

## Abhandlung

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## Rhythm and Expression in Akkadian Poetry

*“In future days, let us hear the beat!” Atra-ḫasīs I 214*

**Abstract:** My aim for this article is to resuscitate the proposal by von Soden that Akkadian poetry uses two core rhythmical elements, the trochee and the amphibrach. After a discussion of previous treatments of metre and rhythm in Akkadian poetry and of the rules of stress in the Akkadian language, I proceed to show that these two core elements are to be found arranged into meaningful patterns, recreating and emphasising the movements of the text. My main point is therefore that the rhythm of Akkadian poetry is to be thought of as a vehicle for poetic expressivity rather than as a metrical law.<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In this article I want to introduce a new method of analysis for Akkadian poetry, a method that studies the interaction between rhythmical patterns and the many other aspects of poetry in order to uncover the particular lyrical *expressivity* immanent in Akkadian literature – the poetic “Prägnanz”, as Landsberger (1926, 371) put it. My main purpose in focusing on this elusive idea of expressivity is to try to escape a rigid differentiation between the content and the expression of literature. By articulating poetry as thoroughly expressive, it becomes irrelevant to define whether that expressivity takes shape through what is said or through how it is said, as the two are inextricable. The rhythmic patterns I propose cannot be abstracted from the mesh of poetry from which they emerge, and so the linguistic, semantic and poetic aspects of expression will be shown to be interdependent. In that respect, I am merely inscribing myself into an Assyriological tradition that goes back to Landsberger’s famous integration of language and thought, which as he writes provides the “Erkenntnismittel” of the philologist (p. 372).

The main task at hand will be to establish the existence of these rhythmical patterns, and as I do so, their

significance will gradually become clear. That the Akkadian poetical tradition should employ features of metre or rhythm has long been suspected, based on the obvious comparison with Classical, Western and Arabic traditions, but not yet successfully proven. This article will be one more attempt at doing so.

There are two main views in Assyriology on the question of prosody. The most generally accepted of these, which I will call *traditional* Akkadian prosody, is to scan poetic verses not according to their phonemic value, that is, according to stress or syllable length, but according to a semi-grammatical principle of “accentual peaks”, in which the semantic “weight” of the sentence is distributed across four of these peaks, constituted – most of the time – by content words that are not reliant upon other words, like a noun in the construct would be. These four peaks are then said to fall into two half-lines. This system has been developed in different directions: an attempted systematisation was presented by Buccellati (1990), while a simpler version, more focused on the caesurae dividing these half-lines, was used by George (2003, 162 f.), and so on – for an overview of these and other developments, see Wasserman (2003, 159–162). This has led to a peculiar situation where traditional Akkadian prosodists are sceptical of the rhythmical nature of anything but nouns and verbs: West (1997, 182) speaks disdainfully of von Soden’s willingness “to put accents on prepositions like *ana* and *ina*”. Compared to virtually all other prosodical traditions, where no such discrimination is to be found, this may at first seem absurd.

There are only a few alternatives to this view, de Liagre Böhl’s (1960) attempt being worth mentioning (but see West 1997, 181 f. for a scathing criticism). The strongest

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of these, however, is the one proposed by Wolfram von Soden in two articles that appeared in this *Zeitschrift*, in 1981 and 1984. Von Soden began with the assumption that there can be no more than two unstressed syllables in a row, based on a parallel with Classical and traditional German metre, which led him to assume the existence of secondary stress and to develop a metrical system consisting of two feet, the trochee and the amphibrach (these will be amply discussed below). Unfortunately, von Soden's proposal has met with very little favour. For example, in his article on metre West (1997, 182) points out two facts that he considers particularly damning for von Soden's argument. Firstly, he holds von Soden's argument to be essentially lacking in methodology, claiming that his assumptions are "unverifiable", that the parallel with German metre is groundless, and that he "postulates various anomalous accentuations as he encounters the need for them". Secondly, he argues that von Soden's two assumptions, secondary stress and a limit on the number of unstressed syllables in a row, practically confirm each other: if you assume secondary stress on alternating syllables, "of course you are not going to have much difficulty in getting accents on every second or third syllable throughout, justifying the initial axiom". Because of criticisms such as these (see also Edzard 1993), the much more vital claim, namely the prevalence of trochees and amphibrachs, has been largely ignored. It is exactly this claim that I wish to resuscitate here. For reasons presented below, we shall call this alternative *rhythmic* Akkadian prosody.

To avoid some of the accusations above, I will begin by narrowly defining first the object of investigation, and then the rules of stress in Akkadian as they shall be applied here. This will indeed lead me to make a series of perhaps "unverifiable assumptions" about the phonemics of Akkadian, but by applying them consistently, I hope to show that they are in fact justified. Only then will we turn to the rhythm itself. First, its basic elements will be characterised, and afterwards, the usage of these elements will be shown through a variety of examples. The applicability of the resulting method will then be tested in a case study. Finally, in lieu of a conclusion, I will present some intimations of further study.

## Rhythm vs. metre

As stated above, in this section I will describe what exactly I will be investigating. When von Soden proposed the idea of trochees and amphibrachs as the core of the prosodical system, he was doing so as part of an investi-

gation into the *Metrik* of Akkadian poetry. Likewise, when other scholars have explored other possible systems of prosody, as outlined above, this has always been with the view of establishing a structure that could be applied unchangingly across the entire poetic tradition, in imitation of Homeric hexameter or Shakespearean pentameter. Variation has been viewed as essentially a problem; the following formulation by West (1997, 182) is symptomatic: "[...] the number of accents in a verse still fluctuates between three and five. The game hardly seems worth the candle".<sup>2</sup>

This hardline focus on regularity within Assyriology has been pervasive (though an interesting exception is provided by Landsberger – see the end of the section *Basic elements* below). It has been, in my opinion, the wrong focus. Indeed, it has been exactly this narrowness of investigation which has prevented a realisation of the full scope of the rhythm in Akkadian poetry: when von Soden came across the prevalence of trochees and amphibrachs in his attempt to establish a constant rule of prosody ("more than two unstressed syllables cannot occur in a row"), his search for metrical regularity led his attention away from the flexibility and the *significance* of the patterns he was discovering.

We need to rid ourselves of the fear of variation to realise the extent to which the material with which we deal is meaningful, since meaning is always being reconstituted and reshaped as innumerable variations of recurrent patterns<sup>3</sup> – and as the longwindedness of this formulation indicates, I am not only speaking of prosody. I want to do this here by shifting the focus away from a search for metrical patterns and towards an attentiveness to the rhythm of poetry.

There is no single distinction between rhythm and metre that is consistently applied throughout the scholarly literature. Sometimes, the two are treated as synonymous, elsewhere, they are seen as belonging to the fields of linguistic and literary studies respectively. Somewhat more commonly, and this will also be the case here, rhythm is

<sup>2</sup> But compare Ezra Pound's *Treatise on Metre*: "So called dactylic hexameter does *not* start from *one* type of verse. There are, mathematically, sixty-four basic general forms of it [...] But this takes no count either of shifting caesura (pauses at some point in the line), nor does it count any of the various shadings. [...] The legal number of syllables in a classic hexameter varied from twelve to eighteen. [...] I believe Shakespeare's 'blank verse' runs from ten to seventeen syllables, but have no intention of trying to count it again, or make a census" (2010, 203 f., his capitals).

