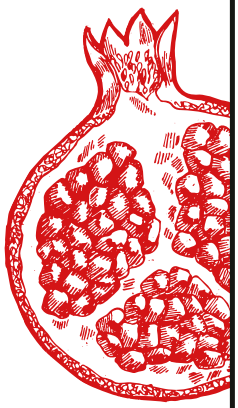
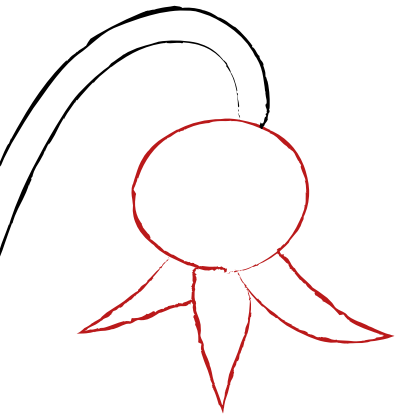
Vol 4, no. 1 Spring 2024

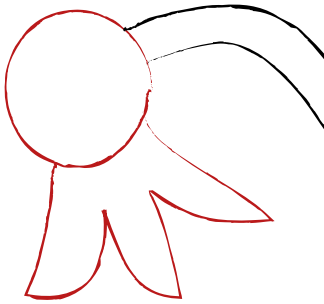


AABNER

ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH



Varia Issue



EABS
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK

AABNER
ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

THE *TALE OF THE POOR MAN OF NIPPUR* BETWEEN MESOPOTAMIAN AND BIBLICAL WISDOM

Giorgio Paolo Campi

Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 4, no. 1 (Spring, 2024): 67–123

URL to this article: DOI 10.35068/aabner.1050

Keywords: Akkadian literature, Bible, intertextuality, Mesopotamia, ancient Near East, pious sufferer, reassessment, *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, wisdom literature

Abstract

This article provides a tentative new overall reading of the literary composition in the Akkadian language known as *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, one that implies a partial reassessment of previous scholarly understandings and that is grounded in a comparative approach with selected examples from both Mesopotamian and biblical wisdom literature. First, a brief philological overview of the extant manuscripts and an outline of the plot (with notes accompanying its most debated and/or obscure passages) are provided, along with some remarks about the information they offer. Second, a review of past scholarly understandings of the tale highlights the hermeneutical impasse that interpreters have found themselves at. Third, the identification of a shared background of tropes and motifs between *PMN* and both Mesopotamian and biblical wisdom texts of the "pious sufferer" type is argued to be the foundation for a new reading that circumvents the impasse and allows *PMN* to be understood in a new context and envisioned as a "hypertext" conversing with both Near Eastern wisdom traditions. Ultimately, *PMN* can be read as an example of "skeptical literature" in line with other cognate examples stemming from the wisdom tradition.

Dieser Artikel bietet eine vorläufige neue Deutung der literarischen Komposition in akkadischer Sprache, die als *Der arme Mann von Nippur* bekannt ist. Diese Deutung impliziert eine teilweise Neubewertung früherer wissenschaftlicher Auffassungen und beruht auf einem vergleichenden Ansatz mit ausgewählten Beispielen sowohl der mesopotamischen als auch der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur. Zunächst werden ein philologischer Überblick über die erhaltenen Handschriften und ein Abriss der Handlung (mit Anmerkungen zu den umstrittensten und/oder schwer verständlich Textstellen) gegeben und einige Bemerkungen zu den darin enthaltenen Informationen gemacht. Anschließend wird in einem Überblick über die bisherige wissenschaftliche Auffassung der Erzählung die hermeneutische Sackgasse aufgezeigt, in der sich die Interpreten befinden, wenn sie sich mit der Erzählung beschäftigen. Die Identifizierung eines gemeinsamen Hintergrunds von Tropen und Motiven zwischen *Der Arme Mann von Nippur* und der mesopotamischen sowie der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur des 'rechtschaffenen Leidenden' legt den Grundstein für eine neue Deutung, die die Sackgasse umgeht und es ermöglicht, *Der Arme Mann* in einen neuen Kontext einzuordnen und als 'Hypertext' zu begreifen, der mit der weisheitlichen Literaturtradition im Gespräch ist. Letztendlich kann *Der Arme Mann* als ein Beispiel für "skeptische Literatur" gelesen werden, in Übereinstimmung mit anderen verwandten Beispielen, die aus der Weisheitstradition stammen.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

AABNER

Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research*
4, no. 1 (Spring, 2024): 67–123

THE *TALE OF THE POOR MAN OF NIPPUR* BETWEEN MESOPOTAMIAN AND BIBLICAL WISDOM[1]

Giorgio Paolo Campi

Dieser Artikel bietet eine vorläufige neue Deutung der literarischen Komposition in akkadischer Sprache, die als *Der arme Mann von Nippur* bekannt ist. Diese Deutung impliziert eine teilweise Neubewertung früherer wissenschaftlicher Auffassungen und beruht auf einem vergleichenden Ansatz mit ausgewählten Beispielen sowohl der mesopotamischen als auch der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur. Zunächst werden ein philologischer Überblick über die erhaltenen Handschriften und ein Abriss der Handlung (mit Anmerkungen zu den umstrittensten und/oder schwer verständlich Textstellen) gegeben und einige Bemerkungen zu den darin enthaltenen Informationen gemacht. Anschließend wird

[1] This article was written within the scope of the project "The Dawn of Monotheism?", financed by the National Science Centre (NCN), Poland: UMO-2020/39/G/HS3/02059. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for all their valuable comments and suggestions on the first draft of this article. All extant mistakes are, of course, my own.

in einem Überblick über die bisherige wissenschaftliche Aufassung der Erzählung die hermeneutische Sackgasse aufgezeigt, in der sich die Interpreten befinden, wenn sie sich mit der Erzählung beschäftigen. Die Identifizierung eines gemeinsamen Hintergrunds von Tropen und Motiven zwischen *Der Arme Mann von Nippur* und der mesopotamischen sowie der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur des 'leidender Gerechter' legt den Grundstein für eine neue Deutung, die die Sackgasse umgeht und es ermöglicht, *Der Arme Mann* in einen neuen Kontext einzuordnen und als 'Hypertext' zu begreifen, der mit der weisheitlichen Literaturtradition im Gespräch ist. Letztendlich kann *Der Arme Mann* als ein Beispiel für "skeptische Literatur" gelesen werden, in Übereinstimmung mit anderen verwandten Beispielen, die aus der Weisheitstradition stammen.

Introduction

Since the moment of its rediscovery, the Akkadian language composition known as *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur* (hereinafter, *PMN*) has puzzled Assyriologists, folklorists, and scholars in literary-related fields.[2] It is perhaps because of its ambiguous literary identity, its problematic positioning within the standards of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature and genres, and the challenges it poses to scholarly constructs that such work has attracted a fair amount of attention across the board throughout the decades.[3] Indeed, *PMN* is an extremely elusive

[2] Line numbers are taken from Baruch Ottervanger's edition of the text (Ottervanger 2016). I have abbreviated the title for the sake of expediency.

[3] This attention brought about in recent times the latest edition of the text in the twelfth volume of the SAACT series by Baruch Ottervanger (2016) and the one-of-a-kind movie adaptation project coordinated by Martin Worthington in 2018, which is well worth mentioning. Professor Worthington and some of his students at the University of Cambridge made a short movie—acted in Akkadian!—using the very text of *PMN* as a script. The movie is available on YouTube on the Cambridge Archaeology channel at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxYoFlnJLoE. It can also be downloaded as an mp4 file at this link: https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.39131.

text, and to grasp its meaning feels much like—to borrow St. Jerome's well-known metaphor concerning the book of Job—*murenulam strictis tenere manibus*.[4]

This article will outline a fresh overall interpretative key for *PMN*, arguing for the need of a partial reassessment of former scholarly understandings of its overall nature; while this will add an additional layer of complexity to modern readings of this literary composition, it will also show how complexity was an integral and actually a vital part of *PMN* itself, unfolding in its hypertextual relationship with tropes and motifs usually found in wisdom literature and traditions.[5] However, before undertaking the investigation of this relationship from a literary-critical and hermeneutical perspective, an updated philological and historical framing of *PMN* and a detailed presentation of its contents are in order.

Context, Author, and Date

The only complete copy of the text, in Neo-Assyrian script (STT I, 38), was found along with some other fragments (STT I, 39 + STT II, 116)[6]

[4] *Incipit Prologus Sancti Hieronymi in Libro Iob* (BSV 2007, 731:19); cf. Reiner 1978, 202, referring to *PMN*: "Es ist offenbar ein Stück Literatur, geschaffen zu einem uns unbekannten Zweck."

[5] Assuming with Wilfred Lambert (1996 [1960], 1) that "wisdom" "is strictly a misnomer as applied to Babylonian literature," I would argue that with this term we therefore define a convenience label arbitrarily coined by modern scholarship; cf. Cohen 2013, 7–19; Oshima 2014, 2 n5. Thus, "wisdom" is envisioned here as a "critical genre," that is, an etic, non-native genre that is not inherent in the ANE sociocultural context, as opposed to emic or "ethnic" genres. As such, "wisdom" gathers within itself heterogeneous literary works; despite this limit, however, the use of it as a label still proves heuristically useful in studies on ANE literature, especially in a comparative perspective with biblical literature. For further discussion about the debate and about the relevant terminology used here, see recently Samet 2020, 328–29; 341 n1, with further literature.

[6] *Editio princeps* in Gurney 1956. *Addenda* and *corrigenda* in Gurney 1957, 135–36; 1958; George 1993, 75. For further bibliography featuring more recent editions, collations, translations, comments, and studies see Saporetti 1985,

within a tablet collection likely belonging to a scribal workshop (*bīt mummi*) unearthed in Sultantepe/Ḫuzirina in what is today south-eastern Turkey.[7] Three fragments in Neo-Assyrian script (K.3478 obv.; K.19604; Rm.468) come from the Library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh,[8] and yet another little fragment of a school tablet in Neo-Babylonian script (N 4022) was found in Nippur.[9] The identity of the composer and the date of the original composition are unknown; the colophon of STT I, 38 (ll. 161–173) marks the *terminus ante quem* at 701/0 BCE.[10] Older hypotheses by Oliver Gurney, Edmund Gordon, and Ephraim Speiser posited an early dating in the Old Babylonian or Middle Babylonian periods, going as far back as the first half of the second millennium BCE.[11] More recently, however, André Finet and Baruch Ottervanger

78–80; D'Agostino 2000, 117; Rositani 2013, 176; Ottervanger 2016, xiv–xvi; Stol 2019; Jiménez 2021, 170–73; Heinrich 2022.

[7] For general overviews about the tablet collection in Sultantepe see Lambert 1959; Reiner 1960, 1967; Pedersén 1998, 178–80, and more recently Robson 2013, 48–50; 2019, 128–38, who concludes that the extant tablets are likely "the remains of a scribal school … for the sons of provincial officials and the like (Robson 2013, 50); cf. D'Agostino 2000, 137 n154; Ottervanger 2016, 45 n163; Lenzi 2023, 38–39.

[8] The fragment K.3478, now held by the British Museum, was rediscovered among the British Museum Geers Copies by Wilfred Lambert, who signaled its existence to Gurney. See Gurney 1956: 148–49; further collations are found in George 1993, 75. K.19604 was identified by Lambert (1992, 38) and Rm.468 by Simo Parpola. These two new fragments have been recently published in Jiménez 2021, 170–73; see there for further discussion on this material.

[9] Published by Maria de Jong Ellis (1974).

[10] The colophon of STT I, 38 reports (*PMN* ll. 169–170) that the text was written during the year of the eponym Hanānu (701/0), governor of Til-Barsip, on the twenty-first day of the month Addāru, corresponding to February-March 700 BCE; see Saporetti 1985, 78 n9; D'Agostino 2000, 138; and Ottervanger 2016, 45–46. The colophon is also featured in Hunger 1968, 111 n354, among others from the Sultantepe collection; cf. Pearce 1993, 186–87.

[11] Building on von Soden 1950, 187–90, Gurney (1956, 158 n17) took the use of the modal particle *tušam(m)a* (*tu-šá-am-ma*) in *PMN* l. 17 as a sign of early composition, since this particular word does not seem to be used after the Old Babylonian period; cf. Finet 1992, 102; D'Agostino 2000, 120 n41. Developing a suggestion made by Gurney (1956, 159 n40), Edmund Gordon (1960, 140 and

have made several arguments in favor of a later dating to the first half of the first millennium BCE, with suggestions anywhere some decades to slightly more than a century before the 701/0 date featured in the colophon of STT I, 38. Their observations are mainly based on intertextual correspondences and parallelisms with texts roughly fitting in that

nn138–39) highlighted a shared motif between *PMN* ll. 35–40, an Akkadian proverb (*KAR* 174 iv 8–10; for a German translation, see Ebeling 1927, 47–48; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 124 n66), and another Sumerian one regarding bribery (for the text and an English translation, see Ottervanger 2016, 28 n35); thus, he pushed the date of composition as far back as the first two centuries of the second millennium BCE, and proffered the idea that the tale had originally been written in Sumerian. Against Gordon's arguments, see the remarks in Ottervanger 2016, x, 28 n35. Ephraim Speiser (1957) dealt with some orthographic parallels between *PMN* l. 73 and *EE* iii 69 and posited a Middle-Babylonian date for *PMN*; he is followed in such a stance by de Jong Ellis (1974, 88); cf. Ottervanger 2016, 34 n73. The folklorist Heda Jason (1979, 194) supported the early dating hypothesis (early 2nd mill. BCE), adducing new considerations based on her definition of *PMN* as a "swindler novella": since oral literature of this kind was usually set in large-scale economic centers, she deems it likely that *PMN* came to light during the Old Babylonian period, when Nippur's political and economic influence was still strong. Recently, Irene Sibbing-Plantholt (2022, 232 n140) opted for a Middle-Babylonian date "based on the locale of the story and the syllabary used"; but in quoting Dietrich 2009 in her support, she misunderstood the main point of that article (!); see below, note 12. Moreover, Erica Reiner (1986, 2–3) (also mentioned by Sibbing-Plantholt) only mentions a tentative date (ca. 1200 BCE) for the humorous composition from Uruk (W.23558, colophon d. 818 BCE) known as *The Tale of the Illiterate Doctor from Nippur* or alternatively as *The Doctor of Isin* or *Ninurta-Pāqidāt's Dog Bite* (see especially George 1993, 63–74 and further Finkel 1994; D'Agostino 1995, 2000, 61–78; Reiner 2003; Worthington 2010, 29–30; D'Agostino 2014, 69–70; cf. Ottervanger 2016, 40 n122): the fact that this text shares some similarities with *PMN* does not provide sufficient grounds for such a conclusion, especially in the light of clearer intertextual connections with later texts; see below, note 12 and note 52 about similarities between *PMN* and another Sumerian composition (*The Three Ox-Drivers from Adab*) dating from the second millennium BCE.

same time frame, most prominently the Standard Babylonian recension of the Gilgamesh Epic (ca. 1300–1000 BCE).[12]

This very brief overview allows us to make some preliminary observations: first of all, the original place of the composition notwithstanding,[13] it must be acknowledged that from a geographical point of view *PMN* knew a widespread diffusion all over the ANE cultural macro-region in the first half of the first millennium BCE; its presence spanned from the peripheral Sultantepe in the far north, to Nineveh and then all the way down to Nippur in the very center of Babylonia. This consideration dovetails with the fact that as a literary piece *PMN*

[12] Finet (1992, 102–6) pointed out intertextual allusions and links between *PMN* and the Standard Babylonian (SB) version of the *Gilgamesh Epic* (especially tablet X), which was compiled and finalized by scribal scholar Sîn-Lēqi-Unninni somewhere between 1300 and 1000 BCE (see George 2003, 28–33; 410–11); he further envisioned the linguistic archaisms featured in the text not as signs of an early composition, but rather as literary devices aimed at parodic allusion. Indeed, the SB *Gilgamesh Epic* must have certainly been well-known in the Sultantepe scribal school, as fragments from tablets VII (SU 51, 129A+237) and VIII (SU 51, 7) were found there (edition in Gurney 1954; cf. George 2003, 381). Ottervanger followed Finet's lead in determining that "the text of the tale suggests that its composer was acquainted with works of Mesopotamian literature which either were composed or reached their final form in the late second and the early first millennium B.C.E." (Ottervanger 2016, x), and went further in identifying several intertextual connections of *PMN* with the SB *Gilgamesh Epic* (Ottervanger 2016, 21–26 nn4, 8, 11, 22; 35 n82; 37 nn95, 100; 41–42 n132) and with the so-called *Advice to a Prince* (also known as the *Babylonian Fürstenspiegel*), dated by Lambert (1996 [1960], 111) to between 1000 and 700 BCE (Ottervanger 2016, 35 n79); cf. Zgoll 2003, 197–98. On this work, see more recently the updated discussion in Finn 2017, 85–95, which argues, however (90), that at least the core of the composition might have originated earlier than the first millennium BCE, as it shares some linguistic traits with *kudurrus* and private *Fluchinscriften* from the Kassite period (16th–12th c. BCE) and might reflect elements of Nebuchadnezzar I's (ca. 1121–1100 BCE) Marduk-centered theology. Dietrich's (2009, 350–52) sociologically oriented analysis of *PMN* supports a later date in the first half of the first millennium BCE.

