

Niraḥ or Šaḥan

HOWARD WOHL
Columbia University

Two readings have been proposed for the logogram ^dMUŠ to replace the old one of *Šēru*. The first, *Šaḥan*, was suggested by Thureau-Dangin in 1910 and by Ungnad in 1911;¹ the second, *Niraḥ*, by Landsberger in 1931.² Landsberger's reading has been generally accepted as substantially correct.³ A re-examination of the evidence shows, however, that both readings can be supported.

The evidence for the reading *Niraḥ* is as follows: inference from the Emesal dialect form *Šeraḥ* which is based upon the well-established alternation of Emesal |š| and standard Sumerian |n|,⁴ and upon the existence of a word for a small snake *nirāḥu* 'adder' (*colubridae tropidonotus tessellatus*).⁵ The basic textual evidence is from the Emesal Vocabulary: ^dŠ e r a ḥ : ^dMUŠ : u d u g é - š á r - r a - k e₄, *Šeraḥ* = (*Niraḥ*) = 'demon of the Ešarra-temple'.⁶ Further conclusive evidence is provided by the alternation in the writing of the name of a *līmu*-official of the Old Assyrian period, Puzur-Niraḥ.⁷

The evidence for the reading *Šaḥan* (or perhaps better *Ša'an*⁸) is as follows: a gloss in the canonical An:Anum god-list, *sa-ḥa-an*,⁹ which is described as u d u g é - k u r - r a - k e₄ 'demon of the Ekur-temple'.¹⁰ The writing of |s| for |š| reflects an Assyrian pronunciation.¹¹ Further evidence comes from Old Babylonian texts, predominantly from Dilbat. Here, personal names are attested with the logogram ^dMUŠ and the syllabically written

1 Thureau-Dangin, *TCL* 1, 67; Ungnad, *OLZ* 14 (1911), 152.

2 Landsberger, *ZA* 40 (1931), 296, and in more complete form *idem*, *Fauna*, 61.

3 Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterpitheta* (Helsinki, 1938), 379 (^dMUŠ), 396 (*Niraḥu*); *AHw.*, 793b; *CAD* S, 150b; Edzard, in Haussig, *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, (Stuttgart, 1965), 1: 120.

4 Poebel, *Grundzüge der sumerische Grammatik* (Rostock, 1923), 30; *idem*, *ZA* 38 (1929), 84-87.

5 Landsberger, *Fauna*, 48; *idem*, *MSL* 8/2, 7:9-10; *AHw.*, 793b. Note that the usual logogram, is *m u š . t u r*.

6 Landsberger, *MSL* 4, 5:i.9. Cf. Pinches, *VR* 52:19-20, Reisner, *SBH*, 85:10.

7 Eisser-Lewy, *ARK*, 52:15 (*Puzur*-^dMUŠ), Clay, *BIN* 4, 161:24 (*Puzur-Ni-ra-ḥ*). See also Hirsch, *Untersuchungen zur altassyrischen Religion*, *AfO Beiheft* 13/14, 33-34; Stephens, *PNC*, *YOS* Res. 13/1, 90.

8 Note the name *I-bi-ša-an* in *CT* 8, 22b:1-2.

9 *CT* 24, 8:11.

10 *CT* 24, 9:15.

11 Deller apud Ungnad-Matouš, *Grammatik des Akkadischen*, 4th ed. 27. (Munich, 1964), sec. 20d; Yvissaker, *LSS* 5/VI, 8-9; Delitzsch, *Assyrian Grammar* (Berlin, 1889), 108-10; *idem*, *Assyrische Grammatik*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1906), 124-26. Von Soden's doubts, expressed in *GAG*, 30, concerning this phenomenon are unwarranted in the face of the evidence.

Šaḥan.¹² While there is no conclusive alternation, as is the case with *Nirah*, the reading Šaḥan is virtually certain. This is supported by evidence from two seal impressions for Šaḥan as a personal god at Dilbat.¹³

The evidence shows that Šaḥan was the Babylonian reading of the logogram ^dMUŠ.¹⁴ The use of the snake god in personal names was common in the Old Babylonian and Kassite¹⁵ periods, but seems to have died out later. The gloss in the god-list is apparently based upon a Babylonian source as the reference to the Ekur-temple suggests.¹⁶ The reading *Nirah* was known in Cappadocia during the Old Assyrian period and probably survived as the common rendering of ^dMUŠ into the late period. That Šaḥan was less known in Assyria may be gathered from a late bilingual proverb in which both the Sumerian and Akkadian versions write ^dŠa-ḥa-an.¹⁷ While the sense of the proverb is difficult to fathom, it is clearly based on a pun with the verb *šahānu* 'to become warm', 'to burn'.¹⁸ While certainty cannot be reached because of fragmentary evidence, this reconstruction seems to accord best with the usage of the logogram ^dMUŠ.

12 Ranke, *Early Babylonian Personal Names*, BE Res. 3 (Philadelphia, 1905), 206-7; Ungnad, *BA 6/V* (1909), 135-36; Frankena, *Abb 3*, 1:1. Note that three of the references which come from texts outside of Dilbat are to a certain Ibbi-Sahan (*CT 8*, 22b:1-2; *CT 6*, 3b:3; Frankena, *ibid.*). The snake cults seem to have been localized in such places as Dilbat and Der (whose chief deity was Ištaran).

13 Gauthier, *Dilbat*, 30, no. 5 (*Išme-Sîn warad ^dŠa-ḥa-an u Nabium*); Ungnad, *VS 7*, 150 ([S]alūḥu[m] [mā]r Uraš-muballit [wa]rad ^dŠa-ḥa-a[n]).

14 Despite what was noted in n. 12, Ebeling's contention, in *MAOG 10/2* (1937), 38, that Šaḥan was restricted to Dilbat is too strong. There are too many gaps in our information to be so restrictive.

15 Clay, *CPN*, *YOS* [Res.] 1, 194.

16 Note however that in some contexts *é . k u r* might refer to the Ešarra-temple at Aššur; see A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden, 1972), 1:19, n. 57.

17 Lambert, *BWL*, 244:14-18 (transliteration), 249 (translation).

18 Delitzsch, *AHW*, 650; Muss-Arnolt, *Dictionary*, 1020b; Meissner, *SplAW*, 93a; cf. Bezold, *Glossar*, 268a. The verb is rare in Akkadian, but well attested to in other Semitic languages.