

# Personal Hygiene or Cultic Purity? Analysis of Cleansing Acts in Hemerologies of the First Millennium BC

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**Abstract** This paper discusses hygiene practices in ancient Mesopotamia through an analysis of hemerologies from the first millennium BC. Hemerologies are calendrical works that offer insights into daily life by providing instructions for various activities, including cleansing acts. By examining the relationship of the cleansing instructions to other instructions within hemerologies, analysing Akkadian terminologies used to describe cleansing acts, and investigating the associations of the assigned dates with the dates of cultic events in the monthly and annual cults, the study aims to determine whether the cleansing and purification instructions are motivated by a hygiene or health problem, or intended to ensure cultic purity.

**Keywords** Hemerology. Cleansing practices. Purity. Hygiene. Daily life.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Cleansing Instructions in the Hemerologies of the First Millennium BC. – 3 Relationship to Other Instructions and Predictions. – 4 Akkadian Terminologies for Cleansing. – 5 Relation to Monthly and Annual Cult. – 6 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

Recent pandemics have made us consciously think about hygiene and health issues, both at the individual and at collective levels. Documentation of supra-regional epidemics and diseases and the response of the ruling class were well attested in ancient Mesopotamia, but hygiene practices for the prevention of these diseases, especially at the daily level, are less well known. In this paper, I will approach this issue using hemerologies, which provide insight into the everyday lives of people across society. By studying hemerological instructions for cleansing acts, I will try to determine if there was such a thing as daily cleansing for health purposes.

Hemerologies from the first millennium BC are calendrical works that provide either a positive or negative value for a day or information about the appropriateness of various activities on a particular day.<sup>1</sup> Such instructions are often formulated as commands or prohibitions, and are sometimes followed by predictions. In this way, they guide readers in their daily lives. At the same time, they provide a means of controlling or systematising users' activities by providing a common understanding of what society considers appropriate or normative. The instructions cover a wide range of activities, not only cultic but also social activities, such as commercial transactions and legal matters. This sug-

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**1** For the Mesopotamian hemerologies see Labat 1972-75; Marti 2010; Livingstone 2013. A study of the hemerological corpus and editions of several hemerological and calendrical works, including unpublished materials, is prepared by the author.



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gests that they were not aimed solely at members of royalty, but also at the wider population. However, the audience was not always the same, as the hemerological compilation *inbu bēl arḫi* from the royal libraries in Nineveh shows.<sup>2</sup> This work was deliberately compiled for the royal environment based on the pre-existing hemerological and calendrical traditions with the replacement of the undetermined subject by *šarru* ‘king’.<sup>3</sup> Among the diverse subjects of instruction, there are several instructions on cleansing. Were they motivated by hygienic or health concerns, as is the case today, to promote personal health or prevent diseases?

In modern terminology, ‘hygiene’ is explained as a ‘department of knowledge or practice that relates to the maintenance of health, a system of principles or rules for preserving or promoting health, sanitary science’<sup>4</sup> or ‘the practice of keeping yourself and your surroundings clean, especially to prevent illness or the spread of diseases’.<sup>5</sup> The adjective ‘hygienic’ is explained as ‘sanitary’<sup>6</sup> or ‘promoting health or cleanliness’.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the concept of hygiene is directly related to health issues. On the other hand, ‘clean(liness)’, which is an aspect of hygiene, is not necessarily related to health issues and has moral, social, and cultural dimensions, that overlap with the concept of ‘purity’.

In ancient Mesopotamia, no Akkadian terms are known to us that correspond to the modern term hygiene or hygienic.<sup>8</sup> This issue is occasionally treated in Assyriology as part of the study of purity or medicine. The concept of purity, especially the question of cultic purity, has received special attention in Assyriology because of the abundance of religious literature available to us.<sup>9</sup> In the Mesopotamian view, a lack of purity or moral transgressions were seen as the cause of the lack of divine protection, leading to physical problems, or as a direct cause of disease. Thus, the relationship between impurity and disease can be explained from both hygienic/medical and religious perspectives. This makes distinguishing between everyday cleanliness and cultic purity in the religious sphere difficult.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in his study of *Körperliche Reinheit*, Sallaberger makes no distinction between oil anointing, bathing, hand washing, make-up, and fresh clothes as daily or special body care and those prescribed for offerings or feasts before the gods,<sup>11</sup> which are treated by other scholars as acts for (cultic) purity.<sup>12</sup>

Hemerologies cover various daily activities of private life, including explicitly religious ones; however, they usually provide minimal information about why a particular action is ordered on a particular day. There is no doubt that the cult underpins hemerologies. But it is only one of the various logics behind hemerologies, and the connection with a specific cult is not always clear.

In this paper, I focus on instructions for physical cleanliness. First, I examine their relationship to other instructions and predictions to gain some background and seek a connection to the disease. Next, the Akkadian terminologies used in the instructions are examined to determine whether the choice of terms reflects a particular daily or religious setting. Finally, the dates to which the instructions are attributed are compared with the monthly and annual cults to investigate their relationship with a particular cult. Thus, this paper attempts to determine whether the instructions for cleansing in hemerologies are motivated by hygienic reasons or are only intended to ensure cultic purity.

<sup>2</sup> Hemerologies take three main forms: (1) independent works on a single tablet or a series of tablets, (2) the juxtaposition of several independent works on a single tablet (= collection tablet), (3) compilation. For the hemerological compilation see Jiménez 2016. The most recent edition of *inbu bēl arḫi* in Livingstone 2013, 199-248, with correction by Marti 2014, 181-96.

