribes were aware of the connection and for this reason chose to interpret the emergence of the color red as a reference to the man's wife, and so functioning as a focusing attribute in this omen. The connection of red and womanhood may stem from the connection of red

<sup>226</sup> 60. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ u GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA IGI.MEŠ DAM<sup>226</sup> LÚ : EN É UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>227</sup> 64. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ u SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ šá kap-pi GAR-nu ina É NA IGI.MEŠ DAM LÚ UG<sub>7</sub> É BI BIR-ah.

<sup>228</sup> ma-gu-ug-za-gi-na gu-ug za-gi-na im-mi-i[n-si]  
ki-ma e-le-ep sa-am-tum ù uq-ni-im sa-am-ta-am ma-li-a-at  
ù gu-ug nu-zu ù za-gi-i[n nu-zu]  
ù sa-am-tum ú-ul i-di ù uq-nu-ú-um ú-u[l i-di].

menstruating blood and the color, seen also elsewhere in anthropological sources. (Turner 1967, 41)

65. If black (and) multicolored ants are seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will die.<sup>229</sup>

71. If small white ants (and red) ants are seen in a man's house, that house will be demolished and will become poor.<sup>230</sup> (Freedman 2006, 248-249)

From these remaining colors, it is rather difficult to specify why they are inauspicious.<sup>231</sup>

Of course multicolored is related also elsewhere with death, so it may function as a trigger here.

ants	red	and	white	establish their paths on top of a sick man	pos.
ants	red	and	white	paths are seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	red	and	red	repeatedly seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	red	and	black	seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	black	and	red	with wings are seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	black	and	multicolored	seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	black	and	yellow-green	seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	white	and	red	seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	white	and	red/small	seen in a man's house	neg.
ants	white(small)	and	red	seen in a man's house	neg.

In the line 71 the appearance of *pešû* in the omen clause may be the reason why *ÚKU* appears in the apodosis. As seen in these examples the connective elements especially with the ones that did not include a specification in the action made (killing). Therefore, the relationship between the protasis and the apodosis remains speculative. The omens that contained ants killing other ants did have some of the apodoses constructed in a systematic manner, and the relationship between the colors made sense.

<sup>229</sup> 65. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ GE<sub>6</sub>.MEŠ u GÙN.MEŠ ina É NA IGI.MEŠ EN É UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>230</sup> 71. DIŠ KIŠI<sub>8</sub>.MEŠ BABBAR.MEŠ TUR.MEŠ u SA<sub>5</sub>.MEŠ ina É NA IGI.MEŠ É BI in-na-qar-ma ÚKU-in.

<sup>231</sup> 66. If black (and) yellow ants are seen in a man's house – scarcities; that house will be demolished.

69. If white and red ants are seen in a man's house, that house will be demolished.

70. If white ants and red/small ones are seen in a man's house, that house's future will be lost.

## 5. The Role and Meaning of Akkadian Color Terms

### 5.1 The Semantics of Color Terms

In this section, I will illustrate that the research hypothesis that was formulated at the beginning of this study can be confirmed with this material. I will also exemplify how the color terms locate themselves in the larger picture of divination. The material that has been investigated in this study should be large enough in order to produce results that may be extrapolated.

*pešû* plays the most intriguing role and has the most clearly defined character in the *Šumma ālu*. From the 31 instances, where the term appears independently, the apodosis provides a neutral (12:18) and a positive (38:101) outcome only one time each. The inauspicious nature of *pešû* is deeply rooted and the term does not fluctuate between auspicious and inauspicious in the same manner as, for example, *sāmu* does. When other color terms seem to be influenced by their referents and specific attributes added to the omens, *pešû* remains stable. This indicates that a white natural object or animal (at least in the *Šumma ālu* omen collection) was immediately recognized as malefic, because there is no fluctuation in its meaning. Even though *pešû* does not appear truly auspicious in this discourse, the 38<sup>th</sup> tablet of the series illustrates that it is possible for a subject of an omen clause to be so benign that it does not matter what coloring it has.<sup>232</sup>

101. If there is white, black, red (or) yellow moth in a man's house, it is fortunate.  
(Freedman 2006, 281)

The insertion of specific attribute together with *pešû* has, occasionally, an effect on the outcome seen in the apodoses. In the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet there are fifteen omens, with preserved apodoses, where *pešû* appears in the protasis. From these attestations fourteen are clearly inauspicious by nature. In the line 17-18 white fungus is described to be “right/left in a man's residential quarter”. As discussed earlier, things that appear on the right side are normally considered more auspicious than the things appearing on the left side. In 12:17 the white fungus on the right side will lead to dispersal (*sapāhu*) of that house while the fungus appearing on the left side leaves that house in a normal state (*sadāru*). The basic meaning of *sadāru* (“to do regularly”, CAD S, 11) should be seen referring to the regular activities of the house, and hence, to the normal state. What is noteworthy is that on the

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Tablet 19, where *rābišu* “demon” is depicted in five colors all associated with inauspicious apodoses (Freedman 1998, 227-228).

