

Sumerian gi-lam and igi-tab

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The following study of Sumerian vocabulary examines two infrequent and difficult to understand words, gi-lam and igi-tab.¹

gi-lam

The Sumerian term gi-lam appears seven times in written records from the third millennium B.C.E., all of those from the ED IIIb period. Five of those are in administrative documents where all of the readings are the same: 1 gi-lam zu₂-lum “1 gi-lam of dates (date-tree fruit)” (DP 059 obv. vi 16; rev. v 4; DP 042 obv. ii 4; rev. iv 6; and Babyloniaca 8, HG 12 rev. v 4). Two other times it appears in the Reform texts of Uru-inimgina: Ukg 5 v 19–23, x 17–19 = Ukg 4 v 22–vi 3, xi 17–19, saĝĝa-NIĜ₂-ke₄ kiri₆ ama uku₂-ra₂ ĝeš na-ba-ni-ri-ri gi-lam e-ta-keš₂-ra₂ . . . saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ kiri₆ ama uku₂-ra₂ nu-lah₅, “The saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official cut down the trees in the orchard of a poor mother (and) gathered up gi-lam . . . The saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official does not plunder (fruit any more) in the orchard of the poor mother”; and Ukg 1 v 1’–5’, [saĝĝa-NIĜ₂-ke₄] kiri₆ ama uku₂-ra₂ nu-lah₅ ĝeš na nu-ba-ni-ri-ri gi-lam nu-ta-keš₂-ra₂, “The saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official does not plunder (fruit any more) in the orchard of a poor mother, does not cut down the trees, (and) does not gather gi-lam.”

Most editions of Uruinimgina’s texts translate gi-lam “fruit,” which is very logical considering the context in which gi-lam appears.² However, Selz translates 1 gi-lam zu₂-lum “1 Gi(r)lam(-Korb) Datteln” (HG 12 xiii’ 4 = rev. v 4), and asserts that gi-lam cannot be translated “Früchte” since it always appears followed by zu₂-lum (dates) in the administrative records.³ He follows Bauer who connects gi-lam to ĝir₃-lam as a “Fruchtmass.”⁴ According to Oppenheim ĝir₃-lam equals 3–5 sila₃.⁵ While

1. I am indebted to Prof. Wayne Horowitz for his comments and suggestions.

2. See, e.g., F. Thureau-Dangin, *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig, 1907), 47, 49; H. Steible, *Die altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften, Teil 1, Inschriften aus ‘Lagaš’* (FAOS 5) (Weisbaden, 1982), 285, 295; J. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions, Vol. 1: Presargonic Inscriptions* (New Haven, 1986), 71, 75.

3. G. Selz, “Eine Urkunde über Festabgaben von Tempelverwaltern und anderen Notabeln aus dem Musée des Antiquités zu Rouen. (H.G. 12),” *WO* 20–21 (1989–1990), 39, 43.

4. J. Bauer, “Bemerkungen zu H. Steible, *Die altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften, Teil 1 und 2, Wiesbaden* (= Freiburger altorientalische Studien, Bd. 5.),” *AoN* 21 (1985), [21] 8.

5. A. L. Oppenheim, *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets of the Wilberforce Eames Babylonian Collection in the New York Public Library*, AOS 32 (New Haven, 1948), 41. See also G. Steiner, “Was geschah im Garten der ama.ukur₃?,” in H. Klengel and J. Renger, eds., *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient* (41^e RAI) (Berlin, 1999), 126–27.

this reasoning makes sense for the administrative records, applying the same meaning to gi-lam in Ukg texts makes very little sense (Ukg 5 v 19–23 = Ukg 4 v 22–vi 3, “The saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official cut down the trees in the orchard of a poor mother (and) gathered up *baskets*”) unless the intended meaning is *fruit-loaded baskets* or something similar.⁶

Another possibility, which scholars have seemingly ignored, had already been suggested in 1920 by Deimel who translates gi-lam “Datelrispen(-Trauben).”⁷ Since that time M. Lambert is the only other scholar known to me to have translated gi-lam in a similar fashion, as “régimes” and “régimes de fruits.”⁸ More recently Steiner wrote, “Näher kommt der eigentlichen Bedeutung von GILAM die Übersetzung, ‘Rispe, Traube’,” but then continues to argue for equation between GILAM and gir₃-lam.⁹

In this article I will try to demonstrate that Deimel was essentially correct, and that the meaning of gi-lam is “cluster,” which in Ukg texts in particular would refer to date-clusters.

