Back to School in Babylonia

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
ISAC MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS • NUMBER 1

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Cat. no. 35

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Edited by
Susanne Paulus

with
Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Madeline Ouimet,
Colton G. Siegmund, and Ryan D. Winters

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Front: Obverse of Old Babylonian tablet ISACM A30276, with a teacher's model (left) and the student's copy (right) partially erased with the student's fingers.
Back: Reverse of the same tablet, with an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu).
Photos by Danielle Levy. See cat. no. 19.

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Foreword

Theo van den Hout
Interim Director, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa

"Reading is dreaming with eyes wide open." I saw this statement recently on a container near a public school in the Prospect Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn in New York City. The ability to read, also known as *passive literacy*, opens a whole world of information and the capacity to act on that information. Our world is full of written messages, from illuminated exit signs and the floor numbers on elevator buttons to advertisements and street names. Everywhere we go, letters, numbers, and pictograms surround us. Most of the time we don't even realize we're reading. We register the signs in our subconscious and are hardly aware how much we need them to navigate the world we live in. It is only when we travel in a foreign country and encounter a language we don't speak that the point is brought home how much we rely on our ability to read *and* understand. Add a different script, and we feel reduced to a state of total illiteracy—we feel truly lost.

And those are just the signs on buildings and in the street. What about newspapers, books, installation manuals, and election ballots? Without reading, there is no political process, there are no rights; a person's life is reduced to something akin to pieces of paper scattered in the wind, blown to wherever they're carried.

The ability to write, or *active literacy*, goes a step further. Young children in America often learn to write their names before they enter first grade and master all the letters of the alphabet, as well as numerals. Even though they need to learn only a few dozen distinct signs, writing requires a lot of time and effort before it becomes automatic. And what about children in China and Japan, who must memorize hundreds if not thousands of characters?

We take reading and writing mostly for granted, not realizing that in the United States alone there are literally millions of people who are either illiterate or can do little more than write their own name. At this very moment, a debate is taking place in American education about literacy curricula. According to a May 10, 2023, *New York Times* article, "about half of [New York] city children in grades three through eight are not proficient in reading. Black, Latino, and low-income children fare even worse." Old strategies for teaching students to read—for example, showing them a word with a picture and having them guess what the word spells—have not worked well. So to its reading programs New York City is now adding phonics, whereby students learn to sound out words letter by letter.

These problems are not new. The invention of writing may go back to the fourth millennium BCE, but apparently we still haven't found an easy way to master the technique. Learning to read and write requires not only fine motor skills and intellectual effort but also the stamina to complete a training program that ordinarily takes several years. Every generation of children and adults, no matter where they are in the world, will struggle and sometimes despair in this pursuit. Do the bite marks on one ancient tablet (**cat. no. 13**; fig. 1.6) reflect the frustration of a young Babylonian student, much as we might angrily crumple up a piece of paper and toss it in the garbage can or fling a notebook across the room?

I am deeply grateful to Prof. Susanne Paulus, her dedicated team of students and colleagues, and the entire staff of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures for creating the beautiful special exhibition *Back to School in Babylonia* and for showcasing the timelessness, importance, and struggles of literacy education.

The exhibition serves as a welcome confirmation and consolation that we are never alone or unique in our pursuit to learn to write and read, no matter at what age we do so. Explore the exhibition, read this catalog, and let your mind wander knowing that reading is just another kind of dreaming—one with eyes wide open.

Foreword

Eleanor Robson
Professor of Ancient Middle Eastern History, University College London

I have been living with House F in my head for more than a quarter of a century now, so *Back to School in Babylonia* provokes many thoughts and memories. I hope that by sharing some of them here I can add another layer of documentation to this rich and wide-ranging catalogue, and further enhance your enjoyment and understanding of this unique and fascinating exhibition.

For most of the twentieth century, studies of Babylonian scribal education were, broadly speaking, of two types. Early works relied heavily on the picture presented by a group of eight literary dialogues purporting to describe Old Babylonian school life. However, these dialogues present an idealised image and cannot be relied on for information as to what scribal training was *really* like. Second, there were major studies of the main "school subjects," from lexical lists and Sumerian grammar, proverbs, and other literature to legal contracts, model letters, and mathematics. Then Niek Veldhuis's pioneering doctoral thesis on elementary education in Nippur (1997) opened the way to understanding them as the products of a historically contextualised pedagogical process.

Inspired and encouraged by him and Steve Tinney—then investigating the elementary Sumerian literary works he dubbed the "*Tetrad*" and "*Decad*" (1999)—my initial aim in studying House F was to understand better the intellectual environment in which ancient mathematics was produced. Through a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellowship held at Wolfson College, Oxford, in 1997–2000, I spent the summers of 1998 and 1999 in Chicago and Philadelphia becoming intimately acquainted with previously unloved and overlooked casts and fragments. I also scoured the day books and find catalogues of the Joint Expedition to Nippur of the University Museum of Philadelphia (now Penn Museum) and the Oriental Institute (now Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures) of the University of Chicago.

However, I soon discovered a major constraint on this type of research—a constraint that left my postdoctoral work incomplete and still affects the practice of Assyriology today. Until Iraqi law changed in 1968, it was standard practice to divide archaeological finds between international excavators' home institutions and the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. In the case of House F, almost 1,000 tablets and fragments were sent to the Penn Museum and ISAC, either as gifts or as long-term study loans, and plaster casts were made of the rest, unfortunately before they were cleaned or joined. Thus the assemblage, and even parts of individual tablets, were scattered across multiple institutions and two continents, rendering holistic study of them almost impossible.

A brief visit to Baghdad in early 2001, where I also presented the conference paper that would become "The Tablet House" (2001), gave me tantalising access to key mathematical tablets in the Iraq Museum. These days, every time I see a House F tablet on museum display in Iraq, I am increasingly determined to use new technologies and the current politics of cooperation to facilitate the virtual reassembly of the House F archive, complete my long-stalled project, and help return dispersed Assyriological knowledge to Iraq.

Nevertheless, as this lovely exhibition shows, we have already learned a great deal from the archaeologically contextualised microstudy of House F and other pedagogical spaces in cuneiform culture. First, while House F is often taken, understandably, as typical of Babylonian scribal education, it was also very idiosyncratic. Even in Old Babylonian Nippur, teachers each had their own repertoire of school exercises: for learning

syllables, the House F teacher preferred a composition we call *Syllable Alphabet* B over *Syllabary* TuTaTi, which is widespread across the rest of the city. And other communities, in other times and places, had their own interpretations and instantiations of the common culture of scribal education, not least through contact with other scripts and languages.

The minutiae of the scribal writings from House F, passed over by previous generations of Assyriologists, also give us an empathetic insight into long-ago childhood and the struggles of attaining competency in an intended profession. There is something particularly moving about holding a piece of clay, shaped by tiny fingers many millennia ago, and observing the misshapen signs, erasures, and wobbly lines pressed so earnestly into its surface—visible, I hope, even through glass. Please, take a moment to really look.

But the House F tablets can tell us even more. All the many thousands of cuneiform documents from the ancient Middle East were written by professional scribes trained in schools like this one. By illuminating the methods by which those scribes were educated, this exhibition sheds light on the creative processes and sociopolitical drives behind ancient literature and mathematics—processes and drives that are ultimately behind the whole of the Babylonian historical record. House F is a gift to the world that will keep on giving for a long time yet.

Preface

Marc Maillot
Chief Curator, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum

When writing was born in the ancient Near East at the end of the fourth millennium BCE, in present-day southern Iraq, scribes used the raw clay tablet as their medium, in part because resources such as stone, metal, and wood were lacking in Mesopotamia. Initially transcribing the Sumerian language, writing was pictographic but soon became schematic because of the medium itself, as in clay it is easier to register straight lines than curves while using a reed stylus. Pressed into the fresh clay with light pressure at an angle, the square or triangular cross section of the reed stylus left signs printed in negative that had a nail or wedge shape; hence the modern term *cuneiform*, which comes from Latin *cuneus*, meaning "wedge."

Thanks to its plasticity, clay made it possible to produce inscribed objects in different shapes, such as prisms and cylinders, but the tablet was the preferred format because it could be adapted to the size of the text one wished to write. The smallest known tablet is the size of a postage stamp, while the largest exceeds 50 centimeters / 20 inches. Archaeologists working in the Near East have unearthed more than a million cuneiform texts, written mostly in Sumerian and in Akkadian, a Semitic language that adapted cuneiform writing for its own use. Other languages, such as Hittite, also used cuneiform until it finally disappeared during the first century CE.

Among this mass of documents brought to light, a few thousand school texts, discovered in southern Mesopotamia and dating mainly from the beginning of the second millennium, have allowed modern scholars to reconstruct the course curriculum followed by apprentice scribes. What does it mean to learn? How can we define knowledge? These timeless questions cover complex and changing phenomena involving many fields of the humanities. Reflecting on them is even more essential today, when the concept of learning has been called into question by the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in the twenty-first century.

The collection of artifacts presented in *Back to School in Babylonia* offers a transdisciplinary approach to enlighten and enrich reflection on what it means to learn. Here the main objective has been to bring together archaeology, philology, anthropology, history, and sociology. All the contributions in this catalog have in common the importance of the materiality of knowledge and, by extension, its conditions of access. To that end, the Tablet Collection of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (ISAC) offers one of the most complete and comprehensive series available worldwide. More than 7,000 tablets and other inscribed objects—including 700 cones, prisms, and various fragments—encompass a wide variety of texts, from economic to literary.

A distinguishing feature of the ISAC collection is that the majority of tablets come from archaeological excavations undertaken by ISAC at sites within its geographical area of expertise, such as Iraq (Nippur, the Diyala region, Khorsabad) and Iran (Persepolis, Choga Mish), in the early twentieth century. At that time, it was common and legal practice for the host country to give a portion of the excavated finds to the institution leading or funding the archeological fieldwork. Because ISAC excavated at Nippur jointly with the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum) in Philadelphia, this catalog includes an illustrative selection of tablets loaned by the Penn Museum, which received a share of tablets from Nippur as did ISAC and the Iraq Museum in Baghdad.

Of crucial importance to *Back to School in Babylonia*, the numerous tablets coming from House F in Nippur, identified by modern scholars as a scribal school, offer an unparalleled snapshot of learning processes, daily life, and teaching methods in ancient Mesopotamia. House F represents one of the rare and particularly fruitful occasions when the archaeological context of the tablets was perfectly recorded, allowing a detailed reconstruction of the school curriculum.

Back to School in Babylonia affords the ISAC Museum an exceptional opportunity to present to a wide audience a technological panorama of ancient school practices. For the Museum collection, it constitutes a powerful anchor in the daily life of Chicago's constituents through its comparative approach: Was the reality of a student's life in ancient Mesopotamia so different from today? There is often an opposition between story-driven exhibitions and object-focused shows. The *Back to School in Babylonia* exhibition demonstrates that we can approach the collection simultaneously on both fronts through the materiality of the tablets. Put succinctly, it is a matter of reappropriating the artifacts in the mental sphere of the spectator. The scientific production of ISAC researchers—their study of daily-life practices linked to techniques and artifacts—shows that ISAC has always taken this approach. Its scholars have long favored as a contender for their research the embodiment of texts in a set of repetitive actions and familiar objects. From the ISAC Museum's perspective, this approach allows personification through comparison, which helps the audience gain a sense of the reality of the objects exhibited through ISAC's adult and youth program.

Many scholars and ISAC Museum staff members made this special exhibition and catalog possible. Our gratitude goes first to Susanne Paulus, curator of the exhibition and of ISAC's Tablet Collection, and associate professor of Assyriology at ISAC and in the University of Chicago's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC). Closely partnering, the Tablet Collection team and the ISAC Museum's staff helped guide the exhibition and this catalog through the various steps of their development. Two dozen authors, several of them located at the University of Chicago within ISAC and NELC, contributed to the essays and catalog descriptions in this volume. Penn Museum assisted with loans of artifacts, which have helped reinforce the comparative approach and context of the Nippur tablets. We thank Penn Museum director Christopher Woods, director of collections Laura Hortz Stanton, keeper of Near East collections Katherine Blanchard, and loans registrars Anne Brancati and Adam Hutler.

We also thank the ISAC Museum team for their constant efforts and advice, which made the exhibition possible. Particular thanks go to registrars Helen McDonald and Susan Allison for their work on loans, access to the collections, preparation of object lists, and photography; conservators Laura D'Alessandro and Alison Whyte for their meticulous treatment of the most fragile tablets; Museum archivist Anne Flannery for providing access to archives and knowledge of the collections; and preparators Robert Bain and Joshua Tulisiak, assisted by Erin Bliss and Judy Radovsky, for the mount making, design, and building of the show. We are also grateful to our colleagues in ISAC's communication and education departments—Matt Welton, Tasha Vorderstrasse, and Kate Hodge—for their help in developing creative educational activities and programs related to the exhibition.

Kiersten Neumann, ISAC curator and special exhibition coordinator, kept the event, catalog, and publicity on schedule and provided incomparable insight on design and layout. In ISAC's publications office, managing editor Andrew Baumann exercised his exceptional taste and keen eye to provide us with a state-of-the-art catalog. ISAC Museum shop manager Denise Browning, with the support of Danielle Levy, carefully prepared a selection of merchandise at an affordable price that combines our educational purposes with an inimitable style. We thank all the reviewers of the catalog for their input and constructive feedback.

We also thank ISAC interim director Theo van den Hout, former associate director of administration and finance Brendan Bulger, and interim associate director of administration and finance Matt Perley for

their continued support and responsiveness toward the special exhibition program. Their personal involvement in the development of this exhibition and catalog strengthened our belief in the project's pertinence. Additional thanks go to Bill Cosper, Brad Lenz, and Emily Smith, in ISAC's development office, for all their help in building support for the show.

