

l a h a n, lahannum, ^{DUG}lahanni-: an exotic flask

The Sumerian word *lahan* is attested only in syllabic writing. The oldest occurrence is Early Dynastic III (*altsumerisch*), from Girsu, and might indicate an object of foreign provenance:

1 la-ha-an kur-ra (Thureau Dangin 1903, 21 ii 1)

Another significant occurrence is in an Old Babylonian (contrary to the record in von Soden 1959-81, 527) HAR-ra lexical list (Civil 1996):

d u g . l a - h a - a n = *lahannu* (HAR-ra 10, 79)

According to von Soden, the originally Sumerian word, *l a h a n*, would have entered the Akkadian lexicon as a loan, producing the adapted substantive *lahannum*. Sallaberger (1996, 123) critically examined the mentions and descriptions of the Akkadian *lahannum* and concluded that the substantive represents a flask with a small opening that could be closed using a ball of clay. It was used in rituals, contained liquids (water, beer, milk, honey, cf. ABL 951: 18) and in some occurrences it was made of precious materials (silver, gold, glass, lapis lazuli).

The CAD L (39f., s.v.) proposes a general meaning “bottle”, and includes a number of examples, some of which demonstrate that this vessel was used not only in rituals but also for medical purposes. More specifically, the *lahannum* was employed for mixing and decanting ingredients, which is consistent with the shape of a flask or bottle; significantly, no examples indicate that one would use a *lahannum* to cook or boil a concoction. In any case, an important function of the *lahannum* was libation, which supports the hypothesis that the flask had a small opening and could be employed to pour liquids for magical and ritual purposes.

Linguistically, according to Sallaberger (1996), who follows the CHD L-N (6, s.v.), the Akkadian *lahannum* should also be connected to the Hittite ^{DUG}*lahanni-*. The *lahanni-* vessel in Hittite was a container employed exclusively for libations, at least judging from the not very numerous occurrences available in the corpus. The verb it is generally associated to is *ispant-/sipant-* “to pour, libate, offer” (HW², IV, s.v.); other vessels employed in the same ritual actions include a GAL (KBo 21, 35 i 8).

The connection between Akkadian *lahannum* and Hittite ^{DUG}*lahanni-* is a perfect semantic match and it is formally unproblematic: each of the two languages might have borrowed the word from the other one, but the fact that *LAHANNUM* (cf. CHD L-N, 6 s.v. for the attestations) is also present as an Akkadogram in Hittite strongly indicates a direction of the loan from Mesopotamia to Anatolia.

The details of the relationship with Sumerian *l a h a n*, however, complicate the picture. First of all, it is necessary to complete the analysis of the Sumerian, Akkadian and Hittite situation, which, indeed, can help shed some light on the origin and direction of the circulation of this Wanderwort.

In Hittite, we also encounter the name of a substance, *lahni-*, which was dissolved in water. Just like ^{DUG}*lahanni-*, the word is not included in the list of “inherited” lexical items discussed by Kloekhorst (2008). Can it be connected with ^{DUG}*lahanni-*? Possibly, but the path of a normal morphological and morphophonemic derivation is beyond any hope of reconstruction (in other words, one cannot derive one of the two words from the other one the way historical linguists do). Still, the semantic fields are still fairly close to each other: a flask for libations and a substance one can solve in water or liquids. While a direct derivation inside Anatolian is unsupportable, the two substantives could be related loans from a different language.

More illuminating is the case of Akkadian, where, apart from *lahannum*, one also encounters another container, the *lahtānum*, a larger basin, usually translated as “(beer) vat”, mostly or exclusively used for beer (cf. in general Sallaberger 1996, 44f.; Damerow 2012). It corresponds to a compound Sumerian logogram (NUNUZ.AB₂×LA) generally transcribed LAHTAN in the same lexical list HAR-ra 10, 6 (cf. Civil 1996; other graphic variants seem to exist in Sumerian, with the

LA phonetic indicator occasionally replaced by different signs). Its function in the brewing process is well known, and even described in the Sumerian literary text Ninkasi A:45 (Civil 1964). The sumerogram is also attested in a Boğazköy vocabulary, where it corresponds to Hitt. *arrumas lahhus* “washing vat (vel sim.)” (KUB 3, 94 ii 17); another occurrence of the logogram can be found in the fragmentary feast KBo 29, 123 vo. 6, with the determinative URUDU. Nothing, however, indicates that the substantive was borrowed into Hittite. As regards the semantics of the sumerogram, the difference between “(beer) vat” and “washing vat” is not surprising, and one must also recall that in Mesopotamia different shapes of *lah-tan* existed (Sallaberger 1996, 45).

Regardless of the historical details one may only speculate upon, also in this case one may wonder whether the two fairly similar Akkadian (and Sumerian?) words, *lahannum*/*lahan* and *lahtānum*/*lahtan*, belonging to two very close semantic fields, had something to do with each other. The problem, here, is that once again a morphological path of derivation does not clearly emerge: in Akkadian, no known process of morphogenesis or diachronic change can produce one form starting from the other one, nor is it possible to reconstruct a triconsonantal radical that would generate both forms.

All in all, what one can conclude is that both in Mesopotamia and in Anatolia there is a chance that other loans existed beside *lahannum* and ^{DUG}*lahanni-* that may have been connected to (related) original form(s) in the model language, and both in Akkadian and in Hittite the semantics of these opaquely close lexical items seems to produce very convincing matches. At this point, the next step should be identifying the language from which all or some of these substantives were borrowed.

The biggest temptation is, of course, to invoke the usual equation “oldest attestation = original form”, which corresponds to the “oldest language = model language” bias. In this case, one could simply assume that Sumerian *lahan* (and *lahtan*) would be the original words, borrowed into Akkadian and then, via Akkadian, into Hittite.

In general, evaluating whether a Sumerian lexical element was indeed Sumerian or if it was, instead, itself a loan is very difficult. The genealogical isolation of Sumerian makes it impossible to study the inheritance of the lexicon, and the attempts at identifying elements of a substrate or adstrate always rely on indirect evidence or on speculations based on the morphological and morphophonemic typology of the language.

In this case, however, one may wish to notice that in Indo-European a candidate root exists for a group of related to containers used to mix (Sumerian *lah-tan*, Akkadian *lahtānum*) and to pour and libate (Sumerian *lahan*, Akkadian *lahannum*, Hittite ^{DUG}*lahanni-*). The root is **leh₂-*, attested in Hittite *lahhuwai-*, with the general meaning “to pour” (Puhvel 2001, 23f. Note that Kloekhorst, 2008, 513, prefers to reconstruct a root **léhu-*).

Could the base for the Wanderwörter, Sumerian *lahan* and *lahtan*, Akkadian *lahtānum* and *lahannum*, and Hittite ^{DUG}*lahanni-* (and **perhaps* lahni-*) have been Indo-European? The answer to this question requires some caution. For linguistic and historical reasons, it seems unlikely that the model language was Hittite (or even Proto-Anatolian): loans from Anatolia to the Sumerian world are difficult to conceive (especially in an Early Dynastic phase) and, as I have argued, there is no clear etymological path to connect *lahni-* and ^{DUG}*lahanni-* inside of Hittite.

However, other Indo-European languages of the area could have very well served as the model for the loan. If one considers the designation *la-ha-a-n kur-ra* (Thureau Dangin 1903, 21 ii 1), it seems reasonable to suppose that the provenance of the flask was indeed exotic, and that the item was imported from either Northern Mesopotamia or, a much likelier possibility, from the Zagros mountains. In both areas, a penetration of Indo-Iranian elements is all but surprising even in the late III millennium BCE. That the lexical element and the item it referred to were in fact not originally Sumerian is further supported by the following facts: (1) exclusive syllabic writing; (2) one case in which the spelling is *dug.la-ha-nu-um*, with Akkadian ending, in a Sumerian text (Old Babylonian Nippur Ura 2, 260, also recorded in the EPSD; last accessed on April 27, 2018).

As for the other areas where the use of this container is attested, while in Akkadian no specific geographical connotation can be associated with the origin of the *lahannum* or with the type of

rituals in which it was involved, in Hittite the vessel was used only in rituals of Hurrian tradition, (and the presence in the Hurrian world of Indo-Iranian elements is well-known).

If one assumed that Sumerian *lahan* was indeed a loan from an Eastern Indo-European language (from which possibly also the other similar words discussed in this contribution may have derived), the likeliest path of diffusion would be the following. The lexical material entered Mesopotamia and was borrowed into Sumerian and Akkadian. Which one of these two languages borrowed it from the other is, at this stage, difficult to say, but the syllabic rendering in Sumerian might indicate that the word entered Akkadian first. From the Mesopotamian (and possibly Hurrian?) world, ^{DUG}*lahanni-* finally entered the Anatolian lexicon. As for *lahtānum/lahtan*, it is very likely that the pattern of diffusion was very similar, while no safe conclusion can be drawn as regards the semantically less close Hittite *lahni-* substance.

Of course, while the path of diffusion can be convincingly reconstructed, it is not possible to also reconstruct the exact original forms, nor shall I try to identify the exact Indo-European model language from which the process of diffusion had originated.

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