



Gula as Ninkarrak in the Middle Babylonian Onomastics

Elena Devecchi

Università degli Studi di Torino, Italia

Abstract Through the analysis of two administrative tablets from Kassite Nippur, this paper examines variation in theophoric elements within personal names – most notably, the alternation between Gula and Ninkarrak in reference to the same individual. The close parallels in structure, content, and ductus strongly suggest that both tablets were produced by the same scribe. This observation offers rare and concrete evidence for the ongoing syncretism between these once-distinct healing goddesses during the Kassite period. Moreover, the study sheds light on scribal practices within the administrative apparatus, highlighting both deliberate stylistic variation and a rather high level of scribal education.

Keywords Gula. Ninkarrak. Middle Babylonian onomastics. Kassite Nippur. Administrative texts. Scribal practices.

Summary 1 MUN 50 and PBS 2/2 106. – 2 Gula and Ninkarrak. – 3 The Scribe of MUN 50 and PBS 2/2 106.

1 MUN 50 and PBS 2/2 106

Recent research on the administrative texts from Kassite Nippur has revealed that the tablets published as MUN 50 (CBS 9254) and PBS 2/2 106 (CBS 3481) not only share similar content and a similar organization¹ but actually record the same information regarding amounts of barley that were either delivered or expected to be delivered by certain individuals at the city-gates of Nippur.

MUN 50 is an almost complete tablet which dates to the 20th year of Kurigalzu II (l. 1). According to its only partially preserved preamble, it records “barley, late *miksu*-payment that [...] in/at the city-gates” (l. 2). The text is organized into two columns: the first lists amounts of barley, while the second records the names of the individuals responsible for the deliveries, as well as the names of several city-gates, which are associated with subtotals. PBS 2/2 106 is a four-column text whose date, preamble, and column-headings are not preserved. Based on their content, however, it is evident that the first three columns record amounts of cereals that are interrelated: in most rows, the figure in the first column corresponds to the sum of the figures in the second and third columns (see, e.g., l. 26); sometimes the quantities in the first and second columns coincide, and the third column does not contain a quantity (see, e.g., l. 27). In her discussion of the *miksu*, Ellis suggested that “the first column shows assessments or amounts due, while the second shows amounts paid, and the third either second installments or amounts still owing”.² Like the second column of MUN 50, the fourth column of PBS 2/2 106 also records

The research was carried out within the framework of the project *Exploring Scribal Minds: The Structural and Visual Organization of Knowledge in Mesopotamian Archives and Libraries* (PRIN 2022 no. 2022ZST22H), funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. I would like to thank Giulia Lentini for discussing these texts with me and Philip Jones, Associate Curator and Keeper of the Babylonian Section at the Penn Museum, for providing me with detailed photographs of PBS 2/2 106.

¹ As already noted by Ellis 1976, 156-7.

² Ellis 1976, 156.



Peer review

Submitted 2025-03-03
Accepted 2025-04-15
Published 2025-08-07

Open access

© 2025 Devecchi | © 4.0



Citation Devecchi, E. (2025). “Gula as Ninkarrak in the Middle Babylonian Onomastics”. *KASKAL. Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico*, n.s., 2, 1-6.

the names of the individuals responsible for the deliveries as well as the names of several city-gates, with subtotals. A close comparison of the two texts shows that the information recorded in PBS 2/2 106: 26-35 largely matches that in MUN 50: 3-9, 12-15, 18; it follows that PBS 2/2 106 is a contemporary of MUN 50 and also deals with the delivery of barley as a late *miksu*-payment.

Since this discovery allows for improved readings and restorations in both texts, it seems worthwhile to reproduce here the relevant passages, with new readings set in **bold**.

