“WHEN YOU PERFORM THE RITUAL OF ‘RUBBING’":
ON MEDICINE AND MAGIC IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA*

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To the memory of my teacher Franz Köcher
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I. INTRODUCTION

“W hen you perform the ritual of ‘rubbing’” is the first line of the so-called Muššu-u ritual tablet. The ritual instructions record ancient Mesopotamian medical and magical encounter with disease. Thus, the text ranks among the most important sources on the nature of Muššu-u. The present article aims at examining its structure, character, and setting.

The discovery of the Muššu-u series is credited to F. Köcher. When dealing with the Assur Muššu-u ritual tablet, Köcher provided in his commentary a list of manuscripts of the series as well as relevant magical-medical texts.1 Almost thirty years later, new information about this series was made available by I. L. Finkel. While cataloguing at the British Museum, he succeeded in identifying a nearly complete set of late Babylonian Muššu-u tablets.2 I am currently preparing an edition of the entire series.3

* A version of this paper was read at the XLVI Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Paris in July 2000.


Letters in bold type refer to the incipits of incantations; roman letters indicate terms in Sumerian; italics are used to designate Akkadian words.

1 “Die Ritualtafel der magisch-medizinischen Ta-
elserie” (Berlin and New York, 1975), pp. xi–xxxii, and those
among the gods, Marduk,” (d) ën an-ni-ti ën ša ëmar.uti, “This incantation is Marduk’s incantation,” (e) ën dingir gaš-ri dingir.meš ëmar.uti, “ Powerful god among the gods, Marduk”; (f) ën it-ta-lil be-lam maš-maš dingir.meš, “He has been purified, lord, conjurer of the gods,” (g) ën mur-šu mi-iq-tum li‘-bi di‘-bi, “Disease, stroke, life-fever, head disease,” (h) ën ū-tan-me-ka-nu-si 4a-nim 2an-tum, “I conjure you (in the name of ) Anu and Antu,” (i) ën id-di 4a-šu, “ Ea recited,” (j) ën kak.kib kak.kib

2 “Muššu-u, Quitâru, and the Scribe Tanitti-Bêl,” in P. Michalowski et al., eds., Velles Paraules: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Miguel Civil on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday (Sabadell, Spain, 1991), pp. 91–104. Note the following minor improvements: (1) Muššu’u tablet IV (pp. 96–97): two incantations are to be added; the sequence, accordingly, reads (a) ën a-nam-di-ka šip-tum ta-ri-dat kal mar-šu-a-ri, “I am reciting the incantation for you that chases away all kinds of diseases,” (b) ën at-ta-di-ki šip-tum ta-ri-dat kal mar-šu-a-ri, “I have recited the incantation for you that chases away all kinds of diseases.” (c) ën maš-maš 4l-gi-ši abgal dingir.meš ëmar.uti, “Conjurer of the igigi gods, wise one among the gods, Marduk,” (d) ën an-ni-ti ën ša ëmar.uti, “This incantation is Marduk’s incantation,” (e) ën dingir gaš-ri dingir.meš ëmar.uti, “ Powerful god among the gods, Marduk”; (f) ën it-ta-lil be-lam maš-maš dingir.meš, “He has been purified, lord, conjurer of the gods,” (g) ën mur-šu mi-iq-tum li‘-bi di‘-bi, “Disease, stroke, life-fever, head disease,” (h) ën ū-tan-me-ka-nu-si 4a-nim 2an-tum, “I conjure you (in the name of ) Anu and Antu,” (i) ën id-di 4a-šu, “ Ea recited,” (j) ën kak.kib kak.kib

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One characteristic of Muššu’u is the inclusion of magical formulas from two distinct corpora: from (1) the incantations series “Evil Utukku-demons” (UDUG.HU.LU.MEŠ), “Evil will be torn out” (HUL.BA.ZI.ZI.MEŠ), and “Grave diseases (characterized by a headache)” (SAG.GIG.GA.MEŠ), as well as from the collection of spells “To release from oath” (NAM.ÉR.IAM.BÚ.RU.DA), and (2) the magical-medical compendia “Hand of the ghost” (ŠU.GIDIM) and “Sagallu-tendon” (ŠA.GAL.LA) as well as the loosely related prescriptions that deal with a variety of afflictions of the limbs.4 To date, in the Muššu’u series forty-six spells are preserved of which twenty-six are attested in magical-medical compendia5 and twenty-one in the incantation series.6

F. Köcher suggested that the Muššu’u series is formed by incantations from other series: “auffällig ist jedoch der Sachverhalt, daß die meisten der (…) Beschworungen Texte sind, die bereits in anderem Zusammenhang bekanntgeworden sind.”7 He further suggested that “vielleicht griff man bei der Kompilation der Serie Muššu’u mit Bedacht auf alte bewährte magische Texte zurück, um sie—von modernen therapeutischen Behandlungsmethoden begleitet—with neuem Leben zu erfüllen.”8

II. The Muššu’u Ritual Tablet

THE TEXT

Unlike the Lamašu, Šurpu, Maqlu, and Mıs pî compendia, the Muššu’u series proper does not include a ritual tablet. There is no reference to a ritual tablet in the Assur catalogue VAT 13723+ as is stated for Maqlu, i.e., obv. i: 13’–14’ enûma nêp[šu ša maqlû teppuša] / 8 maqlû adî nêpêši: “When you [perform the Maqlû ritual / Eight tablets