[13] Perhaps the very city of Nippur. So, for example, Jason 1979, 194; Dietrich 2009, 335; Ottervanger 2016, ix.

had gained quite an appreciation as well, so much so that it was even included in the Library of Ashurbanipal.[14] Moreover, this large-scale reception might be due to the fact that *PMN* is situated in the context of scribal education: the colophon of STT I, 38 informs us that the copy was written by a certain Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur, a *šamallû* (LÚ.ŠAB.TUR, l. 163) "novice, apprentice scribe" studying as a *mār* (DUMU) *mummu* "member of a scribal workshop" belonging to the *ša rēši* (LÚ.SAG) "courtier"[15] Nabû-aḫa-iddin (l. 164), *ana tāmarti* (IGI.DU$_8$.A) "for the reading"[16] of another scribe, Qurdi-Nergal (l. 165).[17] The school tablet

[14] Cf. Saporetti 1985, 14; D'Agostino 2000, 111, which ascribes the appreciation gained by *PMN* to its alleged monarchical views (on this point, cf. also Annus 2024, 120); Fink 2017, 180 n38. According to Heinrich (Jiménez 2021, 170), the newly published fragments K.19604 and Rm.468 from the Nineveh library are "indicative of two distinct Assyrian recensions of the tale." Indeed, *PMN* must have been very popular in the Assyrian capital if echoes of it (or perhaps even quotations) can be found in the petition advanced to King Ashurbanipal by the former exorcist under Esarhaddon and then "forlorn scholar" Urad-Gula (K.4267 = ABL 1285; see Parpola 1985 and SAA 10, 294), who referred to Gimil-Ninurta as an example to effectively illustrate the miserable condition he was in after losing his position at court (Parpola 1985, 273 and n15; cf. Parpola 2007, 102–3). As Lucio Milano (1998, 127) aptly remarks: "One has to keep in mind that it is not Gimil-ninurta who writes the tale of the Poor Man of Nippur: it is actually a scribe, whose psychology must not have been far from that of an Urad-Gula"; cf. Oshima 2014, 7 n22.

[15] *Contra* D'Agostino (2000, 137–38 n155), who renders *ša rēši* as "quello della testa" ("the one of the head"). The consensus (with a few exceptions) is that from at least the fourteenth century BCE onward officials designated with such a title were eunuchs; for recent discussions (with further references), see Peled 2013, 785–86 and n2; Yalçin 2016, 124 and n6; Nissinen 2017, 230–34; Groß and Pirngruber 2014; Frazer 2022; May 2023; cf. Ambos 2009; Ottervanger 2016, 45 n164. The same title also recurs within the plot (*PMN* l. 126), where it is associated with members of the *ḫazannu*'s entourage; see Saporetti 1985, 73–74 n126, 77 n4.

[16] On the exact meaning of the expression *ana tāmarti*, see Pearce 1993, 186–88.

[17] While it is universally accepted that at some point in time the scribal school in Sultantepe had been run by Qurdi-Nergal and his family, this must not have been the case here; in fact, in 701/0 Qurdi-Nergal was likely still a *šamallû* himself, as it appears from other documents in the Sultantepe collection; see Ottervanger 2016, 45 n165 *contra* Pearce 1993, 186; cf. Robson 2013, 49; 2019, 135–36. If,

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

fragment from Nippur (N 4022) further proves that *PMN* was used as a school text for exercises in scribal schools even later, that is, in the Neo-Babylonian period.[18]

Plot Outline

The plot of the tale can be briefly summarized by looking at its structure.[19] As the modern title of the work foreshadows,[20] the story is set in the city of Nippur and begins with a destitute man named Gimil-Ninurta suffering from a terrible hunger; the first section introduces the protagonist and describes his miserable condition (ll. 1–10); in the second part (ll. 11–69) are presented two plans devised by Gimil-Ninurta to improve his condition. At first, Gimil-Ninurta resolves to go the marketplace and exchange his robes for a sheep. He does so, but he gets just a cheaper three-year-old she-goat[21] instead of the expected sheep (ll. 11–15). The animal exchange probably implies some irony with a comic intent: the three-year-old (*šulušī'um*) goat (*enzu*; ùz) was worth less than a sheep: Gimil-Ninurta must therefore have expected a more lucrative return from the exchange of his miserable clothes, but he has

following Ottervanger 2016, 45 n165, we understand that Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur wrote STT I, 38 for the reading of Qurdi-Nergal *at the instruction* of Nabû-aḫa-iddin, the latter is much more likely to have been in charge of the scribal workshop at that time, while Qurdi-Nergal was still to obtain the title of *šangû*-priest of the gods Zababa and Baba and to become chief of the workshop. On Nabû-aḫa-iddin and Nabû-rēḫtu-uṣur, see further *PNAE* 2/II, 799a–801b; Saporetti 1985, 77 n4; D'Agostino 2000, 137 n153; and *PNAE* 2/II, 861a–862b; Saporetti 1985, 77 n2; D'Agostino 2000, 137–38 n155, respectively.

[18] Or, at the very least, only some excerpts from it were used for this purpose; see de Jong Ellis 1974, 89; cf. Ottervanger 2016, x.

[19] This structural subdivision of the plot is indebted to the one sketched out by Dietrich 2009, 336; cf. also Cooper 1975, 163–67; Helle 2020, 217–18.

[20] See Ottervanger 2016, xi, for a brief overview on the tale's modern title fortunes.

[21] Or a "third-rate goat" if at l. 15 we read *šullulta* instead of *šullušita*, which looks like a viable option both from a philological and a narrative perspective; see Giorgetti 1986 and cf. ll. 59, 62.

been disappointed.[22] Gimil-Ninurta would like to eat the goat, but he cannot, probably because social conventions dictate that he should host a dinner party and share the goat with neighbors, relatives, and friends: he does not have enough money to do so, and, in any case, he would not eat as much as he would like (ll. 16–20).[23] Thus, Gimil-Ninurta devises a second plan: he takes the she-goat to the local authority of his community, the *ḫazannu* of Nippur, to submit a plea in exchange for the gift of such goat.[24] In giving the she-goat to the *ḫazannu*, Gimil-Ninurta is

[22] See Gurney 1956, 145; Saporetti 1985, 61–62 n15; D'Agostino 2000, 109; 120 n40; Ottervanger 2016, 24–25 n15.

[23] See, above all, Milano 1998, 116–17, who envisions the imagined slaughtering and consumption of the goat as taking place in a non-sacrificial context, *contra* Gurney 1956, 158 nn17–20; cf. Saporetti 1985, 62 n19; D'Agostino 2000, 109–10 n3; Ermidoro 2015, 56–57.

[24] This term designates the "chief magistrate of a town, of a quarter of a larger city, a village or a large estate" (*CAD* Ḫ, 163); thus, it is usually translated as "mayor" (Gurney 1956, 150–58; Cooper 1975, 170–74; Foster 2005, 813–18; but cf. Ottervanger 2016, *passim*, who seems to prefer "chief" when the term occurs in logographic writing, NU.BÀN.DA, and "mayor" when it is found in syllabic writing, although he is not always consistent with this principle throughout the translation) or equivalents: cf., e.g., Italian *borgomastro* (Saporetti 1985, 59–76) and *sindaco* (D'Agostino 2000, 118–38; Rositani 2013, 176–81; 2021, 156–159); German *Bürgermeister* (*AHw* I, 338). Dietrich (2009, 336 n15) suggests that this title might conceal a reference to the *šandabakku* (LÚGÚ.EN.NA), i.e., the office name of the governor of Nippur since the Kassite period. However, even if this was the case this must not be taken as a hint of an early date, since governors of Nippur kept this title well into the Achaemenid period and changed it for *paqdu* only under the rule of Xerxes I (486–465 BCE); see Oppenheim 1985, 569 n2. Throughout the text, the term is found written both logographically (NU.BÀN.DA, *PMN* ll. 24, 30, 33*, 39*, 50*, 52*, 56*, 69, 87, 92 , 94, 95, 98, 126, 146; asterisks signal an either partially or totally reconstructed portion of text according to Ottervanger 2016's edition) and with syllabic spelling. In the latter case, it is preceded by two different determinatives: LÚ (*PMN* ll. 21, 41, 88*, 104, 114, 148*), generally indicating a profession (and usually found elsewhere with *ḫazannu*; see *CAD* Ḫ, 163–165), and m (*PMN* ll. 26*, 34*, 36, 37, 101*, 118, 120*, 142*, 144*, 152, 153*, 154, 160*), i.e., the single vertical wedge usually affixed before male personal names (cf. Hurowitz 2010, 88 n2). For this reason and for the fact that the proper name of the *ḫazannu* is never mentioned, Jean Bottéro (1982, 26) raised the possibility

probably hoping that he would host the dinner party in his place so he could eat and drink to his heart's content at the price of the goat only (ll. 21–33).[25] The officeholder, however, mistakes Gimil-Ninurta's present as a bribe,[26] he does not comply with Gimil-Ninurta's demands and sends him away with just a little third-rate beer, a bone of the goat, and the gristle of a sinew (ll. 34–63).[27] At this point Gimil-Ninurta gets furious and swears a threefold revenge on the *ḫazannu* in the presence of the gatekeeper Tukulti-Enlil, only to be laughed at by the *ḫazannu* who had overheard (ll. 64–69).[28] The bulk of the story (ll. 70–158) is dedicated

that the purpose of the tale is to convey by some kind of antonomasia the idea of a tight link between the character and his office, thus sketching a prototypical *ḫazannu*; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 121 n48; Fink 2013, 94 n71. As a public office, the *ḫazannu*ship featured prominently in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (for discussions, see Fox 2000, 155–56; Van Buylaere 2010; Ponchia 2012, 217–20; Tarasewicz 2012), further corroborating the later date hypothesis.

[25] Cf. Gurney 1956, 145; Saporetti 1985, 62 n21; D'Agostino 2000, 121–22 n50; Ermidoro 2015, 57.

[26] It is not clear why exactly he would think so: this is due partly to the fragmentary state of tablet STT I, 38, in particular between ll. 53 and 56. On the bribe and its role in the tale, see further below.

[27] Interpreters agree that the mention—along with the third-rate beer, *šikar* (KAŠ) *šalulte*, ll. 59 and 62—of the bone (*eṣentu*) and (the gristle of a) sinew (*gīdu*) delivered to Gimil-Ninurta in ll. 58 and 61 is used to further emphasize the snub inflicted on the poor man; see, e.g., D'Agostino 2000, 125–26 n74; cf. Moran 1991, 327–28; Milano 1998, 115–16; Zgoll 2003, 197. However, in stating that the pairing of bone and sinew is not known elsewhere in the extant literature, D'Agostino fails to recall that Job 10:11 features the two terms עצם and גיד (both of which share roots with the Akkadian terms in *PMN*), in close association. Admittedly, however, these are two very different contexts, since Job here is directly addressing God as his maker using anatomical metaphors; cf. Habel 1985, 199.

[28] The role of the gatekeeper is not to be underestimated: he is always the first and most important witness of Gimil-Ninurta's statements about his revenges. Within the shared "audience" scenario that Zgoll envisioned in both *PMN* and *šu'illa* rituals, the gatekeeper is paralleled by the *āšipu*, the expert leading the ritual; see Zgoll 2003, 191. On Zgoll's take on *PMN*, see further below and note 114. Through Tukulti-Enlil's testimony, Gimil-Ninurta's revenge intentions become binding on him. For an overview about the social background and possible specific reasons behind Gimil-Ninurta's revenge frenzy, see Dietrich 2009, 338–40.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

to Gimil-Ninurta's fulfillment of the three physical revenge acts (i.e., violent beatings) against the *ḫazannu*, which are carried out through some gimmicks. In the first case (ll. 70–114), Gimil-Ninurta appeals to the king and asks him for a chariot for one day, assuring that he would pay a rent of one *mina* of red gold for it; the king promptly grants him the chariot and new fancy garments (ll. 70–84).[29] Gimil-Ninurta disguises himself as a high dignitary, he catches two birds, which he puts into a box, and gets back to the *ḫazannu*'s palace (ll. 85–87).[30] When the *ḫazannu* sees him so dolled up, he invites him inside and they have dinner together. Gimil-Ninurta tells him that the king has sent him to offer the gold in the box he is bringing to the Ekur, the temple of Enlil, city god of Nippur (ll. 88–95). During the night, after the *ḫazannu* has fallen asleep, Gimil-Ninurta opens the box and frees the birds inside (ll. 96–97).[31] When the *ḫazannu* wakes up, he finds the box open and empty, and cries out to Gimil-Ninurta. Thus, the latter tears up his clothes in a simulated despair and blames the *ḫazannu* for the disappearance of the gold, beating him up for reimbursement (ll. 98–106). Additionally, the *ḫazannu* gives him as presents two pounds of red gold and new clothes (ll. 107–108). Upon leaving, Gimil-Ninurta declares to Tukulti-Enlil that this is the first act of revenge and that two more will follow (ll. 109–114). For the second revenge (ll. 115–117), Gimil-Ninurta dresses up as a physician/doctor (*asû*, l. 122): he has his hair shaved and his head spread with ashes (ll. 115–117). [32] Again, Gimil-Ninurta goes to the *ḫazannu*'s palace, and after he has proven his medical expertise by showing the *ḫazannu* where he had previously

[29] About Gimil-Ninurta's odd exchange with a seemingly too benevolent king, see further below.

[30] On actual bird-catchers in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times, see Ottervanger 2016, 36 n85; Worthington 2020, 175 n676, with further literature. About the ruse of the two birds framed in a folkloric perspective, see especially Faragó 1970, 155–58; Gurney 1972, 156–57. On a possible, albeit remote, reminiscence of a section from the *Dialogue of Pessimism*—as suggested by Gurney 1956, 160—see Ottervanger 2016, 36 n85.

[31] On the restoration and reading of ll. 86 and 97, see Reiner 1967, 183 n7.

[32] On these difficult lines, see Saporetti 1985, 72; D'Agostino 2000, 132 nn121–22; Ottervanger 2016, 39 n115, 117.

been beaten, he is invited therein to heal the *ḫazannu*'s bruises (ll. 118–126). Gimil-Ninurta asks for a dark and secluded place to practice his art; when he is left alone with the *ḫazannu*, he binds him and for the second time he beats him up (ll. 127–134). Upon leaving the palace, Gimil-Ninurta declares to Tukulti-Enlil that still one act of revenge is left to be perpetrated (ll. 135–139).[33] For the third act of revenge (ll. 140–158) Gimil-Ninurta asks some random man, in exchange for a fee, to go before the *ḫazannu*'s palace and shout "I am the one of the goat" (ll. 140–146).[34] Gimil-Ninurta hides under a bridge; after the *ḫazannu* has sent all of his servants to catch the man who shouted and has been left alone outside, Gimil-Ninurta jumps out from under the bridge and beats him for the third and final time (ll. 147–158). Finally, after the third beating, in the coda (ll. 159–160), the half-dead *ḫazannu* crawls back into Nippur, while Gimil-Ninurta goes away into the plain outside the city.

The Hermeneutical Impasse: A Problematic Literary Identity

Since the moment of its publication, scholars dealing with *PMN* have found themselves at a loss in trying to understand this text according to the usual literary-critical coordinates, so much so that many commentators have spoken of it as a *unicum* in ANE literature.[35] The first element that many have considered extraordinary is the complete absence of the gods from the action in the narrative. The divine sphere does not play any active role, either direct or indirect, in the story; *PMN* can therefore be described as a "human-centered" tale. Ottervanger argues

[33] Sibbing-Plantholt (2022, 261) considers this skit to be an example of "medical satire"; on the comic role of the *asû*, see Reiner 1986; D'Agostino 1995; and especially 2001; Worthington 2010; cf. Noegel 1997, 108–9; Ottervanger 2016, 40 n122; Rumor 2016.

[34] For a philological study focused on ll. 142–143, see Leichty 1977.

[35] See, e.g., Gurney 1956, 145; Lambert 1959, 120, 122; Cooper 1975, 163; D'Agostino 2000, 109; George 2003, 60; Foster 2005, 813; Rositani 2013, 176.

that one of the possible reasons for such a peculiar absence might be the fact that "Mesopotamian religion would not easily sanction a reversal of the social order inherent in the tale's plot" (Ottervanger 2016, xii). This consideration, while plausible, is only partial, and needs to be better substantiated, as I will show below. Over time, three main interpretive keys have been proposed for *PMN*. Of course, there is not any clear-cut distinction between them; on the contrary, these readings significantly overlap, displaying the inextricably problematic and composite literary identity of *PMN*. The next few paragraphs are devoted to a brief review of each one in turn.