Date clusters can weigh up to 8kg and can be sold in bulk. Thus, selling one cluster of dates can be compared to selling one lamb or goat. Of course, once removed from their clusters, dates could be sold in units of volume (e.g., sila₃, kur₂, ban₂) as is attested in cuneiform sources (see, e.g., DP 107 obv. i 6, 5(ban₂) ĝeštin; VS 14 155 obv. iii 7, 2(ban₂) 3 sila₃ ĝeštin). Other than grapes, which were never sold per bunch/cluster,¹⁰ dates are the only other type of fruit which grew in clusters in southern Mesopotamia in the third millennium. This can explain why gi-lam “cluster” appears only with zu₂-lum “dates” in the administrative texts and no other fruit.¹¹

When it comes to Ukg texts, it is clear from both Ukg 1 and 4/5 that the transgression of the saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official was threefold: he plundered (fruit) from the orchard (Ukg 1 v 3', Ukg 5 x 17–19 = Ukg 4 xi 19), he cut down the trees (Ukg 1 v 4', Ukg 5 v 21 = Ukg 4 vi 1), and he gathered gi-lam (Ukg 1 v 5', Ukg 5 v 22–23 = Ukg 4 vi 2–3). The question is, why a writer of these texts would indicate that the saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official both plundered the fruit and gathered gi-lam (*fruit, basket, fruit-loaded basket*). The writer could have easily written that the saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official simply cut down the trees and plundered the fruit in the orchard. Instead, he clearly separates fruit plundering, tree cutting, and gi-lam gathering as three distinct actions. The saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official was able to plunder the fruit from easily accessible trees such as fig, apple, and grapes (from vines). However, reaching the fruit (dates) on the date-palm usually requires expert climbing or (in the worst case scenario) cutting down the tree itself. The latter is exactly what I believe is happening in these two texts. In an act of lawlessness and

6. Ibid., 127, “Körbchen (mit Datteln der besten Qualität).”

7. A. Deimel, “Die Reformtexte Urukaginas,” *Or.* 2 (1920), 7, 27. See also A. Deimel, *Šumerisches Lexikon* (Rome, 1928), 85 399, “Frucht?, Rispe?”

8. M. Lambert, “Les ‘Réformes’ d’Urukagina,” *RA* 50 (1956), 173, 179.

9. Steiner, “Was geschah im Garten der ama.ukur₃,” 126–27.

10. Compared to the date cluster, the grape bunch is very small, soft, and easily damaged. Thus, setting a fixed price for just one bunch/cluster of grapes and trying to sell them that way would not be practical. Instead, during the ED IIIb period and later, grapes are almost always measured and sold by volume (e.g. sila₃, kur₂, ban₂). Possible exceptions are those rare cases when grapes ĝeštin is preceded by an ordinary number and not a unit of measure (e.g., DP 197 rev. iii' 3, . . . 1(u) 4(diš) ĝeštin . . .), but ĝeštin here need not necessarily be understood as a “bunch of grapes,” as opposed to a grape vine or something else.

11. For the difference between gi-lam and ga-ra-an, a Sumerian word usually translated ‘bunch/cluster’, see F. Vukosavović, “Sumerian ga-ra-an,” *NABU* 2011/8.

self-imposed will, the saĝĝa-NIĜ₂ official steals the easily accessible fruit and then cuts down the date-palms in order to collect their (date-)clusters.¹²

Fruits, vegetables, and grains were the largest and most important part of daily food consumption for a majority of Mesopotamia in the third millennium and later. For many of them it was probably the only food consumed on a daily basis since meat and animal products were expensive and out of reach. Keeping this in mind, it is hard not to realize that out of all of the abuses directed against fellow humans, as described in Ukg texts, this is probably one of the worst, since it deals a potentially life-threatening blow to a person whose orchard was raided. Not only would the fresh fruit be consumed when available, but also all of the most common fruits known to us during the third millennium (dates, apples, grapes, and figs) were dryable, thus capable of stored and consumed throughout the year. Hence, plundering somebody's fruit orchard caused not only temporary hardship, but also a long-lasting (for at least a year) food shortage. Things get even worse when it comes to date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*), which were cut down. A single date palm takes at least 3–5 years after planting before it starts bearing fruit, and then keeps producing for about 75 years. Once mature, a date palm can produce over 70 kg of dates per harvest season.¹³ Dates also served as the major source of sugar, and were an irreplaceable source of nutrition. Thus, the consequences of losing even one fruit-yielding date palm must have been terrible for the ancients, and for us in the 21st century almost impossible to imagine. The severity of this abuse and the consequences of cutting down fruit trees are also reflected in the Bible where God forbids the Israelites from cutting down fruit trees during the siege of an enemy city (Deut. 20:19–20).¹⁴

The proposed new translations are as follows:

1 gi-lam zu₂-lum, “1 cluster of dates” (DP 59 obv. vi 16; rev. v 4; DP 42 obv. ii 4; rev. iv 6; and Babyloniaca 8, HG 12 rev. v 4).

gi-lam e-ta-keš₂-ra₂, “. . . (and) he gathered (date-)clusters” (Ukg 5 v 22–23 = 4 vi 2–3).

gi-lam nu-ta-keš₂-ra₂, “. . . (and) he does not (any longer) gather (date-)clusters” (Ukg 1 v 5').