“To loosen the evil muscle,” (d) ēn i.ba.ah min, “išša diṭto,” (e) ēn ni.ip.pa.ah min, “niṣṣa diṭto,” (f) ēn abû bi.ra.ah, “aba tirâḥ,” (g) ēn par.u nun, “paruna,” (h) ēn [ ], “…”; (i) ēn kāb-ṭu, “Honored . . . .” (j) ēn a-ra.zi, “ara.zi,” (k) ēn kir-ri-gis di-pa-ar, “Girgiris-disease, disease called dipar;” (l) ēn šu-um šüm-šu, “šu’u is his name,” (m) ēn šu-um šüm-šu, “šu’u is his name,” (n) ēn x-x-tu-um min, “…” diṭto,” (o) ēn ez-ze-ti šam-ra-ti kaṣ-ṣa-a-ti, “You are fierce, you are angry, you are wild,” (p) ēn li biển 4ši.šar.bar, “May Girra extinguish,” (q) ēn ka-ra-ra.tum min, “kararatu diṭto,” (r) ēn [ ], “…”; (s) ēn x-bi x-[ ], “…”.


See attestations given in the conclusion with nn. 76 to 88, pp. 15–16, below.

I refrain from giving references here and, instead, list those incantations that can be found in my forthcoming study: I: ṬUb, c, d; III: IV/a, i; j; VI; VII, VIII, b, c, d, e, f, g, j, k, l, m, o, p, q.

UDUG.HU.LU (hereafter UH) VII/d appears as Maššu’u VII/b as referred to by Finkel, “Muššu’u, Qutāru, and the Scribe Tanittu-Bēl,” p. 99. Muššu’u VI is also included as Hubaziz, no. 20; see ibid., p. 97. The overlap between SAG.GIG and Muššu’u has been pointed out by Finkel, in ibid., p. 94. CT 4, pl. 3, constitutes Muššu’u VI. For the Middle Babylonian version, see J. Cooper, “Bilinguals from Boghazkoi I,” ZA 61 (1971): 1 ff. For the incantation Muššu’u VI/a, see John Rylands Library, Box 24; E5 and 25, obv. 1.5. The Old Babylonian catalogue of incantations has been published by C. Wilcke, “Sumerische literarische Texte in Manchester und Liverpool,” AFO 24 (1973): 14 with pl. 3 (read in obv. 1. 5 ama instead of azu). LB 1000 (= MUS 2, pp. 3 ff.) and CT 42, 32 (pp. 41b) are included as Muššu’u IVa and IVb.


Ibid. Recently, E. Reiner, in her study Astral Magic in Babylonia, TAPS 85/4 (Philadelphia, 1995), drew attention to prescriptions and strings of amulet stones that refer to famous kings of the past such as Hammurapi, Naram-Sin, and Rim-Sin, providing more authenticity; see Reiner, Astral Magic, pp. 41 and 129. Note also BĀM 322, an Assyrian tablet from Assurbanipal’s library at Nineveh that claims to be partially a copy of an original from Hammurapi’s palace (obv. 1. 29: GABARĪ Ɛ.GAL Ɨša-am-mu-ra-pi ƗUGAL ȘAR, “original from the palace of Hammurapi, king of the entire world”).
Maqlû together with the ritual tablet,” or for Mts pî, obv. ii: 16’ enûma [mîs] pî [ ]; “when [you perform] Mts pî . . . .” or for Lamaštu, rev. iv: 2 enûma nêpešu ša 4lamaštu [ ]; “when [you perform] the ritual against Lamaštu.”9 It should also be noted that the ritual tablet covers thirty-two spells of which only fifteen10 are related to the Muššu-u series.

The ritual instructions are preserved in two duplicates. Duplicate A (VAT 13653) from Assur has been edited and studied by both Köcher and Finkel.11 The tablet was excavated at Assur in a private house belonging to the family of Bêl-Kundi-ilâya and his descendants, namely, Nabû-zêr-Aššur-ukin, who are known as scribes of the Assur temple.12 The one-column tablet is poorly preserved but can be restored with the help of another exemplar of the ritual tablet, K. 3996+4089+9281, as identified by Köcher. This tablet, my duplicate B, comes from Nineveh and is written in “landscape” orientation (for the autograph, see fig. 1 below).13 The text is presented below in transcription and translation; restorations follow F. Köcher’s edition if not otherwise stated.14 Variants of the duplicates are noted in the footnotes.

TRANSCRIPTION

1 enûma nêpešu ša 4muššu-u teppuštû

2 én gâ.e lû kû-ga-me.en [tammanni]15
3 én šannu ellu šannu ebbu én mešê ba.da.ri16 ana šanni ša tanaddî[ ]17
4 [én sa hu]l duq.û.da 3-ta.âm ana libbi napsâlti tammanni
5 én sa₂₂₃ gîg 4šê.[ku]r.ta nakkaptišu18 / pûssu19 tumašša²
6 šêlpeša pûssu tarakkas én sa₂₂₃ gîg mul an.gi₇ nakkaptišu tumašša²²₀
7 én sa₂₂₃ gîg gu.s.a.a MIN kišâšu tumašša²
8 én anamdiša šipta qâṭ imittišu tumašša²
9 én ’nin.i.si.i.na qâṭ šumelîšu tumašša²
10 én ū ḫul.gâl papân libbišu²¹ tumašša²
11 én ’en.ki en nam.ti.la.ke₂² ṭappaštašu tumašša²