left side the white fungus denotes a more auspicious future than on the right side. An explanation should be seen sought in the interpretation tradition, where two inauspicious elements will lead to a positive apodosis<sup>233</sup> (Koch-Westenholz 1995, 11). In this context, it becomes evident that the element of color that is attached to the noun (*katarru*) functions as an independent sign to be interpreted and the color is responsible for the inauspicious/auspicious nature of the ominous sign. (cf. 12:48<sup>234</sup>)

Similar pattern is also evident in the lines 22-23 where white fungus right in the entryway of a house will lead to the death of the owner of the house, but the same fungus on the left portends grief/worry in to that house. Both of the apodoses are inauspicious, but the white fungus on the left seems to be alleviating the gravity of the inauspicious portent. In other tablets all the attestations of *pešû* are categorically inauspicious and all the animals and insects (partridges, ants, lizards, geckos, skinks, field mice, crickets) that are connected with it portend a malefic future.

The most characteristic apodoses connected with *pešû* are terms poorness (12:21, 25, 28; 17:28; 32:14; 33: 19; 37:67) death and grief (12:1, 5, 22; 33: 113; 37:86). This aspect of *pešû* seems to be intentionally placed in opposition to the terms *šalāmu* and *sāmu*.

*šalāmu*, in contrast to *pešû*, is the term with most positive attestations. *šalāmu* positivity is, however, not so unequivocally presented as is the negativity of *pešû*. In this discourse, *šalāmu* is positive 20/27 attestations. Five negative omens come from the tablet 37, where the behavior of ants is depicted. *kulbābū šalāmūtu* (“black ants”) seem to be in the basic omens auspicious, but when specifying attributes are added the outcome changes to inauspicious.

*šalāmu* positivity is most clearly present in the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet, where the appearance of a black fungus is categorically auspicious. It is noteworthy that besides fungus, lizards, skinks, moths, and crickets, black ants portend an auspicious future in five separate occasions. Black ants are auspicious when they are:

<sup>233</sup>“ Expressed algebraically, the rule is also familiar to us: + + = +; + — = —; — — = +. An often quoted example of this rule is found in the astrological texts: if a well-portending planet is bright: favourable (+ + = +); if it is faint: unfavourable (+ — = —), if an ill-portending planet is bright: unfavourable (— + = —); if it is faint: favourable (— — = +). But the rule might also be illustrated from texts of extispicy or lecanomancy as early as Old Babylonian.” (Koch-Westenholz 1995, 11)

<sup>234</sup>“If there is black fungus in all four directions, right and left –the same (profit will be regular).” Freedman 1998, 195.

- found in the laid foundations.
- discovered while opening a well.
- numerous in the lock of a temple.
- in a man's house.
- inside a man's house.

The omens are turned negative by inserting specifying attributes to define the ants, or by placing them in a more malefic position. Negative apodoses are connected with the ants that are:

- entryway of a city gate.
- with wings and appear in a city.
- with wings are seen in a man's house.
- small with wings in a man's house.
- combined with fungus and found in a man's house.

The ants that are found in the entryway portend a malefic future, also without the color specification (cf. 37:1-2). Earlier it was discussed that ants with wings (*ša kappi*), when appearing in a man's house leads to a death of a member of the household in many attestations (cf. 37:62-64). Also the simultaneous appearance of a fungus (UZU.DIR/*kamunû*) and ants is considered inauspicious. (cf. 37:161-162) The addition of *šalāmu* to this equation does not alter the outcome positive. It would seem that because the basic clauses (without any additional attributes) are auspicious with the black ants, these insects were viewed as inherently auspicious when they were in the range of *šalāmu*. If something, outside this basic scheme, was added it turned the sign immediately inauspicious.

Even though in many cases *šalāmu* seems to be compared with *pešû*, there are examples where *sāmu* appears in its place. The best examples are found in tablets 17, 37, and 32. When *pešû* and *sāmu* are contrasted, the former is the negative counterpart and the latter positive one (cf. 32:13-14). In a few instances where *sāmu* is compared with *šalāmu*, the positive apodoses are connected with *šalāmu* and the negative ones with *sāmu* (cf. 17:17-18; 37:18-19). Similar situation is visible also in the omens where multiple color terms appear; black ants killing red ants portends an auspicious future (cf. 37:34, 75), and inversely, red ants killing black ones portends an inauspicious future (cf. 37:33, 75).

There are 46 omens in this discourse where *sāmu* appears independently and from these omens 10 are auspicious. When observing only this information it would seem that *sāmu* is clearly a negative term. However, if the focus is directed towards the referents

(fungus, ants, crickets), it becomes clear that they are outnumbered by the positive ones (water, fungus, snakes, lizards, geckos, skinks and moths).

Red *miqtu*-fungus is considered an inauspicious sign in all the thirteen attestations. Normal red fungus is considered auspicious when it appears in the residential quarters of a man. Like the omens seen above in connection with black ants, also red fungus turns inauspicious when specifying attributes are inserted:

- in the cella.
- in an entryway of a house.
- in right and left.
- fill the inside of a house.

