

# Leggo!

Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales  
on the Occasion of His 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Edited by  
Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi,  
Cinzia Pappi, and Simonetta Ponchia

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## Vorwort des Reihenherausgebers

Michael Streck

Der zweite Band der Leipziger Altorientalistischen Studien ehrt einen großen Wissenschaftler, der dem Altorientalischen Institut seit einigen Jahren eng verbunden ist. Mit rund einem Dutzend Vorträgen hat Mario Fales unsere Kenntnisse von Assyrien, den Aramäern oder Sigmund Freuds Beziehung zur Altorientalistik bereichert. Im Rahmen des Erasmus-Programmes studieren Studenten aus Udine in Leipzig und umgekehrt. Möge uns Mario Fales auch in Zukunft oft besuchen und uns durch seine außerordentlichen Kenntnisse bereichern!

Leipzig, im August 2011.

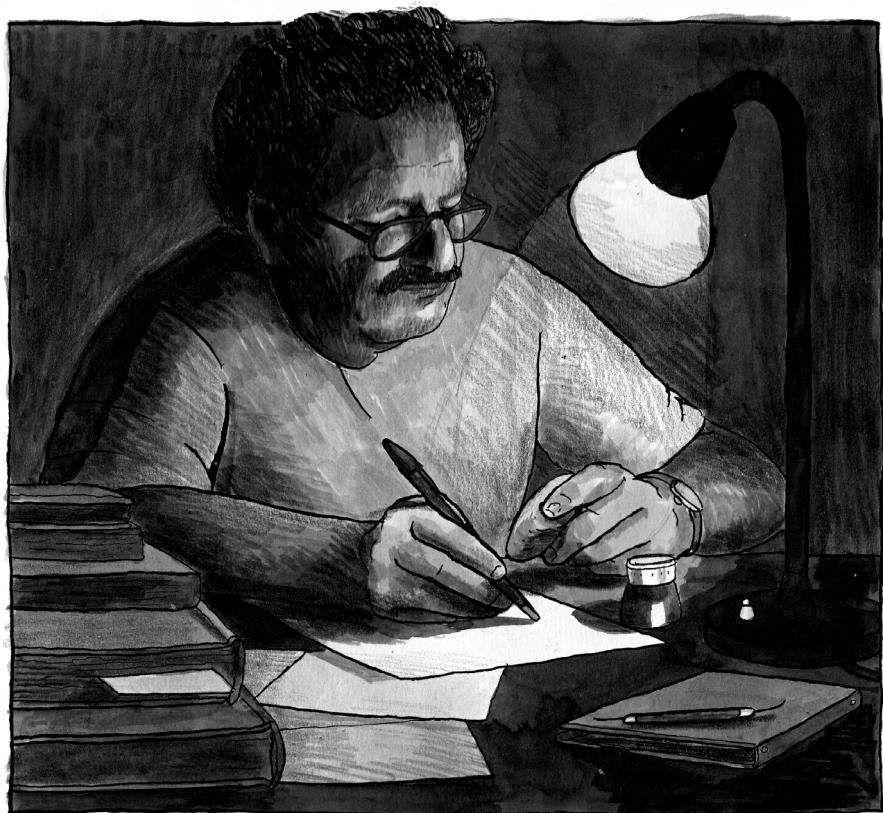
## Foreword

Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Daniele Morandi Bonacossi,  
Cinzia Pappi, Simonetta Ponchia

*Leggo!*, reminiscent of the Latin meaning “to observe, collect, choose, select”, and almost synonymous with “to evaluate”, is part of Mario’s famous idiolect, by which he has always entertained his students and friends, shifting from the highest scientific rigour to the ironic interpretation of questions and situations. Students have often heard and still often hear the word with a certain apprehension, fearing the immediate and severe judgment of their works it might announce. Sometimes, however, the expectant tone in which the word is pronounced promises an appreciative attitude in the evaluation of their efforts, and is perceived as an encouragement on the difficult path of historical and Assyriological studies. The expression is not less reassuring when the object of evaluation is a glass of wine raised in celebration of academic or social events, or the beginning of a new research project.

The levity of tone does not diminish but adds to the lucid and penetrating analytical capacity which characterizes Mario’s fundamental attitude. He has in fact extended the philological method, derived from his multilingual and multicultural education, to many fields of experience, in which analysis and criticism might be linked with tasting and appreciating, from music to literature, art, cuisine, etc. The method must of course have its roots in a Mesopotamian fondness for interpreting signs, for “reading” the multifarious messages of the universe, and condensing them into a text.

This time we have decided to anticipate Mario’s comment in receiving this homage to his scientific career, the reading of which we hope will please him and kindle his interest. In place of the long description of Mario Fales’ many merits and academic accomplishments and rewards, we leave to the reader a reconstruction of the honouree’s scientific and human stature, according to an own method of reading and interpreting. This text condenses, in the words of students, colleagues, and friends, many references to Mario’s themes of research, results of projects that have been originated in his school and in cooperation with colleagues all over the world, discussions, ideas and hints for future developments, as well as preoccupations and engagements that the historian of antiquity and of the Ancient Near East in particular must feel and undertake. Most of all, this book should be read as a token of our gratitude for Mario’s indefatigable enthusiasm in promoting Near Eastern studies as fundamental reading of human experience.



