

The Dogs of Ninkilim: Magic against Field Pests in Ancient Mesopotamia

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Wherever man tills the land and grows crops he finds himself host at a party full of uninvited guests. Chief among such unwanted guests in ancient Mesopotamia were the various kinds of locusts and grasshoppers that still afflict modern farmers in the region. A glance at the entry *erbu* in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* reveals something of the nature of the problem. Thus, at Mari, one finds reports of the arrival of locusts in various localities, and of enduring failure to bring in the harvest because of the activities of this pest.¹ The recently published correspondence of Zakira-Ḥammû, a governor of Qaṭṭunān in the reign of Zimrī-Lim, offers even more detailed accounts of invasions of locusts in the Habur basin, the measures used against them, and the fleeing of the peasantry in the face of the deprivations wrought by them.² Measures taken to counteract locusts are also described in Neo-Assyrian letters.³ As well as being driven off or killed by crushing with sticks and stamping with feet, locusts were also collected in jars. Why collected? Because it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The arrival of locusts was an event that brought not only devastation to crops, but also a source of human food. When they are roasted or otherwise cooked, locusts are good to eat, and locust eating and locust eaters are adequately documented in cuneiform sources.⁴

The invasion of swarms of locusts (*tibûṭ erbī*) is a cliché in omen apodemes, as is the resulting loss of harvest (*ikilti erbī, ebūr māti erbū ikkalū*). In Assyrian royal inscriptions the image of a swarm of locusts becomes a figure which denotes the concepts of both numerousness and devastation. Curse formulæ in Sargonid treaties and other inscriptions, for example the Cruciform Inscription of Man-ištūšu, invoke plagues of locust to consume the crops of the wrongdoer,⁵ while Sargon II's hymn to

¹ *ARM* II 107, 22–26: *erbum*(buru5) and *buru5.ša-an-ša-ar* (letter of Yaqqim-Addu; see further J.-M. Durand, *ARMT* XXI, p. 98²; D. Bonnetterre, *NABU* 1988/56); *ARM* III 62, 8–10: *erbum* (Kibrī-Dagān); and, most dramatically, C.-F. Jean, *RA* 42 (1948), p. 71, 5: *iš-tu šalaš šanātim*(mu.3.kam) *i-na qa-at er-bi-im ḥa-al-ši e-bu-ra-am ú-ul i-pu-úš-ma*, “as a consequence of locusts my district has not brought in a harvest for three years” (Zakura-abu).

² M. Birot, *Correspondance des gouverneurs de Qaṭṭunān* (*ARM* XXVII; Paris: ADFP, 1993), nos. 26–35, 38: *erbum* and *šaršar*; see also *ibid.*, pp. 10 f.

³ S. Parpola, *SAA* I 103–04, 221. Part of the process is described with the verb *šubalkutu*; in his edition of *SAA* I 103 Parpola translates this verb as “knock out”, but *CAD* N/1 places the passage under the entry “to make cross over”. See further below. ⁴ References collected in *CAD* E, p. 257, under the heading “b) used as food”.

⁵ S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *SAA* II 2, vi 1 (Aššur-nārārī V; restored); 6, 442–43 (Esarhaddon); Cruciform Inscription of Man-ištūšu 380, as restored by the copy from the Sippar library: A. R. George and F. N. H. Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 56 (1994), p. 146 and note on p. 148.

the goddess Nanāy invites her to protect the king from such troubles.⁶ Both curse formulæ and omens also mention other field pests. Thus, in the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, the transgressor is threatened with a whole series of pests: “may (the gods) cause the locust, ‘spotty bug(?)’ (*zēru barmu*), weevil (*kalmutu*), caterpillar (*mūnu*) and ‘eater’-pest (*ākilu*) to devour your cities, land and provinces.”⁷ In astrological omens there are apodoses which run “there will be caterpillar and ‘eater’-pest in the land,” and “there will be an outbreak of caterpillars, [they will eat] the harvest.”⁸ But mention of these other pests is much less common than the mention of locusts. I suspect this is for two reasons: first, because many pests were a constant presence in the lives of farmers, and so were viewed as less hostile and alien than locusts, and second, because the deprivations of such pests were less serious than locusts. Regular, small losses are usual, predictable and, in the main, sustainable. The destruction wrought by locusts is irregular, unpredictable, and, in places, total.