As stated already, red ants were considered negative signs, and all the attestations connected with *sāmu* have inauspicious apodoses. The tablet 37, where most of the negative ant omens originate, is organized in to two groups. First, the omens are concerned with ants appearing in the public sphere (a city, a dais, a street, and a temple), and secondly, with private omens occurring in the man's house.

Red, as a color of maximum chromaticity, may be viewed as a powerful symbol that is benevolent when attached to neutral source, but which becomes inauspicious with already malefic beings and objects. This would explain why the red *miqtu*-fungus, ants (*kulbābu*), and crickets (*šaširu*) portend an inauspicious outcome. The ambiguity of this color and the connection with inauspicious apodoses may be related on the one hand to the connection between blood<sup>235</sup> and the color red (Streck 2001, 221), and on the other hand to the association of *sāmu* with happiness and joy (SAA X, 227: r.3-9).

*arāqu* appears in the discourse 19 times and has only four auspicious apodoses. Three of these come out of the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet where fungus in the man's house, opening of the entryway, and on the *giparu* portends profit. Fungus in the *giparu* appears also without *arāqu* and is auspicious by nature (cf. 12:41). *katarru arqu* ("yellow-green fungus") in the cella, however, brings unhappiness, when normal fungus in a cella portends profit (cf. 12:38, 74). Inserting attributes right and left to describe the location of the fungus in a man's house, changes the apodosis from auspicious to inauspicious.

73. If there is green fungus in a man's house, the owner of the house will go about happily.<sup>236</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Blood = *sāmu* (Landsberger 1967).

<sup>236</sup> 73. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA GAR EN É ina lib-bi DÙG.GA DU.DU.

78. If there is green fungus right in a man's house, that house will become poor.<sup>237</sup>  
 79. If there is green fungus on the left in a man's house the owner of that house will die.<sup>238</sup>

It was already discussed above together with white fungi that the traditional interpretation schema works in the 12<sup>th</sup> tablet. Yellow-green fungus is an auspicious sign as illustrated in the line 73. When this sign is accompanied by specifying location (on the right) the apodosis turn inauspicious. This is noteworthy, because in the right – left symbolism right is considered positive element and left a negative one (cf. Guinan 1996b, 9-10), and in accordance with the normal pattern used in Mesopotamian divination two auspicious signs should produce an auspicious apodosis. The line 79 has a yellow-green fungus appearing on the left in a man's house and leads to the death of the owner of the house. Even though the line 78 produces an inauspicious apodosis it is clear that it is more benevolent than the apodosis on the line 79. When only the lines 78 and 79 are observed this does not create any difficulties; the two positive signs on the line 78 create a more auspicious apodosis than a positive and a negative sign on the following line. It is the positive omen in the line 73 that makes this complicated.<sup>239</sup> It seems that the mere insertion of additional attributes to this context turns the apodosis inauspicious.

*barāmu* appears in the *Šumma ālu* only in association with animals. In this discourse it appears independently eight times and it has a positive apodosis in two occasions. In the omens where the apodoses are preserved, its referents are ants, geckos, and skinks. In fragmented omens, it is used also with scorpions. Because there are so few attestations from this term it is somewhat difficult and tentative to define its nature. It has one positive omen in connection with the ants and another in connection with the skinks. However, because the 6-1 ratio favoring the inauspicious omens seems to indicate that the term is more often associated with malefic apodoses.

COLOR TERM	POSITIVE ATTESTATIONS	POSITIVE REFERENTS	COLOR TERM	NEGATIVE ATTESTATIONS	NEGATIVE REFERENTS
<i>šalāmu</i>	20	6	<i>sāmu</i>	36	2
<i>sāmu</i>	10	7	<i>pešû</i>	29	10
<i>barāmu</i>	2	2	<i>arāqu</i>	16	6
<i>arāqu</i>	4	2	<i>šalāmu</i>	7	3
<i>pešû</i>	2	2	<i>barāmu</i>	6	2

<sup>237</sup> 78. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA ZAG GAR É BI ÛKU-in.

<sup>238</sup> 79. DIŠ KA.TAR SIG<sub>7</sub> ina É NA GÛB GAR EN É BI BA.UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>239</sup> The reconstruction of these omens are based on the same Text b (K.7749+), which is well preserved.

The table above provides important information. In the positive column two terms (*ṣalāmu* and *sāmu*) rise above the others and the remaining three terms have only few positive attestations all together. The negative column is worth noticing. *sāmu*, *peṣû*, and *arāqu* dominates the table. *sāmu* position in the highest place in the negative column is troubling, but when the number of referents are compared it will become clear that it should not be considered as the most negative color term. *peṣû*, quite rightfully, claims this place with 29 attestations and 10 referents. *arāqu* takes the second place and after that comes *sāmu*.

### 5.1.1 The Basic Omens

The basic omens form the core in the *Šumma ālu* omen collection. I have chosen the following criteria for the basic omens and neglected all the omens that do not fit into these patterns.

