Introduction to Transcription and Translation of Maqlû

The transcription and translation of the text are given in facing columns. I would offer here a few words about the method used to create the transcription (or, as some call it, normalization) and translation of the standard text of Maqlû.

Transcription

Usually the transcription follows the main Nineveh Assyrian text(s), that is, the Nineveh Assyrian manuscript(s) on which the text is most fully preserved; but sometimes the transcription follows a Nineveh (Assyrian) text that I consider to have a better reading. When the Nineveh (Assyrian) texts are broken, I have restored the text from other manuscripts, usually first from Assyrian manuscripts and then from Babylonian ones. The readings presented in the transcription are, therefore, not always those that I deem to be the best or the most original. But, here and there, even when Nineveh (Assyrian) readings are preserved, I have made minor adjustments based upon other traditions; furthermore, when I regard all Nineveh (Assyrian) manuscripts as wrong, I have sometimes followed other manuscripts or emended the text. Thus, in the main, the transcription agrees with the composite transliteration.

As already noted, our texts are seldom well preserved. Since the standard text presented here does not and cannot follow only one manuscript, the text is drawn from several manuscripts. Brackets indicate that a sign is broken or missing. The use of brackets in the transcription is loose; effectively, brackets are used to indicate to the reader that the text is not fully preserved. But even when brackets have been used, the text is usually certain; when it is not, I have indicated so by means of a note or a question mark. In the transcription, a question mark in parentheses, viz. (?), indicates that a reading or restoration is uncertain. To avoid an overloaded presentation, I have tried to keep the use of quarter-brackets to a minimum, especially within words. Not infrequently, when the text is only very slightly damaged, this has not been indicated. Generally, I have used full square brackets around letters sometimes even when quarter-brackets around a larger segment would have been more accurate. I have tried to use quarter-brackets only for long stretches of text or for full words.

Scribes will often write ki.min as a ditto mark. Unless there is some uncertainty, I have treated ki.min as if it were a logogram and simply given the text that it represented. The degree to which ki.min is preserved may determine the degree to which the text, even when certain, is represented as broken. ki.min is usually not included among the variant readings.

Some variants have been included in the notes. Those cited represent lexical and semantic differences, as well as pluses and minuses, transpositions, and some scribal errors; normally, however, orthographic, phonological, or morphological variations are not indicated, except where these variants are or might be semantically significant. For details, the reader should consult the score, in which all manuscripts have been presented in a synoptic fashion.

Here I should comment about a phonological decision that is reflected in the transcription: In addition to indicating an e vowel where it is a consequence of the occurrence of ʾ3–5 in the root or is clearly indicated by orthography, I have usually rendered i preceding syllable-final r or h as e in verbs and nouns even when I have not rendered i as e in other forms of the word where the following r or h begins a new syllable: e.g., lipāʾtīrī but lipāʾtēr, etc. I hope that this does not lead to any confusion, but I thought it wiser to render i before final r/h as e rather than either ignoring the e vowel in this circumstance or just sometimes rendering the vowel as e. (In the score and the composite edition, I have been more conservative and usually render the vowel as i.) However, I have retained i when I

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was concerned that the reader might have some difficulty identifying the dictionary entry of a noun (thus, e.g., di˘hmemnu, not de˘hmemnu, sîrtu, not sêrtu), as well as when this vowel represented the 3rd person prefix vowel of a verb (thus, e.g., li˘hmut, not le˘hmut). I have also retained i when I found a vocalization with e to be very peculiar.

I should also note that while I generally do not lengthen short vowels before suffixes, I do lengthen the case ending of feminine plural nouns and plural adjectives before suffixes on the grounds that this length is due to analogy (the long vowel being an allomorph) and not to a change of stress (the lengthened vowel being an allophone)—see GAG §65k and especially Borger BAL 2 vol. II p. 163: §65k–l. I also indicate the length of the final vowel of third weak verbs before a suffix/enclitic.

Case endings are often not “correct.” They are not consistent, partially because the ancient manuscripts themselves are not consistent. In addition, logographic writing often renders the form of the case uncertain. Furthermore, case endings will also be mixed in the transcription because I have often given precedence to a fully preserved occurrence over one that is partially or not at all preserved.

The absence of consistency may give a barbaric impression, but I ask the reader to remember that this is due in no small part to the manuscripts themselves and to the nature of their preservation. I had considered creating the transcription by restoring the readings that I assume a “correct” Nineveh text would have had, or even by presenting the most original forms of the incantations (forms that I have often reconstructed on the basis of textual and exegetical considerations); but I decided against such procedures for various reasons, most of all because I felt it necessary to provide the reader with a “reliable” text. I understand that sometimes this will create a “mixed” text, but the reader has only to consult the score to see whence the readings come.

Translation

The translation is linked to the transcription. Because this translation is accompanied by a transcription, brackets within the translation (and translation notes) will usually be limited to words that have been fully or almost fully restored; quarter brackets are not used in the translation. Thus, the brackets in the translation are not necessarily identical with those in the transcription. In the translation, I have used round brackets (i.e., parentheses) to indicate some connotation of the Akkadian that is not conveyed directly in its translation; however, when round brackets are set within square brackets, I usually mean to indicate that if there is sufficient room within a break, the word(s) in round brackets should probably, but not certainly, be restored. In the translation, a question mark in parentheses on the line, viz. (?), indicates that the reading or restoration is uncertain; a superscript question mark in parentheses, viz. (?) , indicates that the meaning is uncertain.

The notes accompanying the translation treat select translation issues; they also provide translations of material given in the notes to the transcription and otherwise not translated: pluses, significant variants, etc. Omissions, deletions, and transpositions of whole lines that are cited in the notes to the transcription are not normally taken up in the notes to the translation.

I should mention that many different terms are used to designate various types of witches and witchcraft in Maqlû as well as in other Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft incantations and rituals. Our understanding of the differences is still primitive. I should therefore note that the translations in this volume for words denoting witches and witchcraft are often no more than conventional renderings.

Moreover, it is important, I think, that the reader of this translation be aware of my understanding of the use of Akkadian tenses in incantations and my choice of translation. My rendering is based upon my understanding of the ritual context of the utterance. I have been guided by the following principles: