**The Literary Development of the Mesopotamian Myth of the Moon-God and His Cow**

An Inquiry into Its Mesopotamian Sources

and Some Observations on Non-Mesopotamian Sources

1. **Introduction**

The Mesopotamian myth of the moon-god and his cow, which tells of Sîn the moon-god’s love for his cow, her pregnancy, and the birth of her calf, is mentioned in many studies as one of the oldest and most widespread myths in Mesopotamia, as well as the earliest one among the tales narrating the mating of an astral god with a cow that were circulated in the ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Regarding its date, some place it as early as the third dynasty of Ur, and even in the pre-Sargonic period,[[1]](#footnote-1) despite the fact that the earliest extant text testifying to the existence of that myth is dated to the Old Babylonian period. With regard to its diffusion, some argue that this myth has innumerable independent versions, while others claim it has only one version.[[2]](#footnote-2) Examining all the extant texts, however, reveals exactly *two* tale-types of the same tradition, from which several versions were developed. Regarding its content, it is generally accepted that the myth describes the mating of the moon-god with a cow,[[3]](#footnote-3) although in not even one of the Mesopotamian texts in question is it ever stated that the moon-god mates with the cow, nor impregnates her. This kind of plot is first narrated only in extra-Mesopotamian literature—that of the Hittite and Ugaritic texts of the Late Bronze Age, and also in Classical texts.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In light of the aforementioned views, the present study seeks to revisit the Mesopotamian myth of the moon-god and his cow, by means of a literary-historical reexamination of all the texts containing this myth. While some of them (those belonging to Type B; see below) have indeed gained only minor attention in earlier studies,[[5]](#footnote-5) others (belonging to Type A) have been examined at length. However, for the most part scholars have limited themselves to textual criticism—that is, presenting the differences and corruptions that have occurred among the various versions—or to a synchronic study.[[6]](#footnote-6) Based on the findings of these previous studies, this paper will explore the literary development of this Mesopotamian myth, as reflected in its several versions.

To date, the myth of the moon-god and his cow is documented on some eight clay tablets, in ten versions, which—as will be shown—belong to two different tale-types. Since many studies use those terms and others with different meanings, we must first clarify their definitions here. The **tablets** are the manuscripts, i.e., the raw material on which the versions of the myths in question were written down. One tablet or a series of tablets may include several versions of the same myth. The **versions** are the texts that contain the myth of the moon-god and his cow. To be considered a version of this story, the text must contain the story’s central elements—the love/concern of the moon-god for the cow and her pregnancy—since only the existence of these elements indicates the author’s familiarity with that myth. If a given text is identical to another, it is a **duplicate** and not an additional version. **The tale-type** is a name for a group of versions that were developed one from another, or share a common source.

The two tale-types of the myth of the moon-god and his cow are called here Type A and Type B. The numbering of versions belonging to each of these types is set according to the order in which they were committed to writing (with A1, for example, being considered the oldest extant version belonging to Type A). This numbering does not indicate the early date of the narrative reflected in the specific version but rather the date of a certain tablet on which the version is written, in relation to another tablet. If several versions were written on the same tablet, or if several tablets are dated to the same time, the versions are numbered according to the order of their occurrence in this article. The following table presents the extant versions of the myth of the moon-god and his cow, divided into Types A and B:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Period** | **Provenance** | **Edition/Copy; Mus. Num.[[7]](#footnote-7)** | **Sigla** |
| Middle Babylonian | Hattusa | *KUB* 4.13:6’-13’ (CTH 810) | A1 |
| Middle Babylonian | Ugarit | RS 25.436:1’-10’ | A2 |
| Middle-Assyrian | Assyria | Lambert 1969, Pl. VI.:51-62 | A3 |
| Middle-Assyrian | Kalhu | Lambert 1965, obv. 19-36; Rm. 376 | A4 |
| Neo-Assyrian | Assur | *BAM* 3 248: III 10-35/ *KAR* 196; VAT 8869 | A5 |
| Nineveh | *AMT* 67.1: III 1-25; K2413 + |
| Neo-Assyrian | Assur | *BAM* 3 248: III 36-43; VAT 8869 | A6 |
| Nineveh | *AMT* 67.1 III 26-29; K2413 + |
|  | | | |
| Old-Babylonian | S. Mesopotamia | VS 17.34 1-10; VAT 8593 | B1 |
| Middle-Babylonian | Hattusa | *KUB* 4.13: 15’-22 (CTH 810) | B2 |
| Neo-Assyrian | Assur | *BAM* 3 248: I 37-51; VAT 8869 | B3 |
| Nineveh | Veldhuis 1989: 255; K8210: I 10’-14’ |
|  | | | |
| Neo-Assyrian | Assur | *BAM* 3 248: III 54 – VI 1; VAT 8869 | B4/A7 |

As mentioned above, this list indicates not the relative date of the **narrative**, the literary material found in each of the versions or types, but rather the time that each was committed to writing. Measuring the precedence of one narrative vis-à-vis another, or establishing that two versions are close to one another and how one developed from the other, is dependent on literary-historical considerations, which will be discussed below.

Since, contrary to most studies dealing with the literary development of belletristic texts, such as Atraḫasis and Gilgameš, we are considering here a story regularly integrated into an incantation, a few prefatory remarks should be devoted to that topic. As to genre, the story of the moon-god and his cow is called a Historiola (because of its inclusion in incantations). That appellation, however, tells us nothing about the story’s content; it tells us only about its *Sitz im Leben*. Being situated in an incantation might subject the tale to two opposing processes. First, unlike Mesopotamian belletristic literature whose recording in writing is sometimes indicative only of scribes’ familiarity with it, the incantation literature functions among the broad public outside the circles of scribes. The oral dissemination of a story integrated into an incantation might, then, be immeasurably wider than that of a written belletristic tale, including dissemination not connected to an incantation. Second, in contrast to a belletristic text, to which over time more and more narrative characteristics of various types have been attached, the functional use of a myth—in this case, to assist a woman in childbirth—might well lead to the sloughing off of literary characteristics that would distance the tale from the object of the incantation and to a focus on the narrative parallel to the situation of the person being treated. The first process, the oral one, occurs “in darkness” from the perspective of scholarly inquiry, but its end may perhaps be discernable in the stories that took shape in Ugaritic and Hittite literature, dissociated from any incantation.[[8]](#footnote-8) The traces of the second process, by contrast, may be discerned by examining the extant Akkadian texts, and it is on that inquiry that this article focuses.

1. **Type A Versions**

The earliest instance of Type A dates from the Middle Babylonian period. Although, as in other cases from that period, the evidence for this was found outside Mesopotamia, in the Ugaritic and Hittite scribal academies of the Late Bronze Age, that evidence is nonetheless sufficient to indicate the existence of that type in Mesopotamia itself as well.[[9]](#footnote-9) In Hittite and Ugaritic, only the end of the versions has survived, and the end of all the lines is broken. The following is a translation of those two versions (with transcription accompanying the narrative section):

A1 (*KUB* 4.13)[[10]](#footnote-10)

1’-5 (xxx)

6’She rub[b]ed (*ilpu*[*t*]) […]

7’A second time she ru[b]bed (*ina šanî ilp*[*ut*]) […]

8’the front of her body (*pāna zumrišu*).[[11]](#footnote-11) In the thi[rd] (*ina ša*[*lši*]) […]

9’he fell on the ground (*imqut qaqqaršu*) […]

10’She called [him] (*iltakan šum*[*šu*]) […]

11’May the young woman give birth […]

12’This pregnant one may give birth normally […]

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13’INIM.INIM.MA incantation for a woman in labor [...]

14’over her epigastrium […]

A2 (RS 25.436)[[12]](#footnote-12)

1’The luminary (*nannāri*) […]

2’He raised his hand to (*išši qassu a*[*na*]) […]

3’Two *Lamassu*s [-of-heaven] (*šittā lamassāt* [*šamê*])[[13]](#footnote-13) […]

4’One ca[rried] oil-from-the-jar (*iltēt šaman pūri na*[*šât*]), […]

5’She rubbed oil-from-[the-jar] (*ilput* *šaman* [*pūri*]) […]

6’With water-from-the-bowl she spri[nkled] (*me ḫalli uš*[*tappiḫ*])[[14]](#footnote-14) […]

7’A second time (*išnīm*[*a*]) […]

8’With water-from-the-bowl (*me ḫalli*) […]

9’In the third time (*ina šalši*), […]

10’[…] on the gro[und] (*ana qa*[*qqari*]) […]

All that has survived from these two versions is the name of the moon-god Nannāru and the assistance that was given to the cow that had trouble calving: three times she was rubbed with potions that brought with them the two protective spirits, until on the third time “her calf fell to the ground” (a common expression indicating ease of giving birth). Although, because of the condition of the tablets, the words “cow” and “calf” are absent from these versions, the obvious similarity between them and the versions found in Mesopotamia itself leaves no room for doubt that this is the end of the story of the moon-god and his cow, worked into an incantation.

Among the three long Type A versions that were committed to writing in Mesopotamia—two from the Middle Assyrian period (A3, A4) and one from the Neo-Assyrian period (A5)—scholars agree that the version closest to the versions in Hittite and Ugaritic is actually the one that was written latest, version A5.[[15]](#footnote-15) This version was copied together with other incantations in a series known among scholars as the NA compendium for a woman in childbirth, which is known to us today from several exemplars.[[16]](#footnote-16) Scholars further agree that despite the paleographical lateness of version A5, it is considered the one that preserves a more precise text that the earlier versions, A3 and A4, which suffer from errors and intentional emendations.[[17]](#footnote-17) In order to assess the context of Type A, to which the various versions in this section are ascribed, we should begin, then, with version A5, despite its paleographic lateness. The following is a translation of that version (the tablet from Ugarit parallels from the end of line 23 on, while the Hittite tablet begins a little further along; a transcription of the Akkadian accompanies the translated narrative):

