Defilement, Disgust, and Disease:
The Experiential Basis of Hittite and Akkadian Terms for Impurity

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This article challenges the common tendency in modern research to treat impurity as a religious phenomenon divorced from mundane concerns. Employing the cross-cultural psychological notion of “contagion,” this investigation examines the usage of terms for pollution and purity in Hittite and Akkadian as they relate to distinct domains of human experience, specifically uncleanness, infection, and transgression. Special attention is given to the use of these terms in reference to infectious disease. This analysis demonstrates the real-world experiential basis for notions of impurity and also provides a new perspective to shed light on the peculiarities of each culture (e.g., the absence of an Akkadian term for “pollution”). The article concludes with a detailed excursus on the etymology of Akkadian musukku and its relation to Sumerian (m)uzug.

After decades of intense research, the notion of impurity continues to attract scholarly attention, probably because it remains nearly as enigmatic as it ever was. Initially, the potential to interpret purity and pollution symbolically—with ritual practice serving to represent abstract sociological and/or theological concepts—served as a productive catalyst for research in the social sciences and the humanities, including ancient Near Eastern and biblical studies. Ultimately, however, the results of this research program have been disappointing, since they have failed to provide a convincing account of why such considerations were such a driving force in motivating actual behavior.

From the outset, the description of this concept in academic discourse has often been hedged by terms such as “religious” or “ritual” impurity. These markers are intended as clarifications, but their implication is to extract the concept of pollution from the realm of rational experience. The following words of social historian Virginia Smith are somewhat extreme, but nevertheless representative of this tendency:

Religious purity has a distinct role in the history of personal hygiene. It was not functional, not rational, and more often than not completely illusory; but it was a key cultural component that determined the lives and cleansing behaviour of very large numbers of people.

1. This fascination shows no sign of abetting, as at least two major volumes have appeared dedicated to this topic in the past few years. For the state of research see the introductory essays of each: P. Rösch and U. Simon, “Why Purity?” in How Purity is Made, ed. P. Rösch and U. Simon (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 1–38; C. Frevel and C. Nihan, “Introduction,” in Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean and Ancient Judaism, ed. C. Frevel and C. Nihan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–46.


However, as Durkheim warned us years ago, we should be suspicious of any account of religious behavior which assumes that it is based on a delusion. Such appeals to the irrational are inevitable results of the initial categorization of pollution as a religious phenomenon—supernatural and divorced from mundane reality.

A much more fruitful approach is offered by modern psychological research on disgust and its relation to “contagion.” This universal cognitive mechanism is responsible for “contamination appraisals,” namely the sense that “physical contact between the source and the target results in the transfer of some effect or quality (essence) from the source to the target.” This perception of the spread of an invisible force or essence is tied to a reaction of disgust and often fear which is elicited by contact (or potential contact) with various sources of contamination, both physiological (such as waste matter, insects, and disease-infected entities) and social, motivated by personal contempt, moral disdain, or racial biases. Interestingly, although the contagion responses evoked by these different causes are generically similar, they tend to differ in regard to the forms of “purification” which can remove the contamination.

The universal capacity to detect contamination plays a crucial role in culture-specific pollution beliefs. These beliefs may be characterized as folk theories (e.g., theories of infection) which offer verbalized articulations of these intuitive contamination appraisals and their implications. The medical anthropologist Edward Green suggests a similar approach in treating African notions of pollution as indigenous theories of infectious disease: “Pollution . . . is not so mystical when examined closely. In the anthropological sense, pollution denotes a belief that people will become ill as a result of contact with, or contamination by, a substance or essence considered dangerous because it is unclean or impure.” From this perspective, which takes these pollution beliefs as culture-specific linguistic constructs derivative from the embodied experiences they describe, it is important to differentiate between linguistic terminology and the experiential schemes to which they refer.

In a previous study which applied this general approach to the notion of pollution (ṭumʾah) in the Hebrew Bible, I identified at least three primary types of experience designated by this term: UNCLEANNESS, INFECTION, and the STAIN OF TRANSGRESSION left by bloodshed and sexual misdeeds. Small capital letters are employed to emphasize the point that these categories of pollution refer to recurrent schemas of non-verbal embodied experience, which can potentially be represented by a single umbrella term or by several differentiated terms.

7. This topic is discussed in more detail from a psychological perspective in my forthcoming article “Contamination Appraisals, Pollution Beliefs, and the Role of Cultural Inheritance in Shaping Disease Avoidance Behavior.”
8. Indigenous Theories of Contagious Disease (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1999), 13.
Interestingly, despite the fact that these different schemas are described by a single linguistic term, these different types of ṭumʾah can be distinguished by several characteristics, especially their normative implications and modes of purification. For example, forms of pollution related to the experience of UNCLEANNESS—such as normal genital discharges—required that the polluted person or object be distanced from contact with the divine sphere and the cult.  

This type of pollution could be removed by the passage of time and washing. In comparison, forms of pollution related to INFECTION—such as abnormal genital discharges, corpse impurity, and leprosy—were perceived as inherently dangerous. These frequently required banishment from the community and expiatory sacrifices as part of the purificatory process.  

A third type of pollution, called the STAIN OF TRANSGRESSION, refers to the invisible stain caused by bloodshed and violation of sexual norms, such as incest, which was thought to provoke divine punishment.

The relationship between pollution and disease (INFECTION) deserves particular emphasis, because it has not been adequately appreciated until now. In their concern to avoid anachronism, scholars have been wary of attributing to the ancients an awareness of infectious disease. However, the textual evidence from Mari demonstrates incontrovertibly what common sense would dictate, that the contagiousness of many diseases was duly recognized. It is equally correct, however, to recognize that the mechanics of infectious disease, namely the transmission of bacteria, were only properly identified in the mid-nineteenth century c.e.

The result of this gap between experiential awareness and scientific knowledge is that premodern cultures were required to explain disease according to the conceptual resources that they had available. In the present article, I seek to examine the use of terms related to pollution and purification in Mesopotamian and Hittite literature as they relate to these concrete domains of human experience, especially disease. This inquiry aims not only to understand the nuanced meanings of these linguistic expressions, but also to shed light on core conceptions and underlying rationales motivating purity practices in these cultures.

