

# Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life

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To Professor T. H. Gaster

*šulmu ša adanniš u tūb šērē liddinunikka*

Divine bookkeeping also began in Sumer. This well-known and intriguing belief in the existence of heavenly tablets upon which were recorded the deeds and destiny of individuals as well as nations can be traced from Sumerian to Talmudic times. The following survey of such celestial ledgers, some of which have hitherto been overlooked, is dedicated to a scholar who has contributed so much to the elucidation and the understanding of the myths, legends, and customs of the civilizations here under study. Noted here for the first time are cuneiform parallels to “the book of life” (or “of the living”) of Ps. 69:29.

In a hymn to the god Haia with a prayer for Rim-Sin, one reads,<sup>1</sup> *n u n<sup>d</sup> Ri-im<sup>d</sup> DEN.ZU* *b a l a - ḥ ú l - ḥ ú l u<sub>4</sub> - s ù - u d - d a š u - z i g a r - m u - n a - a b / i m - n a m - t i - l a - k e<sub>4</sub>* *d u - r í - š è n u - k ú r - r u m u - b i g u b - n i* “Grant to prince Rim-Sin a reign all joyous and length of days! On a tablet of life<sup>2</sup> never to be altered place its (the reign’s) name(s)!” Note, too, that in this same text there is a reference to a tablet of fate, *i m - n a m - t a r*, which also occurs in *UET* 6, 2:4 (restored by Hallo), *LKA* 146:9 (*d u b - n a m - m e š*), and in an unpublished Yale text.<sup>3</sup> The goddess Nungal is also known to possess such an *i n - n a m - t i - l a* ‘tablet of life’.<sup>4</sup>

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1 *UET* 6:101:51f. Courtesy of W. W. Hallo, whose translation of this difficult text is a tentative one. For a thorough study of this hymn, see H. Steible, *Ein Lied an den Gott Ḥaya mit Bitte für den König Rimsin von Larsa* (Freiburg i Br., 1967). His translation of these lines is on p. 15 and his commentary on pp. 164-65. (My friend and colleague, Dr. Raphael Kutscher, made this study available to me.)

2 W. Heimpel, in a written communication (April, 1971), is of the opinion that *i m - n a m - t i - l a* is not a “tablet of life” but a “tablet of (one’s) curriculum.” He adds, “Concretely I believe it is a tablet where the deeds of an individual are recorded.”

3 YBC 4658:13, *<sup>d</sup>Nin-líl-le d u b - n a m - t a r - r a - m u š u - z [ u - š ] è m u - e<sup>2</sup> - r a - x - [ . . . ]*, courtesy of Hallo, who also draws attention to Falkenstein, *SAHG*, 65, no. 6:5, *d u b - š a<sub>6</sub> - g a* [*k a l a m - m a - k e<sub>4</sub>*] *š u - g á - g á* “[Nisaba] you who hold the good tablets (of destiny) of the land.” Cf. below, n. 14.

4 Nungal hymn, line 74 = *PBS* 1/2 104 Rs. 10 = *Ni* 42, 13, 17. References are from Heimpel’s communication just cited. He refers to the forthcoming edition of the Nungal Hymn by Å. Sjöberg in *AfO*.

The gods in Mesopotamia were considered the determiners of destiny,<sup>5</sup> and they wrote their decisions on 'tablets of destiny' (*ṭuppi šīmāti*).<sup>6</sup> Nabu, the divine scribe, was in possession of these records, and kings frequently offered their prayers to him.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Ashurbanipal addresses the deity,<sup>8</sup> *balātiya ina pānika šatir* "My life is inscribed before you."<sup>9</sup> Šamašsumu-kin prays, *ūmê balātišu arkūti ina ṭuppi lištur* "May [Nabu] inscribe the days of his life for long duration in a tablet."<sup>10</sup> And Nebuchadrezzar prays, *ina lē'ika kīnim mukīn puluk šamê u eršeti ibe arāku ūmiya šutur littūtīm* "On your [Nabu's] unchangeable tablet, which established the boundaries of heaven and earth, proclaim length of days for me, inscribe long life."<sup>11</sup> The existence of other heavenly ledgers which record man's deeds are also well attested,<sup>12</sup> cf. *ṭuppi arnišu ḫiātīšu gillātīšu māmātīšu* "the tablet of his misdeeds, errors, crimes, oaths,"<sup>13</sup> and *ṭuppu damiqtī* "the tablet of his good deeds."<sup>14</sup>