<sup>3</sup> Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 188.

<sup>4</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “hygiene”.

<sup>5</sup> Collins Dictionary, s.v. “hygiene”.

<sup>6</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “hygienic”; Collins Dictionary s.v. “hygienic”.

<sup>7</sup> Collins Dictionary s.v. “hygienic”.

<sup>8</sup> No Akkadian dictionaries (*Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* [AHw], *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* [CAD], *Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*) provide these translations.

<sup>9</sup> Guichard, Marti 2012, 48. Studies on purity see van der Toorn 1985; Wilson 1994; Sallaberger 2006-08; 2011; Guichard, Marti 2012; Couto-Ferreira, Garcia-Ventura 2014; Feder 2014. Guichard, Marti 2012, 86-7 used hemerologies to illustrate food prohibitions concerning impurity. However, the treatment of the hemerologies is problematic. On page 86, the entry on the 7th VII is taken as an example from the compilation so-called ‘Hemerology of Assur’, in which prohibitions are explained as *ikkibu* ‘taboo’ of various gods. The author has established that these explanations are the extension in this compilation, not the original part of the instructions, see Kikuchi forthcoming. On page 87, a letter (Hunger 1992, no. 231) is quoted as they are ‘precepts of hemerologies’, but the lines in question have been identified as a quotation from the Lying Down Menology (Hätinen 2023, 227-40). Discussion of hygiene in studies of medicine are found in Geller 2010, 148, 155; Scurlock, Andersen 2005, 13-25, 242, 421-2.

<sup>10</sup> Sallaberger 2006-08, 295-7; Guichard, Marti 2012, 90-1.

<sup>11</sup> Sallaberger 2011, 92.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Maul 1994, 39-41, 94-6.

## 2 Cleansing Instructions in the Hemerologies of the First Millennium BC

In the following investigation, I will approach the question of hygiene by focusing on cleansing instructions for the body and dressing that can be directly associated with personal hygiene. Instructions for achieving cultic purity or avoiding impurities, such as food prohibitions or prohibitions for entering dangerous places, were excluded. These are only mentioned when they have a close temporal connection with the target instructions or when they support their association with specific cultic events.

Table 1 lists the cleansing instructions in the hemerologies, along with a brief description of the combined instructions, predictions, day designations, assigned dates, and their sources. The instructions are arranged according to the type of cleansing act. The following discussion is based on this table.

In the hemerologies investigated, 15 cleansing instructions are attested. They are distributed over 50 dates in a calendar year and can be grouped into four types of cleansing acts. The first type deals with the cleansing of the body and its various parts. The second type, with only one example, is an instruction on bathing. The third and fourth types concern clothing that is either cleansed or changed. In terms of positive and negative commands, types one and two concerning bodily cleansing are mostly formulated in the precative. Only foot washing is forbidden (1f). For cleaning and changing clothes, the positive and negative commands are more evenly attested. The wording of the clothing instructions is almost identical, except for the verbal form. Both types of clothing instructions are combined in the compilation *inbu bēl arḫi* (4f).

## 3 Relationship to Other Instructions and Predictions

Most of the instructions given alongside with the afore-mentioned cleansing show a cultic or ritual context, rather than a secular one. These include instructions for various offerings, prayer and prayeracts (*šigû* ‘prostration’ and ‘hand-lifting’). These instructions are combined with all types of cleansing instructions. Cleansing may be required because of the need for purity when contacting gods.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1** Cleansing instructions in hemerologies

	Instruction(s)	Cleansing act(s)	Combined instruction(s)	Day designation	Prediction(s)	Date(s) and source(s) <sup>i</sup>
(1) Cleansing, washing, purifying	a. <i>libbib</i>	cleansing	calling of <i>šigû</i> (IBA 26th III: not changing a garment = 4e)		joy	16th III (ŠH and its adaption IBA) 26th III (IBA)
	b. <i>limtessi</i> <sup>ii</sup>	washing	no irrigation		pest damage, taboo	7th VII (HA)
	c. <i>lītellil lītebbib</i>	purification, cleansing	food offering, libation		shining like the sun	1st I (Parpola 1993, no. 74)
	d. <i>lītellil</i> (var. <i>limtessi</i> ) <i>lītebbib</i>	purification (var. washing), cleansing	offerings (food, flour), libation		divine mediation	8th VII (TH, bab.)
	e. <i>lītebbibū qāta limtessi lītebbib</i>	cleansing, hand washing	filling the house with fruits; festival organisation; sexual intercourse with wife, not with a strange woman	day of joy	pregnancy	8th VII (TH, ass.)
	f. <i>šēpēšu lā imessi</i>	no foot washing	no sweeping of the house because of Baba (19th: no finishing of the building work)	(19th: wrath day of Baba/Gula)	no disease	19th, 21st day (HI and its adaption HA, IBA <sup>iii</sup> on 19th, 21st I)
(2) Bath	<i>nūna kīma mē lirmuk</i>	bathing in fish (oil/pool[?]) as if in water	prostration; eating fish		divine attention, mercy	1st II (PH)

<sup>13</sup> Guichard, Marti 2012, 80-2.