*Drawing by Andrea Ventura.*

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# Fāle \*

Riccardo Contini, Simonetta Graziani

Among the most specific items which distinguish the material culture and the customs of the well-known “Marsh Arabs” of Iraq (*Mi'dān*, sg. *Mi'ēdi*) is certainly their five-pronged fishing- and hunting-spear, duly mentioned by eminent Western travellers such as Gavin Maxwell (1957), Wilfred Thesiger (1910–2003) and Gavin Young, as well as by ethnographers Sigrid Westphal-Hellbusch and Heinz Westphal, and lately Edward L. Ochsenschlager. W. P. Thesiger (1967: 37) offers perhaps the better description of this “trident” (Figs. 1–4).<sup>2</sup>

These (fish-)spears were formidable-looking weapons with bamboo shafts as long as twelve feet, and five-pronged heads like giant toasting forks, but with each prong barbed,

and Maxwell graphically reports both the – rather inefficient – proper use of the spear for fishing and for hunting boars and the dire consequences of its improper use as an antitheft device: the unfortunate thief is permanently disfigured by the five razor-sharp barbed prongs.<sup>3</sup> While Maxwell, staunchly observing his principle of never quoting

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\* SG is responsible for the Akkadian data, RC for the Aramaic and Arabic ones, whereas we are jointly answerable for the general purport of this paper. Materially, the first part was written by RC, the second by SG. Nobody more than the dedicatee, himself a master of research on the linguistic interference between Akkadian and Aramaic, shall appreciate the alliterative pun which induced us to choose just this word for the present exercise.

- 1 We adopt here Bruce Ingham’s transcription of this ethnic name, used differently by outsiders and by members of the community (Ingham 2000: 125). Both the *Mi'dān* and the Mandaeans, also dwellers for centuries in the marshes of Southern Iraq, were forced to leave their traditional abodes by the aggressive draining program enforced in the area by Saddam Hussein after the First Gulf War (Häberl 2009: 7).
- 2 Though the first to mention this word would seem to have been the Assyriologist Bruno Meissner (1868–1947), also a prominent scholar of Mesopotamian Arabic: “Dreizack, der zum Fischfang gebraucht wird. Besonders zur Zeit der Überschwemmung sieht man in dem stillen Wasser Leute mit dem Dreizack bewaffnet, regungslos, bis an den Bauch im Wasser stehen, um einem Fische aufzulauern” (Meissner 1902b: 102f. note 12). Illustrations of this weapon are plentiful, also representing scenes such as the one described by Meissner: Westphal-Hellbusch & Westphal 1962: Abb. 1 (iron prongs forged by Ṣubba smiths); Thesiger 1967: photos no. 19, 43, 61 (boar-hunting), 92 (fishing in the marshes); Salonen 1970: Taf. V.1, VI.1; Young 1977: photo on the book cover; Ochsenschlager 2004: 230, fig. 13.14.
- 3 Maxwell (1957) 1994: 76, 78, and 214f., respectively.

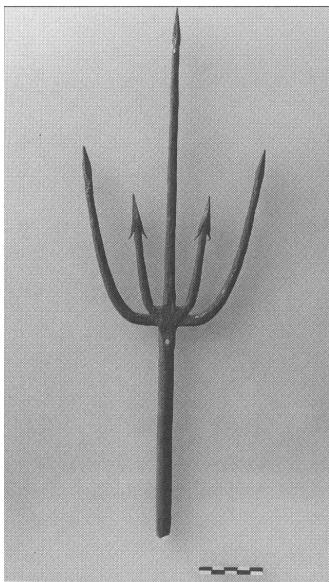


Fig. 1: A *fāle* mounted on a shaft.  
From Ochsenschlager 2004: fig. 13.14.

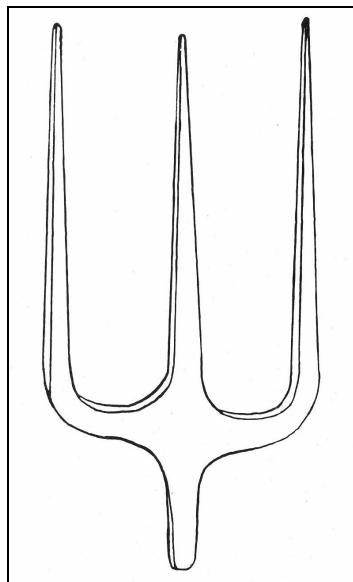


Fig. 2: Ancient Mesopotamian trident.  
From Salonen 1970: Taf. X, 1.



Fig. 3: *Fūl* in the foreground in a Ḫubba smithery.  
From Westphal-Hellbusch & Westphal 1962: Abb. 1.



Fig. 4: Fishing with the *fāle* in the marshes.

From Thesiger 1967: photo 92.

Arabic words in his book,<sup>4</sup> actually does not mention the indigenous name for this weapon, this is recorded by most other sources on the *Mi'dān* or on Iraqi Arabic lexicology,<sup>5</sup> generally transcribed as *fāle*, *faala*, or *falah*, the first option recommending itself as the most accurate phonetically.

Outside Mesopotamian Arabic, *fāle* seems to be documented only in the Arabic dialect of the Šammar Bedouins, where it however denotes the sharp double-edged single heads of Bedouin spears, as described by Baron Max von Oppenheim (1860–1946) at the turn of the century:

- 
- 4 Being a firm advocate of the usefulness of travel literature for linguistic, particularly lexical, research, I [RC] cannot resist the temptation to quote this passage in full, as being completely opposed to my views: “Having a particular ennui for the type of travel book that reads ‘The people do not build houses; they live (*hudl*) in tents (*rīz*) which they fold up (*slamm*) when they want to move (*scipp*) ...’ I have avoided using Arabic words except where they are strictly necessary; it would in any case be a presumption on the part of one who knows as little of the language as I” (Maxwell 1994: vii).
- 5 Meissner 1903: 137b (*fāle*, Pl. *fūl*: “Dreizack für den Fischfang”); Westphal-Hellbusch & Westphal 1962: 350 (index s.v. *fāle*); Edzard 1967: 308 (*fāla*, Pl. *fūl*: “Fischspeer aus Eisen”); Woodhead & Beene 1967: 343a (Iraqi Arabic [not specifically *Mi'ēdi* dialect] *faala* pl. -*aat*, “fish gig, trident”); Ochsenschlager 2004: 177 (*falah*); Avishur 2010: 274a (Jewish Iraqi Arabic: *p'lh*, “fish-hook; harpoon”). After Edzard’s mainly lexical description (based upon information in Westphal-Hellbusch & Westphal 1962 and on his own data), the most recent account of the dialect of the *Mi'dān* was provided by Ingham 2000, who differentiates between its generally South Mesopotamian and its specifically marshland features.