A5 (*BAM* 248: III 10-35 / *AMT* 67.1: III 1-25)[[18]](#footnote-18)

10There was a cow of Sîn (*iltēt littu ša Sîn*), her name is Geme-Sîn (“Slave-girl of Sîn”) (*Gemé-Sîn šumša*). 11With ornaments decorated (*tiqnāte tuqqunat*), 12tempting of shape she was (*binûtam kazbat*). Sîn saw her and loved her (*īmuršima Sîn irāmši*). 13The shining *šubaḫi* of Sîn he laid upon her (*namru ša Sîn šubaḫi ištakanši*). 14He appointed her at the head of the herd (*ušteṣbissima pān sukullim*), and 15the herdsmen followed her (*rē’ûtu illaka arkiša*).[[19]](#footnote-19) 16In the lushest grass they pastured her (*ina nurub šammē irē’ūši*),[[20]](#footnote-20) 17(and) at the abundant well they gave her water to drink (*ina šubbê mašqê išaqqûši mê*).

18Hidden from the herds boys (*ina puzur kaparrī*), not seen by the herdsman (*lā amār rē’î*), 19the wild bull mounted the cow (*ana muḫḫi litti ištaḫiṭ mīru ekdu*), he lifted her tail? (<*zib>batušša išši*).[[21]](#footnote-21)

20When her days came to an end (*ūmēša ina quttî*), her months were finished (*arḫīša ana gamāri*), 21the cow became frightened (and) frightened 22her herdsman (*littu igtalit ugallit rē’âša*). His head was bowed (*appašu qadissu*), (and) all the herd boys lamented with him (*kaparrū kalîšunu sapdūšu*). 23At her crying, at her screaming with labor, he was down cast (*ana ikkilliša ana rigim ḫâliša nepalsiḫ*).[[22]](#footnote-22)

The luminary 24Sîn in heaven heard her cries again and again (*Nannāru* *Sîn ina šamê ištamme rigimša*). He raised his hand to heaven (*išši qassu ana šamāmē*).[[23]](#footnote-23) 25Two Lammassu’s-of-heaven came down (*šittā* *lamassāt šamê ūridānimma*);[[24]](#footnote-24) one (of them) carried oil-from-the-jar (*iltēt šaman pūri našât*), 26the other brought down water-from-the-bowl (*šanītum ušappala mê ḫalli*). She rubbed oil from-the-jar on her brow (*ilput* *šaman* *pūri pūssa*), 27With water-from-the-bowl she sprinkled her whole body (*me ḫalli ušappiḫa kala zumriša*).[[25]](#footnote-25) 28A second time she rubbed oil-from-the-jar on her brow (*šanâ ilput šaman pūri pūssa*), 29with water-from-the-bowl she sprinkled her whole body (*me ḫalli ušappiḫa kala zumriša*). 30For the third time, as she rubbed (*šallatiššu ina lapāti*), 31the calf fell on the ground like a (swift) young gazelle (*būru kīma uzāli imtaqut qaqqaršu*). 32Amar-ga (= “Milk-Calf”) she called the calf (*Amar-ga* *ištakan šum būri*).

33Just as Geme-Sîn gave birth normally, 34may also the girl in difficult labor give birth; 35Let the midwife not tarry, let the pregnant one be all right.

According to this version, this was the content of Type A of the Mesopotamian myth of the moon-god and his cow, parts of which survived in Ugaritic and Hittite as well: The moon-god loved his beautiful cow, so he placed her at the head of the herd. The herdsmen followed behind her and gave her good water. Once, a bull mated with her in secret, and when it came time for her to give birth, the cow was very much afraid and frightened the herdsmen. They cried and wailed along with her. When the moon-god, who loved her, heard this, he sent two protective spirits to assist in her labor, and after three tries she easily gave birth to a calf.