Our gratitude goes to several generous donors who helped make this exhibition and catalog a reality, especially Deborah and Philip Halpern, Malda and Aldis Liventals, and Catherine A. Novotny. Finally, we thank ISAC's members, visitors, and volunteers, who contribute each and every day through financial donations and dedicated time and thereby help us organize two special exhibitions per year while managing the permanent collection, none of which could happen without their passion. We hope that both the show and this catalog pique curiosity and interest in the humanities—and, most of all, that they inspire careers among the youngest of our audience.

Acknowledgments

Susanne Paulus
Associate Professor of Assyriology, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago
Curator, Tablet Collection, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa

Around 1740 BCE in Babylonia, students wrote hundreds of tablets as part of their education; in 2023–24 CE, you can see their exercises in a special exhibition at the University of Chicago's Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa (ISAC). In the exhibition and this accompanying catalog, we have reconstructed and written about the experience of living and learning in a Babylonian school. The Joint Expedition to Nippur of the University Museum of Philadelphia (now Penn Museum) and the Oriental Institute (now ISAC) excavated these artifacts in the early 1950s together with a team of Iraqi field archaeologists. We are foremost grateful to the Iraqi people who shared their cultural heritage with us, and we are indebted to the work of the Joint Expedition and its members. The team of the ISAC Tablet Collection realized this exhibition in close collaboration with the staff of the ISAC Museum, publications office, and departments of development and communications. The exhibition includes objects from the ISAC Tablet Collection, ISAC Museum, and ISAC Museum Archives, as well as loans from the Penn Museum (Philadelphia); we are grateful to these institutions for their continuing support. In addition to the displays in the ISAC Museum special exhibition space and this catalog, we wrote a children's companion and activity book with the adventures of Inanaka and her dog Tuni, created programming for adults and children, and designed merchandise, including the first-ever ISAC plushie, Tuppi.

All this would not have been possible without the contributions of many people, and it is my great pleasure to thank all of them here.

The generous support of our donors Al and Malda Liventals, Catherine Novotny, and Deborah and Philip Halpern made *Back to School in Babylonia* possible. The ISAC Tablet Collection received additional generous support over the past few years from Abhay Parekh, Terry Friedman, and Annette Youngberg. The University of Chicago's College Center for Research and Fellowships and the UChicagoGRAD Graduate Global Impact Internship Program provided funding for and supported the participation of some of our undergraduate and graduate team members.

At ISAC, I would like to thank interim director Theo van den Hout for his support of the exhibition, as well as for sharing his knowledge on literacy; executive assistant Mariana Perlinac; and former associate director for finance and administration Brendan Bulger, assistant director for finance and administration Matt Perley, and business administrator Marianna Capeles. Additionally, our former and current development teams were crucial in raising support and awareness—I am indebted to Wally Verdooren, Polina Kasian, Bill Cosper, Bradley Lenz, and Emily Smith.

The exhibition project was realized under changing leadership at the ISAC Museum. I am grateful to former chief curator Jean Evans for her enthusiasm for the project in its initial stages, to Kiersten Neumann for her vital support as interim chief curator, and to Marc Maillot, ISAC's current associate director and chief curator, for bringing this project to a conclusion while Kiersten continued to support it enthusiastically in many aspects as curator and special exhibition coordinator. I am most grateful to our outstanding Museum team and all the work they put into making this exhibition possible. Anne Flannery, head archivist, assisted by

Apollo El-khatib and Ling Chan, spent considerable time and effort locating, digitizing, and making archival material available. Helen McDonald, registrar, patiently handled and tracked our many movement requests, and associate registrar Susan Allison supported our team with object photography. Laura D'Alessandro, head of the conservation laboratory, made sure no objects were harmed during the process, and conservator Alison Whyte did a fantastic job restoring, joining, and cleaning some of the tablets. I am much obliged to the creativity of Joshua Tulisiak, manager of exhibition design and production, for all he did to realize this show beautifully and appealingly, while preparator Robert Bain built excellent display cases and even a fancy outreach cart. The mounts were expertly crafted by Erin Bliss and Judy Radovsky, together with Josh and Rob. Without the continuous support of the Museum, this exhibition would not have been possible.

At the Penn Museum, I am foremost grateful to Williams Director Christopher Woods and deputy director and chief curator Stephen Tinney, who made the loan of highlights from their collections possible. Thanks are also due to Anne Brancati, Katherine Blanchard, Laura Hortz Stanton, Adam Hutler, Philip Jones, Allison McLaughlin, Alessandro Pezzati, and Kate Pourshariati for their contributions to the project.

Beyond the museum displays, Matt Welton, ISAC's associate director of communications, programming, and marketing, created and managed programming and outreach. I am incredibly grateful to Tasha Vorderstrasse, ISAC's university and continuing education program coordinator, for her enthusiasm for tablets and the exhibition, her willingness to share knowledge, and her day-to-day management of our social media outreach, as well as for creating opportunities to participate in adult programming and teacher workshops. Kate Hodge, ISAC's youth and family program coordinator, developed engaging programming for children and students, while Catie Witt did an excellent job as ISAC's interim volunteers manager. Denise Browning, manager of the Suq gift shop, was open to trying new merchandise and patiently worked through many revisions of plushies, socks, and more.

A project like this would not be possible without significant research. Foy Scalf, head of the ISAC Research Archives, provided any literature we could think of, shared useful knowledge about curating a special exhibition, and helped with ISAC's integrated database. Archaeologists McGuire Gibson, Augusta McMahon, and Karen Wilson supported us with their knowledge about the Nippur excavations, while Abbas Alizadeh and Andrew Wright provided photos from the site.

Our work could not have been accomplished without the past seventy years of research on House F. Beyond the publications listed in the Bibliography, we are especially grateful to the comprehensive databases we had at our disposal: Archibab (https://www.archibab.fr/), directed by Dominique Charpin; the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI, https://cdli.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/), with special thanks to Émilie Pagé-Perron, who quickly provided photos of the tablets from the Penn Museum; the Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts (DCCLT, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/), directed by Niek Veldhuis; the Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur (DSSt, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/), directed by Catherine Mittermayer; Old Babylonian Model Contracts (OBMC, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/obmc/), directed by Gabriella Spada; and last but certainly not least the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/), edited by Jeremy Black, John Baines, Graham Cunningham, Jacob L. Dahl, Jarle Ebeling, Esther Flückiger-Hawker, Eleanor Robson, Jon Taylor, Marc Van de Mieroop, and Gábor Zólyomi.

I am grateful to all the authors of this catalog for their beautiful contributions to bringing House F to life, sharing their research and providing background information in an accessible way. Special thanks to Paul Delnero and Eleanor Robson for providing additional helpful information. Klaus Wagensonner was always available for questions and shared his knowledge about digitization and photography with our team. Hervé

Reculeau and Jana Matuszak are the best colleagues one could imagine, and their support of the project was invaluable. Both were always willing to answer the most obscure questions about anything Sumerian or Old Babylonian and to provide feedback about merchandise, and both generously ignored the steady noise of our growing Tablet Collection team. In addition, Jana reviewed chapters 21–25 and the gallery text and provided much-appreciated feedback on both.

This catalog would not look and read the same way without the meticulous dedication of Andrew Baumann, managing editor of the ISAC publications office. Sorry, Drew, for always running behind schedule and causing you sleepless nights, and a heartfelt thank-you for all you have done for the catalog! Drew was assisted by Connie Gundry Tappy (copyediting), James M. Slate (interior design), and Kristin Goble (typesetting). Kiersten Neumann also read and provided feedback on chapters 21–25. We are grateful to the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), the Louvre Museum (Paris), and the Yale Babylonian Collection (New Haven) for permission to include images of objects in their collections. The map in this book was created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcGIS® Pro are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved. For more information about Esri® software, please visit www.esri.com.

The entire project could never have happened without the awesome team of the Tablet Collection. You are the best team I could ask for. It is impossible to list all that you have done, so please excuse me if I highlight only a few of your many achievements here. C Mikhail (undergraduate researcher 2020–22) and Danielle Levy (undergraduate researcher) produced most of the amazing photographs in this catalog and brought imaging of our collections to new levels. In addition, Dani was the creative force behind our merchandise. Marta Díaz Herrera (graduate researcher, now assistant curator for the Nippur Tablet Project) cataloged all Nippur tablets of the second and third excavation seasons in our collections and thereby established the foundation for the project before working on the annotations for both the catalog and the displays. Jane Gordon (graduate researcher) made vital contributions by editing the catalog in general and my essays in particular and took the lead on our children's book project. Madeline Ouimet (graduate researcher, now assistant curator) researched all archaeological aspects of the project and the archival documentation of the excavation and created maps, plans, and drawings for the catalog and exhibition. Her beautiful watercolors illustrate the children's book. Colton Siegmund contributed as assistant curator until May 2023 by adding archival documents to the integrated database, supporting research and object selection, and moving many hundreds of tablets. Ryan Winters, postdoc at the Tablet Collection, took breaks from cataloging our tablets to support the project wherever possible. During the summer of 2023, the team was joined by undergraduate researchers Pallas Eible Hargro and Sarah Ware and graduate researcher Carter Rote. They supported our work in many ways, took charge of our social media, made line drawings of cuneiform, and created materials for adult and children's education. Sarah took over the professional typesetting and layout of the children's book. To my team: I applaud your creativity, dedication, and professionalism! This exhibition is dedicated to you. You rock!

Finally, a big thank-you and love-you to Knut, who shared all the highs and lows of this marathon. Beyond his continuing moral support, he also solved technical issues, restored lost files (see below), and dedicated his time and energy to producing 3D-printed artifacts. Our felines Shadow and Smoke pawsitively supported the creation and realization of *Back to School in Babylonia* and deleted everything only once.

To our readers: we hope you enjoy this catalog. We did our best to make research about the Babylonian school as accessible as possible. We reduced the many diacritics in the Sumerian and Akkadian transliterations

to a minimum: š is pronounced sh as in **sh**ine; ĝ is pronounced ng as in ri**ng**ing; and ā, ē, ī, and ū mark long vowels. We normalized Sumerian and Akkadian spellings whenever possible, showing a word's pronunciation rather than the cuneiform signs used to write it. In the annotations on the photos, we show transcriptions corresponding directly to the different cuneiform signs and include numbers to distinguish between signs that sounded the same. All composition titles in italics are listed at the end of the book, along with references to complete and easily accessible English translations.

List of Contributors

Dominique Charpin (PhD Université de Paris 1–Sorbonne, France) is a professor at the Collège de France. His research on Mesopotamian civilization is based in particular on the royal archives of Mari, which he is coediting, and on his participation as an epigraphist in excavations at Ur and Larsa (Iraq). He directs the "Archibab" project devoted to Old Babylonian archival texts.

Jay Crisostomo (PhD University of California, Berkeley) is the George G. Cameron Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Civilization and Languages and an associate professor of Assyriology at the University of Michigan. His research and writing focus on language use, scribal cultures, education, and intellectual history in the ancient Middle East.

Laura D'Alessandro, head of the conservation laboratory at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago since 1986, holds a bachelor's degree in Greek and Roman Civilizations from the State University of New York at Albany and an advanced degree in Archaeological and Ethnographic Conservation from the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London. Her current interests include the study of ancient glazes and pigments.

Paul Delnero (PhD University of Pennsylvania) is an associate professor of Assyriology at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. His research focuses on Mesopotamian scribal education, the transmission of scholarly knowledge, cultic lamenting, and the use of written texts in ritual performance.

Marta Díaz Herrera (MDH) is a PhD candidate in Cuneiform Studies and Linguistics at the University of Chicago. Her research currently focuses on language contact between Sumerian and Akkadian and the reconstruction of the sociolinguistic history of third-millennium Mesopotamia. She is also interested in research on the morphology and syntax of Sumerian. She is the assistant curator of the Nippur Tablet Project at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago and a member of the curatorial team for *Back to School in Babylonia*.

Anne Goddeeris (PhD Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium) teaches Assyriology and History of the Ancient Near East at Ghent University. She has published Old Babylonian archival documents from Kisurra and Nippur now kept in the British Museum, Hilprecht Sammlung, and Penn Museum. Her research focuses on Old Babylonian social and economic history and on diplomatic practices of Old Babylonian scribes.

Jane Gordon (JG) is a PhD student in Assyriology and Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago. She studies ancient Babylonian literature, with a particular emphasis on narrative form and questions of perspective, voice, and time. She is part of the curatorial team for *Back to School in Babylonia*.

Danielle Levy (DL) is an undergraduate student majoring in Religious Studies and Philosophy at the University of Chicago. She is also minoring in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, with a focus on Old Babylonian. She serves primarily as the photographer for the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Tablet Collection team and heads the merchandising team for *Back to School in Babylonia*.

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Augusta McMahon (PhD University of Chicago) is professor of Mesopotamian Archaeology at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago. Her research interests include ancient urbanism, social stress and violent conflict, and sensory archaeology, or the daily lived experience of people in the past. She is director of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Nippur excavation, examining the cycles of urban expansion and contraction in the third and second millennia BCE and the effects of government-led urban renewal on city planning, immigration, and neighborhoods.

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C Mikhail (CM) is a recent graduate of the University of Chicago with a degree in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and a minor in Music. They were the Tablet Collection photographer from 2020 to 2022. Since graduating, C has turned their focus to music, playing in several ensembles such as the Chicago Immigrant Orchestra and working as an audio engineer, though they still visit the ISAC Museum from time to time to say hello to the *lamassu*.

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PART I
Essays

1

Back to School in Babylonia: The Aims of Babylonian Education

Susanne Paulus

Schooling and education are widely shared yet varying experiences. Approaching these topics from our own perspectives and assumptions is logical but fraught with complexity, especially when dealing with the experiences of students who lived and learned thousands of years ago in ancient Iraq. I begin this introduction by approaching the scribal schools of the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1595 BCE) through my own experience in three types of encounters: as a student, as a curator, and as a teacher.