The activities and uses of locusts are subjects which would certainly bear deeper study, especially in comparison with what is known about the subject from records of the more recent history of Mesopotamia. But the aim of the present paper is to examine the response of the ancients to these and other pests.

The earliest evidence for ritual activity against locusts and other field pests comes from the Old Babylonian period, though it may well be older. In the Sumerian text that we call the Farmer’s Instructions, when the seed sprouts and shoots appear in the furrow, the farmer is instructed to make an offering to the god Ninkilim and thus to avert losses by what is called Locust Tooth:

u₄ ḥ é n b u r . e k i i m . m a . a b . d a r . r a . t a
 s í s k u r ^d n i n . k i l i m . k e ₄ d u g ₄ . g a . a b
 z ú . b i r ₅ ^{mu š e n} . r a b a l . e . e b

Farmer’s Instructions 64–66⁹

When seedlings break through the earth,
 conduct the ritual offering of Ninkilim,
 make the Locust Tooth move on (lit. cross over).

What rituals and prayers may have accompanied this offering are not mentioned. The term Locust Tooth, in Sumerian *zú.bi r₅ mušen .ra* or *zú.bur u₅ mušen .r a*, needs explanation. The bilingual version of the Farmer’s Instructions translates it simply as *ši-in-ni er-bi*, “the tooth (*or* teeth) of the locust (*or* locusts)”, but this may be no more than a mechanical rendering. In the Sumerian myth we call Inanna and Ebiḥ the speed of Inanna’s arrows is compared to the Locust Tooth (l. 75: *zú.bi r₅ mušen*) attacking fields, garden and forest, and here the image is most successful if the term does indeed refer to the instant devastation wrought by hungry locusts. However, in the

⁶ A. Livingstone, *SAA III 4*, rev. ii 24’–28’.

⁷ *SAA II 6*, 599–600.

⁸ *ACh Šamaš 2*, 30; *Suppl. 2 Šamaš 32*, 58; K 6227, 9 (*CAD M/2*, p. 207). Other apodoses mention the *samānu*-insect attacking barley (*CAD s.v.*).

⁹ M. Civil, *The Farmer’s Instructions. A Sumerian agricultural manual*. *Aula Orientalis Supplementa*, 5 (Sabadell: Editorial AUSA, 1994), p. 30.

epic known today as Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, when grain is delivered to the granaries of Aratta an extra quantity of grain is added for Locust Tooth.¹⁰ This must mean that part of the delivery was expected to be lost to vermin while in store, and these vermin would be weevils and mice, not locusts. A similar problem informs an Emesal song addressed to Utu, in which someone promises him that he will collect up (ri.ri), i.e. remove Locust Tooth (zú.bi r₅ muš^{en}.ra) from malted barley, grain barley and other comestibles that were no doubt also stored in bulk and subject to the depredations of a variety of pests.¹¹ On this evidence Locust Tooth seems to denote more than just attack by locust. It would appear in fact to be the common coinage for infestation by any field pest, though probably not by birds.¹² This would appear to be confirmed by the late series ka.i ni m.ma zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a, “Incantations ‘To Seize the Locust Tooth’”, which, as discussed below, is aimed at expelling all sorts of vermin from the fields, not just locusts, but which makes no mention of birds. The verb used in the Farmer’s Instructions to express the avoidance of Locust Tooth is ba l, which means “to cross over”. The *Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary* views this usage of ba l as obscure,¹³ but note that in the Neo-Assyrian letter cited earlier, one of the verbs that describes the treatment meted out to locusts is šubalkutu, which is of course the conventional Akkadian equivalence of Sumerian ba l. In the Farmer’s Instructions the meaning expected from the context is “avert”, and this is how the verb is translated by Civil. This meaning ultimately derives from the idea that the swarm should be made to “cross over” the field’s boundaries, that is, to move on to someone else’s territory. The point is that one cannot hope actually to destroy even a small fraction of these pests, especially locusts in a swarm. A farmer has to pray that they will leave the vicinity without attacking his crops in particular.

