

An Akkadian Cognate of Hebrew *šēḥîn*

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In memoriam
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(Proverbs 22:9)

In Šumma Izbu I:69¹ we find the following omen:

*šumma sinništu šēḥḥāna (Á.KÁM) lū zikru lū sinništu ūlid sinništu šī [ina sūqi š] a²
arnam iṣū irḥiṣi*

If a woman gives birth to a *šēḥḥānu*, whether male or female, this woman was impregnated by a sinful man in the street.

E. Leichty translated *šēḥḥānu* as 'giant', without offering any evidence in support. He explains the Izbu Commentary's glosses of *ša arnam iṣū* 'sinner' by *garbānu* and *mali mē*³ "by the fact that both leprosy and dropsy are swelling diseases which result in the enlargement of the features or limbs, thus offering an inner connection with *šēḥḥānu* 'giant' in the protasis."⁴ While this explanation might seem far-fetched, it is not impossible in light of the equally far-fetched interpretations found elsewhere in Assyrian and Babylonian commentaries.

However, there is lexical evidence which points in another direction. In the Izbu Commentary W to XI:7,⁵ *maḥḥū* is glossed by *še-ḥa-a-nu*, and, indeed, W. von Soden explicitly relates this gloss to our passage and translates "ein Ekstatiker."⁶ While this gloss would seem unimpeachable in the context of the apodosis of XI:7,⁷ *še-ḥa-a-nu* there would seem to be an

1 TCS IV, 38:69.

2 Restored from Commentary, TCS IV, 213, 35.

3 TCS IV, 213:36–37.

4 TCS IV, 38, ad. loc.

5 TCS IV, 231, 365e.

6 AHw., 1209a, s.v. *šēḥḥānu*. E. Weidner, AJSL 38 (1922), 197–98, and R. Labat, *Commentaires assyriobabyloniens sur le Présages* 82:28, also take *šēḥḥānu* this way.

7 TCS IV, 131:7: *māta maḥḥiātum iṣabbatū* "the crazed women will seize the land."

-ānu formation derived from *šēḥû* 'to become wild', while, as will presently be seen, our *šēḥḥānu* is to be derived from another root. Moreover, this rendering does little to further our understanding of the omen.

There is another piece of evidence that gives us a clue to the correct understanding of this omen and its commentaries. In *lú* = *šā*, *lú*⁸ KA.TAR is glossed with *ši-ḥa-[nu]*.⁹ KA.TAR = *katarru* is found in Erimḫuš III:17f. in a list of skin marks, including *ḥalû*, *umṣatu* and *pindû*;¹⁰ *pindû* and *ḥalû* are in turn glossed in our Izbu Commentary as: *pindû*:¹¹ *umṣatu sandu* and *ḥalû*:¹² MIN *ṣalimtu*¹³—'red' and 'black scars', respectively. We would thus seem to be dealing with a skin eruption, and *šēḥḥānu* would be related to the Hebrew *šēḥîn* and Syriac *šuḥnā*.¹⁴ We would similarly relate *garbānu* to the Hebrew *gārāḥ*, which is closely associated with *šēḥîn*. The medieval Jewish exegete Rashi comments on *gārāḥ* and *yalleḥet* in Lev. 21:20: "they are varieties of *šēḥîn*"; and in Deut. 28:27 he defines *gārāḥ* as "a moist *šēḥîn*" (= Akk. *malî mē!*). Without going into the vexing problem of the identification of the Biblical *ṣāra'at* with leprosy, an identification as laden with problems as it is hoary,¹⁵ we would point to *šēḥîn* as cognate to *šēḥḥānu* and *gārāḥ* to *garbānu*. We take the former as a *qattālu* formation from *šāḥānu*, 'to become warm, to be heated',¹⁶ as Syriac *šuḥnā* is related to *šēḥan*, the regular word for 'to warm'. The relation of blister to burn is explicit in Lev. 13:24f.

We should thus translate *šēḥḥānu* as: 'one afflicted with boils'.

8 AHw., 1209b, s.v. *šēḥu* or *šēḥû* III 'wild werden'.

9 MSL 12, 236, VIII:3.

10 CAD K, 303b, s.v. *katarru*, lex. sect.

11 AHw., 854b, s.v. *pe/indu*.

12 AHw., 314b, s.v. *ḥālu(m)* II *ḥalû* I; compare CAD H, 53b, s.v. *ḥalu* A.

13 TCS IV, 216, IV:128–29.

14 Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 770a.

15 See, e.g., *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 6:776–77 [in Hebrew], and compare CAD G, 49b–50a and AHw., 282a, s.v. *garbānu*. It is interesting to note in this connection that in the Bible and Rabbinic literature *ṣāra'at* is also associated with sin, in this case the sin of tale-bearing; see Num. 12:1–16 and Sifre Deut. (ed. Finkelstein) 294:1f. and the literature there cited.

16 AHw., 1128b.