The term gi-lam also appears later in Hh VIII 46 [*MSL* 7:10] gi-lam = hi-iš-x (*hiššu* suggested restoration). The proposed meaning for *hiššu* I in *AHW*. is ‘Faschine?’. This is also picked up by *CDA*, “reed bundle?” and fits our proposed meaning for gi-lam.¹⁵

12. For a wall relief depicting Assyrian soldiers cutting down palm trees as the part of the “Sack of Dilbat” scene, see, e.g., J. M. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago-London, 1991), 154, fig. 78.

13. These are modern estimates and data, which are probably not far from the ancient reality.

14. For the latest treatment of this Biblical law, see N. Wazana, “Are Trees of the Field Human? A Biblical War Law (Deuteronomy 20:19–20) and Neo-Assyrian Propaganda,” in M. Cogan and D. Kahn, eds., *Treasures on Camel's Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al* (Jerusalem, 2008), 274–95.

15. According to Maeda's collation of HLC (T. Maeda, “Collation of G. A. Barton, Haverford Library Collection of Cuneiform Tablets or Documents,” *Acta Sum.* 2 (1980), 197–224), HLC 80 iii 17 reads: 1 nu anše-NITA gi-lam sag-anše-še₃, which would be another occurrence of gi-lam in the third millennium. However, Maeda's reading of gi-lam is very questionable, and neither Barton's copy of the text nor the photo available at CDLI support the reading. See also CDLI for its reservations over the reading of the same.

igi-tab

The Sumerian term $\text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ in Ukg 1 ii 8, and Ukg 6 v 20' is usually translated “blinkers” or something similar¹⁶ based on the later lexical evidence, [kuš-igi-tab]-ba-anše = nap-la-sa-tu₂ (Hg to Hh XI 165 [MSL 7:150], restored from Hh XI OB Forerunner 109 [MSL 7:219]) = “blinker,” “blinder”; also without the kuš determinative, igi-tab-anše = nap-la-sa-tu(m) (Izi XV A ii 9' [MSL 13:169]; SIG₇.ALAN I 200 [MSL 16:56] etc.). In the following, I shall try to show that these lexical sources reflect the real meaning of igi-tab and its various forms in the third and second millennium.

The earliest written evidence for igi-tab is during the ED IIIb period when it appears almost exclusively as part of PNs lugal-igi-tab (BIN 8 349 obv. v 1; DP 153 obv. ii 2 etc.), and nin-igi-tab-mu (VS 25, 11 obv. iv 6; DP 112 obv. viii 17 etc.). igi-tab continues to be used as part of PNs during the Old Akkadian period (Adab 745:2, lugal-igi-tab), and Ur III period (MVN 17, 54 rev. i 7', 3 nin-igi-tab). The only other appearances of igi-tab during ED IIIb are when written with determinative ĝeš in Ukg 1 ii 8, and Ukg 6 v 20', both times in the same context ($\text{d}^{\text{lama-ša}}_6\text{-ga } \text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab-ba-ni}}$, “the goddess Lamašaga is the $\text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ of Uruinimgina”).

A Lagaš II text from Ġirsu contains igi-tab in a very interesting context, 4 igi-tab-anše zabar “four blinkers of bronze” (RTC 221 rev. i 23). If I understand this line correctly, bronze may have been one of the materials used to make the blinders (the other two being wood and leather). During the Ur III period igi-tab is written with determinative kuš instead ĝeš (the difference being in the material: ĝeš = wood, kuš = leather; for examples see below). The writing with determinative ĝeš is again attested during the OB period in literature (Lugalbanda I 247, hul₃ la₂ $\text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab-ba-ni-me-en}}$ “you are (Utu) the $\text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ of him who holds the reins,” and Lugalbanda II 100, zid-du šag₄ kuš₂-u₃ $\text{den-lil}_2\text{-la}_2\text{-ka } \text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab-bi-me-en}}$ “I am (Anzu) the $\text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ of the righteous one who soothes Enlil's heart”).¹⁷

