



# The egg of the feet? Using the Sumerogram NUNUZ in the Amarna Correspondence

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## ABSTRACT:

This study focuses on one passage in EA 162, an Amarna letter written by the Egyptian king Amenhotep IV (1352–1336 BCE) to Aziru, the king of Amurru and one of his Syrian vassals. The text fragment contains the only attestation of the sign NUNUZ in the Amarna Correspondence and is still not entirely clear to modern scholarship. This article will attempt to clarify the issue and help to fully understand this diplomatic letter. Additionally, some thoughts on the terminology of foot parts in Sumerian and Akkadian will be presented.

## KEYWORDS:

Amarna Letters; NUNUZ; Mesopotamian foot terminology

## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The Amarna Correspondence is the major historical source on the political history of the Late Bronze Age in the Levant. It consists of 349 letters (Rainey 2015: 1), a minority of which relates to business between equally ranked monarchs (of Arzawa, Assyria, Cyprus, Egypt, Babylonia, Hatti and Mittani) and the majority of which tells us more about the relations between the Egyptian pharaoh on the one hand and his Levantine vassals on the other hand. The second category is quite informative on how the Hittites gradually extended their influence over present-day Syria and Lebanon during the reign of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I (c. 1353–1322 BCE).

This short paper focuses on one passage in a specific Amarna letter. More precisely, it will take a closer look at the unique attestation of the Sumerogram NUNUZ in the Amarna Correspondence. In fact, this sign appears in a rather puzzling expression, despite the fact that the context itself is very clear.

The sign NUNUZ is a well-known grapheme in the history of the Mesopotamian cuneiform writing system. It already appears at the very beginning of writing, i.e. in the archaic administrative and lexical texts from Uruk (Deimel 1922: 39 no. 364, 69 no. 798, & 70 no. 813; Green — Nissen 1987: 261 no. 423). From this period onwards, it was continually in use until the latest phase of cuneiform writing (Deimel 1932:

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations are cited from the list in the *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative* (CDLI; [https://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations\\_for\\_assyriology](https://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations_for_assyriology)).

761–763 no. 394; Deimel — Gössmann 1947: 695 no. 701; Salonen 1973: 334; Labat — Malbran-Labat 1994: 180–181 no. 394; Borger 2004: 167 no. 614).

As the Mesopotamian lexical texts prove, the Sumerian lexeme *nunuz* has various meanings and, logically, various Akkadian equivalents. The most frequently attested meaning is ‘egg’ (Akkadian *pelû*, rarely *palû*),<sup>2</sup> but other meanings are ‘woman’ (Emesal equivalent of Sum. MUNUS,<sup>3</sup> Akk. *sinništu*; Schretter 1990: 246–247; Cavigneaux — Krebernik 1998–2001a), ‘offshoot; offspring’ (Akk. *lipu*<sup>4</sup> and *pir’u/par’u/pirhu*)<sup>5</sup> and ‘(egg-shaped) bead’ (Akk. *erimmatu*).<sup>6</sup> The sign also appears in some plant names (e.g. *gulubutu*)<sup>7</sup> as well as in some names of recipients/beer vats (e.g. *lahtanu*).<sup>8</sup> It is one of these meanings which must be compatible with the occurrence of NUNUZ in the Amarna Correspondence.

## 2. NUNUZ IN THE AMARNA CORRESPONDENCE

As already indicated, NUNUZ occurs only once in the Amarna Correspondence. The document where it appears is EA 162 (VAT 347),<sup>9</sup> a letter written by the Egyptian king Amenhotep IV (1352–1336 BCE) to Aziru, the king of Amurru<sup>10</sup> and one of his Syrian vassals. By the time this letter was written, the Egyptian king was profoundly mistrustful of Aziru, suspecting him of organising a defection to Suppiluliuma, the Hittite king. As would later become apparent, this mistrust was more than justified (cf. Rainey 2015: 20). In EA 162, the pharaoh first reprimands Aziru for his actions against Rib-Addi, the ruler of Byblos and a loyal vassal of the pharaoh (1–21). Next, he expresses his irritation at the apparent alliance between Aziru and the ruler of Qadesh, an ally of the Hittites (22–32). The letter continues with a plea to serve Egypt (33–41) and a request for Aziru to come personally to Egypt or to send his son (42–54).

The following section (54–77) talks about Aziru’s promise to deliver various enemies of the king to Hanni, an Egyptian ambassador. Amenhotep says that he has

2 E.g. NUNUZ MUŠEN = *pa-lu-ú* (MSL 8/2, 155, 380).

3 E.g. <sup>d</sup>nuNUNUZ-GÜN-A = <sup>d</sup>MUNUS-GÜN-A = <sup>d</sup>NIN-SIG<sub>7</sub> (MSL 4, 5, 26). The divinity concerned is Nin-imma (Cavigneaux & Krebernik 1998–2001b; Focke 1998–2001: 384).

4 E.g. NUNUZ = *li-i-pu* (MSL 17, 197, 67).

5 E.g. <sup>nu-nu-uz</sup>NUNUZ = *pi-ir-’u* (Idu I iv B 5; MSL 3, 147, 296).

6 E.g. <sup>nu-nu-uz</sup>NUNUZ = *e-rim-ma-a-tú* (CT 11, 33 K.2772, 7).

7 E.g. ŠĒ-GÚ-NUNUZ = *gu-lu-bu-ti* (AfO 18, 328, 27).

8 E.g. <sup>duš</sup>NUNUZ-KISIM<sub>5</sub>LA = *laḥ-ta-nu* (MSL 7, 75, 6).

9 Cf. Rainey (2015: 802–807 & 1511–1512) for the most recent edition of this text.

10 Amurru is a region situated in what is now northwest Syria, to the south of Ugarit. Its Late Bronze Age history is quite fascinating. Originally an ally of Egypt, its king Aziru defected to the Hittite camp during the reign of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I. A later king, Benteshina, tried to take advantage of Egypt’s military successes under Ramses II and turned away from Hittite suzerainty, but after the battle of Qadesh he was captured by the Hittites and deported to Hattusa. Later he was reinstated as king of Amurru and afterwards remained a loyal Hittite ally (Van De Mierop 2016: 176).