10 There is a slight indication that the incantations én izî ḫuš and én mešê ba.da.ri might have been part of tablet 9 of the series. The number of Muššu-u spells would then, accordingly, total 17.
12 For the colophon, see H. Hunger, BAK, nos. 252–54.
13 I wish to thank the Trustees of the British Museum for granting me permission to publish the text. I am, as always, very grateful to C. B. F. Walker for his kind permission to study and collate the manuscripts.
14 Note that Köcher could make use of a rough copy by G. Meier that showed the tablet in a better state of preservation; see idem, “Die Ritualtafel,” p. 13, n. 4.
15 Restored according to Šurpu, “Tablet I,” l. 4.
16 A omits the incantation.
17 Perhaps to be restored in A on the basis of AMT 67.3, l. 7’ ‘ana šanni (i.e.šî) tanaddî(shû)-ma tappaššaši ša šanni; “you recite over the oil and anoint.” In all likelihood, the conjurer would anoint himself; note that the reading tappaššaši is likewise possible. In B there does not seem to be enough space for this restoration. Note that the former incantation also appears in the ritual tablet of Maqlû (IX.1.142) followed by the instruction “ša šanni,” “concerning oil.”
18 In A.
19 In B.
20 A omits the verb in ll. 6 to 15.
21 A reads libbiu.
22 A reads: én en.ki tu₆ ti.la.ke₂₂.
Fig. 1a—K. 3996 + K. 4089 + K. 981. 8.5 cm x 13 cm, obv.
12 en šimmatu MIN ištu giššišu ša imitti adi kišišu tumašša²
13 en kišši ziršu ištu kišišu adi šepišu²⁴ tumašša²
14 en kima šamē u erēti ištu giššišu ša šumēli adi kišišu tumašša²
15 en izi šuš ištu kišišu adi šepišu tumašša²
16 [ištu an]jā [šētēšu] ištu qaqqadī adi šepišu
17 [dam] bē[rēni ta]tānanappät²⁴
18 kima annā šētēšu arkišu abni takasšar
19 en meše ba,da,ri abni ahi imitti u qāti imitti
20 en sa .intValue duq.ä,da abni ahi šumēlišu
21 en i.ba,a,h MIN abni qāti šumēli
22 en meše ba,da,ri én lišli ēgirra abni qabli imitti u šumēli
23 én שו u šumēšu abni saqallī gišši imitti u šumēli
24 en pa,ra,na,šu.un,na²⁵ abni šāti kāsītī kišišu imitti u šumēli
25 en mešē ba,da,ri abni šimmati šēpi imittišu
26 en i.ba,a,h MIN abni šimmati šēpi šumēli
27 én ṣuḥuḥušu dallu kū,ga én mu ṣu,ul bi sar,a
28 ār suḫušši qāti u šepišu tarakkas
29 en su₃,b,ba ki kū,ga šupāti šāmāta ša uṣiqi u puḫatti lā petiti MIN (= qāti u šepišu tarakkas)
30 en an,bāra ga,ga šipāti šamāti bērša talammi
31 en annā šētēšu qatāri tuqattar
32 én zā,hi,ši,šar ákur,rasar qatāri pešāti [ina muḫḫi [. . .] tašakkan
33 én ū,ne,ši,šar ūnin,k,e,še,ne ūnin,k,e,še,ne²⁶ ina MIN²⁷ (= muḫḫi [. . .] tašakkan²⁸
34 én udug ṣu,ul,ši,šar gedim idim kur,ra qatāri ša gizzi [ina rēš bērša tašakkan]
35 én an,ši,šar bā lu,ši,šar qatāri²⁹ buḫummūti ina šepišu bērša tašakkan
36 én anamdi ši,ša ana puḫur ilāni kalāma³⁰ mē ana ṣa,marši tašalla³⁰
37 én anamdi mē ša mašmaša ilāni idāt³¹ bērši mē tanaddle
38 én saq,ši,ša saq,ši,ša zisurra bērša teṣṣir
39 én tummu bi,šu mašša ( [. . .] ta)sṣappakma
40 zisurra bāba teṣṣir bāba tāturma qātkā ina muḫḫi dalī lā [tum]madma
41 én ab,ša nam,šu.un,šu.ku₄,šu,k₄,še,ne ana muḫḫi tamannya
42 bāba tepettima kakki ēri ša ina rēš ṣa,marši šaknu tanaššima ina rēšišu³²
43 [l [. .] én inim,bi an,[na ] tamannya³³