Such records of divine scribal activity are also alluded to several times in the Bible:<sup>15</sup>

5 In LKA 146, Ea orders the seven *apkallu* of Eridu to bring forth the tablets of destiny: "Bring the writing of my *Anu*-ship [highest supreme offices]; let them read it before me. The tablets of destiny are brought." Cf. Lambert, *Bi. Or.* 13 (1956), 144.

6 Cf. B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, (Heidelberg, 1925), 2: 124-25. For a discussion of *šimtu*, *isqu*, and *ušturu*, see A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago, 1964), 201-6. On the theme of the divine determining of destiny in Mesopotamia, see also G. Furlani, "Sul concetto del destino nella religione babilonese e assira," *Aegyptus* 9 (1928), 205-39; H. Zimmern, "Šimat, Sīma, Tychē, Manat," *Islamica* 2 (1928), 574-84; *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (Berlin, 1969), 3: 541 (Sumerians); and, in general, Madeline David, *Les dieux et le destin en Babylonie* (Paris, 1949). Cf., too, the references in n. 7, n. 37, and n. 46.

7 For the role of Nabu, see H. Zimmern and H. Winckler, *Die Keilschriftinschriften und das Alte Testament*, 3rd. ed. [=KAT<sup>3</sup>] (Berlin, 1903), 399-408. See, too, C. Fichtner-Jeremias, *Der Schicksalsglaube bei den Babylonien*, MVAG 27/2 (Leipzig, 1922). Nabu is the holder of the tablets of destiny, *nāši/āḫiz ṭuppi šīmāti*, and the pen, *ṭameḫ qān ṭuppi*, *ṭameḫ lē'ī šābit qān ṭuppi*, but he is not the only god invested with this task. Other gods, who are mentioned in texts as determiners of destiny, *ilāni mušimmu šīmāti*, are Anu, Ningirsu, Bau, Ninhursag, Ishtar, Enlil, Ninlil, Ea, Shamash, Sin, Ninurta, Nusku, Girru, Nergal, Mami, Annunaki, Marduk, Aššur, and Namtar, the personification of fate itself.

8 Cf. T. H. Gaster, *Thespis* (New York, 1961), 288, note.

9 M. Streck, *Assurbanipal*, VAB 7/2 (Leipzig, 1916), 347:21, *balātiya ina pānika šatir*. Cf. 275:15-16.

10 C. F. Lehmann, *Šamašsumukin König von Babylon* (Leipzig, 1892), 10:23.

11 VAB 4, 100, ii:23-25. For Nabu's unalterable tablets, cf. CT 34, 20:50, *ina lē'ika kīnim*.

12 For *ṭuppi ilāni*, see H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig, 1901), 116, no. 24:8. For *lē'ū ša isqēti*, see VS 15, 26:17. Cf. P. Jensen, *Texte zur assyrisch-babylonischen Religion*, KB 4/1 (Berlin, 1915), 138:21. Cf., too, the tablets of destiny mentioned in the Zu epic. For translation, ANET, 112:11-12, "I will take the divine Tablet of Destinies, I, and the decrees of all the gods I will rule." One of the most often cited examples, of course, comes from the Enuma Elish (ANET, 67:121-22).

13 Cf. E. Reiner, *Šurpu*, AfO Beiheft 11 (Graz, 1958), 27:78-80, "May his sin be shed today, may it be wiped off him, averted from him. May the record of his misdeeds (*ṭuppi arnišu*), his errors (*ḫiātīšu*), his crimes (*gillātīšu*), his oaths (*māmātīšu*), (all) that is sworn, be thrown into the water." For *ṭuppi arni*, see also H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig, 1901), 124:5, bottom.