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sent the names of these enemies to Aziru through Hanni and that Aziru should take immediate action. Lines 64–66 of this letter go as follows:

(64) ù šú-bi-la-āš-<sup>r</sup>šú-nu<sup>r</sup>-[ti] a-na LUGAL EN-ka

(65) ù 1-en la-a te-ez-zi-ib i-na <sup>r</sup>lib<sup>r</sup>-bi-šu-nu

(66) ù ŠĒR- ŠĒR URUDU lu-ú ša-ak-nu i-na NUNUZ ĠĪR<sup>meš</sup>-šu-nu

What follows are the names of some individuals who should be sent to the king, together with their sons and/or wives (67–77).<sup>11</sup> The final paragraph of the letter (78–81) is a simple statement from the pharaoh that all is well with him.

As is clear by now, NUNUZ occurs in line 66 of the text. Various authors have already translated the relevant lines, but do not always seem to be convinced of their translations. Winckler (1896: 118–119) reads UZU ‘flesh’, but remains doubtful as he mentions an alternative possibility elsewhere (1896: 118 n. 1). This possibility is a reading TIK, which could stand for *kišadu* ‘neck’, resulting in ‘the neck of the feet’, perhaps a place above the ankles, at least according to Winckler. Alternatively, it could stand for *idu*, leading to a translation ‘an Händen und Füßen’. Winckler’s final translation is “Schicke sie darum dem König, deinem Herrn. Und laß nicht einen weg von ihnen. Und Ketten aus Erz sollen sein an ihren Füßen.” Knudtzon (1915: 658–659)<sup>12</sup> proposes a reading NUNUZ, which he interprets as a rendering of Akkadian *erimmat*, leading to his translation “So übersende sie dem König, deinem Herrn, und laß keinen unter ihnen übrig bleiben! Und Bande aus Kupfer mögen angelegt werden als Kette(n) für ihre Füße.” Mercer (1939: 524–525) accepts the reading NUNUZ and its equivalence to *erimmat*. He translates “Therefore send them to the king, thy Lord, and let none out of their number remain over. And let bands of copper be placed as fetter(s) on their feet.” Moran (1987: 401) has “Fais-les remettre au roi, ton seigneur, sans omettre personne. On doit mettre des entraves de cuivre à leurs *chevilles*.” His English translation is “Have them delivered to the king, your lord, omitting no one. Copper fetters are to be put on their *ankles*” (Moran 1992: 249). Giles (1997: 416) translates the lines as follows: “So send them to the king, your lord, and do not even leave out one of them. And let copper bands be placed on [?] their feet.” The Italian translation by Liverani is similar: “Consegnali al re tuo signore. Non ne omettere nessuno. Ceppi di bronzo siano messi a loro piedi” (Liverani 1998: 279–281).

The most recent edition of the Amarna Letters, by Anson Rainey, presents its reader with the following translation: “So send them to the king, your lord. And don’t leave out even one from among them. May bronze fetters be put on the ankles(?) of their feet” (Rainey 2015: 807). In his commentary on this text, he confirms that NUNUZ ĠĪR<sup>meš</sup> might mean ‘ankles’ (Rainey 2015: 1512).

11 These are “Sharru with all his sons, Tûya, Lêya with all his sons, Pishiari with all his sons, the son in law of Manya with his sons, (and) with his wives, the warrior who knows sacrilege, him who always insults the foreigner, Dāshartî, Ba<sup>r</sup>luma, Nimmaḥê, the robber in the land of Amurru.”

12 As possible alternative, Knudtzon (1915: 658 n. c.) gives ZAB+ĜI, the result of splitting up the sign NUNUZ. This is, however, a meaningless reading.



Clearly, the expression NUNUZ ĠĪR<sup>meš</sup>-š<sub>u</sub>-nu must be understood as ‘their *nunuz*-of-the-feet’. In all probability, the most likely meaning of NUNUZ in this context is ‘egg’, so a final translation ‘their egg-of-the-feet’ or ‘their egg-shaped bead’ becomes likely. The other meanings of *nunuz*, i.e. ‘scion’ or ‘woman’, are less probable. Although the context does not change much if one uses ‘egg’ or ‘bead’, it would be the only attestation of an ‘egg-shaped’ bead in the Amarna Correspondence, where beads appear frequently in the lists of gifts (e.g. *zi-mìn-zu* TUR<sup>meš</sup> na<sup>4</sup> ZA.ĠĪN ‘small *ziminzu*-beads of lapis lazuli’ in EA 13, obv. 7; na<sup>4</sup>ZA.ĠĪN ‘beads of lapis lazuli’ in EA 22, i 35 & 37, ii 20 & 25; na<sup>4</sup>hi-li-bá ‘beads of *hiliba*-stone’ in EA 25, i 33 & 35; [ma-ni-i]n-nu ša na<sup>4</sup>KIŠIB na<sup>4</sup> ZA.ĠĪN KUR ‘[1 *mani*]nnu-necklace, of seal-shaped beads of lapis lazuli’ in EA 25, i 38). Therefore, in the end, a translation ‘their egg-of-the-feet’ seems the most plausible one.

Four scholars, Knudtzon, Mercer, Moran and Rainey, have ventured a translation of this expression, albeit hesitatingly. The other scholars (Giles and Liverani) subtly avoid the problem by not translating NUNUZ specifically. Knudtzon and Mercer mention a translations “fettters,” whereas the translation proposed by Moran and Rainey is ‘ankle’. In all probability, a connection between NUNUZ ĠĪR and the ankle is actually quite plausible; in fact, the ankle has two egg-shaped protrusions, each at one side of the foot (the medial and the lateral malleolus). In this sense, NUNUZ ĠĪR<sup>meš</sup> ‘egg-of-the-feet’ would be a *pars pro toto* for the ankle, for the scribe did certainly not intend to refer to the malleolus itself,<sup>13</sup> but to the entire ankle.