TRANSLATION

1 When [you perform] the ritual ’of’ [Muššu²]:

2 The incantation “I am a pure man”—[you recite].

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²³ In B in singular.
²⁴ B omits ll. 16–17.
²⁵ A reads ara,na,š. 
²⁶ A omits *nin.ki.e,ne.
²⁷ A reads KIMIN.
²⁸ B reads ina MIN MIN.
²⁹ A reads KIMIN.
³⁰ A omits kalāma.
³¹ A omits KIMIN.
³² B reads i'it.
³³ A reads this line.
3 The incantation “Pure oil, holy oil” (and) the incantation “Where have you turned to?”—you recite over the oil [and you anoint yourself].
4 [The incantation] “To loosen [evil muscle]”—you recite three times over the salve.
5 The incantation “Head disease from the Ekur temple”—you rub his temples/his forehead.
6 You bind a rush around his forehead. The incantation “Head disease, star, like in heaven”—you rub his temples.
7 The incantation “Head disease, neck muscle, neck muscle”—you rub his neck.
8 The incantation “I recite the incantation”—you rub his right hand.
9 The incantation “Ninrisina”—you rub his left hand.
10 The incantation “Evil death”—you rub the area around his navel.
11 The incantation “Enki, lord of the life-giving spell”—you rub his hips.
12 The incantation “Paralysis, ditto”—you rub his right waist down to his knee.
13 The incantation “Hated evil machinations”—you rub his temples.
14 The incantation “When heaven and earth”—you rub his left waist down to his knee.
15 The incantation “Fierce Fire”—you rub his knee down to his foot.
16 [As soon as you have done] this, you apply extract of cedar from his head to his feet.
17 After you have done this, you string amulet stones together.
18 The incantation “Where have you turned to?”—stones for his right arm and his right hand.
19 The incantation “To loosen evil muscle”—stones for his left arm.
20 The incantation “Ibaḫ, ditto”—stones for his left hand.
21 The incantation “Where have you turned to?” (and) the incantation “May Girra extinguish”—stones for his right and left side.
22 The incantation “Šu’u is his name”—stones for the sagallu disease of the right and left waist.
23 The incantation “Aranaḫuna”—stones for long-lasting fever of the right and left knee.
24 The incantation “Where have you turned to?”—stones for paralysis of the right foot.
25 The incantation “Ibaḫ, ditto”—stones for paralysis of the left foot.
26 The incantation “Date palm, bright and pure” (and) the incantation “He was named for evil”—you bind a branch of a young date palm around his hands and his feet.
27 The incantation “Shepherd, on pure earth”—(you bind) woven wool from a not yet mounted kid (and) from a not yet mounted lamb (around his hands and feet).
28 The incantation “Broad heaven, the disease”—you wrap red wool around the bed.
29 As soon as you have done this, you burn incense.
30 The incantation “Cress, mint”—you place white fumigants over . . .
31 The incantation “Enki gods, Ninki goddesses”—you place over . . .
32 The incantation “Evil Utukku demon, tremendous spirit of the dead”—you place fumigants of the “he-goat” kind on top of the sickbed.
33 The incantation “In heaven and earth, man on earth”—you place multicolored fumigants at the foot of the sickbed.
34 The incantation “I recite the incantation for the trial of all gods”—you sprinkle water on the sick person.
37 The incantation “I pour the water from the conjurer of the gods”—you pour water around the sickbed.
38 The incantation “Oath, oath”—you draw a circle of flour [around the sickbed].
39 The incantation “Be conjured, house”—you pile up roasted flour and you draw a circle of flour around the gate. You close the gate, but your hand does not have to touch the door!
41 The incantation “They shall not enter through the opening”—you recite over it.
42 You open the gate and lift the weapon of ēru wood that was deposited at the sick person’s head and
43 you [ ]. The incantation “Seven are you in heaven” [ ].

COMMENTARY

Köcher divided the Muššu‘u ritual instructions into three parts: the opening ceremony (ll. 1–3), specific exorcistic as well as therapeutic measures (ll. 4–36), and prophylactic actions (ll. 37–43).\(^3\) In the following, I propose a somewhat different structure and nomenclature, that is, standard opening rites (ll. 1–3), instructions that constitute the main body of the ritual (ll. 4–26), and, finally, standard concluding rites (ll. 27–43).

**Lines 1–3: Standard Opening Rites**

At the beginning of any encounter with the supernatural, prophylactic measures have to be taken. The incantation ēn ġā.e lú kū.ga.me.en, which is also attested in the ritual tablets of Šurpu and Ilī ual ide, authorizes the conjurer to perform the ritual. The spell ēn šammu ellu šammu ebbu, which also forms part of Maqlû mentioned by Köcher, belongs to the Kultmittelbeschwörungen genre.

**Lines 4–26: Main Body of the Muššu‘u Ritual**

It seems that only the incantations quoted in these lines belong to Muššu‘u proper. Support for this interpretation comes from the line “from head to toe” found in medicinal treatments in general, in this case starting with the temples and ending with the left foot. The instruction in l. 15 of reciting the spell “Fierce fire” while rubbing the knee and foot on the left side of the body completes the rubbing therapy. Likewise, the instruction in l. 26 for magical stones for the left foot concludes the preparation of amulets. In this regard, I prefer to understand the incantations and ritual instructions that follow as measures that are no longer connected to the actual Muššu‘u treatment. As will be shown below, these instructions are of a rather apotropaic as well as purifying nature and constitute other healing events as well as religious ceremonies. In contrast, however, Finkel suggests that all the incantations were included in the Muššu‘u series.\(^3\)

The list of spells is loosely constructed according to thematic association with the body. Thus, the order of incantations quoted in the ritual tablet does not follow their order in the

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\(^3\) For duplicate A ll. 44–58 and the colophon, see Köcher, “Die Ritualtafel,” p. 13. Duplicate B partially preserves Assurbanipal colophon c–e, for which see Hunger, *BAK*, no. 319, pp. 97–98.