In the narrative reflected in this version, the herdsmen and the herd play a large role, and the moon-god’s share is minor. The latter is mentioned, in fact, just twice: first, when he falls in love with the beautiful cow and places her at the head of the heard (lines 10–14), and later, when he helps her out during her difficult labor by sending the two protective spirits (line 24). What transpires between those two events takes place among the herd, on earth, and is described in entirely realistic terms. There have been, indeed, those who have thought that both the herdsmen and the bull are names for the moon-god—perhaps because he is called “herdsman” and “bull” in many Sumerian texts, and it is said that he has a huge herd of cows[[26]](#footnote-26)—and others have suggested that the moon-god dressed up as a bull in order to copulate with the cow, or that the entire story took place in the heavens.[[27]](#footnote-27) However, there is no hint of any of this in the text before us. Those hymns and other literary works that describe the moon-god as having a huge herd of cows (whether he is their herdsman or the bull at their head) clarify why it is the moon-god who is considered the patron of the cow in Mesopotamia and why it is said of him that he fell in love with the cow and helped her calve, but they do not permit us to interpret every “herdsman” (and plural “herdsmen” even less so) and every “bull” as a hypostasis of the moon-god.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Scholarly opinion is divided over the question of whether the myth of the moon-god and his cow first developed apart from the incantation or whether it was, *ab initio*, an inherent part of that incantation.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, it appears that the realistic description of the herd and the herdsmen accompanying the cow tips the scales to the side of the possibility that the myth was not authored in order to serve as a Historiola in an incantation for a human woman.[[30]](#footnote-30) Only after the fact did the similarity between the difficult labor of domesticated animals (as distinct from wild animals) and the difficulty of a human woman in childbirth lead to the insertion of the story as a Historiola into an incantation of this sort. As to the time of its formation, since the living patterns of a domesticated herd is at issue here, we should note, following Lambert, that a tale such as this could have been composed only after the agricultural revolution and the domestication of some animals.[[31]](#footnote-31) Nonetheless, it will become clear below that from a textual perspective, the earliest witnesses to this myth come from the Old Babylonian period and no earlier.

The idea that the myth as preserved in version A5 above was directed only *ex post facto* to serve as an incantation for a woman, a human being, gains support from version A3 from the Middle Assyrian period, which intentionally omits any mention of the ways of the herd and the herdsmen. Until now, scholars have explained the differences between version A5 and the two Middle Assyrian versions (A3 and A4)—the late contemporaries of the tablets in Hittite and Ugaritic—as stemming from errors that occurred in the process of transmission. Even if, in the end, errors created a new matrix of sound plays and double entendre, sound association, recurring sound patterns, rhyme and sound parallelism,[[32]](#footnote-32) these versions were considered among scholars to be defective copies of version A5 or of unreliable witnesses to Type A. However, this argument must be corrected in relation to the literary register of the text; the consistent omissions in version A3 indicate that it is a carefully considered version that stands on its own, whose purpose is to bring the ancient narrative close to the object of the incantation—the woman.

In order to accomplish that, the author of version A3 employed two actions: one, as mentioned above, was the elimination of any reference to the ways of the herd and the herdsmen.[[33]](#footnote-33) Sometimes whole lines that refer to them have disappeared from the text, and sometimes they have been attributed to other characters. Thus, for example, in place of a description of the pasturing of the cow by the herdsmen (who are not mentioned at all in version A3), the moon-god himself herds the cow alone (lines 45–55), and in place of their kneeling in supplication, the birthing cow is described as kneeling from labor pains (line 57).[[34]](#footnote-34) The second thing done by the author was to frame the story in the context of the woman’s difficulties in labor, both at the beginning and at the end. Since the final lines relating to the woman in childbirth already exist in this incantation, the author had only to add the opening lines (lines 51–52), which he borrowed from the opening lines of another incantation that was written on the same tablet. The result of this redaction—and this is our primary interest here—is not limited to making the story appropriate for the object of the incantation; rather, it also transfers the story from a realistic setting of herdsmen and herds to a mythic setting in which the sole protagonist is the moon-god Sîn.

The following table (no. 1) will assist us in noting the differences between version A5 and version A3. On the right is the additional Middle Assyrian version (A4), which may reflect the beginning of that trend. The words set off in a different font are those that describe the ways of the herd and the herdsman (which, as noted, are entirely absent from version A3).