### 3. LEXEMES FOR ‘ANKLE’ IN SUMERIAN AND AKKADIAN

A problem with this interpretation is that Sumerian as well as Akkadian already possess some lexemes commonly translated as ‘ankle, ankle bone’. The first one is Akkadian *kišallu* (Holma 1911: 155; CAD K: 434-435; with variants *kisallu*, *kišillu* and *kišillu*), whose Sumerian equivalent is *s/š/zingi*.<sup>14</sup> Their equivalence is well established, as the following example demonstrates: *zi-in-gi-mu gig-ga-àm : ki-šal-la-a-a mar-ša* “My ankles are sore” (SBH, 43, 10’, 11’, 12’, 77, 6’-8’; cf. Cohen 1988: 189 line 41; all attestations are Hellenistic). A nice equation of both terms is also found in *The Elevation of Ishtar*, a bilingual literary composition whose copies date from the Neo-Babylonian and Hellenistic periods. The text has: <sup>d</sup>in-nin ki <sup>giš</sup>tukul sàg-ga zi-in-gi ra-ra-da-gin, igi sùh ra-ra-ab / <sup>d</sup>MIN a-šar tam-ħu-uš kak-ku u dab-de-e ki-ma ki-šal-la mé-li-li saħ-maš-tú “Lady, where weapons clash, play with the chaos like ankles” (Tablet IVB, 9-10; Hruška 1969: 488 & 521, who, however, uses a translation ‘astragal’).

As a logogram, *zingi* is attested in four orthographies: SĪ-IN-GI, ŠĪ-IN-GI, ZI-IN-GI and ZI-IN-GI<sub>4</sub>. The oldest two spellings appear in the Old Babylonian period. The first

<sup>13</sup> In fact, it would be very difficult to put fetters on a malleolus.

<sup>14</sup> See Jagersma (2010: 41-43 & 46-47) on the exact pronunciation of the Sumerian phonemes written S, Š and Z. The examples and abbreviations cited here are drawn from the Electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary, second edition (<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/epsd2/sux>).



is SÌ-IN-GI<sub>4</sub>, which occurs once in a scorpion incantation (VS 17, 10, 36); the second is ZI-IN-GI<sub>4</sub>, which is more frequently attested. It appears in the same scorpion incantation (VS 17, 10, 36), as well as five times in lexical texts (HAG 05,<sup>15</sup> rev. iii 10'; Isin III, Tf. 41, rev. iv 3 [CDLI no.: P349902; OB Nippur Izi: Tab. II 434, 435 = MSL 13, 53, 466, 467; OB Nippur Ura 3, 496]). The third spelling ŠI-IN-GI is nothing more than the Emesal equivalent of ZI-IN-GI. It is attested once in a Neo-Assyrian copy of Ddi: ŠI-IN-G[I] = [ZI-I]N-GI = [ki-šal-lu] (Ddi II 196 = MSL 4, 25, 196; Schretter 1990: 258).

Finally, the last and most frequently attested spelling, ZI-IN-GI, only occurs in post-Old Babylonian texts. Middle Babylonian lexical texts, one of which was found in Ugarit and another in Emar, have it three times (Emar 6/1, 166, Msk 731086, rev. iii 32; MB Izi = MSL 13, 131, 279 [from Ugarit]; SLT, 45, rev. i 1' [from Nippur]). Neo-Assyrian lexical documents also have it three times (CT 19, Pl. 30–32, K.00005, rev. ii' 5'; CT 19, Pl. 30–32, K. 04352+, rev. ii 21; Ura 13, Seg. 1, 271). Twice it appears in Neo-Babylonian lexical texts (CTMMA 2, 55, rev. ii 45b; VS 24, 4, rev. ii 21b') and six times in Hellenistic texts (one literary text [RA 12 73–84, obv. 5] and five times in hymns/lamentations [SBH, 43, obv. 10, 11, 12 and SBH, 77, 6', 8']).<sup>16</sup> The date of the last attestation (Iraq 6 175–176, no. 76, rev. ii 30', a lexical text) is not certain. Furthermore, *zingi* appears in one Neo-Assyrian omen text: DIŠ ZI-IN-GI 15-šú ti-ib sa-ḫal UZU IGI DIŠ ZI-IN-GI 150-šú ti-ib ki-šir ŠÀ DINGIR DU<sub>8</sub> -šu "If his right ankle pulsates, he will experience anger.<sup>17</sup> If his left ankle pulsates, the anger of the god will affront him" (Kraus 1939 no. 22, ii 16'–17'; Böck 2000: 270–271, lines 71–72).

Not surprisingly, medical texts too contain *zingi*:

- 1) DIŠ ta-bi SA ZI-IN-GI-šú KÚM NU TUK[U TIN] DIŠ ta-bi SA ZI-IN-GI-šú KÚM TUKU ḫAR<sup>meš</sup>-š[ú GIG]<sup>meš</sup> u UGU<sup>18</sup>-šú i-šag-gúm TI-uṭ šum<sub>4</sub>-ma GIG-su ḡÍD<sup>1</sup>-ma GAM "If it (that is) a blood vessel (in his feet) is pulsating, his ankles ar[e] not feverish, [he will recover]. If it (that is) a blood vessel (in his feet) is pulsating, his ankles are feverish, 'his' lungs are continually [sick], and his head roars, he will get well. If his illness is prolonged, he will die" (TDP 146, 63'–65' = DPS 14, 264'–266'; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 181 no. 8.83; Scurlock 2014: 127 & 136);<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/pager>. The CDLI number of this text is P382666.

<sup>16</sup> SBH, 43 & 77 are Hellenistic copies of the lamentation *Enemani ilu* "His Word is a Wail, a Wail!" (Cohen 1988: 186).

