

Linguistics and Poetics in Old Babylonian Literature: Mimation and Meter in Etana

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Literary activity in the ancient languages of Mesopotamia, Sumerian and especially Akkadian, is attested over a time span of almost three millennia. Oral traditions changed into written ones, and literacy became a prominent characteristic within many circles in both Babylonia and Assyria. The Akkadian language and cuneiform writing also spread outside Mesopotamia either as a lingua franca or as the medium for writing and for other communicative functions in a diglossic situation, especially in the Levant. Besides the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, literary texts have been preserved both in and outside Mesopotamia, originating from all periods since the spread of literacy in the third millennium B.C.E.

Among the large corpus of written remains from Mesopotamia, a prominent status is held by poetic and narrative compositions, which include—among others—hymns, prayers, magical texts, incantations, secular poetry, wisdom literature, and mythological narratives. The study of Sumerian and Akkadian literary texts has hitherto concentrated mainly on their contents, on their narrative and contextual values. Interpretations have been based on ad hoc philological analyses of the texts involved. Research on the ancient languages of Mesopotamia has long suffered from difficulties originating in their remote antiquity, in the nature of their complex writing system, and in deficiencies in our own methodology for the investigation of the linguistic structure of the Semitic languages. This latter problem has influenced profoundly the linguistic study of the Akkadian languages, or—as they are commonly labeled in Assyriological studies—the Akkadian dialects.

The linguistic study of the literary registers of Akkadian has been quite scarce. Since von Soden's pioneering effort in his long article "Der hymnisch-epische Dialekt des Akkadischen" from the early 1930's,¹ and a collection of linguistic observations later integrated into his *Grundriss (GAG)*,² there has never been another attempt to compile a comprehensive large-scale grammatical analysis of the literary linguistic continuum of Akkadian. Some relatively large-scale works deal with either sections of the linguistic system,³ with specific types of literature,⁴ or with

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1. Wolfram von Soden, "Der hymnisch-epische Dialekt des Akkadischen," *ZA* 40 (1932), 163–227; *ZA* 41 (1933), 90–183.

2. Wolfram von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik* (Rome, 3rd ed. 1995).

3. Erica Reiner, *Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian* (The Hague, 1966); on phonology and morphology.

4. Brigitte R. M. Groneberg, *Syntax, Morphologie und Stil der jungbabylonischen "hymnischen" Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1987); Werner Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen"* (Rome, 1976).

poetic features.⁵ Most recently, Buccellati has introduced linguistic features from literary texts into his grammar of Old Babylonian,⁶ but not in a systematic way.

A comprehensive linguistic description of Literary Akkadian, namely, a grammar of the literary registers of Assyria and Babylonia, is still lacking. The writing of such a grammar is a huge endeavor, because it demands not only many years of study and research, but also, as a preparatory undertaking, the collection of a large amount of literary data from all periods and of many different genres. The goal of having at hand such a comprehensive grammar can be achieved only after the chronological phases have been described and, more importantly, after the different types of Akkadian literature have been defined.

One of the more studied areas of Akkadian literature has always been the mythological texts. Even a glimpse at the many existing translations of the various Akkadian myths would reveal a vast variety of solutions, and sometimes even contradictory renderings of the same passage. I believe that the reason for this situation lies mainly in the low priority given to pure linguistic analysis of the texts. It is with this in mind that some time ago I undertook a linguistic examination of these texts, concentrating on the Old Babylonian myths as a significant body of texts of which language has been taken as a model for literary activity by Mesopotamian scribes of later periods, both Babylonian and Assyrian.⁷

In order to reach the ultimate goal of a systematic description of the features of the language used in mythological narratives, much attention must be devoted to textual variants. Any two versions of a single myth differ not only in their narrative characteristics, but also in their language. Thus, grammatical descriptions of each of the texts should be compiled separately. Then a comparison among the respective structures can be made in order to understand the linguistic significance of the differences between the two variants. Moreover, notice should be taken of differences occurring within each chronological period, and in between. The nomenclature, comprising terms such as "OB recension," "SB recension," "SB variant," and the like, should perhaps be replaced by a more refined set of labels.

Any linguistic study of mythological narratives must take into consideration not only the phonological, morphological and syntactical features, but must also include an investigation of the metrical system(s). While meter is related to the literary and poetic aspects of a text, its study is a linguistic endeavor, and has strong ties with all aspects of language: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. A notable example is word order, which differs in literary, and especially poetic texts from the way it is in administrative registers. It is commonly held that word order in poetic texts is free. However, even this apparent free word order is dependent on pragmatic and poetic constraints.