**DEFILEMENT IN HITTITE TEXTS**

The Hittite term papratar is rendered by the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary* as “impurity, defilement, impropriety.” This abstract noun is derived from the stem papr-, whose

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12. E.g., Leviticus 13–14 (leprosy); 15:2–15, 25–30 (abnormal genital discharges); Numbers 19 (corpse impurity); and Numbers 5:1–4 for the banishment of all three types.
16. Medical historian Virginia Nutton points out regarding ancient theories of infection: “It is important first to remember that in all this we are dealing with descriptions of the invisible, with hypothetical reconstructions of how things are or act, based only on the observance of ‘macrophenomena.’” For example, African pollution beliefs may employ various idioms to describe the invisible essences which cause disease, including filth, insects, heat, and darkness (Green, *Indigenous Theories*, 50 and passim).
derivatives serve as antonyms to those of parkui- “pure, clean” in ordeals, rituals, and cultic texts. Interestingly, the usage of papr- takes on a distinct nuance in relation to each of these, conforming roughly to the Stain of Transgression, Infection, and Uncleanness schemes, respectively. In relation to ordeals, the terminology of “pure” and “impure” corresponds to the innocence or guilt of the person undergoing the ordeal. For example, the Instructions for Temple Officials (CTH 264) require a drinking ordeal to ensure that the offerant has fulfilled the sacrificial obligation properly: “Then you shall drink from the rhyton of the will of god. If you are pure (parkwaeš), it is your protective (lama) deity. But if you are defiled (papranteš), you shall perish together with your wives and children.”

In contrast, when employed in cultic contexts in reference to sacrificial offerings, “pollution” designates the uncleanness that desecrates the gods’ food. This distinct usage appears in the very same text: “If a pig or a dog ever touches the wood or clay utensils that you have, but the ‘pot-bearer’ does not throw it away, and he gives to the gods to eat from the defiled (paprandaza) vessels, the gods will give that one to eat and drink excrement and urine.” This notion of Uncleanness reflects a visceral sense of disgust which is attributed anthropomorphically to the gods (I 21–22): “Is the will of man and the will of the gods at all different? Certainly not! Is their will not the same?”

The association of pollution and disease appears primarily in ritual texts, where papr- designates a metaphysical threat which causes illness and other types of misfortune. It usually appears together with other suspected causes, including sorcery (alwanzatar), evil speech (lala-), curse (ḫurtai-), bloodguilt (ešḫar), and the like. Unfortunately, it is difficult to offer a more specific characterization of papratar, specifically whether it was associated with a particular source.

The Ritual of Tunnawi (CTH 409.I) is specifically designated as a “ritual of pollution” (paprannaš SISKUR) and is explicitly linked to disease:

If a person, either a man or a woman, comes upon any papratar, or if anyone else has named him/her for papratar, or if in a woman <her> children keep dying, or if her fetuses keep mis-

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18. The etymology of this term is debated. The two main proposals are derivations from a reduplicated root *per “to risk, transgress”; cf. Gothic faírina “guilt, blame”; Old Nordic fär “danger”; or from a nominal stem *papra- meaning “dark, dirty”; cf. Sanskrit babhrú “brown.” For the former view, see A. Kloekhorst, Etymological Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 629. Regarding the latter, J. Puhvel further suggests connecting this stem with Indo-European *bhobhro- “beaver,” which is “known widely in Eurasia for its brown fur and also for its obnoxious effluvia of its brownish, oily anal-gland secretion . . . Perhaps this substance was known as *bhobhrom (vel sim.) and survives as a generic term for ‘foul matter’ in Hitt. *papra-” (Hittite Etymological Dictionary 8 106). Cf. also HEG 11/12 428.


carrying, or if for a man or woman in consequence of a matter of *papratar* the body parts are disabled.

If such a person is experiencing *papratar*, then such a person, whether man or woman, performs the ritual of *papratar*. (I 1–8) 23

In this particular case, the *papratar* is understood as the cause of miscarriage or a reproductive dysfunction in the man or woman. At the same time, the text raises the possibility of someone naming him/her for pollution, apparently referring to some form of sorcery. Indeed, *papratar* appears most frequently together with *alwanzatar* (sorcery). 24 Further evidence of the thin line between pollution and sorcery can be found in Hittite Law §44b (cited below), where the malicious transfer of contagion (not explicitly designated *papratar*) to another person is called *alwanzatar*. 25

An additional term for an impure state is derived from the term for “excrement”: *š/zakkar*. The adjectival form *šaknuwant-* is used in the sense “filthy” or “unclean.” A person who is *šaknuwant-* must be distanced from the sacred domain. The *Instructions for Temple Officials* fix the death penalty for the unclean person (*šaknuwanza*) who approaches the thick bread and libation bowls of the gods. 26 In short, this term refers to a state of UNCLEANNESS which prohibits a person from entering the temple or making contact with sacred foods or objects. Hence, it was distinguishable from *papratar*, which could also designate a cause of disease (INFECTION).

**DEFILEMENT IN MESOPOTAMIAN SOURCES**

From the outset, it is worth emphasizing that there is no Akkadian term for pollution designating a metaphysical force comparable to Hebrew *ṭumʾah* or Hittite *papratar*. 27 At the same time, several expressions can be identified which signify an unclean state. Specifically, the adjective *luʾû* is translated by the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* as “soiled, dirty, unclean, sullied” and the factitive D-stem verbal form is glossed “to defile, desecrate (a sanctuary), to dirty (an object).” 28 In several texts this term is employed in relation to the spread of disease. For example, a Neo-Assyrian diagnostic text states in reference to a sick woman: “Unclean hands have touched her” (*qātā luʾāti ilputāši*). 29 Similarly, the *Utukkū Lemnūtu* incantations address the Alû demon: “You . . . who does not wash (his) filthy hands” (*ša qāṭī luʾāti lä išahḫutu atta*). 30

24. This point is noted by CHD P 105.
25. Mouton, “Le concept de purité,” 70–71, though *papratar* is not explicitly mentioned in this passage.
28. CAD L 258.
The relationship between this term and disease is strengthened further if we accept the etymological connection—assumed by both CAD and AHw—between *lu’û* and the noun *lu’tu*, glossed as “softness, debility, decay (also a disease).” \(^{31}\) But etymologies from double-weak roots require a double measure of caution. First, the root *l’y* in Hebrew and Aramaic is used in reference to weakness, fatigue, and inability (like *lu’tu*), but not dirtiness. \(^{32}\) Second, the use of *lu’û* in the context of disease is not attested (to my knowledge) before the Neo-Assyrian period. These points raise the suspicion that these terms derive from two distinct roots. Even if these terms are etymologically distinct, it nevertheless appears that a folk etymology linking these two terms is responsible for the use of *lu’û* as a disease-causing dirtiness. \(^{33}\)