**Table 1**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A4 (Lambert 1965)[[35]](#footnote-35) | A3 (Lambert 1969)[[36]](#footnote-36) | A5 |  |
| 20The cow of Sîn, Geme-Sîn, was great in her stature and attractive in her shape. | 51Gī-Sîn,[[37]](#footnote-37) slave-girl of Sin,  has trouble in childbirth. The child 52is stuck, the child is stuck. The bolt is secured, so as to bring life to an end. 53The door is closed against the suckling babe. | 10There was a cow of Sîn, her name is Geme-Sîn. 11With ornaments decorated, 12tempting of shape she was. | Opening |
| 21Sîn saw her and loved her.  In front of Sîn, the shining […]22He appointed her at the head of her herd, and the cows followed [her]. | Sîn saw her and 54loved her.[[38]](#footnote-38) | Sîn saw her and loved her.  13 The shining *šubaḫi* of Sîn he laid upon her. 14He appointed her at the head of the herd, and 15the herdsmen followed her. | The encounter between the moon-god and the cow |
| 23In the lushest grasses he pastured her, (and) at the abundance of the well [he watered her]. | Among the lushest grasses he always pastured her. In the meadows […] 55he always gave [her] to drink [water].[[39]](#footnote-39) | 16In the lushest grass they pastured her, 17(and) at the abundant well they watered her. | The pasturing of the cow |
| 24Hidden from the herdsmen, not noticed by the herds boys –  the wild bull mounted the cow.  25When her months were finished; her days [came to an end], | The wild bull mounted the cow.  56When her days were fulfilled; her months [were finished], | 18Hidden from the herds boys, not seen by the herdsmen –  19the wild bull mounted the cow, he lifted her tail?.  20When her days came to an end; her months were finished, | Mating and pregnancy |
| 26the cow bent down, the cow went into labor. The herdsmen […] 27all the herd boys lamented her …  At [her crying, 29at] her screaming in labor,  <Sîn?> heard her screaming in heaven. | 57the cow bent down (and) went into labor.  [At her crying,] 58at her screaming in labor,  Sîn, the luminary of heaven [heard her screaming]. | 21the cow was afraid (and) frightened 22her herdsmen. His head was bowed, all the herd boys lamented with him  23At her crying, at her screaming in labor, he was down cast.  The luminary 24Sîn in heaven heard her screaming again and again. | Pain and Wailing |
| 30Two-*Lamassu*s-of-heaven came down.  One […31…] carried water-of-well-being. 32[…] of the cow […]  33[…] fell on the ground[[40]](#footnote-40) […34…] | 59They are two, the Daughters-of-Anu, they came down from heaven. One carried water-from-the-bowl, the second 60carried oil-from-the-jar. With water-of-the-bowl. He? Rubbed her brow, with oil-from-the-jar he [sprinkled] 61her whole body.[[41]](#footnote-41) | He raised his hand to heaven.[[42]](#footnote-42) 25Two-*Lamassu*s-of-heaven came down.  One carried oil-from-the-jar, 26the other brought water-from-the-bowl. She rubbed oil from-the-jar on her brow, 27With water-from-the-bowl she sprinkled her whole body. 28A second time she rubbed oil-from-the-jar on her brow, 29with water-from-the-bowl she sprinkled her whole body.  31The calf fell on the ground like a (swift) young gazelle. 32‘Ama-ga’ she called the calf. | Help from the daughters of Anu/Lamassu |
| Just as Geme-Sîn, may she be normally […] | Just as Gī-Sîn, the slave girl of Sîn, gave birth normally, may also 62this girl in labor give birth. | 33Just as Geme-Sîn gave birth normally, 34may also the girl in difficult labor give birth.  35Let the midwife not tarry, let the pregnant one be all right. | The parallel to a woman |