First, as a student, I discovered the Edubba'a—translated literally from the Sumerian as the "house where tablets are distributed" or the "tablet house" in Akkadian—through groundbreaking modern scholarship. I read Niek Veldhuis's "Elementary Education in Nippur" (1997) and was fascinated by how he used terse (and frankly not very appealing) clay tablets, written in cuneiform script and recovered from cities such as Nippur in Iraq, to reconstruct one of the oldest-known curricula in the world. Complementary essays by Andrew George (2005) and Konrad Volk (2011) offered insights into the literary depictions of Babylonian schooling—the so-called "Edubba'a literature," self-reflective texts written about and taught in the Edubba'a—that continue to resist complete scholarly interpretation. The struggles of Babylonian students in learning to read and write Sumerian and the cuneiform script resonated with me, a student of cuneiform studies trying to learn the same things 3,700 years later.

My second encounter came through material culture as curator of the Tablet Collection of the University of Chicago's Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (ISAC). I still marvel at the tablets written by Babylonian students in Nippur, later excavated by the Joint Expedition of the University Museum of Philadelphia (now Penn Museum) and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (now ISAC) in 1951–52 and divided between the two museums' collections and the Iraq Museum in Baghdad in the host country. While school tablets have been found at a wide variety of ancient sites in the Middle East, the tablets excavated by the Joint Expedition are special because they were discovered in the context of House F, widely believed to have been a scribal school. House F has

Lenticular tablet squeezed by a frustrated student who consequently mixed up their homework. ISACM A30154. Photo by DL. This image was created without touching the object.

allowed us not only to trace the marks of frustrated students erasing their work on wet clay but also to explore the benches where ancient students sat and learned (or played board games).

Third, as a teacher, I had the pleasure of reading and discussing the texts of the ancient curriculum with a group of motivated and talented students. Over the course of a year, we followed the path of Babylonian pupils progressing from the most straightforward writing exercises to complex literary masterworks. The ancient students became our teachers—as they have done for many scholars of cuneiform studies since the humble beginnings of the field in the nineteenth century CE. The ancient students' encounters with cuneiform signs, vocabulary, and topics such as literature, law, mathematics, history, religion, rhetoric, and ethics—if we dare to use contemporary terminology—became our window into the Sumerian language and Babylonian civilization.

All three encounters influenced the creation of *Back to School in Babylonia*. The idea was to allow the public to explore the material and intellectual heritage of Iraq through the lens of the remains of a humble school and its many written sources. The project was not only about ancient education but also an educational experience (and experiment) in itself. Students Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Danielle Levy, C Mikhail, Madeline Ouimet, and Colton Siegmund and postdoc Ryan Winters joined me (fig. 1.1) in working alongside the professionals of the ISAC Museum and renowned specialists in the field as researchers, authors, and curators of the exhibition and catalog. Discussions in class and beyond also shaped the scholarly aim of the project, which was to reassess, after seventy years of studying House F, what the aims of Babylonian education were. The remainder of this introduction further explores these aims, while also contextualizing the essays contained in this volume. It roughly follows the outline of the exhibition, from the discovery of a school in Nippur and the reconstruction of school life in House F to the reconstruction of the curriculum and topics of education.

But before exploring the aims of Babylonian education, we start with the discovery of the Babylonian school—both intellectually and archaeologically—and then examine how the scholarly focus shifted over time from an interest in the content of the school's textual sources to a focus on the curriculum and pedagogy itself.

Discovering a School in Nippur

The discovery of Babylonian education did not start with House F. The remnants of Babylonian schools—the thousands of exercises written by Babylonian students—were part of the scholarly discussion long before they were recognized as such. The University of Pennsylvania excavated in Nippur from 1888 onward, discovering—and removing from their archaeological contexts—thousands of tablets similar to those found later in House F. Indeed, the area in which House F was situated yielded so many tablets that the excavators labeled it "Tablet Hill."

Scholars and excavators believed the tablets from Tablet Hill provided important historical and religious information about the Sumerians who lived in Babylonia in the third millennium BCE. Although the tablets themselves dated to the second millennium BCE—sometime between 2002 and 1720 BCE, when Nippur was partially abandoned (see chapter 2)—they were written in Sumerian. Sumerian had disappeared as a spoken language sometime toward the end of the third millennium BCE, when it was replaced by Akkadian (or Babylonian), a Semitic language related to modern Arabic and Hebrew. Yet Sumerian survived as a prestigious religious and scholarly language, much as Latin did in medieval Europe, and many Sumerian religious and literary texts are known only from Old Babylonian copies, so it is unsurprising that scholars used them as a window into the "Sumerian civilization." They also believed the tablets from Nippur originated from "temple libraries." From the third millennium BCE onward Nippur was the religious center of Babylonia, the seat of the head of the pantheon, Enlil (see chapters

Figure 1.1. The ISAC Tablet Collection team. *Left to right:* Madeline Ouimet, Jane Gordon, Colton Siegmund, Ryan Winters, Danielle Levy, Marta Díaz Herrera, Susanne Paulus. Not pictured: C Mikhail.

2, 3, and 18). Because the tablets were found in direct proximity to Enlil's main temple, the Ekur, and its massive temple tower (ziggurat), they were published as *Historical and Religious Texts from the Temple Library of Nippur* (Langdon 1914). Only the related lexical lists—long and systematic lists of cuneiform signs and Sumerian words—were connected with schooling, as the publication title *Sumerian Lexical Texts from the Temple School of Nippur* (Chiera 1929) betrays.

The Sumerian tablets from Nippur created great excitement in the first half of the twentieth century CE because they were thought to be the oldest religious texts treating topics known later from the Bible, and it was in this spirit that the Joint Expedition returned in 1952 to excavate Tablet Hill (fig. 1.2). In 1910, Hermann Hilprecht had published *The Earliest Version of the Babylonian Deluge Story and the Temple Library of Nippur*, a book on a Sumerian story reminiscent of the biblical story of Noah. This discovery still resonated with field director Donald McCown more than forty years later when he described his hopes of finding new material on Tablet Hill, in the areas now labeled TA and TB:

> This should be our "gold mine" for the literary tablets of the Sumerians, which are almost unique at Nippur and which give so much information about the spiritual life of Sumer. If we are lucky, we may

Figure 1.2. The Joint Expedition excavating Level VIII in Area TA (before reaching the Old Babylonian levels), viewed from the north. ISACM P. 47204 (3N/158).

> find more original editions of the Epic of Creation, new historical records, or other Sumerian epics and legends which are known only by title at present. From the purely archeological side, we will learn the material culture of this period at Nippur, so far only poorly represented in our previous excavations. (McCown 1951, 21)

The sensational discovery of more than 1,400 cuneiform tablets and fragments from House F in January 1952 (re)situated the literary and lexical tablets from Nippur in the context of modest private houses in the scribal community. At first the efforts of the Joint Expedition yielded only modest numbers of tablets. But the excavation revealed much of the tablets' context as the Scribal Quarter, with its domestic architecture and objects of daily life, came to light (see chapters 3 and 4). The excavators' luck changed shortly after Christmas, when suddenly one tablet after another was discovered in the rooms and walls of House F, inundating the expedition's epigrapher (fig. 1.3). As McCown wrote to Froehlich Rainey, director of the University Museum, and Carl H. Kraeling, director of the Oriental Institute, in 1952:

> It has been a tremendous find, with all this last week thirty to fifty tins full of tablets and fragments coming in each day (we use five gallon gas tins cut sideways as trays). In a week or so I will be able to give you figures on what was found, for it will take that long for Francis [Steele, epigrapher] to catch up. (. . .) We are busy as we can be processing the tablets, but hope to have all except the small pieces molded before we close. (McCown, unpublished letter)

Figure 1.3. Excavation photo of Room 205 in House F (Level X Floor 2) showing the discovery of several tablets. ISACM P. 47250 (3N/301).

During the excavations, motivated by the need for more funding, McCown showed immense enthusiasm about the discovery, writing in another letter to Kraeling that the "whole of Sumerian literature is now potentially recoverable." In the publication of the excavation, the focus shifted to the archaeological finds and context, and he entertained the hypothesis that some of the houses in the Scribal Quarter were indeed scribal schools. However, he struggled—as many scholars still do today—to reconcile archaeological reality with the image painted by Sumerologists reading the Edubba'a literature and imagining life in a Babylonian school.

Sumerologists believed that the Edubba'a reflected in the Sumerian sources was an institutional school with a sizable building and staff, similar to modern institutions. This conception contrasted with the modest and domestic character of House F. Indeed, the Babylonian Edubba'a literature, made famous through Samuel Noah Kramer's 1949 translation of *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A), mentions besides teachers and students a wide variety of obscure school staff facilitating all aspects of school life (see chapter 4 and the translation of *Schooldays* [Edubba'a A] on pages 238–39 in chapter 22). This picture diverged from the architecture of House F, which covered only 48 square meters/525 square feet divided into an entryway, a small courtyard, and four additional rooms (fig. 1.4; see also chapters 3 and 4)—space allowing for only a teacher (perhaps with their family) and a few students. In fact, Paul Delnero (2019, 186) estimates that four or five scribes/scribal students wrote the texts from House F. The small number of pupils can be explained by the fact that scribal training happened in several houses in Nippur's scribal quarters TA and TB (Michalowski 2012). Whether the Edubba'a texts describe a school of an earlier period (George 2005) or a fictional and playful take on Old Babylonian schooling attributing different roles to the occupants of House F (see chapter 4), it became commonly accepted that House F is an example of a Babylonian school.

Consequently, the lexical and literary tablets from Nippur were now studied and analyzed in this context. A first wave of scholars pioneered work on Babylonian education in the 1970s. They were followed by a second, continuing wave of scholars from the late 1990s onward who laid the foundations for our understanding of the curriculum and Babylonian education. While space limitations preclude our providing a full overview of this scholarship here, it is essential to mention a few milestones. As part of the project *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon* (see pages 287–88 in chapter 23), Miguel Civil (1969) not only published educational material but also established a typology of the different kinds of school tablets (fig. 1.5; see also chapter 7). In the 1990s, Niek Veldhuis recognized that one of the tablet types, the so-called teacher–student exercise, contained previously studied materials on the reverse or back of the tablet, allowing him to reconstruct the curriculum

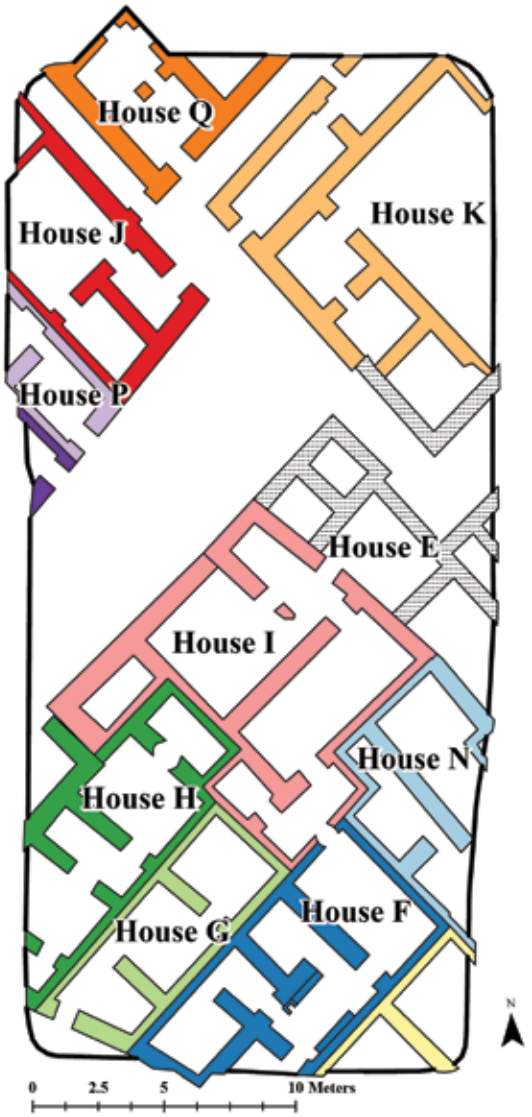


Figure 1.4. Plan of Area TA, Level X Floor 4, including House F. Created by MO based on McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 71.

published as the above-mentioned "Elementary Education in Nippur" (see also chapter 7). Another important contribution by Civil (1979) was a discussion of the lexical material in the context of House F. Building on that work, Eleanor Robson's 2001 article "The Tablet House: A Scribal School in Old Babylonian Nippur" provided a groundbreaking statistical analysis of the textual finds from House F in their archaeological context. Thanks to Herman Vanstiphout (1979), literature, equally present in House F, had become part of the conversation about Babylonian education, as he asked "How Did They Learn Sumerian?" Expanding this conversation was Stephen Tinney's research "On the Curricular Setting of Sumerian Literature" (1999), which helped identify the order in which some literary tablets were studied in the Edubba'a, including the *Decad*, a set of ten compositions covered almost at the beginning of the literary curriculum (see chapter 15). Studying hundreds of copies of those compositions and the mistakes students made when writing them, Paul Delnero (2006, 2012) discovered that the most important pedagogical goal was to learn to write compositions from memory. Finally, Konrad Volk (1996, 2011) used the Edubba'a literature to research the pedagogical methods employed by Babylonian teachers.

Aside from these significant breakthroughs, which still inform our understanding of the Babylonian school and its textual sources, many scholars—some of them contributors to this catalog—studied subgroups of educational materials, from different lexical lists and model contracts to proverbs, dialogues, letters, mathematical texts, and specific hymns and epics (see the bibliography for a comprehensive overview). Together this work allows us to understand deeply the curriculum, methods of education, and contents of texts studied in the Babylonian school.

A big question that remains concerns the purpose of scribal training. The next step in exploring the answer is to inquire about the actors involved in Babylonian education: students and teachers.

School Life—or, Who Went to School in House F?

If we want to understand education in House F, we need to learn more about the actors, or who taught whom—not an easy task, for the Babylonian students often did not sign their tablets, nor do the tablets reveal with certainty the names, titles, or social status of the people who lived and taught in House F (see chapter 5).

Figure 1.5. The five most common types of school tablets, shown to scale. *Left to right*: A multicolumn tablet, a prism, a teacher–student exercise, a single-column extract tablet, and a round tablet. Image by MDH of **cat. nos. 24**, **25**, **19**, **105**, and **17**.