	Instruction(s)	Cleansing act(s)	Combined instruction(s)	Day designation	Prediction(s)	Date(s) and source(s) <sup>i</sup>
(3) Cloth cleansing	a. <i>lubušta/šubāssu ubbab</i>	cleansing a garment			joy; longevity (HA 15th XII: fulfillment of wish)	1st, 2nd, 16th I, 2nd, 10th II (HA), 15th III (HA, IBA), 3rd VII (HA), 7th, 13th VIII (HA), 3rd XI (HA, IBA), 15th XII (HA)
	b.		calling of <i>šigû</i> (IBA: liberation of slave and captive)		joy(!); <sup>iv</sup> longevity	6th, 16th, 26th(!) <sup>v</sup> I (ŠH and its adaption HA), 16th VIII (IBA)
	c. ( <i>šubāssu</i> ) <i>lā ubbab</i>	no cleansing a garment(!) <sup>vi</sup>	calling of <i>šigû</i>		acquisition	6th III (ŠH and its adaption HA, IBA)
	d.		no calling of <i>šigû</i>		(6th I <sub>2</sub> : no joy)	6th I <sub>2</sub> (ŠH and its adaption IBA), 16th I <sub>2</sub> (IBA) 11th VI (HA)
(4) Changing clothes	a. <i>šubāta zakâ liltabbîš<sup>vii</sup></i>	wearing a new garment	oil anointment			
	b. <i>šubāta ešša lā iltabbāš</i>	no wearing a new garment			financial loss	12th IX(!) <sup>viii</sup> (BA and its adaption HA)
	c. <i>lubussu lū nakir</i>	changing a garment	offerings ( <i>nindabû, niqû</i> ), hand-lifting		joy	29th III (IBA)
	d. <i>lubušta/šubāssu linakkir</i>	changing a garment	calling of <i>šigû</i>		fame	28th III (ŠH and its adaption HA)
	e. <i>lubušta/šubāssu lā unakkar</i>	no changing a garment	calling of <i>šigû</i> (IBA: cleansing = 1a)		longevity (IBA: joy)	26th III (ŠH and its adaption HA, IBA)
	f. <i>šubāt pagrîšu ul unakkar ebbûti ul ittalbaš</i>	no changing a garment and wearing a new one	no eating grilled meat and baked bread, no riding, no command, no divination, no medical treatment (offerings [ <i>nindabû, niqû</i> , food], hand-lifting)	evil day		7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, 28th day (IBA) <sup>ix</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Abbreviations: BA = Babylonian Almanac (Livingstone 2013, 5-82); HA = compilation Hemerology of Assur (Labat 1939; Casaburi 2003; Livingstone 2013, 103-59); HI = Hemerology for Invocation; IBA = compilation *inbu bēl arḫi*; PH = Prostration Hemerology (Jiménez, Adalı 2015); ŠH = *Šigû* Hemerology (Labat 1962; 1965, §§ 34-5; Casaburi 2003 [manuscript K]); TH = *Tašritu* Hemerology, ass. = Assyrian version, bab. = Babylonian version (Casaburi 2000). The Hemerology for Invocation is an unpublished hemerology identified by the author (K.3765+//), which deals with the suitability of days for invocation, especially for Šin and Šamaš. The new editions with new fragments of the Hemerology of Assur, Hemerology for Invocation, *Šigû* Hemerology, and *Tašritu* Hemerology will appear in Kikuchi forthcoming.

<sup>ii</sup> The compilation *inbu bēl arḫi* contains the same washing and anointing instructions *šarru limtessi šaman asi lippašiš* ‘The king should wash and anoint himself with myrtle oil’. On the 1st II (K.11637, obv. I 4) and 1st VIII (K.3269+, obv. I 3). They are part of entries taken from the Lying Down Menology, whose entries were systematically incorporated into the section of the 1st day of the corresponding month of this compilation (Hätinen 2023, 223-7, 228 fn. 25). Thus, they do not represent an original characteristic of the day and I therefore exclude them in this paper.

<sup>iii</sup> For the 21st I only foot washing instruction remains (K.15161, rev. I 3).

<sup>iv</sup> When the entry of the *Šigû* Hemerology for the 16th I was incorporated into the Hemerology of Assur for the day, the characteristic of the prediction was changed from joy (*ḥūd libbi*) to no joy (*libbašu ul iṭāb*). Such minor changes, resulting from textual adaptation, occur frequently in the Hemerology of Assur, see Kikuchi forthcoming.

<sup>v</sup> The adoption with the date shift to the 27th I in the Hemerology of Assur. Such shift of assigned dates is observed in the Hemerology of Assur several times, see Kikuchi forthcoming.

<sup>vi</sup> When the entry of the *Šigû* Hemerology for the 6th III was incorporated into the Hemerology of Assur, the cleansing prohibition (*lā ubbab*) was changed to the positive instruction (*šubāssu ubbab*) probably by mistake, while another compilation *inbu bēl arḫi* took over this prohibition correctly (*šubāssu lā ubbab*).

<sup>vii</sup> In the Hemerology of Assur for the 25th V, the clean garment is mentioned: *šubāta zakâ tulabbissu* ‘You (should) clothe him (= figure of ghost) with a clean garment’. This is a part of originally independent ritual instructions incorporated into this day section. For this ritual, see Kikuchi forthcoming.

<sup>viii</sup> The adoption with the date shift to the 10th IX in the Hemerology of Assur.