<sup>17</sup> Literally "the pricking of the flesh"; not a disease, as Oppenheim (1956: 270 n. 42) believes, but an expression for 'anger' (Borger 1957–58: 417a; Böck 2000: 271 n. 820).

<sup>18</sup> Reading UGU-šú by Geller (2005: 256; also CAD Š/1: 65, Scurlock 2014: 127). Other authors (Labat 1951: 146; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 181) have u KA-šú "and his mouth."

<sup>19</sup> Here this study follows the readings by Labat (1951: 146), Scurlock — Andersen (2005: 181), and Scurlock (2014: 127). Based on the tablet VAT 303+, Geller (2005: 256) reads [DIŠ ta-kap IR ZI-IN-GI-šu KÚM] TUKU ki-iš-[ša]-ta DIRI UG[U-šú i-ša]g-g[ú-um TI-uṭ šum<sub>4</sub>-ma GIG-su] "TAG<sub>4</sub><sup>1</sup>-šum-ma TIN "If there is a prickling from sweat, his ankles ar[e] not hot, he will recover. If there is a prickling from sweat, his ankles are hot, it is full of kiššata-disease, and his head buzzes, he will get well. If his illness leaves him, he will recover."



- 2) DIŠ *ina* SAG GIG-šú IR *bu-úh-bu-úh-ta* TUKU-*ma* IR šī-i TA *kìn-ši-šú* EN ZI-IN-GI u KI-TA GÌR<sup>ii</sup>-šú NU KUR-*ád* GIG-BI LÍL-ti U<sub>4</sub> 2.KAM U<sub>4</sub> 3.KÁM LÍL-*ma* DIN “If at the beginning of his illness, he has sweat and *bubu’tu*-blisters and this sweat does not reach from his lower legs to the ankles and the soles of his feet, that sickness is an illness of two days. (If) he is ill for three days, he will get well” (TDP 156, 1–2 = DPS 17, 1–2; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 222 no. 10.79; Scurlock 2014: 163 & 166);
- 3) DIŠ GIG-*su* KU<sub>4</sub> ù É KIMIN ÍL IGI<sup>ii</sup>-šú DUGUD ŠÀ<sup>meš</sup>-šú MÚ-ME-*hu* SA<sup>meš</sup>-šú *kìn-ša-a-šú* ZI-IN-GI<sup>meš</sup>-šú MURUB<sup>meš</sup>-šú 1-*niš* GU<sub>7</sub><sup>meš</sup>-šú G<sup>is</sup>GIDRI ŠU<sup>d</sup>UTU GAR-*su* “If his illness enters and leaves<sub>4</sub>, ditto (and when his confusional state comes over him), lifting his eyes is difficult, his insides are continually bloated and his muscles, his lower legs, his ankles and his hips all hurt him at once, the sceptre, ‘hand of Šamaš’, has been laid upon him” (TDP 160, 38–39 = DPS 17, 38–39; Scurlock 2014: 164 & 168);<sup>20</sup>
- 4) DIŠ *ma-’-du* GÌR<sup>dili</sup>-*ša* u ZI-IN-GI<sup>dili</sup>-*šá nu-up-pu-ḥa* ZAG u GÙB ZUKUM-*as* MAŠ-TAB-BA PEŠ-*at* “If they (the insides of a woman of childbearing age) are large, both her feet and both her ankles are swollen, (and) she steps to ‘right’ and ‘left’, she is pregnant with twins” (TDP 206, 71 = DPS 36, 71; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 279 no. 12.110; Scurlock 2014: 247 & 251).

In its syllabographic form, Akkadian *kišallu* mostly appears in lexical and medical texts. Examples from medical texts are:

- 1) [TA] MURUB<sub>4</sub><sup>ii</sup>-šú *giš-ši-šú* EN *ki-šal-li-šú* “From his waist, his hip down to his ankle” (AMT 52, 8, 6);
- 2) DIŠ NA *a-ḥa-šú kìn-ša-šú ki-šal-la-šú* [GU<sub>7</sub><sup>meš</sup>-šú] NA BI *qé-reb* DÚR-GIG “If a person, his arms, his lower legs, (and) his ankles [hurt him], that person is in the midst of DÚR-GIG” (BAM 89, 8–9; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 253 no. 11.34);
- 3) *Iš-bat giš-šá kìn-ša ki-šil-la qab-la ra-pa-áš-tu u šá-šal-li gu-ub-gu-ba pu-ḥur* SA<sup>meš</sup> “(The disease *maškadu*) grips the hip socket, lower leg, ankle, hip, coccyx and lower back, the calf, all of the muscles” (BAM 124, iv 18–19;<sup>21</sup> Scurlock 2014: 457 & 460);
- 4) DIŠ NA *ki-šil-la-šú* G[U<sub>7</sub><sup>meš</sup>] “If a person, his ankles are co[nstantly hurting]” (BAM 7, 24, rev. iii 4’; Geller 2005: 152–153);
- 5) DIŠ NA *ki-šil-la-šú* GU<sub>7</sub>-ME [...] DÚR-GIG GIG “If a person, his ankles hurt [...] he is sick with DÚR-GIG” (BAM 7, 24, rev. iii 6’–7’; Geller 2005: 152–153; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 153 no. 6.185);
- 6) *Ki-šal-lu* GAL-*ma* SA *ina* UGU ZUKUM “The ankle is large, the vein on the front is crushed” (Böck 2000, 267, line 35);

20 Note the usage of the syllabographic orthography in a parallel phrase: DIŠ ... *kìn-ša-a-šú ki-šal-la-šú 1-niš* GU<sub>7</sub>-*me-šú* “If ... his lower legs and ankles hurt him at the same time” (TDP 20, 13–14).

