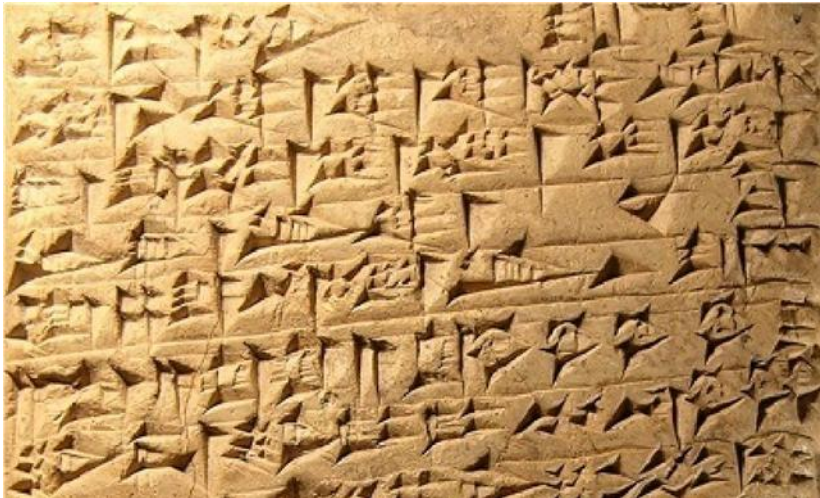


Princess Wife sequel transliteration

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(Hint: press the CTRL key when clicking on a link to make it display in a separate tab.)

Transliteration of cuneiform tablet MS 3228 in the Schøyen Collection



The story of **The Princess Wife**, the sequel

by: Jerald Jack Starr

Abbreviations:

PW1: The original story of the Princess Wife (tablet BE 31,28)

PW2: The sequel to the Princess Wife (this tablet, MS. 3228)

PW3: The whole story of the Princess Wife (tablets Be 31,28 and MS. 3228 combined)

GFB: The story of The Great Fatted Bull (Tablet #36)

GFJ: The story of the Great Fatted Jackass (fragmentary tablet SEM 114)

Trick signs:

All of the tablets listed above are political satires that ridicule lords and kings. This was a dangerous thing to do in the ancient world, so the scribes used “trick signs” to disguise the meaning of the texts, making it difficult (but not impossible) to read the tablets (see [Sumerian Trick Signs](#) on this website).

MS. 3228 uses many of the same trick signs:

MahX = AL = mah2 = mah = “great.” MahX appears on line o10 and possibly on the fragmentary line r15.

GemeX = “a female worker, servant, or slave.” Lines o3 and o13.

HenburX = “henbur/grain-his.” Line r8.

DamX:

Each of the tablets has a main trick sign. On Tablet #36 the main trick sign is mahX. On tablet BE 31,28, it is nu-nus. The scribe of MS. 3228 introduces a new trick sign: damX.



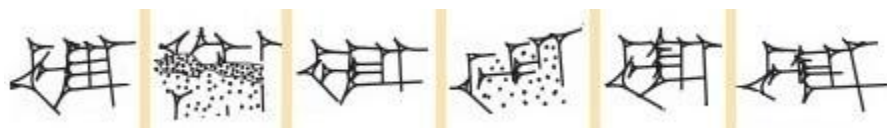
I was suspicious of this sign right from the get-go. It seemed the scribe was overusing it for some reason. Overworking a sign in this manner is usually a hint that it is a trick sign. The same was true for mahX and nu-nus.

Jana Matuszak has all six occurrences of this sign listed as u3. This is a logical conclusion because it looks a lot like u3 (kinda, sorta).