Humor

The foremost feature associated with *PMN* is humor: it has traditionally been considered by scholars as an example of a Mesopotamian humorous literary genre.[36] That humor is a basic ingredient of the tale is hardly disputable. Gurney himself, upon its publication, spoke of it as a "humorous tale" (Gurney 1956, 145).[37] Of course, the Mesopotamian man was not a "stranger to laughter," as Georges Contenau argued some decades ago (Contenau 1954 [1950], 302): humor is an anthropological constant,[38] and it is just not conceivable on an anthropological or psychological level to deny the human propensity for light-heartedness,

[36] See, e.g., Speiser 1957, 43; Foster 1974, 72–73; Cooper 1975, 167–70; Wiseman 1980; D'Agostino 1995, 68 n2 (with further literature); Frahm 1998, 147–49; 2008, 463; Worthington 2010, 26; Minunno 2014: 63–64; Ottervanger 2016, ix; Salin 2020, 64; Noegel 2021a, 72–73, 138. In 2000, *PMN* was included in an anthology of humorous texts from Babylonia and Assyria edited by Italian Assyriologist Franco D'Agostino (2000).

[37] This looks like a curious and timely coincidence because just six years before, in 1950, Georges Contenau had stated in his classic work *La vie quotidienne à Babylone et en Assyrie* that the Mesopotamian man was a complete "stranger to laughter" (!); Contenau 1954 [1950], 302. Twenty years later, Hungarian folklorist József Faragó (1970, 155) deemed *PMN* relevant for cultural history in that it represented "the final proof that the people of Mesopotamia knew how to laugh, that they, too, had their funny stories"; cf. Frahm 2008, 463; Minunno 2014, 61 and n2.

[38] Cf. Frahm 1998, 147; 2008, 464.

laughter, and fun. However, humor is also culture-specific, in that it always stems from and is shaped by cultural matrices each related to a specific time and place. Thus, it would be a fatal mistake to anachronistically project modern paradigms of thought and *Weltanschauungen* onto ancient texts to try and find how humor worked in ancient times and how the Mesopotamian *mens comica* in particular was shaped.[39] For literary-critical purposes, this means that a "humorous genre"—or any literary genre—should not be reified. No text has just one single aim, in this case to elicit laughter; even more so considering that every text is always potentially embedded in a complex and differentiated reception network.[40]

Belles Lettres and Social Commentary

Apart from its humor, the story's elevated literary dimension must be considered as a second important feature. The composition, for example, has an elaborate prosodic structure featuring formal parallelisms, paronomasia, alliterations, strategic repetitions or variations, polysemy, and hendiadyses; furthermore, it is filled with wordplays and both phonetic and visual puns in the writing.[41] These textual features dovetail with the extra-textual, archaeological, evidence mentioned above, proving once again that *PMN* was a *belles lettres* composition deeply rooted in scribal culture, and making it most likely that its expected recipients were the classes of literati.[42] Given this *Sitz im Leben* for the text, we might expect that this was not just a humorous tale in the sense of a mere joke or an exercise in style, but it was something conceptually more sophisticated,

[39] Cf. D'Agostino 1998; 2000, 9–58; Frahm 2008; D'Agostino 2014, 68; Lenzi 2019, 187–92; Noegel 2021b; Southwood 2021, 13–15. About the "professionals of laughter" in Mesopotamia and further discussion about humorous texts and their social context, see Ali 1970; Foster 1974, 81–85; Römer 1975–1978; Minunno 2014.

[40] On these points, see further Holm 2005, 254, with further literature. Cf. D'Agostino 2001, 207; Southwood 2021, 12–14.

[41] See above all Noegel 1996; Ottervanger 2016, xii–xiv, 22–23 n10; Noegel 2021a, 72–73.

[42] See D'Agostino 2000, 111, 115–16; Haul 2009, 148–49; Minunno 2014, 64–65.

hiding between the lines a social and political satire or critique:[43] after all, Gimil-Ninurta is a poor man who struggles against his existential and social condition and thanks to his wit manages to turn the tables. It could be read as a narrative dealing with class struggle and social justice but also as an anti-bureaucratic, anti-corruption, maybe even an anti-establishment tale.

Folktale

Finally, the third feature, or interpretive key, is the way in which *PMN* has been influenced by popular culture. Folktales and fables with a similar structure and closely comparable narrative features have been found in Egyptian literature,[44] in a tale from the *Arabian Nights*, and in traditions from other areas of Europe (e.g., Turkey, Hungary, Italy, Sicily in particular, Provence, and Spain), and they have been extensively discussed.[45] In fact, behind its finest literary filigree *PMN* hides a folk tradition of oral narratives that may have had gnomic or didactic aims. This influence is so strong that *PMN* is sometimes labeled *ipso facto* as a folktale.[46] Ethnopoetic analyses have variously associated

[43] See, e.g., Cooper 1975, 167–70; Oppenheim 1977, 274–75; Bottéro 1982; D'Agostino 2009, 115; Dietrich 2009, 340–50; Fink 2017, 177–78; Annus 2024, 120–121. Indeed, it could be defined, as Jerrold Cooper (1975, 163) phrased it, "a masterfully wrought humorous tale of an abused pauper's triumph over his oppressor."

[44] See Jason 1979; cf. Oppenheim 1977, 275.

[45] See Gurney 1956, 148–49, 1957, 1972; Faragó 1970; Julow 1970; Kločkov 1975; Saporetti 1985, 1996; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 116 n21; George 2003, 60. Recently, Jennifer Finn (2019) has argued for an influence of *PMN* on Herodotus's account of the Pisistratid tyranny (*Histories* I.59–64). For a handy geographical map visualizing all attestations of the *PMN* motif, see Saporetti 1985, 10.

[46] In his monumental anthology of ANE texts, Foster (2005, 813) lists *PMN* as a "unique example of a Babylonian folktale." D'Agostino 2000, 109; 113–15 ultimately envisions *PMN* as a "riunione composita di differenti racconti popolari, riuniti da uno scriba all'inizio del I mill. a.C." (113); cf. Gurney 1957, 136; Gurney 1972, 157; George 2003, 60; Cohen and Wasserman 2021, 133.

Gimil-Ninurta with the traditional roles of the trickster,[47] the rascal, and the dupe, and *PMN*'s subgenre has been associated with the "swindler novella" or the "wisdom novella" (see Jason 1979, 191–98). At the very least, it is clear that it is a highly refined piece of literature that reworked a traditional popular narrative: as Adolf Oppenheim once remarked, it is a much-refined poetic rendition of a very well-known story (see Oppenheim 1977, 274).[48]

PMN and Wisdom: A Viable Addition

Considering the framework sketched so far, *PMN* would not seem to unambiguously fit within the boundaries traditionally associated with Mesopotamian "wisdom" literature as a critical genre.[49] Apparently, both a speculative-philosophical attitude and an existential scope—variously associated with Mesopotamian (and biblical) wisdom[50]—are lacking in this straightforward narrative of wrongdoing and retaliation. However, if some issues are taken into consideration, these two aspects might not appear so far apart from each other. First, as has been recognized, the issue of poverty so relevant in *PMN* has a privileged role not only in legal texts, but in wisdom literature as well, both biblical

[47] See Gurney 1972, 150–51; Reiner 1986, 4; Finn 2019, 20–22.

[48] Cf. Buccellati's (2024) recent remarks about the two strands he identifies in the Mesopotamian wisdom tradition, a popular one (proverbs and folk stories), and an "intellectual" one (literary texts). According to his analysis, the latter marks an epistemic turn from the former, in that it is the product of a "scribal structuring" and "channeling" of the former into thematic and narrative constructs.

[49] Lambert did not include *PMN* in his most famous anthology, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Lambert 1996 [1960]), maybe because of the then still recent publication of the text (but neither did *PMN* feature in his additions in Lambert 1995; cf. Alster 2005, 18 n3), whereas Wolfram von Soden (1990) did include it as one of the *Weisheitstexte*; similarly, Annunziata Rositani (2013, 176–81; 2021, 153–159) more recently included *PMN* in her anthology of Mesopotamian wisdom literature; cf. also Lévêque 1993, 19–23; Holm 2005, 262; Perdue 2008, 128–29.

[50] See Lambert 1996 [1960], 1–2; and Alster 2005, 18–24, respectively.

and Mesopotamian: the poor, together with orphans and widows, often appear as the category most exposed to risks of social injustice, and therefore their need for protection is emphasized.[51] Second, other folktales like *PMN* have often been associated with wisdom literature, because they are featured on compilation tablets along with other wisdom compositions, or because of their didactic purpose and morally flavored lessons.[52] Third, humorous over- or undertones and witty language are not foreign to either folktales or wisdom texts in both Sumerian and Akkadian.[53] Finally, specific satirical intertextuality patterns between

[51] See above all Fensham 1962; Gowan 1987; cf. von Rad 1975, 90 nn28–29; Whybray 1990, 22–23. On the conception of poverty in Akkadian literary texts, see further Lion 1998; cf. Levin 2001, 254–56. In this regard, it must be considered that—albeit belonging to completely different socio-historical contexts and having no direct relation to *PMN*—various excerpts from biblical wisdom literature mainly relating to class struggle (poor vs. rich) and social injustice seem to perfectly illustrate the conflictual exchanges between Gimil-Ninurta and the *ḫazannu* staged in *PMN*. Notable examples include (translations follow the NRSVue): Prov 14:20: "The poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends" (cf. *PMN* ll. 16–20); 18:23: "The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly" (cf. *PMN* ll. 34–63); Sir 13:3: "A rich person does wrong and even adds insults; a poor person suffers wrong and must add apologies" (cf. *PMN* ll. 58–63); 31:3–4: "Rich people toil to amass possessions, and when they rest, they fill themselves with their delicacies. Poor people toil to make a meager living, and if ever they rest, they become needy" (cf. *PMN* ll. 1–9, 92; for the *pasillu* sheep—UDU.AS$_4$.[LUM]—featured in this line as a delicacy, see *CAD* P, 221; *AHw* II, 838–839; Saporetti 1985, 69 n92; Ottervanger 2016, 36 n92).

[52] See, e.g., Gordon 1960, 124; Alster 2005, 23; 373–90; Samet 2020, 340–41. Adolf Oppenheim (1977, 381 n61) noticed a possible parallel "in tenor and milieu" between *PMN* and a Sumerian tale known as *The Three Ox-Drivers from Adab* (TCL 16, 80+83; CBS 1601), which Bendt Alster (1991–1993, 31) defined as a "burlesque folktale" and "a humorous tale teaching a social lesson." On this text, see Falkenstein 1952, 114–20; Foster 1974, 70–72; Alster 2005, 373–83.

[53] For Mesopotamian folktales and humor, see Samet 2020, 340–41; for humor in Sumerian proverbs, see especially Alster 2005, 21–22 and n21 (with further literature); cf. Samet 2020, 330. Among Akkadian wisdom compositions, *The Dialogue of Pessimism* (dating hypotheses range from the twelfth to the seventh century BCE) has received the greatest deal of attention in relation to its use of humor: in this regard, see especially Speiser 1954, 105; Foster 1974, 81–82;

PMN l.79 and a Babylonian wisdom composition called *Advice to a Prince* (1000–700 BCE), which have been detected by Ottervanger, might point in the direction of a "dialogue" between *PMN* and traditional wisdom themes.[54] Admittedly, these considerations alone are not sufficient to partly reassess former scholarly understandings of *PMN* and to circumvent the hermeneutical impasse that has so far blocked our way forward. Nonetheless, they at least warrant an attempt to trace in *PMN* other features and motifs traditionally associated with wisdom, such as the motif of the pious sufferer.

The Pious Sufferer Motif in *PMN*

Four compositions, traditionally ascribed to the Mesopotamian wisdom tradition, share the well-known motif of the so-called "pious sufferer":[55]

D'Agostino 2000, 79–108; van der Toorn 2003, 81–83; Greenstein 2007; and Samet 2008, which argues that the *Dialogue*, by means of irony and inverted quotations from other works, mocks the conventional social order and conveys a cynical and nihilistic worldview; something very much like this will be argued below for *PMN*. Literature on the *Dialogue* is extensive; see the recent summary in Samet 2020, 335–36.

[54] See Ottervanger 2016, 35 n79; on this text, see Lambert 1996 [1960], 110–15 and pls. 31–32; Diakonoff 1965; and Reiner 1982.

[55] These four works have received in-depth treatment with respect to the pious sufferer motif in Bricker 2000, 198–206; Oshima 2014, 19–25; and Verderame 2021, upon which I rely for extensive discussion. In the following, I will just highlight the relevant features of these works to be compared with *PMN*. For the use of the expression "pious sufferer" instead of "righteous sufferer," the latter shared by much modern scholarship, see Mattingly 1990, 318; cf. Oshima 2014, 19.

(a) Sumerian *Man and His God* (19th–18th c. BCE)[56]
(b) Babylonian *Man and His God* (17th c. BCE)[57]
(c) RS 25.460 (16th–12th c.? BCE)[58]
(d) *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (first half of 1st mill. BCE)[59]

The narrative framework and premises in these four compositions are similar to those of *PMN*.[60] The main character in (a)/(b) is an

[56] This text is known in nine duplicates, all coming from Nippur and dated to between the nineteenth and the eighteenth century BCE. A first edition was provided by Samuel Kramer (1955) and was based on five duplicates. The most recent edition, featuring a composite text and a translation, can still be found only online (ETCSL 5.2.4). For discussions on this composition, see Klein 2006; Oshima 2014, 19–22; and more recently Verderame 2021, 223–28, with previous literature. See *COS* 1.179, 573–575 for an English translation.

[57] This text is known from only one copy without provenance, now kept in the Louvre Museum (AO 4462). The first edition is in Nougayrol 1952. Lambert (1987, 187) dated it to the reign of Ammi-ditana (1683–ca. 1645) on paleographical grounds. See recently Oshima 2014, 22–24; Verderame 2021, 229–31, with previous literature. See *COS* 1.151, 485 for an English translation. New hand copies in Oshima and Anthonioz 2023, 20–21; Oshima 2024, 79–81.

[58] This text in Akkadian language is known only in this acephalous copy (RS 25.460) found in the so-called "Maison de Textes Magiques," in the area of the Southern Acropolis of Ugarit, and it was first published in Nougayrol 1968 (*Ugaritica* V, 162); more recent editions are in Arnaud 2007, 110–14; and Cohen 2013, 165–75. The date of this text might range from the late OB period to the early MB period; the *terminus ad quem* is the fall of Ugarit in the early twelfth century BCE. For recent discussions, see Oshima 2014, 24–25; and Verderame 2021, 231–32. See *COS* 1.152, 486 for an English translation.

[59] For an overview of the sixty-four manuscripts of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, between tablets and fragments, uncovered up to July 2022, see Oshima 2014, 5–9; Lenzi 2023, 52–61. The poem was first edited by Lambert (1996 [1960], 21–62; 283–302; 343–45; pl. 1–18; 73–74). Recent editions of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, with extensive discussions, are found in Annus and Lenzi 2010; Oshima 2014, 3–114; Lenzi 2023, 62–183. See *COS* 1.153, 486–492 for an English translation.

[60] Some commentators have highlighted a dense intertextual network between the incipit of *PMN* and the SB *Gilgamesh Epic*, which clarifies several graphical and lexical choices in *PMN*. In particular, the miserable state of Gimil-Ninurta seems to recall the depiction of a worn-out Gilgamesh mourning the death of

able-bodied man in the prime of his life, socially connected, and financially comfortable; such is the meaning of Sumerian GURUŠ in (a). This is rendered in Akkadian with *eṭlu*, used at the beginning of (b).[61] In *PMN*'s incipit, Gimil-Ninurta is described with this very term, *eṭlum* (l. 1).[62] Moreover, the righteous *eṭlu* in (a)/(b) is suffering: he mourns the fact that he has been deserted by his god to his miserable fate, and he groans; Gimil-Ninurta's condition is one of distress as well, and it manifests with similar symptoms.[63] He is described not only with the

his friend Enkidu in replying to Siduri (tab. X, ll. 40–52; text and translation in George 2003, 680–81) and to Ut-napishtim (X, 220–25; George 2003, 690–91); see Gurney 1956, 158 nn1–8; Finet 1992, 89; Ottervanger 2016, 22–24 nn10–11. Most recently, Annus (2024) highlighted some shared narrative patterns between *PMN* and the portrayal of the god Ninurta in the Babylonian Creation Epic tradition (see Lambert 1986) and in a Sumerian epic composition known from a late bilingual edition (*Angim*, Cooper 1978). Intertextual allusions to the epic genre should not automatically rule out other patterns of connection. On the contrary, they attest all the more to the fact that *PMN* is a work in dialogue with other literature, and that it must be understood in light of other knowledge deriving not just from the fruition of the text in itself. The relationships between *PMN* and SB *Gilgamesh*, or between *PMN* and the Ninurta epic tradition, play on a compositional level, whereas the relationship between *PMN* and the pious sufferer compositions, as it will be argued, is rather oriented toward the conveyance of an overall message, but it is no less tight.