21 CT 23, 11, 38, a variant text, has *ki-šal-la*.





- 7) *Ina giš-ši-šú GÌR-šú u ki-šal-li-šú KÉŠ-ma ina-eš* “You tie (the knots) on his hip, his foot and his ankle and he will get well” (CT 23, 9, 12);<sup>22</sup>
- 8) *Ki-šal-la-šú up-ta-na-ṭa-[ra]* “His feet are continually split” (KAR 80, 5);
- 9) *DIŠ ina ki-šil-li-šú ZAG GAR x[...]* *DIŠ ina ki-šil-li-šú GÙB GAR NAM x[...]* “If it is placed on the right ankle [...]. If it is placed on the left ankle [...].” (Kraus 1939 no. 38a, rev. 7’-8’; Böck 2000: 200-201, lines 114-115);
- 10) [*DIŠ TA giš*]-*ši-šu EN pi-ṭir ki-šil-li-šú GU<sub>7</sub><sup>mes</sup>-šú ḥi-ṭám NU TUKU ki-iš-ša-t[um MU-NI]* “[If from] his ‘hip sockets’ to the opening of his ankles it continually hurts him, it is of no consequence; [it is called] ‘gnawing’” (SpTU 4, 152, 101 = DPS 33, 101; Heeßel 2000: 357; Scurlock 2014: 234 & 240);
- 11) [*DIŠ<sup>uzu</sup> ÚR-šú TA giš-ši-šu EN ki-šal-li-šú GU<sub>7</sub>-šú ZI-bi u DU-[a]k maš-ka-d[ù MU-NI]*] “[If] his thigh hurts him from his hip sockets to his ankles (but) he can stand and walk, [it is called] *maškādu*” (TDP 140, iii 37’-38’ = DPS 33, 99; cf. also DPS 14, 170’-171’; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 257 no. 11.59; Scurlock 2014: 234 & 240);
- 12) *DIŠ TU SA ki-[šil-li]-šá ZAG u GÙB ZI-[bi M]AŠ-TAB-BA NU SI-SÁ PEŠ<sub>4</sub>-at DIŠ TU SA ki-šil-li-šá MÚD DIRI<sup>mes</sup> NITA PEŠ<sub>4</sub>-at* “If the blood vessel of a woman of childbearing age ‘right’ and ‘left’ ‘ankles’ pulsates, she is pregnant with twins who will not do well. If the blood vessel of woman of childbearing age’s ankle is continually full of blood, she is pregnant with a male” (TDP 208, 92-93 = DPS 36, 92-93; Scurlock 2014: 247 & 252).

Only a few times does *kišallu* appear in texts that are not strictly medical. Firstly, it appears in some omen and physiognomic texts. Note that it is in these texts that the only instances of *kišallu* denoting a body part of an animal (i.e. a sheep; no. 3) occur:

- 1) *DIŠ LÚ ki-ša-il-la-šú ra-ab-bi-ia na-zi-iq DIŠ LÚ ki-ša-al-li-in la i-šu ni-zi-iq-tum ú-ul i-ṭe-eḥ-ḥi-šum* “If a man’s ankles are large: he is a worrier. If a man lacks both ankles: worries will not affect him” (AfO 18, 64, i 26-27);
- 2) *DIŠ ki-ša-lum ša i’-[m]i-tim pa-al-ša-at aš-ša-at LÚ-lim a-na ḥa-ar-mu-tim uš-ši DIŠ ki-ša-lum ša š[u-me]-lim pa-al-ša-at na-ši-ir-ti<sup>lu</sup> KÚR-ka te-le-qé-e* “If the right ankle is perforated, the wife of a man will leave to become a prostitute.

22 Various medical texts have variants of this phrase:

- 1) *AMT 19, 8, 1: [... u] ki-šil-li-šú [KÉŠ-ma/su ina-eš]* “[You tie to ... and] his ankle [and he will get better]”;
- 2) *BAM 129, i 19: ina MURUB<sub>4</sub>’ ÚR u ‘ki-šal’-li-šú KÉŠ-su* “You tie to the thigh and ankle”;
- 3) *BAM 194, ii 4: ina ki-šal-li-šú KÉŠ-su* “You tie to his ankle”;
- 4) *BAM 415, 7’: (ina) ... u ki-šil-li-šú KÉŠ* “You tie (it) to his ankle”;
- 5) *CT 23, 7, 34-35: ina<sup>uzu</sup> ÚR-šú kìn-ši-šú u ki-šal-li-šú KÉŠ* “You tie (a string of red and white wool) around his thigh, his lower leg and his ankle”;
- 6) *CT 23, 8, 42: ina MURUB<sub>4</sub>’ ÚR u ki-šal-li KÉŠ* “You tie to the waist, thigh and ankle”;
- 7) *CT 23, 12, 49: [... kìn-ši-šú u ki-šal-li-šú KÉŠ-su* “You tie to his [ ], his lower leg and his ankle”;
- 8) *STT 273, i 18: [ina x-x-šú] u ki-šal-li-šú KÉŠ-su* “You tie to his [x] and his ankle.”

If the left ankle is perforated, you will take your enemy's treasure" (YOS 10, 47, 65-66);