Die Spitze (*fāle*) bildet gewöhnlich eine 1 bis 1½ Fuss lange, breite, zweischneidige Klinge.<sup>6</sup>

The semantic nucleus (*sème lexicogène* in P. Guiraud's terminology) of this word seems thus to refer to an iron blade with two cutting edges mounted upon a wooden shaft: this is relevant, as we shall see, for the evaluation of a similar semantic shift which we try to reconstruct in Late Akkadian.

Though notionally referable to a *media infirma* root such as F-W-L or F'-L,<sup>7</sup> this word cannot find a satisfactory etymological explanation in the Arabic lexis, as August Fischer pointed out in his concise but masterly essay, where he also traced the most ancient (around 1200 AD) occurrence of *fāle* in Mesopotamian Arabic in the geographical dictionary of Yāqūt (d. 1249 AD), who records the use of this weapon – which he explicitly states to be three-pronged<sup>8</sup> – for hunting francolins, birds well known for being swift runners but rather slow fliers.<sup>9</sup> After rejecting the Arab geographer's contention that *fāle* might be a Persian loanword in Mesopotamian Arabic, Fischer accepts the possibility that this Iraqi Arabic word may in fact be of Semitic origin, having been inherited from Akkadian through the intermediation of Aramaic: it would be a typical substrate *Kulturwort*, denoting an implement which may have been used for millennia for fishing and hunting in the marshes of Southern Mesopotamia. This pattern of cultural continuity<sup>10</sup> – which in the case of the material culture of the *Mi dān* has been largely confirmed by the results of Ochsenschlager's ethno-archaeological work (2004) – is given poetic expression by the traveller Gavin Young:<sup>11</sup>

We saw Marshmen in the prows of their canoes of immemorial design, bending against the curve of a reed punt-pole, or poised with long five-pronged fishing-spears like javelin-throwers on an ancient freeze.

For our fishing and hunting spear, the hypothesis of substrate influence, which we shall try to examine here, finds decisive support in Mandaic *p'lt'*,<sup>12</sup> which shows perfect phonological and semantic correspondence to Mesopotamian Arabic *fāle*, in the *Book of John* (= *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, edited and translated by Mark Lidzbarski in 1905–15), an important collection of Mandaean texts which in its present form

6 Oppenheim 1899–1900/II: 101, with drawings of two different kinds of Šammari spearheads.

7 The second option is preferred by Woodhead & Beene 1967: 343a, while Edzard 1967: 308 appears implicitly to favour the first one.

8 The *fāle* used in the Southern Mesopotamian marshes at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seems to have known both three-pronged and five-pronged varieties (Fischer 1918: 288), whereas during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the five-pronged one has become the standard.

9 Fischer 1918: 288, with quotation and discussion of Yāqūt's testimonial.

10 Aspects of cultural continuity from pre-classical to Islamic Mesopotamia have recently been illustrated by Manfred Krebernik (2008) in a wider perspective.

11 Young 1977: 18.

12 Drower & Macuch 1963: 361a, s.v. *palta*, “fish-spear, fish-prong”.

is generally dated to early Islamic times, but has recently been shown to contain a great deal of ancient material.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the context of the three passages (*Johannesbuch* 144,3; 148,10; 149,13) where *p’lt’* occurs show the metaphorical usage of a Mandaic fishing and nautical nomenclature for which in some instances an Akkadian (indeed, originally Sumerian) etymology has been suspected, such as *kwtl’* (*kutla*), “aft part of the ship, poop” (cf. Syr. *kutlā*, “poop of ship”, Akk. *kutallu*, “back of head; rear of a building”)<sup>14</sup> and *’t’n’* (*atana*), “mesh, network” (cf. Late Babylonian *itannu*, “mesh, interstice of net”),<sup>15</sup> though only the first word has found acceptance in Stephen Kaufman’s monograph (1974) on Akkadian loanwords in Aramaic.<sup>16</sup> However, Mandaic *p’lt’*, “fish-spear”, seems to be so far unattested elsewhere in Aramaic, and the etymological implications of its occurrence in the *Book of John* have not been investigated by specialists in Mandaean studies after the publication of Drower and Macuch’s dictionary.<sup>17</sup> The urgent need for an updated historical dictionary of Mandaic, persuasively argued by Matthew Morgenstern (2009), can also be stated on etymological grounds, particularly in consideration of the progress in Akkadian lexicography and lexicology since 1963.

An Akkadian etymon for Mandaic *p’lt’* and Iraqi Arabic *fāle* had been put forward already by Meissner,<sup>18</sup> before the Mandaic evidence was published, and subsequently more plausibly recognized by Lidzbarski – followed tentatively by Fischer and by Drower & Macuch<sup>19</sup> – in the word *paltu*, glossed in William Muss-Arnolt’s dictionary (the source quoted by Lidzbarski) simply as “a weapon / eine Waffe”:<sup>20</sup> Muss-Arnolt’s indication that this word, actually with long first vowel *pāltu*, is a cognate form of *paštū* / *pāštu*, glossed as “a two-edged sword / eine zweischneidige Axt”,<sup>21</sup> was not mentioned either by Lidzbarski or by his followers. As we shall see, the standard Akkadian dictionaries do not confirm for *pāltu* a more general meaning “weapon”, which could more easily be supposed to have shifted in Later (possibly spoken) Babylonian to a more specific “fishing / hunting spear with multiple prongs”,

13 Buckley 2004, who stresses that even the present text of part of this collection may well antedate the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.