In the Edubba'a literature, the actors are labeled using kin terminology and vocabulary from professional craftsmanship. The teacher is the "father" (adda) of the Edubba'a, the student a "child" (dumu), and a senior student an "older brother" (šeš gal). The same term "older brother" is also known from craft and labor organization, where it is used to mean "foreman." In that semantic field, the teacher is the "master/expert" (ummia) of the scribal art/craft (namdubsar), while students are "young or adolescent men/workers" (lu tur). The goal of the students was to become "scribes" (dubsar) or "masters" (ummia) themselves. But while the literary texts provide some answers about the actors, other questions—for example, concerning the age and gender of students—remain open.

Estimating the age when children started their education in Babylonia is still tricky. Some scholars have argued for an early starting age of five to six years (Volk 2011, 284), when children began to work in other trades alongside their parents. The singular example of a student's bite marks on a tablet (**cat. no. 13**; fig. 1.6) led to the assumption that students started as early adolescents. This analysis aligns with the term "young or adolescent men/workers" (lu tur) used in the Edubba'a literature. Neither do we know how long students stayed in school. Rarely are school documents dated so as to allow putting them into a secure chronological sequence. A rare exception of unprovenienced tablets, now in the Yale University Babylonian Collection, indicates that a student named Qišti-Ea studied literary compositions between Samsu-iluna's regnal years one and eleven, which would indicate a rather lengthy training period of more than ten years (Wagensonner 2019, 143–45).

Determining the gender of the school children presents another interesting challenge. There is solid evidence that "female scribes" (munus dubsar) existed in the Old Babylonian period and

Figure 1.6. Obverse of **cat. no. 13**, showing a student's bite marks. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

that some priestesses and princesses were literate (Lion and Robson 2005; see chapter 6). However, the Edubba'a was clearly a place where masculinity was constructed and celebrated, even if goddesses are frequently mentioned as actors in literary texts (Robson 2007). Women—with a few exceptions (see, for example, **cat. no. 104**)—were figured as housewives and mothers (chapter 20). But since the Sumerian term "child of the Edubba'a/schoolchild" is gender neutral, the essays in this catalog use gender-neutral language whenever possible.

Apart from questions of age and gender, we have significant information about the social status of the scribal students. They belonged to Nippur's elite linked with the city's many temples, especially the Ekur. Dominique Charpin shows that literacy was widespread among many social groups in Babylonia, including clergy, administrators, military officials, palace administrators, and merchants (see chapter 6). An analysis of the legal and economic documents from the neighborhood of House F indicates that the students were children of the many types of priests linked with the local temples. A special example is Elletum, the only student of House F known by name, mentioned in the colophon at the end of a lexical list from House F. After he graduated, he likely became a gudu-priest attested on several documents from the Scribal Quarter (Eleanor Robson, personal communication; see also Civil 1969, 157; Podany 2022, 341–54). Beyond real estate, the priests' most precious possessions were shares in the temple income received in exchange for performing ritual duties (prebends; see chapter 5). Priests also figure prominently in the texts studied in the Edubba'a (**cat. nos. 92** and **103**). What was the consequence of this connection for those teaching and learning in the shadow of the temple? Above we have already established that scribal training was a private affair taking place in multiple houses such as House F—to date we lack any indication that the temples were institutionally involved in scribal training.

Locally and Babylonia-wide, the scribes in Nippur formed an elite. Many of the self-reflective documents from the Edubba'a view Nippur as the center of the world (**cat. no. 68**; see chapter 18). This perspective is reflected sociohistorically in the special relationship between the kings of Isin and Larsa (and to a lesser extent those of Babylon) with Nippur as a source of divine legitimization of kingship (chapter 2). The scribes from Nippur saw themselves in direct correspondence and service to the king (Kleinerman 2011, 43–44). A satirical literary letter—the *Letter from Nabi-Enlil to Ilum-puzura*, possibly the first surviving school ranking—informs us that education in Nippur was unique and that nothing compared to it (Black et al. 2004, 281–82). While this assertion may be exaggerated—for indeed we know that scribal training was comparable in many Babylonian cities (Delnero 2019)—there is little doubt that the Edubba'a trained the local elite (Michalowski 2011) and that this local elite aspired to national leadership. With these observations in mind, we now turn to the scribal-school curriculum and its purpose.

From Signs to Literature

We have just seen that the Babylonians used two images to describe the Edubba'a: that of a father teaching his child, and that of a craftsman training his apprentice. Similarly, scholars have seen the goal of education in the Edubba'a as cultivating literate students by enabling them to read and write (Veldhuis 2011; Delnero 2019) or as constituting an apprenticeship in the scribal arts (namdubsar) (Volk 2011). Additionally, it has been argued that

the main goal was the building and confirming of a social elite. We will explore these ideas after looking at the curriculum taught at House F in Nippur.

Modern scholarship divides Babylonian education into two phases: an elementary phase, during which students studied many lexical materials, and a second phase dominated by all kinds of "literature." During the elementary phase of education (fig. 1.7), two of the first tasks a novice had to master were forming a clay tablet and using a reed

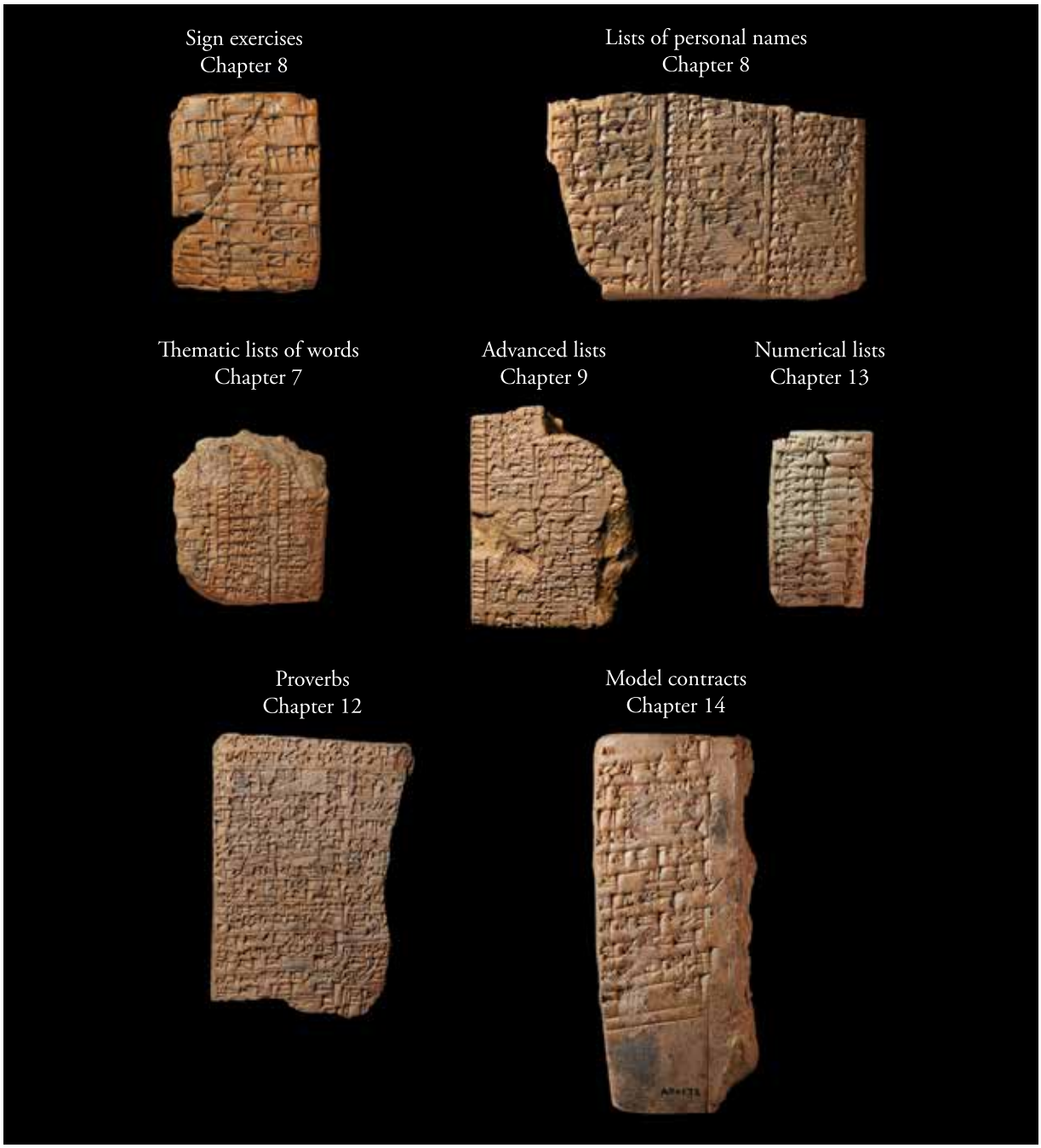


Figure 1.7. Topics taught during the first phase of scribal education. Image by MDH of (*left to right, top to bottom,* shown to scale) **cat. nos. 40**, **44**, **45**, **53**, **85**, **58**, and **89**.

stylus to impress the typical elements of cuneiform: wedges. Once over the first hurdle, the student was quickly confronted with the next challenge—learning the cuneiform writing system. The cuneiform script, developed at the end of the fourth millennium BCE, consists of syllables (for example, a, an, na, and naĝ). Students learned those elements first by writing various "syllabaries" followed by lists of personal names (see chapter 8). Already when writing the lists of personal names, students encountered additional elements of cuneiform. While names could be written purely with syllables, all cuneiform signs are also word signs (logograms), and one sign can represent a full word. So a word such as "god" can be written with three syllables—in this case, di-mi-ir (for diĝir)—or with one logogram,  . An accomplished scribe of Sumerian preferred using logograms whenever possible and used syllables only for grammatical elements or the like. Mastering the many word signs, students studied first the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura), learning how to write words for everything from trees and wooden objects to animals, plants, geographical names, and food (see chapter 7). Other word lists studied in the Edubba'a focused on human beings and their professions.

However, knowing words and syllables represented only one step toward mastering the cuneiform system. Like the strokes of Chinese characters, each cuneiform sign is constructed from a combination of wedges that can range from the simple  to the very complex . With the help of a special list organized by sign shape (an acrographic list), students mastered this aspect of writing. Finally, each cuneiform sign can be read and pronounced in multiple ways—the sign "god," for example, can be read diĝir when meaning "god" but also an when meaning "sky." Furthermore, can represent the syllable an without the meaning "sky." Students mastered this aspect via sign lists, which covered signs and all their potential readings (on all these lists, see chapter 9).

Beyond lexical lists, students covered several other genres toward the end of the elementary phase. Training in mathematics included metrological lists, covering all kinds of measurements; multiplication tables; and reciprocals followed by simple calculations (see chapter 13). At the same time, students were also introduced to proverbs, short sayings and stories (chapter 12), and model contracts—exercises for writing legal contracts (chapter 14). While diverging widely in content, both proverbs and model contracts presented students with full sentences, which are absent from lexical lists, thus highlighting the importance for students to move beyond words and discover the elements of grammar (chapter 11). These easy texts formed the transition to the next phase of education: the study of literature.

During the second phase of scribal education, students studied a wide variety of texts that scholars summarize generally under the term "literature" (fig. 1.8). Eleanor Robson (2001) has calculated that 42 percent of the tablets found in House F are lexical and about 50 percent are literary, with the remaining 8 percent being legal and administrative documents (see chapter 5).

Although scholars distinguish two phases of scribal education, they were deeply connected. Several studies (for example, Crisostomo 2015) have highlighted the interdependency of the lexical and the literary—a student writing and understanding Sumerian literature needed the knowledge gained through the likely tedious study of lexical texts. The corpus of literature studied in House F was vast and included more than 600 tablets with 80 compositions that scholars group into generic categories, such as "myths and epics; city laments and hymns to rulers; law codes and letters; hymns to deities; and school dialogues, disputations, and wisdom literature" (Robson 2001, 50). Topics covered varied widely, from still-well-known stories about the legendary Gilgameš (**cat. no. 74**) to self-praise of a very athletic king (**cat. no. 63**) and a literary competition between deified grain and a ewe (**cat. nos. 119–20**). While these compositions are well studied, it is difficult to reconstruct the sequence of their use in the students' literary education. The first compositions

