A Famous Analogy of Rib-Haddi

DAVID MARCUS
Columbia University

Of the native Syro-Palestinian princes reporting to the Egyptian court, Rib Haddi, prince of Byblos, was the most prolific writer. His sixty-nine letters 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 quoted is the one in which he compares his forced confinement in Byblos to that of a bird in a trap or cage: *kīma eṣṣūri ša ina lībbi ḫubāru/kilābu*; *śaknat kīšūma anāku ina āl* "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." 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."
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. Thus, in a series of declaratory statements apparently expressing similes we find:

18 erín nu. bandanu. me. a šābu [ša lā la sp [tē]
19 a. ša engar. ra in. nu eq[lu ša lā ikkar[i]
20 e en. bīn. nu. nam bītu ša lā bēli
21 munuz nitānu. tuku sinnītum ša lā muti

18 Workers without an overseer
19 (are like) a field without a plowman,
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. 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: sinnītum ša lā muti kī eqāš ša lā ikkari. This reconstruction is corroborated, not only by our Byblian analogy, but also by an Ethiopian proverb which reads: “Woman without man is like a field without seed.”

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. This fact

---

8 Conveniently published in *BWL*, 225f.
9 *BWL*, 229:14-21.
10 Cf. the lexical equation a. ša a pin. nu. lā er-rešu “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).
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.
will be borne out in more detail by a word-by-word analysis of the analogy.

eqliya: ‘my field’,15 written a. ša as always in Amarna. 16 The occurrence of īya for r in the nominative is common in Byblian. 17 For example, amēlūt āl Gubla u bītiya u aššatiya tiqbûna18 ana yâṣiya “The people of Byblos, my household, and my wife say to me: (‘follow the son of Abdi-āšīrta 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, aṭṭ is likewise used for both ‘woman’ and ‘wife’ (cf. Hebrew īsšāb and Ugaritic aṭṭ).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-lâ-il-munnû “Without-god-who (can exist)?” and Munnû-balûm-ilisû “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.
18 On the third person plural taqtulû in Amarna, see Moran, “New Evidence on Canaanite taqtulû(na),” JCS 5 (1951), 33-35.
19 EA 138:6-10.
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 aṭṭ ‘woman’ in the epics, see, for example, 1 D:206-9: tibā nps ɠ ōr tī l ʒi [ h ʃaɪ ɡb ʃr b ʃt b t r[t]h wʼ t tibā nps aṭṭ “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: arbʼ ʃr ʒr m arvbʼ aṭṭ pgt aṭṭ wpgy abyd “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 d 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.
The commentary to balum in line eleven of the Theodicy, abī u banti zibû'-i
innûma bal tarû'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
do not 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 bg
"mercenary without count, regulars without number" 32 (1K:90-91).

mûta: 'husband', 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, mîš is
followed by a preposition, for example, Heb. nimsal 1î. 39 Akk. mašiša-na. 40 Because the verb
mîš does not occur in the qal in Hebrew, mašiš is usually taken as the Akkadian stative. 41 However,
it should be noted that from the point of view of morphology mašîl could also be a
Canaanite perfect (<mašîla); 42 cf. the form ma'id (<ma'idâ); 43 which is clearly the Canaanite
perfect, not the Akkadian stative, which is ma'd. 44 Elsewhere in Byblian comparisons or

---

27 Borger, Fsrh., 42, where ša lā iliini (line 34) interchanges with balum iliini (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-hasis, 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 adjetivalized relative clause of privation or nega-
tion."
32 Cf. Gray, The KRT Text, 40f.
33 EA 74:18; 75:15; 81:37; 90:43.
34 But singular in the personal names mətšûqāb and mətšûšā.".
35 EA 85:54; 85:55, etc.
36 Böh, Die Sprache, #33.
37 EA 74:18; 81:37; 90:43; 75:16 (mašî-š). 38 This is thus another example in the Semitic languages of an intransitive verb taking a direct object
(for which see Brockelman, Grundriss, 2:198a, d; Gesenius-Kautz-Cowley, #117; GAG, #144d; Erg-
anzungen zu GAG, #144d.
39 See the standard Hebrew lexic.
40 AHw., 623b. For example, ša ana aššamiš mašî "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 Böh, Die Sprache, #27f. Cf. šapara (EA 65:7?) and šaper (EA 141:18), and note šakan, ša'al, šabar, etc.
similes, the preposition kīma is used—for example, kīma ʾeṣṣūri,\textsuperscript{45} kīma tāmti,\textsuperscript{46} kīma Šamaš,\textsuperscript{47} etc.

\textit{aṣṣum bali}: ‘because there is no/for lack of’. There is no parallel for this construction in standard Akkadian. The regular negative after \textit{aṣṣu(m)} is īāa, not \textit{balum}. For example, \textit{aṣṣu(m)} as a preposition expressing negative purpose (exactly like \textit{ana lāa}), \textit{aṣṣu lā nāparšadīīu} “in order not to let him escape,”\textsuperscript{48} \textit{aṣṣu(m)} as a conjunction negating a causal clause, \textit{aṣṣum lā intaliku} “because he did not think/thoughtlessly.”\textsuperscript{49} Furthermore, the form \textit{bali} is found only in Amarna, and in its three other occurrences in Byblian it is used as a simple negative: (1) \textit{ana bali šīribi šem ana āl Šumurī} “not to permit the bringing in of barley to Šumuri,”\textsuperscript{50} (2) \textit{šumma lībbi šarr bali uṣṣar šābē piṭāti yāṣpur ana Yanhame u ana Bījura} “If the king does not wish to send archers, let him write to Yanhama and Bījura;”\textsuperscript{51} (3) \textit{bali aṣṣu šābē piṭ jātī ina šettī anni}{u} “If the archers do not come forth this year, then they will take the cities of Byblos.”\textsuperscript{52}

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

This difficulty can be overcome once we assume that \textit{aṣṣum 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 ʾiš ‘en, as is used, for example, in Jer. 14:6, ʾiš ‘en ‘ēsb “Their eyes fail because there is no fodder/for lack of fodder.” However, Hebrew ʾiš and ‘en, are regularly represented in Byblian by \textit{inīma}\textsuperscript{55} and \textit{yānu},\textsuperscript{56} respectively. Thus, \textit{u kīannu paltjāti danniš danniš inīma ʾaynu amēla ša uṣṭižani ʾišu qatisunu} “and that is why I am very much afraid, for there is no one [=Heb. ʾiš ‘en ‘ēš] who can save me from them.”\textsuperscript{57}

Consequently, Moran’s suggestion that Hebrew \textit{mibberi} \textsuperscript{58}
underlies askum bali is much more plausible.\(^{58}\) For not only is Hebrew b'li formally identical with Byblian bali but there are also many examples of mibb'li used in the sense of "because there is no/for lack of," e.g., lākēn gālāb 'ammi mibb'li da'at "Thus my people have gone into exile for lack of knowledge/unwittingly" (Isa. 5:13).

erēšim: 'plowing', written syllabically i-ri-sim.\(^{59}\) Some scholars take this form as the nomen agentis erēšim '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-sim 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 i-pu-š (88:10), i-pu-šu-na (92:15), i-ru-bu (71:35;76:21), etc. Second, in its four other occurrences (three in Byblian), bali is followed by an infinitive (bali šuribi, bali uššar, bali aše, bali mel 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 (ḥara'ū = Heb. ḫāraš, Ug. ħar) 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.


\(^{64}\) Ad n. 14.