14 Drower & Macuch 1963: 211a; Sokoloff 2009: 616b; CDA: 171a.

15 Drower & Macuch 1963: 42b; CDA: 136a.

16 Kaufman 1974: 65 and n. 172.

17 Dietrich 2009 simply reproduces *ne varietur* his doctoral dissertation (Tübingen 1958), limited to Mandaic texts published before 1925 and to the discussion of the etymologies put forward in Th. Nöldeke’s grammar (1875).

18 Meissner 1902a: 471 (*palū*).

19 Lidzbarski 1915: 145 n. 5; Fischer 1918: 289; Drower & Macuch 1963: 361a. On the other hand, Md. *p’lt’* is not included in Heinrich Zimmern’s ambitious catalogue (1917) of Akkadian *Fremdwörter* as evidence of Mesopotamian cultural influence, probably because Lidzbarski’s book was then still too recent.

20 Muss-Arnolt 1905: 810b.

21 Muss-Arnolt 1905: 810b; 847f. The semantic equivalence here postulated between English *sword* and German *Axt* is of course highly questionable.

later on imported by lexical continuity into Mandaic (= Southern Babylonian Aramaic) and (Southern) Mesopotamian Arabic, while a semantic shift between the denotations of different weapons (“zweischneidige Axt” > “Fischergabel”) might have been judged to pose some difficulties in the way of Lidzbarski’s suggested etymology.

Of course, the working hypothesis of the influence of the (Sumerian and) Akkadian substrate, through (spoken) Eastern Aramaic, on Mesopotamian Arabic as well as on North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (= NENA) is today substantiated by a growing amount of lexical data collected by both Assyriologists and dialectologists of Neo-Arabic and Neo-Aramaic in the last 130 years. Even restricting our selection to the semantic area of tools or other items of material culture, more or less convincing cases for a remote Akkadian etymology have been made out for, among others, Iraqi Arabic *tāle*, “palm seedling, palm shoot” (not documented elsewhere in Literary or Colloquial Arabic, possibly connected to Babylonian *tālu*, “young date palm”);<sup>22</sup> *sikka*, “die, mold; coined money” (cf. Syriac *sekkatā*, “nail, ploughshare, wedge”, Classical Ar. *sikkah*, “nail, ploughshare; die”, Akk. *sikkatu*, “peg, nail”);<sup>23</sup> Christian NENA (Barwar) *səkθa*, “ploughshare” (cf. Syriac *sekkatā*, “nail, ploughshare, wedge”, Akk. *sikkatu*, “peg, nail”);<sup>24</sup> *mara*, “spade, hoe” (cf. Syr. *marrā*, Akk. *marru*, Sum. *mar*);<sup>25</sup> *bədra*, “threshing floor” (< *be* + *ədra*: cf. Syr. *'eddəra*, Akk. *idru*);<sup>26</sup> *məššara*, “paddy field basin” (cf. Akk. *mūšaru* “flower, vegetable bed, garden plot”);<sup>27</sup> Jewish NENA *atūna*, “furnace, oven, kiln” (traceable, through Late Aramaic, to Akk. *utūnu, atūnu*);<sup>28</sup> *rušta*, “shovel” (cf. Syr. *rupšā*, Akk. *rapšu*, “winnowing shovel”);<sup>29</sup> Turoyo (= Western Neo-Syriac) *lābəd / lābəd*, “scraper” (cf. Syr. *'abūtā*, Akk. *abiūtu* “a kind of tool”).<sup>30</sup> This cumulative lexical evidence is occasionally invoked to justify a possible Akkadian etymology of an Iraqi Arabic or Eastern Neo-Aramaic word even when no earlier literary Aramaic intermediate form is so far documented: e.g. Turoyo *šuxro* m. (in some dialects *šuxra* f.), “the W-shaped implement for carrying corn on beasts to the threshing-floor” (possibly < Akk. *šaharru*, “ein Bund (v Stroh

22 Meissner 1902a: 470; cf. Woodhead & Beene 1967: 53; CDA: 396a.

23 Besides the references quoted in the following footnote, cf. Woodhead & Beene 1967: 221a; Sokoloff 2009: 1012a; CDA: 322b. A large collection of Iraqi Arabic words with possible Akkadian etymologies can be found in Mme Olympe Lemut’s doctoral dissertation (2006), supervised by Prof. Jérôme Lentin; cf. also Salonen 1952 on ancient substrate and *Kulturwörter* in Arabic, and Holes 2001: xxixf. on the influence of the Akkadian substrate on the modern Bahaini Arabic vocabulary of material culture.

24 Kaufman 1974: 91 and n. 308; Krotkoff 1985: 125; Khan 2002: 514; Sabar 2002: 240b; Khan 2003: 185; Khan 2008: 1035; Lemut & Laffitte 2009.

25 Kaufman 1974: 70 and n. 197; Krotkoff 1985: 126; Khan 2002: 514; Sabar 2002: 13, 224; Khan 2003: 185; Khan 2008: 1035; Lemut & Laffitte 2009.

26 Khan 2008: 1035; also Khan 2002: 514 and 2003: 185 (Qaraqoš).

27 Khan 2008: 1035; cf. Kaufman 1974: 74 and n. 217; Krotkoff 1985: 124f. (*Aradhin miššāra*).

28 Kaufman 1974: 110 and n. 397; Krotkoff 1985: 126f.; Sabar 2002: 101b; Lemut & Laffitte 2008.

29 Kaufman 1974: 88 and n. 291; Sabar 2002: 288b.

30 Kaufman 1974: 33; Tezel 2003: 228f.

usw)”, AHw: 1129), with semantic shift of the denotation from the contents of an implement to the implement itself;<sup>31</sup> Christian NENA (Qaraqoš) *baxšimə*, “storeroom (for grain) in the roof of a house” (probably < Akk. *bīt hašimī*, “barn, storehouse”); *raxiṣa*, “pile of straw (usually barley)” (possibly related to Akk. *raḥīṣu*, “pile of harvest produce, especially straw”);<sup>32</sup> Christian NENA (Tiare) *šibəṛta*, “bracelet” (< Neo-Assyrian *šabirru*, “ring, bracelet, anklet”).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, several cases can be pointed out where NENA words are closer in form or meaning to their Akkadian etyma than their literary Late Eastern Aramaic cognates: e.g. (Qaraqoš) *səmməlta*, “ladder” (< Akk. *simmiltu*, “stair(case)”; cf. Syr. *sebbəltā*, “ladder”, Md. *swmbylt*, “id.”).<sup>34</sup>