Other Old Babylonian evidence comes from the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. In VAS 24 J. van Dijk published a number of small fragments of three Old Babylonian *Sammeltafeln* from Babylon which collected various groups of incantations.¹⁴ The subscripts of two of these tablets record that the preceding text

¹⁰ ELA 329 and 356, with *PSD B*, p. 208.

¹¹ BM 23631, 63–65, partly cited in *PSD B*, p. 208 (š ìr.nam. š ub).

¹² Birds were naturally a source of damage to newly sown crops, seedlings and fruit, and it has been proposed that zú.bi r₅ muš^{en}.ra refers to birds, in ELA (so Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps that Once . . .* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 301 and 303), as well as in the Farmer’s Instructions (Civil translates the term in l. 66 as “the teeth of small birds/locusts”). Birds can be ruled out in ELA since they would not usually have access to the sealed storage bins of ancient granaries. In the Farmer’s Instructions the mention of Ninkilim is highly significant. The close identification of this deity with creeping and crawling things and other vermin is well established (see below), but to my knowledge he is nowhere associated with the activities of birds. His specific mention in the Farmer’s Instructions makes it likely that the term Locust Tooth there refers to damage inflicted not by birds, but only by the creatures of Ninkilim.

¹³ *PSD B*, p. 57, 5.3.

¹⁴ Nos. 45–48 and 50–52: see A. R. George, *BiOr* 46 (1989), 381.

included incantations against “eater”-pests (u ḫ .g u₇ . a).¹⁵ The remnants of text are very fragmentary indeed, but enough to show that these incantations are Sumerian. One rubric does survive: ka.inim.ma u ḫ .g u₇ ḡiṣḫ a š ḫ ur. ḡiṣḫ a š ḫ ur zi.zi.[...], “Incantations to expel fruit-worm.”¹⁶ As well as insects, various kinds of rodent appear in the text. Ninkilim is mentioned on more than one occasion, which confirms the association of this god with field pests that we have already met in the Farmer’s Instructions. Apart from this there is not much to be gleaned from these few scraps. Even less is known, at the moment, about the fragmentary text represented by two tablets from Tell Haddad reported by Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi in a recent issue of the journal *Iraq*. All I can do here is to quote their words: “Another text (H 103, with duplicate H 74), with about 100 lines, largely eludes comprehension. It seems to suggest a whole liturgy, apparently designed to free the fields from vermin, also a rarely attested genre, though it was probably very much used in everyday life.”¹⁷

A further Old Babylonian tablet, now at Yale, contains a little related material, and has been described by Nathan Wasserman in a paper contributed to this *Rencontre*. The first of the four incantations preserved is concerned with field pests, though in this case, as Wasserman noted, the culprits are mice. Ninkilim is repeatedly mentioned.¹⁸