<sup>3</sup> Pound again: "Most arts attain their effects by using a fixed element and a variable" (2010, 201).

perceived as being a broader and more flexible sphere than metre.

In this vein, we will use the term “prosodical” to denote *any use of the contrast between different kinds of syllables*, be this qualitatively (stressed vs. unstressed syllables) or quantitatively (long vs. short syllables). I will define metre narrowly as *any consistently applied pattern of prosodical interchange*. Rhythm shall be defined more loosely as *any expressive arrangement of the non-translatable<sup>4</sup> aspects of speech*, including prosodical patterns, but also consonance and assonance, caesurae, chiasmus, etc. That is to say, when I refer to rhythm below, I am referring to patterns of stress *together with* and *inextricable from* the other phonemic and grammatical properties of the words.

Rhythm, and not metre, will be the focus of this article. While I will be investigating primarily the prosodical aspects of rhythm, my aim is not to discover a “consistently applied pattern”, nor do I limit myself to just that one aspect of rhythm – instead, I will investigate how stress can be used *in conjunction with other rhythmical features in a variety of changeable patterns to achieve poetic expressivity*.

## The rules of stress

The general rules of stress for Akkadian were first established on the basis of comparison with other Semitic languages, and then gradually corrected through internal linguistic evidence, particularly plene spellings. Through this process, a traditional view of stress in Akkadian has developed, one which is shared by most scholars but which has appeared in a number of different formulations. Here, we will follow the rather pedagogical presentation provided by Huehnergard (2011, 3 f), which is essentially the same as the one we find in e.g. Knudsen

<sup>4</sup> This term requires some justification. By using the expression “non-translatable”, I want to exclude those aspects of speech which are entirely bound up in the meaning of the words, “the semantic layer”, so to say – the only aspect of speech that can be more or less successfully transposed from one language to the other. One cannot simply say “non-semantic aspects”, for there is no such thing – just think of how much of the semantic content of a sentence finds its expression in intonation and the like (irony, force, questioning). Neither can one use terms like “phonemic” or even “aural”, for, as we shall see, even the arrangement of grammatical categories such as verbs and nouns can play into rhythm. So if the translatable aspects are those that can be transposed between languages, the non-translatable are those that remain idiosyncratic to what a language can express. However, even with these caveats, the term and the distinction it carries with it remain rough approximations.

(1980, 3) or Ungnad/Matouš (1992, § 24a), though simpler and more lucid.

There are three kinds of syllables in Akkadian:

- Light syllables, i.e. open syllables with a short vowel, e.g. *ma*;
- Heavy syllables, i.e. open syllables with a long vowel (macron) or closed syllables with a short vowel, e.g. *lū* or *šar*; and
- Ultra-heavy syllables, i.e. open syllables with a contracted vowel (circumflex) or closed syllables with either a contracted or a long vowel, e.g. *pū*, *māt* or *dāk*.

Based on this, there are three elementary rules of stress:

- 1) If the last syllable of the word is ultra-heavy, that syllable bears the stress, e.g. *ikūn*.
- 2) If the last syllable of the word is not ultra-heavy, then the last non-final (ultra-)heavy syllable of the word bears the stress, e.g. *parāsum*.
- 3) If there are no ultra-heavy or non-final heavy syllables in the word, then the first syllables of the word bears the stress, e.g. *iptaras*.

To these, we may add at least two rather uncontroversial rules:

- 4) Monosyllabic words bear no stress, but rely on the following word (Ungnad/Matouš 1992, § 24b; Knudsen 1980, 6).
- 5) Word-final, open syllables with a contracted vowel are counted as two syllables, the first of which bears stress, e.g. *nabû* = *nabūu* (Worthington 2010b, 100 on the basis of plene spellings; but already Knudsen 1980, 14 on the basis of the “trochaic ending”).

The five rules above constitute the most accepted form of the Akkadian system of stress. Various additions and occasional alternatives to it have been proposed, though none of these have met with general favour (Knudsen’s own suggestion of *Zweisilbengesetz* will not be considered here). The most commonly recurring of these suggestions, however, is that of secondary stress. This was simply posited by von Soden (<sup>3</sup>1995, § 38g, j), deemed “very likely” by Buccellati (1996, 22) and “plausible” by Aro (1953),<sup>5</sup> etc. Knudsen (1980, 15) limits himself to stating: “There is no positive evidence for secondary stress” – and this is undoubtedly the case, but as the very reticence of his formulation implies, there is reason to suspect its existence.

<sup>5</sup> However, Aro’s notion of secondary stress, or by-stress as he calls it, differs significantly from mine.

The argument is twofold. First, secondary stress is a common feature in the comparative material based on which the Akkadian rules of stress were originally established.<sup>6</sup> Second, and this is the basis for von Soden's claim mentioned above, several grammatical features in Akkadian, such as the elision and contraction of vowels, seem to indicate a strong differentiation between alternatively heavily stressed and unstressed vowels. In GAG (³1995, § 38g), von Soden uses the example of the contraction *iq-biàm* → *iqbâ*, where primary stress is transferred unto a syllable which was originally secondarily stressed when the unstressed syllable is contracted. And likewise with the elision of an unstressed vowel between a primarily and a secondarily stressed syllable, *\*dâmiqûtum* → *dam-qûtum* (see § 38g).

However, these developments are already accounted for by the above rules of stress, and so a clearer example might be the Assyrian vowel harmony. Here, a short *a* in an open, penultimate, and therefore unstressed syllable assimilates to the vowel of the final syllable, e.g. *qaqqarum* → *qaqqurum*. Should the vowel become stressed, e.g. through the addition of a suffix (see below), it will no longer undergo vowel harmony. The following syllable, to which it assimilates, will only be primarily stressed if it is ultra-heavy; otherwise, it only bears stress if *rhythmic secondary stress is assumed*, e.g. *qâqqurim*. So if, as some grammars seem to imply (von Soden ³1995, § 10e; Ungnad/Matouš 1992, § 5b; Huehnergard 2011, 599), the lack of stress is a defining criteria for the vowel to undergo harmony, it may be reasonably assumed that we are dealing with the assimilation of a “weak”, unstressed syllable to a “stronger”, secondarily stressed syllable – which is of course only possible if there existed a rhythmic secondary stress. And so, we may tentatively suggest a final rule of stress:

- 6) Starting from the syllables that bear the primary stress, secondary stress is placed on each alternating unstressed syllable, unless this would result in two

adjacent syllables bearing secondary stress, in which case none of those syllables bears stress.

To reflect the uncertainty of this picture, and allow for the scepticism that is only natural given the scantness of the evidence, the rhythm will be scanned in a way that differentiates primary and secondary stress: / will mark a syllable that bears primary stress, x one that bears no stress, and one that bears secondary stress – likewise, the acute and \ grave accents will be used here to mark syllables not according to their value as cuneiform signs, but as bearing primary or secondary stress, respectively. Further, syllables subject to rule 5 will be scanned as /x, without a separating space – that is, *i nišme*: x / x, but *išmû*: x / x. This way, the critic will be allowed to form her own opinion. For each of the cases discussed below, I shall endeavour to provide at least one example that makes no use of secondary stress, so as to show that the overall argument is not wholly dependent upon the assumption of this final rule. But it should be noted from the outset that the prosodical patterns greatly reinforce this assumption.

