

A Famous Analogy of Rib-Haddi

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Of the native Syro-Palestinian princes reporting to the Egyptian court, Rib Haddi,¹ prince of Byblos, was the most prolific writer. His sixty-nine letters² comprise the largest single corpus of the extant Amarna material. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Rib-Haddi makes use of analogies in order to embellish his many reports. Of his comparisons, his most often quoted³ is the one in which he compares his forced confinement in Byblos to that of a bird in a trap or cage: *kīma eššūri ša ina libbi huḫāri/kilūbi*⁴ *šaknat kīšūma anāku ina āl*⁵ *Gubla* "Like a bird in a bird-trap [gloss: cage], so am I in Byblos."

Another equally famous analogy is that which he uses no less than four times to illustrate the dire straits Byblos is (or is alleged to be) in as a result of the Hapiru incursions. It reads: *eqliya aššata ša lā muta mašil aššum bali erēšim* "My field, for lack of plowing, is like a woman without a husband."⁶ Rib-Haddi's point is that because of enemy activity conditions around Byblos were so dangerous that the fields could not be properly cultivated.

That this analogy reflects an older proverb was perceived by the earliest investigators of the texts. Weber, for example, guessed that the original proverb read either "an uncultivated field is like a wife who has no husband," or "a wife who has no husband is like an uncultivated field."⁷

1 For the normalization of *Rīb-Haddi* 'The Compensation of Hadad', see R. Youngblood, *BASOR* 168 (1962), 25.

2 *EA* 68-95; 101-40; 362.

3 Seven times with slight variations, *EA* 74:45-48; 78:13-16; 79:35-38; 81:34-36; 90:39-42; 105:8-10; 116:18-20.

4 Cf. Hebrew *kēlūb* 'cage' (Jer. 5:27; Amos 8:1-2). The regular expression in Akkadian of the simile 'like a bird in a cage' is *kīma eššūr quppi* as, for example, in Sennacherib: *šāšu kīma eššūr quppi qereb Ursalimmu āl šarrūtišu ēsiršu* "As for him, I shut him up in Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage" (*OIP* 2, 33:27-29, for other examples, see *AHW.*, 928b). Note that *huḫāru* 'bird-trap' is more properly the equivalent of Hebrew *paḥ* (cf. Ps. 124:7, etc.).

5 In the Amarna letters URU is not simply a determinative but is generally to be normalized as a construct noun, see Albright and Moran, *JCS* 4 (1950), 165.

6 *EA* 74:17-19; 75:15-17; 81:37-38; 90:42-43.

7 Otto Weber, *Literatur*, 307, addendum xvi; idem, *EA*, 2:1159, cf. Pfeiffer, *ANET*³, 426. The comparison of a wife to a field, especially the plowed earth, is common in agricultural societies in general. See M. Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des Religions* (Paris, 1949), 226f.; G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Harper Torchbooks, New York and Evanston, 1963), 1:95f.; Stanley A. Cook, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites by W. Robertson Smith*, 3rd ed. (reprint: New York, 1969), 108, n. 3, 537. In ancient near eastern literature, for example, in the Instruction of the Vizier of Ptah-hotep (c. 2455 B.C.) advice is given to make one's wife happy, since "she is a profitable field for her lord" (line 330, trans. Wilson, in *ANET*³, 413). In the Quran it is stated: "your wives are as arable land for you, so approach your tilth however you wish" (Sūra 2:223).

While neither of these formulations are found in Akkadian literature, the individual components do occur in close proximity in the Assyrian Collection of bilingual proverbs.⁸ Thus, in a series of declaratory statements apparently expressing similes⁹ we find:

18 erín nu.bandanu.me.a	šābu [ša lā lap]ut[tê]
19 a.šà engarra.in.nu	eq[lu ša l]ā ikkar[i]
20 e.en.bi.nu.nam	bītu ša lā bēli
21 munuz nitá nu.tuku	sinništum ša lā muti

18 Workers without an overseer

19 (are like) a field without a plowman;¹⁰

20 A house without a master

21 (is like) a woman without a husband.

