§1. The subject of the present paper is a new interpretation of RBC 2000 (originally published by Hallo 1985), which suggests that it may be a prayer for a dead person pleading to be admitted to the netherworld.

§2. RBC 2000 is written in a beautiful hand that points to the latter part of the third millennium. Paleography and orthography (in particular the use of the verbal infix -ši- rather than -še-) may date the tablet to around the time of Gudea. It should be noted, however, that the lack of comparable texts makes any more precise dating rather hazardous, so that an Ur III date is certainly not excluded. As Hallo has pointed out, there is reason to believe that the text comes from the Lagaš area, in particular because of the appearance of the goddess Nanše in the final line. The lenticular format of the tablet is rather unusual and puzzling by itself, and we will come back to this issue later. The following edition is based upon a reading of McCormick's copy as published in Hallo's original edition. Collation from photographs, generously provided by Ulla Kasten, Babylonian Collection, Yale University Library, revealed the great reliability of that drawing.

§3. Edition and Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Sumerian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>e₂₂-gal tir</td>
<td>May the palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>gu₂₂-ur₅mu₅en se₁₂₃-a a sig ḫa-mu-ši-ib₂₂-gar</td>
<td>provide clear water to me in the forest where gur birds live.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ša₂₂-bi gir₄ mah izi ba-ra-a</td>
<td>Inside, where a great oven is lighted, may it sprinkle clear water for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>a sig ḫa-ma-ab-su₃</td>
<td>May its door, which is a courier, stand open when I finish my journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ig₂₂-bi ra-gaba b₂₂harran(KASKAL) &lt;si&gt;₃-a₂₂-ga₂₂ ḫa-gub</td>
<td>May its bolt, which is a messenger, turn around for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ze₂₂-hi-bi lu₂₂-kin-gi₄-a-kam</td>
<td>May its crossbar be the Lama at my favorable side that shines brightly on my right shoulder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>šu ḫa-mu-ši-nigin</td>
<td>May its gate be proud because of me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>giš₂₂-bala-bi lam a₂₂ sa₂₂-ga₂₂-mu ḫa-am₃</td>
<td>May Inanna be my vanguard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>za₃₂₂ zi-da-ga₂₂ ḫa-kar₂₂-kar₂₂-ka</td>
<td>May my god be my helper, may he go behind me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>giš₂₂-ka₂₂-ba gu₂₂-bi ḫa-mu-da-zi</td>
<td>May my gatekeeper bow down, so that I might raise my neck on high!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>newInstance inanna i-gi-du-mu ḫe₂₂-am₃</td>
<td>In the shrine of Enki, Asari in his Abzu will not be able to loose (this spell), since Nanše is at my side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>dingir-mu a₂₂-dah₂₂-mu ḫa-am₃</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>egi₂₂-ga₂₂ ḫa-gen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>lu₂₂-i₃-du-ga₂₂ gu₂₂-e ki ḫa-la₂₂</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>ga₂₂ gu₂₂-mu an-še₂₂ ḫa-zi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>e₂₂₂₂₂₃₃ en-ki newInstance ₃-asar-re abzu-na</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>nam-mu-da-bur₂₂-e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>da-mu newInstance ₃-nanše al-me-a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commentary

Passages discussed by Hallo are not repeated here.

§4. to line 2: The word gu₂-ur₅mušen is unorthographic for buru₄(NU₁₁.BUR)mušen. The reading buru₄ is attested only in first millennium lexical texts; an Ur III text from Umma (MVN 21, 80)¹ and an Old Babylonian lexical text² indicate that the reading was /gur(u)/. The identity of this bird is a matter of debate. For Ur III and later the meaning “crow” seems reasonably assured. It has been argued, however, that in Ebla buru₄mušen means “raptor” or “vulture,”³ and there are indications that this meaning was known in Babyonnia, too. In the late lexical tradition, buru₄-gimušen corresponds to nāšu₂ (“roaring bird” Ur₃-ra 18; MSL 8/2. 151: 339), suggesting a bird of prey (this same translation is used for te₈mušen-gu₅-lamu in Ur₃-ra 18; MSL 8/2, 129: 193). The most telling third millennium reference is UruKAgina 4 v 15-21 = 5 v 12-18 (see FAOS 5/1, 294-295) which refers to “wings of a buru₄-gi-bird” to be delivered as tax by temple administrators (sanga). Here the translation “crow” is indeed very unlikely. Finally, in the Old Babylonian commentary text CBS 11319+ rev. i 12’ (Sjöberg 1993) the word /numma/ is written with two BURU₄ signs on top of each other: nu-um-ma = NU 11.BUR/NU11.BURmušen = zibu (“vulture”). This entry on the one hand reflects the well-known equivalence nu-um-mamušen = zibu, while on the other hand preserving the memory of an older meaning of buru₄mušen. Since the exact date of RBC 2000 remains uncertain, both possibilities (“crow,” or “raptor”) remain open.⁵