- 3) DIŠ *i-na ki-ša-lim ša* [i]-*mi-tim e-še-em-tu wa-ta-ar-tum i-ta-ab-ši a-pil* LUGAL<sup>gis</sup> GU-ZA *i-ša-ba-at* DIŠ *i-na ki-ša-lim š[a š]u-me-lim e-še-em-tu wa-ta-ar-tum i-ta-ab-ši la be-el*<sup>gis</sup> GU-ZA *i-ša-ba-at* "If a superfluous bone has grown on the right ankle, the heir of the king will seize the throne. If a superfluous bone has grown on the left ankle, someone with no claim will seize the throne" (YOS 10, 47, 67-68 = YOS 10, 48, 4-5);<sup>23</sup>
- 4) DIŠ SA *ki-šil 15-šú ZI-ZI-šú DINGIR NU TU*[KU-ši] DIŠ SA *ki-šil GÙB-šú ZI-ZI-šú ap-lum ki-nu TUKU-š[i]* "If the vein of his right ankle pulsates, [he will ha]ve no god. If the vein of his left ankle pulsates, he will have a legitimate son" (Kraus 1939 no. 22, ii 12'-13'; Böck 2000: 270-271, lines 67-68);<sup>24</sup>
- 5) DIŠ *ina ki-ša-a*[l 15-šú ...] DIŠ *ina ki-ša-al 15*[o-šú ...] DINGIR-šú *a*-[...] DIŠ *ina ki-ša-al 15 u 150 GAR x* [...] NU ŠE-GA [...] DIŠ *ki-ša-al-la-šu DIRI*<sup>mes</sup> *me-si-ir N*[Á DIB-su] "If it is on the [right] ankle [...]. If it is on the le[ft] ankle [...], his god [...]. If it is on the right and left ankle [...], not being heard [...]. If his ankles pulsate, he [will have to stay in b]ed" (Kraus 1939 no. 36, rev. v 4'-9'; Böck 2000, 192-193, lines 143-146);
- 6) DIŠ *i-na ki-šal-lu ZAG GAR ina ŠÀ HÛL GEN*<sup>mes</sup> DIŠ *i-na GÙB GAR ina ŠÀ HÛL-LA GEN*<sup>mes</sup> "If it is placed on the right ankle, he will live in sadness. If it is placed on the left ankle, he will live in happiness" (CT 28 27 rev. 28-29 = Kraus 1939 no. 70; Dennefeld 1914: 211; Böck 2000: 210-211, lines 97-98);
- 7) DIŠ ŠE *ina ki-šal-li-šú lu šá 15 lu šá 150 ki-da-nu GAR AMAŠ DAGAL-iš* DIŠ ŠE *ina KIMIN qer-bi-nu GAR*<sup>mi</sup> KALA-GA DIB-su DIŠ ŠE *ina AN-TA-nu ki-šal-li-šú lu šá 15 lu šá 150 15 u 150 lu IGI lu (ana) EGIR lu 2 lu 3 lu 4 GAR-nu KIMIN* "If a *kittabru*-mole is placed on his ankle, be it on the outer right side, be it on the outer left side, his livestock will increase. If a *kittabru*-mole is placed on the same, on the inner side, distress will seize him. If *kittabru*-moles are placed to the right and the left above the ankle, be it the right one, be it the left one, be it to the front, be it to the back, be it two, three or four, the same" (*Šumma kittabru* 117-119; Böck 2000: 226-227).

Furthermore, *kišallu* also appears in three literary texts. In LKA 72, a cultic commentary on religious festivals within the cult of Ishtar-Tammuz (Ebeling 1931: 44), line rev. 12 has [e-r]e-nu bir-ka-šu<sup>gis</sup> ŠENNUR *ki-šil-la-š[u]* "His knees are cedar, his ankles a plum-tree."<sup>25</sup> The text is talking about Tammuz (Ebeling 1931: 44-47). In KAR 307,

23 This particular text has: DIŠ *i-na ki-ša-lum ša šu-me-lim e-še-em-tu wa-ta-ar-tum it-ta-ab-ši la NUMUN-ru*<sup>gis</sup> GU-ZA *i-ša-ba-at*.

24 This text fragment presents a nice sequence of parts of the foot. Lines 10-11' deal with the *kabbartu*, lines 12-13' with the ankle (*kišillu*) and lines 14'-15' with the SIG<sub>4</sub> GÌR (*libnat šēpi*) 'sole of the foot' (Labat — Malbran-Labat 1994: 326). In all these situations, the vein of the concerned body part is pulsating. These omens are followed by two others related to the ankle (*kišillu*, but now logographically written).

25 Matsushima (1987: 170) translates 'apple tree', whereas AHW 1149 has 'common medlar'.





- there is a mole on the left one, ditto [will prosper]” (CT 28, 27, rev. 22–23 = Kraus 1939 no. 70; Dennefeld 1914: 211; Böck 2000: 210–211, lines 91–92);
- 2) DIŠ GÌR-TAB *ka-bar-ti* ZAG-šú me-su-ri DIB-su DIŠ GÌR-TAB *ka-bar-ti* GÙB-šú KIMIN ŠĀ.TI.LA IGI-mar “If a scorpion stings his right/left *kabbartu*, detention will affect him. If a scorpion stings his left *kabbartu*, he will experience prosperity” (CT 38, 38, 43–44; Freedman 2006: 152–153, lines 46–47);
  - 3) DIŠ SA *ka-bar-ti* ZAG-šú ZI-ZI-šú, SA GAL [TUKU-ši] DIŠ SA *ka-bar-ti* GÙB-šú ZI-ZI-šú [SIG<sub>5</sub>-iq] “If the vein of his right *kabbartu* pulsates, [he will fall ill] with the *sagallu*-disease. If the vein of his left *kabbartu* pulsates, [he will succeed]” (Kraus 1939 no. 22 ii 10’–11’; Böck 2000: 270–271, lines 65–66).

Clearly, the lexeme *kabbartu* derives etymologically from *kabāru* ‘to become thick, heavy’ (CAD K: 19) and is generally believed to be another designation for ‘ankle’ (Steinert 2018: 241). Nevertheless, lexical texts have two Sumerian equivalents: ZAG-GÌR = *kab-bar-tú*, DAL-GÌR = *kab-bal-tú* (Erimhuš, II, 218–219 = MSL 17, 38, 218–219). Sumerian ZAG-GÌR means ‘side of the foot’, whereas DAL-GÌR means ‘line of the foot’. These circumscriptions do not really fit with the ankle itself. A solution to this lexical problem could be that *kabbartu* refers to one or both of the malleoli at the side of the foot. As the lateral malleolus is more protruding than the medial malleolus, *kabbartu* might very well refer to the former one, if indeed it refers to only one malleolus. In any case, connecting *kabbartu* with one or both malleoli is in line with the etymology of *kabbartu*, referring to a thick protrusion.

