

Uri Gabbay

The Balaġ Instrument and Its Role in the Cult of Ancient Mesopotamia

§1. The balaġ instrument played an important part in ancient Mesopotamian religion, but its identification has been disputed for many years.¹ There is some evidence that the balaġ was a stringed instrument and other evidence that it was a drum. Anne Kilmer tried to integrate the evidence by hypothesizing that originally it was a stringed instrument whose sound box could have been used as a drummable resonator as well, and that eventually its name became associated with the percussion instrument alone (Kilmer 1995: 465). Other scholars understood the term balaġ as a general word for musical instruments (Hartmann 1960: 57) or for stringed instruments (Krispijn 1990: 6–7; 2002: 468).

Similarly to Kilmer, my understanding is that the textual and iconographical evidence demonstrate that originally the balaġ was a stringed instrument, and that with time the term began to include a drum as well.² However, I believe that this process did not occur because of the use of the resonator also as a drum, but rather due to the cultic environment and circumstances in which the balaġ instrument was played.

§2. In my opinion, the following evidence would seem to point to an identification of the balaġ as a stringed instrument in the third millennium BCE:

¹ Some of the subjects dealt with in this article are elaborations of various points discussed in Gabbay 2007: 53–99. W. Heimpel's unpublished paper "Harp Gods," which deals with similar issues to those dealt with in the present article, was brought to my knowledge too late to be included here. Methodological remark: In this article I make use of sources from different periods, localities and genres. I am aware that the compilation of such sources may be at times misleading, but the lack of a significant volume of clear evidence for the balaġ instrument deriving from a *single* period, locality or genre makes it difficult to draw conclusions that are supported by enough textual and iconographical evidence. In addition, this article demonstrates the changes that the balaġ instrument went through during the period of over 2000 years in which it is attested.

² In any case, in my opinion, the large drums depicted on the Ur-Namma and Gudea Stelae are not balaġs, as was supposed by some scholars (cf. Black 1991: 28), but are rather to be identified as the á-lá drums (see the article by Sam Mirelman in this volume).

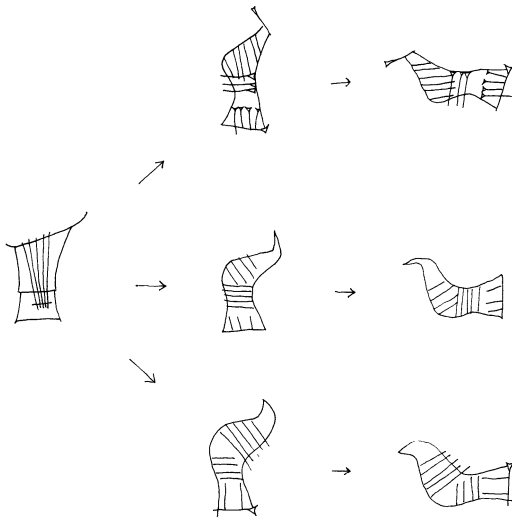


Fig. 1: Reconstructed evolution from lyre to Early Dynastic III sign BALAĠ: Jestin 1937: no. 45, ix: 2, 5; Deimel 1923: no. 70, i: 8; 1924: no. 138, iii: 5 (after photographs in the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative: cdli.ucla.edu).

Fig. 2: The sign ZATU 47 (Green and Nissen 1987: 179).

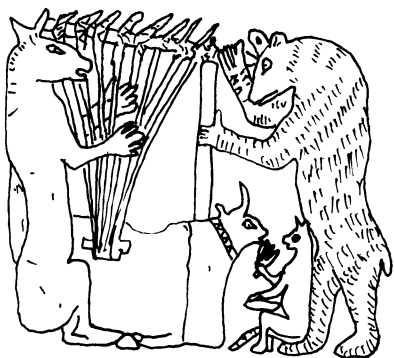


a: The sign ZATU 47 (Green and Nissen 1987: 179): Englund 1994: Pl. 15, W 6760,b, ii: 1; Pl. 20, W 6882,g, 1'; Pl. 82, W 9655,ac, i: 4; Pl. 89, W 9656,aa, ii: 3'; Pl. 90, W 9656,ao, i: 1 (after photographs in the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative: cdli.ucla.edu).



b: The sign in W 20266, 4, ii: 8' (after Green and Nissen 1987: Pl. 41).

Fig. 3: Bull-headed lyre sound boxes.



a: after Hartmann 1960: 323.



b: after Hartmann 1960: 324.



c: after Boehmer 1965: Pl. XXXII no. 385.



d: after Hartmann 1960: 330.