1. if x (animal/plant/water) y (color term) – a (apodosis).
2. if x y in a man's house – a.
3. if x y in a city – a.
4. if x y in a laid foundations<sup>240</sup> – a.

The basic clauses are expanded by adding specific locations and attributes. I argue that in the basic clauses the meaning of a specific color is best illustrated, because there are no distracting elements present. I have divided the basic omens basing on the positivity and negativity of the apodoses. The positive basic omens are found in the table below. The basic clauses have minimum amount of other qualifiers that may influence the apodoses. In these examples, the ideal how an auspicious omen should benefit an individual is clearly visible.

25. If water is black,	he will acquire wealth.
26. If water is red,	he will acquire grain.
43. If there is black fungus in a man's house,	there will be profit in the man's house; the owner of the house will become rich.
68. If there is red fungus in a man's residential quarter,	there will be profit in the house.
73. If there is green fungus in a man's house,	the owner of the house will go about happily.
28. If black ants are seen in the laid foundations,	that house will be built; the owner of that house will grow old.
18. If he discovers black ants,	he will acquire profit.
61. If black ants are seen in a man's house,	the owner of that house will live a long time; all will go on normally. (?)
163. If in a man's house, inside, black ants are seen,	that house will last a long time as a residence.
28. [If] multicoloured ants are seen in a man's house,	the owner of the house will become rich; that house will prosper.
90. If a red snake is seen in a man's house,	that man will become rich.

<sup>240</sup> In the 5<sup>th</sup> tablet the APIN É *na-du-ti* forms the basic clause. (cf. Freedman 1998, 88-91)

44. If there is a black lizard in a man's house,	that house will have a god.
45. If [there i]s a red lizard in [a man's] house,	that house will acquire wealth.
20. If a red gecko is seen in a man's house,	prosperity will continue (for) the owner of that house.
32. If a red gecko [. . .] in a man's house,	the owner of that house will acquire wealth.
114. If a black skink is seen in a man's house,	the owner of that house will acquire wealth.
115. If a red skink is seen in a man's house,	the owner of that house will acquire profit.
116. If a multicolored skink is seen in a man's house,	the commerce will be regular in the man's house.

The omens above reveal something essential concerning this omen collection. The apodoses fall roughly in three categories. The largest group (13/19) is formed by omens that have their apodoses connected with wealth, richness and prosperity in general (*šarû*, *nēmelu*, *išdiḫu*). Also the grain in the tablet 17:26 (*še'u*) can be listed here as a form of economic prosperity, as is the abundance (*ḥegallu*, "plenty"), also connected with *sāmu* (33:20). The colors that are associated with the first group are *sāmu* (7/13), *šalāmu* (4/13), and *barāmu* (2/13). In three occasions the basic omens are associated with the longevity of the house or the owner of the house (37:28, 61, 163). All of the omens portending longevity are ant omens and connected with *šalāmu* and they illustrate the basic nature of black ants. Happiness appears once connected with *arāqu* (12:73).

In the negative basic omens, the picture changes dramatically. It is noteworthy that *pešû*, which was completely absent in the positive basic omens is dominating the negative omens with nine attestations. *pešû* is associated with partridges (2:25), water (17:28), fungus (12:1), ants (5:29; 37:67), lizards (32:43), geckos (33:19, 31), and skinks (33:113). *arāqu* appears in five negative basic omens connected with ants (5:30; 37:72), geckos (33:22, 34), and skinks (33:117). *sāmu* is associated with negative omens in four occasions (5:31; 17:17; 37:12, 47). However, all the attestations concern red ants, which could indicate that in reality *sāmu* should be seen leaning towards the auspicious side. *barāmu* is found in the negative basic omens three times, associated with ants (37:26), and geckos (33:21, 33). *šalāmu* has only one negative basic omen attached to it; "the black partridge seen in a city" (2:25).

25. If a white partridge is seen in a cit[y],	prices will diminish; destruction of Adab.]
28. If a [black] partridge [is seen in a city],	in that month there will be an eclipse;] plague [. . .] an uprising of [locusts in the land].
27. If water is green –	abandonment of [. . .]
28. If water is white, wealth [. . .]	wealth [. . .]
1. If white fungus a[pp]ears in a man's house	[. . .] will die.
29. If white ants are seen in the laid	the owner of that house will change / will demolish his house.