<sup>ix</sup> This entry is preserved in the following days: 7th, 14th, 19th I<sub>2</sub>; 19th II; 7th, 19th, 21st, 28th III; 7th, 19th, 21st, 28th VI<sub>2</sub>; 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, 28th VIII; 7th, 19th, 21st X; 7th, 28th XI; 7th, 19th, 21st, 28th XII<sub>2</sub>.

Among these cultic actions, the calling of *šigû* is instructed for each month of the year on the same four days (6th, 16th, 26th, and 28th) as recorded in the *Šigû* Hemerology. The *Šigû* Hemerology deals exclusively with the suitability or unsuitability of days for the invocation of the *šigû*. The *šigû* prayer is

performed in case of potential transgressions, illness, or in royal rituals.<sup>14</sup> It seems to have been performed at an appropriate time, as suggested by its prohibition on certain calendar days in the *Šigû* Hemerology, as well as royal rituals instructing to call a *šigû* on a ‘good day’.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the cleansing instructions appearing together with the *šigû* instructions on these days (1a, 3b-d, 4d-e) are more likely associated with their dates due to the suitability of *šigû* rather than the significance of each date.

The instruction on bathing (2) appears together with a prostration to Ea in the Prostration Hemerology: *ina Ayyāru ūmi 1 ana Ea liškēn nūna likul nūna kīma mē lirmuk tešmā uššab arhiš iqqarrit* ‘In the month of Ayyāru on the 1st day. He should prostrate himself to Ea. He should eat fish and bathe in fish (oil/pool[?]) instead of water. Then he will achieve attention (from the gods) and will quickly be granted mercy’.<sup>16</sup> Another instruction on eating fish is remarkable because it is normally forbidden in a cultic context to prevent contamination by odour.<sup>17</sup> Another problem is the role of fish in the instruction on bathing. The expression *nūna kīma mē lirmuk* is comparable to the famous curse of Gula for causing endless sickness: *dāma šarka kīma mē lirmuk* ‘May he bathe in blood and pus as in water’.<sup>18</sup> Comparing the sentence structures, one expects some kind of liquid with fish to be used for bathing. Jiménez and Adalı suggest the translation ‘fish (oil)’.<sup>19</sup> However, fish oil is usually written as *šaman nūni*, which does not appear here. Moreover, fish oil is used in anti-witchcraft rituals to defile the figures of sorcerers and witches, so its function is not to win divine favour.<sup>20</sup> Another possibility is bathing ‘in (a pool of) fish (instead of [normal] water)’. But no parallels are known.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, the use of fish seems inappropriate for worship because of its odour, yet bathing is a common means of achieving purity.<sup>22</sup> Because of the positive predictions of divine favour, we expect the actions to be favourable to gods. Therefore, fish cannot be used for pollution. Jiménez and Adalı suggested that both fish instructions can be understood as a special devotion to the god of freshwater Ea, who is associated with fish.<sup>23</sup> Ea is the patron god of the second month Ayyāru, a fact that enforces the connection between instruction and its date.<sup>24</sup> This is also supported by the main interest of the Prostration Hemerology, the time of various ritual activities.<sup>25</sup>

The anointing with oil is ordered once, together with the changing of garments (4a), which applies to both daily and cultic cleanliness, as discussed above.

Eating prohibitions and clothing instructions only appear in *inbu bēl arhi* with a series of prohibitions related to the dangerous character of their assigned days (4f). They are days with a multiple of seven and called *ūmu lemnu* ‘evil day’. Similarly, the instructions on the festival organisation (1e) or the prohibitions on sweeping the house (1f) are strongly associated with the assigned dates’ characteristics as the day of joy or of Baba/Gula, as will be discussed later in § 5.

Among the non-religious acts, irrigation (1b) and sexual intercourse (1e) are thematically closely related to their predictions: pest damage and pregnancy.

As for the predictions, joy is predicted for every type of cleansing instruction, except for the instruction on bathing, which has an obvious cultic character. The connection with diseases as expect-

<sup>14</sup> See Maul 1994, 165; Fincke 2009, 117 for the illness, and Mirelman 2021, 48-9; Ni 2022 for the transgression and royal contexts.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., the royal penitential ritual K.2549+// (Ni 2022, 176-86) Vs. 4: *ina iti šal-me ina UD ŠE.GA ši-gu-ú ana* ‘AMAR.UTU GÜ-[si]’ ‘In a favourable month, on a good day, he should [call] a *šigû* to Marduk’; the building ritual Thureau-Dangin 1992, no. 45 (Linszen 2004, 283-92) Vs. 17: *ina UD ŠE.GA LUGAL li-tu-lil li-te-bi-ib ši-gu-ú a-na* ‘60 ‘EN.LİL u ‘IDIM GÜ-si’ ‘On a good day, the king should purify and cleanse himself (and) call a *šigû* to Anu, Enlil, and Ea’.

<sup>16</sup> Prostration Hemerology (Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 157-83) 5. The translation is largely based on Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 175.

<sup>17</sup> For foods that cause bad breath or flatulence leading to impurity, see Maul 1994, 39; Sallaberger 2011, 29-31. This is only one hemerological instruction that suggests eating fish. Eating fish is otherwise always forbidden in the hemerologies.

<sup>18</sup> Sibbing-Plantholt 2022, 77-8; for examples see CAD R, 113, *ramāku* 1d.

<sup>19</sup> Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 175.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Abusch, Schwemer 2011, text 8.1, 51", 58"; text 8.4, 58; text 8.14, 10'; Abusch, Schwemer 2016, text 8.17, 16'; text 11.3, 42; text 11.5, 8. Cf. Fish oil is used to treat epilepsy in medical commentary (Geller 2010, 173-5), suggesting that it may have other medical functions.

