

Towards a Formal Typology of Akkadian Similes

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In his 1968 presidential address to the American Oriental Society in San Francisco, Samuel N. Kramer presented a well reasoned catalog of the sources of poetic imagery found in Sumerian literature:¹ in so doing he had chosen a topic not only close to his personal interests, but also programmatic for our field of studies, which has not otherwise paid as much attention as is desirable to literary analysis. In choosing now a topic for a paper to be offered in recognition of Kramer's scholarly contributions, it seemed fitting to walk, as it were, in his footsteps, as tangible evidence that his words stressing the importance of literature and the usefulness of literary analysis have not gone unheeded. I will not presume, however, to offer a counterpart for Akkadian of what he gave us for Sumerian literature. Rather than aiming for an exhaustive review of even a restricted corpus of literary texts, I will use a more eclectic approach: the documentary basis will be limited to a few examples which seem particularly meaningful, while methodologically the study will only try to identify some of the formal patterns which are found in Akkadian similes, without attempting to suggest a complete hierarchy in terms of importance, or lines of influence in terms of chronological development. My primary goal, then, is to point out the presence of varying degrees of complexity in the structure of Akkadian similes, and to suggest some formal devices for describing them.²

The major work on Akkadian similes, Schott's 1926 monograph, contains an interesting introductory chapter on the formal aspect of similes,³ even though the major thrust of the book is admittedly on lexical matters. The author uses a system of symbols which, I propose, may be broken down into two sets. One set refers to the structural elements of a simile, namely V = "Vorlage" for what is called in English the principal subject or tenor (e.g. Hammurapi in

(1) *Ḫammurapi kīma abim*

"Ḫammurapi is like a father");

B = "Bild" for the secondary subject or vehicle (*kīma abim* "like a father" in the preceding example); the symbol ~ to express the relationship between the preceding two; and other such symbols. The second set is used for the syntactical constituents of a sentence, such as S for subject and P for predicate. The two sets are usually combined in his notations, so that (1) would be represented as (SḪ) ~ (PḪ). Useful extensions of this system are possible and are in fact used by Schott; thus a deletion transformation as in

¹ S.N. Kramer, "Sumerian Similes: A Panoramic View of Some of Man's Oldest Literary Images," JAOS 89 (1969), 1-10. In the same year as Kramer's address there also appeared the volume by W. Heimpel, *Tierbilder in der sumerischen Literatur* (Studia Pohl 2, Rome, 1968).

² Part of the material presented here takes into account the research done by my student Michael I. Zweibel at UCLA in 1971. This applies especially to the exemplification in sections 2 and 3 and to the manner of formalization chosen. The content of sections 6 was first presented orally at a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Pacific Coast Section, held in Santa Barbara in the Spring 1970. For comments on this section I am indebted to Dr. Hans-Winfried Jüngling of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.

³ A. Schott, *Die Vergleiche in den akkadischen Königsinschriften* (MVAG 30/2), pp. 3-8.

(2) *kīma issūrim ipparšid*

“he fled like a bird [flees]”

is represented symbolically by placing the common predicate, which appears only once in the surface structure, under both elements of the simile conjoined in turn by a horizontal line, as with a fraction: $\frac{SV \sim SB}{P}$. Such scheme may be read as: the grammatical subject (S) of both the principal subject (V for “Vorlage”) and the secondary subject (B for “Bild”) is expressed by two separate items, whereas the predicate (P) is expressed only once and is common to both principal and secondary subject.

Another important aspect of Schott’s work is that in his attempt to provide a formalized overview of devices used in Akkadian similes he came to point out patterns which are in fact missing from the Akkadian inventory: in a contrastive sense this can be very meaningful, because it helps to clarify the nature of the patterns which are attested. Schott’s remarks in this respect are only incidental: he simply notes that a given pattern, which might seem likely to occur because of its similarity with other patterns or for other reasons, is instead missing. Yet his observations pave the way for interesting developments which will be introduced below.

Schott’s formalization was a remarkable achievement, not only for the intrinsic merit of the scheme proposed, but also because of the lucidity with which he tried to cope in a structural fashion with a complex problem of style – something unusual in Assyriology.⁴ It will not, however, be used here, partly because for my purposes a simpler formalization will suffice. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that I will use essentially the second set of symbols proposed by Schott, namely those for syntactical constituents; in addition I will limit my considerations to noun phrases or clauses introduced by *kī* or *kīma*.

The symbols to be used in the body of the article are as follows:

- Cj = conjunction
- S = subject
- O = direct object
- C = complement (adverb or prepositional phrase)
- P = predicate.

The term “clause” is used to refer to a subordinate sentence (i. e. a sentence with a finite verb or a permansive governed by a subordinating conjunction such as *kīma*); the term “phrase” is used to refer to a noun phrase, such as a construct governing a genitive.