1. Thus, for example, Stol states: “…it represents the last phase of a long development which began with the Old Sumerian Fara incantation” (Stol 2000, 65–68). He further suggests understanding the cow’s name, Geme-Sîn, in light of the name of of one of Šulgi’s wives, proposing that the incantation is intended to help her in giving birth. Van Dijk (1975, 71–72) as well (followed by Bergmann 2008, 18) suggests that the myth bears early Sumerian traditions, such as the one reflected in the incantation preserved in UM 29-15-367 (van Dijk 1975; Cunningham 1997, 19-75) about the impregnation of a woman by a bull in a barn (cf. van Dijk 1973, 506-507). While this Sumerian incantation indeed shares some motifs with a few versions of the myth of the moon-god and his cow, it gives no indication of familiarity with the content of that myth. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sanders (2001, 434), for example, argues, that “[t]he picture we have now is one where, until the first millennium, the identity of the Cow of Sîn theme did not exist at the verbal level but at the level of a theme applied to a situation,” and in n. 18 there he adds, “Indeed, the appearance of earlier duplicates would not change this picture much, because the attested range of variation is already so great.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thus van Dijk 1972, 340, followed by, e.g., Cunningham 1997, 108 and Bergmann 2008, 17 (but see Bergmann’s n. 27: “W. Farber cautioned me that not all texts in the Cow of Sîn tradition explicitly say that Sîn takes on the form of a bull and impregnates the cow”). Lambert (1969, 33) shared that opinion: “The story is that Sîn, the moon god, fell in love with a cow of his, came down to earth in the form of a bull, and mated with it” (and cf. also Lambert 1965, 284), as did Veldhuis (1991, 1): “Sîn falls in love with his cow […] As a ‘wild bull’ he impregnates her” (and cf. also Veldhuis 1989, 250). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In the Hittite version, the description of the sun god mating with the cow and the birth of the (damaged) calf opens “The Sun-God, the Cow and the Fisherman” (*KUB* 24.7; CTH 363). For the text, see E. Rieken et al. (ed.), hethiter.net/:CTH 363.1 (INTR 2009-08-12). *[Highlighted material was copied from the original, but it appears flawed.]* In Ugaritic, a story about the storm-god’s mating with the cow and the birth of the calf is integrated into the Baal cycle (*KTU* 1.5 V 1–25), and included in the work “Baal Fathers a Bull” (*KTU* 1.10). Apparently, the fragment *KTU* 1.11 is connected to this topic (for these texts, see Parker 1997). Later on, the Classical texts tell of Zeus mating with a cow (for discussion, see West 1997, 442–446, and cf. Bachvarova 2001, and additional bibliography there). The Sumerian incantations, of which it is often argued that the myth of the moon-good and his cow is a continuation (see n.1, above), tell about an ox impregnating a cow or a woman, without ever mentioning any divinity. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The most widely known of the Type B versions, VS 17.34 (hereinafter B1), has been examined on its own or in relation to the Type A versions, and in relation to versions that are not part of the myth in question at all (see, for example, van Dijk 1972; Wasserman 2013, 17–19). Its relation to the rest of the Type B versions, however, remains to be clarified. Other versions of this type have yet to be discussed (see an initial discussion in Veldhuis 1989, 254; 1991, 65; Zomer 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This has been especially dealt with by Röllig 1985, Veldhuis 1991, and Márquez Rowe 2015. For earlier research, see the survey in Veldhuis 1991, 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For editions later than those listed above, see each text separately. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For the Hittite and Ugaritic texts, see n. XX above. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Additional examples of this phenomena are the compilation *šimâ milka* found at the academies of Ugarit, Emar and Hatušša, and later at Kalḫu from the Neo-Assyrian era (for an edition of the text, see Cohen 2013 and Nurullin 2014) and the versions of Gilgameš found at Ugarit, Hatušša, Emar and Meggido, which are parallel to the versions found at the Library of Ashurbanipa l (for editions, see George 2003; 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For an up-to-date transcription and translation of lines 3–9, see Márquez Rowe 2015, and cf. Röllig 1985 (sigl. E.); Veldhuis 1991 (sigl. D). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For the form *pāna*, see Márquez Rowe 2015, 59. The masculine pronominal suffix *-šu*, which appears in reference to the cow instead of the feminine pronominal suffix (*-ša*), Veldhuis 1991, 65, explains that the copyist’s use of Hittite did not recognize a grammatical distinction between masculine and feminine. Further on in the incantation (l. 14), this substitution appears again, although as Márquez Rowe, ibid., comments, this substitution does not occur in the second incantation (B2, below) that appears on that tablet. This leads us to conclude that the error is not that of the present copyist, but rather that the two incantations come from different sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For a transcription, translation, and discussion, see Márquez Rowe 2015. For the first edition, see Arnaud 2007, 75-77. For a prefatory discussion of this edition, see Márquez Rowe 2014, 77-78. *[I’m unsure whether I’ve understood your use of “ דיון* ***מקדים****”. Should we call it “preliminary”? – translator]* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For this interpolation to complete the text, see the parallel lines in the following Type A versions. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Márquez Rowe 2015, 58-59, found that the written form *ḫal-li* in version A2 from Ugarit clarifies that this is not “water-of-labor” from the root *ḫâlu/ḫiālu* (“to conceive,” “ to be[come] pregnant”), as scholars have thought until now regarding this concept that appears in most of the Type A versions, but rather the noun (a Sumerian loan-word) *ḫallu*, which indicates a vessel containing a liquid. This meaning of *ḫallu* fits the immediate context well, in parallel to “oil-from-the-jar” (for the full context, see version A5 below), and it forms a wordplay with the root *ḫâlu* (“to conceive”), like the wordplay that exists between *pūru* (“jar”) and *būru* (“cow”) in the name of the parallel vessel. The expression *mê bandudi* (“water-from-the-bandudu-bucket”) in version A6 (see below), and the vessel called *karpatum* brought by the daughters of Anu in version B1, which apparently contained water (see below) provide further support for this interpretation. Regarding the completion of the verb *uš*[*tappiḫ*], following Arnaud 2007, 75-76, and Márquez Rowe 2015, 58: if that completion of the verb is indeed correct, it is lacking the š>l shift that is common in Middle Babylonian, and in light of this we should correct the reading *usappiḫ* in versions A3–A5, which has been accepted among scholars (see below). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Márquez Rowe 2015 and the earlier literature cited there (until the publication of the tablet from Ugarit, scholars focused on the similarity to the Hittite tablet [A1]). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For a philological discussion of the NA compendium, see Veldhuis 1989. For a discussion touching of the practical aspects of the incantations in this series, see Couto-Ferreira 2014. For a Babylonian commentary written on this series, see Civil 1974; Scurlock 2014a (Text 4, pp. xx-xx); Jiménez 2014, and further bibliography therein. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. Lambert 1969; Röllig 1985; Veldhuis 1991; Márquez Rowe 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For an updated transcription, see BabMed – Babylonische Medizin: https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/babmed/Corpora/BAM. For additional transcriptions with translation and discussion, see Röllig 1985 (sigl. A+B); Veldhuis 1991 (sigl. A+A’); Scurlock 2014a (text 7, pp. xx-xx); Márquez Rowe 2015 (for ll. 23-30). For additional translations, see… The translation here primarily follows Veldhuis and Márquez Rowe, with a few changes. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. It is nearly certain that the verb in the form *illaka* is based on an error (cf. *CAD*, R, 307). Veldhuis 1991, 9, reads *rē’ûtu* literally as an abstract noun meaning “herdship,” appropriate to the verb in the singular form, but took it to refer to “herdsmen.” Scurlock 2014a, 602, apparently assumes that the moon-god is the cow’s herdsman, and so translated: “He had her take the lead of the herd, going as herdsman after her.” That, however, is not a literal translation of the text in any way. Van Soden, in his dictionary (*AHw* 978) suggests understanding *rē’ûtu* as “herd” on the basis of this singular occurrence, and by comparison, apparently, to version A3 (followed by *CDA* 303). As much as this interpretation fits the context, it is difficult to rely on this lone occurrence (cf. Röllig 1985, 265). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The reading of the verb here as a plural form + feminine singular pronominal suffix ((*i-re-’-ú-ši*), following *CAD* R, 301, and Röllig 2015, 265 (even though in the translation the dictionary employs third person singular, attributing the verb to the moon-god). Scurlock 2014a also construes the verb in the plural, but with the object *šamme* (*i-re-’u šam-me*), while others, such as Veldhuis 1991, construe the verb in the singular (*i-re-’i šamme*). The majority have attributed the verb, with its object *šamme*, to the cow, translating “she grazed,” but Röllig’s suggestion is more in keeping with the syntax and context. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For this suggested reading, see Farber 1987, 275 and n. 19. All subsequent scholarship has followed his suggestion. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The reading *ne-pal-síḫ* follows BabMed. Veldhuis 1991 (followed by several other scholars) thought that this verb is attributed to the moon-god and translated: “At her crying… Nannāru was downcast,” perhaps because of the comparison to version A3, which leaves out this verb (as it does the other references to herdsmen) and relates the preceding words to the moon-god. Other scholars, before and after Veldhuis, such as Röllig 1985; *CAD* N, 272; and Scurlock 2014a, and Márquez Rowe 2015 have found that the verb is to be attributed to the herdsman mentioned in the previous lines, and that seems more likely. For a discussion of this question, including the evidence from version A2 from Ugarit (which was unavailable to previous scholars), see Márquez Rowe 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Since a description of the moon-god raising his hand to the sky seems improbable, it is nearly certain that this sentence too originally referred to the herdsman who falls to his knees in lament, but the author forgot to copy it in the correct place and, realizing that, he wrote it in an inappropriate place and then continued with the flow of the story. Version A2 from Ugarit proves that we are not looking at an error by the neo-Assyrian copyist, but one with its origin in a much earlier stage. For this widespread textual phenomenon, which Greenstein calls *sans erasure*, see Greenstein 2019, v. xxxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The ideograph for the *Lamāssu* here and in version A4 (below) does not enable us to determine whether we are dealing with a noun in the nominative state, with the following word “heaven” functioning adverbially (“i.e., two *Lamassu*scame down from heaven”), or in a construct state with “heaven” in a generative state (i.e, “two *Lamassu*s-of-heaven came down”). Most scholars have understood “heaven” as an adverb, despite the absence of an appropriate preposition, but in light of version A2, where we find *Lamassāt*, in the construct state([*I’m not sure what is meant by באופן הברתי – “as read syllabically”? - translator]*), and the parallel expression in versions A3 and B1, *mārāt Anim* (Daughters of Anu [the sky-god]), it seems that the cautious suggestion by Márquez Rowe 2015, 57, to read here (and in version A4) “*Lamassāt šamê*,” is preferable. From the perspective of the history of traditions, it is almost certain that *Lamassāt šamê* developed from *mārāt Ani*; version A2 from Ugarit also proves that this is not a change introduced by the neo-Assyrian scribe, as Stol 2007, 67, opines, but rather an original variant of Type A. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For the reading *ušappiḫa* (instead of *usappiḫa*), and *ḫalli* (instead of *ḫâli*), on the basis of version A2 from Ugarit, see Márquez Rowe 2015, 57-58, and n. 14 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. For the image of the Sumerian moon-god as a herdsman and as a bull, see the extensive discussion in Hall 1985, and cf., e.g., Ornan 2001; Rochberg 2010, 352-354. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See the sources listed in n. 3 above. Among them, it is worthwhile to cite again the observations by Veldhuis 1991, that “in our text both notions are present: Sin is bull and herdsmen,” and Rochberg 2010, 353: “As a herder, in the literary incantation about the moon’s cow, Geme-Sin, the cow is explicitly placed in heaven with the line ‘the moon heard her cry in heaven.’” It may be that the reworking of versions A3 and A4 have also played a role in establishing this idea (about which, see below). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. By way of comparison, this is similar to the traditional Jewish/Christian interpretation of Song of Songs as a description of the love between God and Israel/the Church. This exegesis was accepted for centuries, in light of other texts in which God’s love for the people Israel is expressed in terms of the love of a man for a woman, and this exegesis can explain the acceptance with which the Song of Songs was met among Jewish sages, but there is not a hint of it in the work itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Lambert 1969, 23, proposes that the tale could have come into being separately from the incantation, and Bergmann 2008, 15, n. 12 is convinced of that. Veldhuis 1991, by contrast, assumes that in any case the story should not be considered in isolation from the incantation, and Sanders 2001, 439, is of the opinion that in Mesopotamia the story was never dissociated from the incantation. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cf. Scurlock 2005, 177, who comes to a similar conclusion regarding the Sumerian incantations that draw a parallel between a pregnant woman and a cow. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Lambert 1965, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Citing Stol 2000, 66, following the work of Veldhuis 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. It may be that for this reason Veldhuis 1951 found that in version A3, “the story is fragmentary,” although, as mentioned, we are not dealing with an accidentally fragmentary tale but rather the outcome of conscious choices. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Contra Stol 2000, 67, a cow that gives birth to a large calf kneels on her side from the pain (even today). By the way, similar literary descriptions appear in versions B2, B3, and B4/A6, and in additional incantations for a pregnant woman that use the image of a cow (see below, in the discussion of Type B). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For a transcription and translation after Lambert 1969, see Röllig 1985 (sigl. D); Veldhuis 1991 (sigl. C); Scurlock 2014a (text 8, pp); Márquez Rowe 2015 (for ll. 58-61). For the purposes of our discussion of version A3, here is the narrative text in its Akkadian original juxtaposed with A4:

    |  |  |
    | --- | --- |
    | A4 | A3 |
    | 20*littu ša Sîn Gemé-Sîn šiknāte mutturat minûta kazbat*  21*ēmuršima Sîn irāmši miḫir Sîn namrūte mu*[…]22*ultaṣbissi pānu sukulliša lâtu illakā ina* [*arkiša*] | 51*Gī-Sîn* *amtu ša Sîn* …53…  *īmuršima Sîn* 54*irāˀši* |
    | 23*ina nurub šammē ira’’īši ina šubbê ša mašqê* [*išaqqīši*] | *ana nurub šammē irtana’’i ina saḫḫi* […]55*iltanaqqī*[*ši mê*] |
    | 24*ina puzur rē’î lā lamād kaparrī*  *litta il*[*taḫiṭ*] 25*būru ekdu*  *arḫīša ina gamāri ūmēša ina* [*quttî*] 26*littu iktamiṣi iḫâl arḫu*  *rē’û* […] 27*u kaparrū kalâšunu sapdūši sap*[…] 28 … | *ana muḫḫi litti iltikiṭ būru ekdu*  56*ūmēša ana mullê arḫīša ana* [*gamāri*] 57*taḫtimiš taḫâl būrtu* |
    | *ana* [*ikkilliša* 29*ana*] *rigim ḫîliša <Sîn*? *i>na šamê ištammâ rigim*[*ša*] | *ina* [*ikkilliša ina*]58*rigmi ḫîliša Sîn nannar šamê* [*ištamma rigimša*] |
    | 30*šittā lammasāt šamê ūridāni iltīt* […31…] *našât mê šulme* 32[…] *ša litti ša* […] | 59*šittā šina mārāt Anim ultu šamê ūridāni* *ištēte našât mê ḫilli* *šanītu* 60*našât šaman pūri* *mê ḫilli <<li>> ilput pūssa* *šaman* *pūri* <<x>> *u*<*šap*>*pi*<*ḫa*>61*kala zumriša* |
    | 33[…]*imquta qaqqaršu ana* …[…] |  |