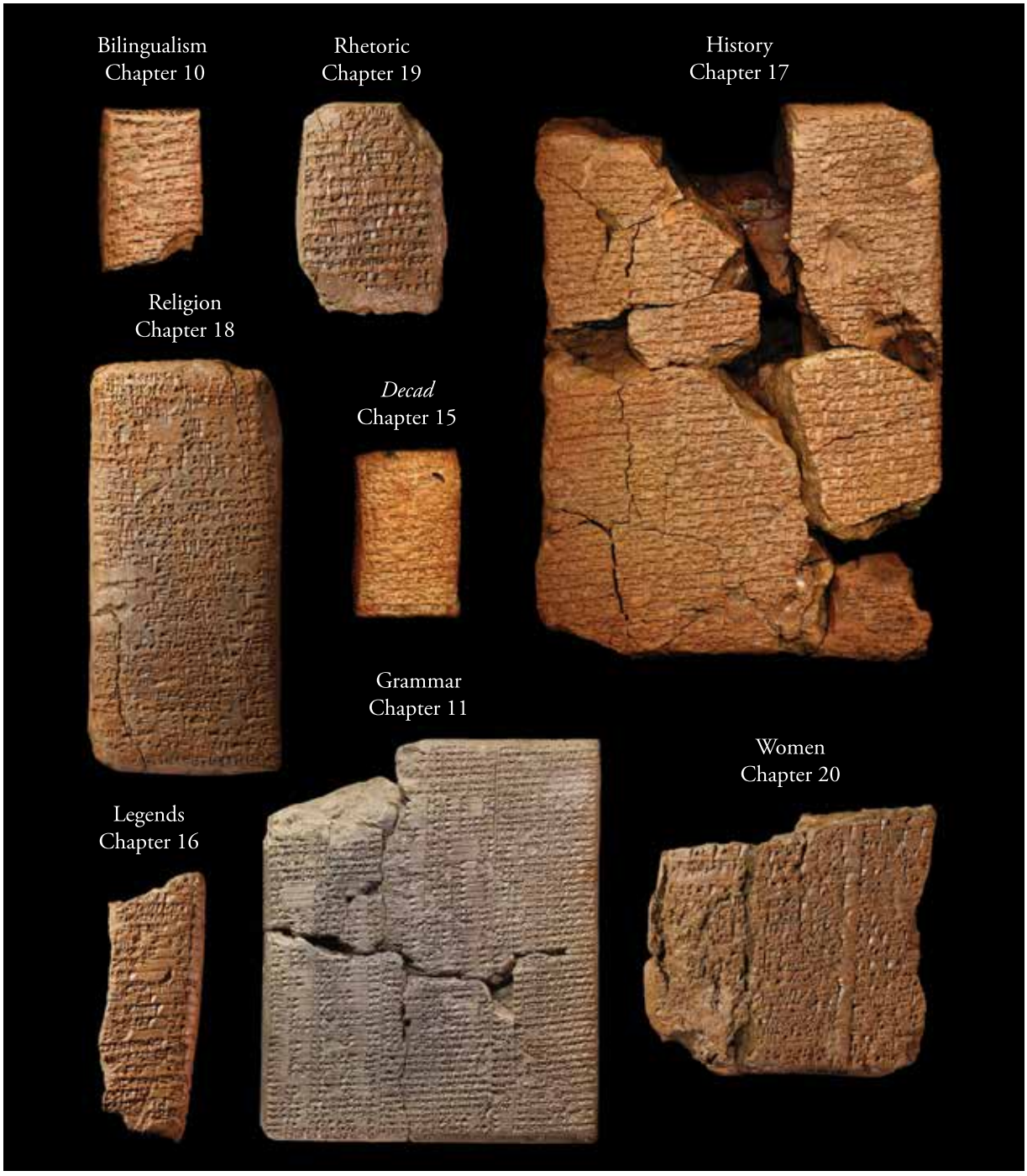


Figure 1.8. Topics taught during the second phase of scribal education. Image by MDH of (*left to right, top to bottom,* shown to scale) **cat. nos. *57***, **121**, **107**, **102**, **62**, **117**, ISACM A24189, and **cat. no. *97***.

were possibly introduced during the elementary phase (Tinney 1999; see chapter 11). A prime example is **cat. no. 59**, where in very cursory script a student first wrote *Syllable Alphabet* B, one of the earliest exercises, followed by an excerpt from the simplest literary text, the *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B.

Then, after proverbs and model contracts, students studied a group of ten diverse literary texts, the so-called *Decad* (**cat. nos. 63–74**; see chapter 15). After that point the study sequence is unclear, though Robson (2001) has identified fourteen compositions most frequently taught in House F in addition to the *Decad*.

Having now gained a detailed overview of the curriculum in House F, we may return to the question of its purpose. Was the goal of the Edubba'a indeed to make students literate? Undoubtedly, graduates of the Edubba'a *were* literate (see chapter 6). After having learned by heart more than 8,000 entries in the lexical lists followed by memorization of thousands of lines of literature—not simply copying them but actually studying them to the point of being able to reproduce whole compositions from memory (Delnero 2012)—these students knew how to read, write, and compose in Sumerian. However, literacy in Sumerian was not practical, for when House F's Edubba'a was in operation, Sumerian was no longer spoken and only rarely written in documents of daily life—there, Akkadian or Babylonian dominated.

Literacy in Akkadian was not the focus but instead a by-product of the curriculum at best. Akkadian was rarely written in the Edubba'a, and, if we trust the Edubba'a literature, students were forbidden to speak in Akkadian in school. Sometimes students added Akkadian translations to Sumerian lexical lists (glossing; see chapter 10), but less than a handful of exercises from House F are written in Akkadian. Marine Béranger's 2018 study of Old Babylonian letter-writing practice showed that some exercises in the first phase of education—such as syllabaries, the lists of personal names, and the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea)—were helpful for writing Akkadian, but training for practical knowledge—for example, how to compose more complex letters—was not part of the curriculum. Based on an analysis of mistakes in those letters, she demonstrated that most people writing them were likely not trained via the curriculum of the Edubba'a. Basic literacy could be gained effectively without the extensive curriculum taught in the scribal schools of Nippur. Niek Veldhuis (2011) has therefore argued that students became "scholarly literate" in the Edubba'a, meaning they gained the literacy necessary for scribes. This view supports the idea of the curriculum as a training process for becoming a scribe.

Compared to other crafts, such as carpentry or smithing, the profession of a scribe was far from homogenous. Most scribes worked in institutions of varying sizes—temples or palaces, for example—taking records, accounting, surveying fields, and managing workers and troops. Scribes were needed for all kinds of legal affairs, from writing marriage contracts to composing court protocols. Others specialized in cultic professions—for example, as lamentation priests appeasing the gods, as musicians, or as diviners who predicted the future by studying the entrails of animals offered as sacrifices. We can assume that most official written records, such as royal inscriptions and law codes, were composed by scribes, as were the texts of the Edubba'a.

So did the Edubba'a prepare its students for all the skills and aspects of their future tasks as scribes? While the students gained knowledge and skills that were helpful for their professional careers, their training was far from practical or complete. Paul Delnero (2022) has shown that even an elementary scribal education formed a solid base for students going on to become cult professionals. On the other hand, many important religious text genres covering liturgy, magic, and divination were not taught in the Edubba'a (Michalowski 2012). While the graduates of the Edubba'a praised themselves for mastering the totality of the scribal art, including complex ledgers and accounting, the reality was different. No exercises covering accounting or field surveying are preserved from House F. A scribe going on to write royal inscriptions or law collections would find the examples covered in school rather outdated. Instead of the contemporaneous *Code of Hammu-rabi* or Hammu-rabi's Akkadian and bilingual royal inscriptions, the curriculum focused on the kings of Akkad and the Ur III and Isin-Larsa dynasties (see chapter 17). This

traditionalism has led to the idea that in troubled times the teachers tried to preserve their past. In sum, if the goal of the Edubba'a was to train scribes for all aspects of their profession, it failed.

Was completing the curriculum, then, only an impractical and excessive but necessary job requirement and introduction to an elite status in society (Veldhuis 2014, 225)? Did the teachers torment their students with thousands of lines of lexical lists and texts as a *rite de passage*, a common experience to create a knowledge bond of unity (Michalowski 2012)? To suppose so underestimates Babylonian schooling. On the contrary, I argue that the texts were carefully selected for curricular purposes. Many of them are consistent from one scribal school to another throughout Babylonia (Delnero 2019). Some, such as selected lexical lists and the *Instructions of Šurruppak*, had been used for centuries; others, especially the extensive literature, are curricular innovations of the Old Babylonian period. If we assume the teachers had agency in selecting and in some cases even composing these exercises, an analysis of the contents can help us understand the goals of the Edubba'a, which certainly cultivated literate pupils, was the source of scribal training, and helped confirm a social elite. Further, I argue that the experience of the Edubba'a was an education in and of itself.

Topics of Education

Since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers, much ink has been spilled on the definition of *education*. At its simplest, education is about transmitting knowledge, acquiring skills, and fostering character traits. Several essays in this book explore the topics of Babylonian education. If we were able to ask Babylonian students what they learned in the Edubba'a, one possible answer would have gone like this:

> I absolutely know my scribal art.
> Nothing withholds me from it.
> My master shows me one sign,
> (and) I add a second one through my wisdom.
> From my appointed time I was sitting,
> now I am equally adept in Sumerian, scribal art, accounting, and balancing books.
> I can converse in Sumerian!
>
> *Scribal Activities* (Edubba'a D), 32–38

This passage combines what we would consider practical knowledge or skills (know-how for calculating, accounting, and balancing books) with scribal art, or scholarly knowledge. The student "speaking" in this text is now at the same level as the master and through their wisdom can enlarge the master's knowledge one-to-one. While modesty is certainly not a character trait on display here, in another Edubba'a story a graduate highlights that aspect of education and praises the teacher:

> He guided my hand on the clay and kept me on the right path,
> he made me eloquent with words and gave me advice.
> He focused my eyes on the rules that guide a man with a task:
> zeal is proper for a task, time-wasting is taboo;
> anyone who wastes time on his task is neglecting his task.
> He did not vaunt his knowledge: his words were modest.
>
> *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C), lines 11–16 (translation after ETCSL 5.01.03)

These lines do not just praise a teacher; as the text itself was used to educate students, these values were also transmitted from the teacher to the student. In sum, these short extracts confirm the idea that the Edubba'a provided education in character, skills, and knowledge.

Forming "ideal scribes" was the goal of the Edubba'a's character-building aspect (Volk 2000): ideal scribes were knowledgeable, motivated, and determined rather than lazy. Being good colleagues, they were reliable, honorable, and able to solve conflicts rather than given to starting quarrels. They had good manners, especially at the table. Their

standing in society and relationship with the gods were impeccable. Good scribes came from respectable families, including the elite families of Nippur, and were settled and independent, with respectable wealth and no debts (Volk 2000). At the side of a successful scribe we find the "ideal woman"—a good housewife and mother (see chapter 20). Teachers conveyed these ideals through positive examples of respectable scribes and scholars, through direct advice such as that contained in the *Instructions of Šuruppak*, and most often through ridiculing the opposite characteristics. The goal was to form children into "humans" (lulu) while teaching them the skills of the scribal art.

Concerning the skills learned by those scribes, we have already discussed advanced scholarly literacy in detail. Beyond facility in that area, students gained a set of skills that formed a solid base for their future careers but did not replace specialized training, which could be pursued later (or even in parallel). That skill set comprised training in mathematics, law and legal reasoning, and rhetoric. Training in mathematics included the basics of multiplication and reciprocals, which were used for division. Addition and subtraction were probably assumed and not further treated. The teachers in House F taught only easy calculations, while more complex problems were solved elsewhere (see chapter 13). Students also learned to handle the complex system of measurements and to write practical legal documents, such as loans and other contracts. Through studying law collections and model court cases, they also practiced legal reasoning (chapter 14). While we have little insight into the oral components of students' scribal education, dialogues and disputes show that making an argument and defending it formed part of their instruction (chapters 19 and 20). Beyond disputes between students, such skills could be applied to accusation or defense in court or to formulate an appeal to the king. Together, those skills likely allowed graduates to receive more specialized training based on the needs required by their profession: a field surveyor would learn more about surface calculation, while a lamentation priest would acquire training in the intricacies of religious texts.

In addition, scribal students learned a good deal of knowledge specific to their intellectual life, beliefs, and history. We discover this aspect of their education by focusing on the knowledge transmitted in the Edubba'a. Nippur and its deities figured prominently in the school curriculum and appeared in hymns, myths, letters, and short stories. Beyond these subjects, students learned the basics of the cult and studied examples of typical religious genres, such as hymns and laments (see chapter 18). Among the other deities, Inana—goddess of love and war—was an especially recurring figure. Historical topics were also taught selectively, focusing on the famous Ur III king Šulgi and certain kings of Isin and Larsa, such as Lipit-Eštar and Sin-iddinam, while omitting many others. Major historical events, such as the fall of Akkad and the destruction of Sumer and Ur (and of course Nippur) were memorized. Students approached history through a variety of text genres, from hymns and laments and lists of kings to historical correspondence and inscriptions (chapter 17). Stories of the legendary kings whose names still resonate in modern times were also part of the curriculum—tales about Gilgameš, Enmerkar, and Lugalbanda. Strikingly, kings, be they historical or legendary, were presented not only as heroes and warriors but also as intellectuals, protectors of scribal knowledge, and brilliant rhetoricians (chapter 16). Besides these topics, much of the historical knowledge imparted was self-reflective of the scribes and their profession, including proverbs about scribes, letters written by famous scholars, a hymn to the goddess of writing, and of course the texts and dialogues dealing with the Edubba'a itself.

Beyond the knowledge transferred via literature, students likely also learned to appreciate and compose literature (chapter 16). But formulating and composing texts comprise one of the least understood aspects of Babylonian education. While we acknowledge that most written documentation was composed by scribes, we often dissociate scribal training and text composition. The fact that most

Mesopotamian literature lacks a named author does not help the matter. In his letter to King Šulgi, Abba'indasa states, "I am a scribe—I can inscribe a stela" (line 15). A look at the letters of the *Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany* reveals that scribes composed letters to the king by reusing elements of hymns they studied at school. So we can assume that studying varied literature, inscriptions, and letters provided the students of the Edubba'a with the foundational knowledge to compose Sumerian literature from blueprints for common genres and also to formulate ideas for narratives, use stylistic elements, and apply an elevated vocabulary. While some of the literature assigned for study originated outside the Edubba'a, a significant portion of it was likely composed by teachers for their students.

The astonishing multidimensionality of many of the exercises in the Edubba'a bears witness to the creativity and compositional skills of the teachers (or former students of the institution): lists of personal names taught students the basics of cuneiform and how to spell these ubiquitous appellations while also conveying an overview of the pantheon (see chapter 8). Proverbs included valuable lessons in ethics next to humorous puns while introducing students to Sumerian grammar (chapter 11). The short extracts were also ideal for taking home to prove students' progress to parents (chapter 12). A letter could include a lesson in history and calculation (chapter 13) while teaching how to formulate orders—a valuable skill for a future administrator. And a funny and engaging disputation, such as *Two Women* B, conveyed the picture of an ideal woman while training students in the genderlect Emesal necessary for lamentations, as well as rhetoric and court procedure (chapter 20).

Education in the Edubba'a was not comprehensive—it was determined by selection based on emphasis of selected character traits, skills, and knowledge. Furthermore, it was not the end of all learning but rather the beginning of many types of scribal careers, as diverse as they might be. I invite you to explore the school in Babylonia through the objects, texts, and ongoing scholarship that enable us to learn from the Babylonian students themselves.