MUN 50: 1-18

U.E.	MU.20.KAM	<i>Ku-ri-ga</i> [l-zu
Obv.	ŠE NÍG.KUD.DA	<i>ar-ku-ú ša i-na</i> KÁ.GAL ^{bi.a} <i>a-ṛna</i> ¹ x[
3	10.0.0	^{md} 30- <i>eri</i> ₄ - <i>ba</i> DUMU ^m [<i>Hu-na-bi</i>]
4	9.0.0	^m Il-lu-[u]l-lu ₄ DUMU ^m Šu[m-š <u>u</u> -nu] ⁱ
5		^{md} NIN.İMMA- <i>ki-pi</i> ₄ -š <u>u</u> DUMU ^m x[
6	PAP 19.0.0	KÁ.GAL A
7	8.4.2	^m Ta- <i>qí-ša</i> - ^d Nin-kar-ra-ak DU [MU ^m LÀL- ^d UTU]
8		^m Ul-tu-DINGIR DUMU ^m Bi-x[
9	PAP	KÁ.GAL ^d IŠKU[R]
10	1.2.2	^{md} En-líl-SIG ₅ -iq DUMU ^m LÀL-É.KU[R]
11	2.1.4	^m ŠEŠ-SUM-ṛna- ^d AMAR.UTU ¹ DUMU ^m Sa-a[<i>ḫ</i> ² -
12	PAP 3.4.0	KÁ.[GAL ^{uru} <i>Hí-lu-ni</i>] ¹ KI ¹ .[TA]
Rev.	PAP 2.0.3	K[Á.GAL ^{uru} <i>Hí-lu-ni</i>] AN.[TA] ⁱⁱ
14	PAP 4.4.4	K[Á.GAL IG]I.BI ŠEŠ.UNUG ^k [.ŠÈ]
15	PAP 11.4.2	KÁ.GA[L] <i>á-ki-t</i> [e]
16	PAP 2.3.3	É lú[M]UNU ₅ ^{meš} KÁ.GA[L
17	EN 1.2.1	<i>ša URU ma-ak-su</i>
18	PAP 3.0.0	KÁ DUMU ^{meš} LU[GAL]

ⁱ Sassmannshausen 2001, 244 hypothesized either ^mG[u or Šu[m-; the second option is now supported by parallelism with PBS 2/2 106: 29, which confirms that Illullu's patronymic is Šumšunu.

ⁱⁱ Cf. K[Á.GAL]¹x¹-ni-DINGIR [] in Sassmannshausen 2001, 244. The PAP at the beginning of the line is present in Sassmannshausen's copy of the tablet, but missing in his transliteration.

PBS 2/2 106: 26-35

26	PAP 3.0.0	1.4.3	1.0.3	KÁ DUMU ^{meš} LUGAL ^m TI-su- ^d AMAR.UTU
27	¹ 1 ¹ .4.2	11.4.2	<i>a-na</i> LÚ ^{meš}	KÁ.GAL <i>á-ki-te</i>
28	[10.0.0]	¹ 12 ² .x.x ¹	¹ x.x.4 ² ¹	^{md} 30- <i>i-ri-ba-am</i> DUMU ^m Hu-na-bi
29	[9.0.0]	8ⁱ.4.4	0.0.2	^m Il-lu-ul-lu DUMU ^m Šum-š <u>u</u> -nu ^{md} NIN-SIG ₅
30	[19.0.0]		0.0.2	KÁ.GAL A
31	[8.4]. ¹ 2 ¹	8.4.2		^m Ta- <i>qí-ša</i> - ^d Gu-la DUMU ^m LÀL- ^d UTU ^m Ul-tu-[DINGIR]
32	[8.4.2]			KÁ.GAL ^d IŠKUR
33	[			KÁ.GAL ^{uru} <i>Hí-lu-ni</i> KI.TA
34	[		¹ x ¹	KÁ.GAL AN.TA
35	[			KÁ].GAL I[GI]. ¹ BI ¹ ŠE[Š.UNUG ^{ki} .ŠÈ]

ⁱ Clay's copy has five horizontal signs, suggesting an amount of 5 kor, but collation of the photograph clearly shows that the correct amount is 8.