foundations,	
30. If yellow ants are seen in the laid foundations –	abandonment of the foundation; that house will not be built.
31. If red ants are seen in the laid foundations –	the owner of that house will die before his time.
17. If he discovers red ants,	the owner of that well will die.
12. If there are red ants in a city,	that city will be abandoned.
47. If red ants are seen in a man's house,	if (it is) a prominent person, he will die; if (it is) the owner of the house, he will become poor.
26. If multicolored ants are seen in a city,	that city will be abandoned.
67. If white ants are seen in a man's house,	that house will be demolished; he will become poor.
72. If yellow ants are seen in a man's house –	scarcities; that house will be demolished / the owner of that house will not prosper.
43. If there is a white lizard in a man's house –	dispersal of the house.
19. If a white gecko is seen in a man's house,	hardship will afflict the owner of that house.
21. If a multicolored gecko is seen in a man's house,	the owner of that house will die a violent death.
22. If a green gecko is seen in a man's house,	the owner of that house will die in that month.
31. [If] a white gecko [ . . . ] in [a man's house],	the owner of that house will not be happy.
33. If a multicolored gecko ditto in a man's house,	the wife of [the owner of ] that house will die.
34. If a green gecko ditto [in] a man's house,	the foundation of the owner of that house will not be secure.
113. If a white skink is seen in a man's house,	the owner of that house will die in a famine.
117. If a green skink is seen in a man's house,	an oath will affect [the owner of] that house.

If the positive basic omens illustrated a future that was longed-for, then the negative basic omens exemplify an unwanted future. The positive omens brought richness, prosperity, longevity, and happiness to the inhabitants. The largest group in the negative omens is connected with death and sorrow (10/23). The second largest group is portending the abandonment (*nadû*), or dispersal (*sapāḥu*) of the house or the city (9/23). Also the insecure foundations of a house could be seen in the second group. The third group consists of omens that portend economic decline (5/23): poorness (*lapānu*), and diminishing prices.

COLOR TERM	POSITIVE ATTESTATIONS	POSITIVE REFERENTS	COLOR TERM	NEGATIVE ATTESTATIONS	NEGATIVE REFERENTS
<i>sāmu</i>	8	6	<i>pešû</i>	9	7
<i>šalāmu</i>	8	5	<i>arāqu</i>	5	4
<i>barāmu</i>	2	2	<i>sāmu</i>	4	1
<i>arāqu</i>	1	1	<i>barāmu</i>	3	2
<i>pešû</i>	0	0	<i>šalāmu</i>	1	1

The table illustrates the systematic manner by which the Mesopotamian scholars used and understood the color terms. The positive color terms appear in totally reversed order in the negative column. Placing *sāmu* in the middle of the negative column is somewhat problematic, because all the negative basic omens originate from red ants, creating an

impression that the term is more inauspicious than it should. If the number of referents is observed, it shows that *sâmu* has, paralleling *şalâmu*, only one referent associated with an inauspicious apodosis.

The number of referents seems to be the more accurate denominator than is the total amount of attestations. This is naturally quite understandable, because the number of attestations may give important information; it cannot, however, function as a basis for the comparison. The main reason for this is the fact, that in some tablets the colors are presented more extensively than others, and thus, creating an uneven picture.

The inspection of the basic omens reveals something intriguing concerning the apodoses. I argue that the focus in the *Šumma ālu* is not to reveal the future *per se*, and instead, the focus and the whole importance is to make the surrounding world understandable and to gain knowledge when to perform a *namburbû*-ritual. The apodoses seem to be stereotypical ideas that do not usually offer much information concerning the future. They fit roughly into two schemas. On the one hand, the apodoses are connected with wealth, prosperity, longevity, and happiness and on the other hand to poorness, death, and abandonment. In the case of a bad prognostic, *namburbû*-ritual may be performed and in the case of a positive omen, no additional action is required. This can be illustrated with patterns:

if x (object) y (auspicious sign) = good to x  
if x (object) z (inauspicious sign) = bad to x

So, most of the omens have so general and even stereotypical apodoses attached to them and the focus is merely to find out whether the sign is benevolent or malefic. What specifically will happen is specified only in a minority of the cases. The more important function is to find out that everything happens for a reason and that the world is understandable contrasting quite sharply with the celestial and other terrestrial omens.

In the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* Eckhard Unger writes that white is a favorable and black an unfavorable color. (Unger 1971, 25) Because this statement strongly contradicts the results seen in this study, I will bring this matter under discussion, even though it does not belong to the discourse of this study. His argumentation is based on two omens belonging to the *Šumma ālu* omen collection (K. 217 + K. 4046). In the relevant part of this text white (*peşû*), black (*şalâmu*), red (*sâmu*), yellow-green (*arâqu*), and multicolored (*barâmu*) dogs (*kalbu*) enter, first the palace (23-27), and then the temple

(33-37). Unger does not mention the lines 23-24 in his article and instead he only looks at the omens in the lines 33-34.

23. Wenn ein weißer Hund in den Palast eindringt, wird die betreffende Stadt schwere Belagerung erleben.

24. Wenn ein schwarzer Hund in den Palast eindringt, die betreffende Stadt Getreide und Brot [ . . . ]

33. Wenn ein weißer Hund in den Tempel eindringt, der betreffende Tempel, sein Fundament wird dauern.

34. Wenn ein schwarzer Hund in den Tempel eindringt, der betreffende Tempel, sein Fundament wird nicht dauern. (Hunger 1909, 93-95)

It is true that a white dog that enters a temple is regarded as an auspicious sign. However, the organization of this text clearly highlights that the palace and the temple are being contrasted. The omens that are auspicious in the context of a palace are inauspicious when they are placed in the temple; and *vice versa*. This holds true also with red and yellow-green dogs. (Hunger 1909, 93-95) With this argumentation, the omen in the line 24 should be considered auspicious, even though it is only partially preserved. I think that this passage is close to the omen found in the 38<sup>th</sup> tablet in association with *šalāmu*<sup>241</sup>. This study clearly illustrates that the positive apodoses are not normally associated with *pešû* and when they are the context reveals something that shows that the semantics cannot be extrapolated.