There is much more documentary evidence for rituals against field pests in the first millennium, particularly from the libraries of Aššurbanipal. In the first of the five *nam.búr.bi* catalogues edited by Caplice in *Orientalia* 34 an incantation is listed under the rubric ka.inim.ma *mu-nu a-[ki-lu ...]*, “Incantation [(missing infinitive)] caterpillar and ‘eater’-pest”.¹⁹ In the opinion of Maul, who has edited these catalogues anew, the *nam.búr.bi* ritual designated by this rubric had as its primary goal not so much the expulsion of pests themselves as the elimination of some future ill that they portended.²⁰ However, one may observe that while some incantations in this catalogue were designed to undo portended evil, as one would expect of a *nam.búr.bi*, others were recited to keep away lions, wolves and robbers from a man’s property, and on these grounds it seems plausible that the incantation rubric ka.inim.ma *mu-nu a-[ki-lu ...]* designates a spell the aim of which was simply to keep field pests out of a man’s fields, date-groves and orchards. In addition, the preceding entry in the catalogue is the incantation *én iš-gu-um nēšu(ur.maḫ) kalab(ur.gi₇) ḡiš-tar*, “Incantation: ‘Roared the lion, hound of Ištar’.” The incipit of this incantation occurs on an unpublished Late Babylonian tablet among incantations and rituals against field pests.²¹ Moreover, the rubric that follows

¹⁵ VAS 24 45, rev. 14'; 46, rev. 7'.

¹⁶ VAS 24 45, rev. 9'.

¹⁷ A. Cavigneaux and F. Al-Rawi, *Iraq* 55 (1993), p. 94.

¹⁸ YOS XI 69, obv. 2.7.9, written ḡnin.g i₄.li.n (a).

¹⁹ R. Caplice, *Or NS* 34 (1965), p. 108, 7. One could of course also read *mu-nu eq[li(a.šà) ...]*, “caterpillars of the field”.

²⁰ S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1994), pp. 196–203, especially p. 197³⁴⁹.

²¹ BM 45686+55561, i 30.

it in the *nam.búr.bi* catalogue should now be restored to read *ka.inim.ma zú. ʾbur u₅ ʾ [dab.bé.d a]*.²² In the first millennium this is the generic description for magic against field pests, from which an entire series of rituals and incantations took its name. It is this series which I will discuss in the remainder of this paper.

In a later volume of *Orientalia*, under the heading “Field and Garden”, Caplice collected three fragments of what he considered to be apotropaic rituals of the *nam.búr.bi* type.²³ Two of these have now been joined to other fragments from Aššurbanipal’s libraries, with the result that it has become clear that they are not *nam.búr.bi*’s at all, but pieces of an incantation series which went under the heading *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a*. The series was already known from the catalogue of Babylonian exorcistic literature (*āšipūtu*) excavated at Aššur.²⁴

Before describing the series it is necessary to justify the reading *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a*. First, one might think that this title should be read *ka.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a*, “To Seize the Locust Mouth,” but the evidence of the bilingual Farmer’s Instructions, where *zú.bi r₅ .ra* is translated *šinni erbi*, makes it almost certain that the first sign is to be understood as “tooth”, not “mouth”. Second, one might read *zú.bur u₅ dib.bé.d a*, “To Make the Locust Tooth Pass by”, but a standard line of the text enjoins various gods to “seize [the pests’] teeth, seize their tongues, seize their weapons!”²⁵ and it is clear that the idiom *zú dab* means to prevent from eating.²⁶ So the title of the series is “To Seize the Locust Tooth”.

It turns out that three pieces of this series had already been published when Caplice published his fragments: two long ago, by Sayce and MacMillan respectively, and a third by O. R. Gurney in the second volume of tablets from Sultantepe.²⁷ Two more fragments identified among the copies of F. W. Geers had also been recognised by Borger as parallels to the tablets of Sayce and MacMillan,²⁸ while Reiner has since called attention to several more in her review of the Sultantepe volume.²⁹ Neither quoted more than a few lines of each. Since Caplice’s editions another two pieces have been published, one by O. Loretz and W. R. Mayer and the other in R. C. Thompson’s copy in *CT* 51.³⁰ The further reconstruction of the series has been made possible by W. G. Lambert, who passed on to me the numbers of those tablets which he knew belonged to it or were similar in content; and the work was given early

²² K 2389+10664, obv. 6; coll., against Caplice: *la ik-* [(so also *CAD* Š/1, p. 64), and Maul: *KA' I[K'?*

²³ Caplice, *Or NS* 40 (1971), pp. 155–56: K 6888, K 5897 and Sm 730.

