

HI-(še₃) la₂

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§1. An incantation against headache

§1.1. In one of the Ur III incantations recently published by Van Dijk and Geller 2003, the expression HI la₂ appears for the first time in a non-administrative context.

§1.2. TMH 6 1 1-7 (HAV 220 Ni 2187)

en₂-e₂-nu-ru
lu₂-ra sag-gig-ge šu mu-ga₂-ga₂
sag-gig-ge gu₂-sa gig-ge-de₃ šu mu-ga₂-ga₂
ig tur-am₃ HI-la₂ nu-la₂
sag-gig-ga-a nig₂-la₂ nu-la₂
guruš-am₃ sag-gig-ge i₃-dab₅
ki-sikil tur-am₃ gu₂-sa gi-a šu mu-gud-gud

enenuru:

Headache is laying hands on the man,
headache is laying hands in order to make the neck muscles ill.
As a small door to which no covering is bound,
no bandage is bound to headache.
Headache seized the man,
it made the little girl tremble like a reed in her neck muscles.

§1.3. In line 4, Geller emended HI-la₂ to gal₅-la₂ (“there is no small opening which can ensnare the galla demon”), but the text gives better sense as is. I will argue in the present note that the expression means: “to cover an opening” (usually with leather).

§2. Previous discussions

§2.1. The expression was discussed by Sigrist 1981, 184-185; and by Civil 1994, 74 and 185 (see also van de Mieroop 1987, 140). Sigrist’s discussion primarily concerns texts about the construction of doors. The records that use the expression HI la₂ list large amounts of hides in various colors, leading Sigrist to the conclusion that the hides were used to decorate the door, or that the door itself consisted of hides hanging from the upper lintel.

§2.2. His interpretation was challenged by Civil in his discussion of the same expression in texts recording hides for the construction of plows. Civil argued that HI la₂ probably refers to a leather strap, which was part of the construction of a plow and a door.

§2.3. Civil’s solution is plausible for the plow texts, but does not hold for the door records because of the numbers of hides involved. Even though these doors are important and probably large, the delivery of over twenty ox hides in different colors seems extravagant for the production of straps for a single door.

§2.4. Both previous interpretations remain unconvincing when the evidence from both text groups is taken into account. In the following, I will explore the various contexts in which the expression is used in an attempt to identify a meaning that is common to all. Before analyzing the semantics, the construction of the phrase will be briefly discussed.

§3. The Construction of the Expression

§3.1. In its fullest form, the expression is: kuš (absolute) Noun-locative HI-še₃ la₂: “to tie a hide to the HI in the N.” While HI la₂ is most frequently found in non-finite forms (HI la₂; HI la₂-a; or HI la₂-de₃), there are two attestations where the verb is fully inflected, demonstrating the structure of the expression (*OrSP* 47-49, 268):

2(diš) kuš anše	2 donkey hides
giš ^{is} apin u ₃ giš ^{is} GAN ₂ -ur ₃ -ra	bound to the <u>HI</u>
<u>HI</u> -še ₃ ba-la ₂	on plow and harrow.

§3.2. The passage demonstrates that HI is a noun and is governed by the terminative postposition. A similar passage in *UET* 3, 826, lists parts and supplies to be used for the covering of a door (obv. ii 1: HI-še₃ ba-la₂). The locative case ending in the full construction is

confirmed by *TCL* 5, 5672 rev. ii 11-12: 1(u) 3(diš) kuš gud gišig dšara₂-ka HI la₂-a, and by the phrase kuš anše gišapin-na HI la₂-de₃ (“in order to tie the donkey hide to the HI in the plow”; several Umma texts; see below). The locative case ending of sag-gig-ga-a in the incantation quoted above (line 6) apparently reflects a similar construction.

§3.3. In the early Isin text *BIN* 9, 477, the expression is HI-la₂-bi-še₃ ba-an-[la₂], which probably indicates that by that time the term HI-la₂ was understood as a single noun.

§4. Doors

§4.1. Ancient Mesopotamian doors were usually made of wooden frames with panels of reed covered in bitumen (see Moorey 1994: 357). This type of door is referred to by the expression gišig sub₄. Other types of materials used for panels are palm fronds (ze₂-na) and small boards (mi-ri₂-za). The latter type, which results in a door that is entirely made of wood, was relatively expensive (see Prang 1976: 24-25).

§4.2. The HI la₂ texts refer to doors with leather panels, produced by tying the hides to the boards of the wooden frame. This results in a door that is lighter than a door with wooden panels, but presumably more prestigious or more appealing than an ordinary reed paneled door. The Umma texts show that the technique was used particularly for large and important doors. In several cases we learn that hides of various colors were used, apparently to enhance the attractiveness of the result. The number of hides and the number of workdays necessary to complete a door like this could be considerable. The text *SACT* 2, 96, records a total of 132 man-days to complete the HI la₂ job on “the big door that was brought to the palace.” *TCL* 5, 5672 rev. ii 5-9 lists a total of 24 1/2 ox hides for the panels of the door of Šulgi. According to *SAT* 2, 251, the door of the god Šara needed the following outlays (1-4):

1(u) 3(diš) kuš gud hab ₂	13 red-dyed ox hides
8(diš) kuš gud kukku ₅	8 black ox hides
6(diš) guruš ašgab ud 5(diš) ig dšara ₂ -ka HI la ₂ -a	6 leather workers for 5 days tying them to the HI on the door of Šara.