1. Comparative Clauses.

True comparative clauses are rare in Akkadian; where they occur, they may be broken down into two types: a first one in which the predicate of the clause is different from the predicate of the main sentence, and a second in which the predicates are the same.

As for the first type, Schott remarks that it does not exist in Akkadian; to indicate what the possible structure would be, he quotes (p. 3) a German example which in translation reads: “The cat was miaowing just like a child would be crying.” In point of fact this type is not altogether missing in Akkadian, and even the documentation gathered by Schott contains examples of it, like the following:

⁴ Schott’s work is also noteworthy for its statistical bent as expressed in various tables, particularly the last one (unnumbered) which gives a graphic representation of frequency distribution patterns – all this notwithstanding reservations may be raised in matters of detail concerning his methodology, for which see P. Fronzaroli, “Statistical Methods in the Study of Ancient Near Eastern Languages,” in G. Buccellati (ed.), *Approaches to the Study of the Ancient Near East: Gelb Volume* (= Or. NS 42 [1973]) p. 98.

- (3) *kīma libnāt Etemenanki kunnā aššātīm*
*išid kussīya šuršid ana ūm rēqūtīm*⁵

“Establish firmly and for long ages the foundation of my throne just like the bricks of Etemenanki are firm forever”.

Another example of the same type, but more complex structure, is found in a text of a different genre:

- (4) *kīma itqu annū*¹ *innappašu-ma ana [išāti innaddū],*
girru qamū iqamm[ūšu],
ana muḥḥi šēnīšu lā ita[rru],
ana lubušti ilim u šarrim lā [iṭeḥḥu],
nīšu, māmītu . . .
 – *kīma itqi annī* –
linna[piš-ma]
ina ūmē annī girru qamū [liqmī]
māmītu littasī-ma
*anāku nūra l[ūmur].*⁶

“As this tuft of wool is plucked and thrown into the fire,
 where the flames thoroughly consume it so that
 it does not return onto its sheep nor does it serve as ceremonial clothing,
 so may invocation, oath, etc. be plucked
 – just like this tuft of wool – and
 may the flames consume it thoroughly on this very day;
 may it depart,
 that I may see the light.”

In (3) the predicate of the comparative clause (*kunnā*) is different in form from the predicate of the main sentence (*šuršid*), but is very similar in form. In (4) the correlation between the predicates is more complex, because there are five in the comparative clause and four in the main sentence, partly with identical and partly with a different root:

comparative clause	main sentence
<i>kīma innappašu-ma</i>	<i>linnapiš</i> : identical
<i>innaddū</i>	: missing
<i>qamū iqammū</i>	<i>qamū liqmī</i> : identical
<i>lā itarru</i>	<i>littasī</i> : different, but similar concept
<i>lā iṭeḥḥu</i>	<i>lūmur</i> : different

In addition, one should note the resumptive noun phrase *kīme itqi annī*, embedded in the main sentence: it serves to tie in the main sentence to the beginning of the clause where the term of comparison first appeared.

While the identity of the predicates in (4) is only partial, there are other cases in which the identity is complete (this being the second of the types mentioned at the beginning of the present section). See for example:

- (5) (a) *kī ša anāku mušarā šītir šumi šarri abi bānīya*
itti mušarē šītir šumiya aškunū-ma,
 (c) *attā,*
 (b) – *kīma yāti-ma* –
 (c”) *mušarā šītir šumīya amur-ma . . . itti mušarē šītir šumika šukun.*”

⁵ VAB 4, 64: 43ff. (Nabopolassar), cf. Schott, op. cit., pp. 31 f., with more examples of the same type.

⁶ Šurpu V-VI 93-100 (cf. 83-92; 103-112; 113-122).

⁷ 3 R 16,6: 14ff. (Esarhaddon), cf. Schott, op. cit., p. 31. Note that is not strictly a simile, since it is not figurative in content.

“Just like I placed the inscriptions bearing the name of the king
my true father together with the inscriptions bearing my own name,
so you,
— just like me —,
when you see an inscription bearing my name . . . place it with the inscriptions
bearing your name.”

Note in this example, besides the identity of the two predicates (*ašunu*, *šukun*), the unusual occurrence of the enclitic *-ma* in an emphatic, rather than coordinative, sense after the verb (*ašunu-ma*), and the addition of a resumptive noun phrase (*kīma yāti-ma*) similar in form and function to the resumptive noun phrase *kīma itqi annī* in (4).