²⁴ *KAR* 44, obv. 22: *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a*. A new edition of this text by M. J. Geller is forthcoming.

²⁵ The verb used is *šabat*, the conventional Akkadian equivalence of *da b*.

²⁶ Cf. *šabātu* in the sense “to paralyse”.

²⁷ K 2596: A. H. Sayce, *PSBA* 37 (1915), pp. 195 ff.; K 5315: K. D. MacMillan, *BA* V/5, p. 673, no. 29; S.U. 52/214: *STT* 243.

²⁸ K 8072 and 9210: R. Borger, *Or NS* 26 (1957), pp. 3 f.

²⁹ K 3270, 5897, 8072 and 6888: E. Reiner, *JNES* 26 (1967), pp. 189 f.

³⁰ Sm 1250: Loretz and Mayer, *Šu-ila*, no. 72; BM 123370 = Th 1932-12-10, 313: *CT* 51 201.

impetus by the efforts of a former student in London, Ulrike Mundorff, who copied a number of these pieces in 1987.³¹

The places of many fragments in the series is still problematic, but an outline of at least part of its structure can be obtained by two methods. First, the tablet from Sultantepe appears to be a digest of the series, and though it is small, and only the bottom third is preserved, it presents important evidence for the order of the incantations. Second, where fragments are clearly parts of a single multi-column tablet, as many are, careful examination of the physical characteristics of the fragments can determine their position in the tablet, and thus the place in the sequence of the text they contain.

The sequence of rituals and incantations in the Sultantepe tablet is as follows: what remains of the text opens with a fragmentary ritual, part of which is to burn parts of the field in question. This is interesting in itself, for smoking locusts out by controlled burning is a traditional weapon still used in the Sahel. The ritual concludes with the setting up of a censer of juniper and the libation of beer. Following the recitation of the preceding incantation or incantations, now lost, the exorcist goes away without looking back. The next section of text gives one-line incantation prayers to various gods, the function of which, according to the rubric, is to drive off field pests.³² The gods listed, insofar as they survive, are: a shepherd of Bēl-mātāti (i.e., Enlil) whose name is not yet fully recovered, Marduk, Ninurta, Adad, South Wind, North Wind, East Wind and West Wind.³³ The ritual that accompanies these prayers begins with the presentation of a food offering to the gods, symbolized by the setting up of “seven and seven” altars of barley flour. Then seven wax figures of locusts are made and burned in fire. The incantations are recited and the remnants of the figurines are buried at the top of the field. The instructions for this ritual use the second person for the burning and the third person for the burying, which means that the work is shared between the exorcist and the farmer who engaged him. The man of magic makes the wax figurines and intones his spells as they burn, while the farmer disposes of the mess in a ritual interment. Another incantation follows, together with the ritual that goes with it. In the ritual a dais (*parakku*) is set up for the god Ninkilim in the middle of the field. Flour-cakes are then presented, along with dates and the sticky confection known as *mersu*. Although at this point the Sultantepe tablet breaks off, it is already clear that this activity is reminiscent of the Sumerian Farmer’s Instructions, which, as we have seen, called for the presentation of an offering to Ninkilim as soon as the crop sprouts. The accompanying incantation is, according to its rubric, specifically to get rid of caterpillars: “Incantation formula to expel

³¹ Other fragments have since been brought to my attention by Werner R. Mayer and M. Stol, to whom all thanks.

³² *STT* 243, rev. 1–2: ka.inim.ma ʿerba(buru₅) mu-na a-ki-la muʿ-bat-ʿti-ra ʃa-ʃi-raʿ sa-ma-n[u] kal-mat eqli(a.šà) ina libbi(šà) eqli(a.šà) ʃu-li-i, “Incantation formula to expel locust, caterpillar, ‘eater’-pest, *mubattiru*-bug, cricket, red-bug and field-weevil from a field.”