An additional term is *(w)aršu/*maršu, which is glossed “dirty, unclean” (CAD A 309–10). The earliest attestations and lexical lists associate this term with the unclean wool of the fuller before it has been processed and turned into pure white wool. \(^{34}\) Indeed, numerous attestations derive from the domain of mundane laundering. But *(w)aršu* was also transferred to the cultic domain, designating—like *lu’û*—a state which desecrates and defiles sancta. The derivative *urrūštu* is an expression for unclean women, both parturients and menstruants. \(^{35}\) It is possible that this term reflects a substantivized usage of the D-stem verbal adjective: “the stained (one),” referring directly to the sullied garments of these women. Be that as it may, the semantic development of *(w)aršu* clearly originates in the perception of clean white wool as a paradigmatic image of purity, such that the unprocessed wool could serve as an image for impurity. \(^{36}\)

Interestingly, *lu’û* and *aršu* appear together in fixed formulas preceding Neo-Assyrian divinatory queries. In particular, the “ezib-formulas,” which ask Šamaš to disregard any defilement caused when performing the act of divination, begin regularly as follows: “Disregard that he who touches the forehead of the sheep is dressed in his ordinary soiled garments (*ginêšu aršāti labšu*), has eaten, drunk, anointed himself with, touched, or stepped upon

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31. CAD L 256–57; AHw 565 suggests that the verb is a denominative derivation from *lātu(m)* and views the latter as designating both “Schmutz” and “eine Hautkrankheit.” Landsberger connects these two senses, understanding *lu’tu* as “‘(innere) Schmutz’, durch Fäulnis bedingte Zersetzung der Sehnen und Lähmung” (“Zur vierten und siebenten Tafel des Gilgamesch-Epos,” RA 62 [1968]: 111).


33. Note that *lu’tu* appears elsewhere in the hemerologies, such that it is not surprising that the scribes would relate these two terms. Specifically, the apodosis of one text places *lu’ātu* in parallelism to the oath-curse *māmītu* as a cause for disease: “the oath-curse seized him, *lu’āti* seized him” (Labat, Hemerologies, 180 [XXIII 24]).

34. The Hittite term *maršiš* (variants *marşāši, maršiš*) is probably derived from the Akkadian term. It designates “something of wool which adheres to linen and wool cloth” before they are processed (CHD L–N 186–87), and is mentioned in relation to *lú*MEŠÁZLAG and *lú*MEŠTÜG (“fullers”). More specifically, it seems that the last of these variants (*maršiš*) is the original, comprised of the Akkadian stem and a Hurrian derivational suffix (-ḫ), which in the other forms underwent a š/ḫ metathesis (GAG §36c). Cf. HED 6 72 and HEG 5/6 136, who miss this derivation. It is tempting to compare the productive Hittite stem *marš-,* whose derivatives pertain to two distinct domains of usage: desecration of sacred materials and falsehood (CHD L–N 195). Although the first usage is remarkably similar to that of our Akkadian term, the etymological dictionaries reject this connection (HED 6 86–87; HEG 5/6 144).


36. This imagery features prominently in Hittite purification rituals, especially that of Ambazzi (CITH 391.1); see B. Christiansen, Die Ritualtradition der Ambazzi: Eine philologische Bearbeitung und entstehungsgeschichtliche Analyse der Ritualtexte CTH 391, CTH 429 und CTH 463 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 104–5, 143–46.
anything unclean (mimma lu’û) . . . “ 37 These formulas suggest a distinction between lu’û, which refers to defilement caused by ingestion or contact, and aršu, which refers to unclean garments.

Accordingly, Akkadian distinguishes between two types of defiled states, one referring to a benign uncleanness that must be distanced from the cult and the other designating a potentially dangerous state of infection (lu’û). Leaving etymology aside, synchronic analysis of texts from the Neo-Assyrian period indicates that aršu is used to designate the experiential scheme of UNCLEANNESS, whereas lu’û is also used in relation to INFECTION.

An additional expression which is worthy of attention is là ellu, “not pure.” The various examples of this expression cited in CAD E 106 generally refer to a state which renders a person or sacrifice unfit for cultic or divinatory use, hence fitting the scheme of UNCLEANNESS. At the same time, some anti-witchcraft rituals employ this expression in relation to disease, for example: “If a man is bewitched and his body is poured out, his semen flows whether he is walking, standing or lying down or when he is urinating, his private parts are impure (là ēl) like those of a (menstruating) woman . . . “ 38 In a related text, a person whose “semen” is incessantly dripping is offered a treatment with the prognosis “Then the impure man will be pure (LÚ NU.KÙ ēl).” 39 Granted, the use of this expression in the context of INFECTION is limited to the narrowly circumscribed situation of abnormal genital discharges, but it is noteworthy that the Hebrew Bible shares this particular concern (Lev. 15:2–15, 25–30). As van der Toorn points out, “[Genital emissions] were charged with connotations of defilement and divine retribution . . . Human sexuality was an area of high tension and any deviations from normality were a source of religious anxiety.” 40 Perhaps more to the point, sexually transmitted diseases are easily recognized to be contagious and hence conceptualized in terms of pollution. As Green observes, pollution beliefs offer a particularly parsimonious explanation (in comparison with alternative theories such as evil spirits or witchcraft) in these cases: “The range of explanations would seem to be most logically restricted in association with illnesses whose cause-and-effect relationship between exposure or contact and illness is most apparent (e.g., syphilis, measles, leprosy and cholera).” 41

Another important term which needs to be evaluated is (m)usukku, corresponding to Sumerian uzug/ḫ, which served as a designation for a category of unclean person. 42 The common denominator of all the various types of uzug / musukku is that they all were banished or isolated from communal activity. In addition to the specific examples cited below,

37. See I. Starr, Queries to the Sungod (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1990), xxiv. In a striking ethnographic parallel, Evans-Pritchard describes at length the measures taken by the Azande to avoid defilement of oracles, since “contact of an unclean person with the oracle is certain to destroy its potency, and even the close proximity of an unclean person may have this result” (Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976], 127–34 [132]).
40. van der Toorn, Sin and Sanction, 76.
41. Indigenous Theories, 248–49, also 135–78, and 209–13 for the association of pollution and sexually transmitted diseases.
42. For a discussion of the etymology of this term, see the excursus at the end of this article.
this point is demonstrated by the expression abul(KÁ.GAL)-uzug “the gate of the unclean ones,” which apparently designates a section of the temple.43

Remarkably, the sources attest to the three experiential schemas of pollution presented above:

UNCLEANNESS: The feminine form musukkatu is used as a designation for a menstruating woman as well as a parturient (ḫarištu). Contact with the musukkatu disqualifies objects and personnel from ritual use. Furthermore, these women are to be secluded and are presumably prohibited from having sexual relations.44 Letters from Mari discuss the need to build separate dwellings for the queen for a segment of each month, apparently due to menstrual impurity, and this banishment apparently stems from the sanctity of the royal palace.45

STAIN OF TRANSGRESSION: In the myth of Enlil and Ninlil, after the rape of Ninlil, Enlil is declared an uzug and banished to the underworld. The rationale for this banishment is obscure, since this was not the typical punishment for rape, nor can it be assumed to have been so in Mesopotamian pre-history.46 In any case, the relationship between a sexual violation and exclusion is echoed by the use of musukku in the myth of Nergal and Ereškigal. In the latter text, Ereškigal, after being raped by Nergal, declares: “I am musakku, I am impure (musukkákūma ul ebbēk). I cannot execute the judgments of the great gods.”47

INFECTION: The use of uzug / musukku in relation to disease is less explicit in early sources, hence requiring a more extended discussion. The earliest evidence for this usage, I submit, is in Gudea’s statue and cylinder inscriptions from the twenty-second to twenty-first century B.C.E. In these inscriptions, we find repeated references to Gudea’s purification of Lagash. For example, the Cylinder A inscription reads (xiii 12–15): 48

énsi-ke₄ iri mu-kug
izi im-ma-ta-lá
uzug-ga ní-ḡal lū-GLAN
ir-ta ba-ta-è

The ruler cleansed the city, he let fire loose over it. He expelled the unclean person (uzug), the fearsome one, and . . . 50 from the city.

43. Proto Kagal 4: ká-gal-ú-zaḫ-e-ne (MSL 13 66: OB Nippur); so also canonical Kagal 4: ká-gal-ú-zuḫ₃ (=abul) mu-su-ka-tim (ibid. 228). One might compare the “chamber of the lepers” (לשכת המצורעים) mentioned in rabbinic literature as located in the courtyard of the Jerusalem temple (e.g., m. Middot 2:5).
44. See Stol, Birth in Babylonia, 205–6.
46. Pace Jacobsen, who postulates that rape was once considered a threat to the community at large, despite the fact that such a stringent view is reserved for incest in Sumerian and OB law codes (The Harps that Once: Sumerian Poetry in Translation [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987], 174 n. 18). He translates uzug as “sex-offender.”
48. Text according to ETCSL 2.1.7.341–44.
49. The usage of ní-ḡal here is exceptional and may imply a monstrous-looking person. For discussion of this idiom, see G. Cunningham, “In the Company of ni₄, ‘self’ and ‘fear(someness),’” in Analyzing Literary Sumerian: Corpus-Based Approaches, ed. J. Ebeling and G. Cunningham (London: Equinox 2007), 92.
50. lū GLAN is left untranslated by nearly all translators. R. E. Averbeck proposes “the man inflamed (with venereal disease)” (“A Preliminary Study of Ritual and Structure in the Cylinders of Gudea” [PhD diss., Dropsie College, 1987], 637 and n. 253. Cf. GĪŠ.BĪR in the comparable passage, Statue B iii 15–iv 4, interpreted as a sufferer
In l. 12, Gudea’s actions are depicted explicitly as purification (kug), which the following line describes as involving fire. Burning rites are a well-known element in exorcistic healing rituals such as *Maqlû* and *Šurpu*, but one might add a reference in a Mari letter to burning the belongings of disease-infected soldiers.\(^{51}\) In the following lines, several categories of persons—including the uzug—are mentioned as those who were banished from the city.

Admittedly, this passage is obscure, but it can be further illuminated by the parallel in Cylinder B (xviii 1–3):\(^{52}\)

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\begin{align*}
\text{iri-na ú-si₉⁻₉-ni zag-bi-a mu-da-a-nu₉-₉₉-nud} \\
\text{eme nīḡ-ḥul-da inim ba-da-kūr} \\
\text{nīḡ-ērim é-ba im-ma-an/-gi₄₉} \\
\end{align*}
\]

His unclean one\(^{53}\) could sleep (only) at the border of his city. He changed the word of the evil tongue,\(^{54}\) and returned evil to its home.\(^{55}\)

The main question for our purposes pertains to Gudea’s motivation for banishing the uzug and the other categories of people mentioned in the parallels. Due to the reference to purification (kug) in Cylinder A xiii 12 and Statue B iii 12, scholars have tended to assume that the goal of these measures was to safeguard the sanctity of the temple or that of the city of Lagash. However, once it is realized that the language of purification—even in relation to whole towns—is attested in relation to epidemics in the Mari letters,\(^{56}\) we cannot rule out the possibility that these measures were viewed as a matter of public safety. This possibility is strengthened by the subsequent lines, where it is emphasized that Gudea also secured the city from slander (evil tongue) and evil, which should probably be taken as metaphysical sources of danger, since these types of forces feature prominently in rituals against sickness and catastrophe in Mesopotamian and Hittite contexts. In fact, “evil tongue” is explicitly mentioned as a source of disease in OB documents.\(^{57}\)

To further contextualize the relationship between banishment and disease in ancient Mesopotamia, we may refer also to the case of *saḫaršubbû*. This highly infectious skin disease—often translated as “leprosy”—is described as covering the body of its victim like from gonorrhea by H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 155 n. 324, or (man with a) “flaccid penis” (PSD B 157).


\(^{52}\) Text: ETCSL 2.1.7.1221–23.

\(^{53}\) For ú-si₉⁻₉ as an orthographic (and phonetic) variant of ú-zug, see A. Falkenstein, *Grammatik der Sprache Gudeas von Lagaš* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1949), vol. I, 32. ETCSL interprets the suffix -ni as a variant of the plural suffix -(e)ne, rendering: “ritually unclean ones.”

\(^{54}\) So Jacobsen, *Harps*, 440.

\(^{55}\) For é . . . gi₄₉ as an idiom for “send back to its place,” see H. Hirsch, “Zurückkehren in sein ‘Haus,’” *AfO* 21 (1966): 84. Nevertheless, Hirsch takes é in the present text as a reference to the Eninnu temple, and this view has been followed by numerous translators, including Edzard: “he had anything disharmonious turned away from the House” (*Gudea and His Dynasty* [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997], 81), against his own translation of the parallel expression in Statue B 36–37: “I had anything disharmonious turned back ‘to its house’ (where it belongs)” (ibid. 36), giving the expected locative sense to é-bi-a.