5. Karl Hecker, *Untersuchungen zur akkadischen Epic* (Kevelaer, 1974). Cf. also—on poetic features—Erica Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (Ann Arbor, 1985); Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, eds., *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* (Lewiston, 1992); Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, eds., *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian* (Groningen, 1996); and—on imagery—Michael P. Streck, *Die Bildersprache der Akkadischen Epik* (Münster, 1999).

6. Giorgio Buccellati, *A Structural Grammar of Babylonian* (Wiesbaden, 1996).

7. GAG §2f.

One frequent device where change of order is used for pragmatic reasons is fronting. Note, for example, the following line from Adapa, where *ana šua:tu*, “to him,” is fronted:

ana-šua:tu ne:meqa iddiššu napišta dari:ta ul-iddiššu
 To him he gave wisdom, he did not give him eternal life.
 (Fragment A: 4')

The best known feature of deliberate word ordering to achieve poetic effect is chiasmus.⁸ A well known example of chiasmus is the following passage from the OB recension of Gilgameš:

<i>ul i:de enkidu</i>	Enkidu did not know
<i>aklam ana aka:lim</i>	(how) to eat bread,
<i>šikaram ana šate:m</i>	(how) to drink beer
<i>la: lummud</i>	he has not been taught.
	(Pennsylvania tablet iii: 6–9)

As for meter, note the plural masculine pronouns in the following passage, again from Adapa, which are needed mainly for maintaining the balance between the two halves of the respective lines:⁹

šunu aḥa:miš | ippallasu:ma iššeneḥḥu:
šunu amata damiqta | ana-ani iqabbu:
pa:ni: banu:ti ša-ani | šunu ukallamu:ka

They will look at each other and smile;
 they will say something good to Anu;
 they will show you the favorable face of Anu.
 (Fragment B = EA 356: 24'–28')

Linguistic study of textual material is a study of systems. Linguistic analysis strives to find systemic structure, a systemic relationship between linguistic components. While discussing the form *sebeta* in the oldest OB fragment of the myth of Etana, Lambert has noted that “Old Babylonian literary texts are as yet a small corpus and are distinguished by unusual and diverse linguistic features. Rare and archaic grammatical features easily survive in particular words or phrases in a literary corpus.”¹⁰

There are no discrete grammatical systems. Any system is a continuum, where all features must find their proper status within the system, including what apparently seems to be an exception to the system. Only a thorough comprehensive study of all subcorpora of the OB mythological texts will enable us to reach the goal of a comprehensive grammar of this linguistic continuum.

8. Cf. in general Robert F. Smith, “Chiasm in Sumero-Akkadian,” in John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, 1981), 17–35.

9. Cf. Shlomo Izre'el, *The Myth of Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death* (in press), chap. 3.

10. W. G. Lambert, “Line 10 of the Old Babylonian Etana Legend,” *JCS* 32 (1980), 85.

In this article I would like to draw attention to a rather simple, elementary linguistic feature, mimation. I am not going to deal with the issue of its nature, whether it is merely a phonetic feature, and hence insignificant to the linguistic analysis, or an actual linguistic marker, which is part of the morphosyntactic system and hence bears significance on the spread of linguistic markers in that system. My aim here is to show the importance of an overall observation into language, and show how variation in the appearance of mimation in a single text may teach us something about the synchrony and the history of Akkadian.

As we learn in the very first stages of Akkadian study, word-final mimation is a feature of only the older periods of Akkadian. Let me quote one of the most popular Akkadian grammars, the one by Ungnad and Matouš:

In the older language (OB, OA) the nom(inative) s(in)g(ular) has the ending *-um*, gen(itive) s(in)g(ular) *-im*, acc(usative) s(in)g(ular) *-am* (. . .). Later (MB, MA) the final *m* (so-called “mimation”) is lost (. . .). Sometimes the mimation is lacking even in the earlier stages, esp. in personal names. . . .¹¹

A significant flaw in this description is the statement that “sometimes the mimation is lacking even in the earlier stages.” This is observable, and we find it stated also in other grammars of Akkadian, such as von Soden’s *Grundriss*.¹² Buccellati in his recent Babylonian grammar says that “mimation begins to disappear in Old Babylonian, and is present only as an archaism in later periods.”¹³ Buccellati even presents a statistical analysis of occurrences of mimation in his sample corpus of Old Babylonian letters to support the view that “mimation is in fact fairly regular in Old Babylonian.” Yet, what we have never been told is whether there are any rules that predict lack of mimation in Old Babylonian. This is a gap in our knowledge, which must be filled.