2 Gula and Ninkarrak

In addition to contributing a new element to the reconstruction of the documentary chain used by scribes to track the collection of agricultural revenues, the parallelism between the two texts reveals that the individual whose name is spelled ^mTa-*qí-ša*-^dNin-kar-ra-ak in MUN 50: 7 corresponds to the person identified as ^mTa-*qí-ša*-^dGu-la in PBS 2/2 106: 31. This provides concrete evidence of the syncretism between the once-distinct healing goddesses Gula and Ninkarrak, with the former gradually absorbing

the latter's identity – a process that began in the Old Babylonian period.³ Although this phenomenon is well documented in earlier sources, it is rarely attested in the Middle Babylonian period, making this case of onomastic variation within a single individual's name particularly significant.⁴

In the Middle Babylonian onomastic repertoire, Gula is far more commonly attested than Ninkarrak. Bartelmus has identified 39 personal names from Nippur which feature Gula as a theophoric element,⁵ to which can be added at least 27 names from texts likely originating in Dūr-Enlilē, and 10 from Ur [tab. 1]. Conversely, Ninkarrak occurs very rarely in personal names:⁶ to my knowledge, the few known attestations come from the legend of a seal belonging to the diviner Luši-ana-nūr-Ninkarrak⁷ and from the colophon of the Middle Assyrian copies of *Ninīsina's Journey to Nippur* that were based on “a *Vorlage* (GABA.RI) of Nippur and Babylon” written “according to the wording of the written tablet of Iqīša-Ninkarrak, son of Ninurta-bāni”.⁸

Given the predominance of Gula in both personal names and other textual contexts,⁹ it is possible that Ninkarrak was retained primarily as a learned Sumerogram used to represent the goddess's name in more formal or scholarly contexts. However, since its actual pronunciation as theophoric element in personal names cannot be determined with certainty, a phonetic rendering is preferred.

3 The Scribe of MUN 50 and PBS 2/2 106

It should be noted that there are also other differences in the spelling of personal names between the two texts, such as ^{md}30-*eri*₄-*ba* in MUN 50: 3 vs. ^{md}30-*i-ri-ba-am* in PBS 2/2 106: 28, and ^mIl-lu-[u]l-lu₄ in MUN 50: 4 vs. ^mIl-lu-ul-lu in PBS 2/2 106: 29. It is worth noting that the old-fashioned spelling ^{md}30-*i-ri-ba-am* in PBS 2/2 106 is otherwise unique;¹⁰ however, for another personal name the same text uses the more common spelling ^mEN-*eri*₄-*ba* (PBS 2/2 106: 19).

On the other hand, a preliminary palaeographic analysis reveals significant similarities in the ductus: in addition to the overall appearance of the handwriting on both tablets, the sign shapes in the words KÁ.GAL and *Ta-qí-ša* are particularly noteworthy [tab. 2].¹¹

In light of these palaeographic features and the aforementioned connection between the content of the two texts, it seems quite plausible that MUN 50 and PBS 2/2 106 were written by the same scribe. The alternating use of Gula and Ninkarrak, along with the different spellings of other personal names, may therefore reflect his stylistic choices, suggesting a deliberate preference for variation when drafting his texts. Moreover, the choice of Ninkarrak over Gula in MUN 50 and the archaic spelling ^{md}30-*i-ri-ba-am* in PBS 2/2 106 may serve as evidence of a rather high level of education for a scribe working in the administration.¹² However, the possibility that some of these variants could result from the ‘editorial history’ of the documents should also be considered. In particular, PBS 2/2 106, which is much longer and more complex than MUN 50, may have been compiled by integrating data from different tablets, thereby inheriting the varying spellings used in those sources.¹³

³ See Westenholz 2010, 385; Sibbing-Plantholt 2022, 115-23.