Muššu'u series; nor are all Muššu'u spells covered. What we find is the following: ll. 3 and 20, ēn sa ḫul du₆₃.₈₃.da = Muššu'u VII/c; l. 5, ēn saŋ-gig ē-ul [ku]r.ta = Muššu'u I; l. 6, ēn saŋ-gig mul an.ginya = Muššu'u II/b; l. 7, ēn saŋ-gig gu.su.a min = Muššu'u III/a; l. 8, ēn ūšul gi₈₃.in = Muššu'u IV/a; l. 9, ēn še₂-nil₁-si₁-in.na = Muššu'u V/a; l. 10, ēn ūš ḫul gi₈₃.lál = Muššu'u VI; l. 11, ēn [en] ki en tu₆ nam.ti.la.ke₄ = Muššu'u VII/a; l. 12, ēn šimmatu šimmatu = Muššu'u VIII/a; l. 13, ēn kispu zir₃₆itu = Muššu'u VIII/b; l. 14, ēn kima šamê u erseti = Muššu'u IX/a; l. 15, ēn izî huṣ = Muššu'u IX; l. 19, 22, and 25, ēn me₂še ba.da ري = Muššu'u IX (also included in UDU₂₂.ḪUL); ll. 21 and 26, ēn i₂ba₂ añh MIN = Muššu'u VIII/d; l. 22, ēn li₂li₄ ₃gi₇₃ra = Muššu'u VIII/p; l. 23, ēn ša₂u šim₃šu = Muššu'u VIII/I or VIII/m (note that these are two different incantations); l. 24, ēn pa₂ra₂a-na₂u₂-un₂a = Muššu'u VIII/g.\(^{37}\)

**Lines 27–42: Standard Concluding Rites**

The standard concluding rites include not only apotropaic rites to ward off evil, but also rites to gain back cultic purity. Often we can hardly differentiate between these two actions, since those objects or media used for the purification are apotropaic per se.

(1) Lines 27–30: Apotropaic and Purificatory Rites Using the Date Palm

The incantations ēn ḫu₂ṣaḥ₃u₂ ku₂₂.g,a, ēn mu ḫul₂₂.bi sar₂₂.a and ēn an₂₂.bar₃a ṣa₂₂.g.g,a form part of UDU₂₂.ḪUL tablet XII.\(^{38}\) They are followed by a rubric stating the purpose of recitation; for example, “Date palm, bright and pure” (UH XII/c) is “for binding the shoot of a date palm to a sick person,” and the spell “He was named for evil” (UH XII/d) is “for binding the limbs of a sick man with a date palm frond.”\(^{39}\) The latter instructions can also be found in the Muššu'u ritual tablet, but here both incantations are to be recited while binding the hands and feet of the sick person with a date palm frond.

Recently, F. A. M. Wiggermann drew attention to the magical properties of the shoot and the frond of the date palm as well as of cornel wood (for which see below).\(^{40}\) The shoot was believed to eliminate sin. The frond of the date palm had apotropaic powers. Consequently, the Muššu'u ritual instructions from ll. 27–30 are concerned with warding off evil as well as with the purification of the person. The incantation “He was named for evil” states, as quoted by Wiggermann, that Ea advises Marduk to split a date palm frond and to bind it to the limbs of the sick person so that it will guard against an evil death and disease of the head. Note that also the encircling of the sickbed as described in l. 30 has an apotropaic effect (which will be discussed below).

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\(^{37}\) The references given in ibid., pp. 101–2, concerning the incantations ēn kispu zir₃₆itu and ēn li₂li₄ ₃gi₇₃ra should, accordingly, be changed (see n. 2, above). Contra Finkel's suggestion (ibid., p. 101) that those incantations that constitute the incipit of a series tablet imply the recitation of all spells included in the respective tablet, one should note that, as a rule, when more than one incantation is to be recited, their incipits are given; see, for example, Muššu'u ritual tablet, ll. 3, 22, and 27; Maqlâ IX, ll. 148 and 149; Lamaštu III, rev. ll. 18 and 19; for which, see D. W. Myhrman, “Die Labartu-Texte,” ZA 16 (1902): 192.

\(^{38}\) See Geller, “A Middle Assyrian Tablet of Utukkî Lemnûtu,” Tablet 12,” Iraq 42 (1980): 28–31. Geller very kindly informs me that what he “thought was Tablet XII years ago turns out to be a combined and very long Tablet XIII–XV.” So the three incipits here, attributed to UH XII, belong to UH XIII–XV.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., pp. 29 and 30.

(2) Lines 31–35: Purification by Incense

The use of fumigation as a medicinal treatment is well known. In addition, the burning of incense plays an important role in magical and latreutic cult because of its association with purity and impurity. Fumigation is part of the veneration of gods and, accordingly, the burning of sweet-smelling fumigants accompanies sacrifices, prayers, as well as intercessions. In contrast, malodorous fumigants are often used as apotropaic means to chase away demonic powers. Unfortunately, we know little about the nature of the fumigants used during the recitation of the magical formulas in the ritual tablets of Enki gods, Ninki goddesses” read: “you shall recite this spell over white fumigants and fumigations. In a duplicate partially edited by Finkel (BM 41191), the spell “Cress, mint” is to be recited over fumigants (šipta annita ana muḫḫi qut[ā]ri . . . ), and the instructions for “Enki gods, Ninki goddesses” read: “you shall recite this spell over white fumigants and place it [= the censer?] at the doorjambs” (šipta annita ana muḫḫi qutāri pešāti tamannūma ina sippi bābi tašakkan), the latter instruction providing more details about the rite than stated in the ritual tablet.

(3) Lines 36–37: Purification by Water

The instructions in these lines are again of an apotropaic character because of the purifying nature of water. They occur frequently, singly, or in combination with each other, in other complex rituals, such as Ilī ul ide, Lamaštu, Maqlū, Šurpu, and Bīt Mēseri. As Köcher points out, the incantation en anamdi šipta an puḫur ilāni kalāma is also included in the ritual tablets of Ilī ul ide (KAR 90 rev. 11) and in Maqlū (IX l. 98). In the latter, it is connected with the libation of water.

