



## The Name of Gilgameš in the Light of Line 47 of the First Tablet of the Standard Babylonian Gilgameš Epic\*

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Line 47 of the first tablet of the Standard Babylonian Gilgameš Epic reads as follows: <sup>d</sup>GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš<sup>1</sup> ul-tu u<sub>4</sub>-um i'-al-du na-bu šum-šu<sub>2</sub>. Ever since this line was recovered on a tablet from Nimrud (Wiseman 1975; MS **g** in George's edition), it was generally treated in three alternative ways.

(1) Some scholars followed C. Wilcke's proposal to read šu<sup>1</sup>-pu instead of na-bu: 'Gilgamesch—seit dem Tag, an dem er geboren wurde, ist sein Name berühmt' (Wilcke 1977:205).<sup>2</sup> Given the fact that the combination of šumu 'name' and nabû 'to name, to summon' is more than natural (and, indeed, fairly common),<sup>3</sup> this emendation is scarcely appealing.

(2) J. Tigay explains this line in the following way: "The section describing Gilgamesh's creation begins with his name being called—that is, destined by the gods for kingship—on the day of his birth. This theme is connected with one frequently found in royal inscriptions, the gods' calling the king's name (for kingship), often before his birth, while he is still in the womb or in his childhood" (Tigay 1982:153). Within Tigay's interpretation, the present line may be rendered as 'Gilgameš—from the day

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<sup>1</sup> I follow George (2003:84f.) in reading <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIN<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ as <sup>d</sup>GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš (probably to be rendered as <sup>d</sup>gilg<sup>gim<sub>2</sub></sup>-maš).

<sup>2</sup> With the following comment: "Wiseman, l. c., liest na-bu; dies scheint auch der Text zu schreiben. Die Korrektur zu šu<sup>1</sup>-pu erfordert einen weiteren Keil" (ibid. 201). Cf. also 'Gilgamesch, seit dem Tage, an dem er geboren wurde, ist sein Name herrlich' (Schott-von Soden 1988:17); 'Gilgamesh (was) named from birth for fame' (Dalley 1989:51). Note that the emendation of na-bu to šu<sup>1</sup>-pu was also suggested (but subsequently rejected) by Wiseman (1975:163).

<sup>3</sup> na-bu in the text must be an error for nabi (v. George 2003:784).

he was born his name was summoned.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in the context of the two preceding lines (45–46), where Gilgamesh is described as an unrivalled king, Tigay’s interpretation is by no means implausible: *man-nu <ša<sub>2</sub>> it-ti-šu iš-ša<sub>2</sub>-an-na-nu a-na šarrū(LUGAL)-ti // u<sub>3</sub> ki-i* <sup>d</sup>GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš i-qab-bu-u<sub>2</sub> a-na-ku-ma šarru(LUGAL) ‘Who is that who<sup>5</sup> can be compared with him in kingship, // and can say like Gilgamesh, “I am king indeed”?’). Still, it is worth pointing out that parallels from royal inscriptions referred to by Tigay<sup>6</sup> are not quite exact. As a rule, these passages mention a particular god (or gods) who summoned the king; it is also common to find the purpose of this act being specified. Cf. for instance *ša<sub>2</sub> Aššur(AN.ŠAR<sub>2</sub>) ab(AD) ilāni(DINGIR.DINGIR) a-na šarrū(LUGAL)-ut māt(KUR) Aš-šur<sup>ki</sup> šakkanakkū(GIR<sub>3</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub>)-ut māt(KUR) Šumeri(EME.GI<sub>7</sub>) u Akkadī(URI)<sup>ki</sup> im-bu-u ni-bit šumī(MU)-ia* ‘(I am Esarhaddon ...) whose name Aššur, the father of the gods, called to kingship over Assyria and rulership over Sumer and Akkad’ (Borger 1956:119, § 101, ll. 10ff.); *ša a-na za-na-nam ma-ḥa-zi u<sub>3</sub> ud-du-šu e-eš-re-e-tim* <sup>d</sup>Marduk (AMAR.UTU) *be-li<sub>2</sub> ra-bi<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>3</sub> ib-bi<sub>2</sub>-u<sub>3</sub> ni<sub>5</sub>-bi-it-su* ‘(Nebuchadnezzar) whose name Marduk, the great lord, called to provide for the sanctuaries and to renew the temples’ (Winckler 1887:169, ll. 5f.; VAS 1, 39 i 5f.).<sup>7</sup> Within Tigay’s interpretation the line under scrutiny turns out to be somewhat too laconic.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Casus pendens*. Cf. Tigay’s own translation: ‘[Gilg]amesh was summoned by name from the very day of his birth’ (ibid. 142). Cf. also Tournay–Shaffer 1994:44 (‘Gilgamesh, dont le nom fut prononcé dès le jour de sa naissance’), with fn. *t* on p. 45 (“Son nom fut prononcé par les dieux qui fixèrent ainsi sa destinée. Le thème est bien attesté pour les rois mésopotamiens ...”).

<sup>5</sup> For the restoration of the relative pronoun *ša* in l. 45 v. George 2003:784.

<sup>6</sup> The passages are collected in Seux 1967:176–179, 370–371.