The third lexeme that may have a meaning ‘ankle’ (AHw 511; CDA 167; Rainey 2015: 271 & 1286), despite the meaning ‘fetlock, lower leg’ given to it by the CAD (K: 566), is *kursinnu*.<sup>27</sup> This lexeme occurs once in the Amarna Letters, more precisely in a list of gifts from the Mitannian king Tushratta to the pharaoh (EA 25, iv 33). Most unfortunately, however, the context of its occurrence is heavily damaged and even the word itself is not entirely preserved: [ku-ur]-si-in-ni na-d[i .....x]-di-ni GÌR “[An]kles use[d ... ..] foot” (reading by Moran 1987: 166 n.33, based on collations by E. I. Gordon; Moran 1992: 83 n.36; Rainey 2015: 270–271).

It is, however, extremely doubtful that the scribe of EA 162 would have had *kursinnu* in mind when he had to note down a lexeme for ‘ankle’. The main reason for this assumption is the fact that Akkadian *kursinnu* usually refers to body parts of animals, not of humans. To my knowledge, Akkadian only has two examples of a *kursinnu* of human beings:<sup>28</sup> Kraus 1939 no. 22, i 27’,<sup>29</sup> a Neo-Assyrian omen text; and

<sup>27</sup> The lexical lists have the following Sumerian equivalents for *kursinnu*, which, however, is never rendered logographically in the extant texts: UZU.UMBIN.BI.GIŠ = *kur-sin-ni-e-tum* (MSL 9, 13, 237); [UZU].LUB.x’BI’ = [ku]-ur-sin-nu, [UZU].TÜN.LÁ = [ku]-ur-sin-nu, ‘LUB.BI’.TUR.RA = k[ur]-sin-na-tum (MSL 9, 13, 249–251); GIŠ.LUB.BI.DU = *kur-sin-nu* (MSL 6, 105, 243).

<sup>28</sup> See Pardee (1986: 132 n. 102) on the reason why *kursinnu* could also refer to the human ankle.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. also Böck (2000: 266–267, line 30). Böck translates *kursinnu* with ‘Oberschenkel’, but uses this translation also for Akk. *pēmu* ‘thigh’ (Sum. ÚR). As the second expression is quite clear, Böck’s use of ‘Oberschenkel’ for *kursinnu* becomes problematic.



TCL 18, 126, 10, an Old Babylonian letter.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, there are many more attestations, in medical, ritual and omen texts, of *kursinnu* as a body part of animals, such as sheep, oxen, gazelles, donkeys and goats (AHw 511; CAD K: 566–567).

Etymologically, *kursinnu* has been compared to Ugaritic *qsr* (cf. supra), Hebrew *qars/šól*, Aramaic *qars/šullā*, Syriac *quršālā* and Punic *qšrt* (AHw 511; Pardee 1986: 132 n. 101), but the Ugaritic and Punic forms are rather closer to Akk. *kišallu* or *kišru*.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. BACK TO AMARNA

With this information at hand, it seems logical that, if the Amarna scribe, when drafting this letter, would have chosen the most suitable Akkadian lexeme for ankle, he would have opted for *kišallu* rather than for *kabbartu* or *kursinnu*.

Now the following question automatically imposes itself: why did the scribe of Amarna Letter EA 162 use NUNUZ ĠİR<sup>mes</sup>-š<sub>u</sub>-nu ‘their egg-of-the-feet’ to indicate the ankle, knowing that there was a word for ‘ankle’ in Sumerian and Akkadian? Why did he not simply use *zingi* or *kišallu*? To this question, four possible answers come to mind:

- 1) The expression is Canaanite. This is, however, difficult to prove, since our knowledge of the Canaanite language is extremely poor. Moreover, as Canaanite was a West Semitic language, its lexeme for ankle was perhaps related to Hebrew *qars/šól* and Aramaic *qars/šullā*. Nevertheless, this can only be true if the connection between these West Semitic words and Akkadian *kursinnu* is not correct.
- 2) The expression is an Akkadian translation of an Egyptian lexeme. This is not likely, since Egyptian has another word for ‘ankle’: ‘*rq* (Erman — Grapow 1926: 211).<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, this lexeme only occurs once, in a text from the Ptolemaic or Roman period.<sup>33</sup>
- 3) The ‘egg of the feet’ is actually only a part of the ankle, which the Amarna scribe intended to specify. Nonetheless, one could wonder why in that case the scribe did not use NUNUZ *ki-šal-li-š<sub>u</sub>-nu* ‘their egg-of-the-ankles’.
- 4) The scribe did not wish to use the usual lexeme for ‘ankle’ (*kišallu*), but instead used a more poetic circumscription in his letter. After all, the letter came from the Egyptian king and had to reflect his royal status in a linguistic and literary way. In this context, it must be underlined that various scholarly and literary texts too were unearthed at Amarna (Izre’el 1997): school exercises

<sup>30</sup> Note also the anthroponym <sup>m</sup>Ku-ur-si-in-ni (genitive) in TCL 17, 19, 17, another Old Babylonian letter.

<sup>31</sup> The Aramaic examples are found in the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (www.cal.huc.edu). Note also Syriac *qwršl* (*quršul*) and *qwršl*’ (*quršlā*).

<sup>32</sup> See also the online *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* (<http://aew.bbaw.de/tla/servlet/GetWcnDetails?u=guest&f=0&l=0&wn=39610&db=0>; consulted on 15.07.2020).

<sup>33</sup> Walker does not mention it in his 1996 monography on Egyptian anatomical terminology.

(EA 342–346, 350, 377), lexical texts and sign lists (EA 347–349, 351–354, 379), epic and narrative texts (e.g. the *Story of Kešši* [EA 341] and *Šar tamhāri* [EA 359, 375]), and mythological texts (*Adapa and the South Wind* [EA 356] and *Nergal and Ereškigal* [EA 357]). This corroborates the existence of an Akkadian-speaking scholarly community at Amarna.