³³ Cf. already W. G. Lambert, *RHR* 207 (1990), p. 126.

caterpillars in a field”,³⁴ and is addressed, of course, to Ninkilim. The first two lines are in Sumerian (incipit: *én tu.tu an.na ħur.sag.gá.k e₄*), but the remainder is in Akkadian and reads: “O great dogs of Ninkilim, you have received your fodder, now go away!”³⁵ The magic of the ritual appears to rely on giving a symbolic food-offering to the deity who controls the field pests so that their appetites will be satisfied and they will depart. It then looks very much as if the “dogs of Ninkilim” are the pests themselves.

This brings us to the imagery of the “dogs of Ninkilim” and the rôle of this deity. First of all, who is Ninkilim? The evidence relating to this deity has most recently been collected by Manfred Krebernik in an excursus of his book on early incantations.³⁶ The name, which is not a genitive compound, can be read Ninkilim, Ningilin or Ninkil, perhaps even Ninki or Ningi. He shares an orthography with the ordinary Sumerian word for “mongoose” (Akk. *šikkû*),³⁷ and, for me at any rate, there is no reason why Ninkilim should not be the deified mongoose, just as, for example, the god Indagar was the deified breed-bull.³⁸ The association of Ninkilim with a wider variety of animals is attested in his epithet *en a.za.lu.lu*, “lord of teeming creatures”, which is paraphrased in Akkadian as *be-el nam-maš-ti*, “lord of the wild beasts”.³⁹ This epithet seems to be substantiated by the lexical entries *ki-lim, gi-li-impÉŠ = nam-maš-tu* and *gi-li-li, ge-epÉŠ = nam-maš-šu-u* in *Ea* I 199–202.⁴⁰ Since, in the Sumerian Flood Story, *níg.gilim* refers again to the teeming creatures of the earth,⁴¹ this is an old equivalence and presents us with an alternative meaning of the name, “Lord Creature”. The line of *Šurpu* which uses the epithet *en a.za.lu.lu* may make a more arcane interpretation of Ninkilim when it gives him control over the *níg.ki ki.a = zer-man-di qaq-qa-ri*, “the creatures of the earth”. Krebernik saw the use here of *níg.ki* as a word-play on an abbreviated form of the god’s name, Ninki.⁴² Outside the texts already mentioned, Ninkilim’s control of,

³⁴ *STT* 243, rev. 10: *ka.inim.ma mu-na ša eqli(a.šà) šu-li-i*.

³⁵ *STT* 243, rev. 8–9: *kalbū(ur.gi₇)^{meš} rabātu(gal)^{meš} šá^dnin-kilim / qe-e-sat-ku-nu maḥ-ra-tu-nu at-la-a* (coll.); unpublished parallels read *ki-is-sat-ku-nu*.

³⁶ Krebernik, *Beschwörungen*, pp. 287–97.

³⁷ For ^dnin.kili m, “mongoose”, see Landsberger, *Fauna*, pp. 110 ff.; Heimpel, *Tierbilder*, pp. 370 ff. A shorter form of this word is /nikka/, which is known from a variant gloss in *Ea* I 198: *ka-a or ni-ka*ka₆(PÉŠ) = *ši-ik-ku-ú* (*MSL* XIV, p. 186; *CAD* Š/2, p. 433). It is this form, through a posited /šikka/ in Emesal, that lies behind the Akkadian word, and presumably also behind the short forms of the divine name.

³⁸ J. van Dijk already proposes that Ninkilim is “a deified rodent, i.e., the rat, the mouse” (*YOS* XI, p. 45). On Indagar, the husband of Kusu, see A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (OLA 40; Leuven: Peeters, 1992), p. 292; W. R. Mayer, *Or NS* 61 (1992), pp. 42 ff.