- (a) The sign BALAG resembles a stringed instrument already in the Early Dynastic III period (although its identification in archaic texts is not certain),³ possibly even a lyre (Fig. 1).⁴
- (b) The Ebla vocabulary equates BALAG with *kinnārum*, a (West-?) Semitic word that is usually understood to designate the lyre (as in Hebrew *kinnōr*) (Conti 1990: 160).⁵
- (c) In my opinion, the many third-millennium iconographical representations of lyres with bull-headed sound boxes (Fig. 3a–d) fit the terms ad-gi₄-gi₄ and GU₄.BALAG known from later periods (see §§9–14 below). In addition, the bull-headed lyres from the Royal Cemetery of Ur are in keeping with the cultic participation of the balaḡ in funerals.⁶

3 Cf. Volk 1994, 170f. It has been argued that the archaic sign ZATU 47 (Green and Nissen 1987: 179), depicting a stringed instrument (Fig. 2a), is the archaic form of BALAG, but it is very different from the later forms of this sign (Fig. 1), and, so, it is difficult to assume that these are actually two phases of the same sign. Therefore, it has been suggested that these signs should probably not be connected (Black 1991: 28 n. 39; Steinkeller 1995: 698). Steinkeller refers to the sign ZATU 775 (Green and Nissen 1987: 374), which resembles a stringed instrument, as a possible candidate for the early BALAG sign (Steinkeller 1995: 698), but this is not certain either. However, even though the form of the sign ZATU 47 significantly differs from the later BALAG sign, its appearance in W 20266, 4, ii: 8' (where the sign BALAG would be expected, according to the same sequence found in a later period), may indicate that the sign ZATU 47 is the predecessor of BALAG after all (cf. Cooper 2006: 41–42 n. 6). It should be noted that there is a slight possibility that the sign appearing in the tablet W 20266, 4, ii: 8' is actually not ZATU 47. The latter usually depicts a curved frame of the instrument, whereas the sign in this tablet contains straight lines and right angles, shaped as a square (Fig. 2b; Green and Nissen 1987: Pl. 21; photograph in Englund and Nissen 1993: Pl. 41).

4 When the Early Dynastic III sign is turned 90° it possibly depicts an instrument consisting of two parts separated by ca. 3–5 horizontal lines (Fig. 1). The bottom part may represent the lyre's sound box, and the top part, the frame and yoke of the lyre. The vertical or slanted lines running from top to bottom may be interpreted as the lyre's strings attached to the yoke on one side and to the sound box on the other. The characteristic extra wedge or curved line at the upper right-hand side (after the 90° turn) may represent the part joining the frame and yoke, which, as seen in iconographical representations of lyres, is often located before the edge of the yoke, leaving a few centimeters of the yoke protruding beyond the joined parts, which occasionally curves upward (cf. Figs. 3a–d).

5 For attestations of *kinnārum* in Mari (and Ugarit), cf. CAD K: 387b, and references in Ziegler 2007: 50 n. 200. For etymology and discussion, cf. von Soden 1988; Koehler and Baumgartner 1994–2000: vol. 2: 484; del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2004: 450–451. Note that the Ugaritic dictionary is hesitant regarding the translation; see del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2004: 450: “harp, lyre.” Note also the Hebrew dictionary: “zither” (Koehler and Baumgartner 1994–2000: vol. 2: 484).

6 For the funerary use of the balaḡ, cf. Gudea, Statue B, v: 1–4: “The hoe was not used at the city cemetery, bodies were not buried, the gala priest did not place the balaḡ and did not recite

Thus,⁷ I assume that originally the term balaġ referred to a stringed instrument,⁸ quite possibly a lyre.⁹

§3. The balaġ stringed instrument was the main instrument to accompany a genre of Sumerian prayers. These prayers were so strongly and closely identified with the stringed instrument that participated in their cultic performance that they themselves were called Balaġ as well. However, other instruments were also used to accompany them. By the beginning of the second millennium BCE, Balaġ prayers were associated more and more with other instruments, especially with

a lament, and the wailing woman did not utter a lament” (Edzard 1997: 32). Note also the lexical equation: lú-balaġ-ġā (he of the balaġ) = *mušēlū eṭemmī*, (raiser of spirits, i.e., necromancer) (cf. references in CAD M/II: 265).

7 In addition to these arguments, the etymology of the word “balaġ” may be an onomatopoeic one, pointing to its identification as a stringed instrument; “balaġ” could represent the resounding of the plucking of a stringed instrument (*blang) (Volk 1994: 171 n. 22; Selz 1997: 195 n. 153).

8 The only significant argument for the balaġ being a drum already in the third millennium BCE is that Ur III administrative texts distinguish between the nar-sa-me and the nar-balaġ-me, sometimes appearing in the same text. Since (Sum.) sa means string, this distinction was understood as referring to two categories of nar musicians, namely, “players of stringed instruments (Sum. sa)” as opposed to “players of percussion instruments (Sum. balaġ)” (Gelb 1975: 57–58). However, sa does not necessarily refer to the general category of stringed instruments, but may define a specific group within them. Thus, the terms sa and balaġ here may refer to two different categories of musical instruments, such as harps and lyres, or lutes and lyres/harps. Supporting this is the Akkadian term *pitnu*, equated with Sumerian sa, which may refer to both a string and (a group of) stringed instruments (CAD P: 439–440; Ziegler 2007: 7677). The same distinction between the groups of sa and balaġ (and in the context of the nar, tigi) players is probably reflected in the Akkadian terms MUNUS.NAR *pi-it-nim* and *ša pi-it-ni*, “players of the *pitnu*” (Ziegler 2007: 76 n. 266) and *tigû, tigîtu*, “players of the *tigû* instrument” (CAD T: 398b).