By stretching these same considerations a little bit, one might suppose for the sake of the argument that Mandaic *p’lt* and Iraqi Arabic *fāle* are connected to a hypothetical \**pāltu*<sup>2</sup>, “fishing / hunting spear with multiple prongs”, different from *pāltu*<sup>(1)</sup>, “axe, adze” (of which more later on) and only by chance not yet documented in written Akkadian. It clearly seems more fruitful to resort to Ockham’s razor and try to verify whether a connection between the denotations of the two different tools/weapons is really so far-fetched as it appears on the surface, particularly considering that semantic shifts are quite frequently seen to occur both in the diachronic development of one and the same language and in the transition of a (hypothetical) substrate word between two or more languages in the same area across the ages, as some of the foregoing instances in fact exemplify.

Before moving on to the survey of the Akkadian sources on the word *pāltu*, it is convenient to summarize a few data relevant for historical and comparative Semitic philology:

1. this word is attested as the Neo-Assyrian and Neo- and Late Babylonian reflex of *pāštu*, a form derived, by means of the “feminine” suffix (a device regularly used in most Semitic languages to build nominal derivates from a base, whose semantic relationship to it may sometimes be difficult to define precisely, and which has often nothing to do with the expression of natural gender),<sup>35</sup> from the basic masculine *pāšu*, “axe, adze”;<sup>36</sup>
2. Akkadian *pāštu* is probably a cognate, rather than the source of a loanword,<sup>37</sup> of Syr. *pwst'*, “axe”, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (Leviticus Rabbah) *ps'*, “spade, hoe”, and Arabic *fa's*, “axe”, though the precise etymological connection which

31 Tezel 2003: 155f.

32 Khan 2002: 514.

33 Mutzafi 2005: 95f., with further instances; Parpola & Whiting 2007: 96a (s.v. *sabirru*).

34 Mutzafi 2005: 95f. (with more examples); cf. Drower & Macuch 1963: 322a (secondary dissimilation; Akk. etymology not mentioned); Sokoloff 2009: 963a (Akk. etymology stated); Kaufman 1974: 92.

35 Cf. Cohen 1988: 20.

36 AHw: 846; CAD P: 70b (*pāltu*), 265–267 (*pāšu*, *pāštu*); CDA: 270a; Parpola & Whiting 2007: 82a.

37 As claimed by Zimmern 1917<sup>2</sup>: 12.

links together this family of words is unclear.<sup>38</sup> Md. *p'lt'* and Syr. *pwst'* may thus be doublets (*allotropi* in Italian linguistic terminology) in Eastern Aramaic: words having the same etymological origin, but different forms and meanings.

In Akkadian sources, the terms *pāšu* and *pāštu/pāltu* both designate an axe or hatchet.<sup>39</sup> They thus belong to the broad range of terms for cutting weapons and tools variously employed for military, civil and ritual uses. Only in a few cases, on the basis of context and only hypothetically, is it possible to establish the morphological features and the function of these objects.<sup>40</sup>

*pāšu* (GÍN, TÙN) designates a single-bladed axe, as is also suggested by the shape of the proto-cuneiform grapheme used in archaic texts to write the word (Fig. 5).<sup>41</sup> From early Akkadian sources onward, *pāšu* denotes a civil,<sup>42</sup> military,<sup>43</sup> or ritual instrument,<sup>44</sup> but also the weapon or emblem of a deity,<sup>45</sup> whose blade, according to the context, can be of bronze, copper, gold, silver, or iron.<sup>46</sup>

38 Kaufman 1974: 82 and n. 260, 140 (with further references); Sokoloff 2009: 1167b (*pwst'* apparently not attested before the 13<sup>th</sup> cent.).

39 *pāšu*: Unger 1928: 469a, “*pāšu* bzw. *pāštu*”; AHw: 846, “Beil, Axt”; CAD P: 267f., (an ax or hatchet); CDA: 270, “axe, adze”; Limet 1960: 231, “hachette”; *pāštu/pāltu*: AHw: 846, “Beil, Axt”; CAD P: 265–267, “double-headed ax”; CDA: 270, “axe, adze”; Parpolo & Whiting 2007: 82a, “axe, adze”. For other names for axes, cf. the dictionaries s.vv. *agasalakku*, *agū*, *akkullu*, *ārimānu*, *haşşinnu*, *kalappu*, *kalmakru*, *kibirru*, *kisītu*, *kulpāšu*, *qulmū*, *zahātū*. For *haşşinnu*, *pāštu*, *qulmū*, *zahātū*, cf. Wiggermann 1992: 60f. and 86, according to whom “all denote different types of axes. The double-headed axe is certainly expected among them” (61). For their attribution to different divine figures on the basis of correspondences between texts and images, cf. *Id.*: 102.

40 On this subject, see Zaccagnini 1976: 324–342, especially 338 and 340: “Il settore delle armi si presenta strettamente collegato a quello degli attrezzi e degli utensili per quanto riguarda le tecniche di lavorazione e le tipologie dei manufatti. Durante tutta l’età del bronzo specie per certe classi di oggetti (accette e coltelli) non è sempre agevole stabilire se l’impiego fosse di tipo artigianale ovvero bellico: con tutta probabilità, certi utensili erano di fatto polivalenti e assolvevano a scopi diversi”. This versatility gradually diminished with the introduction of iron and its increasing availability. On the figurative repertoire of the many different edged weapons documented in glyptics, cf. Digard 1975, II: 255, 20, “Armes”.