The components of the Byblian analogy are used here to convey an idea not of fecundity, as in Amarna, but of proper authority or control, that is, both the field without a plowman and the wife without a husband are compared to institutions without leaders.¹¹ In the light of the Byblian analogy it is tempting to assume that the lines have been misplaced and that line 18 should go with line 20, and line 19 with line 21. Indeed, Pereman is of the opinion that the original form read: *sinništum ša lā muti kî eqli ša lā ikkari*.¹² This reconstruction is corroborated, not only by our Byblian analogy, but also by an Ethiopic proverb which reads: "Woman without man is like a field without seed."¹³

Comparing this reconstruction with the Byblian formulation we note that, apart from the reversal of the analogy, there are differences in language which compel a closer investigation of the Amarna statement. These differences are mostly due to the well-known fact that the language of the Byblian letters is heavily influenced by the scribe's native Canaanite.¹⁴ This fact

8 Conveniently published in *BWL*, 225f.

9 *BWL*, 229:14-21.

10 Cf. the lexical equation a.šà a.p.in.nu] zu lā er-re-šu "a field without a cultivator" (Hh. XX A iii:7, quoted in *CAD*, s.v. *erēšu*).

11 Similarly the preceding analogies in lines 14-17: "A people without a king (is like) a sheep without a shepherd; a people without a foreman (is like) water without a canal inspector" (trans. Lambert, *BWL*, 232).

12 J. Pereman, *The Book of Assyro-Babylonian Proverbs* (Tel Aviv, 1947), 213, [in Hebrew].

13 *African Proverbs*, compiled by Charlotte and Wolf Leslau (New York, 1962), 22. Charlotte Leslau very kindly informed the author in a letter of July 25, 1973 that this proverb was collected by Professor Wolf Leslau from native informants in a Gurage speaking region of Ethiopia, and that there is probably no written source available. Note that there is a Syriac variant of our analogy in which a woman without a husband is said to be like "a river [bed] without water," E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Laughable Stories . . . Bar Hebraeus* (London, 1897), #123.

14 See the many articles by Albright and Moran, especially the latter's unpublished dissertation "A Syntactical Study of the Dialect of Byblos as Reflected in the Amarna Tablets" (Johns Hopkins, 1950). Cf. Rainey, *El Amarna Tablets; 359-379, AOAT 8* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1970), 2-3; idem, *UF 3* (1971), 161f.; idem, *Israel Oriental Studies 1* (1971), 86-102.

will be borne out in more detail by a word-by-word analysis of the analogy.

eqliya: 'my field',¹⁵ written a . šà as always in Amarna.¹⁶ The occurrence of *iya* for *ī* in the nominative is common in Byblian.¹⁷ For example, *amēlūt āl Gubla u bītiya u aššatiya tiqbūna*¹⁸ *ana yāšīya* "The people of Byblos, my household, and my wife say to me: ('follow the son of Abdi-aširta etc.')." ¹⁹

aššata: 'a woman', written both d a m²⁰ and aš-ša-ta.²¹ In standard Akkadian, *aššatu* 'wife' is distinct from *sinništu* 'woman'.²² However, since *sinništu* does not occur in the Byblian corpus, *aššatu* is used for both 'woman' and 'wife'. This is hardly surprising when one considers that in the scribe's native Canaanite, *att* is likewise used for both 'woman' and 'wife' (cf. Hebrew *iššāb* and Ugaritic *att*).²³

ša lā: 'without'. This way of expressing the preposition 'without' becomes quite common in later Akkadian,²⁴ and especially in Neo-Babylonian.²⁵ In neo-Assyrian and standard Babylonian *ša lā* is often used synonymously with *balum*. For example: (1) cf. the personal name *Ša-lā-ili-mannum* "Without-god-who (can exist)?" and *Mannum-balum-ilišu* "Who-without-his-god (can exist)?"²⁶ (2) *ša lā* interchanges with *balum* in a similar context in Borger's *Esar-*

15 Once written with the third person plural suffix *šunu* in EA 81:37.

16 EA 74:17; 75:15; 90:42; 243:15; 359:rev. 23.

17 Franz M. Th. Böhl, *Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe*, LSS 5/2 (1909; reprint: Leipzig, 1968), #15a.