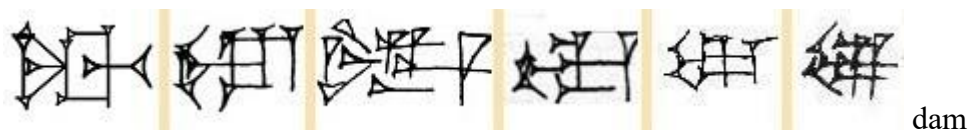


U3 = “and/but/also.” It most often means the word “and.” However, the scribes seldom used this sign. The word “and” usually had to be inferred by the reader. For example, in my English translation of Tablet #36, I used the word “and” thirteen different times, but it is not written once on the tablet. I thought it was highly unlikely that a scribe would use this sign six times on one small tablet (MS. 3228). U3 isn’t used six times on even the longest literary tablets.

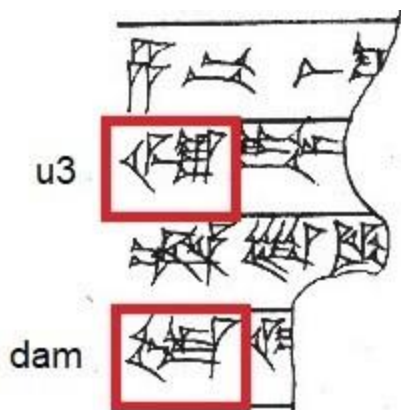
Notice that the “box” section of u3 is a perfect square. It was sometimes compressed (right) to save space on a line that is crowded with too many signs, but it was seldom elongated.



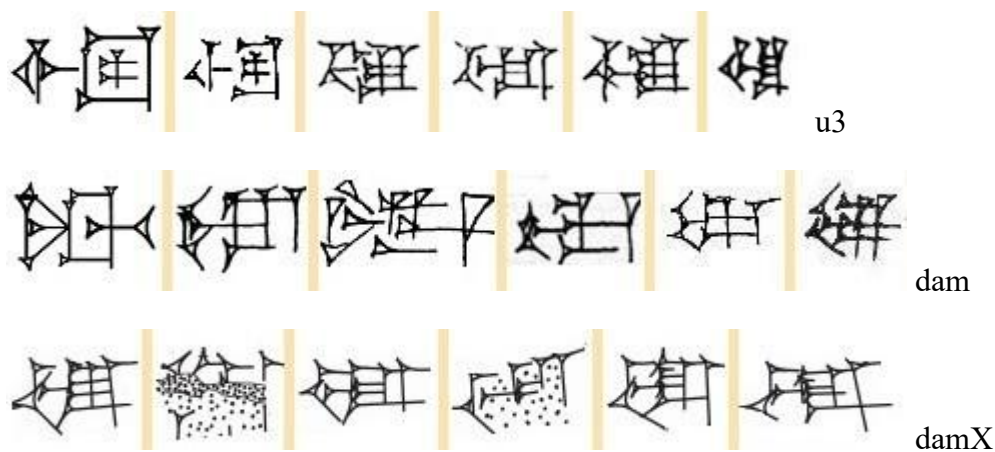
Except for the first example, all of these signs are written longer than normal and the interior horizontal lines go only through the left side of the box. This makes the signs look a lot like dam, “spouse.”



In the Old Babylonian version of dam, the reverse cuneus on the right is replaced with a vertical line to make the sign easier to write. This usually makes the sign seem longer than u3. It looks more rectangular than square.



The similarity of u3 and dam is shown on this fragment of a tablet (CDLI# 254301). Notice that dam is longer than u3.



On tablet MS. 3228, these signs look like a combination of u3 and dam. The sign is used both ways on the tablet. It means u3 in line o17 (“but”) and line r5 (“and”). In all the other occurrences it means dam, “spouse.” In line o17 it means “husband” and it means “wife” in lines o7, o11, and r17.

One of the reasons why I think PW1 was written by a woman is the use of the trick sign nu-nus (“woman/ not woman”). It seeMs. like the kind of trick sign that a female scribe would invent. See the page about [Nu-nus](#). The use of damX (“wife”) also seeMs. like the kind of trick sign that a woman would use.