The introduction of the noun phrase in a resumptive function in the last example is particularly interesting because a noun phrase of this type is, by itself, the standard type of the Akkadian simile. In effect the phrase, even though much shorter, conveys the same information as the comparative clause, since the latter does not add anything to the elements already contained in the main sentence. This relationship may be represented graphically as follows:

(5)	(a)	Cj	S ₁	O	C	P
	(c')	S ₂				
	(h)	Cj	S ₁			
	(c'')			O	C	P

The only change in constituents between (a-b) on the one hand and (c) on the other is the presence of one subject in one case (S₁ - *anāku*, *yāti*), and a different subject in the other (S₂ = *attā*). The other elements of the clause, on the other hand, are also found in the main sentence, namely the object (O = *mušarā* ...), the complement (C = *itti mušarē*) and the predicate (P = *ašunu/šukun*). Thus it may be said the presence of both phrase and clause serves an emphatic purpose, or, more specifically, that the clause is emphatic with respect to the phrase.

2. Deletion Patterns.

The relationship between noun phrase and clause in the example just discussed may be stated by saying that the phrase is the same as the clause except for the deletion of some elements: in *kīma yāti-ma*, the pronoun *yāti* corresponds to the subject of a clause of the type *kīma anāku mušarē ašunu*, regardless of whether or not the text gives in fact such a clause (as it happens to be the case in [5]). The reconstruction of the underlying clause, based in the main sentence, and the successive deletion of some of its elements are a useful tool for describing the nature of a comparative noun phrase. If we look at the comparative noun phrases in this light, a few major patterns of deletion emerge.

Of the basic constituents of a sentence (subject, predicate, object and complement), the ones that are normally preserved, i. e. are not deleted, are the subject and, less frequently, the object: the complement is preserved only seldom: and when the predicate is preserved, we have a clause instead of a phrase. Here are some of the possible types to serve as exemplification (with square brackets including the deleted constituents and dots representing the main sentence).

(6) <i>kīma iššūrū ipparšū</i> ⁸ “like birds they flew away”	~	Cj S [P] <i>kīma iššūrū [ipparšū] . . .</i> “as birds fly . . .”
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⁸ AKA, p. 42: 41-42 (Tiglath-Pileser I). This is properly a combination of metaphor (“they flew away”) and simile (“like birds”); for another example of the same, see for instance AKA, p. 361: 51 (Assurnasirpal): “the city . . . hung down like a cloud from heaven.”

- (7) *ummānātēšunū kīma zirgī unekkis*⁹ ~ Cj O [S P]
 "I cut down their troops like sheep" "as one cuts down sheep ..."
- (8) *gimir mātīšu ... kīma imbari ašḥup*¹⁰ ~ Cj S [O P]
 "I swept over his entire land like a storm" "as a storm sweeps over land ..."
- (9) *kīma iṣṣūrī ašra rapša littapraš*¹¹ ~ Cj S [C P]
 "may it fly away like a bird to the desert" "as a bird flies to the desert ..."
- (10) *kīma iṣṣūri qinnī ana kāpi ša šadī iddūni*¹² ~ Cj S [O C P]
 "like birds they hang their dwellings on the cliff of the mountains" "as birds hang nests on the cliffs ..."

These examples are of the simplest type, and on this basis alone an attempt to describe comparative phrases in terms of an underlying sentence structure may well seem needlessly complicated; however, the usefulness of the model may appear more clearly when it is applied to elucidate unusual patterns. At first, it may seem unlikely that such unusual patterns should be frequent: if noun phrases are the rule, how can there be considerable degrees of complexity? The answer is basically twofold: either because the type of deletion which takes place is different from the common ones described above, or because the noun phrase is complex in its structure. These two possibilities will now be taken up in that order.

3. Unusual Deletions.

As it appears from the breakdown of deletion patterns, the standard types are characterized not only by the nature of the constituents that are retained (subject in the first place, and then object), but also by the fact that normally only *one* constituent is preserved. Unusual deletions, therefore, are those which present an exception to these two trends.

Retention of the complement and deletion of subject, (object) and predicate is the first rare case we must consider:

- (11) *ina dāmēšunū gapšūti išallū nārīš*¹³ ~ Cj C [S P]
 "(the horses) plunged into their overflowing blood like a river" "as one would into a river ..."
- (12) *pagrī . . . kīma urqīti umallā šēra*¹⁴ ~ Cj C [O S P]
 "I filled the plain with their bodies like grass" "as one would cover a field with grass ..."

⁹ AKA, p. 58: 98-99 (Tiglath-Pileser I).

¹⁰ OIP 2, p. 59: 28 (Sennacherib).

¹¹ CT 17, 22 iii 143 f. = CAD I, p. 211 b (SAG.GIG).

¹² AKA, p. 276: 64-65 (Asshurnaṣirpal).

¹³ OIP 2, pp. 45-46: 5-7 (Sennacherib).

¹⁴ OIP 2, p. 46: 9-10 (Sennacherib).