<sup>7</sup> The superficially similar passage from Tiglathpileser’s annals has probably nothing to do with the idea of the king being summoned by the gods to kingship. Rather, it describes the fame of the king: *rēyū(SIPA)<sup>im</sup> ke-e-nu ša si-qir-šu eli(UGU) ma-li-ki<sup>mes</sup> ne<sub>2</sub>-bu-u<sub>2</sub>* ‘Faithful shepherd whose name is proclaimed over (the names of) the (other) rulers’ (Grayson 1991:13, ll. 34f.); ‘Tiglathpileser whose name is more famous (?) than (the names of) the (other) rulers’ (CAD N<sub>1</sub> 35b). Cf. also the use of *nabū* in the Š-stem in the following passage from Assurbanipal’s hymn to Ištar: *u<sub>2</sub>-šab-bi-u zikir šu[mīya] eli kalīšunu malikī* ‘(The great gods) had my name proclaimed over (the names of) all the (other) rulers’ (von Soden 1974–1977:46, l. 19). In view of the obvious similarity between these two passages, I find unlikely von Soden’s correction of *u<sub>2</sub>-šab-bi* to *u<sub>2</sub>-šaq<sup>1</sup>-qu<sup>1</sup>-u* as well as the “irregular spelling for *šūpū*” tentatively supposed in CAD N<sub>1</sub> 38b.

<sup>8</sup> As recognized by Tigay himself, cf. his note to the transliterated text: “Perhaps restore the beginning of the line, instead of [<sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GI]N<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ, either [*ana šarrū(LUGAL)*]-*tī*<sup>1</sup>, ‘for kingship,’ or [*ana da-ra-a*]-*tī*<sup>1</sup> ‘forever’” (Tigay 1982:264).

(3) In a few recent translations, this line has been taken to mean that the hero of the Epic was named Gilgameš since the very day he was born: ‘From the day he was born his name was called “Gilgameš”.’<sup>9</sup> At first sight, this grammatically blameless interpretation may appear rather pointless in the context of the hymn to Gilgameš (ll. 29–62): there is nothing peculiar about the fact that Gilgameš received his name the day he was born.<sup>10</sup> However, this reading becomes more attractive if we assume that the clue to the interpretation of the line is furnished by the meaning of the name of Gilgameš—that is, the name was probably taken here to designate some remarkable quality of the hero.

As is well known, the question of what the name of Gilgameš means is a very complex one.<sup>11</sup> In fact, two different problems are to be solved: (I) the reconstruction of the original form of the name and its meaning, and (II) the exegetic interpretation of the later forms of the name of Gilgameš as supposedly arrived at by learned scribes.<sup>12</sup> It is the second question that I consider of vital importance for a correct understanding of the line under scrutiny. The first question has no immediate bearing on it,<sup>13</sup> but a brief summary of recent views on this issue can nevertheless be useful in the present context.

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Needless to say, these restorations cannot be maintained anymore in view of the explicit evidence from a Babylonian manuscript (MS **h** in George’s edition).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Gilgameš was his name from the day he was born’ (George 2003:541); ‘“Gilgamesch” ist er seit dem Tage, da er geboren, mit Namen genannt’ (Maul 2008:47); ‘Den Namen Gilgamesch trägt er seit dem Tag seiner Geburt’ (Röllig 2009:36).

<sup>10</sup> As recently argued in Radner 2005:27f., it was normal for every Mesopotamian child to receive his name soon after birth (our line is cited by Radner among other supporting examples), even if not necessarily on the very day he was born (cf. Stol 2000:178).

<sup>11</sup> My inquiry into the meaning of Gilgameš’s name is largely based on George’s brilliant survey of the problem (George 2003:71–90).

<sup>12</sup> On hermeneutical practices in ancient Mesopotamia v. Lieberman 1987; Cavigneaux 1987; Lambert 1999; Maul 1999; Selz 2002; Frahm 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, the meaning of the Sumerian form of the name, as it was interpreted by Falkenstein (‘der “Alte” ist ein junger Mann,’ v. Falkenstein 1957–1971: 357a), was supposed by some scholars to be alluded to in the eleventh tablet of the Gilgameš Epic (XI 299), v., among others, Böhl 1957–1971:370; Tournay-Shaffer 1994:9; Foster 2001:xii; Röllig 2009:15f. and, critically, George 2003:75, fn. 29; *ibid.* 525, fn. 288.