One last issue that needs to be discussed is the lengthening of vowels before suffixes, particularly the pronominal suffixes and the *-ma* suffix (i.e., *libbīšu* and not *libbišu*, *iqbī-ma* and not *iqbi-ma*). Since a lengthened vowel before a suffix containing no (ultra-)heavy syllables will automatically bear primary stress, the issue is quite crucial in this context. Von Soden notes in GAG (³1995, § 38h, j) that if a word is followed by *-ma*, *-mi*, the ventive *-nim* or the subjunctive *-ni*, “so liegt der Ton immer auf der diesen Affixen vorangehenden Silbe”. Whether this principle relies on a lengthening of the vowel or not – e.g., if in *išmē-ma* the stress lies on the *e*, whether this is due to a lengthening of the vowel, *išmē-ma*, or a shift in stress without lengthening, *išme-ma* – is as such irrelevant for this particular argument. What is important is the consequence that stress will always fall on the syllable preceding a suffix such as *-ma*. Further, von Soden reckons with the lengthening of the genitive ending *-i* before a pronominal suffix, e.g. *bēlīšu* (§ 65a), likewise resulting in the stress being placed immediately before the suffix (see also Worthington 2010a, fn. 30 and 32; Lambert 2013, 18). In the following, I will assume that the shift in stress before a suffix such as *-ma* is caused by vowel lengthening, as does Huehnergard (2011, 49 and 84–89). This is due mainly to a wish for simplicity, so as not to introduce a separate notation for stress that is brought about by suffixes and not length, seeing as how, in light of von Soden's quite categorical statement above, the difference becomes rather arbitrary for the prosodical patterns anyway.

<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, I have been unable to find an overview or even a comparative study of secondary stress across Semitic languages. For individual languages, see the classic example of Poebel's article of 1939 on stress in Old Hebrew, particularly the illustration on p. 229–30, or Blau (1969, § 4.1) for Syriac. Watson (2007, 119 ff) provides a comparative study of two modern Arabic dialects, San'ani and Cairene, demonstrating that secondary stress is operative in the former, but has been lost in the latter due to conflation. For Tiberian Hebrew, where secondary stress is a commonly acknowledged feature, see e.g. Khan (1987). All of these references seem to indicate that secondary stress is if not the rule then at least common in Semitic languages. For Ugaritic, where the picture is much less clear, see e.g. Wansbrough (1983) and Loretz and Kottsieper (1987).



Here, the trochaic sequence strikes us as light and free-flowing, while the amphibrachic sequence seems heavy and ominous. However, it should be made clear that these observations are only of the most general nature, and are intended to give not rules for interpretation, but an impression of the rhythmic dynamics with which we are dealing. Only a wide-ranging examination can reveal if the two elements have connotations which are applied consistently in the poetic tradition.

Finally, it is worth noting that both these feet end in the sequence stressed-unstressed, which, as recognised by Landsberger (1926, 371), is the ending of practically every line in Akkadian poetry (see von Soden 1981, 170 ff.; Hecker 1974, 102–108; Lambert 2013, 18 ff.). This has been referred to as a “trochaic ending”, but this designation now seems unsuitable in light of the fact that it can be both trochaic and amphibrachic. Aro (1953, 7) calls it the “Clausula Accadica-law”, but I see no reason to use Latin. An alternative term might be *feminine ending*, an expression commonly used in prosody to refer to a verse that does not end in a stressed syllable, as opposed to a *masculine ending*, which does – I will leave the connotations for the theorists of gender to discuss. Should one wish to

avoid these connotations, or the confusion with the homonymic grammatical term, the neutral name *stressed-unstressed ending* (in writing: /x-ending) might be preferable, if more cumbersome.

Either way, Landsberger (1926, 371f.) himself clearly thought of this ending as an element of monotony, to be “ausgeglichen durch eine sorgsam beobachtete kunstgesetzliche Architektur”. Landsberger’s statement is an interesting contrast with the search for metrical monotony practised by the rest of the Akkadian tradition of prosody. This makes the variation underlying the apparent repetition even more significant, for Landsberger’s sentiment is essentially rehabilitated.

### Contrasts and parallels

One of the most common prosodical patterns in Akkadian poetry, and the one that most clearly reveals the use of trochees and amphibrachs, is that of the contrast. In this pattern, the semantic dichotomy between two words or concepts in the text is emphasised by an analogous rhythmic contrast. One way of doing this is chiasmatically, that is, through the reversal of a sequence:

(3) wealth vs. life

*muššer mešrām-ma še’i napšāti / makkūru zēr-ma napišti bulliṭ*

/ x ' x / x ' / x' x / x" x / x' / x' x / x' / x

(TATA><ATAT)

“Let go wealth and seek survival! / Scorn property and save life!” SB Gilg XI 25 f.

(4) before vs. after

*šū pānānum-ma / mutum warkānum*

x \ x' / x " / x ' x / x

(AT><TA)

“Him first, / the groom later” OB Gilg II 160 f.

(5) I vs. they

*ummid-ma pūtī / imidū yāti*

x / x ' / x " / x' x / x

(AT><TA)

“I braced my brow, / and they helped me.” OB Gilg II 12 f.

(6) to destroy vs. to fashion

*šū li’’abbī-ma niši lippatqū*

x \ x' / x' / x' x / x

(AT><TA)

“Let him be destroyed that the people may be fashioned” EnEl VI 14

A contrast can also be expressed by the inversion of a sequence, or through the simple juxtaposition of different feet:

## (7) same vs. different

*anā-mi Gilgāmeš mašil padattam / lānam šapil / ešemtam pukkul*

x / x' x / x' / x' x / x " / x' / x' x / x' / x

(AATA&gt;&lt;TTAT)

"He is the equal to Gilgameš in build, / but lower in height / and bigger of bone" OB Gilg II 183–185

## (8) day vs. night

*šeššet urrī u sebe mušāti*

/ x' / x' x / x' x / x

(TT&gt;&lt;AA)

"Six days and seven nights" SB Gilg, I 94 *et passim*

## (9) destruction vs. safety

*patar šipī ul iṭeḥḥišū-ma šalimtu šaknassu*

/ x' / x' \ x' \ x' / x' x' / x' x' / x

(TTTT&gt;&lt;AA)

"The sword of destruction will not go near it, peace will be upon it" Erra V 58

## (10) human vs. divine

*šittiššu ilum-ma šullultāšu amēlūtu*

x / x' x / x' \ x' / x' \ x' / x

(AA&gt;&lt;TTTT)

"Two thirds of him god and a third of him human" SB Gilg I 48 *et passim*

Through the figure of the contrast, the two words being contrasted are not distanced but rather brought together in their difference to express a whole, e.g. in the last example:  $\frac{2}{3} + \frac{1}{3} = \frac{3}{3}$  (compare Wasserman 2003, 61). Just as the rhythm can express contrast, it can also express

parallel. The mechanism is much the same: again we find a semantic link between two words or concepts being rhythmically reinforced, only here, the link is one of equivalence and not of dichotomy. And again, this can be achieved in different ways. By the repetition of a foot:

## (11) work &amp; hardship

*dullum kabit mād šapšāqum*

/ x' / x' / x' / x'

(TT=TT)

"Heavy was their work, much was their hardship" A-ḥ I 4

## (12) broken &amp; cut

*šabburū ḥūqēki battuqū ašlēki*

/ x' \ x' / x' / x' \ x' / x

(TTT=TTT)

"Your planks are broken, your ropes are cut" Elegy 2

## (13) to roil &amp; to destroy, to lead &amp; to tend

*tāmtam-ma dalḥāta šadē-ma gamrāta / niši-ma redāta būlam-ma re'āta*

x / x' x / x

(AA=AA, AA=AA)

"You roil the sea, destroy the mountains, / you lead the people, tend the beasts" Erra III d 5 f.