14 For a "tablet of good works," *ṭuppu damiqtī*, see IV R 11:r. 48, d u b s a<sub>6</sub> - g a - n a b a - a n - D U : (ana) ṭuppi damiqtīšu šutur. Cf. above, n. 3.

15 Several of the biblical verses referred to have textual difficulties which are not dealt with here. The importance of these citations is only to demonstrate the belief in the existence of heavenly ledgers or in

1. Exodus 32:32-33, "where the erasure of a name from such a register is equivalent to a sentence of death. Moses, interceding for the Israelites after the incident of the golden calf, says, "Now if you will forgive their sins [well and good]. But if not, erase me from the roster which You have written. But the Lord said to Moses, 'He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My roster'." <sup>16</sup>
2. Isaiah 4:3, "Then he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called 'holy', everyone who has been inscribed for life in Jerusalem." <sup>17</sup>
3. Isaiah 34:16-17, "Consult the 'Book of the Lord' <sup>18</sup> and read it." <sup>19</sup>
4. Isaiah 65:6, "It is on record before Me."
5. Jeremiah 17:13, "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who reject You shall be put to shame, and those who turn from You, <sup>20</sup> shall be inscribed in the netherworld." <sup>21</sup>
6. Jeremiah 22:30, "Thus says the Lord, 'Write this man [Jehoiachin] down as childless'."
7. Malachi 3:16, "The Lord listened and heard it, and a tablet of remembrance was written before Him concerning those who revere the Lord and honor his name." <sup>22</sup>

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divine scribal activity also in the Bible. For a brief survey, see S. Ahitub, "The Book of the Lord," *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1968), 5:1086-87 [in Hebrew].

<sup>16</sup> Cf., too, Ps. 69:29 (discussed below); 109:13. For the concept, cf. Gudea 9:6-8, M. Lambert and J. R. Tournay, "Le Statue B de Gudea," *RA* 45 (1951), 64. For similar terminology, compare the AhiRam inscription, *wh'*. *yml̄ sprb* "and as for him, may his inscription be erased," Donner and Rollig, *KAI* 1, 1:2.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. in a slightly different context, *iti bal̄ūti ammāni* "I was reckoned among the living," in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1967), 60:83, which means to receive a favorable decree from the gods to be among the living. For the opposite, cf. A. Boissier, *Cboix de textes divinatoires*, ii: 31, 10, *iti amēli lā immāni*, "He shall not be counted among men." Cf. S. Langdon, "The Semitic Goddess of Fate, Fortuna, Tyche," *JRAS* (1930), 23.

<sup>18</sup> D. R. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Propbets* (Rome, 1964), 45-49, comparing the Sefire Treaty (III:4), interpreted *sēper ywbw* as a reference to the inscribed copy of a covenant. In the light of the material assembled here, it is more likely to interpret this "book" as a heavenly ledger. Cf. Ibn Ezra, ad loc.

<sup>19</sup> In this prophecy the fate of Edom is sealed. For the determining of the destiny of Babylon, see R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien*, *AfO Beiheft* 9 (Graz, 1956), 15:2-11, 70 *šanāti minūt nidūtišu išturma rēmnu Marduk surriš libbašu inūḫma eliš ana šapliš ana 11 šanāti ašābšu iqbi* "Seventy years as the period of its (Babylon's) desolation he (Marduk) wrote down. But the merciful Marduk, in a moment his heart was at rest, turned (the figure) upside down and ordered it to be inhabited after eleven years."

<sup>20</sup> Read *w<sup>e</sup> sūr̄g(y)kā*.

<sup>21</sup> For *erēš* as "netherworld," see W. Baumgartner, *Die Klagegedichte des Jeremias*, *BZATW* 32 (Giessen, 1917), 40. H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen, 1895), 18, n. 1., already amassed evidence for this meaning in Hebrew, Akkadian, and Aramaic. For this verse, cf., too, M. Dahood, *Biblica* 40 (1959), 164-66. The same meaning is now also well attested in Ugaritic, *ʿrš*. Cf., too, W. Baumgartner, B. Hartmann, E. Y. Kutscher, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden, 1967), 88.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. its citation in the *Damascus Scroll* 20:19.