[61] See Zisa 2012, 9; Ottervanger 2016, xi n10; Verderame 2021, 229; cf. *CAD* E, 407. Unfortunately, the incipit of (c) is lost (see Verderame 2021, 231), but in light of the similitudes between the three texts the same characterization of the protagonist—or a similar one—is not to be ruled out.

[62] On the mimation here, see D'Agostino 2000, 118 n24; Ottervanger 2016, 21 n1.

[63] The term that identifies the sufferer's malaise in (a) is GIG (Akk. **mrṣ*) and covers a broad semantic spectrum that involves physical condition, emotional distress, and social marginalization (see Zisa 2012, 11; cf. Southwood 2021, 3–5; Verderame 2021, 224 n6); this term is not featured in Gimil-Ninurta's description. A hint to this lexical root might be spotted at the end of *PMN* l. 121 (the gatekeeper Tukulti-Enlil speaking to Gimil-Ninurta disguised as a physician), where Gurney (1956, 156–57) restored *šá ta-mar-*[*ra-ṣu*] and translated "(Who are you) who are s[ick]?". This would be an appropriate and humorous reversal: Gimil-Ninurta is recognized as suffering when he should instead be mending someone else's suffering! However, other restorations seem more fitting in this place: see von

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

hendiadys *katû u lapnu*, "poor, needy and destitute" (l. 1),[64] but also as *lummunu*, "miserable," "oppressed" (l. 2);[65] he dwells *šūnuḫis*, "wearily" (l. 3); again his *zīmu*, "appearance" (l. 8) and *libbu*, "heart" (l. 11) are *lummunu*.[66]

Soden 1990, 178 n121a (so also Cooper 1975, 175, followed by D'Agostino 2000, 133 and n124): *šá ta-mar-*[*ú-šú*] "that you might se[e him]? [i.e., the *ḫazannu*]"; Saporetti 1985, 102: *šá ta-mar* [*ḫazanna*]; and Ottervanger 2016, 12; 40 n121: *šá ta-mar* [*be-lí*] "that you will vis[it my lord]? (*bēlī*)." In any case, the opening description in *PMN* refers both to physical and psychological conditions and to social positioning.

[64] The two terms are found close to one another in a list (De Genouillac 1928, 125) and in a hymn (*ABRT* 1 54 iv 12 = K.3600+DT75); cf. Lambert 1996 [1960], 18 n1. It might be worth mentioning briefly that the formulaic hendiadys עני ואביון is found extensively throughout the Hebrew Bible (Deut 15:11; 24:14; Isa 41:17; Jer 22:16; Ezek 16:49; 18:12; 22:29; Ps 35:10b; 37:14b; 74:21; 109:16) to designate not only poverty *per se* but also a condition of affliction and oppression; see *HALOT* I, 5; II, 856. It is sometimes used in the prayers' first-person pleas to God to describe their condition (Ps 40:18a; 70:6a; 86:1b; 109:22). On the pious sufferer motif in individual complaint psalms, see Paganini 2020.

[65] The adjective *lummunu* is derived from the verb *lemēnu*, "to fall into misfortune, to come upon bad times, to run into evil" (*CAD* L, 116 1a; cf. *AHw* I, 542). It should be noted that this verb can also mean "to be angry," with *libbu* ("heart") as its subject, or "make angry," with *libbu* as its object; see *CAD* L 117 1b and *CAD* L 118b, respectively. Given the designation of Gimil-Ninurta's *libbu* as *lummunu* in l. 11 (cf. below, note 66), this might as well be another pun (cf. below, note 110): Gimil-Ninurta is at the same time "miserable," but his misery already hints at the following plot developments. In addition, the verb *lemēnu* is attested in (d) I 53; 56 (here with *libbu* as subject; cf. Lambert 1996 [1960], 32; Annus and Lenzi 2010, 32; Oshima 2014, 208); II 2. In another composition ascribed to the Mesopotamian wisdom tradition, the so-called *Babylonian Theodicy*, we find the expression *lumun libbi* (l. 8; cf. l. 255), literally "evil thing of the heart," probably to be translated as "grief" rather than "anger"; see Oshima 2014, 345. This composition also features both *lemēnu* and *lumnu* (<*lemēnu*) in the description of the weak and poor man (ll. 283–285); see Salin 2020, 130–32.

[66] On the alternation of these designations in the mss. and the possible reasons behind it, see Ottervanger 2016, 23–24 n11. The *libbu* ("heart, entrails") is especially featured in (b), where it is mentioned as the first seat of the sufferer's affliction (l. 2): *ḫa-mi-iṭ* ⌜*li*⌝*-ib-bu-uš du-ul-la-šu ma-ru-iṣ-ma* ("His heart was seared, he was

In (a), the first negative effect of the absence of the god is the inability to produce food, the very foundation of life; the man deserted by his god becomes unproductive, and as a consequence he starves.[67] The motif of hunger recurs in (c) and is prominent in (d) too,[68] and Gimil-Ninurta endures a crippling hunger as well (ll. 6–7; 9); however, if in (a) and (d) hunger is an *effect* of *the god's* action (i.e., going away or punishing), in *PMN* hunger is the initial *cause* of *Gimil-Ninurta's* actions.[69]

In a similar fashion, Gimil-Ninurta shares with the pious sufferer the risk of social marginalization, which is tightly linked to illness and malaise.[70] He is frightened of being isolated and alienated from relatives and neighbors (ll. 19–20), and his attempt to avoid this situation is one of the plot mechanisms that trigger the narrative, whereas in (a)/(b)/(d) social alienation is a consequence of the god's seemingly antagonis-

sickened with his burden"; for text and translation, see Lambert 1987, 188–89; *COS* 1.151, 485; Zisa 2012, 8); on the *libbu* as vehicle for an embodied metaphor of physical pain and distress, see Zisa 2012, 12–15; Salin 2020, 155–92; cf. *COS* 1.179, 573 (a) l. 34; *COS* 1.153, 488 (d) I 111, 113; Ps 22:15b: "My heart [לבי] is like wax; it is melted within my breast"; cf. Paganini 2020, 651–54.

[67] See Verderame 2021, 223. About the social ideologization of hunger and its political use in ancient Mesopotamia, see Richardson 2016. The marginalization of the hungry as a tool to reinforce the dominant narrative of the state apparatus as provider of food security could be another target of *PMN*'s biting irony.

[68] See *COS* 1.152, 486 (ll. 17'–18'); and Zisa 2012, 18–20, respectively.

[69] As Milano (1998, 115) points out, Gimil-Ninurta's hunger takes from the start paradigmatic and existential hues: "The hunger of the Poor Man is not only hunger for bread …; it is the ancestral hunger of the poor *par exellance*" [sic]; the universal scope of the tale is also suggested by the characterization of its locale, which is Old Babylonian Nippur, but—as phrased by Oppenheim (1977, 274)—"in fact we are in a fairyland where anyone can enter the king's palace and ask the king that a chariot be put at his disposal for a day upon payment of one mina of gold." Along this same line of thought, cf. also Haul 2009, 148–49; and Bonneterre 2021, 155, which adds: "La figure du citoyen dans la misère … présente tous les traits de l'absurde. Quoi de plus grotesque en effet que de quêter sa nourriture dans la glorieuse cité de Nippur, carrefour de toutes les richesses transitant sur la terre?"; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 111–12 and n9.

[70] Cf. above, note 63.

tic attitude.[71] In (a), ll. 35–45, the man addresses to the unresponsive god a complaint about the bad treatment meted out to him not only by hostile people and ill-wishers, but also by acquaintances, servants, and friends: they curse and abuse him, they lie to him, and they pervert his words, slandering him. The man is burdened when he enters his very own house as well (l. 33); l. 48 also mentions a "brother" (ŠEŠ), but in a broken context.[72] The situation in (d) I 78–98, closely resembles the one in (a): city and land turn into enemies. Brother, friend, and companion either flee from the man or slander him and cause him some harm; his servants publicly curse him. The man's family also turns their back on him, treating him as an outsider.[73] In (b), the theme of social alienation is not so prominent, but it is likely implied in l. 15, where it is said that "if a brother does not look after his brother, would a friend not slander his friend?"; as Takayoshi Oshima makes clear, this line implies that "if one had his god, his brother would look after him, and no friend would slander him."[74]

Finally, in (a), the focus is only on the individual and on his personal relation to the god; however, this changes in (b); the god here does not just intervene for the benefit of the sufferer in the end, but he also urges him to behave with his subordinates in a similar way.[75] This

[71] Notably, (c), ll. 9'–12', contradicts this trend and depicts the relationship between the sufferer and his family in a positive light; family members mourn the man and try to figure out what the source of his suffering is after multiple failures of the divination professionals; cf. Cohen 2013, 173–74; Verderame 2021, 231.

[72] Female members of his family (mother, sister, and wife), however, are portrayed in a positive light: they stand by his side, as he indirectly asks for their help in joining his lament before the god (ll. 64–68). Cf. Oshima 2014, 21.

[73] See Oshima 2014, 21; 190; Verderame 2021, 233–34; cf. Habel 1985, 144, 296.

[74] Oshima 2014, 23 n94. However, this line of text is partially broken (*ú-ul d*[*a-*(*a*)-g]*i-il a-*ʳ*ḫu*ˀ [*a*]-*ḫi-iš-šu ka-ar-ṣí ib-ri-im ib-ra-šu la -*ʳ*a*ˀ-[*ki-il*]), and several slightly different interpretations have been proposed. See again Oshima 2014, 23 n94 for a survey.

[75] See Verderame 2021, 230. This variant of the main theme allowed the *topos* of the pious sufferer to extend beyond the boundaries of wisdom literature into epistolography, where it found a convenient application. The sender of the letter, asking a superior for protection, presents himself according to the prototype of the

inchoate ethical ideal of hierarchical power in which the superior protects the subordinate can also be seen in *PMN*, where power relations and the concept of protection play a pivotal role. The initial quarrel between Gimil-Ninurta and the *ḫazannu* looks much like a case of misgovernment and corruption specifically involving a bribe. Apparently, there has been a misunderstanding between Gimil-Ninurta and the *ḫazannu*: Gimil-Ninurta wants to give the she-goat to the *ḫazannu* as a *šulmanni kadrê* (l. 29) "welcome present / greeting gift"; Gurney (1956, 158 n29) states that *šulmānu* is "the regular term for a gift offered to a person in high position for the purpose of soliciting his favour." Zgoll showed how in both profane contexts featuring an audience with a king or someone higher in the hierarchy of power and in the hand-lifting rituals (*šu'illa*) involving a plea to one or more gods, the concept of reciprocity underlies the interactions between the *orans* asking for help or favor and those on the receiving end of the plea. In this context, "Das 'Begrüßungsgeschenk' ehrt den Beschenkten und soll ihn im Gegenzug zur Fürsorge verpflichten; zugleich ist es Zeichen der Unterwerfung unter seinen Schutz."[76] Such a scenario fits perfectly at this point in the plot of *PMN*; in the initial audience at the *ḫazannu*'s palace, *PMN* draws a picture where the reciprocity implied in the exchange between a petitioner and the recipient of the plea is not only left unfulfilled but is also reversed to the detriment of Gimil-Ninurta. However, D'Agostino (2000, 124 n66) notices that the term *kadrû* may indeed designate a bribe (see *CAD* K, 33c); this would make the *ḫazannu*'s answer mentioning a *ḫibiltu* much more on the point; cf. Ottervanger 2016, 28 n40. In fact, the *ḫazannu* mistakes the gift as a bribe (thus somehow suggesting that he was used to such practices), so much so that he asks

pious sufferer, ideally assimilating the addressee of the supplication to a deity. See, e.g., Liverani 1974, which deals with a letter sent from the vassal king Rib-Adda to King Amenophis IV found in the archives of Tell el-Amarna—perhaps the oldest example of this kind. This practice was widespread in the Neo-Assyrian period as is shown by numerous letters sent to the kings of Nineveh in the seventh century BCE; cf. Verderame 2021, 232 and n21.

[76] Zgoll 2003, 197. Cf. Zernecke 2011, 280: "The gift as greeting in an actual audience (corresponding to the offering in the hand-lifting ritual), the proskynesis, and the praise of the elevated person aim at obligating the elevated person to help."

Gimil-Ninurta what *ḫibiltu* (l. 40) "crime, offense, damage" has taken place.[77] After being rejected by the *ḫazannu*, Gimil-Ninurta turns to the

[77] The proverb in *KAR* 174 iv 8–10 connects *kadrû* and *ḫibiltu* as well. The latter word has been variously interpreted as the "outrage" in itself of bringing a *kadrû* (Gurney 1956, 159 n40); a crime/offense/wrong committed by Gimil-Ninurta; or a wrong/disgrace that he has suffered; see Lambert 1996 [1960], 340 nn8–10; Saporetti 1985, 64–65 n40 and the literature mentioned there; D'Agostino 2000, 124 n66; Ottervanger 2016, 28 n40. For wordplay involving the term *ḫibiltu*, see Noegel 2021a, 73; cf. Moran 1991, 327–28; and Noegel 1996, 173–74. At l. 53, Ottervanger (2016, 10, 16, 30 n53) reads [*x x x x x x*]*x-u lu-u ṣab-tum* "[As soon as he is tired], let [the bri]be be seized," but this seems rather arbitrary: the text is badly damaged. However, the previous misunderstanding involving the bribe is undeniable. This specific theme is also explicitly addressed in several biblical wisdom passages; a brief overview of the most significant ones could shed some light on the scene presented in *PMN*. In the Hebrew Bible, we find the two terms מתן ("present," "gift") and שחד ("bribe" more properly; see *HALOT* IV, 1456–1457). These must have been quite common as tools to win the favor of powerful people (Prov 17:8; 18:16; cf. Sir 7:9). On the other hand, practices involving a שחד are firmly condemned by both the Covenant Code (Exod 23:8) and the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 16:19), because a שחד blinds (עור) clear judgment and twists (סלף) the deeds of the righteous; thus—albeit common—they are not socially acceptable. Prov 17:23 reads: "The wicked accept a *concealed* (מחק) bribe to pervert the ways of justice" (cf. Prov 21:14); significantly, in *PMN* the *ḫazannu* hurries to get Gimil-Ninurta inside (ll. 27–31), perhaps because he did not want him to be seen with what he thought was a bribe. Cf. also Deut 10:17; 1 Sam 8:3; 12:3; Isa 5:23; 33:15; 2 Chron 19:7; Ps 15:5; 26:10; Job 6:22. On Samuel's sons taking bribes, cf. Grottanelli 1999, 89–90. This insistence on the theme of justice, albeit hidden, might suggest that *PMN* might even have served some sort of cautionary purpose (cf. D'Agostino 2000, 111). Uriel Simon (1967) identified as a literary form in biblical texts what he called "juridical parables," the most prominent example being the so-called *Parable of the Poor Man's Ewe* (2 Sam 12:1–4), which shares some similarities with *PMN* in characters and contents; Simon (1967, 220–221) defines the juridical parable as "a realistic story about a violation of the law, related to someone who had committed a similar offence with the purpose of leading the unsuspecting hearer to pass judgement on himself"; notably, the brief parable in 2 Sam 12:1–4 likely had an independent existence before its editorial incorporation in the longer narrative (cf. Cathcart 1995, 216–17). However, similarities notwithstanding (cf. Ottervanger 2016, 30–31 n56), nothing suggests that *PMN* served such a specific function.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

highest rank in the hierarchical scale of human power, namely the king, who immediately complies with his requests (ll. 70–84). Thus, during the first revenge, the true nature of the *ḫazannu* bursts out: he is arrogant with the weaker, but on the other hand he is also servile with those more powerful than him: he immediately welcomes into his palace Gimil-Ninurta disguised as a high official and completely changes his attitude toward him (ll. 88–95).

The role of the king in the narrative and his seemingly positive attitude toward Gimil-Ninurta are very odd, especially in the face of the sociopolitical and satirical nature of *PMN*, and this deserves further discussion. After being wronged by the *ḫazannu*, Gimil-Ninurta resolves to go the king's palace (l. 70). After entering into his presence and greeting him (ll. 72–75), Gimil-Ninurta asks the king to lend him a chariot for one day (l. 76–77). In exchange, Gimil-Ninurta commits one *mina* of red (or refined) gold, which he will pay at an unspecified future date (l. 78). The king immediately complies with Gimil-Ninurta's request, giving him also some new garments[78] without even asking the reason for such request (ll. 79–82). Thus, the king helps Gimil-Ninurta only on the guarantee of a promise, without any further assurance; furthermore, this promise is not even realistic—especially if it is coming from a worn-out man such as Gimil-Ninurta!—as one *mina* of "red" gold was a substantial monetary amount.[79] This episode also appears odd in relation to the social norm(s) of reciprocity in audience scenarios as sketched out by Zgoll (2003, 197–99). In a sense, the king belies this norm for an opposite reason than the *ḫazannu*: this exchange in fact is a one-way transaction, and Gimil-Ninurta brings no gift to the audience as an offering. Interpreters have linked the benevolent dis-

[78] About which see Saporetti 1985, 68 n82; D'Agostino 2000, 128 n95; and Ottervanger 2016, 35 n82.