2

Old Babylonian Nippur in Its Environmental and Historical Settings

Hervé Reculeau

Nippur lies in a strategic position at the center of the Mesopotamian floodplain at the approximate boundary between two slightly different ecological zones that, in the third millennium BCE, also corresponded to the cultural and political regions of Akkad upstream and Sumer downstream (fig. 2.1). Nippur was never the seat of an independent king or city-state; rather, it was a city whose elites, and especially the clergy of Enlil, were courted by all the competing kings who aspired to hegemony over the floodplain. Geography, religion, and politics made Nippur's fortune: its history goes back at least to the Middle Uruk period, in the mid-fourth millennium BCE, and the site was repeatedly occupied as late as the medieval period. However, that long history is marked by a series of disruptions, and the end of the Old Babylonian period is one of them. For the first four centuries of the second millennium BCE, Nippur was the primary religious center of Mesopotamia and an object of courting by the kings of various periods, but also a city whose very existence was threatened by ecological change and the political upheavals that marked the end of the first dynasty of Babylon in the seventeenth century BCE.

A Strategic Location at the Border between Sumer and Akkad

The alluvial plain of Lower Mesopotamia, which was formed by the combined sediments of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, extends from Ramadi southward to the Arabo-Persian Gulf. This large basin of 444,442 square kilometers (171,600 square miles), bordered to the east by the foothills of the Zagros Mountains and to the south by the Gulf, is marked by a very gentle north–south slope and an overall flat topography that masks a heterogeneity of microenvironments. In this arid milieu, which receives only 75–200 millimeters (2.95–7.87 inches) of annual rainfall, dry farming is impossible and the rivers are the only source of water available for agriculture.

Despite its apparent uniformity, Lower Mesopotamia is divided into three main environmental zones, which evolved through time as the alluvial plain expanded southward due to causes both natural (eustatic and fluvial dynamics) and human-made (artificial irrigation and field reclamation/abandonment):

The current landscape of Nippur with the ziggurat of Enlil in the background. Photo courtesy of Andrew M. Wright.

Figure 2.1. Map of Mesopotamia showing the sites mentioned in this chapter. Created by MO. Sources: Esri, USGS.

1. In the north, the river plain (roughly equivalent to ancient Akkad) extends southward to the level of Nippur, and the rivers present strongly meandering channels and well-defined levees that are 2–3 meters (6.5–9.8 feet) higher than the basins they overlook. This configuration allows for easy irrigation through gravity flow, with limited risks of salinization because water-table levels are relatively low. Floods, on the other hand, could be very destructive.
2. Farther downstream, the deltaic plain starts just south of Nippur (fig. 2.2) and covers the central alluvium (roughly equivalent to ancient Sumer). Here the rivers' gradient becomes minimal, and they build low levees that are prone to breaches, creating seasonal marshes and lakes that help reduce the threat of violent floods. The proximity of the water table, on the other hand, means that this area is severely affected by soil salinization.
3. Finally, the marshes (known from the seventeenth century BCE onward as "the Sealand") create an immense, fluctuating wetland that formed the background of the early Sumerian

cities located on its margins (Uruk, Umma, Ur). In recent millennia, these wetlands have been pushed farther downstream as the twin rivers have aggraded their floodplain southward to the present shoreline of the Arabo-Persian Gulf.

In the deltaic plain, human activity and erosion over millennia have contributed to the lower preservation, in height and extent, of levees that would originally have been slightly more substantial than in the river plain. In both regions, the system of raised channels and natural levees led to the development of a landscape of irrigation defined by its "herringbone" pattern, with the river (originally along its natural course but increasingly artificialized over time) running at the center of the levee's crest and short canals (1–3 kilometers, or 0.6–1.8 miles, in length) branching off at regular intervals and running down the slope of the levee to reach the lower-lying fields. River levee soils, made of coarser sediments, offer better drainage and less salinization through seepage but require mechanical devices to be irrigated. They support a wide variety of crops, especially date palms that stabilize the soil with their roots and offer shadow and moisture to low-lying trees and crops. River basin soils downslope have low permeability, drain poorly, and are closer to the water table. They are thus more prone to salinization. Although poorer than levee soils, they are more easily irrigated by gravity flow and were used for growing winter cereals, legumes, flax, and a wide range of vegetables in crop-fallow alternation.

Our understanding of the past climates of Mesopotamia has progressed significantly in recent years with the publication of two high-resolution speleothem records, one from the Gol-e-Zard cave on the Iranian plateau (Carolin et al. 2018) and the other from the Kuna Ba cave in Iraqi Kurdistan (Sinha et al. 2019). Both caves have been dated at high levels of precision using the uranium/thorium method, the former between circa 3200 and 1700 BCE and the latter between circa 2000 BCE and the present. Both records are much more precise chronologically than is commonly the case for paleoclimate proxies, with "slices" in the speleothems covering two to ten or fifteen years at a time and a global uncertainty of the absolute chronology of only twenty-five or thirty years. Although further data will be required to refine the picture, these two records offer reasonable proxies for the climate that prevailed over Upper Mesopotamia and Anatolia during the Old Babylonian period and would have affected the behavior of the twin rivers in the area around Nippur. (Local atmospheric humidity would logically have followed similar trends but was never a crucial component for agriculture in this arid environment.) The end of the third millennium BCE was marked by a significant episode of rapid climate change (the so-called "4.2-kiloyear event"), which caused the aridification of the Upper Mesopotamian plateau, with effects on its land use and settlement patterns that are still debated but were probably significant in this region dominated by dry farming. By contrast, the irrigated agriculture of Sumer and Akkad does not appear to have been affected much, and both the Akkadian and Ur III records (2292–2002 BCE) suggest a healthy agriculture, if somewhat less productive than in Early Dynastic times (ca. 2900–2300 BCE). Paleoclimate records for the Old Babylonian period (2002–1595 BCE) attest the return to wetter conditions in the twentieth century BCE, followed by 350–400 years of highly volatile conditions marked by both frequent instability and limited variability in rainfall, with no identifiable marked pluvial or drought episode until around the transition from the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1500 BCE). For the early part of the period, changes in settlement patterns are hardly recognizable, but global trends for the second millennium BCE are toward a lower population density and a lesser part played by urban centers as compared with agrarian villages. However, changes in rainfall in the catchment areas of the Tigris and Euphrates could explain why branches of the latter experienced dramatic episodes of avulsion and changes of course

Figure 2.2. The current landscape of Nippur photographed from the top of the ziggurat of Enlil. Photo courtesy of Andrew M. Wright.

during the period, with a significant impact on the occupation of some areas, including Nippur and its surroundings: textual and archaeological evidence indicates that at least since the end of the third millennium BCE, the branch of the Euphrates that ran by Nippur, Uruk, Larsa, and Ur was slowly depleted of water to the profit of a new branch (which would become known as the Arahtum) running by Babylon, Borsippa, and Dilbat, prompting a change in the balance of powers among the cities of the alluvium. To counter the effects of this natural shift, a canal named Ka-sahar was created in the late third millennium to transfer water from the Tigris into the branch of the Euphrates on which Nippur sat. This canal was maintained (and renamed at least once) by various rulers during the Old Babylonian period (Steinkeller 2017b).

Nippur: A Coveted Prize for Isin, Larsa, and Babylon (ca. 2002-1763 BCE)

The position of Nippur at the interface between Sumer and Akkad may explain why it rose to prominence as the primary religious center of early Mesopotamia. While Sumer in the late fourth and early third millennia BCE seems to have been dominated by Uruk and its city goddess Inana, sometime during the Early Dynastic I–II period (ca. 2900–2575 BCE) the primacy shifted to Nippur and its city god Enlil. This shift may have happened under the influence of Kiš, then the dominant polity in what would later become Akkad, if a later tradition is to be trusted that attributes the foundation of Enlil's sanctuary, the Ekur, to one of its early kings, Enmebaragesi. By the Early Dynastic III period (ca. 2575–2300 BCE), Enlil was securely established as the head of the Sumerian pantheon and the patron of royal power. Kings throughout the region started dedicating votive inscriptions in the Ekur. This tradition was only amplified after the conquest of Sumer by Sargon of Akkad (2316–2277 BCE), as he and his successors were the first to use their control of Nippur to justify in religious terms their claim as "king(s) of Sumer and Akkad." During the Sargonic period (2292–2173 BCE), Enlil became the imperial god and his son Ninurta was promoted to city god of Nippur, a situation that

still prevailed in the Old Babylonian period. Both the Sargonic kings and their successors of the Ur III dynasty (2110–2002 BCE) sponsored restorations of the city's various sanctuaries. After the reforms of Šulgi (2094–2046 BCE), Nippur and its satellite towns played a central role in the kingdom. First, Nippur was the seat of a province, and Puzriš-Dagan centralized all the taxes in livestock before reallocating them throughout the kingdom (including to the temple of Enlil in Nippur). Second, Nippur, Enlil, and the Ekur played a key role in the theology of power of the kings of Ur, who were coronated in Nippur even before they were crowned in their own political capital, Ur, or in the city associated with the dynasty's origins, Uruk (Sallaberger 1996). Moreover, the nearby settlement of Tumal played a crucial role in cultic activities that involved the royal family. It was therefore no small feat when, in the face of persistent troubles, the last king of the dynasty, Ibbi-Sin (2028–2003 BCE), was forced to send one of his high officials, Išbi-Erra, to secure Nippur and Isin (27 kilometers, or 16.7 miles, southeast of Nippur). Having established himself in Isin, Išbi-Erra (2019–1987 BCE) soon rebelled and became independent from Ur, establishing the first "Old Babylonian" kingdom, which partly overlapped with the last years of the Ur III dynasty. At Nippur itself, this shift in allegiance (the first in a long series) does not seem to have been particularly noteworthy, and the archives of the Inana temple span the periods of both Ur and Isin domination without a sign of discontinuity. Nippur's importance to Išbi-Erra's newly established kingship is visible in his choice of the Nippur calendar as the official calendar of his kingdom after he abandoned that of his former overlord.

Although Isin appears to have controlled most of the alluvium after Ur fell to an Elamite raid in 2002 BCE, a competitor soon rose in Larsa, downstream on the Euphrates. While later traditions claimed, for propagandistic purposes, that the local dynasty was even older than that of Isin, its first historically attested king is Samium (1976–1942 BCE). Not coincidentally, after having extended his dominion over Uruk and other southern cities, Samium seems to have targeted Nippur, for there are indications that his contemporaries in Isin, Iddin-Dagan (1976–1956 BCE) and Išme-Dagan (1955–1937 BCE), temporarily lost control of the city. (See Charpin 2004 for the reconstruction

Overview of the Old Babylonian Kings of Isin, Larsa, and Babylon

Isin	Larsa	Babylon
Išbi-Erra (2019–1987 BCE)		
Šu-ilišu (1986–1977 BCE)		
Iddin-Dagan (1976–1956 BCE)	Samium (1976–1942 BCE)	
Išme-Dagan (1955–1937 BCE)		
	Zabaya (1941–1933 BCE)	
Lipit-Eštar (1936–1926 BCE)		
	Gungunum (1932–1906 BCE)	
Ur-Ninurta (1925–1898 BCE)		
	Abi-sare (1905–1895 BCE)	
Bur-Sin (1897–1876 BCE)		
	Sumu-El (1894–1866 BCE)	
		Sumu-la-El (1880–1845 BCE)
Lipit-Enlil (1875–1871 BCE)		
Erra-imitti (1870–1863 BCE)		
	Nur-Adad (1865–1850 BCE)	
Enlil-bani (1862–1839 BCE)		
	Sin-iddinam (1849–1843 BCE)	
		Sabium (1844–1831 BCE)
	Sin-eribam (1842–1841 BCE)	
	Sin-iqišam (1840–1836 BCE)	
Zambiya (1838–1836 BCE)		
Iter-piša (1835–1832 BCE)	Ṣilli-Adad (1835 BCE)	
	Warad-Sin (1834–1823 BCE)	
Urdukuga (1831–1828 BCE)		
		Apil-Sin (1830–1813 BCE)
Sin-magir (1827–1817 BCE)		
	Rim-Sin (1822–1763 BCE)	
Damiq-ilišu (1816–1794 BCE)		
		Sin-muballit (1812–1793 BCE)
		Hammu-rabi (1792–1750 BCE)
		Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BCE)
		Abi-ešuh (1711–1684 BCE)
		Ammi-ditana (1683–1647 BCE)
		Ammi-ṣaduqa (1646–1626 BCE)
		Samsu-ditana (1625–1595 BCE)

After Charpin 2004.

of political events here and below.) From the very beginning, Nippur was thus at the heart of the Isin-Larsa rivalry, which came to dominate the power games in the alluvium until the early eighteenth century BCE. The reason for Nippur's importance lies in the fact that kings could claim the title "King of Sumer and Akkad" only when they had been recognized as legitimate by the clergy of Enlil, who in exchange received substantial benefits and revenues from royal patronage in the form of votive offerings,

dedications to the temples, and the (re)building of various religious centers on the site—the Ekur (fig. 2.3) first and foremost, but also other centers whose vestiges have been partially recovered by archaeologists, such as the temple of Inana (fig. 2.4). Besides the aforementioned title, these shifts in allegiance can be traced through various other clues. For example, the cuneiform tablets written (and recovered) at Nippur itself are dated according to the year names of whichever kingdom it was a part of at the time of redaction (year names being a dating system by which every new year was named after a notable event—military, religious, etc.—of the preceding year); in addition, the inscriptions dedicated in the Ekur, as well as mentions of the city and its temples in the kings' year names, reflect whoever controlled Nippur at any given point in time.