In any case, the practice of denominating a body part by a composite expression ('X of Y') is not exceptional in Akkadian. For instance, feet and hands may have 'breasts'.

- 1) Feet: DIŠ KIMIN-*ma* GABA<sup>meš</sup> ša GÌR<sup>ii</sup>-šú GI<sub>6</sub><sup>meš</sup> ŠU<sup>d</sup>[15 GÍD-*ma* GAM] "If ditto (it is the first day he has been sick) and the 'breasts' of his feet are dark, 'hand' of [Ishtar; if it is prolonged, he will die]" (TDP 238, 65 = DPS 15, 65'; Scurlock 2014: 143 & 148). 'Breasts' of the feet also appear in TDP 144 iv 51' (= DPS 14, 252'; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 353 no. 14.44; Scurlock 2014: 127 & 136).
- 2) Hands: DIŠ KIMIN-*ma* GABA<sup>meš</sup> ša ŠU<sup>ii</sup>-šú GI<sub>6</sub><sup>meš</sup> ŠU DINGIR 'URU'-šú GAM "If ditto (it is the first day he has been sick) and the 'breasts' of his hands are dark, 'hand' of the god of his city; he will die" (DPS 15, 28; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 353 no. 14.43; Scurlock 2014: 141 & 145).

In addition, toes and fingers may have 'bellies'.

- 1) Toes: DIŠ *kar-ši* U<sup>meš</sup> ša GÌR<sup>ii</sup>-šú GI<sub>6</sub><sup>meš</sup> *i-ṭa-mu* GAM "If the bellies of his toes are dark and he twists, he will die" (TDP 144, iv 49' = DPS 14, 250'; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 352 no. 14.42; Scurlock 2014: 127 & 136); DIŠ KIMIN-*ma* *kar-ši* U<sup>meš</sup> ša GÌR<sup>ii</sup>-šú GI<sub>6</sub><sup>meš</sup> [*i-ṭa-mu* GAM] "If ditto (it is the first day he has been sick) and the 'bellies' of his toes are dark [(and) he twists, he will die]" (TDP 238, 66 = DPS 15, 66'; Scurlock 2014: 143 & 148).
- 2) Fingers: DIŠ KIMIN-*ma* *kar-ši* U<sup>meš</sup> ŠU<sup>ii</sup>-šú GI<sub>6</sub><sup>meš</sup> *u i-ṭa-me* ŠU GÍDIM-MA GAM "If ditto (it is the first day he has been sick) and the 'bellies' of the fingers of his hands are dark and he twists, 'hand' of ghost; he will die" (DPS 15, 29; Scurlock — Andersen 2005: 352 no. 14.41; Scurlock 2014: 141 & 146).

Finally, an interesting body part, because of its use of *kisallu/kišallu*, is the *kisil ritti* 'ankle of the hand', i.e. 'wrist (bone)' (only attested in Kraus 1939 no. 62, 23'–24', an Old Babylonian medical text; Böck 2000: 302–303, lines 23–24).<sup>34</sup>

34 A seeming synonym for 'wrist' is *šišit ritti*, lit. 'joint of the hand' (CAD Š/3: 124), but this expression occurs inter alia in the same text (Kraus 1939 no. 62, 17'–18') and must therefore indicate something different from the *kisil ritti*. Other expressions referring to the wrist or a part of it are *išdi kappi* (Kraus 1939 no. 24, 20) and *išdi qāti* (Antagal, D, 171 = MSL 17, 206, 171; cf. Holma 1911: 117), both literally meaning 'base of the hand'. In all likelihood, *kimkim-mu* also means 'wrist' (Holma 1911: 154–155; CAD K: 373), and *rittu* 'hand' may occasionally also refer to the wrist (CAD R: 383, meaning 1 a 2').



Putting this information together, one may conclude that the last answer of the list above seems to be the most likely one.

For the sake of completeness, it should also be mentioned that the lists of presents belonging to the Amarna Correspondence contain two similar expressions indicating an ‘anklet’: 𐎲AR ša GĪR (EA 14, i 78; EA 25, ii 24) and 𐎲AR GĪR (EA 22, ii 5; EA 25, iii 58, 61, 63, 64), both meaning ‘ring of the foot’. This is a common expression, whereby 𐎲AR (Akk. *semeru*) indicates a ring-shaped ornament, a torque, and GĪR the fact that it is a ring for feet, i.e. an anklet. 𐎲AR ŠU ‘ring of the hand’ is thus a name for a bracelet. Interestingly, these two expressions are predominantly used in Middle Babylonian texts (e.g. HSS 13, 61, 1 [a small list from Nuzi]; PBS 1/2, 62, 3 [a letter]; PBS 13, 80, rev. 6–7 [an inventory from Nippur]; PRU 3, 183, RS 16.146+161, 5 [an inventory from Ugarit]; RA 43, 174, 12 [an inventory from Qatna]).

## 5. CONCLUSION

One peculiar text passage in the Amarna Letters speaks of NUNUZ GĪR<sup>mes</sup> ‘egg of the feet’. Despite the hesitations of some earlier scholars, one may safely assume that this expression has the meaning ‘ankle’, but it occurs only here in this shape, the usual Akkadian word for ankle being *kišallu* (Sum. *zingi*). The reason for the use of this circumlocution is not clear, but may be poetic; the scribe simply wished to use more beautiful language. In addition, a study of the three possible Akkadian words for “ankle” (*kišallu*, *kabbartu* and *kursinnu*) has clearly revealed that it would be useful to have a new look at the anatomy of the foot as it is reflected in the Sumerio-Akkadian texts.

## ABBREVIATIONS

DPS = Diagnostic and Prognostic Series (Mesopotamian medical texts, cf. Heeßel 2000, Scurlock — Andersen 2005 and Scurlock 2014).

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