§4.3. Two Umma texts record hides and man-days for the production of doors without using the expression HI la₂ (*UTI* 3, 1744, and *UTI* 4, 2605). It may be assumed that the same type of door was meant in these accounts.

§4.4. Two texts record the delivery of a number of bronze HI-la₂ (in these contexts clearly a noun; s. *RA* 14, 180):

2(u) HI-la ₂ zabar za-ri-in	twenty panels of zarin bronze
ki-la ₂ -bi 1(u) 7(diš) 1/3(diš) ma-na 8 gin ₂	their weight is 17 1/3 mana and 8 shekels
1(u) 5(diš) gin ₂ an-na ba-a-gar	15 shekels of tin has been applied
mu gišig dib tab-tab-ba ka ₂ ki-[gal-še ₃]	for the quadruple door of the gate of the kigal.

§4.5. The amount of tin recorded is too small (1.4%) for being the full tin component of the bronze. It may have been used for upgrading the zarin quality or for decorations on the bronze panel (for uses of tin in artifacts and as a component of bronze see the discussion by Reiter 1997, Chapters 5 and 6).

§4.6. Each of these panels weighed 52.4 gin₂, which is almost exactly the weight of the two bronze panels for the door of the courtroom (ki di kud) recorded in *SANTAG* 6, 322 (52.5 gin₂ each; for the text group to which these two records belong, see Neumann 1993: 122-123 and *SANTAG* 6, p. 244, note to text 314).

§4.7. HI-la₂^{zabar} differs from ar-ma-tum, another metal item occasionally recorded for the production of doors, in that the latter is always listed by weight rather than counted (Steinkeller 2002: 367). HI-la₂, therefore, is a bronze door panel, perhaps of more or less standardized size and weight, whereas ar-ma-tum is “sheet metal,” a semi-manufactured product which may be used for metal covering or for other purposes (see *CAD* s.v. *armatu* A).

§5. Plows

§5.1. Several texts recording the delivery of one or two donkey hides use the expression gišapin-a (or gišapin-na) HI-(še₃) la₂. These texts differ in several respects from a much larger group of records (predominantly from Umma) which record the delivery of relatively large numbers of hides (usually more than 10) to be used for covering various parts of the harness (ad-tab and ša₂/šudul₉; the semantics of these words are in need of further clarification), and whips (kušusan₃ gu₂-ba), and for the production of straps (kuššag-keš₂) and watering buckets (kušnag; all these items in *Syracuse* 154; see Sigrist 1981: 185 and Civil 1994: 101 n. 24; several additional texts have appeared since). One of the more explicit texts of this latter group is *MVN* 15, 83 = *JCS* 24, 167 83 obv. 1-10 (Umma, ŠS 4):

1 (u) 8(diš) ša ₂ -dul ₉ (URxA)	18 leather-covered šudul's,
kuš [si-ga]	
ki-la ₂ -bi 2(diš) 1/2(diš)	2 1/2 mana (of goat hair)
ma-na-[ta]	each,
kuš gud-bi 3(diš)	their ox hides: 3,
kuš udu-bi 1(u)	their sheep hides: 10.
1(u) 8(diš) ad-tab kuš [si-ga]	18 leather-covered adtab's,
ki-la ₂ -bi 1/2 ma-na-[ta]	1/2 mana (of goat hair) each,
kuš udu-bi 6(diš)	their sheep hides: 6.
5(diš) kušusan ₃ <<U>> gu ₂ -ba	5 whips,
ki-la ₂ -bi 1/2 ma-na-ta	1/2 mana (of goat hair) each,
kuš udu-bi 1(u) 2(diš)	their sheep hides: 12

§5.2. The weights in ma-na refer to amounts of goat hair, explicitly so in *JCS* 28, 214 23, and confirmed by many texts that record the delivery of goat hair “for the plowing oxen.” Several texts that record comparable entries demonstrate that ša₂-dul₉ and ad-tab are usually delivered in multiples of six, apparently corresponding to the number of draft animals in a full team (*AUCT* 3, 243; *Syracuse* 22; *Syracuse* 154; *JCS* 28, 214 23; *MCS* 6, 18 BM 112980; *SAT* 3, 1209).

§5.3. In contrast, the expression giš₃apin-a (or giš₃apin-na) ĤI-(še₃) la₂ refers to work on the plow itself, never referring to the animals. Moreover, the number of hides is always small (1 or 2) and they are always donkey hides, suggesting that a particular quality of leather was needed. The expression may refer to the leather object that is called kušim-du₅-mu in Farmer's Instructions 43 and whose function was, according to Civil's interpretation “to close any gap between the seeder and the plow's frame so that no grain would spill out” (see Civil 1994 80). This corresponds nicely to the use of the ĤI la₂ idiom for doors where the hides are attached to close the openings in the frame.