In both cases the comparative noun phrase produces a surprise effect precisely because the pattern is unusual and unexpected. Similar is the case with deletions which leave two constituents unaffected, as in the following:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| | ~ | Cj O C [S P] |
| (13) <i>madatta kī ša Aššurī ēmissunūti</i> ¹⁵ | | <i>kīma ša (=maddatta) eli Aššurī [emmidu] . . .</i> |
| “I placed upon them a tribute like that of the Assyrians” | | “as I impose it over the Assyrians . . .” |

This is actually not a good example, because the phrase *ša Aššurī* is properly a genitival phrase, and thus might best be considered under the complex noun phrases discussed in the next section. A proper example for the type here at stake would be a sentence like:

- (14) “he was as dear to him as a child to his father,”
but I did not happen to find an example of this type in Akkadian. It may be that nominalization by means of the determinative pronoun is a common way of resolving cases where two constituents would otherwise appear in the surface structure, though my documentation is too scanty to suggest this as a rule. Here is another example of the same phenomenon:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ~ | Cj S C [O P] |
| (15) <i>eper šepēšunu</i>
<i>kīma imbari kabti ša dunnī erīyāti</i>
<i>pān šamē rapšūte katim</i> ¹⁶ | | <i>kīma imbaru ina dunnī [šamē katmu]</i> |
| “the dust of their feet
covers the expanse of the sky
like a heavy storm of the coldest
period of the winter.” | | “as a storm covers the sky in winter” |

4. Complex Noun Phrases.

The elements preserved from deletion may be in themselves complex noun phrases. The simplest degree of this type of complexity is illustrated by the following:

- | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| | ~ | Cj S [P] |
| (16) <i>bīta ella . . . ša šūpū kīma kakkab šamē</i> ¹⁷ | | <i>kīma kakkab šamē [šūpū] . . .</i> |
| “a pure house which was bright like a star of heaven” | | “as a star of heaven is bright . . .” |

The complexity of the noun phrase is reduced to the fact that the subject (*kakkab šamē*) consists of a possessive genitive, which implies an underlying sentence of the type: *šamū kakkaba išū*. The examples listed at the end of the preceding section, with nominalization by means of the determinative pronoun, belong properly here as complex noun phrases. In all of these cases the predicate presupposed by the comparative noun phrase is the same as that of the main sentence. When the predicate is different, a new degree of increased complexity is introduced.

Let us consider first a simple example of this type:

- (17) *šadāni šaqūti ša šamtu kīma ziqip paṭri*¹⁸
“high mountains, (the top of) which were sharp like the point of a dagger.”

¹⁵ Lie, Sargon Annals, 10 (Sargon II).

¹⁶ OIP 2, p. 44: 56-60 (Sennacherib).

¹⁷ AKA, pp. 97-98: 90-97 (Tiglath-Pileser I).

¹⁸ AKA, p. 53: 43 (Tiglath-Pileser I).

On the face of it, the structure of this comparative phrase is identical to that of (16), since in both cases *kīma* occurs as a preposition followed by a genitive noun in the construct state, governing in turn another noun in the genitive. There is however a difference in the way in which one must understand the predicate of the underlying sentence. While in (16) the predicate of the comparative clause is the same as that of the main sentence, in (17) it is not; here the predicate is instead derived from the noun in the construct state, hence:

<p><i>kīma ziqip paṭri</i> “like the point of a dagger”</p>	~	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Cj</td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="text-align: center;">~</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="text-align: center;"><i>kīma paṭru zaqpu</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="text-align: center;">“(as sharp) as a dagger is pointed”</td> </tr> </table>	Cj	S	P	~			<i>kīma paṭru zaqpu</i>			“(as sharp) as a dagger is pointed”		
Cj	S	P												
~														
<i>kīma paṭru zaqpu</i>														
“(as sharp) as a dagger is pointed”														

Note that no deletion is indicated precisely because the elements of the comparative clause (and of the noun phrase which is its nominalization) are independent from those of the main sentence.

The natural extension of this type is by means of a relative clause added to the comparative noun phrase, as in the following example:

- (18) *kī rē'ī ša šēnāšū ḥabīā ēdānuššū ipparšid*¹⁹
“he fled alone like a shepherd whose flocks have been robbed.”

Here the relative clause built into the comparative phrase describes the flight of an Assyrian enemy (the grammatical subject of the main sentence), stressing however not so much the fact of the flight as such, but rather the isolation which results from it. In addition, the relative clause emphasizes the violent nature of the events (the flocks are not simply missing, they have been robbed – which shows us, incidentally, the Assyrian king taking pride in his behaving like a robber), and acquires therefore greater strength than a phrase such as

- (18') *kī rē'ī balūm šēnīšū*
“like a shepherd without his flock.”