## 5.2 Colored Animals and their Social Dimension

It was illustrated in the early part of the study that omens bear a close resemblance to Mesopotamian legal tradition. In fact, omens were seen as specific instructions sent by gods. These instructions had the power to modify a person's behavior. (Jean 2010, 267-277)

The god has (only) wanted to open the king's ears: "He should pray (literally 'open his fists') to the god, perform the apotropaic ritual and be on his guard." (SAA X, 56)

The omen (an earthquake) was interpreted as a warning directed towards the king, in which the king reacts through prayer and ritual. In other words, the king altered his behavior as a reaction to an inauspicious sign. In a completely analogous manner with the earthquake, colors have similar properties.

<sup>241</sup> cf. 38:61. If black crickets are numerous in a man's house, that house will have enough food (É BI NINDA *i-šeb-bi*). (Freedman 2006, 278-279)

Colors form a clearly distinguished group in divination. If a person sees a white ominous sign, it can be interpreted that this person has done something in the past that has caused this sign and should now change the behavior in a more appropriate direction.

113. If a white skink is seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will die in a famine.<sup>242</sup>

114. If a black skink is seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will acquire wealth.<sup>243</sup>

115. If a red skink is seen in a man's house, the owner of that house will acquire profit.<sup>244</sup>

116. If a multicolored skink is seen in a man's house, the commerce will be regular in the man's house.<sup>245</sup>

117. If a green skink is seen in a man's house, an oath will affect [the owner of] that house.<sup>246</sup> (Freedman 2006, 204-213)

In the example above this is well illustrated. If a person should see a white skink in his house, it can be interpreted, similar to the earthquake above, as a warning from the gods. In other words, only a person who has done something inappropriate should receive an ill omen. This inauspicious sign gives the person information to be acted upon. First, one has to perform *namburbû*-ritual in order to avert the negative prognostic and secondly, to alter one's behavior so that the person should not receive the inauspicious sign for the second time. In this manner, the interpretation of omens had an important social dimension.

Objects that were black (*ṣalāmu*) or red (*sāmu*) were regularly interpreted as benevolent signs.<sup>247</sup> The objects that were white (*peṣû*), or yellow-green (*arāqu*), on the other hand, could be identified with substantial accuracy as inauspicious signs. The objects that were multicolored (*barāmu*) most probably were more inauspicious than auspicious. The lack of attestations leaves this matter still open. With these two groups the inhabitants of the ancient Near East have gained important information from the surrounding world and knew when they had to perform *namburbû*-ritual and when not. The accidental nature of the omens in the *Šumma ālu* mandates that the interpretation of the ominous phenomena has to be done immediately and in many instances the expert is not the one who detects the ominous sign. For this purpose the general guidelines were probably clear to a large part of the population.

<sup>242</sup> 113. DIŠ KUN.DAR BABBAR *ina* É NA IGI EN É BI *ina* SU.KÚ UG<sub>7</sub>.

<sup>243</sup> 114. DIŠ KUN.DAR GE<sub>6</sub> *ina* É NA IGI EN É BI NÍG.TUK TUK-*ši*.

<sup>244</sup> 115. DIŠ KUN.DAR SA<sub>5</sub> *ina* É NA IGI EN É BI Á.TUK TUK-*ši*.

<sup>245</sup> 116. DIŠ KUN.DAR GÜN *ina* É NA IGI *a-lak-tu<sub>4</sub>* *ina* É NA *sad-rat*.

<sup>246</sup> 117. DIŠ KUN.DAR SIG<sub>7</sub> *ina* É NA IGI [EN] É BI NAM.ÉRIM DIB-*su*.

<sup>247</sup> Only clear exceptions to the schema are the red ants and *miqtu*-fungus.

The reason why white (*pešû*) and yellow-green (*arāqu*) animals and plants were generally understood as inauspicious and black (*šalāmu*) and red (*sāmu*) animals as auspicious could originate from the fact that the natural colors of animals are more frequent in the range of *šalāmu* and *sāmu* than they are in the range of *pešû* and *arāqu*. If this is the case, then the former establishes the norm against which the latter group is compared. It is quite natural that the inauspicious omens are understood as a change from the normal state. Walter Sallaberger (2000) made an important observation concerning the color terminology in the 120<sup>th</sup> tablet of *Šumma ālu*, which may shed some light into this matter.