§5.4. The interpretation proposed here runs into one unsolved problem. In *OrSP* 47-49, 268, the expression ĤI-še₃ - la₂ is used for a plow and a harrow (GAN₂-ur₃). A harrow basically consists of a wooden frame with numerous “teeth” to break up clods of earth. Why one would use a hide for a harrow remains unclear.

§6. Other uses of ĤI-(še₃) la₂

§6.1. The expression ĤI la₂ is used for several other (wooden) objects: the bench (giš₃hu-um) of a boat (2 texts), the wheel(?) of a chariot; and a bariga vessel. A bench may well consist of a strong frame with a leather seat attached to this frame, very similar to the construction of doors discussed above. The boats in questions are no ordinary boats as they require a considerable investment of time and material (*UTI* 4, 2538):

1(diš) giš ₃ hu-um	1 bench
kuš gud babbar ₂ -bi 2(diš)	its white ox hides are 2;
5(diš) guruš ud 1(diš)-še ₃	5 men for one day
giš ₃ hu-um ma ₂	attaching them to the frame
lu ₂ -ur ₃ -ra GIN ₂ ?-ka	of the bench of the boat
ĤI la ₂ -a	of...

§6.2. *MVN* 13, 378, records the expenses in beer mash (dida) for the workers who do the ĤI la₂ work for the bench of the ma₂-gur₈ boat of the ensi₂. *TCL* 5, 5672 rev. ii 17 records 5 calf hides for a new barig vessel:

5 kuš amar ba-ri₂-ga gibil ĤI la₂-a

§6.3. While references to leather lids or leather wrappings around clay vessels are relatively common (Sallaberger 1996: 18-22), this entry remains unique; without further parallels I do not hazard an interpretation.

§6.4. Finally, *UTI* 4, 2528 1-3 reads:

1(diš) kuš gud mu 1[↑] u₂-hab₂[↑]
giš₃umbin[↑] giš₃gigir-da DI dšara₂-ka
ĤI la₂-de₃

This text is published in transliteration only and has too many problems of reading and interpretation to be taken into account in our present argument.

§7. Conclusion

§7.1. Despite a few unsolved problems, the general meaning of ĤI-(še₃) la₂ seems to be to close an opening by means of a tying a hide. This meaning of ĤI-(še₃) la₂ is clearly distinct from the usage of the verb si.(g) which means “to cover” (with leather or metals), where the object covered is solid (see Stol 1983: 541). The meaning and reading of ĤI remains unclear.

§7.2. In the incantation from which this argument started, the bandage that is supposed to keep headache out is compared to the leather panel of a small door. The absence of the bandage leaves an opening for headache to enter. The imagery used here is comparable to that of the *arkabinnu* or “unfinished door” in two Akkadian incantations from the Old Babylonian period: “I will cross over you like a doorsill; I will pass back and forth through you like an *arkabinnu* door” (see Whiting 1985). Most famously, the goddess Ištar is compared to such a dysfunctional door in Gilgames' insulting answer to her proposal: “you are an *arkabinnu* door which does not keep out wind or draft” (VI 34).

§8. Attestations

§8.1. The preceding discussion is based upon the following texts. With the exception of *UET* 3, 826 (Ur), all Ur III texts come from Umma.

<i>OrSP</i> 47-49, 268	plow and harrow	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>AnOr</i> 1, 86	door	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>BIN</i> 5, 106	door	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>BIN</i> 5, 215	door	Ur III/Umma	leather, beer, and man days
<i>Georgica</i> 1.1.3	plow	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>MVN</i> 13, 378	bench (^{hu} um) of the magur boat of the ensi ₂	Ur III/Umma	beer for workers
<i>RA</i> 14, 180	door	Ur III/Umma	bronze
<i>SACT</i> 2, 96	palace door	Ur III/Umma	man days
<i>SANTAG</i> 6, 322	door	Ur III/Umma	bronze
<i>TCL</i> 5, 5672			
<i>SAT</i> 2, 251	doors (Šulgi, ^d Šara); barig vessel	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>UET</i> 3, 826	door	Ur III/Ur	leather
<i>UTI</i> 4, 2528	chariot	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>UTI</i> 4, 2538	bench (hu-um) of a boat	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>UTI</i> 4, 2657	plow	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>UTI</i> 5, 3002	plow	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>UTI</i> 5, 3449 (restored)	plow	Ur III/Umma	leather
<i>BIN</i> 9, 174	door	Isin	leather
<i>BIN</i> 9, 477	door	Isin	leather

§8.2. Note that *TCL* 5, 5672 (Šulgi 40), is a balanced account for lu₂-sag₁₀ concerning hides. The thirteen ox hides for the door of ^dŠara in rev. ii 10-11 are apparently identical with the thirteen ox hides for the same

purpose in *SAT* 2, 251 (same year), but since the latter text includes, in addition, eight black ox hides, not accounted for in *TCL* 5, 5672, the relationship between the two texts remains unclear to me.

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