## I. The original form of the name of Gilgameš and its meaning

The original Sumerian form of Gilgameš's name is commonly thought to be *pa-bilga-mes*.<sup>14</sup> Within such a reading, it consists of *pa-bilga*, a term denoting an elder paternal uncle or grandfather (v. Edzard 1960:254f.; Sjöberg 1967: 212ff.) and *mes* '(young) man' (often translated as 'hero'). The name itself is usually understood as a nominal sentence: 'the forebear (was) a hero.'<sup>15</sup> For several reasons, such a rendering is open to criticism. First, there is no reliable evidence for the meaning 'hero' of Sum. **mes**. It was recently argued by G. Marchesi (2004:192f.) that **mes** "is related to the idea of manliness and strength," but I do not find Marchesi's arguments sufficiently convincing. Thus, the equation **mes** = *zi-ka<sub>3</sub>-ru* (MSL 14, 97, 187:5) can be explained by the confusion between **geš**<sub>(3)</sub> 'male, man' (= *zikaru*) and **mes** '(young) man' (= *eḫlu*), cf. the interchangeable use of the signs MES and GIŠ in Proto-Lu and Lu<sub>2</sub> = *ša: sul, mes, ġuruš* (MSL 12, 44:311–313);<sup>16</sup> **su**<sub>(6)</sub>, **ge-*es*-*š***, **gu-ru-uš** **ġuruš** = *et-lum* (MSL 12, 126: 77–79). Ninsianna's epithet **mes-saġ** (translated by Marchesi as 'leading *mes*') in an inscription of Rīm-Sin (Frayne 1990:297, l. 8) may as well be read as **dub-saġ** 'former; leader' (cf. Alster 1997:111, 3.188). Finally, in the passages cited by Marchesi (Wilcke 1969:102, l. 110; Sjöberg–Bergmann 1969:32, l. 266; Klein 1991:302, l. 19) the rendering of **mes** as 'vigorous male' or 'strong one' is hardly compelling—in each case the neutral meaning 'man' would easily fit as well. Now, the rendering of Gilgameš's name as 'the ancestor (was) a (young) man' is, to my taste, rather pointless (cf., however, Glassner 2003:211). Moreover, as pointed out by Krebernik (2002:15), in the early Sumerian onomasticon **mes** alone is not used as a predicative element. Thus, for example, it cannot be used in the manner of **ur-saġ** 'hero' in the name **a-ur-saġ** 'the father is a hero' (UET 2, 143 i 6). It is, therefore, quite likely that *pa-bilga-mes* is an abbreviated form of the name (Krebernik 2002:15). The only other name which seems comparable to it comes from Archaic Ur: **pa<sub>4</sub>-bilga(GIŠ<sub>x</sub>)<sup>bil</sup>-mes-utu-pa<sub>3</sub>-da**<sup>17</sup> 'the ancestor

<sup>14</sup> For the variant spellings of *pa-bilga* v. George 2003:72ff.

<sup>15</sup> George 2003:74, cf. also Diakonoff–Jankowska 1990:104; Tournay–Shaffer 1994:9; Sallaberger 2008:42; Röellig 2009:15.

<sup>16</sup> In MSL the sign in line 312 is read as **meš**, but in Chiera's copies there are clear **mes** signs. V. Chiera 1929, No. 102 i 8 (followed by **geš** in l. 9); No. 238rev. ii 7; No. 240rev. i 40.

<sup>17</sup> The word *pa-bilga* is transliterated according to the system developed by George (2003:72ff.), for alternative transliterations v. Krebernik 2002:14, fn. 39; Marchesi 2004:196. Note that according to Krebernik (2002:15) the reading of this name is far from certain.

(was) the man which was chosen by Utu.<sup>18</sup> It is tempting to suppose that Gilgameš bore the same or similar name (cf. Krebernik 2002:15; for a different interpretation v. Marchesi 2004:195ff.).

## II. The exegetic interpretation of Gilgameš's name

The Ancients' first attempts to make sense of Gilgameš's name might have been triggered by the loss of the element /pa/. According to George (2003:74ff.), this loss occurred after the Fara period. This thesis is supported by the following arguments. After the Fara period the name became spelled without PAP, its first element being written either with GIŠ.BIL<sub>2</sub> or, less frequently, with GIŠ.BIL. In the late third millennium, these sign-groups were sometimes used as syllabograms for /bil/ and /pil/ (v. Gelb 1961:84f.; von Soden–Röllig 1991:30). They are also examples of the first syllable of Gilgameš's name written with BIL<sub>2</sub> or BIL(NE).<sup>19</sup> However, the Ur III spellings <sup>d</sup>pa-GIŠ.BIL<sub>2</sub>-ga-mes and <sup>d</sup>pa-GIŠ.BIL-ga-mes (cited by Marchesi 2004:196) clearly suggest that the old form of Gilgameš's name was also retained and apparently coexisted with the new one (*bilga-mes*) at least during the Ur III period. As soon as the abbreviated form of Gilgameš's name had become prevalent, a need might have been felt to give a meaning to it. It seems possible that the ancient treatment of <sup>d</sup>bil<sub>3/4</sub>-ga-mes was similar to some of its modern interpretations. It was suggested by Klein (1993:94, fn. 5) that <sup>d</sup>bil<sub>3/4</sub>-ga-mes (according to Klein, apparently the original form of Gilgameš's name) is to be parsed as *bilga* 'offshoot, offspring' + *mes*, a designation of a kind of tree (v. Powell 1987:149; 2003:17b). The whole could thus be rendered as 'the offshoot (of) the *mes*-tree.'<sup>20</sup> Klein's interpretation is based primarily on a passage from the Marriage of Martu, where the city of Ninab seems to be de-

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<sup>18</sup> This name is attested once in an administrative text (UET 2, 281obv. ii 5) that records the delivery of cakes: on the reverse it is stated that 127 cakes (**gug**<sub>2</sub>) were delivered by **engiz**(EN:ME:GI, on this office v. Zgoll 2006:417, with further literature). According to Marchesi (2004:196), **pa**<sub>4</sub>-**bilga**(GIŠ)<sup>bil</sup>-**utu-pa**<sub>3</sub> in Deimel 1923, No. 29rev. i 19 (list of personal names) may be "an abbreviated or corrupted form of the same name."