9 The two main reasons why balaġ is often understood as “harp” and not “lyre” are that the archaic sign that presumably represents BALAG looks like a harp, and that the lyre is supposedly represented by a different Sumerian word: zà-mí. However, as noted above (footnote 3), the identification of the archaic sign ZATU 47 as BALAG is uncertain. Regarding zà-mí, in my view, it is more likely that this is the term for “harp” rather than “lyre.” Thus, Akkadian *sammû* (< Sum. zà-mí) is quite often attested in the first millennium BCE (cf. references in CAD S: 119), but representations of lyres in the art of this period are quite rare. Additionally, if Steinkeller’s suggestion that the *parašitum* instrument is to be identified as a horizontal harp is correct (Steinkeller 2006: 7–10), its designation as a type of zà-mí in two texts (cf. Steinkeller 2006: 7) would seem to refer to zà-mí as a word generally designating “harp” instruments, and to the *parašitum* as a specific harp in this group. Admittedly, the evidence is not certain for the identification of balaġ as originally designating “lyre” and zà-mí as “harp” (and vice versa). The interpretation of balaġ as a general word for “stringed instrument” (cf. §1 above) would solve some of the problems of the conflicting evidence, but, in my opinion, this may be a modern compromise, while the ancient terminology designated specific instruments or groups of specific instruments and not general musicological terms.

the *lilissu*,¹⁰ a drum that can be identified according to an iconographical representation from the Seleucid period of a kettledrum with the label ^dLILIZ ‘divine *lilissu*’ (Thureau-Dangin 1922: Pl. 91).¹¹ The result of this process was that the *balaḡ* stringed instrument itself was no longer the main instrument that accompanied these prayers. In fact, there is no evidence for the playing of this instrument even in texts mentioning the *balaḡ* stringed instrument in the same context of *Balaḡ* prayers, and these prayers may have been chanted in front of the (deified) *balaḡ* instrument rather than accompanied by it.

§4. The replacement of the *balaḡ* stringed instrument by the *lilissu* drum in the performance of *Balaḡ* prayers is seen in Old Babylonian dedicatory inscriptions. During the third millennium BCE, especially in the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, kings are known to have dedicated *balaḡ* instruments to the temple. This is seen in royal inscriptions and year names, such as in a year name of Gudea, ruler of Lagaš: “The year in which the *balaḡ* Ušumgalkalama was fashioned” (Falkenstein 1966: 8), or in a year name of king Ibbi-Sin: “The year (in which) Ibbi-Sin, king of Ur, fashioned the *balaḡ*, (the divine) Ninigizibara, for the goddess Inana” (Sigrist and Gomi 1991: 329).

However, from the beginning of the second millennium BCE, *lilissu* drums appear to have been donated rather than *balaḡ*s, as seen, e.g., in a year name of king Iter-piša of Isin: “The year (in which) Iter-piša the king fashioned a bronze *lilissu* for the god Utu” (Sigrist 1988: 36).¹² Interestingly, a variant of this year name, appearing in the date formula of one Old Babylonian legal tablet from Nippur, seems to have the sign BALAG before the word li-li-is, probably to be understood as a determinative (^{balaḡ}li-li-is), indicating the li-li-is instrument which belongs to the category of *balaḡ*, i.e., serving in ritual as the *balaḡ* instrument and accompanying the *Balaḡ* prayers.¹³

10 Thus, probably already in a ritual from Mari, where the mention of the *lilissu* with Ninigizibara (cf. below, §§10–11), may refer to a performance of Emesal prayers (cf. reference in Ziegler 2007: 63, with n. 221).

11 I know of only three third-millennium-BCE attestations of the *lilissu* instrument: the first probably appears in a lexical list from Fara, written li-li (Civil 1987: 137), and the second and third in Ur III documents from Umma, written ^{urudu}li-li-is in an Ur III document from Umma (de Genouillac 1922: no. 6055, ii: 9–10) and li-li-is (Sigrist and Ozaki 2009: no. 1559: 11).

12 For other references to dedications of *lilissu* instruments in the Old Babylonian period, cf. Charpin 1978: 28 with n. 55.

13 See Stone 1976: no. 5, A 6 (N 1064) (according to transliteration in the electronic publication of the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary: psd.museum.upenn.edu). However, from my own reading of the microfiche photograph, one cannot exclude the possibility that the sign is URUDU^l (the determinative for “copper”) and not BALAG. The same phenomenon probably occurs in an Old Babylonian copy of a liturgical text, which laments the change of cult in the temple; see,

Two other Old Babylonian dedication inscriptions combine the sign BALAG with the syllabic spelling li-li-š. The first is a year name of Immerum of Sippar: “The year (in which) he fashioned two BALAG li-li-š” (Pinches 1898: Pl. 50, Bu. 91–5–9, 318, rev. 32).¹⁴ The second is in a Sumerian inscription of Warad-Sin of Larsa, describing the fashioning of “BALAG [l]i-li-š zabar,” dedicated for his own life and for the life of his father Kudur-Mabuk (Frayne 1990: 260, iii: 4’–9’). The first occurrence deals with the fashioning of two instruments and the second occurrence mentions two dedications (for Warad-Sin and for Kudur-Mabuk), which probably implies that two instruments were fashioned. It is possible that in both instances the sign BALAG should be understood as a determinative (cf. above), indicating that two *lilissu* drums that served as balaḡs were fashioned. Another possibility is that the sequence balaḡ li-li-š (zabar) is to be understood as “balaḡ and (bronze) *lilissu* drum,” perhaps indicating that in this period the balaḡ stringed instrument was still used in cult together with the *lilissu* drum.