41 Administrative texts and lexical lists relating to metal objects: cf. Green & Nissen 1987: 296, no. 561; Labat & Malbran-Labat 1988: no. 595.

42 Cf., for example, Erra i 56 (Cagni 1969) and Gilgameš xi 50 (George 2003), where it is a carpenter’s tool (<sup>lu</sup>*nagargallu* and <sup>lu</sup>*naggāru*, respectively). It is depicted as such among the tools carried by Ur-Namma on his shoulder in his capacity as “builder king” on his stele. According to Salonen 1970: 73 “Axt ist doch ein Instrument, mit dem die Fische – nämliche grosse Fische – zerkleinert werden konnten: den Gebrauch von Äxten in dieser Hinsicht kenne ich aber nicht.”

43 CAD P: 267f.; CDA: 270.

44 CAD P: 267f.; Wiggermann 1992: I, 30, 41, 69, 86.

45 Erra, Lugal-irra e Meslamta-ea: CAD P: 268b. In a Neo-Assyrian seal (Black & Green 1992: 124 fig. 102), however, Lugal-irra and Meslamta-ea brandish a double-headed axe in their right hand and a mace in their left. According to Wiggermann 1992: 61, “*zahātū*, ‘battle-axe’, is held by Meslamtaea”.

46 CAD P: 267f.; Limet 1960: 231.

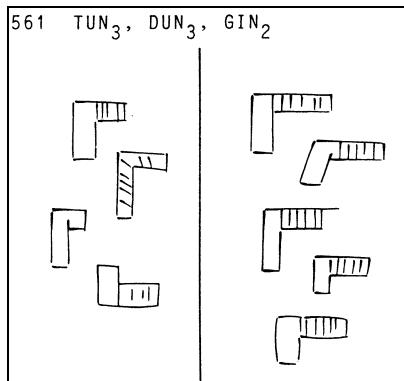


Fig. 5: Proto-cuneiform GÍN, TÙN.  
From Green & Nissen 1987: 296, no. 561.

*pāštu/pāltu* (<sup>(urudu)</sup>ŠEN.TAB.BA, <sup>(urudu)</sup>DUR<sub>10</sub>.TAB.BA),<sup>47</sup> attested ever since Old Babylonian sources,<sup>48</sup> seems instead to designate a double-bladed axe,<sup>49</sup> as the Sumerogram TAB.BA, “double”, suggests. *pāštu* designates primarily a god’s weapon or emblem.<sup>50</sup> The blades could be of copper, bronze, or silver, sometimes graced with semi-precious stones set in gold, or other ornaments,<sup>51</sup> and sometimes toothed, with three or five points.<sup>52</sup> They were mounted on a handle of sometimes precious wood.<sup>53</sup> As a divine emblem it was employed in legal practice.<sup>54</sup> As an instrument or weapon, it was employed for civil and military<sup>55</sup> as well as ritual<sup>56</sup> purposes.

47 For <sup>(urudu)</sup>DUR<sub>10</sub>.TAB.BA cf. CDA: 270; Borger 1981: no. 8; Borger 2003: 579; Schramm 2003: 43.

48 CAD P: 265. The lemma is however already attested at Ur III, where the Sumerogram is “glosé *pa-al-tu* ou *pa-aš-tu*”, Limet 1960: 226.

49 CAD P: 265–267 “double-headed ax”; but see AHw: 846, “Beil, Axt”; CDA: 270, “axe, adze”; Wiggermann 1992: 86 and 218, “a type of axe”. On the possibility that the term for “double axe” – or at least a type thereof – was *zahātū*, cf. *Id.*: 61 s.v.

50 Sin, Šamaš, Ningizzida, Uraš, Tišpak, Lugal-kisurra (?): Krecher 1957: 498b; CAD P: 265f., and the list of divine emblems by Falkenstein 1931: 31, 11 (*pa-āš-tú*).

51 CAD P: 265b.

52 Limet 1960: 227, “šen-tab-ba 3-ta (ou 5-ta) doit se comprendre comme une hache à 3 ou 5 tranchants”.

53 Wood from Magan: Limet 1960: 226f.

54 CAD P: 266a. On the use of divine emblems in legal oaths, cf. Lafont 1997; Westbrook 2003a: 33f.; 2003b: 374f.

55 CAD P: 266b.

56 CAD P: 266b; Wiggermann 1992: II, r.1, but cf. p. 60 and especially 86: “*pāštu* is a type of axe; it is held by the *bašmu* in its mouth (...). Although the *pāštu* can be used as a weapon, this is hardly the reason of its appearance here, since a *bašmu* without hands cannot be used as such. It may have some symbolic value”.

There is a vast figurative documentation of axes, although no correspondence can be established between the many images of axes of various types<sup>57</sup> (Fig. 6) and the vast lexical repertory of epigraphic sources.<sup>58</sup> The earliest depictions of axes date back to the Chalcolithic: double-bladed axes appear as decorative motifs on the pottery of Arpačiya, and in the Halaf period as stone amulets believed to symbolize a deity of the atmosphere.<sup>59</sup> In historical times, the double-bladed axe seems to give way to the single-bladed one, whose earliest depictions date back to the middle of the third millennium, when the war-axe replaces the mace as a war weapon.<sup>60</sup> Beginning from the second half of the third millennium, the single-bladed axe is included among the weaponry of warlike deities whose names elude us.<sup>61</sup> Over time, it is increasingly often pictured as a divine weapon,<sup>62</sup> brandished by heroes and gods,<sup>63</sup> especially in scenes of combat against demons and monsters, which from the Akkadian period onward are a recurring theme on cylinder seals.<sup>64</sup>

In divine iconography, the axe often appears as the weapon of Adad (Fig. 7),<sup>65</sup> and can stand for him symbolically in glyptic.<sup>66</sup> The axe is also often associated with

57 On the typology of axes in figurative documentation from prehistory to the Old Babylonian period, cf. Solyman 1968: 47–54, 101–107, who distinguishes five different types: “Die quadratische Einklingenaxt”, “Die Pickelaxt”, “Die Doppelaxt”, “Die Sichelaxt”, “Die Sichellöwenaxt”. For different kind of axes in glyptic cf. Digard 1975: II, 255 20.1 “Haches”.