<sup>21</sup> The stone water container found in the Assur temple at Assur (VA Ass 1835) is decorated with fish-*apkallu*, probably together with Ea. Possibly, the reference to ‘fish’ in this instruction pertains to such fish-related decorations rather than actual fish. The fish-*apkallu* are also painted on the bathroom wall in Til-Barsip (see Portuese, in this volume). In this case, the instruction could be interpreted as referring to a special bath or bathing in the particular bathroom, rather than a regular one, which fits well with the special devotion to Ea suggested below.

<sup>22</sup> For the ritual bath see Guichard, Marti 2012, 77. For oil anointment see Guichard, Marti 2012, 66, 68-9, 81.

<sup>23</sup> Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 184.

<sup>24</sup> According to *iqqur ipuš* § 105 (Labat 1965, 196-7), Ayyāru is the month of ‘Ea, the lord of the living people’ (*Ayyāru ša Ea bēl tenēšēti*). Cf. Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 184 fn. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Jiménez, Adalı 2015, 154.

ed by the modern definition of hygiene is only evident in the prohibition of foot washing (1f), where it is predicted: (*amēlu šū*) *ul imarraṣ* ‘He (var. this man) will not get sick’. It could be argued that the frequent prediction of longevity (3a-b, 4e) could also be understood broadly in terms of health,<sup>26</sup> but none of the predictions speak explicitly of purity.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the cleansing acts in the hemerologies are not directly associated with purity or impurity, although this could be something that exists as a layer behind the instructions.

In short, the instructions combined with cleansing instructions indicate a religious setting, while this aspect is not obvious in predictions in most cases.

#### 4 Akkadian Terminologies for Cleansing

The acts of cleansing in the hemerologies are expressed using different verbs or adjectives. Sallaberger (2006-08) established a distinction in vocabulary between daily washing and cultic purity, although the terms are partly the same.<sup>28</sup>

The most frequently attested is *ubbubu* (*ebēbu* D) ‘to clean’ for cleaning oneself or one’s clothes. The related adjective *ebbu* is also used to describe a new garment (4f). *ubbubu* can be used in physical, ritual, legal, or moral senses.<sup>29</sup> It is also used to ‘clean’ leprosy. Sallaberger (2011) thus argues that *ebēbu* refers to pathological impurities.<sup>30</sup> *ebbu* describes the luster of metals or precious stones, the cleanliness of clothing in everyday contexts, and the objects and materials in cultic use.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, another common verb for cleansing with the cultic connotation *elēlu* ‘to purify’ has very limited use in the hemerologies. The related adjective *ellu*, which expresses the state of purity of objects and persons,<sup>32</sup> never appears in the hemerologies. In the hemerologies, *elēlu* is attested only twice, always along with *ebēbu* (1c-d). Here *elēlu* seems to be used to reinforce the shared meaning of cleansing through the lexical pairs of similar meanings rather than for cultic nuance.<sup>33</sup> This is supported by the replacement of *elēlu* by *mesû* ‘to wash’ in several manuscripts of the Babylonian version of the Tašritu Hemerology.<sup>34</sup>

It is worth noting that the common verb for ritual purification *qadāšu* ‘to purify (oneself), to make (ritually) clean’ and the related adjective *qašdu* do not appear in the hemerologies.<sup>35</sup>

The verb *mesû* ‘to wash’ also appears alone (1b) or together with body parts: hand and foot (1e-f). It refers to the washing of body parts, clothes, objects, and (refining) metal or legal cases.<sup>36</sup> Unlike *ebēbu*, *elēlu*, and *qadāšu*, the use of *mesû* is restricted to the secular sphere and has no cultic connotation.<sup>37</sup> Foot washing in the private sphere is known from the Old Babylonian period when servants

26 *balātu irrik* ‘the life will become long’ or *amēlu šū ultabbar/ušalbar* ‘this man will have a long life’.

27 Cf. (NU) *(e-)el/SIKIL* ‘He is (not) pure’ as apodoses of behavior omens in *šumma ālu*, as in K.40567+Rm 452+82-5-22, 507. For the Join and the transliteration see the *electronic Babylonian Library* under the divination corpus “II.6 *Šumma Ālu* 80-120” (<https://www.ebl.lmu.de/corpus/D/2/6>). See also Guichard, Marti 2012, 83-4.

28 Sallaberger 2006-08, 295-6. Here I will not go into Sumerian terminologies, as Wilson 1994 points out that “Sumerian and Akkadian religions must have derived from different sources originally, and even though the Akkadian adopted many of the Sumerian religious forms, [...], the vocabularies suggest disparate religious concepts. [...] the Akkadians never totally adopted the Sumerian concepts” (1994, 95).

29 AHW 181, *ebēbu* D; CAD E, 5-7, *ebēbu* 2-3; Sallaberger 2006-08, 295; Guichard, Marti 2012, 84; Feder 2014, 101.

30 Sallaberger 2011, 19-20.

31 AHW 180, *ebbu* 1-5; CAD E, 1-3, *ebbu* 1; van der Toorn 1985, 27-8; Wilson 1994, 80-2; Sallaberger 2006-08, 295; Thavapalan 2020, 96-8, 103. However, *ellu* is generally preferred to *ebbu* for qualifying the purity of ritual equipment and offerings, see Mayer 1976, 153. Cf. Feder 2014 argues that radiance etymologically underlies the terms for purity. Thavapalan 2020, 97, on the other hand, argues that the ‘(ritually) clean’ is an extended meaning built secondarily around the adjective. She also suggests that brightness and luminosity are metaphors for life and health (Thavapalan 2020, 104).

