SUSAPINNU

The Mesopotamian paranymph and his role

BY

MEIR MALUL
(Haifa University)

I. Introduction

The Akkadian word susapinnu occurs in MB and SB sources, mostly in lexical and synonym lists, where it is equated with Sumerian nigr (Eme-sal libir)-si, and few times indeed in other kinds of sources¹). The Sumerian word nigr/libir-si occurs also in a lexical list and in a few Sumerian compositions from the OB period²).

The word susapinnu and its Sumerian equivalent had originally been considered a title of an official³). However, already at the end of the last century, it was connected with the Aramaic attested frequently in Talmudic and other Jewish sources where it denotes "paranymph, best man"⁴). This was suggested as the meaning of the

¹) The lexical occurrences are MSL 12, 101:173; 126:66-68 (in l. 66 the Sumerian column gives nigr-a-fa-g[a]); TCL 6, 35 II 26; the synonym list is LTBA 2, 2, 357 // 1 VI 21 // An IX 76 (Meissner, BAW 1, 72:16). The other occurrences are in two late bilingual passages, SBH no. 56 ob. 58f and no. 69:17; a Hittite text StBoT 15, 44 no. 672/u:2.6f.; and an Akkadian text from Ugarit where the word susapinnatu appears, RS 16.153 (PRU 3, 146f.).

²) For the lexical evidence, see MSL 12, 60:760 (nigr-si). The Sumerian compositions are: SLTN 35; BE 31, 12; and line 37 in The Instructions of Suruppak. For a review of all the available cuneiform evidence, see below section II.

³) See the dictionaries of Delitzsch and Muss-Arnolt s.v.; G. Howardy, Clavis Cuneorum, London + Leipzig + Kobenhavn, 1933, no. 56, 46: "magistratus."

Akkadian word too\(^5\)), and this meaning is commonly accepted today by most scholars\(^6\).

However, unlike the Talmudic sources—and others to be presented in the following discussion—which enable one to get a clear notion of the nature of the role played by the šūšbin, the cuneiform sources have by and large been unhelpful in this matter, and scholars could gain only a vague notion of the role of the susapinnu in Mesopotamian civilization.

It should be noted, however, that no one, who treated the issue of the Mesopotamian nīgīr/libīr-sī = susapinnu, has adduced together all the available and relevant evidence, and different scholars have made use of different segments of the evidence. Also, external (i.e. Talmudic and other Jewish) and ethnological evidence, which—at least from a typological point of view—seems to be extremely suggestive in reconstructing the role of the Mesopotamian susapinnu\(^7\), has only meagerly been used\(^8\).

It is, therefore, the purpose of the present article to gather and re-evaluate all the available cuneiform evidence pertaining to the nīgīr/libīr-sī = susapinnu in an effort to draw a profile of this functionary and to define the role he fulfilled. Although a careful analysis of the cuneiform evidence may help in gaining some notion of the nature of the susapinnu’s role, it is only the insight provided by external and ethnological evidence which points to the right interpretation of the vague hints culled from the cuneiform sources.

---

5) See Bezold, *Glossar*, p. 216a translating “*Brautführer*”; cf. now *AHw* 1063b; Landsberger, *Symbolae M. David*, p. 81 notes 1-2 and pp. 98f.; and most recently *CAD* S 416b.

6) See, however, recently Kraus’s expressed uncertainty as to the character of this title, *RA*, 70(1976), p. 170.

7) On the justification of using external evidence in this case, see below pp. 268 ss.