[79] On the two variants in the mss. *ruššâ hurāṣa* (Ḳ[Ù].GI), "red gold" (STT I, 38) and *mu-uš-e* ḲÙ.GI, "refined (?) gold" (STT I, 39), see Ottervanger 2016, 34 n78. In any case, it is clear that we are dealing here with a very precious metal. On "red" gold being a pure and thus a pricey kind of gold, see D'Agostino 2000, 128 n90; cf. more recently van der Spek et al. 2018, 114–15 on red gold in sources from Kassite Babylonia.

position of the king to the unrealistic fictional scenarios of fairytales.[80] Ottervanger (2016, 35 n79) sees instead a satirical take on the character of the king, who, enticed by the rich sum promised, immediately grants his favor without bothering to investigate the reasons why a citizen had been treated unfairly.

The reading of the following l. 71, placed between Gimil-Ninurta's resolution to go to the king's palace (l.70) and his plea (ll. 72–80) followed by the king's grant (ll. 81–82), is crucial to the understanding of this passage, both on a textual and a contextual level. On a textual level, the problem lies in the understanding of the expression *i-na* ⌜*ṭè*⌝*-mi* L⌝ UGAL at the beginning of the line and its relation to what follows. Most commentators understood this as a genitive compound (*ina ṭēmi šarri*) and translated it along the lines of "By order/By will of the king, prince and governor give fair judgment."[81] Ottervanger (2016, 33 n71) confronts this consensus with a strong grammatical argument: in a construct state, *ṭēm* should be expected instead of *ṭēmi*. Moreover, since Gimil-Ninurta does not turn to the king so that the latter can right his wrong, but just to obtain the material tools to enact his revenge, it would make no sense to state at this point that the prince and governor act righteously by order of the king. Ottervanger understands *ina ṭēmi* as a self-standing adverbial locution (cf. *CAD* Ṭ, 94–96) and translates accordingly: "By reason king, prince and governor should render a judgment of truth."[82] This latter interpretation would rule out their being any possible monarchical implications, as D'Agostino (2000, 111) would

[80] See, e.g., Oppenheim 1977, 241; and Haul 2009, 149. In particular, Jason (1979, 195–96) saw in the king the traits of the "helper" character in folktales, and especially in the "wisdom novella," where the general rule is that helpers "do not reflect upon the hero's deeds and orders, but act as he demands of them" (196).

[81] See, e.g., Gurney 1956, 153; Cooper 1975, 171; Saporetti 1985, 67; von Soden 1990, 176; D'Agostino 2000, 127; Foster 2005, 933; and Rositani 2013, 178; 2021, 157. Cf. Saporetti 1985: 100, which transliterates *i-na* ⌜*ṭe*⌝*-mi* [*šá* L]UGAL, thus making a genitival compound the only possible reading. The text of STT I, 38 is partly damaged in this spot, but a reconstruction of *šá* is entirely conjectural and ultimately unwarranted: there is no trace of this sign left, unlike for *ṭè*, *mi*, and the very first part of LUGAL.

[82] Ottervanger 2016, 17.

have it instead, since l. 71 would not be an indirect praise of the just rule of the king.[83] The following contextual analysis of l. 71 within the narrative seems to further disavow this view. On a contextual-narrative level, there are two different ways to understand l. 71: it could be understood either as direct speech, expressing Gimil-Ninurta's thoughts, or not. In the first case, l. 71 looks like "a statement of the hope of the wronged Nippurite" (Ottervanger 2016, 33 n71), and parallels Gimil-Ninurta's inner monologues of ll. 12–13; 17–22.[84] In this case, not only would it be part of the narrative, but also a device allowing its unfolding: as it also appears from the statements of purpose for the three acts of revenge (ll. 66–68; 111–113; 137–139), Gimil-Ninurta's actions are always foreshadowed by programmatic speech. If it is not understood as direct speech, l. 71 appears as an extrinsic consideration made by the scribe about Gimil-Ninurta's deliberation to resort to asking for the king's help and the rationale behind it. However, this does not look like a feasible explanation for l. 71. In fact, the narrative flow in *PMN* is self-explanatory; this would be the only instance of the scribe/narrator intervening to provide a rationale for plot mechanisms or to express an abstract judgment about characters or events. We might have a similar case in ll. 79–80 just below, where it is said that the king does not even ask Gimil-Ninurta for an explanation of his request. However, such a description is smoothly blended in the narrative: even if there might be some meta-textual implications in these lines,[85] their function is—far from being an assessment of the king's naivety—to portray the king either as the obliging helper of folktales or as a greedy and unprincipled sovereign. Given *PMN*'s highly refined literary guise, it would not come as a surprise if these lines included a conscious reuse of the folktale trope for satirical purposes.

[83] Cf. also Oppenheim 1977, 275; Annus 2024, 120.

[84] Cf. Cooper 1975, 166; D'Agostino 2000, 126–27 n82.

[85] See Jason 1979, 196.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

PMN *and Job*

Given this shared background between *PMN* and the ANE compositions featuring the pious sufferer,[86] it should not come as a surprise that *PMN* bears some similarities even with the biblical text of the pious sufferer, the book of Job.

The vast majority of exegetes and commentators have envisioned the pious sufferer motif as the primary and most explicit feature of Job,[87] and under this light they have variously paralleled it with the Mesopotamian texts addressed just above.[88] The outcomes of the previous paragraph, which have highlighted the existence of the same background between these texts and *PMN*, also provide the grounds for a further comparison between *PMN* and Job. These two literary works are clearly very different at their heart, and in a sense symmetrically opposed: while *PMN* is the tale of a man seeking an immediate improvement of his condition of poverty and hunger and a personal comeback, Job is a man who after losing an ideal initial condition reckons with his seemingly inexplicable suffering brought about by God. However, these two otherwise very

[86] This common background had already been noticed by Dietrich (2009, 341, 350–52). However, his view that Gimil-Ninurta must have seen himself as "just" because he was the former *ḫazannu* and unfairly lost his position to the current one seems too far-fetched and is ultimately not convincing; there is nothing in the plot to back up such a stance (cf. Ottervanger 2016, xi n9), and the characterization of Gimil-Ninurta as an ordinary man (cf. Milano 1998, 116) definitely rules it out.

[87] See, e.g., Tsevat 1976, 364: "The primary theme is the suffering of the innocent. For the overwhelming majority of readers and commentators this is, and always has been, the problem of the book." Cf. Dell 1991, 29–34.

[88] Literature abounds since at least Jastrow 1906; throughout the decades and among many others, see Dhorme 1926, lxxxvi–lxxxvii; Andersen 1976, 26–29; Albertson 1983; Alonso Schökel and Sicre Diaz 1985, 19–37; Habel 1985, 29, 45, 462–63; Hartley 1988, 6–11; Weinfeld 1988; Clines 1989, 38–39; Mattingly 1990; Witte 1994, 100–6; Janzen 2003, 21–28; Ravasi 2003, 135–49; Vicchio 2006, 17–21; Clifford 2007, xi–xiii; Uehlinger 2007, 124–63, and more recently Gray 2010, 5–20; Schmid 2010, 69–74; Seow 2013, 51–55; Mazzoni 2020, 14–16; Vicchio 2020, 181–82.

different texts nevertheless share—beyond the motif of the pious sufferer—other similarities.[89]

One such similarity is structural in nature. In both texts, a key role is played by the cyclical nature of the structure and the division of the text into blocks with a similar outline—though with variations in content. In turn, these blocks can be further subdivided into repeating subsections.[90] Not only do we find the heavy use of repetition—of entire scenes,[91] of key formulas and idioms, or simply of keywords[92]—in both texts, but we also see the number three given a pivotal structural role to play: Gimil-Ninurta takes revenge three times in three different cir-

[89] Some formal analogies between *PMN* and Job, recently highlighted by Annus (2024, 116–119), further encourage a comparison between the two texts : (1) both of them begin in the same way, with the mention of a "man" (*PMN* l. 1: *eṭlum*; Job 1:1: איש) followed by an introductory formula expressing his geographical origin (*PMN* l. 1: *mār Nippūri*; DUMU EN.LÍL.KI; Job 1:1: איש היה בארץ־עוץ); (2) both of the protagonists' names foreshadow the content of the narratives (for the name Gimil-Ninurta, see above, note 65, and below, note 110; on the name Job and its various possible meanings, see Seow 2013, 252–53, 266); (3) after the introductory sentences, both texts talk about the economic condition and the social status of the protagonist (*PMN* ll. 1–10; Job 1:2–3). Moreover, Annus (2024, 125–140) also argues that chs. 6–27 of the Testament of Job (TJob, composed between the 1st c. BCE and the 1st c. CE)—another text dealing with the Job narrative material—used as its source material *PMN* or another Mesopotamian narrative very much like it.

[90] As far as Job is concerned, this happens especially in the dialogue section, chs. 4–27. For Job see, e.g., Westermann 1981, 81–83; Hartley 1988, 36–37; and Hoffmann 1996, 69–75. For the cyclical/repetitive structure in *PMN*, see above all Cooper 1975, 163–67; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 112–15.

[91] The council scene (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6); the messenger scene (1:13–15, 16, 17, 18–19); in *PMN*, Gimil-Ninurta's reason for going to the *ḫazannu*'s palace is first narrated (ll. 9–22), and then exposed by Gimil-Ninurta himself to the *ḫazannu* (ll. 42–50). Every time he stands on the threshold of the *ḫazannu*'s palace, Gimil-Ninurta repeats to the gatekeeper Tukulti-Enlil his "revenge count" (ll. 65–69; 109–114; 135–139).

[92] For Job, see Habel 1985, 49–50; 81–83; for *PMN*, see in general Ottervanger 2016, xiv, 22–23 n10; cf., e.g., the recurring formulas to describe Gimil-Ninurta's inability to change his clothes (ll. 10, 12, 14) or the three beatings of the *ḫazannu* (ll. 102–103, 134, 155–156).

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

cumstances;[93] in the dialogue section of Job (chs. 4–27) "the number three is prominent … three speakers each deliver three speeches in a threefold cycle. In each cycle Job has three responses."[94]

Furthermore, many exegetes believe that "Job had its forerunners in ancient Near Eastern folklore" (Habel 1985, 35), and at least the prologue-epilogue prose narrative of Job (1–2; 42:7–17) probably circulated as an oral saga or folktale before the composition of the book (as also implied by Ezek 14:12–20), only later to be written down in a literary form and juxtaposed to the dialogues.[95] As already seen, a

[93] The number three is not a mere structural feature of *PMN*, as it is also mirrored in the tale's plot: Gimil-Ninurta buys a three-year old (or a third-rate: cf. above, note 21) goat from the marketplace (l. 15), he receives third-rate beer from the *ḫazannu* (ll. 59, 62; see Saporetti 1985, 66 n59; and D'Agostino 2000, 126 n75; for a different interpretation, see Ottervanger 2016, 31–32 n59), and will repay him three times as much (ll. 68, 158); the characters' actions ideally divide the night in the palace of the *ḫazannu* into three sections (ll. 94, 96, 98). Threefold repetition is a literary device known elsewhere in biblical, Ugaritic, and Akkadian literature (see Ottervanger 2016, 23 n3), but it is most significant in the case of Job and *PMN* as it stacks with other similarities between the two texts; on repetitions in biblical prose more generally, see Zeelander 2012, 55–79. Furthermore, the use of repetitions in these cases may be grounded in the oral origins of both Job and *PMN*; cf. Sandoval 2020, 269.

[94] Hartley 1988, 37. It is almost generally agreed that the third cycle was originally complete, but in reconstructing its truncated end in ch. 27 and addressing the missing third mention of Zophar exegetes are faced with the thorniest of problems; see discussions in Alonso Schökel and Sicre Diaz 1985, 49–54; Habel 1985, 37–38; Hartley 1988, 24–26; Dell 1991, 52–53 n161; Janzen 1993, 229–32; Witte 1994, 7–55 (with a history of previous scholarship); Hoffmann 1996, 276–88; Steinmann 1996, 87–88 (which argues for a basic structure based on fourfold groupings); Ravasi 2003, 24 and n10; 31–32; Gray 2010, 59–62; Seow 2013, 29–30; Mazzoni 2020, 12–14.

[95] Early theories also considered the existence of a *Volksbuch* and/or an epic substratum underlying the framework narrative; also, the fact that the prologue and epilogue (Job 1–2; 42:7–17) belong to the same composition that was originally detached from the dialogue section is not universally accepted (see, e.g., Hoffmann 1981; and Schmid 2010, 15–19; cf. recently Bührer 2022). For more on these issues, see discussions in Weiser 1975, 12, 39–41; Alonso Schökel and Sicre Diaz 1985, 44–45 and nn19–21; Habel 1985, 29, 35–36, 49; Hartley 1988,

similar fate must have befallen *PMN*, which arose in an oral environment and was later penned down and reworked into a refined literary composition.[96]

Finally, the presence of humor in biblical texts has been much discussed, and while it does not seem to be one of the primary dimensions of Job, as Dirk Geeraerts stated: "A reading of the Book of Job as a humorous text is not an altogether implausible option" (Geeraerts 2003, 40). Indeed, several scholars have engaged with Job addressing the issue of humor and its many facets.[97] The somewhat unexpected closeness shown just above between Job and *PMN*—a text that is instead overtly humorous—can only encourage these approaches and in turn be encouraged by them.

21–24; Dell 1991, 6–7 and n3, 199–205; Ravasi 2003, 21–23; Gray 2010, 17–19, 43; Seow 2013, 27–29; and Sandoval 2020, 269–70. Carole Fontaine (1987) provided a formalist analysis of the framework narrative according to Vladimir Propp's structural units of folktales. William Urbrock (1972, 1975, 1976) has consistently argued that the presence and use of formulas are evidence for oral antecedents to the poetic sections of the book of Job as well; cf. Habel 1985, 9–10, which also mentions the works by Victor Maag and Georg Fohrer. Most recently—and much more significantly for the topic of this article—Martin Leuenberger (2022) has read the frame narrative in Job against its ANE cultural background, and argued that this tale, as a conscious reworking of the ANE *Hiobstoff*, was not a naive, popular *Volksbuch*; on the contrary, it exposes a complex and articulated theological view, which criticizes traditional wisdom and its optimistic orientation.

[96] Cf. Newsom 2009, 269 n31, which states: "[*PMN*] uses schematically opposed characters, as well as closely parallel narrative and verbal repetition" but also adds that "the character type of the clever 'nobody' who bests his social betters and the humorous and class-conscious revenge plot makes this composition a better candidate than Job for the status of folktale."

[97] Literature on the subject reaches a wide scope, and often interlaces with studies on the "theatrical" dimension of Job and the interpretation of the book as a whole as a dramatized comedic play; for a narrower focus on humor in Job and many references to further bibliography, see Geeraerts 2003, 40–42; Pelham 2010; and Claassens 2015, 149–54; cf. most recently Southwood 2021, 13–15.

PMN as Skeptical Literature

The preceding paragraphs have revealed an image of *PMN* as a "dialogical" composition or—to use Gérard Genette's more sophisticated definition—a "hypertext,"[98] that is, a literary work that "converses" with previous ones and which can only be understood in its entirety through prior knowledge derived from sources other than the text itself. This happens on the level of formal composition and intertextuality, but also on the broader level of tropes and content, and it is especially in the scope of the latter that affinities between *PMN* and the pious sufferer compositions must be understood. However, *PMN*'s humorous, lighthearted, and at times irreverent tones do not suggest a reappraisal of this tradition for the purpose of homage or reaffirmation but rather for the purpose of mockery and ridicule. Indeed, several scholars have seen in *PMN* some form of parody of different literary forms and genres, especially epic.[99] Finet (1992, 102–6) explicitly ascribes the recurrence of archaizing language in *PMN* to a parodic aim. Finn (2019, 22) makes a case for *PMN* being a sort of parodic take on *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, a Sumerian-language poem (one in a cycle of four, dated to the Ur III period, 2112–2004 BCE) that recounts the conflicts between Enmerkar, king of Uruk, and the lord of the city of Aratta, and displays features similar to *PMN* in the narrative (recurrence of three-based patterns, gimmicks, violation of hospitality, etc.).[100] Helle (2020, 217–18) argues that *PMN* can be read as "a satirical reuse of a pattern otherwise associated with 'high' epic narratives" (213), i.e., the two-act structure that he sees in the mirroring of the wrong suffered by Gimil-Ninurta and his subsequent triple vengeance. Parody-like compositions are not

[98] See Genette 1997, 5: "By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary."