32 AHW 197, *elēlu* II 2 and 204-5, *ellu* 1-2; CAD E, 80-3, *elēlu*, 1a, 2a-c, 3 and 102-5, *ellu* 1-2; van der Toorn 1985, 27-8; Wilson 1994, 67-83, 94-5; Sallaberger 2006-08, 295; 2011, 19-20; Guichard, Marti 2012, 50-2, 63, 84; Thavapalan 2020, 96-8, 100, 103. *Ellu* never refers to physical cleanliness (CAD E, 4, *ebbu*).

33 Guichard, Marti 2012, 51, 61-2.

34 The prediction of divine mediation on these instructions, however, implies the necessity of this cleanliness for divine favour.

35 AHW 906, *qašādu* and *qašdu*; CAD Q, 46-7, *qadāšu* and 146-7, *qašdu*; van der Toorn 1985, 28; Sallaberger 2006-08, 295; Guichard, Marti 2012, 52.

36 AHW 647-8, *mesû* II 1, 4, 6; CAD M/2, 30-3, *mesû*; Sallaberger 2006-08, 295.

37 Sallaberger 2006-08, 296; Guichard, Marti 2012, 71.



customarily washed their master's feet.<sup>38</sup> Hand washing is widely found in rituals, often with adjectives that additionally express cleanliness, such as *ebbu* or *ellu*.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, two Old Babylonian Sumerian proverbs concern washing hands at meals, suggesting an awareness of hygiene: "Putting unwashed hands in one's mouth is disgusting",<sup>40</sup> and "To serve beer with unwashed hands [...] are abominations to Utu".<sup>41</sup>

The verb *ramāku* 'to bathe, wash, soak' is attested to in daily and cultic contexts.<sup>42</sup> Bathing in medical texts may imply sanitary consciousness, but could also be explained in a cultic way since the conceptualisation of disease in ancient Mesopotamia is linked to supernatural powers, as mentioned in § 1.<sup>43</sup>

In the instructions on changing clothes, new garments are sometimes qualified by the adjectives *eššu* (4b) and *zakû* (4a). *eššu* 'new, fresh' is used in everyday contexts to refer to various objects or buildings and has no religious connotation.<sup>44</sup> It emphasises the newness of the clothing after manufacture, as opposed to old (*labīru*) clothing that has been in use for a while.<sup>45</sup> *zakû* 'clear, clean' is also an everyday term used to refer to liquids and clothing,<sup>46</sup> or to express the luster of metals or freedom from legal claims, as is the range of meanings of *ebēbu/ebbu*.<sup>47</sup> This can accentuate the shiny quality of the fabric, as is the case with metal.<sup>48</sup>

## 5 Relation to Monthly and Annual Cult

As seen in § 3, some instructions have a clear connection to the specific character or cult of the assigned dates.

A group of instructions for cleansing and clothing (1a, 3b-d, 4d-e) on the 6th, 16th, 26th, or 28th days of a certain month are organised alongside the *šigû* instructions as these days of the month are particularly suitable or unsuitable times for the *šigû*, the recitation of which presupposed cleanliness for contact with the gods. Similarly, the instructions for cleansing a garment (3a) on the 15th day possibly go back to an older hemerological tradition recorded in KUB 4, 46 (+) KUB 43, 1 dating from the fifteenth/fourteenth century BC Hattuša.<sup>49</sup> This tradition refers to the cleansing of the garments and the calling of *šigû* only on the 15th of each month, despite the fact that the garment instruction on the 15th III and the 15th XII make no mention of *šigû*.

Several prohibitions, among them the change of clothes (4f), are repeated monthly on the days with a multiple of seven (7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, 28th day), called *ūmu lemnu* 'evil day'.<sup>50</sup> This characteristic of the days is induced by the significance of the number seven in Mesopotamian literature as the number of groups of demons, monsters, ghosts, witches, and other supernatural beings.<sup>51</sup> This well-known association may have contributed to the characterisation of these days as dangerous. This is further supported by an association with the significant lunar phases of the seven-day lunar cycle: the waxing half-moon, the full moon, the waning half-moon, and the invisible moon.<sup>52</sup> On the day of the full moon, the moon and the sun are simultaneously present on the western and eastern horizon in the morning.

<sup>38</sup> Guichard, Marti 2012, 75-6. Examples see CAD M/2, 31, *mesû* 1 2'.

<sup>39</sup> Guichard, Marti 2012, 71-3. Cf. The Sumerian equivalent of the hand washing *šu-luḥ* denotes the lustration ritual.

<sup>40</sup> Alster 1997, no. 3.161: *šu nu-luḥ-ḥa ka-e tùm-da níg-gig-ga-àm*.

<sup>41</sup> Alster 1997, no. 3.8: *šu nu-luḥ-ḥa kaš i-dé-a [...] níg-gig ʹutu-kam*.

<sup>42</sup> AHW 948, *ramāku* 1-5; CAD R, 111-14, *ramāku* 1-2.

<sup>43</sup> Examples of bathing in medical texts see CAD R, 114, *ramāku* 3 2'.