⁴ Cf. the alternative writings Puzur-Gula and Puzur-Ninkarrak for the same individual, attested in Old Babylonian documents from Sippar and Isin (Westenholz 2010, 385-6).

⁵ Bartelmus 2017, 310.

⁶ Bartelmus 2017, 311.

⁷ Known from impressions on several clay sealings found at Nippur, it is catalogued as seal no. 29 in Matthews 1992 and as no. 163 in Stiehler-Alegria 1996; see also Hölscher 1996, 132.

⁸ KAR 15: 14'-16' and KAR 16: 28'-30' (Wagensonner 2008).

⁹ See the attestations collected by Bartelmus 2017, 278-310, including examples from royal inscriptions, *kudurrus*, inscriptions on votive objects, and seal legends. Gula is also the most commonly attested name of the goddess in administrative texts referring to her temples (Sassmannshausen 2001, 158-61; van Soldt 2015, 585; Devecchi 2020, 387).

¹⁰ See the attestations of *Sin-eriba*, and cf. also the spellings of other personal names of the type DN-*eriba* and *Eriba-DN* in Hölscher 1996, 187 and 259 (under *riābu/rābu*).

¹¹ These observations are based on photographs and should be confirmed through a more thorough palaeographic analysis of the original tablets.

¹² Cf. Sassmannshausen's remarks about the scribe who wrote the ration list MUN 112: although he used some rare phonetic values to write some personal names, in the rest of the tablet he adhered to spellings more frequently attested in the administrative documents (Sassmannshausen 2002, 213-14).

¹³ In this respect, note the different pairs of names in MUN 50: 5-6 (Illullu son of Šumšunu, Ninimma-kī(n)-pišu son of ... [...]) and PBS 2/2 106: 29 (Illullu son of Šumšunu, Bēltu-mudammīq), suggesting that the two texts did not depend on each other.

Table 1 Personal names with Gula as theophoric element in Middle Babylonian texts from Nippur (see Hölscher 1996; Sassmannshausen 2001; Tenney 2011; Bartelmus 2017, 311), Dūr-Enlilē[?] (see van Soldt 2015; Levavi 2017; Devecchi 2020), and Ur (see Gurney 1974, 11-15; 1983, 197-9)

Personal name	Place
Amīl-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?] , Ur
Arad-Gula	Nippur
Banâ-ša-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Bīt ² -Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Bunna-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Bunni-Gula	Ur
Ēmid-ana-Gula	Nippur, Ur
Gimil-Gula	Nippur
Gula-asāt	Nippur
Gula-balāṭa-ē/īriš	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Gula-dīninni	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Gula-ē/īriš	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?] , Ur
Gula-la-...	Nippur
Gula-(m)uballit	Nippur
Gula-mušallim	Nippur
Gula-nāširat	Nippur
Gula-pilaḥ	Nippur
Gula-rēmanni	Nippur
Gula-šarrat	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Gula-šemat	Ur
Gula-šuma-ušur	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Gula-šuma-ušarši	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Gula-šumu-lišir	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?] , Ur
Gula-zī... (?)	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Ibni-Gula	Nippur
Iddin-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Iqīša-Gula	Nippur
Irēmši-Gula	Nippur
Irība-Gula	Ur
Kidin-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Kunni-Gula	Nippur
KUR-Gula	Nippur
Libūr-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Lūši-ana-nūr-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Muballitāt-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Puzur-Gula	Nippur
Qīšat-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Rabâ-ša-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?] , Ur
Rabât-amât ² /pî ² -Gula	Nippur
Rabât-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Rabia-ša-Gula [?]	Nippur
Rimūt-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?] , Ur
Rīšat-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Ša-Gula	Nippur
Ša-šilli-Gula	Nippur
Šīgû-Gula	Nippur
Šummak-lā-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Ṭāb-kidin-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Ṭāb-libbi-Gula	Ur
Taqīša-Gula	Nippur
Tarība-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē [?]
Tarībti-Gula	Dūr-Enlilē [?]