Thus the comparison refers both to the predicate (*ipparšid*) and to the complement (*ēdānuššū*) of the main sentence: the Assyrian enemy shares both in the solitude of a shepherd deprived of his flock, and in the sense of fright of the same shepherd who, having been attacked and robbed, runs presumably away from his attackers. The comparative noun phrase may therefore be analyzed according to the following scheme:

- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|-----|---|-----|-----|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|--|-------------------------|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>(18) <i>kī rē'ī . . . ēdānuššū ipparšid</i>
“he fled alone like a shepherd”</p> <p><i>kī rē'ī ša šēnāšū ḥabt</i>
“like a shepherd whose flock was robbed”</p> | | <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Cj</td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="text-align: center;">[C</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P]</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">~</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;"><i>kīma rē'ū [ēdānuššū ipparšid] . . .</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">“as a shepherd flees alone . . .”</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">O</td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">P</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">~</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;"><i>šēna rē'ī iḥbutū</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">“they robbed the shepherd's flock.”</td> </tr> </table> | Cj | S | [C | P] | ~ | | | | <i>kīma rē'ū [ēdānuššū ipparšid] . . .</i> | | | | “as a shepherd flees alone . . .” | | | | O | S | P | | ~ | | | | <i>šēna rē'ī iḥbutū</i> | | | | “they robbed the shepherd's flock.” | | | |
| Cj | S | [C | P] | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ~ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>kīma rē'ū [ēdānuššū ipparšid] . . .</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| “as a shepherd flees alone . . .” | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| O | S | P | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ~ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>šēna rē'ī iḥbutū</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| “they robbed the shepherd's flock.” | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

5. Conjoined Noun Phrases.

Another way in which the complexity of noun phrases may be increased is by conjoining two or more of them: “like . . . and/or like . . .” Such clustering of comparisons does not seem to be frequent in Akkadian, though it does occur. The example which I will quote is the most complex Akkadian simile I know, combining as it does all the patterns reviewed so far. It comes from the Vision of the Netherworld, on the content of which I will come back in the Excursus below. Given the length of the text to be quoted, I place the translation side by side, and will give the analysis separately.

¹⁹ Lie, Sargon Annals, 55 (Sargon II)

(19) *kīma eṭli tābik dāmē*
ša ina šuṣē idiššišū ittanallaki

bēl birki iktumušu-ma
itarrakū libbūšū
ū kīma lillidi šahī šehri
ša ina muḥḥi sinništišū elū
u libbūšū ittanampaḥū
ṭitta ana pīšū u arkātišū
itteneššū,
*sipitta ušašriḥ-ma . . .*²⁰

“like a man who has shed blood,
 who, alone, runs back and forth in the reed
 thickets

and just as his pursuers track him down
 (feels) his heart pound(ing heavily),
 or again like a young boar just come of age
 whose heart is all ablaze
 as he mounts his mate,
 and keeps secreting ‘slime’
 through his front and his back,
 (thus the prince) utters cries of mourning . . .

The entire passage, except for the last line, consist of a cluster of comparative noun phrases. The first major sub-division is given by the disjunctive particle *ū*: *kīma eṭli . . . ū kīma šahī . . .* “like a man . . . or a young boar.” On either side of the particle *ū* we have a complex and rhythmic structure consisting of three relative clauses in each case:

ša ittanallaku,
iktumušu,
itarrakū,
ša elū,
ittanampaḥū,
itteneššū.

“who runs back and forth,
 whom they track down,
 whose (heart) pounds;
 who is on top,
 whose (heart) is ablaze,
 who keeps secreting.”

The subject of each set of clauses is in turn qualified by an apposition which serves in effect like a fourth clause in each case:

kīma eṭli tābik dāmē,
kīma lillidi šahī šehri.

“like a man who has shed blood,
 like a young boar who has just come of age.”

The relationship between the main sentence and the comparative clause, or clause cluster, is involved, and may best be understood against the background of a closer investigation of the text as a whole, which will be given separately in the Excursus below. Here it must be pointed out, however, that imagery contained in the cluster of similes is so well developed as to almost besome an end in itself. The author does more than give a fleeting reference to a point of comparison. He paints two vivid pictures which stand out, literarily, on their own merits – even apart, that is, from what they contribute to the main theme of the text as a whole. In the imaginative delight which goes into the portrait of the murderer and the young boar, Mesopotamian literature comes closest, perhaps, to the type of long and well developed “epic simile” that one finds for instance, in Homer.²¹

6. Stylistic Considerations: Similes and Figurative Language.

The relative scarcity of truly complex similes in Akkadian literature, such as (4) and (19), must not be understood in the sense that this literature is poor in imagery and figurative language. Obviously, one cannot equate imagery with similes, and one will have to look elsewhere in order to formulate a valid comprehensive

²⁰ E. Ebeling, *Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellungen der Babylonier* 1. Teil, 1 Rev. 29-31; see also W. von Soden, “Die Unterweltsvision eines assyrischen Kronprinzen,” *ZA* 43 (1936), 1-31; A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago 1946), pp. 132-36; Speiser, *ANET*, pp. 109-110; Oppenheim, *Dream-book*, p. 214.