Later in his reign, Išme-Dagan reconquered the city and bestowed on its inhabitants an exemption from tax and military service that may have been part of his strategy to lure the local elites back into Isin's orbit. A literary composition, the *Lament for Nippur* (**cat. no. 108**), was possibly also composed on this occasion. In the following decades, Nippur changed hands between the two hegemons, following whichever one appeared to be the more powerful but apparently without ever being forcefully conquered. Thus Lipit-Eštar of Isin (1936–1926 BCE) apparently lost the city to Gungunum of Larsa (1932–1906 BCE), which led to the integration of hymns to this king into the Nippur school curriculum (*Adab to Nanna for Gungunum* [Gungunum A] and/or *Hymn to Nanna for Gungunum* [Gungunum B]). Gungunum lost the city back to

Figure 2.3. Aerial view of the Ekur, the temple and ziggurat of Enlil. Photo courtesy of Abbas Alizadeh.

Figure 2.4. Orthomosaic of Nippur showing all areas excavated from 1948 to 2019. Courtesy of Andrew M. Wright.

Ur-Ninurta of Isin (1925–1898 BCE), who like his predecessor Išme-Dagan accompanied his reconquest with tax exemptions and a debt remission (*mīšarum*; see chapter 5). At times, these shifts in allegiance could happen at a rather frantic pace: one of the most dynamic kings of Larsa, Sumu-El (1894–1866 BCE), launched a series of campaigns against his northern neighbor and managed to take Nippur for at least three years between his tenth and thirteenth regnal years (1885–1882 BCE; see Reculeau 2008), only to lose it again to Bur-Sin of Isin (1897–1876 BCE). Sumu-El reconquered the city in his twenty-fourth year, at the death of Bur-Sin's successor Lipit-Enlil (1875–1871 BCE), but lost it again in his twenty-eighth year to Erra-imitti of Isin (1870–1863 BCE), who commemorates construction works in the city in one of his year names. Erra-imitti's successor, Enlil-bani (1862–1839 BCE), proclaimed another debt remission for Isin and Nippur, but this time it does not appear to have been related to another shift in allegiance. Some twenty years into his reign, however, Larsa again gained the upper hand, and cuneiform tablets from Nippur were dated to the seventh and final year of

Sin-iddinam (1849–1843 BCE). For the occasion, he took the title "shepherd who makes everything abundant for Nippur," and royal hymns dedicated to this king depict the moon god Nanna (Sin in Akkadian) of Ur as presenting food offerings to Enlil and Ninlil in the Ekur (*Praise Poem of Sin-iddinam* A) or represent the king as respectful of Enlil and approved by the Ekur (*Sin-iddinam and Iškur* [Sin-iddinam E]). Sin-iddinam's glory lasted longer in poetry than on the ground, however, and after just a few years the city returned to Isin's orbit. His second successor Sin-iqišam (1840–1836 BCE) also enjoyed short-lived control over the city: the name of his fourth year celebrated his dedication of fourteen statues to the Ekur, and a tablet dated to his fifth year was recovered on the site. However, the next king of Larsa, Ṣilli-Adad (1835 BCE), was overthrown only a few months after his coronation, and although his two known inscriptions call him "provider of Nippur," his claims over the city must have been more aspirational than legitimate, because the succession crisis allowed a new player to enter the fray: Sabium (1844–1831 BCE), the second king of Babylon, profited from Sin-iqišam's death and was recognized by the Nippur elites, as witnessed by tablets from his ninth year (1836 BCE).

The rise of Babylon had started under the first king of the dynasty, Sumu-la-El (1880–1845 BCE), and with this new power located on the Arahtum (the branch of the Euphrates that now carried most of the river's water), the political landscape became even more volatile. Warad-Sin (1834–1823 BCE), a member of a new dynasty, took over the throne of Larsa after Ṣilli-Adad's deposition and managed to take back control of Nippur in his sixth year (1829 BCE), when he too dedicated fourteen statues in the Ekur, and the city's tablets are dated by his regnal years starting in 1828 BCE. A stela was also dedicated in the Ekur by his father, Kudur-mabuk, celebrating his victory over the rebellious city of Maškan-šapir. Larsa maintained control over Nippur until the tenth year of Warad-Sin's brother and successor, Rim-Sin (1822–1763 BCE), but it returned to Isin around 1812 BCE. This time, the shift in allegiance seems to have been forced rather than voluntary: texts from Uruk, an ally of Isin against Larsa, show that a number of inhabitants were deported there from Nippur under the king ANam, who later celebrated his own magnanimity when he ordered their return home—a feat apparently realized only under his son and successor, IRnene, who celebrated in kind. Isin and its allies had only a few years to rejoice, however, and in 1810 BCE Larsa defeated a coalition that included, besides Isin and Uruk, Babylon, Rapiqum, and groups of Sutean nomads (as recorded in Warad-Sin's fourteenth year name). From then on, Larsa consolidated its control over the deltaic plain and the marshes, conquering Uruk in 1803 BCE and Isin in 1794 BCE and securing control over Nippur against the new leading polity in the river plain, Babylon.

Nippur under Hammu-rabi and His Successors (1763–1595 BCE)

For the thirty-one years between its conquest by Rim-Sin and the final demise of his kingdom at the hands of Hammu-rabi of Babylon (1792–1750 BCE), Nippur remained securely in Larsa's orbit and therefore does not appear much on the political scene of the time. Based on the first dates with his name to appear in the archives of Nippur and Isin, Hammu-rabi took the religious center just a few weeks before taking Larsa in his thirtieth year (1763 BCE). In gratitude, the new master of Nippur had a storehouse built for Enlil in his Babylonian sanctuary, the Enamtila. Unlike his predecessors, however, Hammu-rabi did not uphold Nippur's local customs in legal matters, and shortly after his conquest contracts were redrawn according to the Babylonian tradition, especially for real estate. Little is known of the history of Nippur during his last thirteen years, but the city figures prominently in the prologue of his famous *Code of Hammu-rabi* as one of the three cities where the great political gods of the kingdom had their terrestrial abode: Nippur and Enlil were placed on the same high level as the old Sumerian center Eridu and its god Ea, and the kingdom's political capital Babylon

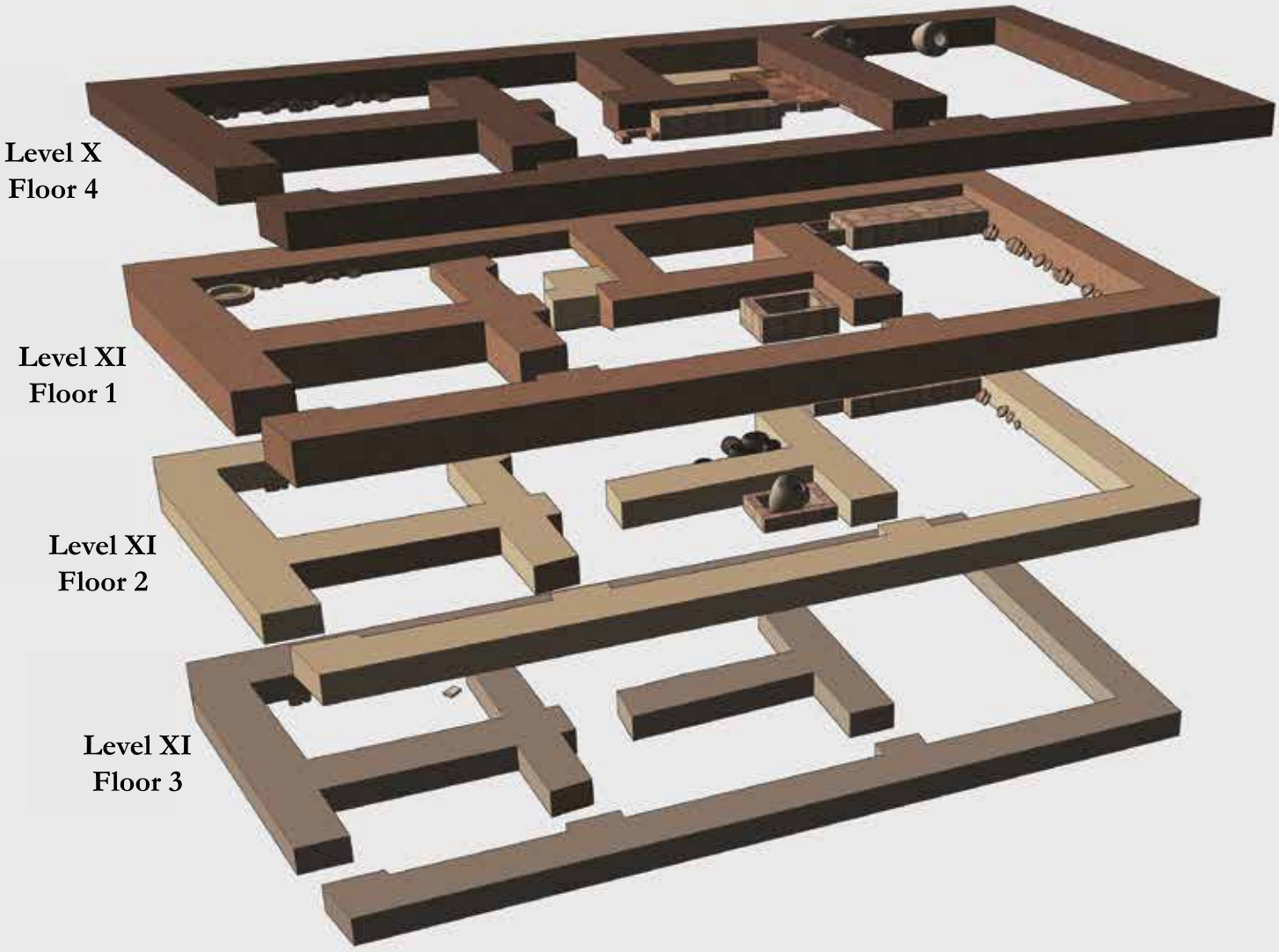
and its tutelary god Marduk. According to an inscription and the year name of his thirty-third regnal year, Hammu-rabi redug the Ka-sahar canal, renamed it "Ḫammu-rabi is the abundance of the people" (Hammu-rabi-nuhuš-niši), and installed (or retitled) a fortress named after his father, "Fort Sin-muballiṭ" (Dur-Sin-muballiṭ), just upstream from Nippur where the canal joined the Euphrates.

In the reign of Hammu-rabi's son and successor, Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BCE), Babylon's control over Sumer in general and Nippur in particular was challenged by revolts and the rise of a rival kingdom in the marshes, the Sealand. In Samsu-iluna's eighth year, cities from the former kingdom of Larsa rebelled, with independent kings taking over Larsa (Rim-Sin II, who was perceived by Babylon as a Larsean even though he may actually have ruled from Keš) and Uruk (Rim-Anum). Rim-Sin II took over the lion's share of the Sumerian heartland, including Nippur, which was lost to Babylon until Samsu-iluna and his armies finally tamed the rebellion two years later (after having had to deal with a series of other troubles, including the first documented arrival in Babylonia of Kassite troops and a challenge from Ešnunna). What happened next is still a matter of debate, but Babylon clearly lost control of the southernmost part of the alluvium—Ur, Uruk, and Larsa—shortly after this Pyrrhic victory. Archives there end less than a year after Samsu-iluna's reconquest, and all three sites show archaeological traces of abandonment for an extended period of time. Various hypotheses have been advanced to explain this situation, ranging from military (an Elamite or Sealand attack) to environmental (the aforementioned shift in the Euphrates's course); a combination of factors remains the most plausible. Recently published texts from the early Sealand dynasty, however, suggest that the abandonment may have been less drastic than was once thought and that the area fell under the control of the dynasty newly established in the marshlands. It is undeniable, however, that some of the urban elites (including the local clergies) chose to stay loyal to Babylon, and they could be found living as exiles in northern Babylonian cities such as Kiš, Dilbat, and of course Babylon.

Volatility of the rainfall in the Euphrates's catchment area seems to have created new problems, for apparently at some point too much water was running through the Euphrates. Perhaps for this reason, in his twenty-fifth year Samsu-iluna ordered massive hydraulic works farther up on the Middle Euphrates, which he had just reconquered, to divert some of the water toward what is today known as Lake Habbaniyah in order to protect the cities located along the Arahtum, which had suffered from dramatic floods. This tactic may have backfired and triggered additional water stress on the older course of the river, depleting even further the water supply for the cities along it, including the abovementioned southern cities (which show signs of early abandonment) and of course Nippur itself. This, combined with mounting pressure from the Sealand, appears to have created a situation in which life in Nippur became increasingly perilous. Archives dated according to the kings of Babylon cease to exist by Samsu-iluna's thirtieth year, and the city was conquered for a short time by Iluma-ilum of the Sealand, in whose name a handful of contracts are dated. This conquest was part of a greater scheme of destruction and abandonment in the central plain, which affected cities such as Lagaba, Maškan-šapir, and Isin. Although it was once thought that Nippur was abandoned around this time and that its clergy went into exile in Babylon, the recent publication of texts from a fortress named after Samsu-iluna's successor, Abi-ešuh (1711–1684 BCE), shows that these events took many years to unfold.

"Fort Abi-ešuh" (Dur-Abi-ešuh), as this fortress was called, was probably just a rebuilding of the one Hammu-rabi had established as "Fort Sin-muballiṭ" and was part of a series of defenses that the kings of Babylon put together to protect the heart of their kingdom against the Sealand dynasty and other threats. More specifically, two fortresses named "Fort Abi-ešuh" were located along the Hammu-rabi-nuhuš-niši canal: one on the Tigris to

protect its provisioning, the other (the source of our archives) at the place where it joined the Euphrates, near Nippur. Both were vital to keep the city supplied with water from the Tigris. This strategy seems to have worked for a while, and it is plausible that Samsu-iluna was able to reconquer the city by his thirty-seventh year (Steinmeyer 2022). Nevertheless, the situation in the city must have been dire, and the clergy and the cults they attended progressively moved away from Nippur and took shelter in the abovementioned fortress. While cultic activities may still have been performed in Nippur under Abi-ešuh's successor Ammi-ditana (1683–1647 BCE), members of the Ekur clergy are attested at "Fort Abi-ešuh" between the eighteenth year of Ammi-ṣaduqa (1646–1626 BCE) and the early days of the last king of the dynasty, Samsu-ditana (1625–1595 BCE), and there are good reasons to believe that the entire cult and civic institutions had been moved there as early as the eighth year of Ammi-ṣaduqa (Charpin 2020). Given the proximity of the two cities, the political situation was probably the primary trigger for that move, since Nippur was a city that lacked good defenses and the fortress was therefore a safer choice. The archaeological record suggests that the site was almost completely abandoned by the late seventeenth century BCE, only to be revived after the fall of the first dynasty of Babylon under the leadership of the new Kassite rulers of the region.