18 On the third person plural *taqtulū* in Amarna, see Moran, "New Evidence on Canaanite *taqtulū(na)*," *JCS* 5 (1951), 33-35.

19 EA 136:8-10.

20 EA 75:15; 81:37; 90:42.

21 EA 74:17.

22 See CAD A², 462f.; *AHw.*, 83. Thus the occurrence of *sinništu* (not *aššatu*) in the bilingual is significant.

23 For *att* 'woman' in the epics, see, for example, 1D:206-9: *tlbš nṣš ḡzr tšt ḥl b/nšgb ḥrb išt bt'r[t]h w'l tlbš nṣš att* "Then she [takes] and puts on the garb of a warrior, places the kn[ife in] its sheath, places the sword in [its] scabbard; and above she dons the garb of a woman" (trans. Gaster in *Thespis*, 373). In the administrative texts, see, for example, PRU V, 81:1-4: *arb' šr ḡzrm arb' att pḡt aḥt wpḡy aḥd* "fourteen warriors, four women, one girl, and one boy." Translating 'woman' rather than 'wife' here and in texts such as UT 119 makes it much less certain that polygamy was practiced at Ugarit, as is supposed by A. van Selms, *Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature* (London, 1954), 20, and by L. M. Muntingh, "The Social and Legal Status of a Free Ugaritic Female," *JNES* 26, 1967), 106-7.

24 *AHw.*, 521, c2. Note that *ša lā* is used in the bilingual proverbs.

25 Ebeling, *Glossar*, 213. In neo-Babylonian a secondary preposition *šalānu* develops from *ša lā*, see *AHw.*, 521. On the question of whether or not *ša lā* is a borrowing from Aramaic in this period, see S. A. Kaufman, "The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic and the Development of the Aramaic Dialects," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1970), 154, 312-13. In his discussion, however, Kaufman fails to mention that Aramaic *dī lā* 'without' exists in biblical Aramaic (see Rosenthal, *Grammar*, #84, 87) and thus is not "limited to Eastern Aramaic" as he contends (p. 154).

26 Tallqvist, *APN*, 208b; *CAD B*, 71b.

baddon;²⁷ (3) the commentary to *balum* in line eleven of the Theodicy, *abī u bantī īzibū' - innīma bal tarū'a*²⁸ "my parents abandoned me without a guardian," reads: *ba-lu : ša-la*.²⁹ Since *ša lā* is practically nonexistent in Old and Middle Babylonian,³⁰ the Byblian expression no doubt reflects a borrowing from the native Canaanite language; and we suggest that something like Ugaritic *dbl* is the underlying construction. This use of a determinative pronoun and a negative to express "without"³¹ occurs in the Legend of King Keret, *hpt dbl spr tnn dbl hg* "mercenaries without count, regulars without number"³² (1K:90-91).

muta: 'husband', written *mu-ta*.³³ Cf. Ugaritic *mt* and Hebrew (mostly plural, *m^etîm*).³⁴ This word is well attested in Byblian, for example, *PN mut-ši* "PN, her husband."³⁵ Note that after the prepositional phrase *ša lā*, *muta* is in the accusative instead of the expected genitive case, a reasonably well attested feature of Byblian and of Amarna in general.³⁶

mašil: 'is like', written *ma-ši-il*.³⁷ The only occurrence of this verb in the Byblian letters is in this phrase governing the object *aššata*.³⁸ Normally, in both Canaanite and Akkadian, *mšl* is followed by a preposition, for example, Heb. *nimšal le*,³⁹ Akk. *mašil ana*.⁴⁰ Because the verb *mšl* does not occur in the *qal* in Hebrew, *mašil* is usually taken as the Akkadian stative.⁴¹ However, it should be noted that from the point of view of morphology *mašil* could also be a Canaanite perfect (<*mašila*);⁴² cf. the form *ma'id* (<*ma'ida*),⁴³ which is clearly the Canaanite perfect, not the Akkadian stative, which is *mād*.⁴⁴ Elsewhere in Byblian comparisons or

27 Borger, *Fsarb.*, 42, where *ša lā ilāni* (line 34) interchanges with *balum ilāni* (line 43). See Borger's note to line 29 on pages 41-42.