Turning to poetical texts, we may note a similar tendency in mimation, namely that word-final mimation disappears as we advance in time. Erica Reiner, who based her *A Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian* on Standard Babylonian, makes the following statement regarding the use of apparent mimation in these texts as follows:

The older form of these endings [i.e., the case endings in the singular] (OAkk., OA, partially OB) is *-um*, *-am*, *-im*; in the OB period and sporadically earlier, in OA, the loss of the final /m/ can be noted; the literary dialect [i.e., the post-OB Standard Babylonian] however still often writes final /m/, although usually only by selecting a CVC sign whose last consonant is /m/. It need not be necessarily assumed that these signs have to be read as a CV sign, e.g., *tu₄* and not *tum*, *lu₄* and not *lum*, *tì* and not *tim*, *rù* and not *rum*, etc., since in the literary dialect these CVC signs are used only for forms in which the /m/ ending is historically correct, in contrast to archaizing texts of the NB period. . . .¹⁴

However, there are many indications that mimation was not already in use in the literary language during at least part of the Old Babylonian period. For example, when

11. Arthur Ungnad, *Akkadian Grammar*, rev. Lubor Matouš [1969], trans. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (Atlanta, 1992), 48.

12. GAG §63c.

13. *A Structural Grammar of Babylonian*, 150.

14. Reiner, *Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian*, 60, §5.3.4.1.1.

Lambert and Millard note the “optional use” of mimation in *Atraḥasis*,¹⁵ is it merely a reflection of later periods or phases of Old Babylonian? Indeed, Metzler’s brief account of the data in older periods of Akkadian shows that mimation in OB is definitely not regular, and thus may suggest its having fallen into disuse not only towards the end of the OB period, but much earlier than that.¹⁶ Greenstein reminds us that spelling is usually more conservative than speech, and thus changes reflected in writing may have well occurred before their first attestation in the written medium.¹⁷ Later in the same chapter he makes a point supporting the view that the falling of mimation is the result of phonetic change.

One may, or rather *should* ask, what it means to say that the use of mimation is optional. Although vocalic case endings indeed seem to be the rule, there are still a not negligible number of forms in which mimation is overtly spelled by the use of *Vm* signs. Would such spellings, being a purposeful addition to the syllabic string of the written vocable (contrast the long lasting use of *CVm* signs), be used if mimation was not pronounced? And if it was pronounced, is there any system that lies behind this distribution of forms?

Similar observations may be made with regard to other Old Babylonian literary narrative texts, such as *Agušaya*, where mimation is restricted in use, yet tends to be applied in some cases, notably in the spellings of certain nouns.¹⁸

Another example is the Susa tablet of the Old Babylonian *Etana* myth. In that fragment, occurrences of mimation fit, more or less, its employment and distribution in non-literary texts from Susa, for which occurrences of forms with mimation are regarded as archaic or formal spellings.¹⁹ Careful observation of the occurrences of mimation reveals that overt marking of mimation is found mostly in the first part of the tablet (ll. 3, 4, 6, 10, 21, and perhaps 22, all of them on the obverse).²⁰ This distribution may suggest more careful restoration of an older, obsolete phenomenon at the beginning, which is lost at later stages of writing.²¹

In contrast to the Susa fragment, the Morgan fragment of the *Etana* myth displays a much more extensive use of mimation. Still, there are many forms in this latter tablet as well in which mimation is lacking. The Morgan fragment is written with a much older ductus than the Susa fragment, a feature that may hint towards an older

15. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḥasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford, 1969), 29.

16. Kai A. Metzler, “Restitution der Mimation im altbabylonischen Atram-ḥasis-Epos,” *UF* 26 (1994), 370.

17. Edward L. Greenstein, *Phonological Studies in Akkadian* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1977), chap. 5.

18. Brigitte Groneberg, *Untersuchungen zum hymnisch-epischen Dialekt der altbabylonischen literarischen Texte* (PhD diss., Westfälischen Wilhelus-Universität, Münster 1971), 32, n. 32.

19. L. De Meyer, *L'Accadien des Contrats de Suse* (Leiden, 1962), 55–56; Erkki Salonen, *Untersuchungen zur Schrift und Sprache des Altbabylonischen von Susa* (Helsinki, 1962), 92–93.

