



AMAR ANNUS AND ALAN LENZI:
LU DLUL BĒL NĒMEQI: *THE STANDARD*
BABYLONIAN POEM OF THE
***RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER* (*)**

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RESUMEN / ABSTRACT

Review of: Amar Annus and Lenzi Alan: *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi: The Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (2010), State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts 7, Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, LVI-68 pp., ISBN-10 952-10-1334-6 / ISBN-13 978-952-10-1334-8.

The book *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi: the Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* by Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi, written in very good English, belongs to the field of assyriological studies and contains 123 pages together with introductory commentaries and notes that contain one philological and one historical analysis of the poem, of the cuneiform texts

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(four tablets¹), a transliteration, a translation, a glossary, a bibliography, and a sign list.

This poem, known in Assyriological circles from its opening line *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* (*LBN*)² – “I will praise the Lord of wisdom”, is of course one of the most important poems or texts that help us better understand the religious and ideological background of the Mesopotamian civilization and the theological basis of the cult of Marduk.

As Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi quite rightly remarked: “We have good reason to believe *LBN* was a well-known, widely-diffused, and highly valued poem” (Annus and Lenzi 2010: ix). This poem was very popular in Babylonia and Assyria in the late Middle-Babylonian period when it was created, and then again in later historical periods when it was copied many times (during the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods; this poem was probably also known in the Achaemenid period and maybe even later in the Hellenistic Period) and each advanced scholar or scribe in Mesopotamia must have known these texts well, along with priests and priestesses of the time (Annus and Lenzi 2010: ix), because this poem was dedicated to Marduk, chief god of Babylonia and head of the pantheon of gods. The text of *LBN* must also be closely related to another very important text – the epic of *Enūma elīš*³ that had also strongly influenced Ancient Near Eastern literature, theology and ideology.

This book is not simply a new cuneiform edition of the famous ancient Mesopotamian classic epic or poem *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*⁴, it is a

¹ Or perhaps five tablets – see T. Oshima hypothesis: “Thus, what we have previously believed to be Tablet IV must be in fact Tablet V and entire Tablet IV, whose existence W.G. Lambert had vaguely hinted at but without giving further details, is evidently still missing. Put simply – *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* must have consisted of five tablets, not four as previously believed”. – T. Oshima (2012: 29).

² In transliteration *lud-lul EN né-me-qi* ... – see Annus, Lenzi (2010: 15). This current poem was already translated several times into German and English by von Soden (1990: 110–135); Foster (2005: 392–409); George, Al-Rawi (1998: 187–201); Lambert (1996: 21–62); Wiseman (1980: 101–107); see also Albertz (2003: 85–105); Annus, Lenzi (2011b: 181–205); Gerhards (2011: 93–152); Horowitz, Lambert (2002: 237–245).

³ See new edition of *Enūma elīš* by Kämmerer, Metzler (2012).

⁴ It is worth noting that Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi also published an article about *LBN* in Estonian – Annus, Lenzi (2011a: 631–651). This is the first publication in Estonian Assyriology written in the Estonian language about Babylonian Wisdom Literature. Last year the Estonian Egyptologist Sergei Stadnikov (also internationally well-known) published the Estonian translation “The Teachings of Ptahhotep” (2011 in Tallinn University Press) with profound commentaries and introduction – Stadnikov (2011); For further information on wisdom literature see also Assmann (2005); Kämmerer (1998).

monograph that contains profound philological and historical analysis of the epic. This research deals with a very famous Babylonian literary masterpiece – the epic *LBN* that belongs to the category of wisdom literature.⁵

This new cuneiform edition of *LBN* consists of *Acknowledgments, Introduction, Manuscripts, Abbreviations, Bibliography, Cuneiform (Tablets I-IV), Transliteration of Tablets I-IV, Translation of Tablets I-IV, Glossary and Indices*. Its introduction is very profound. The authors tackle several questions, including an analysis of previous research of the text *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* – “*I will praise the Lord of wisdom*” (Annus and Lenzi 2010: x). In the 1960s a very famous English Assyriologist, Wilfred G. Lambert (1926–2011), published Babylonian *Wisdom Literature (BWL)* that was reprinted almost 40 years later in 1996⁶ and which, amongst other literary texts, also contains a transliteration and translation of *LBN* and other Babylonian wisdom literary texts.

The appearance of a new critical edition of *LBN*, published by Annus and Lenzi 2010, is very important because the last critical edition by W.G. Lambert in *BWL* came out in 1960 and is already more than 50 years old – although of course new fragments of it were published during this time.

Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi remark:

“Though no new critical edition has appeared since 1960, several new tablet discoveries have led to the publication of notes, articles, partial editions, and/or tablet copies that have increased our knowledge of the text of the poem, in some cases quite substantially. Most of these, including Leichty 1977 (our MS hh), Wiseman 1980 (MS ff), George and Al-Rawi 1998 (MS gg), Gesche 2000, 246-248 (MS oo), and Horowitz and Lambert 2002 (MS ww), have affected our knowledge of Tablet I. The few exceptions are Gesche 2000, 558-559 (a copy and edition of an extract from Tablet III; our MS ss), Gesche 2000, 614 (a copy of an extract from Tablet IV; MS tt), and OECT 11 48 (a copy of a few lines from a fragment of Tablet IV; MS vv).” (Annus and Lenzi 2010: x)

⁵ *Wisdom literature* in German is designated as *Weisheitsliteratur*.

⁶ Lambert (1960). For more on wisdom literature in Mesopotamia see also Perdue (2007); Schmid (1966).

I have read this new edition of *LBN* and have not found any mistakes or inaccuracies. The translation seems to be done very well, I would even say scrupulously well. This edition has a detailed introduction and, in addition, the reader can learn about how the poem was analyzed and find explanations of historical, literary and linguistic aspects and other features such as vocabulary, voice, philological, lexical and other parallelisms, religious and ideological phenomena and questions arising from *LBN*. The monograph also concentrates on the detailed analysis of cuneiform texts – especially cuneiform signs. The authors also dealt with questions surrounding manuscripts that they researched, analyzed, transliterated and translated. There are over 50 fragments and tablets from very different places (e.g., Nineveh, Nippur, Ashur, Sippar, Sultantepe, Babylon, Kish), uncertain origin and some yet unpublished tablets too. The *Glossary and Indices* section comprises a list of *Logograms and Their Readings* – Sumerograms with Akkadian readings (Annus and Lenzi 2010: 45). The *Glossary* (Annus and Lenzi 2010: 47–57) contains Akkadian words used in the poem and each word has an accompanying English translation and explanation of the different grammatical forms that appear within the text of *LBN*. To facilitate referencing in this edition, the reader is provided with an index of all places in the text where a specific word is used. In addition to that one can see in which grammatical form it is used.

One excellent feature of this edition is the list of cuneiform signs in the *Sign List* section (Annus and Lenzi 2010: 61–68) which, although actually only containing those Akkadian cuneiform signs that appear in this epic, is a very helpful addition for those researching this poem.

So, in summary, it was extremely necessary, very important and useful to carry out a new critical analysis of the poem *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* completed with copies of the tablets (including all known tablets and fragments of text old and new), transliterations and translations of the text and a reconstruction of this wonderful poem in praise of the principal Babylonian god Marduk.

Let us hope that new editions of other important poems, e.g., the famous Babylonian myth of creation *Atra-hasis*, will also be published in the future by scholars with such a solid grasp of transcription, transliteration, translation and analysis.

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