8. Psalm 40:8 possibly belongs here too; but it seems to speak of a book of commandments rather than fate: “. . . In the roll of the book it is written of me.”
9. Psalm 56:9, “. . . Are they [my tears] not in Your book?”<sup>23</sup>
10. Psalm 87:6, “The Lord records in the roll of nations: ‘This one was born there’ (Selah).”
11. Psalm 139:16, “And in Your book they are all recorded.”
12. Daniel 7:10, “The [heavenly] court sat in judgment and books were opened.”
13. Daniel 10:21, “But I will tell you what is written in the book of truth.” (There follows a preview of the history of the next two and three-quarters of a century.)
14. Daniel 12:1, “But at that time Your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.”

Two other possible examples which have been cited are: 1 Samuel 25:29, “The life of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of life,”<sup>24</sup> and Ezekiel 13:9,<sup>25</sup> “They [the false prophets] shall not be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel.”<sup>26</sup>

Citations for this belief in post-biblical literature<sup>27</sup> are also found in the Pseudepigrapha, the Apocalypse of Zephania, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and in Talmudic literature.

#### A. Pseudepigrapha

1. Jubilees 30:19-23, “And so they inscribe as a testimony in his favor on the heavenly tablets blessing and righteousness before the God of all. . . . But if they transgress and work

23 Cf. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York, 1969), 759.

24 O. Eissfeldt, *Der Beutel der Lebendigen* (Berlin, 1960), thinks (p. 25) that this verse represents the initial stage of the concept that is developed in Psalms. He also quotes K. Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (1902) 167f. Eissfeldt bases his view on the study of Oppenheim, *JNES* 18 (1959), 121-28, who discussed the custom in Nuzi of registering sheep and goats by means of pebbles transferred to receptacles. According to Eissfeldt, the biblical idiom refers to such a usage, i.e., the wish of Abigail that King David's life be deposited in a pouch reserved for those who are to be kept alive. See, too, N. H. Tur Sinai, *Peshuto Shel Miqra* (Jerusalem, 1965), 2:180.

25 This verse, however, may refer to a human register similar to Nehemiah 7:5f; 12:22f.

26 Some have also compared Nehemiah 13:14, “Remember this, my God, to my credit, and do not wipe out my devotion.” For the idiom *zākar lē* (cf. Jer. 2:2), see J. Hempel, “Die Israelitischen Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischen Parallelen,” *ZDMG* 4 (1915), 61, continuation of n. 4.

27 Only selected examples are listed here. For a comprehensive listing (excluding the Qumran literature), see Zimmern and Winckler, *KAT*<sup>3</sup>, 405-6; P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Tübingen, 1934), 290-92; and W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen, 1926), 258. Cf., too, A. Jeremias, *Babylonisches im Neuen Testament* (Leipzig, 1905), 69-73. For an additional collection of citations stressing apocalyptic literature, see R. Eppel, “Les tables de la loi et les tables celestes,” *RHPR* 17 (1937), 401-12.

uncleanness in every way, they will be recorded on the heavenly tablets as adversaries, and they will be destroyed out of the book of life, and they will be recorded in the book of those who will be destroyed and with those who will be rooted out of the earth."

2. 1 Enoch 47:3, "In those days I saw the Head of Days when He seated Himself upon the throne of His glory, and the books of the living were opened before Him." (Cf. 81:1f.; 103:2; 104:1, 7; 108:3, 7.)<sup>28</sup>

#### B. Apocalypse of Zephania

1. 3:15-4:13, "I am wont, however, to bring them before the Lord Almighty, in order that He may inscribe their names in the book of the living. Also the angles of the accuser, who is upon the earth, they also, in turn, write according to all the sins of man upon their scrolls. Also they sit at the gate of Heaven. They announce to the accuser that he is to inscribe them upon his scroll in order that he may accuse them when they come hither out of the world below."