    [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For a transcription and translation after Lambert 1965, see Röllig 1985 (sigl. C); Veldhuis 1991 (sigl. D); Márquez Rowe 2015 (for ll. 29-33). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Lambert 1969, 38, suggests that the cow’s name here, Gī, is “a phonetic rendering of *gemé*.” For a late development of this name, see below in the discussion of version A6. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The derivation of the verb *irāˀši* from the root *râmum* (to love), follows Lambert 1969, 38 (and those who followed him). Veldhuis 1991 suggests reading *ira’’īši*, from the root *rē’û* (to graze), like the next verb in the next line. *[אני מבין שחלה טעות בעברית ובמקום ״בדומה לפועל הבא* ***בשורש*** *הבאה״ צריך לקרוא ״...****בשורה*** *הבאה״.]* [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Scurlock 2014a reads the verbs in these lines as plural, *contra* Lambert 1969, Röllig 1985, and Veldhuis 1991. From the perspective of context, Scurlock’s suggestion is difficult to accept, since the only figure previously mentioned is the moon-god. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Contra* Lambert 1965, and, following him, Márquez Rowe 2015, who understood A.GÀR-*šu* as a scribal error relating to the common phrase *imqut qaqqaršum* (a collocation that appears in most versions of types A and B cited here), Röllig 1985 and Veldhuis 1991 read the phrase *[Why is this called a צירוף? Maybe a תיבה but צירוף? What can I call it in English?]* *ugāršu* as a literary variant of *qaqqaršu*. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Many errors have crept into these lines, so they have a variety of suggested readings, none of which is sufficiently satisfying, whether for grammatical reasons or because of the context, and that includes the suggested reading behind the translation that appears above. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. As was mentioned above (n. XX), the subject of the sentence is apparently the wailing herdsman. His absence in version A4 (and A3) strengthens this view. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)