<sup>19</sup> Note especially the spelling <sup>d</sup>bil<sub>2</sub>-ga-mes on an Ur III mace-head, v. George 2003:77, No. 4c.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Parpola 1998:325, fn. 38. Note also that according to Marchesi (2004:197, fn. 253) the older form *pabilga-mes* may mean 'the progenitor (?) is (as fruitful as) a *mes*-tree.'

scribed as **bil<sub>2</sub>-ga** <sup>giš</sup>**mes-me-en** ‘you are an offshoot<sup>21</sup> of the *mes*-tree’ (cited from Klein 1997:110, l. 7). In Klein’s opinion, this phrase “is ambiguous and can also be translated ‘you are Gilgameš,’ it may be a word play on the part of the author of the myth” (Klein 1993:94). However, as rightly observed by George (2003:75, fn. 30), it is difficult to see “what such an allusion to would add to the story.” The resemblance of this phrase to Gilgameš’s name may well be accidental. One must acknowledge, nevertheless, that in Sumerian hymns the *mes*-tree is indeed a frequent metaphor for a king, v. Klein 1993:94, fn. 5; Parpola 1998:325, fn. 39.<sup>22</sup> All in all, Klein’s suggestion that ‘the offshoot (of) the *mes*-tree’ is the original meaning of Gilgameš’s name can hardly be accepted. There is little doubt that the original form of this name had *pa-bilga*, a term of kinship, and not *bilga* ‘offshoot’ as its first element. Besides, “nowhere is the name identifiably a genitive compound” (George 2003:75). Nonetheless, the shortened form of the name (*bilga-mes*) may have been interpreted as a combination of *bilga* ‘offshoot’ and *mes*-tree, but for the time being such a hypothesis cannot be taken as proven.

Attempts were made to see the meaning of Gilgameš’s name as encoded in the standard first-millennium spelling <sup>d</sup>GIŠ-*gim*<sub>2</sub>(GIN<sub>2</sub>/TUN<sub>3</sub>)-*maš*. According to F. M. Th. Böhl, the name of Gilgameš may allude to the axe seen by Gilgameš in his second dream about the coming of Enkidu. He reads <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIN<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ as **giš-tun<sub>3</sub>-maš** and renders it as “‘Zwillingsaxt’ oder ‘Doppelaxt’ (Labrys): ein Bild unverbrüchlicher Freundschaft” (Böhl 1957–1971:370).<sup>23</sup> C. Saporetti sees in this spelling the Sumerian expression **tun<sub>3</sub> bar** ‘to cleave (wood) with an axe.’ Accordingly, the name of Gilgameš, being spelled as <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIN<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ (= <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.TUN<sub>3</sub>.BAR), would mean ‘colui che taglia (con l’ascia) il legno/gli alberi’ (Saporetti 1984:404). In Saporetti’s view, the allusion is to the episode of the chopping down of the cedar trees in Ħuwawa’s forest as well as to the felling of the **ħalub**-tree described in the Sumerian poem “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Nether World.” A much more sophisticated interpretation was put forward by S. Parpola. In his opinion, the spelling <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIN<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ conceals the follow-

<sup>21</sup> Note that **bil<sub>2</sub>-ga** in this passage is often translated as ‘ancestor’ (v., for instance, PSD B 153a).

<sup>22</sup> In addition to the passages adduced by the authors one may add Klein 1981:34, l. 15, with commentary on p. 24, fn. 122; Civil 1996:163 ii 3’; Römer 1965:51, l. 244.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. also Beckman 2003:50: “Perhaps the choice of GIN<sub>2</sub> reflects a clever play on its alternate value TUN<sub>3</sub> = *pāšum*, in allusion to the axe of which Gilgameš dreams.”

ing esoteric meaning: (Gilgamesh) '(who) matched the tree of balance' ([ša] iṣṣi šitqulti umaššil[u]) (Parpola 1998:324).<sup>24</sup> The name of the hero thus portrays him "as an embodiment of the sacred tree."<sup>25</sup>

As one can see, the interpretations of Gilgamesh's name suggested so far are notoriously divergent from each other, being, it seems, primarily grounded on their authors' views of what the name *should* mean. This is not to say that an exegetical approach to the name of Gilgamesh is unwelcome (cf. George 2003:87). However, any treatment of this kind is deemed to remain highly uncertain unless supported by ancient sources,<sup>26</sup> the more so since the spelling <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIN<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ does not seem to have been intentionally coined by the Ancients to load the name of Gilgamesh with a hidden meaning.<sup>27</sup> George's conclusion that "the writing GIŠ-gim<sub>2</sub>-maš has its origin in old traditions of spelling" (ibid. 87f.) is very well founded.

The primary goal of the present study is to find out how the name of the hero was understood by the author(s) of the "old" prologue to the Epic. I propose the following steps to solve the problem. The first is to seek for ancient evidence of the name of Gilgamesh being interpreted in a hermeneutical way. Thanks to the passage under discussion, we are also able to make the next step, namely to check whether the exegetic meaning obtained on the basis of this evidence fits the context of this particular

<sup>24</sup> The correspondences used by Parpola are as follows: GIŠ = iṣu 'tree'; GIN<sub>2</sub> = šiqḷu 'shekel' (according to Parpola, this logogram might also be read as šūqultu 'balance'); MAŠ = mašātu 'to be like.'