28 *BWL* 70:11.

29 *Ibid.*

30 The only occurrences are in Old Babylonian (Lambert-Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*, 100, vi:14, and Dossin, *TCL* 18, 95:6; 136:13 [letters]), see *GAG*, #115s, and *Ergänzungen zu GAG*, #115s.

31 In *UT*, #13.74, Gordon calls this construction "an adjectivalized relative clause of privation or negation."

32 Cf. Gray, *The KRT Text*, 40f.

33 *EA* 74:18; 75:15; 81:37; 90:43.

34 But singular in the personal names *m^etūšēlaḫ* and *m^etūšā'ēl*.

35 *EA* 85:54; 85:55, etc.

36 Böhl, *Die Sprache*, #33.

37 *EA* 74:18; 81:37; 90:43; 75:16 (*ma-ši-el*).

38 This is thus another example in the Semitic languages of an intransitive verb taking a direct object (for which see Brockelmann, *Grundriss*, 2:198a, d; *Gesenius-Kautsch-Cowley*, #117; *GAG*, #144d; *Ergänzungen zu GAG*, #144d).

39 See the standard Hebrew lexica.

40 *AHw.*, 623b. For example, *ša ana aḫāmīš mašlu* "which is like its fellow" (*EA* 11:rev. 11).

41 Ebeling, *EA*, 2:1466; *idem*, *BA* 8, 52; *AHw.*, 623b.

42 The loss of the final vowel of the perfect is frequent in Amarna; see Böhl, *Die Sprache*, #27f. Cf. *šapara* (*EA* 65:7) and *šapar* (*EA* 141:18), and note *šakan*, *ša'al*, *šabat*, etc.

43 *EA* 89:46, 52; 105:38; 116:29.

44 *AHw.*, 574a.

similes, the preposition *kīma* is used—for example, *kīma eššūri*,⁴⁵ *kīma tâmti*,⁴⁶ *kīma Šamaš*,⁴⁷ etc.

aššum bali: 'because there is no/for lack of'. There is no parallel for this construction in standard Akkadian. The regular negative after *aššu(m)* is *lā*, not *balum*. For example, *aššu(m)* as a preposition expressing negative purpose (exactly like *ana lā*), *aššu lā naparšudišu* "in order not to let him escape";⁴⁸ *aššu(m)* as a conjunction negating a causal clause, *aššum lā imtaliku* "because he did not think/thoughtlessly."⁴⁹ Furthermore, the form *bali* is found only in Amarna, and in its three other occurrences in Byblian it is used as a simple negative: (1) *ana bali šuribi še'im ana āl Šumuri* "not to permit the bringing in of barley to Šumuri";⁵⁰ (2) *šumma libbi šarri bali uššar šābē piṭāti yašpur ana Yanḫame u ana Biḫura* "If the king does not wish to send archers, let him write to Yanḫama and Biḫura";⁵¹ (3) *bali ašī šābē piṭ[āti ina] šlatti annīti [u la]qūmī ālāni Gubla* "If the archers do not come forth this year, then they will take the cities of Byblos."⁵²

Since the regular negative after *aššum* is *lā* and since *bali* is used elsewhere in Amarna as a negative, it would seem that *aššum bali* here stands for *aššum lā*. However, the context requires a conjunctive use of *aššum*—"because there is no/for lack of plowing"—and not a prepositional use—"in order not to plow"—which would be meaningless.⁵³ The former idea is expressed in Akkadian by the addition of the verb *išū* 'to have', for example, *aššum lā išū i-ri-tam* "because he has no protection(?)/for lack of protection(?)".⁵⁴

This difficulty can be overcome once we assume that *aššum bali* is not an Akkadian expression but one reflecting the scribe's native language. The expected underlying construction would then be something like the common Hebrew phrase *kî 'ên*, as is used, for example, in Jer. 14:6, *kālû 'ênêhem kî 'ên 'ēšēb* "Their eyes fail because there is no fodder/for lack of fodder." However, Hebrew *kî* and *'ên*, are regularly represented in Byblian by *inūma*⁵⁵ and *yānu*,⁵⁶ respectively. Thus, *u kinanna palḫāti danniš danniš inūma yānu amēla ša ušēzibani ištu qātīšunu* "and that is why I am very much afraid, for there is no one [=Heb. *kî 'ên* 'iš] who can save me from them."⁵⁷ Consequently, Moran's suggestion that Hebrew *mibbēlî*