(4) Lines 38–43: Apotropaic Rites in the Sick Man’s Home

The spell én sag.ba sag.ba, which belongs to the series ZI.SUR.RA.MEŠ is attested in the Lamaštu ritual tablet, in a ritual for building a house, SpTU II 16, and the Maqlū...
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ritual tablet IX 149; *én tummu bitu* is quoted in *Bit Mēseri* tablets I and III–IV and in the *Maqlû* ritual IX 148, where it follows *én saği ba saği ba*. Both incantations are, again, associated with the drawing of a circle of flour. The magical formula *én ab.ta nam mu.un da ku4 ku4 e ne* is included in the “zi pad” incantations, but no rubric is given. In the ritual instruction for “blocking the entry of the enemy in someone’s house” (*šēp lemuttu ina bit amēli parāsu*)—also referred to in KAR 44 l. 20—the spell is associated with the cleansing of the house during the night of the fourth day of the ritual. As Köcher points out, this incantation as well was included in the *Lamaštu* ritual tablet. The ritual instructions conclude with the incantation *én inim bi an[a*], which constitutes UH XII/a, as identified by Köcher. In the *UDUG .UL* tablet, this spell is followed by the rubric “incantation for putting cornel wood on the head of a sick man.” As for the function and magical properties of *ēru* wood, Wiggermann concludes that “it protects the exorcist against the forces of evil, purifies the body on behalf of the gods, puts to flight evil.”

RUBBING

The verb *muššā‘u* is translated in the dictionaries as “the act of rubbing”; the noun is used mainly as the name of the series. It occurs exclusively in medical and magical-medical contexts, where it is attested as a treatment for afflicted (and, particularly, for paralyzed) limbs, i.e., hands, arms, feet, and legs, as well as a treatment for the belly of women about to deliver a baby.

Lines 5 to 15 of the *Muššā‘u* ritual tablet recommend the rubbing treatment proper. Structured in the order *a capite ad calcem*, the whole body is rubbed, starting with the temples, then the neck and arms, followed by the abdominal area, down to the legs. During the topical application, spells are recited. This interdependency of nonmagical and magical elements, not only characteristic of the *Muššā‘u* healing event, also occurs in l. 4 of the ritual tablet mentioning the healing balm. The salve was probably of medicinal benefit but was enhanced by three separate sets of magical recitations.

It is important to stress that the overall direction of movement is from head to toe and, in particular, from the limbs downwards. This structuring should not surprise us, since it can be observed in a whole string of texts independent of their genre: in medical

50 See Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, pp. 111–12, with references given.
51 For Maqlû, see T. Abusch, “Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature,” p. 254.
54 Further attestations are quoted in ibid., p. 30 n. 258. See, for example, R. Caplice, “Namburbi Texts in the British Museum V,” *Or.*, n.s., 40 (1971): 168–69. See text 66 (K. 3443), ll. 5′–8′, quoting also *én tummu bitu* with the instructions in the *Muššā‘u* ritual tablet, ll. 40–42.
55 See Geller, “A Middle Assyrian Tablet,” p. 28, l. 1′.
56 Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, p. 68; an exhaustive collection of attestations in magical texts can be found on pp. 79–85.
57 *CAD* MII/2 282a, “to rub, to rub with liniments”; *AHw.* 685a, “eintreiben, salben.”
58 See references given in *CAD* MII/2 282a.
59 As generally assumed, the numbers three and seven are of special importance in magic.
TYING KNOTS AND AMULETS

The healing event of Muššu-u, as far as the ritual tablet is concerned, covers the conjunction of stones. The preparation of amulets is outlined in greater detail in magical-medical texts. One important example is the Kuyunjik text K. 2542+; a four-column tablet written in Babylonian ductus.65 The tablet includes several prescriptions and incantations; col. i gives instructions for amulets for a-ictions of the neck, cols. ii–iv lists amulets for the demon/disease inhabiting the body part to leave it by the way of an extremity. There is no question, I believe, that massage (Muššu-u) is a practice that is clearly therapeutic, but the centrifugal direction of its manipulation indicates a relation to the belief that disease is caused by beings that the massage is intended to expel. Once these beings are driven out, the body parts are protected by tying amulets to them.

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61 See the 45-tablet series of prescriptions entitled “If the upper part of a man’s head is feverish” (ṣumma amēlu muḫḫašu sumer ukuł), for which see Kocher, “Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk,” in Ch. Habrich et al., eds., Medicinische Diagnostik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Festschrift für H. Goerke zum sechzigsten Geburtstag (Munich, 1978), pp. 17–39. Some of the Niniveh duplicates preserving extraseral prescriptions state in the colophon “remedies arranged from the top of the head to the toenails” (buṣṭi ištu muḫḫi adi supi); see, for example, BAB 574 iv 56 (first tablet of the chapter “If a man suffers from a cough,” ṣumma amēlu suša maru), or BAB 575 iv 59 (second tablet of the chapter “If a man suffers from a cough”). For a colophon (“Assurbanipal Typ q”), see Hunger, BAK, p. 103, no. 329.

62 This principle can be found in the physiognomic omen treatise Ṣumma alanDIMMû as well as in the medical omen handbook Sakikkû; for ṢummaalanDIMMû, see my Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie, AFÖ Beiheft 27 (Vienna, 2000); for medical omens, see N. Heeßel, Babylonische-assyrische Diagnostik, AOAT 43 (Münster, 2000), and R. Labat, Traité akkadien de diagnostics et pronostics médicaux (Paris, 1951).