The expression a sig means “clear water,” in opposition to a lu₃-a “muddy water,” see PSD A/1, 164.

The verbal form ḫa-mu-ši-i₂-gar implies an inanimate agent, presumably “the palace.” The prefix –ši₂- is understood here to have a first person referent (“to me;” see also line 7). The interpretation of the ḫa-/he₂- forms in this text follows Civil forthcoming, who defines this prefix as a subjunctive-optative with deontic and epistemic functions.

§5. to line 5: The reading of the signs basically follows Hallo, who discusses the singular writing ḫa₂-harran(KASKAL). The expression ig — gub (“to set a door open”) is constructed here with a locative just as in ETCSL: Gilgameš and Akka 87: 6 ti-abul-la-ka sila-ba bi₂-in-gub “he put the door of the main gate in its street.”

§6. to lines 6-8: The technical terminology for parts of the door (ze₂-Ì₂-ib₂ = sa₂Ì₂-ab₂ and gi₅-bala) is rather confusing here. In ETCSL: Hymn to Nungal 23, sa₂Ì₂-ab₂ is compared to a snake that slithers into a hole, which argues for the meaning “bolt.” The expression Ù₂ — nigin (“to circle,” “to make a round trip”)⁶ implies a movement that comes back to its beginning. In this sense it is understandable for a messenger who comes back to his place of origin, but how this image applies to the bolt remains unclear to me.

§7. to line 10: “May the neck of its gate rise with me.” In my translation above, “because of me” renders the prefix –da-.

§8. to line 14: The text has lu₂-KAK-du. I assume that the intention is lu₂-i₂-du, for lu₂-i₂-du₄, “gatekeeper.”

§9. to lines 16-17: For this formula see Schramm 2001, 13-18.

Discussion

§10. In his edition Hallo suggested that this prayer was meant for someone’s release from “the big house,” which, according to Hallo, may be a colloquial word

¹ N guruš u₄ 1-še₅ // gu-ur₂mušen dal-la (“N men for one day, to chase away the gur birds”). Compare SAT 3, 1630: 1 guruš buru₄mušen; Touzalin, Aleppo 241: 1 guruš ud 30-še₅ // buru₄mušen dal-še₅.

² Sjöberg 1993, 3 rev. i 11’: gu-ru = NU₁₁.BURmušen = he-re-ba-am.

³ For the g/b alternation, see Civil 1973, 60.

⁴ See Fronzaroli 1996, 53 with note 6 and Sjöberg 1999, 540 with references to earlier literature.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of buru₄mušen, see the catalogue of Sumerian bird names (Chapter 9) in my forthcoming Religion, Literature, and Scholarship. The Sumerian Composition Nanie and the Birds.

⁶ See the discussion in Karahashi 2000, 164.
for prison. I would like to consider another option: the “palace” in this text may be “palace Ganzer,” the entrance to the netherworld. In that case, the request to open the doors is a request to be let in, rather than to be released. Several details of the text argue for such an interpretation.

§11. In ETCSL: Inanna’s Descent, her arrival at the netherworld is described as follows (73-75):\(^7\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{inanna} & \text{ e₂-gal ganzer-še₃ um-ma-te} \\
\text{ki₃ig kur-ra-ka šu ḫul ba-an-us₂} \\
\text{abul kur-ra-ka gu₁ ḫul ba-an-de₂}
\end{align*}
\]

When Inanna arrived at the palace Ganzer, she pushed the door of the netherworld in anger, she shouted at the great gate of the netherworld in anger.