Another scribal trick:

The scribe of MS. 3228 introduces another trick that isn’t seen on the other tablets: Sometimes the signs are written slightly out of order. Nothing major, not enough to make the sentences incomprehensible, but just enough to keep the reader off balance. This occurs in lines o17, r7, r13, and r17. In hindsight, it seems inevitable that some scribe would eventually think of this trick.

Scribal wordplay:

nu mu kalam (nu = no/not, mu = man, kalam = Land/land/people)

All of these satirical tablets include some clever wordplay, partly to obscure the meaning of the stories, and partly just for the fun of it. On this tablet, the scribe uses variations of the repeating phrase: *nu mu kalam*. It alternately means: "man with no land," "not a man of the Land (of Sumer), and "not a man of the people." It is *very* clever.

Many signs in a row:

All of the tablets use a string of the same sign repeated many times in a row. This makes the tablet hard to read and thus obscures the meaning of the text. It is used four times on this tablet, as explained below.

Transliteration:

See a copy of Jana Matuszak's line-drawing of tablet MS. 3228: [Obverse](#) and [Reverse](#).

See a [photograph](#) of tablet MS. 2228.

As usual, I offer a "simultaneous translation/transliteration" for the tablet. I show a picture of each sentence as it is written on the tablet. Below each sign is the Sumerian word (transliteration). Below the Sumerian word is the English word (translation). This format makes it easy to check my work.

See a copy of the **translation/transliteration** for tablet MS. 3228: [Obverse](#) and [Reverse](#). They will display in separate tabs. You may want to refer them when you read the Notes on the Transliteration (below).

I do not offer a sign list for this tablet because: 1) I have already demonstrated my ability to read Sumerian signs (see the sign lists for [Tablet #36](#) and [BE 31,28](#)). 2) The signs on MS. 3228 are not "compressed" so they are easy to recognize. And 3) I agree with most of Matuszak's reading of the signs (except where noted). Our transliterations differ mainly in the sign definitions.

You may also want to read the [Notes on the Translation](#).

= damaged but readable sign x = damaged unreadable sign [...] = missing sign

! = miswritten sign {...} = prefix or suffix (ES) = Emesal dialect

Notes on the Transliteration:

Obverse:

o6 This sentence is lacking a negation (nu) for "women." It should read, "Mulu has *no* women." That's because this sentence is a copy of line o16 from PW1, "... he is a man without power, *without women*, and without virtue." The problem is the scribe substituted the sign munus (woman) for nu-nus, forgetting that nunus is a trick sign that has a built-in negation (woman/no woman). Very interesting. See [Nu-nus](#) for an explanation of the sign.

o7 DamX: This sentence confirmed my suspicion that damX/u3 is a trick sign. In PW1,

line o17 is “Like a storm, Mulu flies to his father Bantu, the Supreme Lord.” Here on tablet MS. 3228, the scribe substituted damX for the word “father.” Thus, “Like a storm, Mulu flies to the wife of Bantu, the Supreme Lord.” Any definition of u3 (“and/but/also”) doesn’t fit into the sentence, whereas “wife” fits perfectly. This was a hint from the scribe that damX/u3 is a trick sign. The beauty of a good trick sign is there is always a hint to its true meaning. I had been looking for the sign for “wife” on this tablet (after all, this is the story of the Princess Wife) but I couldn’t find it until I read this sentence. Then damX occurred two more times as “wife” and then once as “husband.”

Dal/dirig: see line o17 in the [transliteration of The Princess Wife](#) (PW1).

o13 [Lack]: “My trusted maidservant has told me all about your *lack* of character.” Versions of this sentence appear on PW1 line r2 and GFJ line r5. The last signs on both PW1 and PW2 is damaged, but the corresponding line on GFJ shows lal at the end of the line, meaning “a *lack* of character.”