45 EA 74:45 and passim.

46 EA 89:47.

47 EA 99:24.

48 TCL 3, 333 (Sargon).

49 Gilg XI:168. For more examples of these usages, see CAD A², 466f. and AHw., 84.

50 EA 98:17-18. Cf. *lā ile'u šurib* (109:56).

51 EA 117:59-61. Cf. *lā ile'u uššar* (82:22; 113:29; 126:7).

52 EA 129:40-42. Cf. *lā ile'u ašē* (81:21; 104:50-51).

53 Equally meaningless would be to assume that *aššum* is the missing preposition which *mašil* requires.

54 BWL 88:285 (Theodicy). In this respect *aššum X lā išū* "because there is no X" is parallel to the relative clause construction *ša X lā išū* "who has no X"; for examples, see CAD I, 290f. and AHw., 402f.

55 Albright, BASOR 89 (1943), 30, n. 7; Moran, A Syntactical Study, 67, 133.

56 Moran, A Syntactical Study, 14f.

57 EA 74:43-45. For the same idea, see EA 69:23-24; 74:32-33, and for other examples of *inūma yānu*, see EA 92:22; 94:5-6; 101:6-7; 119:41-42.

underlies *aššum bali* is much more plausible.⁵⁸ For not only is Hebrew *b^elî* formally identical with Byblian *bali* but there are also many examples of *mibb^elî* used in the sense of “because there is no/for lack of,” e.g., *lākēn gālāb ‘ammī mibb^elî da’at* “Thus my people have gone into exile for lack of knowledge/unwittingly” (Isa. 5:13).

erēšim: ‘plowing’, written syllabically *i-ri-ši/šim*.⁵⁹ Some scholars take this form as the *nomen agentis errēšim* ‘plowman’,⁶⁰ while others take it as the infinitive ‘plowing’ or ‘cultivation’.⁶¹ Supporting the first interpretation is the fact that the analogy favors the mention of a person parallel to *mutu* ‘husband’, and this point of view is bolstered by the appearance of *ikkaru* ‘plowman’ in the bilingual text.⁶² The second interpretation can be supported by both morphological and syntactical considerations. First, the writing *i-ri-ši/šim* indicates an infinitive. While it is true that the Byblian scribe is by no means meticulous in writing doubled letters, he does exhibit a remarkable degree of consistency in writing doubled letters in initial weak verbs of this type. For example, note the forms *ip-pu-uš* (88:10), *ip-pu-šu-na* (92:15), *ir-ru-bu* (71:35;76:21), etc. Second, in its four other occurrences (three in Byblian), *bali* is followed by an infinitive (*bali šūrībi*, *bali uššar*, *bali ašê*, *balīme urrud*),⁶³ so it seems very likely that *erēšim* is also an infinitive.

In our analysis of the language of Rib-Haddi’s analogy we have attempted to show that much of it is influenced by the scribe’s native language. As has been pointed out above,⁶⁴ this is true of Byblian as a whole, which can only be fully understood when its Canaanite elements are clearly identified and explained.

58 Moran, *A Syntactical Study*, 14.

59 EA 74:19; 75:17; 81:38; 90:44. The West Semitic form of this verb (*ḥarāšu* = Heb. *ḥāraš*, Ug. *ḥrt*) appears twice as a gloss in 226:11 and 365:11.

60 CAD A², 464, 466; B, 71b; E, 249b, 305; BWL, 233; AHw., 243b.

61 Albright, *Supplements to VT*, 8 (1955), 7; Ebeling, *BA* 8, 59; Moran, *A Syntactical Study*, 14; Pfeiffer, *ANET*³, 426.

62 And perhaps by the lexical equation “a field without a cultivator,” mentioned in n. 10, above.

63 EA 98:17-18; 117:59-61; 129:40-42; 191:9-10.

64 *Ad* n. 14.