20. The only possible occurrence of mimation on the reverse is found in a broken context in line 7: *qa-qa-ra-a[m]*, where the last sign might as well be part of the following word, which is restored as *erū*.

21. The MA recension of *Etana* does not exhibit even a single occurrence of word-final mimation. Mimation is sporadically attested in the NA recensions, mostly, but not solely, in *CVm* spellings (cf. Reiner, *A Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian*, 60, cited above); cf. *kib-ra-a-ti₄-im* (Saporetti, text A, 11); [*qf-bi*]-*'a'-am* (Saporetti, text A: 10); *ki-a-am* (Saporetti, text C, 17); both texts are from the Kuyunjik collection.

recension of the text, whether or not this specific copy is to be dated to an earlier period.²²

One way of explaining the existence of such a distribution is to say that mimation had already disappeared from the vernacular language: the scribes in early periods still write forms with mimation, while forms without mimation are lapses towards their actual pronunciation in everyday life. This explanation is possible, but not necessary. I believe we should strive for more than just this elementary conclusion.

First of all, such an explanation has several possible implications which one should consider and study. One such implication might be that the Morgan fragment is late Old Babylonian yet written with an archaic ductus and archaic language. Another possible implication may be that mimation had disappeared from the spoken vernacular in the dialect of our scribe much earlier than in other OB dialects. Yet even this is not enough. Linguistic changes do not occur overnight. Changes occur gradually, and it may well be that such gradual changes can be traced in the texts at our disposal. Moreover, such gradual changes may begin in a specific environment, either linguistic or extralinguistic.

In order to enable ourselves to unveil some clues regarding any such historical process, we need to study in a systematic way all occurrences of the feature involved. So, here we are again with the notion of system, because only a systematic study of linguistic features can bring us to some understanding of language as a system. Systematic study of a text will include the study of variation. As modern studies in sociolinguistics inform us, variation is the synchronic manifestation of diachronic change.²³ One can compare synchronic observation into language to looking at a photograph. By looking at a two-dimensional photograph we see reflections of the world's third dimension if we know how to interpret different sizes and shapes in this two-dimensional screen. Similarly, taking a snapshot of language at any of its ever-developing stages loses its historical dimension. However, as if looking at a photograph, looking at variation in a synchronic stage of a language or a dialect can reveal the missing diachronic dimension. Of course, we can realize this goal only by knowing how to interpret variation in historical terms.

A careful analysis of the Morgan fragment of Etana (see Appendix below) reveals variation in the appearance of mimation. A thorough study will also determine that this variation is systematic, and therefore systemic; that is, it correlates with other linguistic features. In other words, the existence or lack of mimation correlates with the linguistic environment of the respective individual forms.

The first step will be to eliminate from the investigation all forms ending in *CVm* signs. As mentioned above, *CVm* signs usually occur in word final position also in late texts as a relic from times where they had been used to mark *CVC* syllables ending with *m*, and in word final position, of nouns with mimation. After having eliminated these forms, we are left with sixteen forms ending in *Vm* signs and seven forms where mimation is expected but does not occur.

22. Claudio Saporetti (*Etana* [Palermo, 1990], 124) suggests a 20th or 19th century B.C.E. date for the Morgan fragment. J. V. Kinnier Wilson (*The Legend of Etana: A New Edition* [Warminster, 1985], 28) says that this type of script was in use for a long time in the literary tradition. See also Michael Haul, *Das Etana-Epos: Ein Mythos von der Himmelfahrt des Königs von Kiš* (Göttingen, 2000), 103.

23. William Labov, *Principles of Linguistic Change, Vol. 1: Internal Factors* (Oxford, 1994), Part A.

Forms ending in Vm signs

ma-a-ta-am (i 2)
šar-ra-am (i 6)
ḥa-aṭ-ṭù-um (i 8)
uq-ni-a-am (i 8)
ḥa-aṭ-ṭù-um (i 11)
me-a-nu-um (i 11)
a-ni-im (i 12)
ur-da-am (i 14)
iš-ba-¹ta¹-am (iv 1')
[s]a-am-na-am (iv 2')
wa-ar-ḥa-am (iv 2')
ú-ku-ul-ta-am (iv 3')
né-ši-im (iv 3')
e-mu-qá-am (iv 3')
še-ru-u[m] (iv 4')
e-ru-um (iv 5')

Forms lacking mimation

me-a-nu (i 7)
se-bi-ta (i 10)
ši-bi-ir-ru (i 11)
ša-am-šu (iii 13')
ú-še₂₀-te-qá (iv 2')
e-ru-ú (iv 3')
na-e-ri (iv 3')
lu-ud-di-ik-ku (iv 7')