2. 14:5, "For thy name is inscribed in the book of the living."<sup>29</sup>

#### C. Dead Sea Scrolls

1. 4QDib Ham, *kol hakkātūb b<sup>e</sup>sēper haḥayyî[m]* "All those inscribed in the book of the living."<sup>31</sup>

2. 1QHod 1:23-24,<sup>32</sup> *bakkol ḥāqūq l<sup>e</sup>pāne(y)kāb b<sup>e</sup>ḥeret zikārūn*<sup>33</sup> "Everything is inscribed before You with a stylus of remembrance."

3. 4Q180:3,<sup>34</sup> *w<sup>e</sup>bu' ḥārūt 'al lūḥôt* "And it [the preordaining of the ages] was engraved

28 Enoch is the latter-day counterpart of Nabu, the heavenly scribe, who possesses the heavenly tablets.

29 H. P. Houghton, "The Coptic Apocalypse," *Aegyptus* 39 (1959), 78, 88.

30 See F. Nötscher, "Himmliche Bücher und Schicksalsglaube in Qumran," *Revue de Qumran* 1 (1959), 405-11, who also draws attention to a statement by J. Starcky, *RB* 63 (1956), 66, pertaining to a small group of Aramaic fragments from Cave 4 which mention heavenly tablets. These fragments apparently have not yet been published, unless they are contained in the text, "Un Texte Messianique Araméen de la Grotte 4 de Qumran," *Mémorial du Cinquantenaire 1914-1964* (Paris, 1965), 51-66, where we read on 52:5 the phrase, *[m]nd' tltt spry'*, "the record of the three books."

31 M. Baillet, "Un Recueil Liturgique de Qumrân, Grotte 4: 'Les Paroles des Luminaires,'" *RB* 68 (1961), 210:14. On p. 232, he refers this expression to the Bible itself. My attention was drawn to this reference by my friend and colleague, Raphael Weiss.

32 J. Licht, *The Thanksgiving Scroll* (Jerusalem, 1957), 61 [in Hebrew]. Cf., too, T. H. Gaster, *Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York, 1956), 125, "All things are inscribed before Thee in a recording script for every moment of time, for the infinite cycle of years, in their several appointed times." Gaster also refers to xvi:10, p. 195, "Moreover, because I know that Thou dost keep a record of every righteous spirit."

33 Cf. *ḥeret ḥayyîm*, "stylus of life," 1QM xii: 3, and 1QS 10:11. Cf. also IQpHab. vii:12-14.

34 J. M. Allegro, *Qumrân Cave 4, DJD5* (Oxford, 1968), 78, no. 180:3, and the corrected reading by J. Strugnell, "Notes en marges du Volume V des 'Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan,'" *Revue de Qumran* 26 (1970), 253. The present corrected reading is very clear from the plate itself (Plate XXVII, 1). Cf., too, CD III 3-4, C. Rabin, *The Zadokite Documents*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1958), 11, *wayyikkātēbū 'ôhabîm lā'el ūba'alē b<sup>e</sup>rūt l<sup>e</sup>'ôlām* "And they were written down

upon tablets."<sup>35</sup>

#### D. New Testament

1. Luke 10:20, "Nevertheless, what you should rejoice over is not that the spirits submit to you, but that your names are enrolled in heaven."
2. Philippians 4:3, ". . . whose names are in the roll of the living."
3. Hebrews 12:23, ". . . and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven."
4. Revelation 3:5, ". . . His name I will never take off the roll of the living."
5. Revelation 13:8, "Except those whose names the Lamb that was slain keeps in his roll of the living, written there since the world was made." (Cf. 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.)