\(^{56}\) ARM 26/1 564–65 (n. 263) ll. 17–20 refers explicitly to *mašmašu* priests who purify (*ullilû*) a city stricken by plague.

a garment, leading to stigmatization and banishment from the community. Often the victim was forced to literally roam the steppe. It is worth noting that the curability—or more commonly, the incurability—of this disease was designated through the idiom of purification (ebbu), as in the following curse: “May Sîn cover his entire body with incurable saḫaršubbû so that he will not be pure (ā ibbib) until the end of his days!” It seems hardly coincidental, therefore, that musukku is mentioned together with saḫaršubbû disease in the Neo-Assyrian healing ritual BMS 12. In the ritual following the Marduk prayer, the exorcist is instructed to pull wool from a sheep’s forehead and then strew it on the head of either a musukku (ú.ka) or a person with saḫaršubbû disease. Though the text is laconic, it seems safe to assume that this procedure was intended to transfer the disease-causing evil to these unfortunate recipients as a means of disposing of the evil. This understanding is supported by the accompanying remark that “no one should watch as you strew (the hair)” (l. 98).

In sum, though Mesopotamian texts lack a reified term to designate a metaphysical threat analogous to Hittite papratar, there were nevertheless adjectival forms which were used to describe a state of defilement. A fine distinction can be detected between the usage of aršu—used to describe a state of UNCLEANNESS incompatible with the sacred sphere—and lu ’u, which was also used to describe a threatening form of defilement associated with INFECTION. Furthermore, Sumerian uzug and Akkadian (m)usukku could be used in all three experiential contexts discussed above: TRANSGRESSION (specifically sexual violations), UNCLEANNESS, and INFECTION. All of these types of defiled persons were to be banished from their communities.

“PURIFICATION” AS A RESPONSE TO DEFILEMENT

So far the discussion has focused on terms for defilement in Hittite and Mesopotamian literature. An additional line of inquiry is to examine the terminology of purification in Hittite and Akkadian ritual contexts, particularly as related to disease and contagion. In general, scholars tend to merge these two lines of inquiry based on the assumption that “purification” by necessity implies defilement. The problem with this assumption is that it fails to address the question of how pollution was conceptualized in the native terminology—if at all, which is, in fact, an issue where cross-cultural differences can be found.

58. See CAD R 149. For discussion of this disease and its relationship to leprosy (Hansen’s disease), see M. Stol, “Leprosy: New Light from Greek and Babylonian Sources,” Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap (Ex Oriente Lux) 30 (1989): 22–31; Scurlock and Andersen, Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine, 231–33, 723–24 nn. 139–40. Like these authors, I am inclined to view leprosy as one of the diseases, if not the main disease, referred to by this term. See also J. Klein, “Leprosy and Lepers in Mesopotamian Literature,” Korot 21 (2011–12): 9–24 (Hebrew). One may also compare the skin disease šara‘at in the Hebrew Bible, which is similar in numerous respects, including its banishment (Leviticus 13:45–46; Numbers 5:2–5; 12:14; 2 Kings 7:3–10).


61. This problem mars the otherwise very helpful recent overview of Guichard and Marti, “Purity in Ancient Mesopotamia.” The two authors seem to have tackled this problem from different perspectives: the treatment of Sumerian and Old Babylonian literature (pp. 53–79) employs an emic approach, focusing on native terminology, whereas the discussion of Neo-Assyrian rituals (pp. 79–105) treats these concepts from an etic perspective, viewing the various types of metaphysical danger (e.g., witchcraft and omens) as “impurity.”
A convergence of these ideas—infection, pollution, and purification—can be found in a Hittite Law dealing with cattle disease (§163):

If anyone’s animals are smitten (with disease) by a god (šiuniaḫta), and (the owner) purifies them (parkunuzi) and drives them off, but he places the refuse on the scrap-pile, but he does not tell his companion and his companion does not know, so that he drives his cattle (there) and they die, there is restitution. 62

Though the factitive middle form šiuniaḫta might invite a translation such as “become divine,” 63 Hoffner’s translation “stricken by disease” is clearly correct and corresponds to the general ancient Near Eastern idiom (found in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Biblical Hebrew) whereby disease is designated the “hand of DN.” 64 Such cattle are subject to some form of purification and then “driven off” (arha pennāi). 65 However, the owner is to be held accountable if he is careless in disposing of the refuse (išuwan), leading to the death of his neighbor’s cattle. This source further demonstrates the awareness of contagion and the role of some kind of purification to eliminate it, though it does not employ papratar to designate this threat.

A similar connection between contagion and purification can be found in an additional law (§44b):

If anyone purifies (parkunuzzi) a person, he shall dispose of the remnants (of the ritual) in the incineration dumps. But if he disposes of them in someone’s house, it is sorcery (alwanzatar) and a case for the king. 66

This law treats the remnants (kuptar) of the purification rite as a potent danger, such that the disposal in another person’s house is automatically interpreted as a malicious act of sorcery and a capital offense.

The anxiety of contagion implicit in these laws finds vivid expression in a letter from Ortaköy:

Concerning the fact that an act of sacrilege (maršaštarraš) has now occurred, and a Man of the Storm God and an Old Woman have been apprehended. They will begin to perform (a purification ritual). But let them not begin to perform (the ritual) in the town of Ḫanziwa. Let them not bathe in the river of the town of Ḫanziwa. Let them rather perform (the ritual) in [ . . . ], and let them bathe only there. Let them not perform (the ritual) in Ḫanziwa. And let them not bathe in the river of Ḫanziwa. Get to it! 67

This passage focuses on the potential contagion that can result from a purification ritual performed for two cultic officiants who have committed an act of sacrilege. The author repeatedly demands that these rites not be performed in the river of Ḫanziwa, apparently because this town was upstream from the king’s temporary residence in Šapinuwa. 68 In light of the

63. Cf. HED 2 486: “suffer demonic possession,” and see Hoffner’s comments, Laws, 131 n. 429 and 213.
64. For numerous Mesopotamian examples, see Scurlock and Andersen, Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine, 429–528. Note also Laws of Hammurabi §249, which refers to an ox that a god has stricken down. For the Hebrew Bible, see Exodus 9:3; 1 Samuel 5:6, 9; and 2 Samuel 24:14–15. For the idiom yd ʾilm at Ugarit, see, e.g., CAT 2.10 11–13.
65. Pace Hoffner: “driven home.”
68. For discussion and bibliography, see Hoffner, Letters.
laws cited above, it is safe to assume that this contamination was perceived as a mortal threat. Here again we see that parkuiti- was used to address purification from contagion of various forms and not confined specifically to papratar.