There is very little doubt that the meaning of $\text{kuš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ is “blinkers,” “blinders” in the Ur III economic corpus, especially considering that in several instances $\text{kuš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ is followed by $\text{anše}^{\text{kunga}_2}$ “equid”:¹⁸

- a) $\text{kuš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ followed by $\text{anše}^{\text{kunga}_2}$: BPOA 2 2015 obv. 1, 4 $\text{kuš}^{\text{igi-tab}} \text{anše}^{\text{kunga}_2}$ “four blinders for equid(s)”; ITT 3 5470 obv. 2, $\text{kuš}^{\text{igi-tab}} \text{anše}^{\text{kunga}_2}\text{-še}_3$ “a blinker for an equid”; UET 3, 1277 obv. 8–9, 2 kuš gu₄ a-ĝar gu₇-a mu $\text{kuš}^{\text{igi-tab}} \text{anše-še}$ “two ox skins soaked in *depilation fluid* for (making) the blinders”;

16. Steible, *Die altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften*, 281, 323, “Scheuklappe” (see also H. Behrens, and H. Steible, *Glossar zu den altsumerischen Bau- und Weihinschriften*, FAOS 6 [Wiesbaden, 1983], 171); D. Foxvog, W. Heimpel, and A. D. Kilmer, “Lamma/Lamassu,” *RIA* 6 (1983), 449, “blinkers”; Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions*, 74, 77, “guide”; and G. Selz, *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des altsumerischen Stadtstaates von Lagaš* (Philadelphia, 1995), 159 [5], “Scheuklappe.”

17. For similar translations of $\text{ĝeš}^{\text{igi-tab}}$ in Lugalbanda see, e.g., C. Wilcke, *Das Lugalbandaepos* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 84, l. 241, and 102, l. 100, “Scheuklappe”; ETCSL (t.1.8.2.1:241) translates the former “blinkers” (it is unclear to me how ETCSL translates the later (t.1.8.2.2:100), “I keep on the straight and narrow path the righteous who follow Enlil's counsel”); but see H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings*, SBLWAW 20 (Atlanta, 2003), 117, l. 247, and 141, l. 100, with the translation “helmet.”

18. See also A. Salonen, *Hippologica Accadica* (Helsinki, 1956), 131.

b) $kuš_1gi$ -tab not followed by $anše_kun_2ga_2$: UTI 6 3505 obv. 1–2, 4 $kuš_1gi$ -tab $si-sa_2$ 4 $kuš_1gi$ -tab nu^1 -[$si-sa_2$] “four *straight* blinders, and four *not straight* blinders”; BPOA 2 2015 obv. 4, 7 read the same, 4 $kuš_1gi$ -tab “4 blinders.”

However, the question is, whether the same meaning can be assigned to *igi-tab* in literary texts and personal names, and if so, how should we understand the term. I fully agree with Eichler who suggests that “the metaphor ‘blinker’ seems to refer to one’s ability to direct and guide the gaze of others thus ensuring their resolve in executing one’s commands.”¹⁹

Blinkers/blinders are used to prevent equidae from seeing what is occurring on the sides or behind, hence, staying always focused on one desirable bearing. The same imagery was most probably used by the ancients to describe the “desirable relationship” between a man and his god, in which the former is always focused on fulfilling the god’s will by allowing the god to be his blinders, i.e., to focus his eyesight, to help him not to stray, to be his guide. If so, then both Ukg texts and Lugalbanda epics, which express the same idea that a god (Lamasaga in Ukg, and Utu or Anzu in Lugalbanda) is/can be the *igi-tab* (blinders) for both a king and commoners, should be understood in this way. The same stands for the personal names, e.g., *lugal-igi-tab*, to be understood, “king who is focused (on fulfilling god’s will),” or “king who is guided (by a god),” or something similar.

Only after this article was sent for publication did I acquire Frayne’s newly published book in which he writes the following for $giš_1gi$ -tab: “. . . [it] likely refers in our text to the blinders which keep humans on the unerringly right path,”²⁰ and translates Ukg 1 ii 7–9 “for Lamasaga, his (protective) blinkers, he built her temple.”²¹ However, the same text in Ukg 6 v 20’–21’ Frayne translates “for Lamasaga, his guide, (?) he built her temple.”²²

19. B. L. Eichler, “Of Slings and Shields, Throw-Sticks and Javelins,” *JAOS* 103 (1983), 96. Note also other examples given by Eichler, 96–97.

20. D. R. Frayne, *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early Periods. Volume 1. Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)* (Toronto, 2008), 266.

21. *Ibid.*, 267.

22. *Ibid.*, 275.