<sup>44</sup> AHW 258 *eššu* 1-2, 4; CAD E, 374-6, *eššu* a-e.

<sup>45</sup> Joannès 2010, 405.

<sup>46</sup> AHW 1505, *zakû* 1, 3; CAD Z, 23-4, *zakû* 1-2; Sallaberger 2006-08, 295-6. Apart from the specification of garments, the relative noun *zakûtu* 'cleaned (barley)' (CAD Z, 32, *zakûtu* 2) is mentioned in hemerological instructions on barley processing. Feder 2014, 97, 99, 105 stresses that the use of *zakû* is not primarily for cultic purity.

<sup>47</sup> AHW 1505, *zakû* 4, 7; CAD Z, 24-5, *zakû* 4-5; van der Toorn 1985, 28.

<sup>48</sup> Beaugéard 2010, 285: *zakûm* "un tissu lustré ou qui brille (?)".

<sup>49</sup> For the study and the edition of this tablet see Fincke 2009.

<sup>50</sup> 19 is a square number of seven, counted from the first day of the previous month (7×7=49-30=19), as already pointed out in Landsberger 1915, 119.

<sup>51</sup> For a study of seven divines and demons, see Konstantopoulos 2023.

<sup>52</sup> The manifestation of the moon should not be underestimated, as it formed the basis of Mesopotamian calendar systems and served as an indicator of temporal divisions. For a comprehensive study of the relationship between the moon god Sin and calendars, see Häntinen 2021, 90-135. Note that the independent hemerological works and compilations are treated equally there.

This astronomical phenomenon is theologically understood as a meeting of the moon god and the sun god to make divine decisions.<sup>53</sup> The dark, moonless night at the end of the month was also associated with the Netherworld, giving it a negative connotation.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the evil nature of these days results from the interplay of several factors – the significance of the number seven, the phases of the moon, and the association with the Netherworld – which require a clean state to avoid potential dangers.

The example of the instruction on bathing (2) discussed above illustrates a case in which the timing of the instruction is inspired by the importance of the patron god for the month, in this case, Ea for the month Ayyāru.

In contrast to these entries related to the significance of days, the prohibition of foot washing (1f) may reflect a monthly cult. It is followed by the prohibition of the sweeping of the house, which explains the connection with Baba/Gula: (*amēlu*) (*aššum Ba'u*) *bīssu lā išabbiṭ šēpēšu lā imessi* 'He (var. a man) should not sweep his house (because of Baba). He should not wash his feet'. These instructions are given in the Hemerology for Invocation for the 19th and 21st day, which have been incorporated into the compilations Hemerology of Assur and *inbu bēl arḫi* under the section for the first month. According to the first-millennium monthly cultic calendar, the 19th day is the *ebbū ša Ba'u/Gula* 'Wrath day of Baba/Gula'.<sup>55</sup> Sweeping is required to clean the offering site when making offerings to gods.<sup>56</sup> Thus, both prohibitions of sweeping and washing can be understood as ritual preparations for invoking gods. But the 19th day seems to be an inappropriate time to appeal to Gula, since she is in an angry mood. The 21st day also contains the above explanation about Gula, but has no connection to this god in the monthly cultic calendar.<sup>57</sup>

The connection with the annual cult is obvious in the instructions on cleansing and hand washing (1e),<sup>58</sup> which appear together with the festival instruction (§ 3). A further connection is suggested by the assigned date, the 8th VII, which is called *ūm ḫidūte ša Enlil/Bēl* (var. *ili*) 'day of joy of Enlil/Bēl (var. god)'. In the first millennium BC, the beginning of the seventh month is known as the time for the New Year festival in autumn.<sup>59</sup> During this state festival, the king, other participants, and cult objects are repeatedly cleansed. The 8th day marks the climax of the festival, when the fate of the king is determined in the divine assembly. After the divine verdict, various cleansing procedures were carried out: washing and purifying the king, changing the king's clothes, and purifying cult objects.<sup>60</sup> This ritual procedure reflects the instructions given on cleansing. This event also is in line with the intensive cleansing instructions for the same day (1d).<sup>61</sup> The designation of the day as a 'day of joy' may reflect the divine satisfaction with the king or the joy of the king over the renewed assurance of his legitimacy and the continuity of his rule.<sup>62</sup>

The New Year festivals celebrated at the beginning of the first and seventh months are of particular importance in the annual cult.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the cases already mentioned, other cleansing instructions during the festival period correspond well with the course of the ceremony. The instruction for the cleansing of a garment (3a) for the 2nd I is in line with the special requirement of cleansing for the high priests called 'elder brother' on this day before they enter the presence of the gods for prayer and begin their duties in the temple on the following days.<sup>64</sup> The washing instruction (1b) for the 7th

<sup>53</sup> Koch 2013, 133-4; Häntinen 2021, 92, 106-10, 126, 154. For a discussion of the connection with other prohibitions, see Kikuchi forthcoming.

<sup>54</sup> Landsberger 1915, 141-3; Häntinen 2021, 98, 122, 124-5.

<sup>55</sup> See Livingstone 2013, 250-4 with corrections in Marti 2014, 197-8 for the monthly cultic calendar incorporated into the hemerologies.

<sup>56</sup> Maul 1994, 48; Linssen 2004, 149.