#### E. Talmudic Literature<sup>36</sup>

1. Mishnah *Aboth* 3:20, . . . *w<sup>l</sup>happinqās pātū<sup>a</sup>ḥ w<sup>l</sup>harryād kōtēḇet* . . . "[Rabbi Akiba said,] . . . the ledger is open and the hand writes . . ." (The allusion here is to a heavenly ledger in which all man's actions are written down prior to the final day of reckoning.)
2. TB *Rosh Hashanah* 16b,<sup>37</sup> "Three books are opened [in heaven] on the Day of the New Year; one for the thoroughly wicked, one for the thoroughly righteous, and one for the intermediate. The thoroughly righteous are immediately inscribed and sealed for life. The thoroughly wicked are immediately inscribed and sealed for death. The fate of the intermediate is suspended until the Day of Atonement [nine days later]: if they are found deserving, they are inscribed for life; if not found deserving, they are inscribed for death."<sup>38</sup>
3. TB *Arakhin* 10b, "The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Why does not Israel sing the Song [that is, the *Hallel*] before You on New Year's Day and on the Day of Atonement?' He answered them, 'Would that be possible—the King sitting on the throne of judgment, with the books of those destined to live (*siprê ḥayyîm*) and destined to die (*siprê mēîm*) before Him, and Israel singing the Song [that is the *Hallel*] before Me?'"

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as friends of God and His covenanters for eternity." (References courtesy of R. Weiss.) According to J. T. Milik, "*Milkî-Ṣedeq* et *Milkî-Reša'* dans les anciens écrits Juifs et Chrétiens," *JSS* 23 (1972), 19; *bû'āh bakkā[tû]b 'ālāw* in IIQMelch 3 II, 19, also refers to heavenly tablets. He interprets the Melchizedek text as belonging to the same literary genre as 4Q 180.

35 For a possible allusion to such a belief in a Punic inscription of the third-second century B.C.E., see Gaster, *Thespis*, 288-89. "Moreover, the gods (*l'nm*) have . . . my name (*šmy*); my mark (*ty*) . . . along with their names have they inscribed (*ktb*), and the glory and [splend]or of my name (*šmy*) did they record from the beginni[ng] forever (*l'im*)." The text is found in M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik* (Giessen, 1902), 1:164f., esp. 166-67.

36 For further references, see L. Ginsberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2:175 (Levi knew how to read the celestial books written by the finger of God); 5: 82, n. 27 (Adam was shown the book in which all the future generations were recorded—cf. Jeremiah, *Babylonisches*, 69-73); 5:128, n. 141; 129, n. 142; 6:55, n. 284.

37 For the determining of one's fate by the gods in Mesopotamia at an assembly which takes place at the New Year in one of the sacred chapels of Esagila, see S. A. Pallis, *The Babylonian Akîtu Festival* (Copenhagen, 1926), 92-102, 183-97; Jeremiah, *Babylonisches*, 69-73; Meissner, *Babylonien*, 125; S. Langdon, *Die Neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig, 1912), 126:54-65.

38 One of the proof texts for the passage in Rosh Hashanah 16b cited above is Ps. 69:29.



These last two passages have greatly influenced the liturgy of the Jewish High Holidays, especially in the recurrent plea, *zok<sup>e</sup>rēnū l<sup>e</sup>ḥayyīm meḥlek ḥāpēs baḥayyīm w<sup>e</sup>kot<sup>e</sup>bēnū b<sup>e</sup>sēpēr baḥayyīm . . .* “Remember us for life, O King who delights in life, and inscribe us in the book of life . . .,” and in the prayer *U-netanneh Tokef*, *b<sup>e</sup>rō š<sup>š</sup> baššānāb yikkātēbū ūb<sup>e</sup>ḥyōm šōm kip-pūr yēḥātēmū* “On the New Year it is written down [man’s destiny for the coming year], and on the Day of Atonement it is sealed.”

The recurrent references above to a “book of life/living” ultimately hark back to Ps. 69:29,<sup>39</sup> where the expression a “book of life” or, better, a “book of the living,”<sup>40</sup> makes its sole appearance in all of biblical literature, *yimmāḥū missēpēr ḥayyīm w<sup>e</sup>’im šaddīqīm ’al yikkātēbū* “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;<sup>41</sup> let them not be enrolled among the righteous.”