One can safely add to the list of forms with overt mimation the form *šar¹-r[a-am]* (i 15), where restoration is practically certain; the form *ka-ti-im-ti[-x?]* (iv 15') is ambiguous with respect to restoration, although the line probably ends with the *ti* sign. Another possible attestation of a mimation-less form is *pi-il-ši* (iii 11'), a reading which has been rejected by Saporetti, who divides the words in this line differently: *iš-pi-il ši-x*.²⁴ This reading seems to be preferred over SAHAR *pi-il-ši*, “the dust of a cleft,”²⁵ as the use of Sumerograms in this text is less likely, the only other instance being the fragmentary *l[TU.MEŠ]* (iv 1'). In any case, we might suggest that *pi-il-ši* stands for the plural *pilši*.

Another form which requires explanation is *mi-it-lu-ku* (i 13). This is a noun in the construct state which has retained the nominative ending *-u*. Such retention of case endings in the construct state is attested elsewhere in Akkadian literary language; being in the construct state, mimation is duly absent from this form.²⁶

Of the eight forms where the expected mimation is absent, four are found at the end of a poetic line. We may thus hypothesize that it is this specific environment that brought about the fall of mimation in these forms. The relevant lines are the following:

i-na ši-à-tì la ka-aṣ-ra-at ku-ub-šum me-a-nu

ina šia:ti la: kaṣrat kubšum mea:nu

At that (time), headdress, crown, had not been fastened

(i 7)

ḥa-aṭ-ṭù-um me-a-nu-um ku-ub-šum ù ši-bi-ir-ru

ḥaṭṭum mea:num kubšum u šibirru

Staff, crown, headdress and scepter

(i 11)

24. Saporetti, *Etana*, 76.

25. Kinnier Wilson, *Etana*, 38.

26. GAG §64a.

e-ru-ú ma-ḥi-ir ú-ku-ul-ta-am ki-ma né-ši-im na-e-ri

eru: maḥir ukultam ki:ma ne:šim na:ʔeri

The eagle, having received food, is like a roaring lion

(iv 3')

qí-bi-a-am-ma ša te-e-er-ri-ša-an-ni lu-ud-di-ik-ku

qibi:amma ša te:rrišanni luddikku

Speak to me, and I shall give you what(ever) you ask of me.

(iv 7')

To these examples one can probably add the last line of the fragment, which ends with the form *ka-ti-im-ti[-x?]* (see above). The occurrences are illuminating indeed. Comparing *kubšum* and *mea:nu* of the first line, *šibirru* as against all other three nouns in the second line, and *na:ʔeri* with *ne:šim* of the third line, it seems clear that the correlation between lack of mimation and a position at the end of a poetic line is also the reason for this difference between the respective nouns. The last example shows that deletion of mimation occurred not only in nouns, but also in verbs.

Lack of mimation at the end of a poetic line is conceivable on linguistic grounds, as it involves intonation patterns which may play a role in the form of word accentual patterns, and consequently also in their phonological form.

A similar phenomenon involving pausal forms and the opening of final syllables in a similar morphemic environment is attested in the poetic registers of classical literary Arabic:

As a general rule, all final short vowels [at the end of a verse], both of the noun and verb, are dropped in prose (. . .). But in poetry it constantly happens that the vowel is retained as long, the *tènwin* [i.e., the nunation; Sh.I.] of the noun disappearing at the same time (. . .).²⁷

One may postulate that mimation in the dialect represented in the Morgan tablet of Etana had dropped at the end of a poetic line, or, rather, in pausal forms.²⁸

The first word in line iv 3', *e-ru-ú*, might be compared now to line 5 of the same column, there spelled *e-ru-um*. Both forms seem to occur in an identical syntactic position. However, there is a difference between the immediate environment of this noun in the respective lines: whereas in line 5 *eru:m* is found in a simple sentence with the word order Subject-Object-Verb, in line 3 the subject is followed by a parenthetical gerundive phrase. Such an environment may have had an impact on the lack of mimation in *eru:*, as it requires a longer pause between the subject and its parenthetical apposition than when occurring in a simple, flowing string. In this respect, the dropping of the closing *m* co-occurs with its dropping in other pausal environments.²⁹ In other words, we are dealing here with a phonetic phenomenon.

Similar reasoning might explain the lack of mimation in the vocative form *ša-am-šu* (iii 13'), as vocatives are always followed by a pause.