## (14) hand &amp; waist

*sissinnu qātīni ḥuduššu qablīni*

x / x' x / x' x / x' x / x

(AA=AA)

"The spadix-bracelet of our hand, the frog-belt of our waist" Love I 11' f.

Or by the repetition of a sequence:

(15) wash & clean

*imsi malēšu ubbib tillēšu*

/ x' x / x' / x' x / x

(TA=TA)

“He washed his hair and cleaned his gear.” SB Gilg VI 1

(16) king & gods

*ina māti šarrāku ina ilī ezzāku*

/x' /x' x /x' /x'x' x/ x

(TTA=TTA)

“In the land I am king, among the gods I am furious.” Erra I 110

(17) silent & closed

*ḥabrātum niši šaqqummā / petūtum uddulū bābū<sup>9</sup>*

x / x' / x' x / x " x / x' / x'x / x

(ATA=ATA)

“The noisy people are all silent, / the open doors are closed.” Night 3 f.

## The standard line

Though contrasts and parallels are particularly common figures, and a useful illustration of the importance of trochees and amphibrachs in Akkadian poetry, they are not the only ones. The two basic elements can be combined into a gamut of sequences and combinations, some of which strike us as more meaningful than others. A particularly crucial example is what I will term the *standard*

*line*, one of the most common figures in the text, which consists of a sequence of trochees, of variable length, that ends in a single amphibrach. The standard line is often used in *narrative* and *dramatic* contexts, that is, when the telling of the story moves quickly or when the narrating voice is particularly strong, for example at the beginning of a character’s speech.

We find it in such focal passages as Enkidu’s achievement of consciousness:

(18) *u šū iši tēma rapaš ḥasisa*

\ x' /x' / x' / x' x / x

(TTTTA)

“But he had reason and intelligence!” SB Gilg I 202

Or the battle with Hūmbaba:

(19) *mūtu kīma imbari izannun elišun*

/ x' / x' / x' \x' / x'x / x

(TTTTTA)

“Death rained on them like fog” SB Gilg V 136

Or the beginning of Marduk’s 50 names:

(20) *i nimbē-ma ḥanšā šumēšu*

\x' / x' / x' x / x

(TTTA)

“Let us speak his 50 names!” EnEl VI 121

Or the famous outcry at Marduk’s birth:

(21) *māri šamši šamši ša ilī*

/ x' / x' / x' x / x

(TTTA)

“Son of sun, sun of gods!” EnEl I 102

<sup>9</sup> This would also explain the peculiar word order of the line, where a stative comes between a noun and its adjective.

Or the epigraph of this article:

(22) *aḥriātiš ūmī uppa i nišme*

\ x' / x' / x' / x' x / x

(TTTTA)

“In future days, let us hear the beat!” A-ḥ I 214

These examples could easily be multiplied. Another one is the following passage from Ut-napišti's speech to Gilgameš, which shows how the word *eleppu*, a “natural” am-

phibrach, is modified in two different ways to make it fit the trochaic pattern of the standard line: once by a strange *-ma*, and once by a rather unnecessary *ša*.

(23) *ērub ana libbi eleppim-ma apteḥe bābi / ana pēḥi ša eleppi Puzur-Ellil malāḥi*

/ x' / x' / x' \ x / x' / x' x / x " / x' / x' \ x' / x' / x' / x' x / x

(TTTTTTA / TTTTTTA)

“I went into the boat and closed the door, / and for sealing the boat [I gave my palace with all its goods] to the shipwright Puzur-Ellil” SB Gilg XI 94 f.

Probably the best illustration of the use of the standard line comes from the composition known as the Assyrian Elegy, most recently discussed by George (2010). This

short but beautiful poem begins by the voice of a narrator asking a deceased woman why she has died:

(24) *ana mīni kī eleppe ina qabal nāre nadāki (...)?*

/ x' / x' \ x' / x' / x' / x' / x' x / x

(TTTTTTTA)

“Why are you cast adrift like a boat midstream (...)?” Elegy 1

The two following lines, one of which was quoted in the previous section, develop on the metaphor of the boat crossing the river. In the fourth line the apostrophe is fully realised by the appearance of the dead woman's own

voice. At first, she merely repeats the question of the narrator (as her only existence is through that apostrophe), but subtly twists it with the addition of the word *akē*:

(25) *akē lā nadāku lā battuqū ašlēyā?*

x / x' x / x' x / x' \ x' / x

(AAATT)

“How should I not be cast adrift with my ropes cut?” Elegy 4

This twist has two functions. On the semantic level, the question is answered with another question, that is, not at all. The *akē* renders it ironic, and exposes its unanswerability. On the prosodical level, it shifts the entire pattern, as the standard line associated with the narrator is reversed: the trochees become amphibrachs and the amphibrach becomes two trochees. Thereby, the narrative fluidity of the voice of the living is contrasted with the broken voice of grief. Though brought into being by the narrator's appeal, the woman thus gains her own identity in the poem by the subtle manipulation of language and rhythm, not answering but ironising the question that created her – while at the same time achieving an intertextual reference to SB Gilgameš X 47.

## Other figures

Upon cursory examination, no particular figure seems to recur as commonly as the ones discussed above, but different figures are put to different uses in a variety of contexts. In the case study below I outline a rather complicated figure found in the beginning of the Enūma eliš, which shall serve as a demonstration of how a rhythmic figure can underline and recreate the movements of the text. But the clearly contextual nature of such cases make them inept for general investigations, and at this stage, no rules for interpretation can be given. Instead, it must simply be repeated that rhythm and content work together to bring out the poetic expression in its full force. For example, the framework of trochees and amphibrachs means that one must be on the look-out for *shifts* from passages dominated by one foot to the other.

## Going beyond prosody

As we have already discussed, rhythmic analyses situate the prosodical patterns in a mesh of many interrelated aspects of speech. Many of these aspects are in the case of Mesopotamian poetry unfortunately lost to us today, including such features as intonation and timbre. Some, however, are retained in writing, and these present to us a picture of many different parts of speech acting together to form a more expressive whole. This whole is what I investigate in this section.

(29) *ilū lillikūni ana surqinni / Ellil ayy-illika ana surqinni*

/ x '\x'/x' / x'x / x" / x' x / x'x/ x'x / x

(TTTTA/TAAA)

“Let the gods come to the sacrifice, / but may Ellil stay away from the sacrifice!” SB Gilg IX 168 f.

