

## CDLN 2010:005

### Jerrold S. Cooper: Blind Workmen, Weaving Women and Prostitutes in Third Millennium Babylonia

W. Heimpel (2009) was right to look for blind workers in Ur III administrative accounts, since king Šu-Suen himself reported that, after a successful campaign (*RIME* 3/2.1.4.3 iv 15-31):

nam-guruš iri<sup>ki</sup> iri<sup>ki</sup>-ba<sup>7</sup> / sa<sub>2</sub> ba-ni-in-du<sub>11</sub>-ga<sup>7</sup> a<sup>7</sup> / igi-bi im<sup>7</sup> -[ma]-an-du<sub>8</sub>-du<sub>8</sub> / <sup>ges</sup>kiri<sub>6</sub> d<sup>en</sup>-lil<sub>2</sub><sup>7</sup> / <sup>d</sup>nin-lil<sub>2</sub>-la<sub>2</sub><sup>7</sup> / u<sub>3</sub> / <sup>ges</sup>kiri<sub>6</sub> dingir [gal]-gal<sup>7</sup>-e-ne-[ka] / giri<sub>3</sub><sup>7</sup>-še<sub>3</sub> im-mi-in-se<sub>3</sub> / u<sub>3</sub> nam-geme<sub>2</sub><sup>7</sup> / iri<sup>ki</sup> iri<sup>ki</sup>-[ba] / sa<sub>2</sub> ba-ni-in-du<sub>11</sub>-ga<sup>7</sup> -[a?] / e<sub>2</sub>-uš-bar<sup>7</sup> / <sup>d</sup>en-lil<sub>2</sub> / <sup>d</sup>nin-lil<sub>2</sub>-la<sub>2</sub> / u<sub>3</sub> / e<sub>2</sub> dingir gal-gal-e-ne-ka / sag-še<sub>3</sub> im-mi-[in]-rig<sup>7</sup>

*He blinded the working men of the cities he had conquered and put them in service in the gardens of Enlil and Ninlil, and in the gardens of the major gods. He presented the working women of the cities he had conquered as oblates to the textile mills of Enlil and Ninlil, and to the temples of the major gods.*

The translation of igi—du<sub>8</sub>, lit. “to open the eyes,” as a euphemism for “to blind,” can hardly be doubted, and is supported by OB Lu B iv 48 (*MSL* 12 183; now DCCLT Lu<sub>2</sub>-azlag<sub>2</sub> B-C Seg. 2, 103) igi-du<sub>3</sub>-du<sub>3</sub> = *ša ināšu nashā*, “whose eyes are torn out,” and the first millennium lexical equations igi-du<sub>8</sub>-du<sub>8</sub> = *inān nashātu* “torn out eyes” (*CAD* s.v. *nasāhu*, pointed out by G. Rubio) and du<sub>8</sub> = *napālu ša<sub>2</sub> IGI*, *nasāhu ša<sub>2</sub> IGI* “to gouge/tear out, of the eye” (*CAD* s.v. *napālu* A).

That Šu-Suen had his blinded captives set to work in temple gardens accords well with both Heimpel’s evidence for workers designated SIG<sub>7</sub>-a primarily working in gardens, and, as Heimpel points out, with the ED Girsu workers, primarily working in gardens, designated igi nu-du<sub>8</sub>. Although this designation unambiguously means “not seeing,” many scholars have been reluctant to accept that these workers were actually blind, as Heimpel notes (though see Selz 1995: 51 n. 230: “Vielleicht... geblendete Kriegsgefangene.”)

Perhaps supporting Heimpel’s suggestion that SIG<sub>7</sub>-a means “blind” is the sign SIG<sub>7</sub> itself, IGI-*gunû*, that is, the sign for “eye,” IGI, barred or canceled.

Whereas Šu-Suen had his male captives blinded, the female captives were not mutilated, but sent off as is to the textile mills, as were, most famously, Zimrilim’s female captives several centuries later (*LAPÖ* 18, 1166-1167). The latter, however, explicitly ordered that the prettiest women be sent to the royal harem for music lessons, where some, at least, were available sexually to the king (see Ziegler 2007: 37, 168-169). Several years ago, I noted that there were male personnel at Ur III Girsu who were identified not by patronyms, but as sons of prostitutes, alongside others who were listed as sons of female weavers (*RIA* 11, 16; see now Heimpel 2010). Prostitution and weaving seem to be the only women’s professions used to identify male personnel; in the case of prostitutes, it is understandable that the fathers of their children would not be known, and women weavers, especially captives, may also have been sexually vulnerable (as were the captives of Zimrilim), and hence unable to identify the fathers of their children. It is also possible that some of the Ur III prostitutes, about whom we know next to nothing, were captives as well.

---

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Heimpel, Wolfgang

2009 “Blind Workers in Ur III Texts” *KASKAL* 6, 43-48.

2010 “Left to Themselves. Waifs in the Time of the Third Dynasty of Ur.” In A. Kleinerman and J. Sasson, eds., *Why Should Someone Who Knows Something Conceal It? Cuneiform Studies in Honor of David I. Owen on his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, pp. 159-166.

Selz, Gebhard J.

1995 *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des altsumerischen Stadtstaates von Lagash*. *OPKF* 13. Philadelphia: University Museum.

Ziegler, Nele

2007

*Les Musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari. Florilegium marianum IX.*  
*Mémoires de NABU 10.* Paris: SEPOA.