A somewhat similar case occurs in an Old Babylonian year name from the city of Kisurra, where the sign BALAG seems to stand for the *lilissu* drum in two tablets: “The year (in which) Itur-Šamaš built a bronze *lilissu* (written: BALAG ‘zabar’) for (Annunītum)” (Kienast 1978: vol. 1: 22; Goddeeris 2009: 17). Kienast correctly read the sign BALAG (misread by Goddeeris as ūb) as liliš_x here, since ZABAR ‘bronze’, is the regular designation for the *lilissu* drum (cf. references in CAD L: 186–187) and never occurs with the balaḡ stringed instrument (cf. also §6 below). In fact, the same year name also appears with the syllabic writing li-li-š zabar (Goddeeris 2009: 17). This year name may be identical to two other shortened date formulas from Kisurra, which have syllabic writings for the *lilissu* drum (Kienast 1978: vol. 1: 22; Goddeeris 2009: 17).¹⁵

The religious-political significance of these votive acts was identical: by donating the main instrument that accompanied one of the most important prayers of the temple cult, the king could be involved in the ritual and not only

“my lady’s (leather) ūb instrument is (now) a (balaḡ-type) *lilissu* drum” (ga-ša-an-ḡā^{kuš} ūb-a-ni balaḡ[?] li-li-š-ām) (Radau 1909: Pl. 16 and photographic plate X, no. 13, rev. v: 15’). This reading is probably reflected in Falkenstein’s transliteration: liliš^{li-š} (Falkenstein 1939: 171 n. 1).

14 mu BALAG li-li-š min^l-a-bi^{du} tu-ra mu-na-an-dīm. Charpin read the second sign as eḡir (i.e., “the year after...”) (Charpin 1978: 28 n. 55), but it seems more like BALAG.

15 mu li^l-li-sa-am^l a-na an-nu-ni-tum and mu li-li-š zabar. Note also another year name from Kisurra: mu urudu^l li-li-š^{du} nin-ī-si-in-na^l-ra (Kienast 1978: vol. 1: 25; Goddeeris 2009: 16). In light of the survey of year names discussed above, one wonders whether the dedication of a balaḡ in a Sumerian inscription of Išbi-Erra of Isin (Frayne 1990: 6–7) refers to the balaḡ stringed instrument or that the sign BALAG stands here for the *lilissu* drum.

the temple and its personnel. This is true whether this instrument was a balaĝ stringed instrument or a *lilissu* drum.¹⁶

§5. I do not know what caused the change from stringed instrument, balaĝ, to kettledrum, *lilissu*, in the cultic performance of the Balaĝ prayers, but this change in cult probably also led to a change in the meaning of the word “balaĝ.” As mentioned above, balaĝ is both the name of an instrument, a stringed instrument in the third millennium BCE, and a genre of prayers. The shared name points to the close association between the two. This relationship seems to have given rise to a new association: since the prayers, now associated with the *lilissu* instrument, were still called Balaĝ, the term “balaĝ” began to designate the kettledrum that accompanied them, in addition to its common name — *lilissu*. The exact context of the word’s new meaning is not certain: was it a literary word, or was it understood as the Sumerian counterpart to the Akkadian word *lilissu*? In any case, the word “balaĝ” now referred to the kettledrum, *lilissu*, the main instrument associated with the Balaĝ prayers (which was still also designated by the word *lilissu*).

§6. This is supported by second-millennium-BCE writings of the sign BALAG with the determinative KUŠ ‘leather’, usually used for drums, as opposed to the regular determinative GIŠ ‘wood’, found in administrative third-millennium-BCE texts and in lexical texts (cf. references in PSD B: 75, 78). The writing ^{kuš}balaĝ is found in second-millennium-BCE Sumerian lexical texts (cf. references in PSD B: 78), as well as in texts relating to the genre of Balaĝ prayers, as seen in an Old Babylonian catalogue of Balaĝ and other prayers.¹⁷ These texts suggest that the instrument accompanying the Balaĝ prayers was the leather balaĝ, i.e. the *lilissu* kettledrum (known from later sources to have had a bull-hide drumhead), and not the wooden, stringed balaĝ.

This process is clearly seen in first-millennium-BCE sources. Many ritual instruction texts connect the singing of the Balaĝ prayers to the playing of the *lilissu* drum (e.g., Maul 1999: 292). According to a Late Babylonian ritual text, the genre of prayers known as Balaĝ may have even been called *Lilissu* in the first mil-

¹⁶ Apparently, not only the balaĝ and *lilissu* instruments were donated: two Old Babylonian year names mention the donations of á-lá drums (cf. Charpin 1978: 28 with n. 56).

¹⁷ See Zimmern 1913: 56 no. 206: 8 (Löhnert 2009: 16). The determinative KUŠ is probably also found with BALAG in the subscript of an unpublished Old Babylonian Eršema prayer (BM 23696), where it stands for the Balaĝ genre as well, referring to the two Balaĝ prayers with which the Eršema on the tablet may be paired. Note also ^{kuš}balaĝ appearing a few times in an Old Babylonian ritual text from Larsa (Goodnick Westenholz and Westenholz 2007: no. 1; see W. Sallaberger *apud* Löhnert 2009: 68 with n. 312).

lennium (among other names). Thus, in a Late Babylonian ritual, a Balaĝ prayer is denoted *Lilis* (Çağırkan and Lambert 1991–1993: 100: 158).

This association is also reflected in the first–millennium-BCE writing of the sign LILIZ (standing for *lilissu*), which is a combination of the signs ÁB (used in several other signs designating percussion instruments) and BALAG.¹⁸

Another reflection of this change is seen in a ritual act that was connected to the chanting of Balaĝ prayers and their musical accompaniment: ritual circumambulations were connected to the balaĝ stringed instrument in the third millennium BCE as seen in administrative documents dating to the Third Dynasty of Ur, which mention the balaĝ in the context of the Sumerian verb *niĝin* ‘to turn around, circumambulate’, especially in the phrase *balaĝ u₄-da é iri niĝin-na*, “the balaĝ of the day which circumambulates the temple and city” (Heimpel 1998 with reference to previous studies). Cultic circumambulations are connected to the *lilissu* drum in first-millennium sources, as seen in the use of the verb *lawû*, the Akkadian equivalent of Sumerian *niĝin*, in a Neo-Assyrian letter: “Only one copper *lilissu* will circumambulate (*i-lab-bi-a*) the temples” (Cole and Machinist 1998: 15, no. 12, rev. 13–14).

The evolution of the word “balaĝ” from the third-millennium-BCE stringed instrument to its association with the *lilissu* drum in the second and first millennia BCE is demonstrated by a mythological pseudo-historical description from Seleucid Uruk, where Nungalpiriĝgal, the *apkallu* scholar of Enmerkar, is said to have made a bronze balaĝ for the god An: “During the reign of Enmerkar, Nungalpiriĝgal was the *apkallu*...[He fashioned(?) a bronze balaĝ...They set the balaĝ before An” (van Dijk 1962: 44–45, Pl. 27: 8–11). This Seleucid text continues the long tradition of the dedication of balaĝ and *lilissu* instruments mentioned earlier. However, while after the third millennium BCE it was the *lilissu* drum and not the balaĝ stringed instrument which was dedicated, the scribe of this text uses the word “balaĝ” (or at least the sign BALAG) for this mythological dedication. But bronze, ZABAR, is very often associated with the *lilissu* drum and never with the balaĝ instrument. Therefore, the concrete object the scribe had in mind was the *lilissu* drum, although he used the word “balaĝ” or the sign BALAG — perhaps as an archaism — since this drum was so closely related to the Balaĝ compositions (cf. also §4 above).

§7. In the second and first millennia BCE, the word balaĝ, or Akkadian *balaggu*, was still used (although quite rarely) in nonliterary and nonlexical contexts

¹⁸ There is no evidence that the sign ÁB (which can stand for “cow” in other contexts) in these instruments refers to the skin of a cow that covered the instruments (contra Heimpel 1998: 15). See also D. Shehata, this volume.

alongside *lilissu* for the instrument that accompanied the Balaḡ prayers (and other Emesal prayers), but it now probably referred to the *lilissu* drum and not understood in its original sense — the stringed instrument. This is reflected also by the Syriac word *plaga'*, an Aramaic loanword from Akkadian *balaggu*, which refers to a type of drum (Brockelmann 1928: 571).

§8. To sum up, and before continuing, the balaḡ was originally a stringed instrument that accompanied the Balaḡ prayers. Other instruments played at these prayers as well, especially the *lilissu* drum, which eventually replaced the stringed instrument. The Balaḡ prayers continued to be associated with an instrument bearing the same name, and since the *lilissu* had become so closely connected to them, the word “balaḡ” became to be understood as a secondary name of the *lilissu* instrument.

§9. I would now like to relate to the theology of the balaḡ instrument, and by doing so to connect it again to its third-millennium identification as a stringed instrument, specifically a lyre (at least at some point of time).

Many minor gods are listed in god lists from the first millennium BCE as GU₄.BALAG, the signs indicating “balaḡ-bull.” This is a logogram for Akkadian *mundalku*, that is, counselor or advisor (CAD M/II: 206–227; Litke 1998: 7 n. 49, 78 n. 100), or, more accurately in this context, minor gods who participate in the deliberations of the great gods, representing humanity. Some of the names of these deities are connected to their function as counselors. Thus, names that are constructed in the formula “divine name/epithet + da + gal/maḡ + di” (e.g., ^dNin-lil-da-gal-di, ^dNin-da-gal-di, ^dNin-da-maḡ-di) refer to the grand or mighty (Sum. gal/maḡ) speaking (Sum. di) of the counselor deity with (Sum. -da) the main deity (Heimpel 2001). Other names contain the element šà-kúš-ù (^dKalam-šà-kúš-ù, ^dšà-kúš-ù-kalam-ma),¹⁹ which also stands for counselor and is often paired with the phrase ad-gi₄-gi₄ (cf. §§11–13) (PSD A/III: 18).

Other names of the GU₄.BALAG deities clearly refer to their physical form as musical instruments. Thus, some names of these deities contain the element balaḡ itself (Balaḡ-^dEn-lil, ^dBalaḡ-e-si¹-a¹, ^dNin-šir²-balaḡ², ^dBalaḡ-ḡá),²⁰ while others refer to musical instruments that are possibly related to lyres or to the balaḡ instrument (^dSur₉-gal, ^dUr₄-sur₉-ra, ^dUr-^dZa-ba-ba).²¹ Other names of these deities

¹⁹ Litke 1998: 134, III: 157–158.

²⁰ Litke 1998: 51, I: 264; 52, I: 272; 105, II: 311, 313; for ^dbalaḡ-ḡá, cf. also Jursa 2001–2002: 78, iii: 7¹.

²¹ Litke 1998: 51, I: 268; 144, III: 260–261; for the sur₉ instrument, see Veldhuis 1997–1998 (note also Volk 2006: 95: 15, cited below, §11); for the urzababa instrument (Akk. *urzababitu*), see Ziegler 2007: 72, 222 (with references).

refer to the sound (Sum. gù, ad, šeg₁₀) of the instrument (^dGù¹-du₁₀-ga, ^dPiriḡ-gù-du₁₀-ga, ^dAd-du₁₀-nun, ^dU₄-gù¹-nun-DI, ^dŠeg₁₀-mu-un-gi-gi).²²

§10. Some of the divine advisors listed in the god lists are actually known from other genres, where they are connected to Balaḡ prayers or to their performers: the gala/*kalû* priests. These attestations often refer to a physical object, implying that these deities were represented by the balaḡ instruments, as was seen in the year name cited earlier: “The year (in which) Ibbi-Sin, king of Ur, fashioned the balaḡ, (the divine) Ninigizibara, for the goddess Inana” (see §4 above). Here, Ninigizibara refers to the concrete balaḡ instrument that was fashioned (Sum. dím).²³ But the same Ninigizibara is also known from god lists as the GU₄.BALAG advisor of Inana. Thus, in the An = Anum god list and in the Emesal vocabulary we find the following entry: “Ninigizibara (and) Ninsiḡarana — two advisors (written: GU₄.BALAG ‘balaḡ-bull’) of Inana” (Litke 1998: 153–154, IV: 73–75; Landsberger et al. 1956: 9, I: 87–88).²⁴

§11. The main theological purpose of the musical instruments used in the performance of the Balaḡ prayers was to soothe the angry heart of the deity,²⁵ in correspondence to the purpose of the prayers themselves.²⁶ Besides the natural soothing quality of music, the balaḡ instrument had the ability to calm the heart of the god, since it served in the role of an “advisor” deity in the gods’ deliberations, as mentioned above. This purpose is also mirrored in the term ad-gi₄-gi₄, which, like GU₄.BALAG, is also paired with Akkadian *mundalku* (and *māliku*) ‘counselor,

22 Litke 1998: 51, I: 267; 52, I: 270, 273; 144, III: 262, 264; for ^dAd-du₁₀-nun, cf. also n. 32 below.

23 Ninigizibara also refers to a concrete object in a ritual from Mari, where it is said to be placed (but not necessarily played) for a ritual performance involving music (Ziegler 2007: 57, i: 8’, 10’, 60). An administrative text from Mari mentions a delivery to Tuttul of four minas of silver and five shekels of gold for plating(?) Ninigizibara (Joannès 1985: 111); see also Heimpel 2000. In two cultic texts from Late Babylonian Uruk, Ninigizibara is mentioned, with other cultic images, in context of rituals involving Ištar (Linszen 2004: 201, i: 27–ii: 9, 238–239; 25’, r.10’–14’), but there is no evidence that Ninigizibara refers to a deity in the image of a musical instrument in these late texts.

24 A similar situation occurs with the deity Ninhinuna, who is known both from god lists as a GU₄.BALAG deity, and from administrative texts as a concrete object; cf. Cavigneaux and Krebernik 2000.

25 Gabbay 2007: 95; cf. especially the name of a GU₄.BALAG deity of Ninḡirsu: ^ddu₁-ga-lugal-ani-šà-huḡ-ḡe₂₆, “He appeases his master with speech” (Litke 1998: 177, V: 104). Note also Gudea Cylinder A, vi: 24–vii: 6 and Cylinder B, x: 14–xi: 2, where the balaḡ is associated with calming the heart (šà–huḡ) (Edzard 1997: 73, 94).

26 For the purpose of the Balaḡ prayers (and Emesal prayers in general) as calming the heart of the gods, see Gabbay 2007: 145–148.

advisor', in the Mesopotamian lexical tradition.²⁷ In fact, some of the gods known as GU₄.BALAG in the god lists are entitled ad-gi₄-gi₄ in other contexts; for example, ^dEn-nun-daġal-la, GU₄.BALAG of Marduk according to the god list An = Anum,²⁸ is said to dwell in é-ad-gi₄-gi₄ 'ad-gi₄-gi₄ temple', according to a "Kedorlaomer text": "(The enemy) entered the ad-gi₄-gi₄ temple and ripped out the *portal*, the enemy approached En-nun-daġal-la with evil intent" (Lambert 1994: 68: 20–21).²⁹ ^dEn-nun-daġal-la and ^dGašan-šùd(-dè)-an-na, the GU₄.BALAG of the goddess Zarpanī-tum in the god list An = Anum,³⁰ both bear the title ad-gi₄-gi₄ in Balaġ prayers (Cohen 1988: 492: f + 241–242).

The term ad-gi₄-gi₄ is also used in reference to the balaġ instrument itself. On Gudea Cylinder A (vi: 24–25), the god Ninġirsu's balaġ Ušumgalkalama is called níġ-ad-gi₄-gi₄ 'ad-gi₄-gi₄ object': "His (= Ninġirsu's) beloved balaġ Ušumgalkalama, the *famous* ġiš-gù-di, his ad-gi₄-gi₄ object" (Edzard 1997: 73).³¹ The term ad-gi₄-gi₄ is also an epithet of the balaġ instrument in a Balaġ prayer: "The balaġ, your ad-gi₄-gi₄, is not present..." (Cohen 1988: 54: 86).

Finally, a connection between the term ad-gi₄-gi₄, the actual balaġ instrument, and the deities ^dSur₉-gal and Ninigizibara, known as GU₄.BALAG deities in god lists (see §§9–10 above), is found in a Balaġ prayer: "My small balaġ, my roaring wild bull! My holy balaġ, my *spouse*, my lapis-lazuli (instrument)! My ad-gi₄-gi₄, my sur₉-gal instrument! My ad-gi₄-gi₄, Gašanibizibara (= Ninigizibara)!" (Volk 2006: 94–95: 13–16).³²

²⁷ Cf. PSD A/III: 19.

²⁸ Litke 1998: 98, II: 257.

²⁹ Note, however, that in this late text, En-nun-daġal-la was not necessarily understood as a deified musical instrument, but perhaps as an anthropomorphic cult image (cf. the mention of his tiara in line 28).

³⁰ Litke 1998: 98, II: 259.

³¹ balaġ ki-âġ-ni ušumgal kalam-ma ġiš-gù-di mu-TUK níġ-ad-gi₄-gi₄-ni. It should be noted that Ušumgalkalama is not the balaġ instrument usually associated with the gala (which in the inscriptions of Gudea may be the instrument called lugal-igi-huš-àm; Gudea Cylinder B, xi: 1, see Edzard 1997: 94), but rather the balaġ instrument, which is usually associated with the nar and is often referred to as tigi₍₂₎ (written NAR.BALAG or BALAG.NAR). This is demonstrated by the association of Ušumgalkalama with nar, nam-nar and /tigi/ (written: ti-gi₄) (Cylinder B, x: 9–14, xv: 20–21, xviii: 22; see Edzard 1997: 94, 97, 98). Whether Ušumgalkalama was a lyre or a different instrument is not certain, but it is unlikely that it was a giant drum as supposed by some scholars (cf. n. 2 above). Its designation as ġiš-gù-di, (literally "voice-making wood") seems to indicate that it was a stringed instrument (note the use of sa 'sinew, strings', for the ġiš-gù-di instrument in Ur III documents; cf. Michalowski 2006: 50 n. 8), but it is also possible that this is a general word for instruments with wooden sound boxes (I find the identification of ġiš-gù-di as "lute" by some scholars uncertain; cf. Krispijn 1990: 13–14 with references).

³² Note also the following three personal names of gala priests: (1) Ur-ad-gi₄-gi₄, chief gala (gala-mah) of the city Urusaġrig in the Ur III period (Buccellati 1966: Pl. VIII no. 18, rviii: 14'; Owen

§12. Adgigi is also the name of a deity, written with the divine determinative DINGIR (^dAd-gi₄-gi₄). According to the god list An = Anum ^dAd-gi₄-gi₄ is one of the GU₄.BALAG deities of the mother goddess Diġirmaḥ (Litke 1988: 77, II: 94–95). In an Old Babylonian Balaġ prayer to the mother goddess Aruru (who is identified with Diġirmaḥ in the Mesopotamian tradition), Adgigi is mentioned as the actual balaġ instrument: “May Adgigi, the balaġ...” (Kramer 1971: 169, ii: 31).³³

Another reference to the deity Adgigi as an actual musical (stringed) instrument is in an Old Babylonian Akkadian lament to the mother goddess Mama (who is also identified with Diġirmaḥ in the Mesopotamian tradition): “Adgigi! They (= the enemies) cut off its/his strings!”³⁴

§13. The theological image manifested by these references is of the main deities sharing their deliberations with their beloved counselors, the ad-gi₄-gi₄ deities, also known as GU₄.BALAG. As counselors (*mundalku*) they are asked for their opinion on different matters, and they answer (Sum. gi₄-gi₄) with their voice (Sum. ad).³⁵ However, these counselors, with their voices, exist not only in the mythological realm, but are also manifested in a concrete image: the balaġ lyre, or more specifically, the bull of the balaġ (GU₄.BALAG). In my opinion, this refers to the lyre’s bull-shaped sound box, found in many third-millennium iconographical representations,³⁶ which resounds (Sum. gi₄-gi₄) with the voice (Sum. ad) produced by the balaġ.³⁷

1991: no. 192: 4¹); (2) Ur-^dIgi-zi-bar-ra (the divine name short for Ninigizibara), a gala mentioned in an Ur III document from Ġirsu (Calvot et al. 1979: no. 179, i: 12–13); Ur-^dIgi-zi-bar-ra is also the name of a person who was in charge (*ġir*) of copying an Old Babylonian Eršema tablet (and likely to have been a *kalû*) (Limet 2000: 5: r.17); (3) Ur-ad-du₁₀-nun, a gala mentioned in an Ur III document from Ġirsu (Barton 1909: no. 92, r.xii: 8’–9’). These personal names reflect the close affiliation between the gala/*kalû* and the balaġ instrument (Ninigizibara and ad-gi₄-gi₄; cf. §10–11, and ad-du₁₀-nun; cf. Litke 1998: 52, I: 273 and §9 above).

33 ^dad-gi₄-gi₄ balaġ-e² ba-si² ḥu-mu-ra-ab-du₇

34 ^dad-gi₄-gi₄ ú-pa-ar-ri-ú pi-it-ni-šú² (BM 29624: r. 6, unpublished. Note that the next line deals with the al-ġar musical instrument).

35 Cf. Landsberger et al. 1956: 127: 7: ad gi₄-gi₄ = *ri-ig-ma ip-pa-lu*, “they answer a voice (or: claim)” (not in a religious or musical context).

36 Cf. Figs. 3a–d and examples in Hartmann 1960: 314–330. Despite the identification of these instruments as *zà-mí* by some scholars, I understand them to represent balaġ instruments, cf. n. 9 above.

37 The mention of the balaġ as a bull is also found in Gudea Cylinder A, xxviii: 17: a-ga balaġ-a-bi gu₄ gu₄ nun di, “its (= the temple’s) chamber of the balaġ, the bull making a lofty sound” (Edzard 1997: 87); cf. the following almost identical phrase from an Emesal prayer: ma balaġ-ġá gu₄ gu₄ di nun-n[a] // É *ba-la-áġ-ġá al-pu* [], “the chamber of the balaġ, the bull making a lofty sound” (Reisner 1896: 92a no. 50a: 18–19). Note also Volk 2006: 94: 13 cited above, §11 ([balaġ bân] -da am [u]r₅-^rša₄-⁷ġu₁₀, “my small balaġ, my roaring wild bull”).

The use of the same verb for the resounding of the balaḡ lyre and the divine counseling of the balaḡ lyre-gods can be explained by the original meaning of the verb *ad-gi₄(-gi₄)* ‘to return a sound’, that is, ‘to echo’. This fits the concept of musical resounding, but can also be used as a metaphor for counseling, where the advisor echoes the god’s speech through his counseling, subsequently calming him.³⁸

Thus, it is not surprising that both *ad-gi₄-gi₄* and *GU₄.BALAG* serve as designations for the balaḡ *mundalku* counselor deities: both terms are used to describe the sound box that resounds with the voice of the lyre (*ad-gi₄-gi₄*) and is shaped as a bull (*GU₄.BALAG*). The cultic playing of the balaḡ instrument, accompanying the Balaḡ prayers, connects the mythological and the concrete realms. The mythological counseling is induced by the player (usually the gala), who produces soothing sounds by playing the balaḡ that accompanies the prayers. These sounds, played before the statue of the main deity, are the counsel in favor of humanity, asking for the appeasement of the god.

§14. This religious aspect of the balaḡ instrument is important not only for understanding the theology of the cult in which it participated. The terms describing it (*ad-gi₄-gi₄* and *GU₄.BALAG*) fit the physical identification of the balaḡ as a lyre in the third millennium BCE. The identification of the third-millennium balaḡ instrument as a lyre with a bovine-headed sound box, along with the shift in sense of the term “balaḡ” from lyre to kettledrum at the turn of the second millennium BCE, can explain the virtual absence of iconographical representations of lyres with bovine-shaped sound boxes from the end of the third millennium BCE onward.

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³⁸ Another verb that uses a nominal element for “sound” and the verb *gi₄*, ‘to return’, is *šeg_{10/11}-gi₄*. This refers to a loud thundering echo (*šagāmu*; CAD Š/I: 63), while *ad-gi₄* refers to the echoing of a regular or soft voice (Sum. *ad*) (cf. Krispijn 1990: 14–15).

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Cypro-Archaic I period, 750–600 BCE.

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