

An Akkadian Cognate of Hebrew *šehîn*

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In memoriam
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(Proverbs 22:9)

In Šumma Izbu I:69¹ we find the following omen:

*šumma sinništu šehhāna (Á.KÁM) lū zikru lū sinništu ūlid sinništu šī [ina sūqi š] a²
arnam išū irhīši*

If a woman gives birth to a *šehhānu*, whether male or female, this woman was impregnated by a sinful man in the street.

E. Leichty translated *šehhānu* as 'giant', without offering any evidence in support. He explains the Izbu Commentary's glosses of *ša arnam išū* 'sinner' by *garbānu* and *mali mē*³ "by the fact that both leprosy and dropsy are swelling diseases which result in the enlargement of the features or limbs, thus offering an inner connection with *šehhānu* 'giant' in the protasis."⁴ While this explanation might seem far-fetched, it is not impossible in light of the equally far-fetched interpretations found elsewhere in Assyrian and Babylonian commentaries.

However, there is lexical evidence which points in another direction. In the Izbu Commentary W to XI:7,⁵ *mabhû* is glossed by *še-ḥa-a-nu*, and, indeed, W. von Soden explicitly relates this gloss to our passage and translates "ein Ekstatiker."⁶ While this gloss would seem unimpeachable in the context of the apodosis of XI:7,⁷ *še-ḥa-a-nu* there would seem to be an

1 TCS IV, 38:69.

2 Restored from Commentary, TCS IV, 213, 35.

3 TCS IV, 213:36–37.

4 TCS IV, 38, ad. loc.

5 TCS IV, 231, 365e.

6 AHw., 1209a, s.v. *šehhānu*. E. Weidner, AJSL 38 (1922), 197–98, and R. Labat, *Commentaires assyriologiques sur le Présages* 82:28, also take *šehhānu* this way.

7 TCS IV, 131:7: *māta mabhiātum išabbatū* "the crazed women will seize the land."

-ānu formation derived from *šehû* 'to become wild', while, as will presently be seen, our *šehhānu* is to be derived from another root. Moreover, this rendering does little to further our understanding of the omen.

There is another piece of evidence that gives us a clue to the correct understanding of this omen and its commentaries. In *lú = šá, lú* KA.TAR is glossed with *ši-ḫa-[nu]*.⁹ KA.TAR = *katarrû* is found in Erimḫuš III:17f. in a list of skin marks, including *ḫalû, umṣatu* and *pindû*;¹⁰ *pindû* and *ḫalû* are in turn glossed in our Izbu Commentary as: *pindû*:¹¹ *umṣatu sandu* and *ḫalû*:¹² MIN *ṣalimtu*¹³—'red' and 'black scars', respectively. We would thus seem to be dealing with a skin eruption, and *šehhānu* would be related to the Hebrew *šehin* and Syriac *šuhnā*.¹⁴ We would similarly relate *garbānu* to the Hebrew *gārāb*, which is closely associated with *šehin*. The medieval Jewish exegete Rashi comments on *gārāb* and *yallepēt* in Lev. 21:20: "they are varieties of *šehin*"; and in Deut. 28:27 he defines *gārāb* as "a moist *šehin*" (= Akk. *mali mē!*). Without going into the vexing problem of the identification of the Biblical *šāra'aṭ* with leprosy, an identification as laden with problems as it is hoary,¹⁵ we would point to *šehin* as cognate to *šehhānu* and *gārāb* to *garbānu*. We take the former as a *qattālu* formation from *šahānu*, 'to become warm, to be heated',¹⁶ as Syriac *šuhnā* is related to *šehan*, the regular word for 'to warm'. The relation of blister to burn is explicit in Lev. 13:24f.

We should thus translate *šehhānu* as: 'one afflicted with boils'.

8 *AHw.*, 1209b, s.v. *šehu* or *šehû* III 'wild werden'.

9 *MSL* 12, 236, VIII:3.

10 *CAD* K, 303b, s.v. *katarru*, lex. sect.

11 *AHw.*, 854b, s.v. *pe/indu*.

12 *AHw.*, 314b, s.v. *ḫālu(m)* II *ḫalû* I; compare *CAD* H, 53b, s.v. *ḫalu* A.

13 *TCS* IV, 216, IV:128–29.

14 Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 770a.

15 Sec, e.g., *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 6:776–77 [in Hebrew], and compare *CAD* G, 49b–50a and *AHw.*, 282a, s.v. *garbānu*. It is interesting to note in this connection that in the Bible and Rabbinic literature *šāra'aṭ* is also associated with sin, in this case the sin of tale-bearing; see Num. 12:1–16 and Sifre Deut. (ed. Finkelstein) 294:lf. and the literature there cited.

16 *AHw.*, 1128b.