³⁹ *Šurpu* VII 69–70; in unpublished fragments from the series *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d* a the epithet is also paraphrased as *bēl bu-lim* and *bēl šik-n[a-at napišti]*.

⁴⁰ *MSL* XIV, p. 187.

⁴¹ Line 49: *níg.gilim ki.ta ki.ta mu.lu.lu*, “everywhere was teeming with animal life”. Cf. M. Civil, in Lambert and Millard, *Atra-ḥasīs*, p. 169.

⁴² Note also ^dnin.kilim *níg.ki.a.ni* in *VAS* 24 51, rev. ii 10' (van Dijk, *ibid.*, p. 11).

specifically, vermin is also found in a collection of apotropaic incantations in which the destruction wrought by garden pests is termed *níg.gilim* ^dnin.kilim.m [a¹ (LA). k] e₄ = *šaḥ-lu-uq-tu₄* ^dni-ke-el-li, “the losses caused by Ninkilim”.⁴³

The Dogs of Ninkilim are much more in evidence in the fuller form of the series *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a*. Using the version from Sultantepe as a guide to the order of the prayers to the various gods, it is possible to see that we have lost all the first Tablet of the series except for the last few lines of an incantation prayer to Marduk. Tablet II begins with a prayer to Ninurta and continues with Adad and the four winds. The content of these prayers is very standard. The divine addressee is eulogized with conventional epithets, asked to accept a food-offering, begged to show kindness to the field in which the exorcist is evidently standing, and encouraged to get rid of the Dogs of Ninkilim. The pests are enumerated in different places in these prayers in slightly different sequences. The standard list of pests known as the Dogs of Ninkilim comprises the locust (*erbu*, *eribu* or *aribu*), ‘eater’-pest (*ākilu*), caterpillar (*mūnu*) and some other kind of grub (*mubattiru*). Other pests mentioned are the locust larva (*zēr erbi*), granary mouse (*arrabu*) and mouse (*ḥumširu*, *ḥamašširu*). The verb used here is *šūlū*, “to expel, drive out”. The second Tablet ends with fuller forms of the same rituals and short incantations that close the Sultantepe fragment. One of these short incantations is spoken by the farmer and the exorcist in turn, which shows again that the farmer was not excluded from some of the magic practices conducted on his land.

Further fragments probably represents the continuation of the series, and may thus be parts of a Tablet III. They contain an incantation prayer to the goddess Kusu and the accompanying ritual, a prayer to Nergal, another to the Igigi gods, and a different prayer spoken by the farmer himself to a plurality of gods, perhaps the Anunnaki. The end of the series is preserved on a large fragment which may represent Tablet IV. It includes a prayer to Ereškigal, further rituals, an elaborate colophon which associates the series with a man who revels in the glorious name Papsukkal-ša-iqbû-ul-īni. This name is entered in the bilingual list of scholars and sages which was edited by W. G. Lambert in his article on “Ancestors, Authors and Canonicity”,⁴⁴ and the man who bore it, like others in the list, probably lived in the Kassite period. The colophon is followed by a list of ritual ingredients, evidently a kind of check list of the items needed for the rituals. A fragmentary catch-line indicates that the series *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.da* was followed by incantations against field-mice and granary mice.

Two questions remain to be examined. The association of vermin with Ninkilim, a god of wildlife, is understandable, but why are the pests depicted specifically as

⁴³ *STT* 219, ii 6'–7'. Krebernik avoids the emendation by implicitly reading *níg.gil* ^dnin.ki l_x.l [a. k] e₄ (*Beschwörungen*, p. 293). Word-play on the noun *níg.gilim* and ^dnin.kilim is also found in the Yale incantation against rodents, where *pé š .níg.gilim.ma.ga r*, “the mouse that causes losses”, “mouse appointed by Ninkilim”, is one of the animals listed (*YOS* XI 69, obv. 5).