64 An enumeration of afflicted parts of the body can be found, for example, in Ludul bal nēmeqi (text duplicate Si 55), for which see W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Oxford, 1960), pp. 52–55, and in the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninhursag, for which see P. Attinger, “Enki et Ninhursag,” ZA 74 (1984): 1–52 (esp. pp. 28–30).

65 S. Langdon published in BE 31, pp. 57–66, transliteration and translation of parts of the text; his copy can be found on pls. 50–51. When he studied the text, the tablet consisted of fragments K. 2542+ K. 2772+K. 6030+DT 85+DT 170. Kocher added the fragments K. 3300+K. 10232 (= AMT 29.4) and K. 13382. A photograph of the tablet can be found in W. Horowitz, Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1998), pls. 8–9.

66 Written uguš.ṭu. Recently, A. Schuster drew attention to the reading of the logogram as agusg dug; see N.A.B.U. 2001/39.
A stone called snake, iron, magnetite, alabaster, a stone called mûsu; a stone called šû in its male and female variety; a stone called agusigu, lapis lazuli; a stone called hulâlu; black obsidian, coral; a stone called zibitu; a stone called zalâgu; a stone called muššaru, carnelian.

You string together (these) 16 (stone) beads on a black string for paralysis of the left hand. You tie seven knots; whenever you tie a knot you recite the incantation “ibaḫ ditto”; you bind it around his left hand.

Incantation for Paralysis

Tying a knot in magic implies hindering the actions of demons due to the symbolic relationship between its function (to bind and to tie as a practical as well as mnemonic device) and the homeopathic or imitative principle in magic.67 Two effects of knots should be distinguished: beneficial and harmful, depending on the intention of the person who ties the knot as well as on the status of that person (witch or conjurer). Demons and their corresponding diseases were believed to be caught by knots, bands, threads, strings, or amulets that were fixed around those parts of the body possessed by the evil spirit. In the healing event, knots generally serve a benevolent purpose that can be further categorized according to its active or passive efficacy. An illustrative example for the active
effect of binding is the Šurpu incantation V–VI, ll. 144–71: “Incantation. Uttu took the thread into her hand, Ištar made the thread of Utu ready, made the skillful woman sit down to her piece of clothing; she spun with a spindle white wool, black wool, a double thread, a mighty thread, a great thread, a multicolored thread, a thread that cuts the oath, against the words of bad portent, an oath (caused) by men, against the curses of the gods, a thread that cuts the oath; she tied the head, the hands, the feet of this man, so that Marduk, son of Eridu, the prince, could rip it off with his pure hands. May he remove the thread (representing) the oath into the field, the pure place, may the evil oath step aside, may this man be purified, cleansed, may he be entrusted into the propitious hands of his god!”68

It is difficult to determine the exact nature of tying amulets in the Muššûritu ritual. The stone strings might have an apotropaic, hence passive, character as hinted at in the discussion on rubbing above. It is likewise possible to understand the tying and binding of limbs as the ultimate action of catching the demon, whose grip had already been relaxed by massaging.

**DRAWING CIRCLES**

Knots symbolize rings, which, alternately, characterize completeness as well as protective encircling—another well-known feature of rites of magic.69 The wrapping of red wool around the sickbed (l. 30), pouring water around the sickbed (l. 38), or drawing a circle of flour around the bed (l. 39) and the gates of the sick man’s house (l. 41) serve as a defense against demons and are intended to keep the patient safe. Demons were thought to have been unable to penetrate such a shield.70 The symbolic meaning of such protective circles in order to avert demons and their evil influences, that is, the roundness, is a direct contrast to the assumed location of evil spirits, i.e., corners and angles.71 These places symbolized, in turn, the opposite of roundness, i.e., sharpness or acuteness, and were thought to have been preferred by demons, since, as we are told in some passages, they could leave, enter, or hide there. In the Šuila prayer to Nusku, KAR 5872 ll. 42–44, for example, it is said that facing the light of the Nusku Šedu demon, watcher demon, evil Alluappu-net demon, Gallû demon, catcher demon, evil god, Utukku demon, as well as the Lilû and Lilîtu demons are forced to step out from the hidden corners in which they had taken refuge.73 Also the incantation én ab.ta nam.mu.un.daku₄₄₅₄₆₇₈₉.e.ne conjures demons in order to block

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70 With regard to an incomplete design, one is reminded of a scene in Goethe’s Faust when Faust first meets Mephistopheles. Taking the form of a poodle, Mephistopheles could enter Faust’s study only because of an inaccurately drawn devil-charm; as Mephistopheles remarks: “Beschaut es recht! Es ist nicht gut gezogen; / Der eine Winkel, der nach außen zu, / Ist, wie du siehst, ein wenig oﬀen.”


72 The most recent treatment of the text is W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen “Gebetskonzäsröungen.”* Studia Pohl, Series maior 5 (Rome, 1976), pp. 482–89.

73 šedu bayayu alluappu babbû nu llâr râhišu ila lemuu utaku lîlî lîlîtu inmedi zu’ur šaḫṭi ina pân 4nîrîka šâṣi.
their entrance into a house through a corner and niche. A final example comes from an Udug-zi-ul incantation stating the characteristics of evil spirits, that is, “the evil Udug-demon is destructive, the evil bailiff-demon stands near the corner, and the evil ghost and evil Galla-demon do not sleep.”