8. Wenn (Marduk) *ditto*, sein Antlitz schwarz ist: es wird eine Finsternis geben und Erra wird das Land verzehren; (Südwind wird wehen).<sup>248</sup>

9. Wenn (Marduk) *ditto*, sein Antlitz weiß ist: schwere Hungersnot wird das Land erfassen und des Königs Tage werden wenige (/beschnitten) sein; (Nordwind wird wehen).<sup>249</sup>

10. Wenn (Marduk) *ditto*, sein Antlitz grün ist: Ellil wird die Länder durch Niederlagen zu Fall bringen; (Westwind wird wehen).<sup>250</sup>

11. Wenn (Marduk) *ditto*, sein Antlitz rot ist: Ellil wird diesem Land Reichtum hinzufügen; (Ostwind wird wehen).<sup>251</sup>

12. Wenn (Marduk) *ditto*, sein Antlitz strahlt: Ellil wird dieses Land erleuchten; dieses Land wird reich werden (/ der Tag wird aufhellen)<sup>252</sup> (Sallaberger 2000, 232-234)

The omens seen in the 120<sup>th</sup> tablet belong to the 3<sup>rd</sup> typological category (the products of human endeavor), because they are concerned with the statue of Marduk. According to Sallaberger the statue had a wooden interior and it was covered with “red gold” (*hurāšu sāmu*). The positive apodoses that were connected with *sāmu* and *namāru* indicate that the real appearance of the statue corresponded with these two positive terms. This means that the values associated with colors are not constructed arbitrarily and the real appearance of the statue influences the semantics. Only the colors depicting the normal appearance produce auspicious apodoses and the others are seen inauspicious. (Sallaberger 2000) This example suggests that Mesopotamians regarded colors that appear more frequently in the nature more benevolent than the colors that were only seldom attested. This could explain why *pešû* is so strongly inauspicious in the animal omens. A white animal is easy to isolate from a herd or flog of dark animals.

<sup>248</sup> 8. DIŠ KI.MIN IGI.MEŠ-šú GI<sub>6</sub> AN.MI GÁL-*ma* dÈr-ra KUR KÚ.

<sup>249</sup> 9. DIŠ KI.MIN IGI.MEŠ-šú BABBAR SU.KÚ dan-nu KUR<sup>1</sup> DAB<sub>5</sub>-*ma* LUGAL u<sub>4</sub>- mi- šú i-šu.

<sup>250</sup> 10. DIŠ KI.MIN IGI.MEŠ-šú SIG<sub>7</sub> dEN.LÍL KUR.KUR *ina* BAD<sub>5</sub>.BAD<sub>5</sub> ú-šam-qat.

<sup>251</sup> 11. DIŠ KI.MIN IGI.MEŠ-šú SA<sub>5</sub> dEN.LÍL *ana* KUR.BI meš-ra-a ú-rad<sup>1</sup> (TextÚ)-da.

<sup>252</sup> 12. DIŠ KI.MIN IGI.MEŠ-šú *nam-ru* dEN.LÍL KUR.BI ú-nam-mar KUR.BI i-šár-rù.

However, one could build a case arguing that the hermeneutics seen in this omen series is based on symbolic analogies more than empirical observation concerning the animals. Paralleling evidence from this behavior can be found in the writings of Artemidorus.

2:11... If they bite or bark, it means attacks and injuries. If the dogs are white, the attacks will be out in the open; if the dogs are black, they will be concealed. If they are russet, the attacks will not be altogether out in the open; if they are spotted, they will be much more terrible. For they are in no way analogous to noble or free men, but rather to the very violent and ruthless. For such is the disposition of these dogs. (White 1975, 93)

Even though Artemidorus's accounts are not paralleling the meaning associated with colors in Akkadian context, they are however, demonstrating that the explanation for an omen is sought from the range of symbolic meaning that is embedded in these terms. He is also seeking the explanation from the connection between a color and the social class it represents.

2:3 ... But a red-violet robe means food luck for slaves and rich men. For slaves, it signifies freedom, since slaves are not permitted to wear it. For rich men, it means a position of honor and great fame because of the suitability of the garment and the high dignity to which it corresponds. But it portends death for the sick and injuries for the poor. (White 1975, 84-85)

I think that against this background the question should be asked whether the connection that *sâmu* has with deities and the upper society is the reason why it is normally associated with auspicious apodoses. Is the connection between *pešû* and mourning a link that explains its negativity? Above mentioned Artemidorus's account concerning dogs could also provide an insight why *barâmu* was considered as a negative term: to be variegated was analogous not to the high society, but rather, to the violent and ruthless.