This can be confirmed and expanded by looking at the prosodical patterns: with only a single change in the verbal form the rhythm achieves a standard line, its reversal and thereby a contrast between coming and not coming, as well as the rhythmic consonance of *il*, *lill*, *Éll* and *ill*,

(27) *naḥlapta apluḫti pulḥāti ḥalip-ma*

x / x 'x / x' x /x' x / x

(AAAA)

“He was dressed in a fearsome armoured garment” EnEl IV 57

This alliteration is so well-wrought that Lambert (2013, 475) considers it “unique in Akkadian poetry”. Another example is this:

(28) *ša šadî šemūšu māšū-ma*

\ x' /x' x / x' x / x

(TTAA)

“The name of the mountain was Mashu.” SB Gilg IX 37

Here, the rhythm of the two words *šemūšu* and *māšū-ma* brings out the sound of each other, as the stress on *mú* points to the couplet *mā* and *ma* and the stress on *šú* does the same for *še* and *šu*.

For more examples of consonance, see e.g. Hecker (1974, 139 ff); Reiner (1985, 91 and 106); Izre'el (1992, 163 f.); Lenzi (2011, 114, 427 f. and 493); and in Gilgameš, George (2003, 185, 817, 879 and 892).

## Consonance, assonance and rhyme

The aspect of rhythm that is most visibly preserved in writing is the expressive repetition of phonemes. If it is consonants which are repeated, this is termed *consonance*, or *alliteration* if it occurs at the beginning of a word, while the repetition of vowels is called *assonance*. The combination of the two yields *rhyme*, which in this usage is not restricted to the end of verses but rather includes any repetition of syllables or parts of syllables.

Consonance in particular is a device which is regularly used in Akkadian poetry, and exactly because it is relatively accessible through writing, it is also one of the best studied features of Akkadian poetic language. A simple example will show how the prosodical patterns I propose can be combined with previous research on consonance. George (2003, 891) notes the heavy repetition of *l* in the following lines:

which George takes to indicate “that the Mother Goddess uttered her words in a kind of ululation”.

Likewise, the fourfold repetition of *ḥ*, *l* and *p* from the *Enūma eliš* is supported by the identical stress pattern on each word:

It is likewise with assonance: there is much previous research to be found on this, and it can often be easily combined with prosody. For example, Westenholz (1997, 61) notes the repetition of the assonant pattern *i-u* in the beginning of Sargon the Conquering Hero, which is reinforced by the accompanying repetition of the prosodical pattern: *libbum išdum tībum* (Sargon I 4). Likewise, in her discussion of the rendering of “Akkadian euphonics” in translation (1999, 84 f.), she highlights the line *da'mum damāmum kalbum šalmum* from an Assyrian incantation

against dog attacks. In order to recreate the assonance of *a-u*, which we can now see is rhythmically realised as *á-u*, she proposes the translation “moaning, bemoaning coal-black canine”, and thereby also ends up recreating the prosodical pattern TATT! (Compare also fn. 3 above.)

For other examples of assonance, see e.g. Izre’el (1992, 162); Hecker (1974, 140 fn. 2); Foster (2005, 15 fn. 1); as well as Lenzi (2011, 450 and 452), who further notes examples of combinations between consonance and assonance (p. 301), between prosody and assonance (p. 450), and between prosody and consonance (p. 247).

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (30) <i>Marduk attā-ma mutirru gimillīni</i><br><i>nīddikka šarrūtu kiššat kal gimrēti</i><br><i>tīšab-ma ina puḥri lū šušqāta amatka</i><br><i>kakkēka ayy-ippaltū lira’isū nakirika</i> | / x ' x / x ' x / x ' \ x ' / x<br>x / x ' x / x ' / x ' \ x ' / x<br>x / x ' / x ' / x ' \ x ' / x ' x / x<br>x / x ' x / x ' / x ' x / x ' \ x ' / x |
|---|--|

“Marduk, you are our avenger!  
We give you sovereignty over the whole world,  
Sit in the assembly and your word will be the highest.  
May your weapons never miss, but always strike your enemy!” EnE1 IV 13–16

As Groneberg (p. 69) notes, the first and last syllables of the verses form a concatenating pattern: the syllable *ni* ends line 13 and begins line 14, *ti* ends line 14 and begins line 15, *ka* ends line 15 and begins line 16, and is then repeated again at the end of line 16 and thus rounds off the pattern. None of these syllables bear stress, and thus the rhyme seems at first unconnected with rhythm. But if we scan the prosody, a fascinating pattern emerges, full of parallels and reversals:

TAA TT  
AAT TT  
ATT TTA  
AAT AAT

Held up against the symmetry of the revolving patterns, the bracketing function of the rhyme becomes clear. Even if unstressed these syllables still play a crucial role in the rhythm, as they accentuate the prosody by opening and closing it.

## Parallelism and repetition

Let us now move from the repetition of sounds to the repetition of words and syntagms. Particularly, the repetition of a given verse or couplet in a modified form, e.g. through a change in word sequence, the substitution of words or

As for rhyme, which is much rarer in Akkadian poetry, Wasserman (2003, chapter 6) has already devoted an entire chapter of his study of literary style to the connection between rhyme and metre in what he calls “rhyming couplets”, replete with reference to previous studies. We may therefore safely assume that rhyme and prosody are intimately related, but before moving on, I want to highlight a rather wonderful example of what this relation can look like. In her discussion of assonance, which in her terminology includes what I have referred to as consonance, Groneberg (1996, 67–70) notes the “spectacular Tail-cum-Head rhyme” in tablet IV of Enūma eliš:

expansion, is referred to as *parallelism*. A wide range of examples of this sort of operation can be found in Hecker (1974, 142–160); see also Reiner (1985, 103); Foster (2005, 14 f.); Lenzi (2011 *passim*); and Groneberg (1996, 70–75) with references. An intriguing case in this context is Vogelzang (1996). Her article is particularly relevant here because her focus on repetition as a *general* feature of literature allows her to look at various forms of repetition at once, and especially how they work together: both repetition of words (p. 172 f.), passages (p. 174), and sounds (p. 179). Her approach points us towards the wide range of possible interplays between rhythm and repetition. Take the first two examples she provides (p. 170f.): they both consist of a couplet being repeated to form a four-verse stanza, and the repetition is verbatim except for two words being changed in the second couplet. In the first example, from a hymn to Ishtar (Thureau-Dangin 1925), the two sets of words are: *iltum* / *Ištar* and *nīši* / *išši* (lines 1–4), “goddess” / “Ishtar”, “people” / “women”. In the second example, from Atra-ḥasīs, the two sets are: *bītu* / *Ekur* and *ilu* / *Ellil* (A-ḫ I 70–73), “house” / “Ekur”, “god” / “Ellil”. All these words are trochaic, and thereby the texts achieve a parallelism, with the substitution of words in both cases moving from the general to the specific, *while retaining the prosodic pattern unchanged*.

But parallelism does not necessarily imply that the rhythm remains static. Another fascinating example of the combination of parallelism and prosody is the incantation

known as The Heart Grass (see Reiner 1985, 94–100). Here, a formulaic parallelism is unfolded and then reversed, forming first the pattern xx, yy, zz, ww and then moving backwards as wz, zy, yx. The words that are thus concatenated are the following: *Šamaš, umāmī, šērī u bamāti, šadī u ḥarrī*, “Šamaš”, “the beasts”, “the fields and the plains”, “the mountains and the vales”. Prosodically, they form the pattern T, A, TTT, AA. So unlike the previous examples, here parallelism implies a *change* in rhythm, as the words that are strung together become progressively longer and move from the trochaic to the amphibrachic.