A similar case can be made for the use of Akkadian purification terminology, specifically in the context of exorcistic rituals for the treatment of disease. As noted above, neither the Babylonians nor the Assyrians acknowledged the existence of a depersonalized force comparable to Hittite papratar. For them, personalized agents were responsible for the witchcraft, divine anger, and demonic influence which caused disease (see further below). Nevertheless, although the sources of these threats are personified agents, the threatening influence resulting from their activities was perceived as spreading contagiously. A well-known example is the reference to the “accursed” person (tamû) in Šurpu III 130–33:69

the māmītu of talking to an accursed man,
the māmītu of eating an accursed man’s food,
the māmītu of drinking an accursed man’s water,
the māmītu of drinking an accursed man’s left-overs.

Although the term māmītu originally referred to a self-malediction accompanying an oath, it is depicted here as an impersonal form of contagion that can be transferred through contact with the cursed person.70 Similarly, numerous aspects of Namburbi and anti-witchcraft rituals are clearly motivated by the need to contain the spread of contagion. Practically, these rites required the exorcism and elimination of the dangerous influence, followed by shaving and washing to remove any possible residues.71 As a result, despite the absence of a term for pollution, these sources reveal an awareness of contagion as a cause of disease, and the removal of this dangerous influence was understood generically in terms of purification (ebbû, ellû, zakû), regardless of the specific cause.72

CONCLUSION

Having surveyed the terminology of pollution in Hittite and Akkadian, we may now summarize how the various usages of these terms relate to the experiential schemas described at the beginning of this paper. As noted above, the precise usage of pollution terms is determined to a striking degree by the literary genre in which they appear. Interestingly, these distinct usages can be correlated with distinct experiential images. These correspondences between genre, semantics, and experience are outlined in the following chart:

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72. For a survey of some relevant sources, see E. Jan Wilson, “Holiness” and “Purity” in Mesopotamia (Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1994), 68–82; Guichard and Marti, “Purity in Mesopotamia,” 93–105.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential Image</th>
<th>Sociolinguistic Context</th>
<th>Characterization of Pollution</th>
<th>Characterization of Purity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNCLEANNESS</td>
<td>Cult/ sacrificial offerings</td>
<td>Defiled offerings/ personnel, disqualified from cultic use and contact with sacred domain (terms: Hitt. papr-, šaknuwant-; Akk. luʾū, waršū, lā ellu)</td>
<td>Pure, holy (terms: Hitt. parkui-, šuppi-; Akk. ebbu, ellu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFECTION</td>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Infected by metaphysical threat causing illness and other forms of calamity (terms: Hitt. papr-; Akk. luʾū, lā ellu)</td>
<td>Free of metaphysical threats (terms: Hitt. parkui-; Akk. ebbu, ellu, zakû)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAIN OF TRANSGRESSION (+ other causes)</td>
<td>Legal (ordeal)</td>
<td>Guilty as detected by divine judgment (term: Hitt. papr-)</td>
<td>Innocent (terms: Hitt. parkui-; Akk. ebbu, ellu, zakû)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, these findings indicate that pollution and purity terms reflect distinct nuances of usage as determined by the socio-religious contexts in which they were used. Moreover, these distinct senses correlate with distinct experiential images. These correspondences are similar to those previously identified for the biblical terms for impure (ṭame’) and pure (ṭahor)—although with some illuminating differences.

Beginning with cultic texts, here we find the highest degree of similarity between the Hittite, Akkadian, and biblical use of pollution and purity terms. The underlying scheme is UNCLEANNESS, whereby defilement renders a person or object unsuitable for participation in the domain of interaction with the divine realm, the cult. It is noteworthy that Hittite šaknuwant- and Akkadian ṭaršu were designated for this usage, in comparison with papratar and luʾū, which also designated a threatening form of pollution related to INFECTION.

In ritual contexts, both Hittite and Mesopotamian sources employ the terminology of defilement and purity in relation to disease and healing, respectively. However, whereas the Hittite noun papratar could signify the cause of disease, Mesopotamian texts tended to employ adjectival forms to describe the state of illness, which itself was caused by supernatural (divine anger, demonic possession) or human (sorcery, curse, slander) agency. Viewed in the context of cross-cultural theories of illness, this distinction corresponds to the tendency of Mesopotamian texts to assume a personified cause, compared with the Hittite sources, which were also concerned with depersonalized mechanical forces. 73 In fact, I would suggest that the assumption of personalized and anthropomorphic agencies as responsible for disease

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and other forms of calamity can explain the absence of a Mesopotamian notion of pollution as a reified concept.  

In the context of ordeals, terms for purity and impurity designate the innocence or guilt of the accused party. In general, this usage corresponds with the STAIN OF TRANSGRESSION model, although it incorporates additional categories of transgression discernable to the gods. Whereas the biblical evidence tends to focus on the invisible stain left by bloodshed and sexual violations, in the Mesopotamian and Hittite evidence the use of purity and pollution terms is broader, corresponding to the varied usages of the ordeal in these cultures. In Mesopotamia, the river ordeal was employed to adjudicate cases of adultery, but also for suspected witches. The Hittite usage of the ordeal was even more varied, including cases of misappropriation of the property of the gods. It is even attested in the case of a water-carrier suspected of bringing the king water with hair in it. Nevertheless, these sources reveal a fundamental similarity to the STAIN OF TRANSGRESSION model, namely the reference to purity and impurity in connection with the possibility of divine punishment, whereby the gods serve to police hidden transgressions within society. A further point of interest is the absence of an Akkadian term for guilt (i.e., pollution) in these contexts corresponding to the use of ebbu and zakû to designate innocence. This absence reinforces the observation that there was no reified notion of pollution in Mesopotamia.

Taken together, this data demonstrates the applicability of “contagion” for understanding the Hittite and Mesopotamian notions of impurity, specifically how contamination appraisals related to different domains of experience can serve as the basis for pollution beliefs. By identifying the experiential substrate of pollution terminology, especially the usage of these terms to designate the communicability of disease, we can better appreciate the pervasive concern with issues of purity and impurity in these cultures. In short, this defilement was not symbolic, nor was it strictly “religious.” It was real.