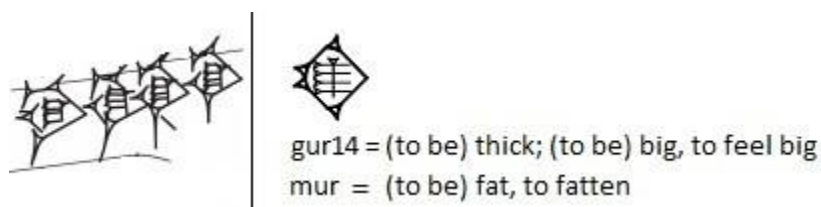
o17 [Suitable]: The signs are damaged and unreadable in the middle of the line so I inserted the generic word “suitable,” i.e., “She decides he would make a *suitable* lord and husband.”

o18 Zuh/saĝ: This is explained in line r6 of the [transliteration for The Princess Wife](#) (PW1).

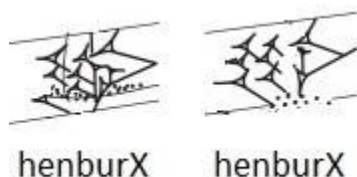
Reverse:

◁◁◁ = ◁◁ man = companion ◁ umun (ES, en) = lord

r5 The scribes of these satirical tablets love putting three or four of the same signs in a row and giving them different definitions. It occurs 4 times on this tablet (lines r5, r6, r7, and r11). It occurs 3 times on GFB (lines o7, o8, and r15). It also occurs on PW1 (line r11). This makes the tablets difficult to read and it helps to disguise the meaning of the tablets. The writing looks wild on the page. Visually, it looks out of control; it looks like “gibberish,” which discourages a serious attempt to translate it.



r7 The possibilities are endless for these four signs in a row, so I opted for a generic translation: “He quickly became a very *very* fat man,” although this clearly does not do justice to the obvious hyperbole of the sentence.



r8 The scribe uses both versions of henburX in this sentence. Left: henburX = “grain-his.”

Right: henburX (with only one vertical line) = henbur grain.

r11 Urta (barley). Technically, urta is just a single stalk of barley, not a large quantity. In this way, the scribe mentions the plundered barley without being too obvious about it, since urta (IB) has a variety of other meanings. Urta is also mentioned in line o12.

Gi4-in (ES, geme2, "female servant or slave"): I translated it as "Zuzu's land and his barley are turned over to his slave women." It could just as easily translate as "Zuzu's land and his barley are turned over to her servant girl," i.e., the trusted servant girl of the princess wife.

r12 La-ba ("no/not") di ("decide"). Clearly, the princess wife *is* deciding Zuzu's destiny, so I translated it as "decide *against*."



A A?

r16 The sign on the right looks like a šešig version of the sign A on the left, meaning it has additional markings (Winkelhakens). However, there is no such thing as a šešig version of A. I believe the sign merely has some accidental markings.

Sur5: The definition for sur5 is "a harness team (of draft animals or workers); member of a team, team-worker." This opens the possibility that Zuzu is in a harness. This makes sense because he is a donkey. However, I did not choose this interpretation because it is an awkward fit with the next sentence where he is measuring the fields, sowing grain, etc., where wearing a harness is not required. Sur5 also opens the possibility that Mulu is the other half of the harnessed team, but I did not choose this interpretation because Mulu was strangled to death early in the story. After that, he is never heard from again.

In conclusion:

I have often said that the scribes who wrote the stories of The Great Fatted Bull and The Princess Wife were literary geniuses. You don't believe me? Write something better. See [A Masterpiece](#).

Once you understand the tablets at the sign level, you can appreciate the fact that the scribes are literary geniuses, not just for the quality of the stories they tell, but also for their sophisticated use of the language. No modern writer is their equal. I should know this because I was a Lit major in college.

I have also said that I believe that the scribe who wrote The Princess Wife (parts 1 and 2) was a woman. Was it the same woman? Or two? Did they know each other? Were they collaborators?

In any case, there has never been a better woman writer in all of Women's Literature.

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