This may also serve as an illustration of how rhythm can be connected with the more general *Wortfolgeprinzip* in literature, i.e. the principles structuring the coordination of words into larger units, e.g. through word pairs (Ehelolf 1916; see also again Landsberger 1926, 371 f). In his review of Wasserman’s work on merismus, Sallaberger (2004, 580 f) uses exactly this principle to criticise Wasserman’s exclusive focus on the semantic aspect of the merismus: “Die semantischen Kriterien der Abfolge sind dem Ehelolf’schen lautlichen Wortfolgeprinzip völlig untergeordnet” (p. 581). We may use this realisation, together with examples such as The Heart Grass, in turning again towards the rhythmic dynamics involved in the structuring of words into larger sequences.

## Grammatical patterns

Another aspect of rhythm is grammatical, namely the word order of a sentence and particularly the relation between verbs and nouns. The free word order characteristic of literary texts, and often necessary to achieve the prosodical effects we have seen, effectively adds texture to the rhythmic games and presents us with a wider range of nuances (Hecker 1974, 144; Groneberg 1996, 66 f.; George 2003, 888; Lenzi 2011, 389 and 394 f.; Foster 1977, fn. 15 speaks of a “pretty chiasma”). Complicated prosodical patterns, such as example nr. 3 which is a double contrast spanning two lines with the figure TATA><ATAT, can be made clearer and more powerful by being repeated in the patterning of verbs and nouns, in this case VNVN><NVNV. Of course, the opposite is equally possible, as prosody and

(31) *minde Gilgāmeš ša kīma kāti*

/ x'x / x'x / x' / x

“Why, Gilgameš! A man just like you (...)” OB Gilg II 17

Here, it is easy to see how the caesura accentuates Nin-sun’s exclamation (for *minde* as an assertive exclamation, see George 2003, 182). As caesurae have been plentifully

grammar can point in different directions. The significance of the grammatical patterns should, however, be weighed case by case against the necessity of that pattern to achieve other rhythmic effects.

## Caesurae

Then, of course, there is the use of *caesurae*, pauses in rhythm which divide verses into half-verses. This is the aspect which has found most recognition in the secondary literature up to now (see e.g. West 1997 and George 2003, 162 f.). Traditional Akkadian prosody relies exclusively on this feature, where verses are either divided by a caesura into half-verses each with two “beats”, or contain no caesurae, and so have three “beats”. As stated by George (2003, 163): “Successive four-beat lines will quicken the tempo, while successive three-beat lines will achieve a slower, more measured effect.” There is of course no reason why this feature should not be reconcilable with the new picture of Akkadian prosody that I am drawing, since pauses can be neatly incorporated as an aspect of rhythm. When scanning the examples for this article, I have marked the caesurae exclusively according to the rules of traditional prosody, and it is quite interesting to note how well this fits the breakdown into trochees and amphibrachs. Most often, the caesura falls after the second foot, but this is not always so, and pauses should not be seen as predictable but expressive features.

An easy example of this are the contrasts and parallels discussed above, where the two parts being linked consequently fall into each their half-verse, separated by a caesura (see again the *Wortfolgeprinzip*). The exception that proves the rule is example no. (17), where the parallel spans two verses, and so it confirms our suspicions to find that these two verses are “three-beat lines” – that is, lines without a caesura.

Likewise, the common conjunction between a rhythmic caesura and a syntactic or semantic break point us towards the expressive nature of such pauses. For example, in OB Gilgameš, the beginning of Ninsun’s interpretation of her son’s dream is divided by a caesura into two, prosodically symmetric halves:

analysed in traditional Akkadian prosody, I do not think it requires more examples to demonstrate that pauses can play an important role in the rhythmic structure of a verse.

## Other aspects

There are numerous other aspects of speech which await investigation within the analytical frame provided by rhythm. For example, syllable length might feasibly be used to slow down or speed up the poetic flow (e.g. Reiner 1985, 106) – the dominantly qualitative nature of this prosody does not preclude the use of quantitative patterns as well. The amount of feet per verse might likewise be significant, and the division into stanzas might bring together verses that either subvert or reinforce each other's patterns (see example no. 25). The simple 3-level notation employed here (/, \, x) might have to be extended depending on which aspect of rhythm is being studied. For example, one may wish to differentiate unstressed syllables that are short from those that are long (a combination of the slash-and-cross and the

(32) *wašrū sikkūrū šērētum šaknā*

/ x' x / x' x / x' / x

“The bolts are drawn, the rings are in place” Night 2

(TA >< AT)

This example is not at all exceptional. Indeed, the relation between contrasts and parallels and what they express might turn out to be more complicated than what was in-

(33) to put down & to touch

*bīllam-ma šumēlik luppit-ma ḥurdatni*

x / x' x / x' x / x' x / x

“Put down your left hand and touch our vulva!” Love i 13'

(AA=AA)

(34) to stretch out & to touch

*u qātka šūšām-ma luput ḥurdatni*

x' / x' x / x' / x' x / x

“Stretch out your hand and touch our vulva!” SB Gilg VI 69

(x TA=TA)

The comparison between the two examples is particularly interesting, as they are both parallels expressing the same thing, but achieve this rhythmically in two different ways.<sup>10</sup> However, in the second example the line in fact begins with the conjunction *u*, which must be scanned separately from the rest of line if one wishes to see it as a parallel (otherwise, the pattern would be AATA). Although such cases are somewhat rarer, the strength of the figure

macron-and-breve systems, yielding a 4-level notation: /, \, -, u).

## Breaks in prosody

It is paramount to note that this system of trochees and amphibrachs should not be seen as a rule, or a straight-jacket of poetry, but rather as a strong prevalence which can be used for poetic effect. Most importantly, rhythm does not follow the content automatically, seeing as these poets are perfectly able to play with our expectations. Where they can emphasise meaning with rhythm, they can just as well subvert it. This is the case in the following line, taken from the Prayer to the Gods of the Night, where, in place of an expected parallel, we find a contrast, both in prosody and word order (VN><NV):

indicated above. Likewise, there are also cases where syllables seem to fall outside the structure of trochees and amphibrachs. Compare the following two examples:

as well as the comparison between the two examples suggests the possibility that there might occur syllables which belong outside the prosodical patterns. This again indicates that the rhythm is not to be viewed as metrical law but as rhythmic expressivity.

## Summary

It should already be clear that the rhythm we observe in Akkadian poetry is no static, self-contained thing. Not only are we dealing with rhythm rather than metre, as outlined above, but we have here a rhythm which is particularly flexible and interwoven with the semantics of expression. The

<sup>10</sup> Also, the two sets of words being linked, *bīllam* / *šūšām* and *luppit* / *luput*, are not as such equivalent, but rather consecutive (stretch out to touch). As such, the parallelism behaves much like the grammatical element *-ma* (by which the words are also linked), which can act as both a copular and a consecutial linkage.

rhythm is not closed upon itself, and when it springs into focus, it is always in an interplay between meaning and sound, where different aspects of speech (stress, meaning, word order, consonance, assonance, pauses etc.) converge.

Not all passages make use of prosody to the same degree, and many consist of a seemingly random sequence of trochees and amphibrachs. Many figures that do occur in the text have no discernible significance or import on the content of the text. But these figures should not be simply disregarded, as they presumably held an aesthetic value which we cannot fully appreciate today: the very beat of poetry can be its own justification. Rhythm, as opposed to metre, can never be said to be absent from a given text, it is always there, in the flows, turns and pauses of speech.

