

A Note on the Use of *erinnu* in *bārû*-Rituals

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In a ritual treated by Zimmern in *BBR*,¹ the *bārû*-priest, a priest without blemishes who is about to perform an act of divination in which he observes the configuration of oil droplets in water, approaches the judgment place of Šamaš and Adad and grasps the *erinnu* prior to divination.² In the same text, the *erinnu* is mentioned as one of the appurtenances of the *bārû*-priests passed on by the legendary founder of their order, Enmeduranki.³

Two questions arise concerning the *erinnu* in this ritual that have never been answered satisfactorily: (1) what was the object in question, and (2) what was its function.

Concerning the first of these questions, we may note that Zimmern translated the cuneiform ^{giš}ERIN as “Cedernstab.” The use of italics for *Stab* (“staff”) suggests that he was not sure of the precise shape of the object. Nevertheless, several decades later, Lambert used similar terms to refer to the object in question when speaking of this same text: “Enmeduranki, king of Sippar, was received by Šamaš and Adad and taught oil- and liver-divination, also the holding of the cedar rod, an oft-mentioned ritual appurtenance, the function of which is no longer understood.”⁴ This comment illustrates that by 1967 there was still no clarity as to either the shape or function of the object.⁵

As regards the shape of the object, the suggestion of a staff or rod is not unreasonable in view of the fact that the object is *lifted*. A staff or rod could certainly be lifted easily. On the other hand, if a staff is really the object in question, then why is it simply called *erinnu* (or more precisely, denoted by the Sumerian ^{giš}ERIN),

1. H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig, 1901), 116ff., no. 24. Cuneiform text given on plates XXXIX and XL.

2. Line 24: *mu-kin* ^{giš}dili₂-gal ku₃^{te} na-šu—u₂ ^{giš}erin, “He places the wooden bowl (for divination), (and) he raises the *erinnu*.”

3. Other items include the “tablet of the Gods,” and the “pouch(?) of the secrets of heaven and earth,” cf. lines 14 and 15.

4. W. G. Lambert, “Enmeduranki and Related Matters,” *JCS* 21 (1967), 127.

5. Indeed, the translations of Zimmern and Lambert actually involve two assumptions: (1) that the shape of the object was that of a rod or staff, and (2) that the object was made of cedar. Although Sumerian ^{giš}ERIN and Akkadian *erinnu* have traditionally been assumed to be cedar (i.e., *Cedrus libani*), Hansman has made a fairly convincing case for another type of tree or wood, viz., *Juniperus excelsa*; “Gilgamesh, Humbaba and the Land of the Erin Trees,” *Iraq* 38 (1967), 23–35. This issue is of no real significance for our current investigation, however, since the questions at hand are not which of the two conifers was used, but rather what shape did the object take and what was its function.

when one might expect a staff or rod to be called *ḥaṭṭu ša erinni*? Indeed, the very lack of a noun for which *erinnu* could serve as a modifier suggests that the reference is not to an object simply constructed of cedar or derived from cedar, but to the cedar (or Juniper) tree itself; for other objects made of, or derived from cedar specify the substance or object more precisely (e.g. cedar pegs, or the oil or resin of cedar used in rituals). But how does one “lift” a tree?

The answer to this last question is that one can “lift” a tree if that tree is not an actual tree, but a representation of a tree. Trees are certainly not unknown as motifs in Mesopotamian cylinder seals and other art forms where cultic scenes are depicted, but the problem that arises is that trees which actually look like trees may represent gardens, or trees out of doors which could not possibly be *lifted*. In order to support the supposition that the *erinnu* of the *bārû*-rituals is a stylized tree, it would be helpful to find a picture of an object that is clearly man-made and in use in the inner parts of the temples, but which nevertheless is still recognizable as a (stylized) tree—or at least of a form that is suggestive of a tree.

In this regard, we may observe that Lundgreen identified an upright object with a conical top section that appears in certain Assyrian cultic representations as a type of stylized tree.⁶ Although Lundgreen wished to interpret the object as an *asherah*, what is important for our purposes here is not whether it corresponded to the biblical *asherah*, but simply his assertion that it is a (stylized) tree. In the 1930 edition of Alfred Jeremias’ *Das alte Testament in Lichte des alten Orients* (p. 422) there is a scene in which this upright object with the conical top appears adjacent to a table for offerings that stands before the statue of a god. This would seem to locate the object in question in the cella of the temple. This is compatible with the location of the *erinnu* of the *bārû*-ritual, for the latter is located at a point where the priest stands before Šamaš and is about to begin divination.

One might be tempted to argue that the object in question is not a tree at all, but rather an incense burner. One might even seek support for that assumption in the picture of a seal published by Jitta,⁷ in which the conical object rests on a stand and is surrounded by centrifugal lines that could almost be suggestive of light rays emanating from a fire on a stand. This should be compared, however, to a seal in the Newell collection,⁸ which also has pointed objects radiating from it, but these are connected to the “trunk” by criss-crossing lines which give it the appearance of a tree with branches rather than a light source.

Another indication that the object in question is a tree (and more than that, a conifer) derives from the depiction of just such an object in seal no. 89284 of the British Museum.⁹ In that scene, the conical object appears behind a seated deity

6. Friedrich Lundgreen, *Die Benutzung der Pflanzenwelt in der alttestamentlichen Religion* = BZAW 114 (Giessen, 1908), 35.