Personal name	Place
Tukultī-Gula	Nippur, Dūr-Enlilē?
Usāt-Gula	Nippur
Ušur-Gula	Nippur

Table 2 Comparison of the shapes of the sign sequences KÁ.GAL and ^mTa-qí-ša in MUN 50 and PBS 2/2 106

MUN 50	PBS 2/2 106
KÁ.GAL, l. 6	KÁ.GAL, l. 30
	
KÁ.GAL, l. 9	KÁ.GAL, l. 33
	
^m Ta-qí-ša, l. 7	^m Ta-qí-ša, l. 31
	

Bibliography

- Bartelmus, A. (2017). "Die Götter der Kassitenzeit. Eine Analyse ihres Vorkommens in zeitgenössischen Textquellen". Bartelmus, A.; Sternitzke, K. (Hrsgg), *Karduniaš. Babylonia under the Kassites = The Proceedings of the Symposium Held in Munich, 30 June to 2 July 2011*, Bd. 1. Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 245-312. Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie 11/1.
- Clay, A.T. (1912). *Documents from the Temple Archives of Nippur Dated in the Reigns of Cassite Rulers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Publications of the Babylonian Section 2/2.
- Devecchi, E. (2020). *Middle Babylonian Texts in the Cornell Collection. Part 2, The Earlier Kings*. University Park (PA): Eisenbrauns. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 37.
- Ellis, M. deJ. (1976). *Agriculture and the State in Ancient Mesopotamia: An Introduction to Problems of Land Tenure*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Occasional Publications of the Babylonian Fund 1.
- Gurney, O.R. (1974). *Ur Excavations Texts VII: Middle Babylonian Legal Documents and Other Texts*. London: British Museum Publications.
- Gurney, O.R. (1983). *The Middle Babylonian Legal and Economic Texts from Ur*. Oxford: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
- Hölscher, M. (1996). *Die Personennamen der kassitenzeitlichen Texte aus Nippur*. Münster: Rhema. IMGULA 1.
- Levavi, Y. (2017). "Four Middle-Babylonian Legal Documents Concerning Prison". *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*, 111, 87-108.
- Matthews, D.M. (1992). *The Kassite Glyptic of Nippur*. Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 116.
- Sassmannshausen, L. (2001). *Beiträge zur Verwaltung und Gesellschaft Babyloniens in der Kassitenzeit*. Mainz am Rhein: Philip von Zabern. Baghdader Forschungen 21.
- Sassmannshausen, L. (2002). "Zur babylonischen Schreiberausbildung". *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, 33, 211-22.
- Sibbing-Plantholt, I. (2022). *The Image of Mesopotamian Divine Healers: Healing Goddesses and the Legitimization of Professional asûs in the Mesopotamian Medical Marketplace*. Leiden; Boston: Brill. Cuneiform Monographs 53.
- Stiehler-Alegria Delgado, G. (1996). *Die kassitische Glyptik*. München; Wien: Profil Verlag. Münchener vorderasiatische Studien 18.
- Tenney, J. (2011). *Life at the Bottom of Babylonian Society: Servile Laborers at Nippur in the 14th and 13th Centuries BC*. Leiden; Boston: Brill. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 51.

- van Soldt, W.H. (2015). *Middle Babylonian Texts in the Cornell University Collections*. Part I, *The Later Kings*. Bethesda (MD): CDL Press. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 30.
- Wagensonner, K. (2008). "Nin-Isina(k)s Journey to Nippur: A Bilingual Divine Journey Revisited". *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 98, 249-76.
- Westenholz, J.G. (2010). "Ninkarrak: An Akkadian Goddess in Sumerian Guise". Shehata, D. et al. (Hrsgg), *Von Göttern und Menschen: Beiträge zu Literatur und Geschichte des Alten Orients. Festschrift für Brigitte Groneberg*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 377-405. Cuneiform Monographs 41.