This unique expression, moreover, also has an earlier Mesopotamian counterpart. Such a heavenly ledger bearing this specific title is found in the blessing recorded in the introduction to a Neo-Assyrian tablet addressed to Esarhaddon (ABL 545):<sup>42</sup> *ana šarri bēliya . . . lū šulmu ana šarri adanniš adanniš Nabū Marduk ana šarri bēliya litrubū . . . ūmu VIII<sup>kam</sup> epēš nikkassi<sup>43</sup> Nabū ina lē’išu ša balāti nikkassu ša šarri bēliya u ša mārē bēliya [a]na ūmē šāti [līpuš]* “To the king, my lord . . . May all be very very well with the king, my lord. May Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord . . . On the seventh day is the making of the reckoning of Nabu. In his *tablet of life* [may he make] the reckoning of the king, my lord (and) of the sons of my lord forever.”<sup>44</sup>

The phrase, *lē’ū ša balāti*<sup>45</sup> “tablet of life/living” is the interdialectal semantic equivalent

39 For Ps. 69:29, see Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom*, 764.

40 Cf., for example, H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen, 1926), 299; E. Podechard, *Le Psautier* (Lyon, 1954), 275; Eissfeldt, *Der Beutel*, 22, n. 1, because of the parallelism with *šaddīqīm* ‘the righteous’.

41 Cf. n. 16, above.

42 For ABL 545, see the translation in L. Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire* (1930), 1:386-87; E. Behrens, *Assyrischbabylonische Briefe kultischen Inhalts aus der Sargonzeit* (Leipzig, 1906), 43.

43 For the expression *epēš nikkassi* ‘to settle accounts’, see Behrens, loc. cit., and B. Landsberger, *Die kultische Kalender des Babylonier und Assyrier* (Leipzig, 1915), 135; and CAD E, 214. Cf. n. 44.

44 The appearance of such a blessing in an economic text and context may be explained by Volz’s comment, *Eschatologie*, p. 292 (written without any knowledge of the passage under discussion): “Für die Aufzeichnung der Handlungen (in Bücher) könnte die Vorlage im kaufmannischen Leben zu suchen sein (vgl. das Schuldbuch in Abot 3:16); das Motiv ist das Bedürfnis der gerechten Vergeltung.” Cf., too, L. Koep, *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum* (Bonn, 1952), 14. The economic imagery in the Mishnah referred to (and already cited in our study) is extremely bold: “He [Rabbi Akiba] used to say: All is given against a pledge, and the net is cast over all the living [so that none may forfeit paying by escaping]. The shop is open; the shopkeeper extends credit; the account-book lies open and the hand makes entries. Whoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow; but the collectors make their rounds continually, every day, and exact payment [of men] with their consent or without their consent, for they have that on which they can rely [i.e., God’s records of man’s debts]; and the judgment is a judgment of truth. And all is made ready for the banquet.”

45 Cf. also KAR 109:23, in a hymn to Ba’u, E. Ebeling, *Quellen zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion*, MVAG 23/1 (Leipzig, 1918), 50, no. 109:22: *ina ezida našat lē’ū (!) balāti inašši rēša* “In

of the Hebrew *sēpēr haḥayyîm*. And the Akkadian is none other than a reproduction of the Sumerian phrase, *im-nam-ti-l-la*, already cited in the beginning of this study.<sup>46</sup>

Postscript by W. W. Hallo

At the invitation of Professor Paul, the following is added by way of amplification.

(1) In the Haia-hymn (*UET* 6:101), lines 51f. should be translated: "Grant to prince Rim-Sin a reign all joyous and length of days! On a tablet of life never to be altered place its (the reign's) name(s)!"

Note that *š u - z i . . . g a r = šutlumu*, "grant" (e.g., *MSL* 13:118:132; *PBS* 10/4:8:4 = C. Wilcke, *Welt des Orients* 5 [1969] 2; cf. *šutlumu = nadānu*, *LTBA* 2:2:210) as in the comparable Warad-Sin passage: *b a l a - ḥ ú l - l a š u - z i m a - n i - i n - g a r* "he has granted me a joyous reign" (A. Falkenstein, *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 3 [1964], 27:47).

The name(s) in line 52 may well refer to the date formula(s) of Rim-Sin.

Line 5 of the same composition refers to the tablets of fate: *g i - k ù - g a š u - g á l - l e i m - n a m - t a r - g a l - m u l - m u l*: "(Haia), holding the holy reed-stylus (and) the resplendent great tablets of fate."