58 Cf., however, notes 39 and 45.

59 Van Buren 1945: 159, 162: “the double axe was used symbolically from the earliest time, and even without definite proof it may be presumed that it was the symbol of the Weather-god”; Solyman 1968: 49f., 101f., Pls. IX–X. On prehistoric symbolic images as precursors of the depiction of deities, cf. Green 1995: 1842.

60 Solyman 1968: 47f., pls. XLII, 254–255 (ivory plaques from Mari); 256 (“Vulture Stele”); XLIII, 258 and LX, 324 (Steles of Sargon and Naram-Sin); XLIII, 257 (stele fragment from Šamši-Adad I). Axe specimens are archaeologically documented in the ancient Near East long before their depictions: cf. Van Buren 1945: 160; Limet 1960: 17–20; Solyman 1968: 47; Curtis 1983; Moorey 1999: 223.

61 Van Buren 1945: 160.

62 Van Buren 1945: 160; Solyman 1968: 101 and pls. LXI, 329, LXXX, 428, LXXXI, 420, and *passim* on divine weapons and their respective attributions.

63 See for example Solyman 1968: pl. LXXXV, 455; Collon 1987: 560, 792; Collon 2001: Pls. XVIII 126, 130, XXXV 244, XXIII 277 (= Collon 1987: 792), enlarged on pls. XL: 277, 280; XXIV 290; XLII 338. On a fragmentary relief from Assurbanipal’s palace at Nineveh (Kolbe 1981: Pl. XV/1; Black & Green 1992: 163, fig. 134), the Sebettu are exceptionally depicted anthropomorphically with their weapons: a knife in the left hand, the arch and quiver slung around their shoulders, and the axe in the right hand; the latter, according to Wiggermann 1992: 60, is to be identified as a “*qulmû* ‘hatchet’”. For the Sebettu and their symbolic representation as the Pleiades, cf. Graziani 1979: 673–690.

64 Just by way of an example, see the scenes depicting Gilgameš fighting with Huwawa in Lambert 1987: Pls. VII, 3–6, VIII, 8. On the popular theme of contest scenes, see Collon 1987: 193–197 “Contest Scene”. In early Akkadian glyptic, the single-bladed axe also appears as a decorative motif in scenes of various kinds.

65 And, in general, of the storm god (Tešub, Hadad) in Anatolia and the Western Semitic world: Van Buren 1945: 160f.; Porada 1948: II, Pl. CII, 692E; Collon 1987: 552 with double axe, 792.

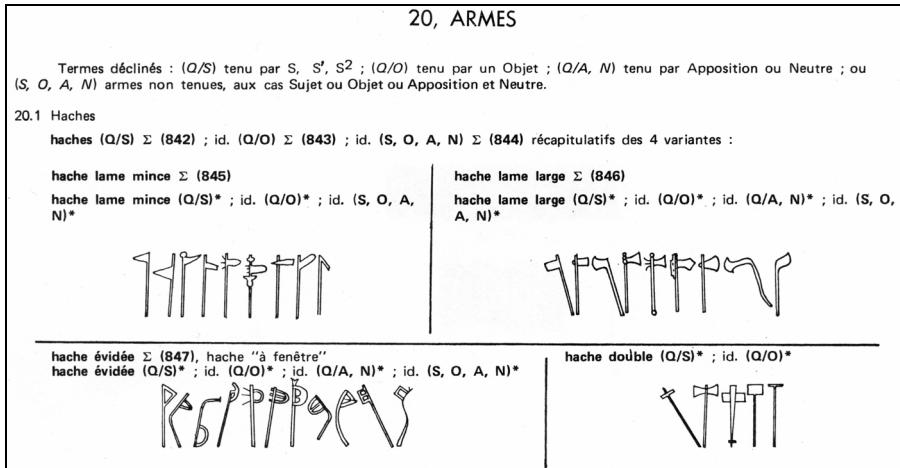


Fig. 6: Different kind of axes.

From Digard 1975: II, 255.



Fig. 7: Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal depicting Adad with his axe.

From Collon 1987: 792.

- 66 A Neo-Assyrian seal shows a fish offering to symbolically represented deities, including Adad represented by the axe: Van Buren 1948: 119; Salonen 1970: Taf. XXII.3. For a similar scene and axe-shaped pendants gracing the collars of Assyrian kings and courtiers along with the symbols of other deities of the Neo-Assyrian pantheon, cf. Van Buren 1945: 162. On scenes showing the offering of fish to the symbols of deities, cf. Van Buren 1948:119: "Sometimes the subject of a fish-offering to a divinity was abbreviated to an allegorical formula, for a symbol was substituted for the divinity".

lightning,<sup>67</sup> pictured by means of two or three zigzag lines evoking the thunderbolt,<sup>68</sup> which is itself feature of the iconography of Adad and his symbol.<sup>69</sup> An evolution of Adad's thunderbolt is a three- or five-pronged fork that appears in Mesopotamian glyptic of the first millennium as a symbol of the god when he is not depicted anthropomorphically (Figs. 8–9).<sup>70</sup>

Adad's fork is an exact replica of a fishing implement which, along with three or five-toothed forks and a series of hooked points, has been part of the toolbox of Mesopotamian swamp fishermen from antiquity all the way to the present day (Figs 1–2, 4).<sup>71</sup> In spite of the rich repertoire of terms for different manners of fishing and the respective utensils,<sup>72</sup> cuneiform sources give us no name for this implement. However, merely by way of hypothesis, we wonder if it could have been designated as *pāšu* or *pāštu/pāltu*, on the basis of the following considerations:

1. *pāšu* and *pāštu/pāltu* undoubtedly designate an axe of some kind;
2. *pāštu/pāltu*, in particular, appears to refer to a bladed axe that can also be toothed, with five or three points;
3. the axe is the weapon and symbol of Adad, in association with or in replacement of the three- or five-pronged fork;
4. as an atmospheric deity, in his positive aspect Adad is associated with beneficial rain and thereby connected to the cycle of fertility; in this capacity, especially in

67 *birqu, berqu*; one of the epithets of Adad is *bēl birqi*, “Lord of lightning”: CAD B: 258f.