<sup>25</sup> Parpola's interpretation is based on his perception of the Epic of Gilgamesh as "structured after the sacred tree, its individual tablets corresponding to the divine powers making up the tree and marking progressive stages in the hero's quest for immortality and spiritual perfection" (ibid. 325; for a detailed discussion on this topic v. Parpola 1993:192–195).

<sup>26</sup> A parade example of such a corroboration is the name of the demon Šulak as explained in a commentary of a medical text: *šumma amēlu lišānšu ebēt-ma* <...> *ana bīt musāti lā irrub Šulak imahḥassu Šulak ša iqbū* : ŠU : qātu : LA : lā : KU<sub>3</sub> : ellu : *ana bīt musātu irrub qātāšu lā ellā ana muḥḥi qabi* 'If a man's tongue is swollen <...> (this man) should not enter the lavatory, (otherwise) Šulak will strike him. (The name) Šulak, as they said, (should be interpreted as) ŠU "hand," LA "not," KU<sub>3</sub> "clean"; he enters the lavatory and his hands are not clean, it is because of this that he is called so' (Hunger 1976, No. 47, ll. 1ff.; see further Cavigneaux 1987:250; Parpola 1998:319; Glassner 2003:155; Selz 2002:661).

<sup>27</sup> So explicitly in Parpola 1998:318: "The fact that the spellings <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIM.MAŠ and <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.GIN<sub>2</sub>.MAŠ are close to the actual pronunciation of the name but slightly deviate from it suggests that they were indeed introduced to make a specific logographic reading possible."

line. In my opinion, the fact that the line under scrutiny occurs in the context of the hymn (ll. 29–62) suggests that the name ‘Gilgameš’ was intended to describe some admirable quality of the hero. This quality might have characterized Gilgameš from the very first days of his life (*ultu ūm i”aldu*), but it is also possible that the name foretells the heroic features to be acquired by Gilgameš in his more mature years.<sup>28</sup>

Turning now to the meaning of the name of Gilgameš as understood by ancient scribes, one has to recognize that the most important piece of evidence comes from the so-called “Group Vocabulary 3” (“série *šarru*” according to Cavigneaux 1980–1983:638a):

**kal-ga imin** = <sup>d</sup>**bil**<sub>3</sub>-ga-mes

**kal-ga imin** = *muq-tab-lu*

**kal-ga imin** = *a-lik pa-na*

(CT 18, 30 iv 6–8)

In the first line of this lexical segment, it is stated that **kal-ga imin** is an explanation of the name of Gilgameš. In the next two lines, the meaning of the equation **kal-ga imin** = <sup>d</sup>**bil**<sub>3</sub>-ga-mes is clarified: it describes the hero as a ‘warrior’ (*muqtablu*) and as a ‘leader’ (*ālik pana*).

The Sumerian word **kal-ga** ‘strong’<sup>29</sup> seems to refer to the first element of the name of Gilgameš. This element was apparently pronounced in a variety of ways. The spellings that interest us here are those with /k/ in *Anlaut* as well as those with /a/ in the first and second syllables: *ki-il-ga-mes*;<sup>30</sup> <sup>d</sup>*gal-ga-mi-iš*; <sup>d</sup>*gal-ga-mi-šu-ul*;<sup>31</sup> *gal-ga-meš*.<sup>32</sup> In George’s opinion, the use of the sign GAL in the last three examples “can best be explained by reference to a western orthographic tradition whereby signs *CaC* can have the value *CiC* (and vice

<sup>28</sup> The latter possibility has been suggested to me by L. Kogan. One cannot rule out that it also predicts some of his future heroic achievements (such as killing *Ḫuwawa*), but this is, in my view, considerably less likely.

<sup>29</sup> Sumerian **KAL-ga** is usually transliterated as **kalag-ga** or **kala-ga**. This reading is supported by the spellings like **kal-la-ga** (Alster 1997:92, SP 3.67, MS A) as well as by the syllabic writings **ka-la-ka** and **ka-la-ak-ka** (v. CAD D 93a *dannu*, lex. section), v. also Römer 1965:103 with further literature. However, there is also evidence for the variant pronunciation with the vowel in the second syllable syn-copated, cf. **gal-ga** in a syllabically written Sumerian text from Ebla (Edzard 1984: 43, A iii 1), which corresponds to **KAL** in the standard orthography (ibid. B ii 1). Cf. also **ur-saḡ ga-ar-ga** in KAR 158 iii 22, which seems to stand for **ur-saḡ kal-ga** (v. Falkenstein 1950:103, fn. 7; van Dijk 1960:115, fn. 3).