²¹ See for instance C.M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London, 1952), pp. 275-80; T.B.L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London, 1958), pp. 82, 223-239.

judgment. While such evaluation is not the purpose of the present article, some considerations along these lines will help to place the nature of the Akkadian simile in its proper perspective.

Some of the phenomena that have been noted with respect to comparative noun phrases and clauses reflect a trend which is generally noticeable in Akkadian on other levels as well. Thus nominalization is used very extensively, with a large number of structural variations and a wealth of meanings; certainly it is preferred over other clauses, including relatives.²² In point of fact, subordination in general is avoided, or at least it is less productive than one might expect – which explains why the use of *kīma* as a comparative conjunction is so unproductive. Instead of subordination, Akkadian maximizes coordination, so that coordinating particles, especially the enclitic *-ma*, acquire a much wider range of values than is has been recognized so far.²³ Statistical analysis may be quite useful in this case, since it helps to pinpoint with reliable quantitative documentation the relative degree of popularity and productivity of the various constructions.

Since subordination is generally avoided, and since nominalization imposes considerable limitations on the expanded development of a comparison, it is natural that other formal patterns should come into play to serve as an outlet for figurative language in Akkadian literature. Most common and successful among them is perhaps the metaphor, which we find especially in wisdom and religious texts. Here it is much easier to encounter relatively complex structures, such as the following example of a conjoined metaphor from the Dialogue of Pessimism:

(20) *sinništu burtu-burtu, šattatu, ħirītu*
*sinništu paṣar parzilli šēli ša ikkisu kišād eṭli*²⁴

“Woman is a pitfall – a pitfall, a hole, a ditch,

Woman is a sharp iron dagger that cuts a man’s throat” (Lambert)

The two elements of the metaphor are skillfully construed to provide a sense of climax and parallelism at the same time. The first one contains elements of comparison which are similar in content: we have in effect a list of synonyms for “trap,” made more lively (and rhythmic: the cesura divides the line in two hemistichs) by the syntactical break due to the emphatic repetition of the first predicate. The second metaphor introduces a new concept (from passive antagonist – a trap – to active – a dagger), and a similar bipartite structure, whereby the first hemistich is also a nominal sentence, while the second, for variation and resolution, is a relative clause.

Religious texts often contain images which are very intense, but are more easily disregarded precisely because their being embedded in religious and practically oriented manuals shrouds their literary quality. It is difficult in effect to distinguish between the purely imaginary value of some of the texts, and other texts where the image is concretized by ritual enactment: the demarcation line may not be clear, but the vividness of the image remains a certain fact, whether in addition it is also enacted or whether it remains at the level of the word. Take for instance the following passage taken from a manual of potency incantations, and addressed to the sick person, or more specifically to the part of the male body affected by impotence:

(21) <i>Akannu, akannu!</i>	Wild ass, wild ass!
<i>Rīmu, rīmu!</i>	Wild bull, wild bull!
<i>Mannu u[rammēk]a</i>	Who has made you fall limp
<i>kīma qī ramūti?</i>	like slack cords?
<i>Mannu kīma ħūli</i>	Who has blocked your passage
<i>alakt]aka iprus?</i>	as if it were a road?

²² See G. Buccellati, “On the Akkadian ‘Attributive’ Genitive,” Proceedings of First North-American Conference on Semitic Linguistics, forthcoming.

²³ A preliminary analysis of coordination types is to be found in G. Buccellati and J.L. Hayes, Morpho-Lexical Analysis of Akkadian Texts, Vol. 1, forthcoming.

Mannu itbuk
ana libbīka
 [mē kaš]ūti,
ana muḥḥi libbīka
iškun ad[irt]a
 [dīl]ipta i[špuk]?²⁵

Who has poured
 on your quick
 frigid water,
 upon your quick
 has heaped gloom,
 has instilled confusion?

The personification as wild ass and wild bull is obviously meant to have a suggestive value for the impotent man, and provide a psychological basis for the cure by inducing the appropriate sort of phantasy in the patient's mind. But there is no doubt that the text has a strong literary quality which is in effect placed in the service of the intended medical treatment: the chiasmic resolution of word order (the noun phrases *kīma qī ramūti* and *adirta* occurring after the predicate, *kīma ḥūli* and *dīlipta* occurring before); the anticipation of the predicate in the predicate in two instances, over complement and direct object (*mannu urammēka kīma qī ramūti* and *mannu itbuk ana libbīka mē kašūti*), alternating with the two other sentences which have regular word order (another type of chiasm); the deletion of *mannu* in the last sentence, resulting in a longer sentence at the end with a noticeable climactic effect—all of this has an inner momentum which gives the passage a strong structural unity as if in a poetic stanza. It matters little that the initial stimulus may be due to a religious and psychological intent: the literary achievement is valid on its own merit. And for our present concern, this means (even without further documentation at this point) that figurative language is in fact present in Akkadian with a degree of excellence which leaves nothing to be desired.