<sup>57</sup> It should be noted that the offering(s) to Gula (sometimes referred to as Baba or Meme, the goddess identified with Gula) is ordered on the 19th day in *inbu bēl arḫi* and on the 21st I in the Hemerology of Assur. Possibly the offering was offered to appease the wrathful goddess. The offering on the 21st day strengthens the link between the 21st day and Gula.

<sup>58</sup> For the annual cult and calendars see Cohen 1993; 2015.

<sup>59</sup> For this festival see Ambos 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Ambos 2013, 57-69.

<sup>61</sup> This correlation between hemerological entries and this festival has already been pointed out in Ambos 2013, 69. More detailed discussion including the connection between this festival and offering instructions and prediction for the divine mediation (1d) see Kikuchi 2019, 448-9.

<sup>62</sup> The latter argument by Ambos 2013, 69. The prediction for pregnancy (1e) possibly reflects the ascertained continuation of the rule.

<sup>63</sup> For a recent study on the New Year festival in the first month, see Debourse 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Debourse 2022, 21-2, 239. The purity of the priests is a general requirement for ritual participation, so the cleansing statement in the festival text is superfluous. Debourse 2022, 240-1 assumes the special (in her word 'more symbolic') form of cleansing.



VII corresponds to the sequence of the New Year festival in autumn, when various purification rituals were performed.<sup>65</sup>

A further comparison of the dates of the instructions with those of the annual cult shows good agreement in the following cases. Two types of instructions (1c: purification and cleansing, 3a: garment cleansing) are provided for the 1st I, which fits perfectly with the purification ritual known from the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>66</sup> Its ritual text contains the same instructions for purification and cleansing, and a comparative instruction for wearing a new garment.<sup>67</sup> The instructions for cleaning clothes (3a) also coincide with the date of the sacred marriage of Nabû and Tašmētu/Nanaya (2nd II), or the ablutions (*rimkāni*) for Šamaš and Adad (10th II).<sup>68</sup> Instructions for wearing a new garment (4a) are given for the 11th VI in the Hemerology of Assur. This month is known as the time of the purification ceremony of Inanna/Ištar, whose tradition goes back to the third millennium BC and was kept until the Seleucid period. The date of the individual events varies depending on the period, yet the date of our instruction is close to the main celebrations of the Ur III period, probably between the 12th and 25th of the month.<sup>69</sup> The connection with this cult is supported by the repeated instruction of offering to Ištar in the Hemerology of Assur from the 10th to the 16th day of this month.

There are still six instances of instructions concerning clothing that do not coincide with the established dates of the recurring cult known so far.<sup>70</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

The instructions on cleansing in the hemerologies are scattered over 50 dates in the year, which shows the interest of the Mesopotamians in cleansing acts in private daily life (§ 2). The analysis of the instructions and predictions, combined with the instructions on cleansing, reveals that most of the cleansing has a cultic background (§ 3). This is supported by the coinciding of the dates of the instructions and religious events in the monthly or annual cult (§ 5). However, we still have some instructions for cleansing garments that do not correspond with a specific cult, so we cannot exclude the possibility that they reflect daily practices. It is worth noting that the hemerologies did not use the verbs for cleansing acts with a clear religious connotation (§ 4). Although most of the terms could be used in both daily and cultic contexts, the hemerologies preferred *ebēbu* and *mesû* to *elēlu*, which has a cultic undertone, and avoided the technical term for cultic purity *qadāšu* altogether.

The connection with health, which is the essential aspect of the modern definition of hygiene, is indicated in several predictions concerning health and longevity (§ 3). A possible connection to hygiene is also suggested by the terms *ebēbu*, *mesû*, and *ramāku*, since they have a health dimension (§ 4).

In conclusion, the results of the study of hemerologies provide new insights into the concept of private cleanliness. Although in many cases cleansing was cultic in motivation, the instructions on cleansing without a clear connection to religious events may remind us of the need for cleansing in everyday life.

<sup>65</sup> Already argued by Ambos 2013, 48. For the purification rituals on the 7th VII see Ambos 2013, 46-8. The instruction for cleansing of a garment on the 3rd VII is also within the period of the New Year festival in autumn, but its procedure of this day includes no mention of the cleansing, see Ambos 2013, 38-41, 146-52.

<sup>66</sup> For this ritual see Livingstone 1997, 215-17; 2000; 2017, 422-3; Cavigneaux, Donbaz 2007, 321-31.

<sup>67</sup> K. 2438+, obv. 1-3// (Cavigneaux, Donbaz 2007, 324-31): *Diš ina Nisanni U[D 1.KAM ša Anim (u)] Enlil ūmu magir gallābūssu [līpuš lītelli] lītebbib šaman kanakti [lippašiš(?) šubāta] ešši liltabbiš* 'In the month of Nisannu. [The first] d[ay]. (It is the day) of Anu (and) Enlil. Good day. [He should have] himself shaved, [purify] (and) cleanse himself. [He should anoint himself(?)] with oil (perfumed with) *kanaktu*-plant. He should clothe himself with a new [garment]'.

<sup>68</sup> Cohen 1993, 311-12; 2015, 409-10. The 2nd is the day of the preparation of the sacred marriage, including the dressing of divine status, the contact with which required purity.

<sup>69</sup> Cohen 2015, 141-5, 423-4. For the witness from the Seleucid period see Livingstone 2017, 427-9.

<sup>70</sup> Instructions of the type 3a on the 16th I, 7th VIII, 13th VIII, and 3rd XI, the type 4b on the 12th IX, the type 4c on the 29th III.

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