In general, however, I would advise against the scanning of poetry for its own sake, that is, scanning prosodical patterns without considering how those patterns relate to the content of the text and to other aspects of speech. While such an automated procedure may prove that the exceptions to the prevalence of trochees and amphibrachs are few and far between, it does nothing to help us understand the meaning of the relevant passage, or the usage of rhythm within it. Rhythm is not always significant, and it alternates in prominence with other layers of poetry such as plot or imagery,<sup>9</sup> and so it is much more rewarding to analyse it case by case, paying attention to those passages where it is particularly expressive (as I put it before, when it springs into focus) and recognising that expressivity in its context. There are even passages, as we have seen above, that deviate from the prosodical patterns, showing us that those patterns are not to be seen as poetic constraints – they are rather a form of aesthetics that arises within the ebb and flow of language, as patterns surfacing in a stream of sound.

In light of all this, rhythm must be seen as an independent *field of expression*, with its own dynamics and possibil-

ities, even if always linked and responsive to the other expressive fields of poetry, such as tension, plot, genre and imagery (the link between imagery and rhythm will become clearer in the case study). One may apply here the useful terminology developed by Latour (2005, 39) to say that rhythm is a mediator and not an intermediary of meaning. Both mediators and intermediaries transport meaning from one place to another, but intermediaries do so automatically, even invisibly (“defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs”), while mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry”. Such is the rhythm in Akkadian poetry. While it may be used both to confirm pre-made interpretations and to develop new ones, its expressivity cannot simply be taken for granted, but must always be gauged in relation to the particular case.

## Case study

In his article on metrical patterns in Akkadian poetry, Buccellati (1990, 125–128) used the beginning of the *Enūma eliš* as a testing ground for the analytical method which he had developed. West (1997, 187) followed his example, effectively establishing this passage as the go-to guinea-pig of Akkadian prosody. In this article, I intend to follow this tradition – not as a way of competing with the results offered by Buccellati, but of complementing them, since I believe the semantic nature of his approach to be perfectly reconcilable with the rhythmical nature of mine. Furthermore, the character of the rhythmic prosody I have proposed, with its focus on context and the high degree of interaction with the semantic level, makes a comprehensive analysis of a single, focal passage particularly appropriate. For previous discussions of this passage, see Held (1968, 233–237), Wilcke (1977, 163–170), Vanstiphout (1987), Moran (1988) and now the edition by Lambert (2013, 50 f).

<i>enūma eliš lā nabū šamāmu</i>	x / x' / x' \ x' / x' x / x	A T T T A
<i>šapliš ammātu šuma lā zakrat</i>	/ x' x / x' / x' x / x	T A T A
<i>Apsūm-ma rēštū zērūšun</i>	x / x' x / x' x / x	A A A
<i>mummu Tiāmat muallidat gimrišun</i>	/ x' x / x' x / x' \ x' / x	T A A T T
<i>mēšunu ištēniš iḫīqū-ma</i>	/ x' \ x' / x' \ x' / x	T T T T T
<i>gipāra lā kiššuru šuṣā lā šē'u</i>	x / x' x / x' \ x' / x' x / x	A A T T A
<i>enūma ilū lā šūpū manāma</i>	x / x' / x' \ x' / x' x / x	A T T T A

<sup>11</sup> This is of course not to suggest that such an alternation is exclusive in nature – the highest degree of poetic expressivity is obtained when all these layers work together.

*šuma lā zukkurū šimātu lā šimū* / x ' x / x ' \ x ' / x ' x / x T A T T A  
*ibbanū-ma ilū qerebšun* \ x ' / x ' / x ' x / x T T T A

“When above heaven was unnamed, and earth below had not been spoken as a word, there was only primeval Apsu, their seed, and *mummu* Tiamat, who gave birth to them all. They were mingling together their waters, as no field had been woven and no reed-thicket to be seen. When none of all the gods had been called into being, no name given and no destiny decreed, *then* were all the gods created within them.” EnE1 1–9

We begin, in lines 1 and 2, with a simple contrast, between up and down, *enūma eliš* and *šapliš ammātu*.<sup>12</sup> This contrast is not only prosodical, AT><TA, but also grammatical, with the two adverbs, both marked by the ending -iš, occurring in opposite positions. This dichotomy clearly emphasises the *totality* of the world’s initial namelessness, both above and below, the two directions being both linked and contrasted. However, this figure leaves the rest of the two verses hanging, so to say, as yet unbound by rhythm: affixed to this AT><TA structure we find, separated by caesurae, TTA and TA. We shall return to them below.

The next four lines describe how the two primordial beings, Apsu and Tiamat, mingle together their waters. The whole passage is strongly sexualised, Apsu described as *seed* and Tiamat as *birth-giver*. The mixing of waters plays on two semantic levels: It is both the sexual exchange of body fluids, and the literal commingling of water, as Apsu and Tiamat are deifications of actual bodies of water, the groundwater and the ocean respectively. This is beautifully supplemented by the next verse, which evokes a world free of fields and reed-thickets: for someone accustomed to the landscape of southern Iraq, a checkerboard of fields and canals where all there is between water and water is the cultivated land, and the only thing that marks this separation are thickets of reed standing near the banks, this must indeed have been a powerful image (Buccellati 1990, 125. Note also that the fields are described by the word *kiššurū*, that is, *woven*). The world before the gods is evoked as a *commingled*, *undifferentiated* and highly *fertile* state.

All this is mirrored in the complex rhythmic pattern of these lines. First, we have three amphibrachs. Then, the

figure TAATT. Then, five trochees, the opposite figure of the first line. Last, the figure AATTA. While neither the figure of the second nor the fourth line seem significant by themselves, when taken together they form each other’s mirror image, their figure being not only turned inside out, trochees becoming amphibrach, but also back to front, 12211 becoming 11221. What we are dealing with here is the entwining of two couplets, which themselves are made up of the reversal and inversion of one verse in the other.<sup>13</sup> The two couplets are also linked through their structure and use of caesurae: the second and the fourth line are divided into half-lines, the first and the third are not (in traditional prosody, one would say that they are four-beat and three-beat lines, respectively). The metaphorical intermingling of water is thus reflected in the rhythmical intertwining of verses.

To round off this complicated motif, we have a repetition of the figure of the first verse, three trochees encircled by amphibrachs. But again, prosody does not act alone. The lines *enūma eliš lā nabū šamāmu* and *enūma ilū lā šūpū manāma* have a number of similarities beyond the prosodical pattern: the same first and third word, and a number of rhyming features (*eli – ilū*, *bū – pū*, *āmu – āma*).

So, having come full circle, we are now ready to continue – except for the two verse-ending that we have left hanging from line 1 and 2. No thread must be left untied, and this is realised in the next line, which sees these two endings repeated in reverse order: TA TTA. The verse also references the two endings through repetition, the TA patterns being nearly identical – *šuma lā zukkurū* = *šuma lā zakrat* – and the TTA patterns referencing each other somewhat more subtly through consonance – *šimū*

<sup>12</sup> *ammātu* (or *ammātu*) is the word in this passage whose scanning is the least secure, particularly regarding the syllable *ma*. The word has only a few other attestations, one in the Theodicy and a few in lexical lists (see CAD; Hutter 1985, 187 f.), and none of these tell us much about the rhythmic structure of the word (unfortunately it does not occur as the last word in the verse of the Theodicy). However, I find the contrast between “above” and “below” convincing, especially since it is reflected the chiasmic arrangement of the adverbs, and so I have chosen to render it as *ammātu*.