7. Excursus: Of a Prophetic Topos in Assyria and Ancient Israel.

A proper understanding of text (19), which is the most complex simile quoted in the article, requires a longer discussion than it was possible in the body of the discussion. The passage is taken from *The Vision of the Netherworld* which, following von Soden's convincing arguments,²⁶ may be dated in the latter years of Esarhaddon, around 670 B.C. The content in which our simile is embedded may be summarized as follows: An Assyrian prince, by the name of Kummā, conceives a strong desire to visit the Netherworld, and is finally granted his wish — in a dream. After viewing an entire parade of monsters he arrives in the presence of Nergal; the god turns against the prince and wants to kill him; but Išum, the god's messenger, convinces him to instead spare the prince's life, and to send him back to the upper regions so that he may serve as a living witness of Nergal's glory ("that the inhabitants of all the earth may forever hear of your greatness," Rev. 17). Nergal agrees, but only after translating his messenger's advice into a precise missionary program. Kummā will be let go, on condition that he proclaim to the world two interrelated messages: the goodness and glorious deeds of a spirit who is standing next to Nergal, and the perversity of Kummā's own father. Neither the spirit nor Kummā's father are identified, but from their attributes it appears clearly that they are both kings of Assyria. Following von Soden's interpretation,²⁷ it is likely that the dead king, who is standing in spirit next to Nergal, is Sennacherib, and the living king who is reproached is Esarhaddon. Kummā, therefore, would be a son of Esarhaddon, more precisely the crown prince, possibly Assurbanipal; he would represent a party at court in favor of resuming the policies of the older king Sennacherib, especially (perhaps) with respect to Babylonia. Thus the text which we entitle "The Vision of the Netherworld," with its message from Nergal in favor of Sennacherib's political line, would be a plot of the anti-Babylonian party aimed at adding religious prestige to their political plans.

²⁴ BWL, p. 146: 51-52.

²⁵ TCS 2, p. 19: 20-23.

²⁶ ZA 43 (1936), 3, 6-9.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the text presents Kummā as the carrier of a message which is unpopular at that particular moment in time and implies therefore a certain danger. And here we come to the specific locus which gives occasion to the author to introduce the simile. After a final warning by Nergal that the message will be "like a thorn in the heart of" the people once Kummā starts proclaiming it in the upper regions, Kummā awakens and is stricken by the consciousness of his newly acquired prophetic vocation – and the simile is introduced precisely to describe his state of mind. Kummā feels strongly ambivalent. The confrontation with Nergal and the awareness of the unpopularity and resulting danger of his message cause fear in him – such as a murderer feels who is running away hiding in the bushes – and yet excited attraction at the same time – similar to that of a boar in heat who is mounting his mate. The simile, therefore, serves a precise function in the economy of the story: it underscores the seriousness of the situation and the heroic posture of the protagonist.

Such an interest in the psychological state of the prophet is not found in other Mesopotamian prophetic texts, of which the Mari letters have provided the most recent and the best studied examples.²⁸ Only one text²⁹ refers to a young man (*ṣuḫārum*) who did not immediately communicate a vision he had received, and did so only after receiving a second vision. The reason for the delay is not stated in the text but may have possibly been due to a reluctance based on fear of the consequences. An interesting bit of information follows in the same text. After the first revelation the young man became sick, which may be interpreted either as a punishment for his delay, or as a physical reaction to the psychic problems caused by the revelation.³⁰ If the Mari texts are so laconic concerning the psychic state of the prophets it is most likely because these texts are essentially reports contained in letters, so that the interest centers rather on the content of the messages than on the psychological state of the prophet. The Vision of the Netherworld, on the other hand, precisely because it does not belong to the epistolary genre, dwells with greater interest on the internal experience of the prophet.

In line with the Assyrian text are, on the other hand, many Old Testament passages which are equally literary, rather than epistolary, in character. The first prophet who comes to mind is Jeremiah, whose vocation is described in detail, and who reacts with cries of woe reminiscent of Kummā's:

'āhāh 'āḏonāy Yhwh
hinnē lō-yāda'it dabbēr.³¹
'ōy it, 'immî
kî yaḏigtinî
'š rāḫ wə'š māḏḏōn ləkāl hā'āreš.³²
Kî middē 'ādabbēr 'ez'āq
hāmās wāšod 'eqrā;
kî hāyā dəḫar Yhwh kî
ləḫerpā ūləqeles kāl hayyōm.
Wə'āmartî: lō 'ezekōrennū
wəlō 'ādabber 'ōḏ bišmō.
Wəhāyā bəlabbī kə'ēš bo'eret

"Ah, Lord Yahweh,
look, I do not know how to speak."
"Woe to me, my mother,
because in me you have brought to life
a man of strife and discord for all the land."
"Whenever I speak, I cry loud,
I proclaim violence and destruction;
thus the word of Yahweh has become for me
cause of derision and ridicule all day long.
I said: 'I shall forget about him.
quit speaking in his name.'
But there came like a burning fire in my heart,

²⁸ See most recently K. Koch, "Die Briefe 'prophetischen' Inhalts aus Mari," UF 4 (1972), 53-77, with earlier literature.