27. W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3d ed. rev. W. Robertson Smith and M. J. de Goeje (Cambridge, 1896–1898), vol. 2, §224.

28. The present stage of research does not seem to support a similar tendency in Nur-Ayya's OB Atrahasis; Metzler, "Restitution," 369–72.

29. One may further conjecture that dropping of mimation here is aided by its being hung on a long vowel.

There are two forms with mimation at the end of a line; both forms have an *a* vowel in their final syllable: *ma-a-ta-am* (i 2); *ur-da-am* (i 14). One possible explanation might be that *i* and *u* behave differently from *a* in its preservation of mimation.³⁰ In other words, one may suggest a chronological order in the falling of mimation, where mimation tends to be preserved longer when following the vowel *a*. This hypothesis is supported by comparative data in both Akkadian and other Semitic languages.³¹

There are two occurrences of forms without mimation which do not conform to this set of observations. One is *se-bi-ta* (i 10). This form is probably to be taken as a rote use of the numeral “seven” as an attribute.³² That this is not the accusative case marker seems clear, as it appears in apposition to *ba:bu:* in the nominative;³³ the lack of mimation may further suggest the detachment of this final *a* from the case system, at least as it is known to us. While similar phrases in literary OB are spelled with the TAM sign,³⁴ the lack of mimation in this occurrence suggests that mimation was not used in this phrase. The retention of mimation after *a* even when occurring at the end of a poetic line lends further support to this assumption.

The second form that lacks mimation even after *a* is the verb *ú-še₂₀-te-qá* (iv 2'), which must be left for further investigation. If, however, the final *-a* is interpreted as the ventive, it may be viewed as a slip towards another register of the spoken language, one where mimation had already been dropped altogether. This may well be the case, since poetry tends to be more conservative than other registers and thus tends to retain older features, in this case mimation.

There is one other spelling in this fragment that may create the impression that mimation had already disappeared from the everyday spoken language of that period. This is the spelling for *ši-à-tim* /*šia:til* (i 7) for a form which seems to have originally ended with a vowel. Otherwise, the scribe would not have used a *CVm* sign for this form.³⁵ This is not necessarily the case, however. One may even postulate that this form was indeed pronounced with a final *m* by our scribe, in which case it would be a normative form in our scribe's dialect.³⁶ It is possible, of course, that this fragment reflects a period—be it as old as it is—when mimation had already been lost from the vernacular in all positions. In this case, some of the exceptions we have discussed may reflect haphazard slips to the oral forms of the vernacular. The form *ú-še₂₀-te-qá* discussed above may support such an assumption. Still, the manifest tendency towards systematization in the appearance of mimation may nevertheless give us a clue as regards the history of this process or of a different structure of the contemporary literary or poetic registers. In any case, it has been

30. Similarly, a brief survey of mimation in OB Atrahasis shows that mimation is marked by *Vm* signs in the majority of cases where the preceding vowel is *a*; e.g., *is-qá-am* (I 12); *na-ra-am* (I 25). Cf. Metzler, “Restitution.”

31. Cf. Shlomo Izre'el, *Amurru Akkadian: A Linguistic Study* (Atlanta, 1991), vol. 1, §1.7.

32. Lambert, “Line 10,” 81–85.

33. Pace Lambert; also Claus Wilcke, “Die Anfänge der akkadische Epen,” ZA 67 (1977), 157 and others.

34. Lambert, “Line 10.”

35. Cf. Reiner, *A Linguistic Analysis of Akkadian*, 60, cited above.

36. While most spellings of this pronoun—as well as paradigmatic data—attest to non-mimated forms, still CAD (Š/2, 373a) cites one spelling with TIM in an OB lexical text (Proto IZI).

shown, I believe, that forms with and without mimation are not haphazard, and that close scrutiny may disclose possible rules for their distribution.

Admittedly, the data provided by this short text is too scanty for compiling a theory of the history and distribution of mimation. However, the tendencies shown here can, and should, serve as a working hypothesis for further study into this subject and related matters. What I had in mind in setting forth these observations is, above all, to show that thorough, comprehensive linguistic analysis must be a basic desideratum for future serious analysis of literary texts.