<sup>13</sup> One could say that they put the rhythm down, flip it, and reverse it. Note further that this pattern relies on viewing the *nu* in *mēšunu* as secondarily stressed, though all other final vowels in the plural pronominal suffixes in this passage have been lost, e.g. *gimrišun*. Whether this is to be seen as a strength or a weakness in the argument (a strength because it explains the uneven distribution of final vowels in the orthography, a weakness because it relies on placing secondary stress on a syllable which was commonly lost) must be for the reader to decide.

echoing *šamāmu*. This also makes the whole structure of the passage more symmetric, as we now have the four entwined verses discussed above surrounded by two verses on either side.

Furthermore, the prosodical and consonant identification of the words *šamāmu* and *šimū*, “heaven” and “destiny”, reinforces what may otherwise have been the merely coincidental implication of the common *amātu*, “word”, in the rare *ammātu*, “earth”. We see what is uncreated and *potential* – names and destinies – expressed as an echo present in what is already there – heaven and earth. The beginning of the story thus already hints at its culmination in the 50 names (and destinies) of Marduk.

And now, with the pattern completed, we can move on. The next verse indeed marks a shift, away from the static and commingled nature of the world’s beginning and towards the dynamic nature of creation (from fertility to activity). This is fully realised on the rhythmical level by the first appearance of the standard line, which, as we have seen above, marks the passage as *dynamic*. The line is not halted by a caesura and so it is free to move forward, unlike the statically interlinked section that precedes it. This forward movement is powerfully supplemented on the grammatical level: Where all verbs so far have been stative and negated, with the sole exception of *iḥīquū*, we now have a verb which is not only fientive and positive, but also stands right at the beginning of the sentence (this point was already made by Buccellati 1990, 127; see also Moran 1988, 15, who argues for reading *i-ḥi-qu-ú* as a durative, calling it “an apt description of eventless flux”).

Finally, we turn to structure. The symmetry of the pattern, with four verses surrounded by two verses on either side, has already been noted. But it is further interesting to note that this very symmetry breaks with the traditional division into strophes of 4 verses. Instead, we here have half-strophe – full strophe – half-strophe, with the half-strophes being rhythmically linked and the full strophe entwined with itself. This is compounded by the cross-reference of pronouns, as the *-šun*’s in line 3 and 4 point *forward* to the gods in line 7, while the *-šun* in line 9 points backwards, across that link, to Apsu and Tiamat in lines 3 and 4. We therefore have two options. Either, we can follow West (1997, 187) in reconstructing an “original” sequence 1–2, 7–8, 3–6, and see the second strophe as interpolated into the first – a reconstruction which, though it resolves the problematic pronouns, finds no basis in any manuscript. Or, we can simply accept the complexity of the passage, which by its symmetry and its cross-reference fully expresses the primordial state it describes. In this view, which I much prefer, the rhythmic games are more

advanced, and the shift from the half-strophic structure towards the simpler division into 4-line entities becomes yet another marker of the dynamic shift discussed above.

Figure 1 below gives an overview of this series of patterns. It is worth noting that none of the patterns are realised by prosody alone, but all rely on a number of other features, such as assonance, pauses, grammatical features and imagery. The resulting picture confirms and fine-tunes our understanding of the passage: The sexual mingling of water is brought into sharper focus, and the shift from static to dynamic is underscored. But most importantly, we can now fully realise the organic character of the passage *as a whole*, with all verses and all their sounds working together to create a totality of expression.

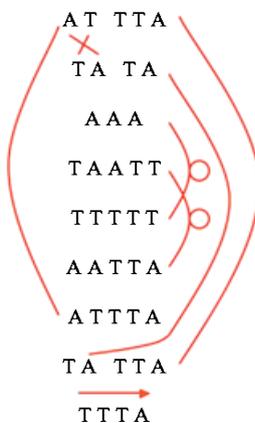


Figure 1. Rhythmical interlinkages in Enūma eliš I 1–9.

## “In future days”

I began this article by stating that I wanted to introduce a new system of literary analysis for Akkadian poetry, and that the aim of investigating rhythmical patterns was to expose the poetry’s lyric expressivity, thus allowing for those patterns to fully unfold their significance. Whether this aim has been met is not for me to say. Instead, I will sketch out the further research required to work towards that end, should anyone else happen to think this torch worth carrying.

In order to study the use of rhythm in Akkadian poetry, a twofold procedure will have to be followed, at least to begin with. On the one hand, it will require broad investigations focused on particular aspects of rhythm, across periods and/or genres. Only on the basis of such investigations can we detect patterns of use that are applied consistently. But on the other hand, the nature of this rhythm

favours that we at the same time concentrate on close textual readings and on analyses of individual works, paying full attention to content and context. Indeed, this type of oscillation between establishing broad patterns and observing their variability and application case by case (that is, between nomothetic and idiographic approaches) lies at the very heart of the humanities.

Only when the picture here proposed has been substantially improved in accuracy and reliability can it be applied towards other ends, such as linguistic research into Semitic stress patterns – I do not doubt that my rather primitive presentation of secondary stress must be corrected and refined. Even now, a great number of open questions remain: Does secondary stress move left-to-right or right-to-left – for example, is a line like *ilū iplaḫū abūbam-ma*, SB Gilg XI 114, to be scanned *iplaḫū abūbām-ma* or rather *iplaḫū abūbām-ma*, as a standard line? Can secondary stress move “across” the caesura? Is the scanning of final ultra-heavy syllables as two syllables restricted to cases where the syllable is open (rule 5), or does it include closed syllables as well – i.e., is the line *kikkiš kikkiš igār igār*, SB Gilg XI 21, deliberately breaking the prosodical pattern, or merely to be scanned as TTAA? What about the question of suffixes and vowel lengthening? And so on. But if the proposed picture holds even in the most general way, a substantial foothold will have been gained.

Last of all, I would like to briefly return to the question of expressivity and the conflation of content and expression. We have seen how the rhythm in various ways renders a division between a semantic layer and a linguistic expression unstable: if a contrast is realised rhythmically, one way or the other, it becomes rather arbitrary to say that there is “first” a semantic contrast, which is “then” mirrored in the rhythm. Rather, it seems that the contrast is created in meaning and rhythm simultaneously. The poetic *Prägnanz* cuts across multiple layers, so that the texts appear to us thoroughly expressive – even today, millennia after their composition.

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A-ḫ = Atra-ḫasīs. Edition: Lambert/Millard (1969).  
 Elegy = The Assyrian Elegy. Edition: George (2010).  
 EnEl = Enūma eliš. Edition: Lambert (2013, 45–134).  
 Erra = Erra and Išum. Edition: Cagni (1969).  
 Love = The Forgotten Love Song. Edition: Westenholz (1987).

Night = Prayer to the Gods of the Night. Edition: Soden (1936).  
 SB Gilg = The Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš. Edition: George (2003, 378–741).  
 OB Gilg = The Old Babylonian Epic of Gilgameš. Edition: George (2003, 159–375).

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