7. A. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, *Catalogue sommaire des cylindres orientaux au cabinet royal des médailles à la Haye*, (The Hague, 1952), no. 129 (p. 148).

8. H. H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mr. Edward T. Newell* (Chicago, 1934), seal no. 443 (plate XXX).

9. Dominique Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum: Cylinder Seals III* (British Museum Publications, 1986), seal no. 95 on plate X.

and has a narrow stem; but it is a cone that is much wider at its base than in other representations, and it is thus easily recognizable as a tree.

Finally, the best evidence against seeing the conical object as an incense burner occurs in another seal published by Collon¹⁰ in which a conical object on a stand appears, but there is also another object on a stand which has wavy lines rising quite vertically from its top, very suggestive of smoke. This latter object would therefore appear to represent the incense burner, while the conical object stands next to another object (on the same base) which has the shape of a simple staff.

If the shape of the object in question in these various glyptic representations is that of a stylized ERIN-tree, we must inquire as to its purpose. The answer to our question may lie in the fact that Šamaš appears to be intimately associated with particular mountains where ERIN-trees grow, viz., the Zagros mountains. He is often depicted as rising out of a mountain covered with trees¹¹ that are represented by cone shapes similar to the conical part of the stylized trees mentioned above.

One such representation is found in Frankfurt's *Cylinder Seals*, pl. XVIIIa), there is a figure of a female deity who is standing above him and either calling him forth or perhaps making his "resurrection" from the earth possible. In any case, the cones are present on the mountains in both pictures, and that further supports the assumption that the upright object with the conical top that is present inside the temples is indeed a representation of a tree. The pictures of Šamaš rising from the mountains suggest that the purpose of the ERIN-tree in the temple is to recreate the scene of the *erinnu*-covered mountain from which Šamaš rises.

The purpose of recreating the mountain scene might be to provide a setting where Šamaš can mystically be brought forth, since his presence as the divine judge is required for divination. If our suggestion has any validity, however, in addition to the representation of the *erinnu* of those mountains, we should also be able to identify the significance of a mountain in the proposed cultic setting. Fortunately, this mountain motif is attested in other texts where it, or rather its cultic equivalent, is called by the Sumerian name *du₆-ku₃*.

The *du₆-ku₃* is a feature of Mesopotamian temples which seems to have some special relationship to the *abzu*, and hence with the innermost areas of the temple, although it is not synonymous with the *abzu*. Its precise function is not stated in the Sumerian texts, but there are several references to it. In one passage, for example, it appears to be associated with a cultic meal, which is significant, since a cultic meal is part of the *bārû*-ritual:¹²

e₂ du₆-ku₃ u₂-siki-l₂-la ri-g₇-ga

Oh temple, holy mound where pure food is eaten!¹³

10. Dominique Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago, 1987), no. 378 on p. 82.

11. The relation of the Zagros mountains with ERIN-trees is known from the Gilgamesh epic (cf., also Hansman, n. 5 above) and it would be natural to think of Šamaš as rising on a daily basis from those mountains since they are east of Mesopotamia proper.

12. That meal in the *bārû*-ritual is described in a text published by Goetze in *JCS* 22 (1968), 25ff. as "An Old Babylonian Prayer of the Divination Priest."

13. Sjöberg, *Temple Hymns* . . . , 10, line 4.

Some additional details about the du_6 - ku_3 may be gleaned from a bilingual *bīt rimki* text, which, though late, almost certainly preserves ancient notions concerning the du_6 - ku_3 . The notions that appear in this text are that the du_6 - ku_3 is a great mountain, that it is associated with the subterranean waters (*abzu*), and that it is the place where the gods gather for judgment, as is evident from the following:¹⁴

1. en_2 dUtu kur - gal - ta um - ta - e_3 - na - zu - $še_3$
2. kur - gal kur - $idim$ - ta um - ta - e_3 - na - zu - $še_3$
3. du_6 - ku_3 ki - nam - tar - tar - re - e - de_3 um - ta - e_3 - na - zu - $še_3$
4. ki - $še_3$ an - ki ur - bi lal_2 - a - ta an - ur_2 - ta um - ta - e_3 - na - zu - $še_3$
5. $dingir$ gal - gal - e - ne di - da ma - ra - ab - sug_2 - ge - $eš$
6. dA - nun - na - ke_4 - e - ne $eš$ - bar - bar - ra ma - ra - ab - sug_2 - ge - $eš$

Incantation. Shamash, when you come out of the great mountain,
 When you come out of the great mountain, the mountain of the springs (of water),
 When you come out of the *duku* where fates are determined,
 When you come out of the (place) where heaven and earth are connected, from
 the foundation of heaven, to (this) place,
 The great gods will present themselves before you for judgment;
 The Anunnaki will present themselves to you for decisions.

The relation of this last passage to the events of the *bārû*-ritual are rather striking since Šamaš rises from the *duku* for the express purpose of rendering judgment—even though in this case it is the gods who are judged rather than men as in the *bārû*-ritual.

In view of these considerations, it would seem warranted to suggest that the *erinnu* (or gi_5 ERIN) of *BBR* 24 is not a staff or rod, but a stylized tree, and that it serves as part of a cultic representation of the divine mountain from which Šamaš is thought to rise in order to pronounce judgment during divination rituals.

14. V R 50 + 51. The transliteration here follows Borger, "Das dritte 'Haus' der Serie *bīt rimki*, *JCS* 21 (1967), 1–17. Though the text is bilingual, only the Sumerian will be reproduced here.