[99] See above, notes 12 and 60 for intertextual patterns between *PMN* and epic material.

[100] Cf. Ottervanger 2016, 22–23 n10 and n2. Further discussion, transliterated texts and translations of *Enmerkar* and the rest of the cycle are found in Vanstiphout 2003; cf. *COS* 1.170, 547–50.

lacking in ANE literature. An example is LKA 62 (VAT 13833), which Dietz-Otto Edzard (2004) and Jennifer Finn (2017, 150–54) interpret as a "purposeful parody of an Assyrian campaign report" (Finn 2017, 151) featured in a poem dedicated to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (LKA 63). Both texts have been dated to his reign (1114–1076 BCE), but hypotheses range from the Middle to Neo-Assyrian period.[101] A more significant case can be made for STT I, 40+41+42, the well-known *Letter of Gilgamesh*, a fictitious letter, one of several examples of "bogus royal missives … popular in first-millennium intellectual circles" (George 2003, 118). Its fictitious author is none other than Gilgamesh himself, and it has a clear parodic aim: Gilgamesh is writing to a foreign king, asking him for precious stones, metals, animals, and slaves in absurd, farcical amounts under threat of military retaliation.[102] In this light, *PMN* would be best described as a parody of the pious sufferer motif as well.[103]

A further assumption takes its cue from the parallels between *PMN* and Job sketched out above. In a landmark monograph on the book of Job, Katharine J. Dell exposed the inadequacy of the label "wisdom" to

[101] For a recent discussion, with further literature, see Fink and Parpola 2019, 177.

[102] Most notably, this particular text was found in Sultantepe in the very same library where the main mss. of *PMN* were also unearthed; the first edition is in Gurney 1957, 127–35. On this text as a whole and on its parodic intent, see D'Agostino 2000, 50–58; George 2003, 117–19; Finn 2017, 138–41; and Pryke 2019, 178, with further literature. It might be worth mentioning that parts of tablets I and II of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* were found in Sultantepe as well (Lambert and Gurney 1954), as well as another fragment with snippets of tablet V (Lambert 1996 [1960], plate 18; Gurney and Hulin 1964, plate 143); see recently Lenzi 2023, 38–40 and cf. Andersen 1976, 26 n4; Ravasi 2003, 138 and n35; Verderame 2021, 232–33 n22, with further literature.

[103] As a literary device, parody can only happen within a dialogic interface between different literary works, in that it "must have a model to imitate" and earlier examples to mock (Hallo 2009, 287); cf. Dell 1991, 147–57; Greenstein 2013, 67–69, with further bibliography about philosophical and literary-critical approaches regarding parody as a literary device/form/genre. For a reappraisal of parody as an interpretive lens in biblical criticism, see Kynes 2011. Within the fourfold categorization scheme he sketches out, *PMN* could be placed both in the "ridiculing" and the "rejecting" sections, using its literary precursors as "targets."

describe it and proposed that it best be described as a parody, one that is mainly based on deliberate misuses and displacements of traditional forms and is aimed at conveying a skeptical message (Dell 1991).[104] I argue here that the aim and scope of *PMN* in its ANE context fit this proposal rather well. In the pious sufferer compositions, the outcast condition of the sufferer is caused by the neglect of the protagonist by the god or by the god's actions: at the outset, the normal state of affairs experienced a *metaphysical* crack. The god's actions—or his non-action/desertion—are necessary requirements for the development of events: the sufferer can be reintegrated into society only by means of the god's intervention, because it is the god who caused the rupture in the first place.[105] This is not so for *PMN*: as mentioned above, it is instead a totally "human-centered" tale, and the gods are notably absent, not in the sense that they left Gimil-Ninurta, but in the sense that they do not play any role: there is no mention of the divine sphere. Rather, the suffering condition is plainly stated at the beginning as a matter of fact devoid of metaphysical superstructures; as a consequence, it is Gimil-Ninurta with his own—all too human(!)—grit and determination who strives to get himself out of the initial condition.[106] Let us compare, for example, composition (b) mentioned above and *PMN*: the protagonist of (b) after reflecting in his *kabattum* and in his *libbu* ascribes his suffering to a sin he cannot identify (ll. 12–13),[107] whereas Gimil-Ninurta in a similar

[104] Samet (2008) makes a similar case in the ANE context for *The Dialogue of Pessimism*: thus, it is no mere coincidence that both compositions make use of bitter and sharp humor; cf. above, note 53.

[105] In this respect, the description of Marduk as a destructive but also consoling and healing god in (d) I 1–34 is particularly telling. Cf. Southwood 2021, 2–5. Verderame (2017, 62–63) remarks that the man who is deserted and has lost the protection granted by his god is thus exposed to illness and other harmful agents, including demonic attacks. In fact, the "deserted man" is featured prominently not only in wisdom literature, but also in incantations against demons: the common perception located the cause of evil and pain on the extra-human level. It might also be this kind of epistemological framework that *PMN* tries to mock.

[106] Cf. Dietrich 2009, 350–52; Ottervanger 2016, xi–xii.

[107] For reference to text and translations of (b) and about the *libbu*, see above, notes 57, 65–66; on the *kabattum*, see further Zisa 2012, 12; Oshima 2014, 175.

condition resolves—in his *libbu* (!)—to sell the goat in the marketplace (ll. 11–13).[108]

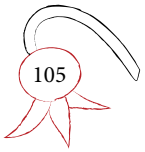
But parody would not be such without a more straightforward subversion of its models, which is disclosed by *PMN* in its own humorous hue: in fact, the gods *are* mentioned, but for every mention there are clear ironical connotations.[109] The very name of Gimil-Ninurta plays on

[108] Furthermore, note that in both cases the same verb *malāku* "to take counsel/advise/deliberate" in the Gt-stem is employed: *amtalkamma*, (b) l. 12 / *imtallik*, *PMN* l. 11; see *CAD* M/1, 156 c4; *AHw* II, 593; cf. Ottervanger 2016, 23 n11.

[109] The only possible exception being a standard greeting formula that mentions Enlil, the city of Nippur, Ninurta, and Nusku (ll. 37–38); cf. D'Agostino 2000, 124 n64, which does not see in the expression any parodic intent. Gimil-Ninurta's greeting of the king in l. 75 is more ambiguous, and the mss. report different versions. In STT I, 38, the king is defined as a king "whom Lamassu extols," *ša šurruḫu Lamassu* (^{d}LAMÁ); cf. the translations in, e.g., Gurney 1956, 153; Saporetti 1985, 75; D'Agostino 2000, 75; Foster 2005, 933; Rositani 2013, 178; Ottervanger 2016, 17. Cooper (1975, 172) took the king as subject and ^{d}LAMÁ as object (*lamassa*), thus translating "who strengthens good fortune." For Lamassu being here the protective/tutelary goddess rather than an abstract concept denoting "(good) fortune," "dignity" (cf. *CAD* Š/2, 38 3c), see Ottervanger 2016, 34 n7. STT I, 39 has instead *ša šūtara Lilû* (*šu-ta-*⌜*ra* ^{d}LÍL⌝). The last sign is partly erased, and Ottervanger (2016, 34 n75) reconstructs it as LÍL; the two signs LAMÁ (KAL) and LÍL (KID) are identical except for the fact that the latter has a final single vertical wedge, whereas the former has a double vertical wedge. Since the last part of the sign with a single vertical wedge is clearly visible, despite the abrasion, Ottervanger's conjecture looks sound. He understands *šūtara* as a Š-stem causative <(*w*)*atāru* and translates accordingly "whom the Lillu-demon made superior." The purpose of an appeal to the protective deity Lama/Lamassu in a wishful greeting is rather obvious. Moreover, this divine being was often represented iconographically in introductory scenes before kings, standing behind the *orans* for whom she intercedes, with both her hands lifted in a blessing gesture; see Spycket 1960, 81; RlA 6, 453–455. This might be loosely linked to Gimil-Ninurta's weird lifting of both hands before the king to greet him (l. 74, *ullāma qātēšu*, following the restoration *u*[*l-l*]*a-*[*m*]*a*ʾ proposed by von Soden in Gurney 1957, 136. Cf. the later reconstruction with the singular, *ul-la-a*ˈ in von Soden 1990, 176 n36a, to be read *ullâ qātīšu* "holding high his hand"). However, it should be noted that such iconography of the goddess had fallen into disuse, at least in Babylonia and Assyria, after the OB period; see again Spycket 1960, 84. Cf.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

a pun: its literal meaning is "kindness/favor of Ninurta," even if he does not appear to be "favored" at all.[110] The gods are mentioned collectively three times (ll. 66, 111, 137) by Gimil-Ninurta before each one of his revenges. The expression *taḫdāt ilāni* ("greetings of the gods") featured in these lines is used ironically to hint at the "abundance of the gods," that is, the abundance of beatings that Gimil-Ninurta will inflict on the *ḫazannu*.[111] At l.6, there might be a hint pointing to the goddess of the harvest, Nisaba,[112] but it is also said that Gimil-Ninurta's stores are lacking grain. At l.91, the city god, Enlil, is mentioned, but the offering in the box Gimil-Ninurta is taking to Enlil's temple, the Ekur, is just part of his deceit. Finally, ll. 105–106 portray a blatantly ironic scene: the *ḫazannu*, while being beaten, professes himself as a sacred protégé



Ottervanger 2016, 34 n74, which instead sees a humorous undertone in the image of a prostrated person trying to lift both hands. Less obvious is an appeal to a *lilû* demon in the same circumstances, since such entities are mostly associated with winds and ghostly apparitions; see Verderame 2013, 125; cf. *CAD* L, 190; *CAD* Z, 60; RlA 7, 23. The spelling preceded by the divine determinative, usually absent before LÍL, might point in the direction of a scribal error for ^{d}LAMÁ'; however, it might be worth mentioning that the sumerogram LÍL/KID could also be read as *zaqīqu* (see OB Nippur LÚ, 825 = MSL 12, 028 A r vii 10'). Apart from designating phantasmatic presences and entities connected to dreams, such term can also refer to specific manifestations of gods in the context of dreams, denoting messenger entities, or in the context of intercessions, denoting "some kind of divine communication in answer to prayers" (*CAD* Z, 60); see Zgoll 2012, 94–98; *CAD* Z, 59 1a 2'. Whichever is the case, it is clear that Gimil-Ninurta appeals here to non-human entities not out of personal piety, but out of custom, and on top of that with a utilitarian purpose, namely for himself to be welcomed and his plea to be accepted by the king.

[110] This is not the only pun discernible in the name; the elaborate wordplays are evidence that its use was deliberate and served specific functions. On the reading of the name and its multiple references and puns, see Noegel 1996, 185 n62; D'Agostino 2000, 118 n26; Hurowitz 2010, 88 and n4; Fink 2013, 94 n71; Ottervanger 2016, 21 at n2; and Annus 2024, 121.

[111] See Cooper 1975, 168; D'Agostino 2000, 126 n79; and Ottervanger 2016, 32 n66; cf. Noegel 1996, 175 n28.

[112] The word "grain" is written logographically with the same sign (^{d}NISABA) used for the name of the goddess Nisaba; cf. D'Agostino 2000, 119 n31.

(*kidinnu*) in order to arouse the (religious) pity of his assailant. At this point, he has not yet recognized Gimil-Ninurta: in fact, he addresses him as "my lord" (*bēlī*), and the warning he makes for the shedding of his blood as an *ikkibu* ("sin," "taboo") against Enlil (*ik-kib* ^{d}BE) is best explained if the *ḫazannu* still believed that he was being beaten by a high dignitary on his way to the Ekur to pay homage to Enlil himself.[113]

Thus, *PMN* employs images and devices that serve to instantiate a reversal or a deformation in a parodic sense of the traditional motifs and tropes of the wisdom tradition—such as the pious sufferer—and the pious worldview they convey. The outcome is a disillusioned picture, or perhaps even a pessimistic inclination: relying on the gods cannot do any good, since they do not care at all about human affairs.[114]

[113] For further discussion on this scene, and the meaning of the two terms *kidinnu* and *ikkibu*, see Gurney 1956, 160–61 n106; D'Agostino 2000, 131 n117; and Ottervanger 2016, 38 n106. For possible hidden wordplays, see Noegel 1996, 185.

[114] As already mentioned above, Zgoll 2003 linked the help requests to a social superior featured in *PMN* to the ritual actions in *šu'illa* rituals and showed how they paralleled each other within the shared conceptual horizon of the "audience" scenario and the social norms of reciprocity. As Alan Lenzi (2010, 311) remarks: "The gods invoked in the *šuilla*s are being addressed in an official capacity as cosmic authorities." Since Gimil-Ninurta's plea for help was not satisfied and indeed was misunderstood by the *ḫazannu*, and only superficially fulfilled by the king, this might well be another hint at the inefficiency of both social superiors and the gods in their role of cosmic guarantors of order and justice; cf. Dietrich 2009, 339–40. Significantly, as Beaulieu (2007, 11) remarks, the feelings expressed in *šu'illa* prayers "are very much the same as the ones we find in compositions about pious sufferers," that is, "praise of the deity, sense of guilt, ignorance of the fault committed, feelings of dejection, paranoia, abandonment, bodily ailments and disease." This recalls once again the idea expressed above about *PMN*'s rehashing of the pious sufferer motif, thus closing the circle of allusions: Gimil-Ninurta is both a supplicant before the human authority and implicitly a "pious sufferer" before the gods, but in both cases his pleas are rejected, and his vicissitudes can only find resolution thanks to his own actions. Cf. also Edward Greenstein's (2007, 59) analysis of humorous tones in *The Dialogue of Pessimism*: "The text's ridicule of the gods goes hand in glove with its pervasive display of ridicule toward the master and the upper class he represents. The ridicule finds expression in the character of the clever and brazen servant." For more on this text, cf. above, note 53.

Conclusion

The philological framework of the text and the overview of past scholarly assumptions about *PMN* given in the first half of this article (i.e., it is a humorous and a satiric composition drawing from folk tradition but preserved in a refined and intellectual form) showed that these cannot—and must not—be set aside. However, an in-depth comparison between *PMN* and the pious sufferer texts stemming from both Mesopotamian and biblical traditions highlighted the presence of several shared motifs, and some fuzzy passages of the plot of *PMN* have become clearer thanks to it. Thus, the literary identity of *PMN* stretches even further out than former interpretations were willing to grant: as its intertextual connections also reveal, *PMN* is a *pastiche*-like work that "dialogues" with other literary products, and one can fully grasp its message only from the privileged point of view of those familiar with them—a feature that fits very well with a *belles lettres* composition included in the scribal curriculum.

As far as wisdom tradition is concerned, *PMN*'s use of its tropes looks like a deliberate attempt to parody ancient understandings of piety. In this way, *PMN* allusively expresses a bitter and disillusioned worldview that ascribes it to a dimension close to *The Dialogue of Pessimism* or Job envisioned as "skeptical literature": the laughter it elicited must have been a very bitter or a cynical one. Once again, the modern reader's perception is put to the test and questioned as to how the very same literary tropes could be used, reused, or misused in different hues: in theological speculation and theodicy but also in a refined form of entertainment such as *PMN*.

Significantly, Manfried Dietrich included *PMN*—along with other texts such as the *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* and the *Babylonian Theodicy*—in the scope of the *Krisenliteratur* ("crisis literature"), marking the dark side of society and public life in the first half of the first millennium BCE.[115] To social criticism may now be added an existential uneasiness:

[115] Dietrich 2009; cf. also Fink 2013, 93–96, which treats *PMN*—along with other texts, such as the *Dialogue Between Shupe-ameli and His Father*, the *Babylonian Theodicy*, and the *Dialogue of Pessimism*—as an example of intellectual

PMN, while employing its undeniable humorous tone, highlights the inadequacy of traditional and religious answers to the timeless problem of injustice and suffering. It is tempting to see in *PMN* not only a mere attempt to make fun of the examples of piousness displayed in wisdom literature, but also—by means of a conscious rejection of the metaphysical dimension of evil and suffering—to radically polemicize with the epistemological framework in which such examples could have arisen. It is the lack of a *pars construens* after this devastating *pars destruens* that shapes the nihilistic void between a witty allusion and a bitter laugh.

Bibliography

Albertson, Robert G. 1983. "Job and Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature." In *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method*, edited by William W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, and Leo G. Perdue, 213–30. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Ali, Fadhil A. 1970. "Comic Texts in the Sumerian and Babylonian Literature." *Sumer* 26: 87–100. [Arabic].

Alonso Schökel, Luis, and Jose L. Sicre Diaz. 1985. *Giobbe: Commento teologico e letterario*. Translated by Gianantonio Borgonovo. Rome: Borla.