APPENDIX

The Myth of Etana: The Morgan Fragment

One illustrative example for lack of keen interest in the linguistic aspects of Akkadian literature is the scant use of transcription (i.e., normalization) in publications and discussions of Akkadian texts. This is especially significant in the discussion of literary and even more so of poetical texts, where subsequent publications of literary texts usually give only their translation. I believe that any serious discussion, not to mention editions of Akkadian literary texts in particular, and any Akkadian text in general, must include an effort in transcription aside transliteration. This should provide a more penetrating look at the language, and will serve to address the linguistic system as reflected through the defective medium of writing. In our case, the need to make the nominal endings exact as regards their phonological form have made me think of mimation and its implications. Thus, the outcome of this investigation is presented in the transcription rather than in the transliteration. Special attention has been given to metrical units larger than a verse. For example, line i 11 shows clearly that mimation drops also in verses which are not closing larger units (such as couplets or quatrains). This is why I have transcribed the final word of i 1 and other verses like this without mimation.

While the following edition reflects my understanding of the text, it obviously owes much to and is based primarily on previous research. See especially the three most recent editions: Kinnier Wilson 1985; Saporetti 1990 and Haul 2000 (see n. 22 above).

Col. i

1 *ra-bu-tum a-nun-na ša-i-mu ši-im-tim*
 2 *uš-bu im-li-ku mi-li-ik-ša ma-a-ta-am*
 3 *ba-nu ki-ib-ra-tim ša-ki-nu ši-ki-it-tim*
 4 *ši-ru a-na ni-ši i-lu i-gi₄-gu*
 5 *i-sí-nam a-na ni-ši i-ši-mu*
 6 *šar-ra-am la iš-ku-nu ka-lu ni-ši e-pí-a-tim*
 7 *i-na ši-à-ti la ka-aš-ra-at ku-ub-šum me-a-nu*
 8 *ù ħa-aṭ-ṭu-um uq-ni-a-am la ša-ap-ra-at*
 9 *la ba-nu-ú iš-ti-ni-iš pa-ra-ak-ku*
 10 *se-bi-ta ba-bu ud-du-lu e-lu da-ap-nim*
 11 *ħa-aṭ-ṭu-um me-a-nu-um ku-ub-šum ù ši-bi-ir-ru*
 12 *qú-ud-mi-iš a-ni-im i-na ša-ma-i ša-ak-nu*
 13 *ú-ul i-ba-aš-ši mi-it-lu-ku ni-ši-ša*
 14 *[be-e]l-tum i-na ša-ma-i ur-da-am*
 15 *[x x x x (x) IN]ʿANNA¹ ʿšar¹-r[a-am] i-ši-i*
 Rest broken

rabu:tum anunna ša:imu: ši:mti
ušbu: imliku: milikša ma:tam
ba:nu: kibra:ti ša:kinu: šikitti
ši:ru: ana niši: ilu: igi₄gu:
isinnam ana niši: iši:mu:
šarram la: iškunu: kalu niši: epia:ti
ina šia:ti la: kašrat kubšum mea:nu
u ħaṭṭum uqni:am la: šaprat
la: banu: išti:niš parakku:
sebitta ba:bu: uddulu: elu dapni
ħaṭṭum mea:num kubšum u šibirru
qudmīš anim ina šama:²i šaknu:
ul ibašši mitluku niši:ša
[be:]ltum ina šama:²i: urdam
 [iš]¹tar¹ ʿšar¹r[am] iši:

- 1 The great Anunna, who proclaim decrees,
 2 Sat down (and) deliberated the advice of the land;
 3 The creators of regions, who set the structure,
 4 Elevated upon people, the Igigu gods,
 5 Set a feast for the people;
 6 They did not install a king (for?) all the numerous people.
 7 At that (time), headdress, crown, had not yet been fastened,
 8 And staff had not been decorated with lapis,
 9 Daises had not ever been created.
 10 The seven doors had been locked against the hero.
 11 Staff, crown, headdress and scepter
 12 Had been set before Anu in heaven;
 13 There had been no advisor for her people —
 14 The Lady came down from heaven.
 15 [] 'Ištar' is looking for a king (?)

Col. ii

- 1 *li ki x[*
 2 *mar-ḥi-is-[su* *marḥi:s[su*
 3 *la-á'-bu[-um* *la'bu[m*
 4 *bu šu [*
 5 *ù a-n[a*
 6 *lu ḥu[*
 7 *il x[*
 8 *wa aš[*
 9 *i-na [*
 10 *i-na [*
 11 *i [*
 12 *il x[*
 13 *x[*

Rest broken

- 1 . . .
 2 [his] wife [
 3 the *la'bu* disease
 4–13 . . .