<sup>30</sup> George 2003:81, No. 20 (Hh XXII, Emar).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 79, No. 11 (Hurrian version of the Gilgameš Epic).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 81, No. 18 (Hh XX–XXII, Ugarit).



versa). The sign *gal* can thereby be given the value *gil<sub>x</sub>*” (George 2003:79). However, to my knowledge, there are no other examples of such a use of GAL. Note that a few pages later George takes a rather different view: “the sign *kal* in GIŠ-*kal*-TUK recalls the western spellings *gal-ga-mi-iš* (No. 11) and *gal-ga-meš* (No. 18); perhaps it glosses GIŠ” (ibid. 86). Tournay and Shaffer (1994:10) also refer to the spelling *kal-ka-meš*, said to be attested on a cylinder seal of the Old Akkadian period (with no exact reference). The association of the first element of Gilgameš’s name with **kal-ga** ‘strong’ may be further corroborated by the following passages: **kal-ga** <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.BIL<sub>2</sub>-**ga-mes** DI **ha-ra-a[n-...]** ‘May the mighty Gilgameš ...’ (Sjöberg 1983:315, l. 96); **kal-ga** <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.BIL<sub>2</sub>-**ga-mes mi<sub>2</sub> du<sub>11</sub>-ga** (var. **za<sub>3</sub>-mi<sub>2</sub>**) ‘The mighty Gilgameš has been praised (?) (var. Praise be to the mighty Gilgameš)’ (Edzard 1991:232, l. 201). Since in Sumerian an adjective normally follows the noun modified, one may wonder whether, in this case, **kal-ga** ‘strong’ placed before <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.BIL<sub>(2)</sub>-**ga-mes** was supposed to allude to the first element of the name. Also remarkable is the fact that in the hymn to Gilgameš which constitutes a part of Šulgi O, the strength of the hero is frequently mentioned. Cf., for example, **šul-gi** <...> <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.BIL<sub>2</sub>-**ga-mes nam-kal-ga-na** (var. **nam-ur-saĝ-ĝa<sub>2</sub>-na**) **mu-ni-in-i-i** <...> **kal-ga me<sub>3</sub>-a** ‘Šulgi <...> praised Gilgameš in his might <...>: “Mighty one in the battle ...”’ (Klein 1976:276ff., ll. 49–53). It is, therefore, possible that in the passages just mentioned the first element of Gilgameš’s name (spelled with the sign-group GIŠ.BIL<sub>(2)</sub>-**ga**) was read as /kalga/ (or /galga/). Such a reading, though nowhere explicitly attested, may be confirmed by the occurrence of the name of Gilgameš in the Song of the Hoe. As is well known, in this composition the syllable /al/ plays an important role: the verbal prefix **al-** as well as a number of words and names which contain the syllables /al/ or /Cal/ (and also /ar/ or /Car/) are frequently used, obviously to make a pun on the Sumerian word for ‘hoe’ (<sup>ĝis</sup>**al**), v. Wilcke 1972:36f. It is tempting to suggest that Gilgameš, who is involved in lines 73–78 of the Song (v. Civil 1969:70, fn. 1), is referred to because his name was pronounced (at least by the author of the Song) with /al/ (i. e., *galgames* or the like). Thus, it seems likely that <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.BIL<sub>(2)</sub>-**ga-mes** here (and, probably, elsewhere) is a historical writing of the name which has little bearing on its actual pronunciation.

The role of **imin** ‘seven’ is less clear. George interprets it as “a symbolic number” and translates **kal-ga imin** as ‘strongest of all’ (George 2003: 86),<sup>33</sup> noting that “whatever the interpretation of **imin**, it is Gilgameš’s physical prowess that is at issue” (ibid. 87).

<sup>33</sup> This translation is based firstly on the equation **imin** = *kišsatu* which is found in the same list (for details see George 2003:87). Note that in this list the

That Gilgameš's name may allude to the strength of the hero can also be deduced from the spelling GIŠ-KAL-TUK,<sup>34</sup> apparently interpreted by the Ancients as 'one who has strength' (KAL = *danānu*; TUKU = *išū*).<sup>35</sup> This spelling seems to be derived from the more common GIŠ-TUK(-*maš*).<sup>36</sup> In George's opinion, the latter writing "suggests deliberate manipulation of the spelling," since "spellings that include the signs GIŠ and TUK might have been favoured (if not coined) as a scholarly exercise in revealing a characteristic of the hero Gilgameš for which he became celebrated in the Babylonian epic tradition: he was a man of extraordinary wisdom" (George 2003:86). The reason for this conclusion is that "the signs *giš-tuk* evoke the Sumerian word *geštug*, written <sup>gi</sup>PI<sup>tug<sub>2</sub></sup> etc., meaning 'ear; understanding, wisdom' (*uznu*, *ḥasīsu*) and also 'wise, perceptive' (*ḥassu*)" (ibid. fn. 81).<sup>37</sup> According to George, "the spelling <sup>d</sup>GIŠ-*kal*-TUK offers the possibility of an additional exegesis that makes allusion to the hero's strength as well as his wisdom."

As regards the abbreviated form GIŠ-TUK, it might indeed have been interpreted as an allusion to the wisdom of the hero. But the fuller spelling, GIŠ-TUK-*maš*, cannot be easily treated in this way, for, within such a treatment, *maš* would be left unexplained.