For the entire text, see Horst Steible, *Ein Lied an den Gott Ḥaja mit Bitte für den König Rīmsīn von Larsa* (Ph.D. diss., Freiburg i. Br., 1967).

(2) The reference to *UET* 6:2:4 should be restored: *d u [ b - n a m - t a r - b ] i a b z u - š è b a - a - n - g i 4* "Those tablets [of fate] returned to Abzu."

For the entire text, see now Bendt Alster, "'Ninurta and the Turtle', *UET* 6/1:2," *JCS* 24 (1972), 120-25.

(3) The reference to the unpublished Yale text is *YBC* 4658:13: *<sup>d</sup>N i n - l í l - l e d u b - n a m - t a r - r a - m u š u - z [ u - š ] è m u - e ? - r a - x - [ . . . ]*. Cf. also *IKA* 146:9: *ittašû-nimma iltanasû tup šīmāti* (DUB.NAM.MEŠ) *ilāni rabûti* "they (the seven *apkallu*'s) brought and recited the tablets of fate of the great gods."

See, most recently, J. van Dijk, *UVB* 18 (1962), 48.

Ezida [the temple of Nabu in Borsippa], as the bearer of the tablet of life(?), she raises her head." The reading *balāti*, however, is totally uncertain and highly unlikely. There is another text in which this phrase has been read: E. Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie Šu-ila "Handerhebung"* (Berlin, 1953), 124:13. But the reading is apparently based only on a reconstruction.

<sup>46</sup> For an interesting, though sarcastic, reflection of this belief in Greek literature (Euripides), see A. Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 2nd ed. (1889), 523, fragment 506: "Do you believe that the sins are written in a book before Zeus, and Zeus reads it and judges men accordingly. The heavens are not large enough to write down the sins." Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom*, 764, brings additional evidence, "Similarly the Roman Parcae and the Teutonic Norns are said to have kept a written record of men's fates, the latter being sometimes designated *Die Schreib-erinnen*. In the same vein, too, Tertullian tells us that at the conclusion of a child's first week of life, prayers were offered to *Fata Scribunda*." See also his notes on p. 849. For Egyptian, Greek, and Roman analogues to the above, see Koep, *Das himmlische Buch*. For an interesting study of the belief in destiny and free will in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Qumran, see F. Nötscher, "Schicksalsglaube in Qumran und Umwelt," *BZ* 3 (1959), 205-34.



(4) Other references to the tablets of life occur in hymns to Nin-imma: *i m - n a m - t i - l a š u ? ! - g á l - l a - m e - e n* (*ISCT* 1:74 *Ni.* 4233:5) and Nungal: *i m - n a m - t i - l a š u - m à m u - g á l* (e.g., *PBS* 1/2: 104 rev. 10). For the latter passage, see now the edition of the text by A. Sjöberg, *AfO* 24 (1973), 44, who adds (*ad* line 77) a reference to *d u b - n a m - t i - l a* in a hymn to Ba'u (*UET* 6/1:72:3).

(5) That *n a m - t a r* and *n a m - t i - l a* are simple antonyms for death and life in all contexts may be doubted in view of such passages as: *n a m - t a r n a m - t i - l a . . . s a g - e - e š ħ a - m a - a b - r i g 7 - g e* "may he bestow upon me a fate of life" (*Warad-Sin* 7:35).

(6) I take this opportunity to add to Professor Paul's "Psalm 72:5—A Traditional Blessing for the Long Life of the King," *JNES* 31 (1972), 351-55, another parallel from Samsu-iluna's inscriptions: *n a m - t i - l a ḏN a n n a - g i m i t i - i t i - d a m ú - m ú - d a (m) = [balātam ša] kīma Šim [warḫiš]am [uted]dišu*: "a life which grows (so the Sumerian; Akkadian has: renews itself) each month like Nanna (so Sumerian; Akkadian: Sin; i.e., the moon) (the great gods bestow on me)." (*LIH* 2:97:88-92=98:89f.=99:89f.).

See the latest translation of the text by E. Sollberger and J. R. Kupper, *Inscriptions Royales Sumériennes et Akkadiennes* (Paris, 1971), 220f.