Alster, Bendt. 1991–1993. "The Sumerian Folktale of the Three Ox-Drivers from Adab." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 43–45: 27–38. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359843.

Alster, Bendt. 2005. *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.

Ambos, Claus. 2009. "Eunuchen als Thronprätendenten und Herrscher im Alten Orient." In *Of God(s), Trees, Kings and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, edited by Mikko Luukko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila, 1–7. Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.

Andersen, Frances I. 1976. *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*. London: Inter-Varsity Press.

Annus, Amar. 2024. "Some Motifs of Mesopotamian Literature in the Prose Narratives of Job." *Mythopoeïa* 1: 113–42. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356696322_Some_motifs_of_Mesopotamian_literature_in_the_prose_narratives_of_Job

"Gegenkultur." *PMN* is one of those "dangerous texts" that ridicule "das herrschende System" (Fink 2013, 82).

Annus, Amar, and Alan C. Lenzi. 2010. *Ludlul bēl Nēmeqi: The Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*. Helsinki: The Neo Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

Arnaud, Daniel. 2007. *Corpus des textes de bibliothèque de Ras Shamra-Ougarit (1936–2000) en sumérien, babylonien et assyrien*. Barcelona: Ausa.

Beaulieu, Paul-Alain. 2007. "The Social and Intellectual Setting of Babylonian Wisdom Literature." In *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, edited by Richard J. Clifford, 3–19. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Bonneterre, Daniel. 2021. *Banquets, Rations et Offrandes Alimentaires au Proche-Orient ancien: 10000 ans d'histoire alimentaire révélée*. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Bottéro, Jean. 1982. "Note additionelle sur le Conte du pauvre here de Nippur." In *Les pouvoirs locaux en Mésopotamie et dans les régions adjacentes: Colloque organisé par l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Belgique 28 et 29 janvier 1980*, edited by André Finet, 24–28. Brussels: Institut des Hautes Études de Belgique.

Bricker, Daniel P. 2000. "Innocent Suffering in Mesopotamia." *Tyndale Bulletin* 51, no. 2: 193–214. http://dx.doi.org/10.53751/001c.30290.

Buccellati, Giorgio. 2024. "An Epistemological Perspective on the Mesopotamian Wisdom Tradition." In *Wisdom Between East and West: Mesopotamia, Greece and Beyond*, edited by Francesco Sironi and Maurizio Viano, 5–20. Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari. http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-776-0/001

Bührer, Walter. 2022. "Anmerkungen zum chronologischen Verhältnis von Hioberzählung und Hiobdichtung." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 134, no. 1: 68–84. https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2022-0001.

Buylaere, Greta van. 2010. "The Role of the *ḫazannu* in the Neo-Assyrian Empire." In *Proceedings of the 53e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, Vol. 2: *City Administration in the Ancient Near East*, edited by Leonid E. Kogan et al., 229–46. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Cathcart, Kevin J. 1995. "The Trees, the Beasts and the Birds: Fables, Parables and Allegories in the Old Testament." In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J.A. Emerton*, edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson, 212–21. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Claassens, Juliana L. 2015. "Tragic Laughter: Laughter as Resistance in the Book of Job." *Interpretation* 69, no. 2: 143–55. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0020964314564844.

Clifford, Richard J. 2007. "Introduction." In *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, edited by Richard J. Clifford, xi–xiii. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Clines, David J. A. 1989. *Job 1–20*. Dallas: Word Books.

Cohen, Yoram. 2013. *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Cohen, Yoram, and Nathan Wasserman. 2021. "Mesopotamian Wisdom Literature." In *The Oxford Handbook of Wisdom and the Bible*, edited by Will Kynes, 121–39. New York: Oxford University Press.

Contenau, Georges. 1954 [1950]. *Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria*. Translated by K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop and A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cooper, Jerrold S. 1975. "Structure, Humor, and Satire in the Poor Man of Nippur." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 27, no. 3: 163–74. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359242.

Cooper, Jerrold S. 1978. *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur: an-gim dím-ma*. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum.

D'Agostino, Franco. 1995. "Umorismo e utilizzo del testo: a proposito de 'Il medico di Isin.'" *Aula Orientalis* 13: 67–74. https://iris.uniroma1.it/handle/11573/482373.

D'Agostino, Franco. 1998. "Some Considerations on Humour in Mesopotamia." *Rivista degli studi orientali* 72, no. 1: 273–78. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41881025.

D'Agostino, Franco. 2000. *Testi umoristici babilonesi e assiri*. Brescia: Paideia.

D'Agostino, Franco. 2001. "Il medico come figura comica presso gli assiro-babilonesi." *Aula Orientalis* 19, no. 2: 207–23. https://www.ub.edu/ipoa/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20012AuOrDAgostino.pdf.

D'Agostino, Franco. 2014. "Assyrian and Babylonian Humor." In *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, edited by Salvatore Attardo, 68–70. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

De Genouillac, Henri. 1928. "Curieux syllabaire de l'époque de la dynastie de Babylone." *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 25, no. 3: 123–32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23290922.

Dell, Katharine J. 1991. *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Dhorme, Édouard-Paul. 1926. *Le Livre de Job*. Paris: Gabalda.

Diakonoff, Igor M. 1965. "A Babylonian Political Pamphlet from about 700 BC." In *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday, April 21, 1965*, edited by Hans Güterbock and Thorkild Jacobsen, 343–49. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dietrich, Manfried. 2009. "'Armer Mann von Nippur': Ein Werk der Krisenliteratur des 8. Jh. V. Chr." In *Of God(s), Trees, Kings and Scholars:*

Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola, edited by Mikko Luukko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila, 333–52. Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.

Ebeling, Erich. 1927. "Die babylonische Fabel und ihre Bedeutung für die Literaturgeschichte." *Mitteilungen der altorientalischen Gesellschaft* 2, no. 3: 3–53.

Edzard, Dietz-Otto. 2004. "LKA 62: Parodie eines assyrischen Feldzugsberichts." In *From the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: Studies on the History of Assyria and Babylonia in Honour of A. K. Grayson*, edited by Grant Frame, 81–87. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten te Leiden.

Ermidoro, Stefania. 2015. *Commensality and Cerimonial Meals in the Neo-Assyrian Period*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari.

Falkenstein, Adam. 1952. "Das Potentialis- und Irrealis-suffix -e-še des Sumerischen." *Indogermanische Forschungen* 60: 113–30. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110243017.113.

Faragó, József. 1970. "A Contribution to the Table Motif of the Bird Concealed in the Vessel. The First Revenge of the Poor Man of Nippur." *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 19: 147–59.

Fensham, Charles F. 1962. "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 2: 129–39. https://doi.org/10.1086/371679.

Finet, André. 1992. "Le trois vengeances du pauvre home de Nippur: Conte babylonien." In *L'atelier de l'orfèvre: Mélanges offerts à Ph. Derchain*, edited by Michèle Broze and Philippe Talon, 87–106. Leuven: Peeters.

Fink, Sebastian. 2013. "Gegenkultur im Alten Orient?" In *"Gegenkultur": Cultural Encounters and Transfers 2*, edited by Timo Heimerdinger, Eva-Maria Hochhauser, and Erich Kistler, 77–101. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

Fink, Sebastian. 2017. "Intellectual Opposition in Mesopotamia between Private and State." In *Private and State in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 58th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Leiden, 16–20 July 2012*, edited by Rients de Boer and Jan Gerrit Dercksen, 173–83. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Fink, Sebastian, and Simo Parpola. 2019. "The Hunter and the Asses: A Neo-Assyrian Paean Glorifying Shalmanesser III." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 109, no. 2: 177–88. https://doi.org/10.1515/za-2019-0013.

Finkel, Irving L. 1994. "Untitled Short Note #41." *Nouvelles Assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 1994, no. 2: 39. http://sepoa.fr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/1994-2.pdf.

Finn, Jennifer. 2017. *Much Ado about Marduk: Questioning Discourses of Royalty in First Millennium Mesopotamian Literature*. Boston: De Gruyter.

Finn, Jennifer. 2019. "Herodotus' Poor Man of Nippur." *Classical World* 112, no. 2: 13–38. https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2019.0001.

Fontaine, Carole R. 1987. "Folktale Structure in the Book of Job: A Formalist Reading." In *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, edited by Elaine R. Follis, 205–32. Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press.

Foster, Benjamin R. 1974. "Humor and Cuneiform Literature." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 6, no. 1: 69–85. https://janes.scholasticahq.com/article/2238-humor-and-cuneiform-literature.

Foster, Benjamin R. 2005. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.

Fox, Nili S. 2000. *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press.

Frahm, Eckart. 1998. "Humor in assyrischen Königsinschriften." In *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Prague, July 1–5, 1996*, edited by Jiří Prosecký, 147–62. Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute.

Frahm, Eckart. 2008. "Babylonischer Humor." In *Babylon Wahrheit*, edited by Joachim Marzahn and Günther Schauerte, 463–64. Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Frazer, Mary. 2022. "Heads and Beds: On the Origin of the Akkadian Term for Eunuch or Courtier." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 9, no. 1: 95–112. https://doi.org/10.1515/janeh-2022-0001.

Geeraerts, Dirk. 2003. "Caught in a Web of Irony: Job and His Embarrassed God." In *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, edited by Ellen van Wolde, 37–55. Leiden: Brill.

Genette, Gérard. 1997. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

George, Andrew R. 1993. "Ninurta-Pāqidāt's Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales." *Iraq* 55: 63–75. https://doi.org/10.2307/4200367.

George, Andrew R. 2003. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giorgetti, Piero. 1986. "Un'ipotesi a proposito del rapporto 1:3 nel Poveruomo di Nippur." *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 9: 81–82. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24232692.

Gordon, Edmund I. 1960. "A New Look at the Wisdom of Sumer and Akkad." *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 17: 122–52.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Gowan, Donald E. 1987. "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner." *Interpretation* 41, no. 4: 341–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/002096438704100402.

Gray, John. 2010. *The Book of Job*. Sheffield, UK: Phoenix Press.

Greenstein, Edward L. 2007. "Sages with a Sense of Humor: The Babylonian Dialogue between a Master and His Servant and the Book of Qoheleth." In *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, edited by Richard J. Clifford, 55–65. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Greenstein, Edward L. 2013. "Parody as a Challenge to Tradition: The Use of Deuteronomy 32 in the Book of Job." In *Reading Job Intertextually*, edited by Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes, 66–78. London: T&T Clark.

Groß, Melanie, and Reinhard Pirngruber. 2014. "On Courtiers in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: *ša-rēši* and *mazzāz pāni*." *Altorientalische Forschungen* 41, no. 2: 161–75. https://doi.org/10.1515/aofo-2014-0015.

Grottanelli, Cristiano. 1999. "Charismatic Possession and Monarchic Rationalization: The Folly of Saul." In *Kings and Prophets: Monarchic Power, Inspired Leadership, and Sacred Text in Biblical Narrative*, edited by Cristiano Grottanelli, 87–109. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gurney, Oliver R. 1954. "Two Fragments of the Epic of Gilgamesh from Sultantepe." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 8, no. 3: 87–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359092.

Gurney, Oliver R. 1956. "The Sultantepe Tablets, V: The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur." *Anatolian Studies* 6: 145–64. https://doi.org/10.2307/3642407.

Gurney, Oliver R. 1957. "The Sultantepe Tablets, VI: A Letter of Gilgamesh." *Anatolian Studies* 7: 127–36. https://doi.org/10.2307/3642349.

Gurney, Oliver R. 1958. "The Sultantepe Tablets I (Occasional Publications 3): Corrigenda." *Anatolian Studies* 8: 245–46. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0066154600001812.

Gurney, Oliver R. 1972. "The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur and Its Folktale Parallels." *Anatolian Studies* 22: 149–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/3642559.

Gurney, Oliver R. and Peter Hulin. 1964. *The Sultantepe Tablets II*. Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara 7. London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara.

Habel, Norman C. 1985. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.

Hallo, William W. 2009. "Jonah and the Uses of Parody." In *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, edited by John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook, 285–91. London: T&T Clark.

Hartley, John E. 1988. *The Book of Job*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Haul, Michael. 2009. *Stele und Legende: Untersuchungen zu den keilschriftlichen Erzählwerken über die Könige von Akkade*. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag.

Heinrich, Adrian C. 2022. "The Poor Man of Nippur." With contributions by Enrique Jiménez and Tonio D. N. Mitto. Translated by Benjamin R. Foster. *Electronic Babylonian Library*. https://doi.org/10.5282/ebl/l/1/11.

Helle, Sophus. 2020. "The Two-Act Structure: A Narrative Device in Akkadian Epics." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 20, no. 2: 190–224. https://doi.org/10.1163/15692124-12341315.

Hoffmann, Yair. 1981. "The Relation between the Prologue and the Speech-Cycles in Job: A Reconsideration." *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 2: 160–70. https://doi.org/10.2307/1517679.

Hoffmann, Yair. 1996. *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context*. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press.

Holm, Tanny. 2005. "Literature." In *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*, edited by Daniel Snell, 253–65. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Hunger, Hermann. 1968. *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

Hurowitz, Victor A. 2010. "Name Midrashim and Word Plays on Names in Akkadian Historical Writings." In *A Woman of Valor: Jerusalem Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Joan Goodnick Westenholz*, edited by Wayne Horowitz, Uri Gabbay, and Filip Vukosavović, 87–104. Madrid: CSIC.

Janzen, Gerald J. 2003. *Giobbe*. Translated by Teresa Franzosi. Turin: Claudiana.

Jason, Heda. 1979. "The Poor Man of Nippur: An Ethnopoetic Analysis." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 31, no. 4: 189–215. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359751.

Jastrow, Morris Jr. 1906. "A Babylonian Parallel to the Story of Job." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 25, no. 2: 135–91. https://doi.org/10.2307/3260156.

Jiménez, Enrique. 2021. "From the Electronic Babylonian Literature Lab 16–24." *KASKAL* 18: 159–256. https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5293342.

Jong Ellis, Maria de. 1974. "A New Fragment of the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 26, no. 2: 88–89. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359391.

Julow, Viktor. 1970. "The Source of a Hungarian Popular Classic and Its Roots in Antiquity." *Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debrecensiensis* 6: 75–84.

Klein, Jacob. 2006. "Man and His God: A Wisdom Poem or a Cultic Lament?" In *Approaches to Sumerian Literature: Studies in Honour of Stip (H. L. J. Vanstiphout)*, edited by Piotr Michalowski and Niek Veldhuis, 123–43. Leiden: Brill.

Kločkov, Igor S. 1975. "The Babylonian Poem 'A Poor Man of Nippur'." In *Ancient East*, Vol. 1: *Studies Presented to M. A. Korostovtzev on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, edited by Isidor S. Katsnelson, 218–29. Moscow: Nauka. [Russian].

Kramer, Samuel N. 1955. "'Man and His God:' A Sumerian Variation on the 'Job' Motif." In *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Presented to Harold Henry Rowley by the Editorial Board of Vetus Testamentum in Celebration of his 65th Birthday, 24 March 1955*, edited by Martin Noth and David Winton Thomas, 170–82. Leiden: Brill.

Kynes, Will. 2011. "Beat Your Parodies into Swords, and Your Parodied Books into Spears: A New Paradigm for Parody in the Hebrew Bible." *Biblical Interpretation* 19: 276–310. http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/brx8-s706.

Lambert, Wilfred G. 1959. "The Sultantepe Tablets: A Review Article." *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 53, no. 3: 119–38. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23294803.

Lambert, Wilfred G. 1986. "Ninurta Mythology in the Babylonian Epic of Creation." In *Keilschriftliche Literaturen: Ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Münster, 8.-12.7.1985*, edited by Karl Hecker and Walter Sommerfeld, 55–60. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.

Lambert, Wilfred G. 1987. "A Further Attempt at the Babylonian 'Man and His God'." In *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, edited by Francesca Rochberg-Halton, 187–202. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society.

Lambert, Wilfred G. 1992. *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum: Third Supplement*. London: British Museum Press.

Lambert, Wilfred G. 1995. "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature." In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, edited by John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and Hugh G. M. Williamson, 30–42. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lambert, Wilfred G. 1996 [1960]. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Lambert, Wilfred G. and Oliver R. Gurney. 1954. "The Sultantepe Tablets (Continued). III: The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer." *Anatolian Studies* 4: 65–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/3642375.

Leichty, Erle. 1977. "Literary Notes." In *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of J.J. Finkelstein*, edited by Maria de Jong Ellis, 145–46. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Lenzi, Alan C. 2010. "Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 2: 303–15. https://doi.org/10.2307/27821021.