68 For example Frankfort 1939: Pls. XXVII, i, XXXIII, b; Porada 1948: II, Pls. XXXIV, 220; Black & Green 1992: 111, fig. 89; Collon 1987: 560, 563, 725f., 787f., 791; Collon 2001: Pl. XIII, 171.

69 Van Buren 1945: 67–73, according to whom “The whole conception of Adad holding the symbol was taken over by Hittite art to represent the god Tešup armed with axe and lightning” (69); Seidl 1957: 485f.: “Blitzbündel”; and Krecher 1957: 498b; Seidl 1989: 103–107, 203. See also Porada 1948, II: CXXVII, 849 Cappadocian, depicting “a god holding weapon, trident, and rein of kneeling bull on which he stands” (I, 108). In general, on divine symbology see Green 1995: esp. p. 1841 on the direct relationship between the image and the deity it represents, and the immediate adherence of the symbols to the nature of the deity they refer to, as is especially evident in the case of the symbol of Adad, on which cf. 1838, Fig. 1, N.7. Collon 2001: 13: “It appears surprisingly rarely on first-millennium seals and each example is different.”

70 Salonen 1970: Taf. XX, five-pronged fork; Collon 2001: Pls. XXIII, 281, XL 215, three-pronged fork; the latter notes, however, that “the trident could symbolize either Adad (lightning fork) or Ninurta (who is depicted firing trident arrows, e.g. on no. 288); however, a similar trident appears as a symbol on Urartian royal seals [Collon 1987: 401, 556] and this symbol may have a political meaning rather than a purely religious one” (115). Furthermore, “the identification of figures in art with the principal gods of the pantheon is not always entirely straightforward” and “it is also clear that on occasion symbols and attributes might be transferred from their real ‘owner’ to another deity”: Green 1995: 1842, as for example in the case of Ninurta who, having usurped Adad’s role in the killing of Asakku, also took over his symbol.

71 Salonen 1970: 51–55, esp. 54f.: “Fischspeer und Harpune” and pls. V–VI, VIII, X; Fales 1976: 216–219; cf. also fn. 2, *supra*. On depictions of harpoon fishing in glyptics cf. Salonen 1970: Taf. XII, 1–3; Collon 1987: 696–697.

72 Salonen 1970: 22–83, 265–276.

glyptic, the god is the recipient of fish offerings, which, as has been convincingly demonstrated, were destined especially to deities connected to fertility;<sup>73</sup>

5. at least in one case, *pāšu* seems to refer to a fishing tool used to cut large fish into pieces (cf. note 42).

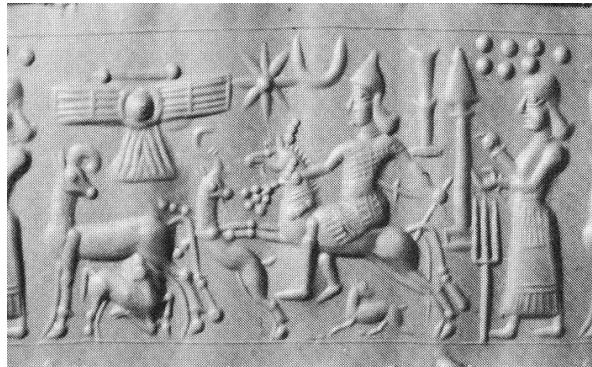


Fig. 8: Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal depicting the trident of Adad.

From Collon 2001: Pl. XL 215.



Fig. 9: Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal depicting the five-pronged fork of Adad.

From Salonen 1970: Taf. XX.

Deprived of its original meaning, *pāštu/pāltu* – and its counterparts imported into spoken Lower Mesopotamian Aramaic – may have shifted to denote (also) the fishing spear, whose designation survives, as we have seen, through Late Aramaic and

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73 Van Buren 1948: 119: “he [Adad] had great influence upon the growth of the crops and upon fertility in general, and thus when fish-sacrifices were offered to him it was merely a continuation of the ancient tradition which ordained that such sacrifices should be offered to fertility-divinities”.

Medieval Arabic in the dialect of the *Mi'dān*, and more generally in modern Iraqi Arabic. A decisive role in this semantic evolution must have been played, in our opinion, by the very same *sème lexicogène* “metal blade with two cutting edges mounted upon a wooden shaft” that we believe may have caused the re-semantization of *fāle* as “sharp double-edged spearhead” in the Arabic dialect of the Šammar Bedouins.

The combination of cultural symbolism and linguistic clues that we have endeavored to examine here would appear to substantiate, albeit in a different and much wider iconographic and etymological context, Bruno Meissner’s old tentative suggestion of an original divine connection for the humble fishing and hunting implement of the inhabitants of the marshes of southern Mesopotamia.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Meissner 1902a: 471: “Vielleicht ist es möglich, hierzu die zugleich als Insignie für Könige und Götter dienende Waffe *palū* zu stellen. Besonders auf alten Siegelzylindern sieht man häufig Götter mit einem Zweizack oder Dreizack bewaffnet”.

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