§12. In the same composition Ereškigal instructs the doorkeeper how to let Inanna in (119-120):\(^8\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{abul kur-ra imin-bi } & \text{ši₃-gar-bi ḫe₂-ib-us₂} \\
e₂₂-gal ganzer dili-bi & \text{ši₃-gi₃ šu ḫa-ba-an-us₂}
\end{align*}
\]

At each of the seven main gates of the netherworld the bolt should be applied, the doors of the palace Ganzer should be pushed open one by one.

§13. “Palace Ganzer” is the entry to the netherworld and therefore closely associated with gates and doors – as in our text.\(^9\) The same association is found in ETCSL: Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld 166, where we find Gilgameš crying at the “gate of Ganzer, in front of the netherworld” (abul ganzer igi kur-ra-ka). The name of the palace is identical to a word for flame (ga-an-ze₂-er = \text{nablum}).\(^10\) Although the two words are kept apart in spelling,\(^11\) they are clearly identical in origin, reflecting the notion that the dead have to cross a fire in order to reach the netherworld. As far as I know this idea is nowhere explicitly formulated, except in the present text which speaks about a “great oven in which a fire is lighted.” It should be emphasized that the evidence does not allow an image of the netherworld as “hell.” The fire (or the oven) is something that one has to cross or go through, it is one more way to express the difficulty of accessing the realm of the dead, similar to a long journey, to crossing a river or to passing through seven gates. The oven and the forest (line 1) are images for the inhospitable terrain that the dead person has to cross. The scorching heat relates to the supplicant’s desire for water and to his or her request for being admitted to the “palace.” The journey itself is mentioned in line 5: “may the door, which is a rider, stand open when I finish my journey.”

§14. The gu₂-ur₅ mušen in line 2 of our text may call to attention the association between birds and spirits of the dead. All texts where this theme occurs, however, are first millennium in date;\(^12\) no such association is known from earlier sources. If gu₂-ur₅ mušen means “crow” the image invoked may be that of a body being picked at by a crow. If the meaning “raptor,” or “vulture” is applicable here, the image becomes more poignant.

§15. The expression a sig or a si-ga (OB), “clear water,” is often used for libation water. At several places it indicates the water for the dead in the netherworld, as in the final lines of ETCSL: Nintinugga’s Dog:\(^13\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{u₄ ti-la-ga₂ igi ḫu-mu-un-du₄} \\
u₄ ba-ug₅-en kur-ra a si-ga ḫu-mu-un-na₈-na₈
\end{align*}
\]

May (Nintinugga) look after me while I live and when I die may she provide clear water in the netherworld.

§16. In lines 8-13 the deceased, while entering the netherworld, asks for protection from all sides: the “crossbar (?)” on the side, Inanna in front, and his family god to the rear. This is followed by a pair of expressions that uses the opposition down – up: “May my

\text{and Enki I116, but the context is unclear.}

\text{Identical lines are found at the conclusion of ETCSL: The Exploits of Ninurta 569; ETCSL: Nuska A D7; and ETCSL: Lament for Uruk E19.}

\text{See Maul 1995 and Katz 2003, 227-228.}

\text{Identical lines are found at the conclusion of ETCSL: The Dedication of an Axe to Nergal. See further PSD A/1 under a-si-ga and a-sig, and the discussion in Alster 1991, 88 commentary to line 167.}
gatekeeper bow down, so that I might raise my neck on high!”14 The implication seems to be that there is a doorkeeper who is less than welcoming – again a reference to the difficulty of being admitted. In this context, Inanna’s position at the vanguard is more than appropriate: she had experience in forcing her way into the netherworld. The appearance of Inanna in this context strongly suggests a conscious reference to the theme of Inanna’s visit to the realm of the dead.

§17. Finally, one may speculate about the significance of the physical format of RBC 2000. Lenticular tablets were used for specific administrative purposes in the Ur III period and for school exercises in OB, but neither of these uses is relevant here. The round format was called im-su15 “hand tablet,” since it is easily held in the hand. It may be, then, that this tablet was given to the deceased person in the grave to be held by hand, to be consulted and recited on his or her journey to the netherworld.

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14 For this passage see Tinney 1996, 175.

15 See most recently Robson 1999, 176 with earlier literature.