Returning to the spelling GIŠ-KAL-TUK, it seems doubtful whether it can allude to both the strength and the wisdom of the hero. More likely, what is at issue here is the strength alone. If the assumption that KAL glosses GIŠ (*kalga*(GIŠ)<sup>kal</sup>-TUKU, v. fn. 35) is accepted, then the writing GIŠ-TUK-*maš* may be read as *kalga*(GIŠ)-TUKU-*maš* 'the ... (*maš*) which has

number 'seven' is also involved in the commentary on the name of Enkidu: **a-ra<sub>2</sub> imin** = *en-gi-du<sub>3</sub>* (CT 18, 30 iv 10). In view of the correspondence **a-ra<sub>2</sub>** = *māliku*, George renders **a-ra<sub>2</sub> imin** as "counsellor *par excellence*" (ibid. 143).

<sup>34</sup> George 2003:86, No. 21 (**An** = *Anum*, MA copy; Hh IV).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. George 2003:86, fn. 82. The sign KAL should probably be regarded as a gloss (George 2003:86). Note that it seems to indicate both the pronunciation (*kalga*(GIŠ)<sup>kal</sup>) and the meaning (KAL = *dannu*, *danānu*) of the name.

<sup>36</sup> George 2003:81, No. 15, 17 (Hh XXII, Emar; conventional Sumerian column of the Emar version of the Poem of Early Rulers; early NA sources of the Epic of Gilgameš). The origin of this spelling is probably due to misreading. As observed by George (2003:84), "the signs TUK and KIN (*qi*) can easily be confused at Emar, Ugarit, Hattusa and elsewhere in the West." Thus, GIŠ-TUK-*maš* is probably "descended from a Middle Assyrian spelling \*GIŠ-*qi*-*maš* or an Old Babylonian spelling \*GIŠ-*kin*-*maš*. Both would be simple variants of the attested GIŠ-*gim*-*maš* and GIŠ-*gim<sub>2</sub>*-*maš*."

<sup>37</sup> George also draws attention to the Sumerian compound verb **giš** ~ **tuku** 'to hear.'

strength.’ There are, therefore, two features which distinguish GIŠ-TUK-*maš* from GIŠ-KAL-TUK: first, the gloss is lacking; second, the last element of the name (*maš*) is preserved. The crucial problem is how to interpret this element. The clue to this question seems to be found in the passage from the Group Vocabulary cited above. In my view, the equation **kal-ga imin** = *a-lik pa-na* suggests that the last element of Gilgameš’s name might have been associated with the Sumerian word **mas-su**<sub>(2)</sub>, borrowed into Akkadian as *massû* (with phonetic variants *maššû*, *mansû*, *mensû*, *massu’u*). In both languages, this word appears to have two principal meanings: (1) ‘expert’; (2) ‘leader.’<sup>38</sup> The latter meaning seems to agree well with the explanation of Gilgameš’s name as *ālik pana* in the Group Vocabulary 3.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> It was proposed by Landsberger (MSL 2, 104, fn. 1) that there are two Akkadian words *massû*, each having a different Sumerian etymon: *massû* I < **maš<sub>2</sub>-saġ** ‘Leitbock’ (this Sumerian word can also mean ‘leader,’ v. Heimpel 1968:18) and *massû* II < **mas-su<sub>3</sub>** ‘mit fernem (weitem) Blick’ (note that **mas-su<sub>3</sub>** is a late spelling, up to the Old Babylonian period this word was written as either **mas-su** or **mas-su<sub>2</sub>**, thus Landsberger’s rendering of this word seems rather doubtful). Landsberger was subsequently followed by the majority of scholars dealing with this question (v., for instance, Lambert 1960:310; Römer 1965:243f.), including the standard dictionaries of Akkadian. The former term is generally rendered as ‘leader’ (CAD M<sub>1</sub> 327b), ‘Anführer’ (AHw. 619a), whereas the latter as ‘expert’ (CAD M<sub>1</sub> 327a), ‘Sachkundiger’ (AHw. 619b). Note, however, that in CDA 200a there is only one entry *massû* ‘leader, expert.’ Doubts were cast upon the validity of this distinction also by Lieberman (1977:389, fn. 631). Indeed, on the one hand, the phoneme /ḡ/ (**maš<sub>2</sub>-saġ**) is not expected to disappear in Sumerian loanwords into Akkadian, cf. *uršānu* ‘warrior’ (< **ur-saġ**) or *geršānu* ‘kind of leek’ (< **ga-raš-saġ**). On the other hand, **mas-su**<sub>(2)</sub> seems to mean both ‘leader’ and ‘expert,’ ‘counselor,’ cf. **na-gada mas-su niġ<sub>2</sub>-zi-ġal<sub>2</sub>-la-kam** ‘(Enlil) is a herdsman, the leader of all living creatures’ (Enlil A 94, cited from Reisman 1969:51); **dumu an-na mas-su<sub>2</sub> inim pa<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub>** ‘(Bau,) daughter of An, a counselor who chooses words (carefully)’ (Römer 1965:236, l. 5). Thus, it seems likely that there is only one word *massû* ‘leader; expert,’ borrowed from Sumerian **mas-su**<sub>(2)</sub> with the same meanings. Note also that in CAD M<sub>1</sub> 327a *massû* ‘expert’ is listed as an adjective. This seems to be based first of all on the passage from an inscription of Esarhaddon: <sup>d</sup>[Šin(30) u <sup>d</sup>Šam]aš(UTU) <sup>il</sup>āni(DINGIR)<sup>mes</sup> *maš-šu-u<sub>2</sub>-te* (Borger 1956:2 i 31). Borger, however, interprets it differently: ‘Sin und Šamaš, die “Zwillingsgötter”’ (ibid., cf. also AHw. 631a), perhaps having in mind an otherwise unattested *nisba* adjective *maššû* (< *māšû*, *maš(š)û* ‘twin’).