The omen series *Šumma ālu* is an important work because it illustrates the stratification of the Mesopotamian world view. The world revolved around the household and the city. Outside these spheres, the nature was seen as something that could threaten the urban life. The animals cross the boundary between the spheres and infiltrate the urban setting. Because the scholars understood the surrounding world as a cuneiform tablet waiting to be interpreted, they experienced the changes in the world to be full of meaning. These were seen to originate from the divine sphere and therefore, it was imperative to pay attention to them. From the sheer amount of animal omens seen in the omen series testifies how important it was to understand what a change in an animal's

behavior or its appearance meant. The scholars were under pressure to unravel why the world was full of abnormalities. Animal behavior or appearance was not indifferent to the scholars. It was believed that ominous appearance or behavior was a sign that indicated a misfortune. The understanding of this system gave the scholars a possibility to give meaning to the arbitrary incidents that otherwise did not make sense. Moreover, to possess the knowledge how the world functioned alleviated the tension between nature and the urban environment and it gave the inhabitants the means to counteract the threatening situations through *namburbû*-ritual.

## 6. Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to investigate the use of color terminology in the omen series *Šumma ālu*. This work has illustrated that the hermeneutics of Mesopotamian scholars was not based on arbitrary principles. The Akkadian color terms show a highly systematized structure and all the color terms can be seen to operate in a specific range of meaning.

It was important for the Mesopotamian scholars to have easily identifiable tools in their use, when they were creating the omen series. The color classification appears alongside other methods of classification as such a tool. Mesopotamians did not have a modern understanding concerning the development and origins of species. They understood that animals, just as the rest of the cosmos, were filled up with messages from the gods. Members of the Mesopotamian scholarly tradition were the ones that held the keys for the interpretation and understanding of these phenomena. Especially animals that could be seen occupying a liminal role seem to be significant for the scholars, because they are present with such a volume. Naturally, the colors are not the only variable that made an animal or plant malefic or auspicious – but they are one. It is not a coincidence that so many tablets exist where the colors play such an important role. The importance of colors can be explained by the fact that visual observance is the most important manner by which knowledge from the omens was gathered.

The animals must have created a lot of anxiety to the scholars and for this reason they were trying to explain why the animals acted in the manner that they did. In this manner,

their worldview was rather anthropocentric and all the features in the animal's appearance and behavior were seen meaningful from the human point of view. By creating interpretations through classification they alleviated tension that was building up between nature and people. They were able to allocate meaning to arbitrary changes in nature and make them understandable and meaningful. Everything happened for a reason and no incident was beyond the interpretation methods of the scholars. The interpretation was using analogies from mythology, physical irregularities, to the classification of color.

The numerous color attestations seen in the *Šumma ālu* speaks in favor for a consensus concerning the semantics seen in this omen series. In this discourse, the color classification extends from the bodies of water, to the members of *flora* and *fauna*. The reason why white, yellow-green and multicolored animals were viewed as inauspicious and red and black animals as auspicious could be based on an empirical observation. However, it is possible to see the changes originating from a process of analogy, where the symbolic value of a specific color was exploited in order to create meaning. This aspect is visible also in the later writings of Artemidorus and in his work *oneirocritica* and it could be analogous with Akkadian, where *pešû* bears a connection with mourning. *sâmu* is frequently associated with royalty and gods and, furthermore, it is used to describe happiness in the Neo-Assyrian times. In the latter context it is even compared with *arāqu* that stands for unhappiness in the passage, creating analogies with *sâmu-arāqu* symbolism seen in the discourse of this study. Artemidorus associates the variegated objects with violence, which is something that may lie behind *barāmu* also in Akkadian context. This suggests that perhaps the hermeneutical principles of *Šumma ālu* were more based on symbolic than empirical associations.

In this omen collection, the colors are also organized in a systematic manner and a standard sequence can be identified. If *pešû* (“white”) is present it usually begins the sequence, in few cases *šalāmu* (“black”) is placed before it. There seems to be a norm that *pešû* and *šalāmu* are treated as a pair and they may change places, but *sâmu* (“red”) or *arāqu* (“yellow-green”) do not appear before *pešû* and *šalāmu* – at least normally. The order of the following colors is normally *sâmu*, *barāmu* (“multicolored”), and *arāqu*.

The classification of color terminology was based also in more complex patterns of interpretation in the omens that contained more than one color term. More than one color term usually leads to an inauspicious apodosis and the only term that was associated with positive attestations was *ṣalāmu*.

Many animals that belong to this study were seen also in the lexical series HAR-ra *hubullu*. Noteworthy is that all the animals that are described with five colors in this lexical series are animals associated with the omen series *Šumma ālu*. This seems to indicate that the Mesopotamian taxonomy in the lexical tradition did not systematically list all the animals that they were aware of, instead, they listed in the lexical series animals that were seen important from the point of view of divination. It could be that one of the important features why these animals were viewed important in the *Šumma ālu* was their excessive variations that they had in their coloring. The whole purpose of this taxonomy was to preserve the important and meaningful aspects of animals that had significance for the scholars and to the Mesopotamian society. To put it in other terms, the color classification of animals had more significance from the point of view of divination than economy.

This study included information that was gathered from the tablets 1-40 of the omen series *Šumma ālu*. This comprises only one third of the total extent of this omen collection. However, even though that the study is demarcated the total amount of omens comes close to 200 omens. The extent of this survey was wide enough in order to produce results that may be extrapolated and when the rest of the omen series become available for the comparison the patterns seen in this discourse should show themselves valid.

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