²⁹ ARMT 13, 112.

³⁰ See F. Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari und Israel* (Herzberg, 1968), pp. 158 f.: on the psychic state of the prophets see especially W.L. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica* 50 (1969), 27 f. The unusual reaction brings to mind shamanistic traits; on this subject see e. g. A. S. Kapelrud, "Shamanistic Features in the Old Testament," in C.-M. Edsman (ed.), *Studies in Shamanism* (Stockholm, 1967), pp. 90-97.

³¹ Jer. 1 : 6.

³² Jer. 15 : 10.

³³ Jer. 20 : 8-9.

‘āšur bə‘ašmotāy:
wənil’ēḫ kalkēl
wəlā ‘ukāl.³³

sealed up inside my bones:
 and I was exhausted by holding it in
 and could not make it.”

The passionate confessions of Jeremiah are only the most detailed, and lyrical, expression of a tradition which is otherwise richly documented in the Bible, from Moses to Jonah to Paul. Even Isaiah shows a certain reluctance at first in face of the prophetic vocation; he volunteers his offices as the messenger of god only after proclaiming his unworthiness, and having been purified on his mouth by a seraph with a burning coal.³⁴

Thus the Assyrian Vision of the Netherworld, though close in time to Jeremiah (they both belong probably to the same seventh century, Kummā in the earlier, Jeremiah in the latter part), should not be construed as providing a specific parallel to any given Biblical text. Rather it would seem to give evidence of a general trait which accompanied the prophetic “profession” in ancient Southwestern Asia. It had become a prophetic “topos” to express reluctance in front of the divine vocation, a reluctance borne out of a sense of awe for God as the originator of the message, a feeling of inadequacy for one’s own potential, and – especially in the case of unpopular messages – the real fear of harmful consequences, to the point of persecution and the loss of life. The texts of Mari, being the oldest evidence for prophecy, provide us in an indirect manner with an etiology for the fear/attraction topos. As pointed out especially by Moran,³⁵ there was great concern in Mari for means of establishing the authenticity of the prophetic word – a concern which remained prevalent throughout the history of Biblical prophetism. And it is along these lines, I would suggest, that the fear topos developed. One was not supposed to show facile enthusiasm for a vocation to the prophetic mission,³⁶ rather it was in keeping with the “profession” to react negatively to the divine call. Not that such a reaction was necessarily insincere: the nature of the experience itself, when genuine, would explain fully the hesitations of the chosen one – an instinctive gesture of humble withdrawal such as the Gospel of Luke describes for Mary at the Annunciation.³⁷ But however sincere and understandable the reaction, the fact remains that in the ancient Near East hesitation borne out of fear had become a characteristic reaction of the prophet when he felt himself called, and that this had built up into a real tradition.³⁸ As a counterpart of the fear topos, there also grew an excited overstress of the call itself: hesitation and fear, in other words, could only be overcome by an even greater attraction inherent in the call, thus originating the enthusiasm syndrome, in its etymological sense. It is the latter aspect of the prophetic attitude which is embodied in the most common Akkadian word for prophet, *maḥḥū*,³⁹ which refers to the ecstatic transport by means of which the prophet overcomes fear and establishes a direct connection between the human sphere and the divine.

³⁴ Is. 1 : 4-9. On the literary structure of these and other Old Testament prophetic vocations see N. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” ZA 57 (1965), 297-323.

³⁵ *Biblica* 50 (1969), 27 f.

³⁶ Along these lines see also F.R. Kraus, “Ein Sittenkanon in Omenform,” ZA 43 (1936), 92-93, 107, Text 6, Obv. i 36’-37’: [*šumma nūr i]li ammar, nūr ili amar ištānassī, ina dān dīnīšu ul uṣṣī* “if he is wont to say aloud ‘I see the light of god, I see the light of god!’, he will not come out easily from the verdict due for his case.”

³⁷ It is interesting to note how the element of humility is stressed in the pictorial representations of the Annunciation in the medieval Tuscan schools, of which the one by Simone Martini (today in the Uffizi gallery) is perhaps the most famous. Compositionally, this is underscored by the presence, in almost all cases, of a vertical element (normally a column) between Mary and the Angel.

³⁸ For “traditional” elements, as evidenced first in the Mari texts, preserved in Hoseah, see M.J. Buss, “Mari Prophecy and Hosea,” JBL 88 (1969), 338

³⁹ On this see especially Moran, *Biblica* 50 (1969), 27 f.

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