Lenzi, Alan C. 2019. *An Introduction to Akkadian Literature: Contexts and Content*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Lenzi, Alan C. 2023. *Suffering in Babylon*. Ludlul bēl nēmeqi *and the Scholars, Ancient and Modern*. Leuven: Peeters. https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-233971

Leuenberger, Martin. 2022. "Vergeltung überschreiten: Hiob und sein Gottesverhältnis in der (Rahmen-) Erzählung vor dem altorientalischen Hintergrund." In *Menschsein in Weisheit und Freiheit: Festschrift für Thomas Krüger*, edited by Veronika Bachmann, Annette Schellenberg, and Frank Ueberschaer, 200–14. Leuven: Peeters.

Lévêque, Jean. 1993. *Sagesses de Mésopotamie*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

Levin, Christoph. 2001. "The Poor in the Old Testament: Some Observations." *Religion and Theology* 8, no. 3–4: 253–73. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/157430101X00125.

Lion, Brigitte. 1998. "La conception de la pauvreté dans les textes littéraires akkadiens." In *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Prague, July 1–5,* 1996, edited by Jiří Prosecký, 199–214. Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute.

Liverani, Mario. 1974. "Rib-Adda, giusto sofferente." *Altorientalische Forschungen* 1: 175–205.

Mattingly, Gerald L. 1990. "The Pious Sufferer: Mesopotamia's Traditional Theodicy and Job's Counselors." In *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III*, edited by William W. Hallo, Bruce W. Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly, 305–48. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

May, Natalie Naomi. 2023. "Neo-Assyrian Eunuch-Scholars." In *Deciphering Assyria: A Tribute to Simo Parpola on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday*, edited by Raija Mattila, Robert Rollinger, and Sebastian Fink, 261–76. Münster: Zaphon.

Mazzoni, Stefano. 2020. *Giobbe: Introduzione, traduzione e commento.* Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo.

Milano, Lucio. 1998. "Aspects of Meat Consumption in Mesopotamia and the Food Paradigm of the Poor Man of Nippur." *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 12: 111–27. https://hdl.handle.net/10278/14472.

Minunno, Giuseppe. 2014. "Scribi che ridono: L'umorismo nell'antica letteratura mesopotamica." In *L'Umorismo in prospettiva interculturale: Immagini, Aspetti e Linguaggi / Crosscultural Humour: Images, Aspects and Languages.*

Atti del II° Convegno internazionale di Lucca-Collodi, 6–8 Aprile 2009, edited by Omar Coloru and Giuseppe Minunno, 61–68. Parma: Atelier 65.

Moran, William L. 1991. "Assurbanipal's Message to the Babylonians (ABL 301), with an Excursus on the Figurative Biltu." In *Ah, Assyria... Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, edited by Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al, 320–31. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

Newsom, Carol A. 2009. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nissinen, Martti H. 2017. "Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament." In *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, edited by Ilona Zsolnay, 221–47. London: Routledge.

Noegel, Scott B. 1996. "Wordplay in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur." *Acta Sumerologica* 18: 169–86. https://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/PDFs/articles/Noegel%2018%20-%20Acta%20Sumerologica%201996.pdf.

Noegel, Scott B. 1997. Review of *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel*, by Hector Avalos. *Journal of the Association of Jewish Studies* 22, no. 1: 107–9. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1486871.

Noegel, Scott B. 2021a. *"Worldplay" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Noegel, Scott B. 2021b. Review of *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, by Baruch Ottervanger. *Archiv für Orientforschung* 54, no. 2: 477–79. https://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/PDFs/reviews/noegel-review-ottervanger-AfO-54-2021.pdf.

Nougayrol, Jean. 1952. "Une version ancienne du 'Juste Souffrant'." *Revue Biblique* 59, no. 2: 239–50. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44091251.

Nougayrol, Jean. 1968. "(Juste) Souffrant (R.S. 25.460)." In *Ugaritica V. Nouveaux textes accadiens, hourrites et ugaritiques des archives et bibliothèque privées d'Ugarit: Commentaires des textes historiques (Première partie)*, edited by Jean Nougayrol et al., 265–73. Paris: Geuthner.

Oppenheim, Adolf L. 1977. *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Rev. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Oppenheim, Adolf L. 1985. "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia." In *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 2: *The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, edited by Ilya Gershevitch, 529–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oshima, Takayoshi M. 2014. *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Oshima, Takayoshi M. 2024. "New Copies of AO 4462 (the Old Babylonian Man and His God)" Nouvelles Assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires 2024, no. 49: 79–81. https://sepoa.fr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/NABU-2024-2.pdf

Oshima, Takayoshi M. and Stephanie Anthonioz. 2023. *Affronter le mal en Babylonie. Théodicées Akkadiennes.* Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

Ottervanger, Baruch. 2016. *The Poor Man of Nippur*. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

Paganini, Simone. 2020. "The Righteous Suffering Servant: Observations about a Theological Problem in Four Individual Complaint Psalms." *Old Testament Essays* 33, no. 3: 649–62. http://hdl.handle.net/2263/82232.

Parpola, Simo. 1985. "The Forlorn Scholar." In *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, edited by Francesca Rochberg-Halton, 257–78. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society.

Parpola, Simo. 2007. *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Part II. Commentary and Appendices*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Pearce, Laurie E. 1993. "Statement of Purpose: Why the Scribe Wrote." In *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, edited by Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg, 185–93. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.

Pedersén, Olof. 1998. *Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East, 1500–300 BC.* Bethesda, MD: CDL Press.

Peled, Ilan. 2013. "Eunuchs in Hatti and Assyria: A Reassessment." In *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona 26–30 July 2010*, edited by Lluís Feliu et al., 785–97. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Pelham, Abigail. 2010. "Job as Comedy, Revisited." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 1: 89–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089210378963.

Perdue, Leo G. 2008. *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of the Empires*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Ponchia, Simonetta. 2012. "Administrators and Administrated in Neo-Assyrian Times." In *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Würzburg 20–25 July 2008*, edited by Gernot Wilhelm, 213–24. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Pryke, Louise M. 2019. *Gilgamesh*. New York: Routledge.

Rad, Gerhard von. 1975. *La Sapienza in Israele*. Translated by Carlo Bocchero. Turin: Marietti.

Ravasi, Gianfranco. 2003. *Giobbe: Traduzione e commento*. Rome: Borla.

Reiner, Erica. 1960. "Fortune-telling in Mesopotamia." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1: 23–35. https://doi.org/10.1086/371554.

Reiner, Erica. 1967. "Another Volume of Sultantepe Tablets." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26, no. 3: 177–211. https://doi.org/10.1086/371909.

Reiner, Erica. 1978. "Die akkadische Literatur." In *Altorientalische Literaturen*, edited by Wolfgang Röllig, 151–210. Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion.

Reiner, Erica. 1982. "The Babylonian Fürstenspiegel in Practice." In *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honour of I. M. Diakonoff*, edited by Muhammad A. Dandamayev et al., 319–25. Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips.

Reiner, Erica. 1986. "Why Do You Cuss Me?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 130, no. 1: 1–6. https://www.jstor.org/stable/987088.

Reiner, Erica. 2003. "The Tale of the Illiterate Doctor in Nippur." *Nouvelles Assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 2003, no. 3: 62. http://sepoa.fr/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2003-3.pdf.

Richardson, Seth. 2016. "Obedient Bellies: Hunger and Food Security in Ancient Mesopotamia." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no. 5: 750–92. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341413.

Robson, Eleanor. 2013. "Reading the Libraries of Assyria and Babylonia." In *Ancient Libraries*, edited by Jason König, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, and Greg Woolf, 38–56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robson, Eleanor. 2019. *Ancient Knowledge Networks: A Social Geography of Cuneiform Scholarship in First-Millennium Assyria and Babylonia*. London: UCL Press.

Römer, Willem H. P. 1975–1978. "Der Spassmacher im alten Zweistromland: Zum 'Sitz im Leben' altmesopotamischer Texte." *Persica* 7: 43–68. https://docplayer.org/66114184-Der-spassmacher-im-alten-zweistromland-zum-sitz-im-leben-altmesopotamischer-texte.html.

Rositani, Annunziata. 2013. "La sapienza nelle culture mesopotamiche." In *La Sapienza nel Vicino Oriente e nel Mediterraneo Antichi: Antologia di testi*, edited by Andrea Ercolani and Paolo Xella, 97–181. Rome: Carocci.

Rositani, Annunziata. 2021. *La letteratura sapienziale nell'antica Mesopotamia*. Firenze: Le Monnier Università.

Rumor, Maddalena. 2016. "Aluzinnu Versus Ἀλαζών: On the Use of Medical Terminology in the Babylonian and Greek Comic Traditions." In *Libiamo*

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

ne' lieti calici. Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends, edited by Paola Corò et al., 587–603. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328810034_Aluzinnu_Versus_Alazon_On_the_Use_of_Medical_Terminology_in_the_Babylonian_and_Greek_Comic_Traditions_-_In_E_Devecchi_P_Coro_M_Maiocchi_and_N_de_Zorzi_eds_Libiamo_ne'_lieti_calici_Ancient_Near_Eastern

Salin, Silvia. 2020. *Le espressioni della sofferenza individuale nei testi assiro-babilonesi*. Verona: Alteritas.

Samet, Nili. 2008. "The Babylonian Dialogue between a Master and His Slave—A New Literary Analysis." *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Near Eastern Studies* 23: 99–130. [Hebrew].

Samet, Nili. 2020. "Mesopotamian Wisdom." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, edited by Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff, 328–48. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.

Sandoval, Timothy J. 2020. "The Orality of Wisdom Literature." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Wisdom Literature*, edited by Samuel L. Adams and Matthew Goff, 267–85. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.

Saporetti, Claudio. 1985. *La storia del siciliano Peppe e del poveruomo babilonese.* Palermo: Sellerio.

Saporetti, Claudio. 1996. "Una favola siciliana legata al 'Poveruomo di Nippur'." *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*. Serie IV 1, no. 2: 755–62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24308194.

Schmid, Konrad. 2010. *Hiob als biblisches und antikes Buch: Historische und intellektuelle Kontexte seiner Theologie*. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk.

Seow, Choon L. 2013. *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Sibbing-Plantholt, Irene. 2022. *The Image of Mesopotamian Divine Healers: Healing Goddesses and the Legitimization of Professionals* asûs *in the Mesopotamian Medical Marketplace*. Leiden: Brill.

Simon, Uriel. 1967. "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable." *Bib* 48, no. 2: 207–42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42618475.

Soden, Wolfram T. H. von. 1950. "Ein Zwiegespräch Ḫammurabis mit einer Frau Altbabylonische Dialektdichtungen Nr. 2[1]." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 49: 151–94. https://doi.org/10.1515/zava.1950.49.1.151.

Soden, Wolfram T. H. von. 1990. "Der arme Mann von Nippur: Eine Erzählung." In *Weisheitstexte, Mythen und Epen: Weisheitstexte* I. TUAT III/1, edited by

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Willem H. P. Römer and Wolfram T. H. von Soden, 174–80. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Southwood, Katherine E. 2021. *Job's Body and the Dramatised Comedy of Moralising*. London: Routledge.

Speiser, Ephraim A. 1954. "The Case of the Obliging Servant." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 8, no. 3: 98–105. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359094.

Speiser, Ephraim A. 1957. "Sultantepe Tablet 38 73 and Enūma Eliš III 69." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 11, no. 2: 43–4. https://doi.org/10.2307/1359598.

Spek, Robartus J. van der, Jan G. Dercksen, Kristin Kleber, and Michael Jursa. 2018. "Money, Silver and Trust in Mesopotamia." In *Money, Currency and Crisis: In Search of Trust, 2000 BC to AD 2000*, edited by Robartus J. van der Spek and Bas van Leeuwen, 102–31. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Spycket, Agnès. 1960. "La déesse Lama." *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 54, no. 2: 73–84. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23294909.

Steinmann, Andrew E. 1996. "The Structure and the Message of the Book of Job." *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 1: 85–100. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1585391.

Stol, Marten. 2019. Review of *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, by Baruch Ottervanger. *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 76, no. 3/4: 286–87. https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/secure/POJ/purchaseform.php?id=3286983&sid=.

Tarasewicz, Radosław. 2012. "On the *ḫazannu* in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods." *Palamedes* 7: 25–42. https://www.academia.edu/3467785/On_the_%E1%B8%ABazannu_in_the_Neo_Babylonian_and_Persian_periods.

Toorn, Karel van der. 2003. "Theodicy in Akkadian Literature." In *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, edited by Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor, 57–89. Leiden: Brill.

Tsevat, M. 1976. "The Meaning of the Book of Job." In *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, edited by James L. Crenshaw, 341–74. New York: Ktav Publishing House.

Uehlinger, Christoph. 2007. "Das Hiob-Buch im Kontext der altorientalischen Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte." In *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.–19. August 2005*, edited by Thomas Krüger et al., 97–163. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag.

Urbrock, William J. 1972. "Formula and Theme in the Song-Cycle of Job." In *SBL 1972 Proceedings* 2, edited by Lane C. McGaughy, 459–87. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Urbrock, William J. 1975. "Evidences of Oral-Formulaic Compositions in the Poetry of Job." PhD. diss., Harvard University.

Urbrock, William J. 1976. "Oral Antecedents to Job: A Survey of Formulas and Formulaic Systems." In *Oral Tradition and Old Testament Studies*, edited by Robert C. Culley, 111–37. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.

Vanstiphout, Herman. 2003. *Epics of Sumerian Kings: The Matter of Aratta*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Verderame, Lorenzo. 2013. "'Their Divinity Is Different, Their Nature is Distinct!' Nature, Origin, and Features of Demons in Akkadian Literature." *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 14, no. 1: 117–27. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/arege-2012-0008.

Verderame, Lorenzo. 2017. "Demons at Work in Ancient Mesopotamia." In *Demons and Illness from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, edited by Siam Bhayro and Catherine Rider, 61–78. Leiden: Brill.

Verderame, Lorenzo. 2021. "Il motivo del 'giusto sofferente' nell'antica Mesopotamia." *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 87, no. 1: 222–41. https://iris.uniroma1.it/handle/11573/1562371.

Vicchio, Stephen J. 2006. *The Image of the Biblical Job: A History*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Vicchio, Stephen J. 2020. *The Book of Job: A History of Interpretation and Commentary*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Weinfeld, Moshe. 1988. "Job and its Mesopotamian Parallels—A Typological Analysis." In *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F. C. Fensham*, edited by Walter T. Claassen, 217–26. Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press.

Weiser, Artur. 1975. *Giobbe: Traduzione e commento*. Translated by Giovanni Casanova. Brescia: Paideia.

Westermann, Claus. 1981. *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*. Translated by Charles A. Muenchow. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Whybray, Roger N. 1990. *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*. Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press.

Wiseman, Donald J. 1980. "An Old Babylonian Humorous Tale." *Ur-Magazine* 4: 31–4.

Witte, Markus. 1994. *Vom Leiden zur Lehre: Der dritte Redegang (Hiob 21–27) und die Redaktionsgeschichte des Hiobbuches*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Worthington, Martin. 2010. "Medicine, Comedy, Power and their Interconnections in Babylonia and Assyria." *Journal des Médecines Cunéiformes* 15: 25–39. https://medecinescuneiformes.fr/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/JMC-15-Worthington-25-39.pdf.

AABNER 4.1 (2024)
ISSN 2748-6419

Worthington, Martin. 2020. *Ea's Duplicity in the Gilgamesh Flood Story*. London: Routledge.

Yalçin, Serdar. 2016. "Men, Women, Eunuchs, Etc.: Visualities of Gendered Identities in Kassite Babylonian Seals (ca. 1470–1155 BC)." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 376: 121–50. https://doi.org/10.5615/bullamerschoorie.376.0121.

Zeelander, Susan. 2012. *Closure in Biblical Narrative*. Leiden: Brill.

Zernecke, Anna E. 2011. "A Shuilla: Ishtar 2. 'The Great Ishtar Prayer.'" In *Reading Akkadian Prayers & Hymns: An Introduction*, edited by Alan C. Lenzi, 257–90. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Zgoll, Annette. 2003. "Audienz—Ein Modell zum Verständnis mesopotamischer Handerhebungsrituale: Mit einer Deutung der Novelle vom *Armen Mann von Nippur*." *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 34: 173–95. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370646820_Audienz_Ein_Modell_zum_Verstandnis_mesopotamischer_Handerhebungsrituale_Mit_einer_Deutung_der_Novelle_vom_Armen_Mann_von_Nippur.

Zgoll, Annette. 2012. "Der oikomorphe Mensch: Wesen im Menschen und das Wesen des Menschen in sumerisch-akkadischer Perspektive." In *Der ganze Mensch: Zur Anthropologie der Antike und ihrer europäischen Nachgeschichte*, edited by Bernd Janowski, 83–106. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Zisa, Gioele. 2012. "Sofferenza, malessere e disgrazia: Metafore del dolore e senso del male nell'opera paleo-babilonese 'Un uomo e il suo dio': un approccio interdisciplinare." *Historiae* 9: 1–30. https://ddd.uab.cat/record/118588.