### III. Concluding Remarks

The Muššu’u ritual tablet represents a complex ceremony for treating the sick. The main body of the rites deals with the topical application of healing balms and the preparation of amulets. This section is found within the prophylactic and apotropaic measures belonging to the standard repertoire of the conjurer, as evidenced in other complex rituals, such as Lamaštu, Šurpu, Ilī ul ide, Bit Mēseri, or Maqlû. Both nonmagical and magical elements are juxtaposed.

If the Muššu’u ritual tablet is indeed the manual of a complete ceremony for treating the sick, we may ask for which illness/demons this ritual was performed. Typical examples are cited below.

The attestation of Muššu’u spells in magical-medical texts refers to symptoms of paralysis, (šimmattu) without specifying the body part, as well as to paralyzed (or otherwise afflicted) arms, hands, hips, feet, ankles, and heels. Numbness (rimātu), maškidu disease, sagallu disease, and fever, i.e., “long-lasting fire” (išātu kāšīstu), are also mentioned. These ailments seem to have the weakness of limbs in common. Some Muššu’u spells appear in the context of migraine headaches (SAG.KI.Dabd.Ba), others are connected with diseases of the area of the abdomen (papān libbi). One set of incantations is used in the treatment of afflictions caused by curses (mamitu), witchcraft (kišpī), witchcraft through zikurudā, “Hand of the ghost” (qāt etemmin), and “Everything evil” (minma lemmu).

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74 For the spell in extenso, see Borger, “Die erste Tafel der zi-pa Beschworungen”; p. 10, ll. 197–98 are paraphrased here.

75 Translation follows Geller, Forerunners to Udag-zi-ul: Sumerian Exorcistic Incantations, FAOS, vol. 12 (Stuttgart, 1985), p. 54, ll. 617–19; note that the lines are partially restored.

Since a discussion would be beyond the scope of this article, I only mention the location of foundation deposits, in particular of peg deposits, from Early Dynastic through Ur III times; see R. S. Ellis, Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia, YNER 2 (New Haven and London, 1968). As Ellis pointed out in his discussion on pp. 46–93, the in situ findings were placed in corners, under or beside doors as well as close to the “meeting” of walls (see, for example, p. 53 Early Dynastic, Lagaš; p. 58, The Neo-Sumerian Period, Mari; p. 60, Rulers of Lagaš; p. 63, Ur III Deposits in Ur; pp. 65–66, Ur III Deposits in Nippur)—at exactly those areas where demons were believed to find entry. Compare, as one example, the already quoted incantation en astra nam mum da, ku₄ ku₄ e ne, although dating to the first millennium B.C.E., which mentions not only the corners and angles, but also the gate, threshold, doors, bar, bolt, and lock of a door (see again Borger, “Die erste Tafel der zi-pa Beschworungen.” p. 10, ll. 191–96). Note that Ellis, in his discussion “Folklore, Psychology, and Imagination,” in Foundation Deposits, pp. 91–93, refers to comparable rituals and to speculations about phallic symbolism. The place where something is put is not taken into account.

76 A treatment of all relevant texts will appear in my forthcoming study. In the following, I thus quote only one example. See, for example, BAM 398.

77 See, for example, K. 2752* (arm), K. 2542+ (hand), BM 98584+ (foot, hips), BAM 354 (ankle), AMT 69, 9 (heel).

78 See BAM 194.

79 See BAM 182.

80 See BAM 128.

81 See STT 273.

82 See BM 41271+.

83 See K. 2426.

84 See BAM 197.

85 See BAM 197.

86 See BAM 159.

87 See AMT 97, 1.

88 See BAM 386.
The Muššu'u ritual tablet overlaps with some of these applications but gives instructions for a cluster of symptoms that have not been attested in magical-medical texts so far: presumably, a grave disease characterized by headaches and afflictions of the limbs, and further described as paralysis, sagallu disease, and “long-lasting fever.”

These findings suggest different conclusions:

1. The ritual tablet is a conflation of sources interpolating different healing events. Accordingly, it does not represent a consecutive and unified ritual.

2. The Muššu'u ceremony is performed in case of either headaches or afflictions of the trunk and limbs—leaving it open whether some instructions of the main body of the ritual can be dropped ad hoc—or in case all these ailments occur together.

Support for the latter explanation comes from external evidence. It is written by Aulus Cornelius Celsus (first century C.E.), who dedicates a whole chapter in his medical treatise De medicina to the therapy of rubbing, which was believed to have been invented by Asclepius. Celsus seems to answer the question of when rubbing is performed and, accordingly, how we may understand the whole ceremony of rubbing. “For both prolonged headaches,” he explains, “are relieved by rubbing of the head, although not at the height of the pain, and any partially paralysed limb is strengthened by being itself rubbed. Much more often, however, some other part is to be rubbed than that which is the seat of the pain and especially when we want to withdraw material from the head or trunk, and therefore rub the arms and legs.”

I would suggest, then, that the Muššu'u ritual tablet represents a single, unified and structured ceremony that was performed for pain in the head, trunk, and/or limbs.

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90 With regard to the attestation of Muššu'u in the context of childbirth texts, it likewise illustrates that one of the Greco-Roman measures to induce abortion includes vigorous massage; see R. Jackson, Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire (London, 1988), p. 108. It is certainly not a mistake to assume that this treatment has the same effect as rubbing in Babylonian prescriptions in order to facilitate the delivery of a child.