<sup>39</sup> Note that *ālik pana* could hardly be derived directly from **kal-ga imin**. In my opinion, these two explanations of Gilgameš’s name are of different origin. The former is the traditional interpretation of the name which stemmed, long before the Group Vocabulary 3 was composed, from the need to clarify its last element.

The line under discussion may therefore be read as follows: ‘From the day he was born his name was called “Gilgameš” (that means “the mighty leader”).’<sup>40</sup> Within this interpretation, one must assume that the name of the hero was identified with the Sumerian phrase **kal-ga mas-su**<sub>(2)</sub>.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the name was not explained on the graphemic level (as usually assumed), but was rather subjected to a kind of popular (or, rather, learned) “Sumerianizing” etymology.<sup>42</sup>

An inherently related question is how the name of Gilgameš was pronounced by the author of the “old” prologue of the Epic (the date of its composition is uncertain, but early OB is possible). If, as proposed here, it was understood as **kal-ga mas-su**<sub>(2)</sub>, then a form with the vowel /a/ in all syllables is expected (i. e. /galgāmaš/ or the like). Such a form is so far unattested. However, this may be due to the scarcity of the extant evidence. As is well known, the name of the hero was generally pronounced either with /i/ in the second syllable and /a/ in the third one (*Gilgimmaš*) or with /a/ in the second syllable and /e/ (or /i/) in the third one (*Gilgāmeš*). To my knowledge, there are only two exceptions. The first is <sup>d</sup>GIŠ.BIL<sub>(2)</sub>-**gim<sub>2</sub>-mes**<sup>43</sup> (George 2003:75, No. 2), the Old Sumerian spelling of the name current in the city-state of Lagaš. More interesting for our purpose is the second exceptional spelling, <sup>d</sup>GIŠ-*ga-maš* (ibid. 78, No. 9), which comes

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As for the latter, much more sophisticated **kal-ga imin**, it may have been coined *ad hoc* by the compiler of the list and then combined mechanically with the former variant.

<sup>40</sup> One may wonder whether line 31 of the first tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš may be considered as an allusion to the name of the hero: [*i*]-*lak ina pa-ni a-ša<sub>2</sub>-rid* ‘Going ahead he was the leader.’

<sup>41</sup> Judging from the equation <sup>ma-aš<sub>2</sub></sup>MAŠ = *a-ša<sub>2</sub>-ri-du* (MSL 14, 227:93), MAŠ alone might have been identified with the word **mas-su**<sub>(2)</sub> (for a different interpretation of this entry see George 2003:82, fn. 65). Note also that in the version of the Poem of Early Rulers from Emar <sup>md</sup>GIŠ-TUK-*m[aš]* (George 2003:81, No. 15) in the regular Sumerian column is rendered as *ki-iš-mas-su* in the syllabic Sumerian column (ibid. No. 16; according to George (ibid. 85) it is to be read as *ki-iš* < *ki* > *-mas-su*).

<sup>42</sup> The spellings GIŠ-TUK-*maš* and GIŠ-KAL-TUK discussed above were probably coined (perhaps by an accident of misreading, v. fn. 36) and interpreted against the background of this kind of thinking of the name of Gilgameš. GIŠ-TUK-*maš* thus may be rendered as *kalga*(GIŠ)-TUKU-*maš* ‘the mighty leader’ (lit. ‘the leader who has strength’). Note, however, that the reading GIŠ-TUKU(= /ḡeštu.g)-*maš* ‘the wise expert’—a development of George’s idea mentioned above—cannot be entirely ruled out.

<sup>43</sup> On this reading v. George 2003:75f., with further literature.

from Elam of the *sukkalmašs*.<sup>44</sup> The sign GIŠ does not allow us to detect the reading of the first syllable of the name.<sup>45</sup> George (2003:82) proposes to render it as *bilga*(GIŠ)<sup>ga</sup>-*maš*. However, if we accept that Gilgameš's name could also be pronounced with /a/ in the first syllable, the alternative reading *galga*(GIŠ)<sup>ga</sup>-*maš* (or the like) can hardly be excluded.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> George (2003:83) notes that this spelling is found in “essentially well-written Babylonian texts,” and hence “there is no reason why this has to be a local coinage.”

<sup>45</sup> The writings of the name of Gilgameš with the sign GIŠ may be explained as a survival of old orthography. Originally it was used to render the second part of the word *pa-bilga*, a term of kinship which played an important role in the early Sumerian onomastic (v. George 2003:71ff.). As part of the later spellings of the name of Gilgameš, the sign GIŠ (as well as GIŠ.BIL<sub>(2)</sub>, see above) was apparently read in a variety of ways, depending on how the name was pronounced within one or another tradition.

<sup>46</sup> Falkenstein's proposal that *a-ba-al-ga-maš*, the name of the ruler of Marhaši (Parahšum) conquered by Nāram-Sîn, contains the name of Gilgameš (Falkenstein 1957–1971:357; 1949:9, fn. 1) is intriguing, but difficult to prove.

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