⁴⁴ W. G. Lambert, *JCS* 11 (1957), p. 13, 51: ^{md}nin. š ubur - du g₄ - nu.bal.bal = ^{md}pap-sukkal-ša-iq-bu-ul-i-ni.

“dogs”? The answer to this question lies in the place of dogs in the Near East, ancient and modern, which is rather different from the pampered position they occupy in modern, western society. In ancient Mesopotamia it is probable that most dogs were strays, roaming in packs and scavenging in the rubbish tips. As parasites they were a nuisance and as animals that could bite painfully, if not fatally, they were shunned. Locusts, the most feared of all field pests, also roamed in packs, and they brought a voracious appetite to their feeding. It was this appetite, symbolized by their “teeth”, that the series *zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.da* sought to counteract. One is reminded of the description of a locust attack by the prophet Joel: “A nation is come upon my land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the jaw teeth of a great lion.”⁴⁵ Locusts, then, like dogs, were parasites with teeth. In the Old Babylonian incantation from Yale similar imagery is attached to another field pest well known for its appetite:

ka.gal zú.kar.kar ^dnin.ì.si.na.kam
 zú níg.g u₇.g u₇ ^dnin.g i₄.lí.na.kam
 pe š.gi š.gi níg.zú.ur

YOS XI 69, 1–3

Great mouth with rapacious teeth, like that of Ninisinna!
 Teeth that eat and eat, like those of Ninkilim!
 Field mouse, that has a dog’s teeth!

Here the canine imagery is clear, not only in line 3 but also in line 1: Ninisinna is Gula, the goddess of dogs.⁴⁶

The second question concerns the significance of the deities addressed. To recapitulate, we have noted incantation prayers addressed to Enlil’s shepherd, to Marduk, Ninurta, Adad, the four winds, Kusu, Nergal, the Igigi, probably the Anunnaki, and Ereškigal. Though fragmentary, the prayers are fairly standard, but there is some distinction to be observed between prayers to the gods and prayers to the winds in the methods of disposal of the pests. The gods are asked to hand the Dogs of Ninkilim over to their master, “the lord of the animals”, with the request that he take them away. The winds, on the other hand, are entreated to lead the Dogs of Ninkilim to the “latch of heaven” (*ḥanduḥ šamē*), where the heat of the sun will roast them. The gods named are appropriate, in one way or another. Marduk and Kusu are exorcists, and Enlil’s shepherd, Marduk and Ninurta are gods with expertise in herding and agriculture, i.e., divine farmers. The Igigi and the Anunnaki represent the totality of the gods, always good to have on one’s side. As rulers of the Netherworld Nergal and Ereškigal might be expected to accommodate the unwanted pests in their realm, from which, naturally, there would be no return. Adad is the divine irrigator and also the storm god, and the four winds are to be associated with him. Their job is to blow the pests away. The rôle of wind in the patterns of migration of locusts is well

⁴⁵ Joel 1: 6, RV.

⁴⁶ On this subject see the discussion of A. Livingstone, “The Isin ‘Dog House’ Revisited”, *JCS* 40 (1988), pp. 54–60, especially pp. 58 f.

known. In the most recent serious plague of locusts in north Africa, which began in 1986, the crisis was brought to a swift end by wind. To quote a recent book: “The way the plague collapsed was equally remarkable. Towards the end of 1988 large numbers of swarms, apparently heading for Morocco, were carried by unusual wind patterns out over the Atlantic Ocean. Most died, and those that reached the Caribbean—a remarkable feat with no recorded precedent—failed to breed.”⁴⁷ I am sure that any Babylonian farmer would have been grateful if he knew that the winds of Adad could blow his locusts such long distances, and would have been highly satisfied with the evident efficacy of the incantation prayers and rituals of zú.bur u₅ dab.bé.d a, “To Seize the Locust Tooth”.

⁴⁷ *Grasshoppers and Locusts. The Plague of the Sahel*. Panos Dossier (London, Paris and Washington: The Panos Institute, 1993), pp. 5 f.