EXCURSUS: THE ETYMOLOGY OF (M)USUKKU

The etymological derivation of Akk. (m)usukku and the relationship between it and its Sumerian lexical equivalent (m)uzug have been points of confusion in modern scholarship. Although nearly all scholars would agree that the correspondence between these terms is rooted in an etymological connection, consensus breaks down after this point. It remains to be determined whether this term is of Sumerian or Akkadian origin, or whether perhaps it

74. This finding fits well with Green’s rationale for treating African pollution beliefs as naturalistic or quasi-naturalistic theories of infection: “They involve an impersonal process of illness through contact or exposure. Polluted individuals are not singled out for illness or misfortune by a human or superhuman force; they typically become polluted from mere contact, from being in the wrong place at the wrong time” (Indigenous Theories, 14). From this perspective, the Mesopotamian conception of disease should not be considered a pollution belief.

75. E.g., Laws of Ur-Namma §14; Laws of Hammurabi §132; Middle Assyrian Laws §§17, 22, 24. In the latter cases, at least, additional considerations are involved, namely oaths and slander. Compare the drinking rite of the suspected adulteress in Numbers 5.

76. E.g., Laws of Hammurabi §2. See further T. Abusch, Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 201–11.

77. For the latter case, see F. Pecchioli Daddi, “The Palace Servants and Their Obligations,” Orientalia 73 (2004): 467. For misappropriation of the gods’ property, see the excerpts from the Instructions for Temple Officials cited above.

has taken a circuitous route from Akkadian to Sumerian and back again as a Rückentlehnung.\footnote{79} The following analysis seeks to untangle the intertwined orthographical, phonological, morphological, and semantic issues with the hope of shedding light on this complicated question.\footnote{80}

At first glance, a derivation from $\textit{masāku}$ (“to be ugly, bad”) would be the most attractive explanation, since derivatives of this root refer to a wide variety of persons, objects, and situations which evoke a sense of disgust and revulsion. This lexical evidence attests to both physiologically repugnant (e.g., rotten fish, cadavers) and morally despicable referents, such that the banished and unclean ($\textit{m}usukku$) would find himself in good—or rather, bad—company. However, things are not that simple. Numerous problems have convinced most scholars that the derivation from $\textit{masāku}$ is nothing more than a folk etymology.

The first major difficulty is phonological, namely the problem of explaining the variant Akkadian form $\textit{usukku}$ and the Sumerian writing of $\textit{uzug}$—always written with Ú, indicating a lack of initial $m$- already in the late third millennium.\footnote{81} In fact, the unanimity of this orthographic convention indicates that the Sumerian term should be rendered $\textit{uzug}$ (not $\textit{muzug}$).\footnote{82} The question is: if $m$- was part of the original root, how do we account for its loss?

Before addressing this challenge, let us engage the alternative hypothesis—that the term is originally Sumerian.\footnote{83} If one assumes that the original reading was $\textit{muzug}$, then the question remains, since one must assume the loss of $m$- in both Sumerian and Akkadian. However, if one assumes that the Sumerian lexeme was $\textit{uzug}$, then one could potentially explain the addition of $m$- in $\textit{musukku}$ as resulting from analogy with the D-stem participle or from “contamination” by a folk etymology from $\textit{masāku}$. A further point in favor of assuming a Sumerian loan is the doubling of the third radical in $\textit{musukku}$, characteristic of many Sumerian loanwords in Akkadian. However, since numerous other examples of native Akkadian terms in the $\textit{purussu}$ pattern can be adduced, this consideration is not in itself conclusive.\footnote{84} One might also compare the doubled third radical in $\textit{musukkā’u}$/$\textit{musukkû}$, discussed below, which conforms to the $\textit{purussā’}$ pattern and whose derivation from $\textit{masāku}$ is unanimously accepted.

Returning to the possibility of an Akkadian derivation, one possible solution to the phonological difficulty (i.e., the loss of $m$-) is to assume that the term derives from a I-weak root. The only attempt at such an etymology known to me is the suggestion of Miguel Civil that

\footnote{79} For the first comprehensive survey of the evidence, see Behrens, \textit{Enlil und Ninlil}, 149–59. Most recently, this question has been taken up again by V. V. Emelianov, “On the History of Sumerian (m)uzug: Orthography, Semantics and Etymology of the Word,” in \textit{Indo-European Linguistics and Classical Philology XVII (Joseph M. Tronsky Memorial Conference): Proceedings of the International Conference, St. Petersburg, 24–26 June, 2013}, ed. N. N. Kazansky (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2013), 282–89 (Russian), although this latter article addresses different issues than the present discussion.

\footnote{80} I am grateful to Yoram Cohen, Uri Gabbay, Edward Greenstein, and Jacob Klein for their keen insights on this multifaceted issue.

\footnote{81} For further complications in vocalizing the Sumerian term, see below.

\footnote{82} Pace S. J. Lieberman, \textit{The Sumerian Loanwords in Old Babylonian Akkadian} (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 400–401; ePSD. The phonetic reading of the Sumerian term as muzug is attested for the first time in MA/MB documents. The reading mu-su-ug appears in Ea III 78 (MSL 14 206; cf. p. 201: Source C; MA) and Emar 6/I 326–27 rev. 1 3’.

\footnote{83} So \textit{AHw} 678, followed by Behrens (with reservations), \textit{Enlil und Ninlil}, 151 n. 306 and 153; also Lieberman, \textit{Sumerian Loanwords}, loc. cit.

the term derives from esēḫ/k/qu, but this proposal is hardly compelling. These forms are used in the senses “to draw” and “to allocate,” but they are not used to designate the exclusion of persons or objects, what we might expect if usukku were derived from them. Though this suggestion addresses the phonological difficulty, it leaves a sizable semantic gap in its place. In addition, this suggestion fails to address the predominance of the form musukkum in the OB lexical traditions, which would be less likely if the initial m- were secondary.

Now, returning to the suggested derivation from masāku, a few suggestions can be offered to account for the loss of m-. The loss of an initial labial is unusual, but not unparalleled, and is certainly worthy of consideration, especially in a case of interlinguistic borrowing. An alternative explanation can be offered if it is assumed that the root was originally I-w and was borrowed into Sumerian at an early period as /u-/. While the use of m- to express /w/ in word-initial and intervocalic positions only became systematic in later OB and especially MB texts, there is precedent for such an exchange in earlier periods. In particular, it is probable that the Sumerian variants ušum and muš (“serpent”), both attested in the early third millennium, should be derived from */wušum/, originally */wašm-/.