Col. iii (v)

- 1' [
 2' *lu-ta-[aš-še-er(?)*
 3' *da-aB[-*
 4' *še-ru-u[m pi:šú i-pu-ša-am-ma a-na e-ri-im-ma* *še:ru[m pi:šú i:pušamma / ana-*
 iz-za-ka-ar-šu] *eri:mma izzakkaršu]*
 5' *ma-a ú-wa'-[* *ma: uwa[*
 6' *še₂₀-re-et-k[a* *še:retk[a*
 7' *ut-ta-ši [* *uttaši[*
 8' *ib-qú-un-šu-m[a id-di-šu* *ibqunšum[a iddi:šu*
 9' *a-ša-ar mu-ú[-tim?* *ašar mu:[tim?*
 10' *pa'-a₄-ší-iš e-r[i-im* *pa'a:šiš eri:[m*
 11' *iš-pi-il ši-i[d?* *išpil . .[.*
 12' *u₄-mi-ša-am-ma[* *u:mišamma[*
 13' *ša-am-šu qá-ti ša-b[a-at* *šamšu qa:ti: šab[at*
 14' *ia-ti-i-[ma bu-ul-li-i[* *ia:ti:[ma bulli[*
 15' *^dUTU pi-šu i-p[u-ša-am-ma a-na e-ri-im-ma iz-za-ka-ar-šu]* *šamšu pi:šú i:p[ušamma / ana-*
 eri:mma izzakkaršu]
 16' *le-em-né-ti-m[a ka-ba-at-ti tu-ša-am-ri-iš]* *lemne:tim[a kabatti: tušamriš]*
 17' *an-zi-lam ša i-[li a-sa-ak-kam? ta-ku-ul]* *anzillam ša-i[li: / asakkam ta:kul]*

- 1' [
 2' . . .
 3' . . .
 4' The snake [set his] mo[uth and spoke to the eagle]
 5' Thus: . . [
 6' Yo[ur] punishment [
 7' He went out[
 8' He plucked him an[d threw him into a pit]
 9' A place of death
 10' To smash the ea[gle]
 11' He went down . . [
 12' Daily[
 13' O sun, sei[ze] my hand [
 14' [Save] me[
 15' Šamaš op[ened] his mouth [and said to the eagle:]
 16' By wicked deeds [you made me upset]
 17' An abomination of the g[ods, a taboo you broke(?).]

Col. iv (vi)

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|---|---|
| 1' [q]á-as-su iṣ-ba- ^r ta ¹ -am se-bé- ^r e-et ¹ I[TU.MEŠ | [q]assu iṣbatam sebe:t w[arḫi: |
| 2' [s]a-am-na-am wa-ar-ḫa-am ú-še ₂₀ -te-qá šu-ut-ta-as-su | samnam warḫam uše:teqa šuttassu |
| 3' e-ru-ú ma-ḫi-ir ú-ku-ul-ta-am ki-ma né-ši-im na-e-ri | eru: maḫir ukultam ki:ma ne:šim |
| | na: ² eri |
| 4' e-mu-qá-am i-šu | emu:qam i:šu |
| 5' e-ru-um ^r pa ¹ - ^r a ¹ -šu i-pu-ša-am-ma a-na e-ta-na-ma | eru:m pa:šu i:pušamma ana etanama |
| iz-[z]a-kà-ar-šu | iz[z]akkaršu |
| 6' ib-ri lu-ú it-ba-ra-nu a-na ù at-ta | ibri: lu: etbara:nu ana:(ku ²) u atta |
| 7' qf-bi-a-am-ma ša te-e-er-ri-ša-an-ni lu-ud-di-ik-ku | qibi:amma ša te:rrišanni luddikku |
| 8' e-ta-na ^r pa ¹ - ^r a ¹ -šu i-pu-ša-am-ma a-na e-ri-im-ma | etana pa:šu i:pušamma ana |
| iz-za-kà-ar-šu | eri:mma izzakkaršu |
| 9' i-ni-m[a] x mi ^r PI ² ti ka-ti-im-ti[-x?] | i:ni:ma . . . katimti |
-
- 1' [. . .] 'caught his hand' for seven m[onths];
 2' In the eighth month he helped him out of the pit.
 3' The eagle, having received food, is like a roaring lion;
 4' He has strength.
 5' The eagle opened his mouth and spoke to Etana:
 6' "My friend, let us be associated, you and I.
 7' Speak to me, and I shall give you what(ever) you ask of me."
 8' The eagle opened his mouth and spoke to Etana:
 9' "... eyes(?) . . . hidden. . . ."