Indeed, an early w > b shift can also explain the Ebla writing ba-ša-mu-um, apparently for /bat(a)mum/, cognate with Akk. bašmu, Ugar. btn, and Heb. ptn. On this basis, we can reconstruct an original form *wa/usVk, which preceded the attested Sumerian uzVg.

On these grounds, we can now give further attention to the semantic relationship between musukku and other msk derivatives. The adjective mas/šku, which is attested from the OA period and later, signifies “rotten” fish, “ugly” facial features, and a “bad” reputation (CAD M/I 324–25). Its verbal forms have the following usages (CAD M/I 322):

- masāku (G) “to be ugly, bad”
- mussuku (D) “to spoil, make disgusting, revile”
- šumšuku (Š) “to give a bad name”
- namšuku (N) “to become bad, receive blame”

86. See CAD E 327–29, 331–32.
87. Cf., e.g., 85mes-má-gan-na, loaned into Akkadian as both musukanu and usukanu (CAD M/2 237).
88. So Emelianov, “(m)uzug,” 283.
92. Regarding the vocalization of the second syllable, Falkenstein has argued that the orthography of the Gudea inscriptions indicates an early vocalization either as /lusg/ or /lusgl/, with the later reading /lusg/ resulting from vowel harmony (Grammatik, 32). However, the evidence from Ebla ı-uzḫ(KA) seems to indicate that the u-vocalization was already in existence, and that the use of SAG may actually be a shorthand for KA (contrary to Falkenstein’s reconstruction). See G. Conti, Il sillabario della quarta fonte della lista lessicale bilingue Eblaita (Florence: Università di Firenze 1990), 95; P. Fronzaroli, Testi di cancelleria: I rapporti con le città: (archivio L. 2769) (Rome: Missione archeologica italiana in Siria, 2003), 160. The reading luzḫl (- /⟨wu⟩šuḫl/) can be compared to musuḫ-attested at Kültepe (see below). For additional early examples, including the obscure ki-üzg, see P. Steinkeller and J. N. Postgate, Third Millennium Legal and Administrative Texts in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 21.
In general, these usages indicate that msk refers to a state of physiological repulsiveness, and this sense was transferred to the social sphere to describe morally despicable behavior. Along these lines, the nominal form masiktu designates a “bad reputation,” “hostility,” and “wickedness.”

To round out this overview, it is necessary to include the lexical evidence for a byform of masāku, namely *mussuḫu (always massuḫu). Interestingly, neither AHw nor CAD acknowledges an etymological connection between these two roots, despite the clear semantic and phonological basis for their unity. The clearest evidence for this connection is found in the domain of metal commerce. Specifically, from msk we find the widely attested OA/OB purussā’ form (GAG §560) musukkā’u/ musukkā, which designates an inferior quality of silver, specifically the silver slag resulting from the process of refining silver in a kiln. From mšḫ we find the adjectival form massuḫu/ maššuḫu designating “poor-quality” silver and copper. It is striking that von Soden does not link these two forms, although he translates musukkā as “minderwertige Bestandteile” (AHw 678) and massuḫu as “minderwertig (Metall)” (AHw 619). Indeed, this evidence supports Hecker’s conclusion that we are dealing with variants of a single root. Specifically, the variation between k/lh apparently stems from the problem of orthographically representing a velar fricative (/x/), and this ambivalence can explain the existence of the corresponding Sumerian form /uzuḫ/ alongside /uzVu/. The usages of massuḫu are of particular interest for our discussion of musukku. In particular, we find a fascinating morphological distinction between indicative D-stem forms signifying “to treat with contempt,” which apply exclusively to people, and a stative form which applies exclusively to poor-quality metals (CAD M/2 236–37). This point demonstrates that the semantic range of the root msk/lh encompasses both the concrete context of metals (as well as other sources of physiological disgust mentioned above) and the social context of contemptible people. Hence, it is problematic that while CAD is willing to derive the metallurgical term musukkā from masāku, which, unlike massuḫu, is not otherwise attested in relation to metals, it denies the derivation of musukku (the ostracized person), despite the abundance of attestations of masāku derivatives designating contempt in the social domain. In sum, both major dictionaries make an untenable phonemic distinction between msk and mšḫ, which leads to a highly problematic semantic distinction which dissociates musukku from masāku.

These observations invite a closer comparison of musukku and musukkā’u/ musukkā. Noteworthy is the fact that the latter refers to the impurities resulting from the silver refinement process in a metallurgical context. Elsewhere, I have argued that the primary sense of terms such as Sum. kug and Akk. ellu and ebbu pertained to the “radiance” or “brightness” of materials—especially pure metals, but that these terms acquired the secondary sense “pure” in a metallurgical context, where the radiance of the metal corresponded to its degree of purity. In light of this general correlation between purity and radiance in the domain of

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93. Adapted from CAD M/1 323–24. The designation of a separate entry for bēl masikti, which designates a criminal executed for his crime in an Alalaḫ text (ibid.), is unnecessary. See also M. Held, “A Faithful Lover in an Old Babylonian Dialogue,” JCS 15 (1961): 25.
95. CAD M/2 236. Note also the verbal form masāḫu, found in a stative form with the sense “to be of poor quality,” and a D-stem form massāḫu with the sense “treat with contempt.” See AHw 618; CAD M/2 236–37.
96. Moreover, AHw glosses the G-stem form of masāku as “schlecht sein, werden” (618) and the G-stem form of massāku (not included in CAD) as “schlecht sein” (619) without connecting these roots.
concrete materials, especially metals, which was transferred to the domain of cultic purity, it hardly seems fortuitous that we find such a close formal similarity between the unclean refuse of metallurgic refinement (musukkû) and the term for unclean persons banished from the community (musukku).

To summarize, due to the numerous complicating factors involved, it is not surprising that no consensus has so far been reached regarding the relationship between uzug and musukkum. Nevertheless, it seems probable that the Sumerian term was derived from the Akkadian. The semantic range of msk, which refers both to ugliness and repulsion in the physiological domain and to contempt and exclusion in the social domain, is precisely what one would expect for the etymology of a term such as musukku. Furthermore, we can hardly ignore the formally similar musukkα’ul musukkâ, which refers to the “impure” metal left over from the refinement process, offering an additional semantic connection with the terminology of purity and impurity. Although some issues remain unresolved, it seems highly implausible that these connections are fortuitous. Thus, the derivation of musukku from the root msk can be taken as further evidence for the psychological origins of pollution terminology in the affective domain of human disgust, which could then be used to articulate the repulsion and fear evoked by physiological, metaphysical (unseen forces / contagion), and social threats.