Level X
Floor 4
Level XI
Floor 1
Level XI
Floor 2
Level XI
Floor 3

3 The Archaeology of Nippur's House F and Its Neighborhood

Augusta McMahon

The ancient city of Nippur is located near the center of the southern alluvial plains of modern Iraq, in southern Mesopotamia (see fig. 2.1 in chapter 2). Nippur was one of Mesopotamia's most important cities from the third to the first millennium BCE. Its importance stemmed from the presence of the main temple of the god Enlil, lord of the air and wind and one of the most powerful deities in the Mesopotamian pantheon. From the third through second millennia BCE, priests of Enlil confirmed the legitimacy of kings until Enlil was displaced by Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon. During the early second millennium Old Babylonian period, when House F was occupied, the city covered an area of approximately 70 hectares (172 acres) and was a center of both religious and economic power. Scribes were a key element in its administration and success.

The Site and City of Nippur

The site of Nippur has a complex, multimounded shape that developed across millennia as the settlement expanded and contracted and as its inhabitants built, abandoned, and rebuilt houses, shops, shrines, and temples (see fig. 2.4 in chapter 2). The primary construction material in Mesopotamia was mudbrick, simple to build with and easily manufactured with local resources of clay, water, and straw. Constant repair and rebuilding of mudbrick structures contributed to the site's vertical accumulation. The city grew and shrank in response to political developments and climate change, resulting in a complicated, submounded form. Further, mudbrick is susceptible to damage from rain and wind, and after Nippur's abandonment around 800 CE, centuries of erosion carved gullies into the mound. Excavations since 1889 have added further pits and spoil heaps.

Nippur's most distinctive natural feature is the Shatt an-Nil, a northwest-to-southeast watercourse that divides the city into eastern and western portions. The Shatt was used for transport, industry, irrigation, and household drinking water and would have been crucial to the city's long-term occupation and resilience. The most distinctive human-made feature of Nippur is the ziggurat (stepped temple tower) of Enlil in the northeast quadrant of the site. The Enlil

3D stratigraphic model showing layers of occupation in House F. Created by MO based on McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 71, and data from McCown and Haines 1967 and Stone 1987.

temple complex was the largest of the city's temples and shrines; other religious buildings were scattered across the site and acted as localized centers of worship, employment, and social networking, much as mosques and churches do today.

Beyond temples, the city was occupied largely by houses clustered in dense neighborhoods, with narrow streets or alleys and small plazas providing access and public space. Some of these houses contained small shops or workplaces, such as bakeries or scribal schools, while others were entirely residential. The economy was based on irrigation agriculture in the hinterlands around the city, as well as on the products of animal herding, industry, and trade. Many industries, such as pottery production and brickmaking, may have been located at the city's edge, where demands for space and access to water and fuel could be met relatively easily. But some aspects of textile production, Mesopotamia's most important economic activity, were probably carried out in houses. Spinning wool into thread, for instance, is ideally suited to the multitasking nature of traditional women's roles.

Scribes made up a crucial scaffolding element of Nippur's administrative and economic structure, and several structures at the site have been proposed as scribal schools. The best known of these is that of "House F" in Area TA, Levels XI–X. Area TA is located in the East Mound at Nippur, southeast of the Enlil temple (see fig. 2.4 in chapter 2). Because of the abundance of tablets in this part of the site, early excavators dubbed it "Tablet Hill" (Hilprecht 1903). But not all the tablets came from scribal schools; indeed, many tablets may have been brought home by students (McCown and Haines 1967, 178–79) or were held in household archives.

Figure 3.1. House F from the west, mid-excavation. ISACM P. 47263 (3N/217).

House F was excavated during the third season of the Joint Expedition to Nippur, conducted by the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania from November 1951 to March 1952 (McCown and Haines 1967, 64–66; Stone 1987, 56–59) (fig. 3.1).

Area TA Neighborhood

The Tablet Hill area was largely occupied by neighborhoods of houses during the third through first millennia BCE (fig. 3.2). The excavated stratigraphy of two large trenches, Areas TA and TB, generated a typological sequence of material culture, mainly pottery, that is still foundational to archaeologists' reconstructions of southern Mesopotamia in the second to first millennia BCE. The excavators identified fifteen occupational levels in Area TA (Ur III to Achaemenid period, roughly 2100–331 BCE) and thirteen in Area TB (Akkadian to Old Babylonian period, roughly 2200–1700 BCE), based on architectural changes. The material-culture sequence was based in these distinctions of architectural level and on subtle changes in forms or styles of pottery (**cat. nos. 5** and **6**; McCown and Haines 1967, 78),

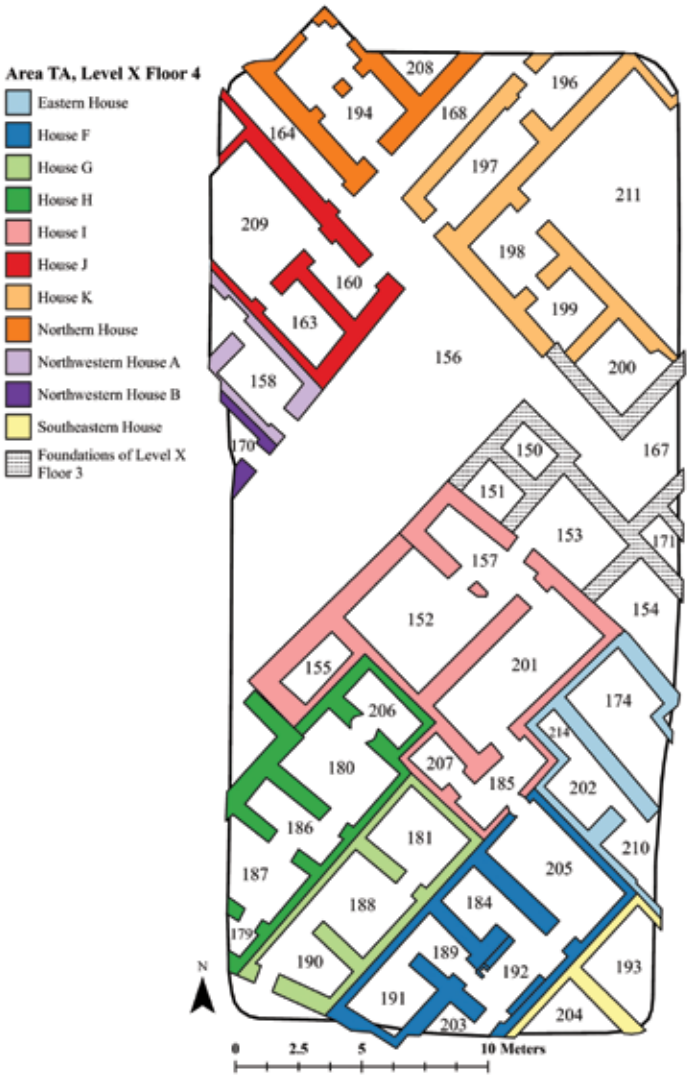


Figure 3.2. Plan of the TA neighborhood, Level X Floor 4. Created by MO based on McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 71.

cylinder seals (McCown and Haines 1967, 80–82), and other objects. Absolute dating for some levels was supplied by dates written on legal and economic tablets (McCown and Haines 1967, 74–77).

The Area TA neighborhood is notable for its variable house sizes in the Old Babylonian levels, suggesting diversity in household status, wealth, and professions, even while texts suggest a degree of kinship connections (Stone 1987). A similar early second-millennium BCE neighborhood was excavated in the city of Ur (Woolley and Mallowan 1976). From these excavations, we can see that the ideal Mesopotamian house during this period was a single-story building with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms of varying functions and degrees of privacy. This ideal plan, however, was rarely achieved, since the nature of the household, preexisting property lines, and access routes compelled adaptations (fig. 3.2). The inheritance of roofed space was documented in detail in texts, reflecting the value of roofing timbers in this low-rainfall region. House F, one of the smaller Area TA houses, had approximately 35.6 square meters (383 square feet) of roofed space, while adjacent House I, one of the larger Area TA houses, had about 52.5 square meters (565 square feet) of roofed space (Stone 1981, 21). These sizes may correspond roughly to the space needed for a nuclear or an extended family, respectively (Stone 1981, 26). However, texts undercount women and children, and children are also difficult to account for in the archaeological record even though they may have made up the majority of a house's residents during a household's lifetime. Buildings such as Houses F and P (a possible bakery) may have had fewer occupants (e.g., childless families or single individuals) and instead used space for commercial or semipublic activities.

The scribal school, House F, shared party walls with buildings to its northwest (House G), north (House I), northeast (Eastern House), and southeast (Southeastern House). Connections among the occupants of these houses are likely to have been minimal, however, since each house faced onto and was reached by a different street. The street system was already established in earlier levels of the Isin-Larsa period (McCown and Haines 1967, 54, 62).

The Archaeology of House F

House F is dated mainly to the early years of the reign of King Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BCE), son of Hammu-rabi. The phasing was complicated (Stone 1987); identified in Level XI were three floor levels that document how the layout of the house changed over time during its occupation. The house was built at Floor 3 in what was temporarily an open plaza. Floor 2 included a minor change to a doorway. The upper Floor 1 rebuilding also included a doorway change; variable elevations in different rooms required the placement of doorsills and steps between them. After Level XI Floor 1, the house was left as a ruin in Level XB, related to a wider economic downturn in 1739 BCE. It was rebuilt in Level XA and reoccupied by a family unrelated to the previous owners until the city was abandoned in about 1720 BCE because of political unrest and a change in the climate (Stone 1987, 35, 56). Plans and plot outlines remained largely the same from Level XI to Levels XB and XA; further internal doors were blocked or opened as the space within Level X evolved. It must be noted here that the archaeological phases, which are artificially assigned, separate what were constant changes and repairs made to the house during its use.

Approximately 1,425 tablets or tablet fragments with a rich variety of text genres were recovered from House F in Level XI, making it one of the most important known scribal schools. The structure's plan is that of a courtyard house typical of southern Mesopotamia but adapted to conform with the available space. These adaptations included a relatively small courtyard and an arrangement of rooms along only three of its sides—the southwest, northwest, and northeast (fig. 3.3). The plan is similar to that of "Quiet Street no. 7," a contemporary house in Area EM at Ur that has also been identified as a scribal school because of the school tablets recovered there (see fig. 4.4 in chapter 4; Charpin 1986; Woolley and Mallowan 1976, 110–12).

Figure 3.3. Plans of Level XI Floors 1–3 and Level X Floor 4 of House F in Area TA. Note Level XI's bench in Room 205 and boxes in 205 and courtyard 192 in Floors 2 and 1, compared with Level X Floor 4's newly constructed benches in 192. Created by MO based on McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 71.

The entrance to Nippur's House F was not exposed, but the excavators proposed that it was located at the southwest from a street into a small room, numbered 203. This room opened directly onto a rectangular courtyard, 192, with benches against two walls. There was a baked-brick box in the northern corner of the courtyard that contained a storage jar; inside the jar were small pots, which may have been used to hold water for drinking and/or tablet soaking and preparation. A similar basin with broken and squashed tablets, possibly midway in the process of being recycled, was found in a house at ancient Sippar-Amnanum, also identified as a part-time scribal school (Gasche 1989). Two rooms were connected to courtyard 192: the large main room, 205, at the northeast, and a small connecting space, 189, at the northwest. Each of the two rooms allowed access to more private rooms: 184, reached from 205, and 191, reached from 189. Locus 205 was the largest space in the building and is identified as a roofed living and working room; this room contained the largest number of tablets. A bench against its northwest wall was outlined in mudbricks and filled with broken bricks and tablets. Adjacent to the bench, almost in the doorway to Room 184, was a small basin made of discarded tablets (McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 160 D–F).

Both bench and basin were covered with mud plaster (see fig. 24.2 in chapter 24). Some of the other tablets from this room may have been stored on shelves or in bags/baskets attached to the walls (Stone 1987, 56–57). Room 184 was partially paved

in Level X and may have been a bathroom during that phase; it may have functioned similarly in Level XI, but its purpose remains unclear. Although entered via Room 205 in Level XI, Room 184 was accessed directly from courtyard 192 in Level X—evidence of the adaptability of mudbrick architecture and the capacity of a house's inhabitants to alter their living spaces to correspond to household changes. In Level XI, Room 189 had a small mudbrick platform in its eastern corner, but its function is ambiguous. Room 191 held a bread oven at the upper floor in Level XI and was probably used as a kitchen; that a significant number of tablets and amount of recycled clay were found in this room, however, suggests the room's flexibility of use.

At the upper floors in Level X, the house changed hands and does not seem to have been a scribal school. But in both Levels XI and X, the nontablet contents of the house comprised typical domestic material culture: ceramic vessels for cooking, serving, and eating; broken clay plaques and figurines; a model wagon wheel; and bone tools (McCown and Haines 1967, 116).

Tablets as Material Culture

Tablets were found in all rooms of House F in Level XI. The quantity of tablets (more than 1,400), however, was unusual and far outstripped the number of tablets found in all the other contemporary houses in Area TA combined (Stone 1987, tables 7 and 8; fig. 3.4).

Notably, the tablets found in House F do not have a logical administrative archive structure like that found at roughly contemporary sites, such as Mari in modern-day Syria. In Mesopotamian administrative archives, tablets about the same subject, or those recording specific activities or associated with bureaucratic offices, tended to be kept together on the same shelf or in the same room. But in House F, each room contained tablets about mixed topics. This mixing of subjects might be ascribed to the nature of the tablets as scribal exercises rather than a working administrative archive; in a school context, it would not matter whether

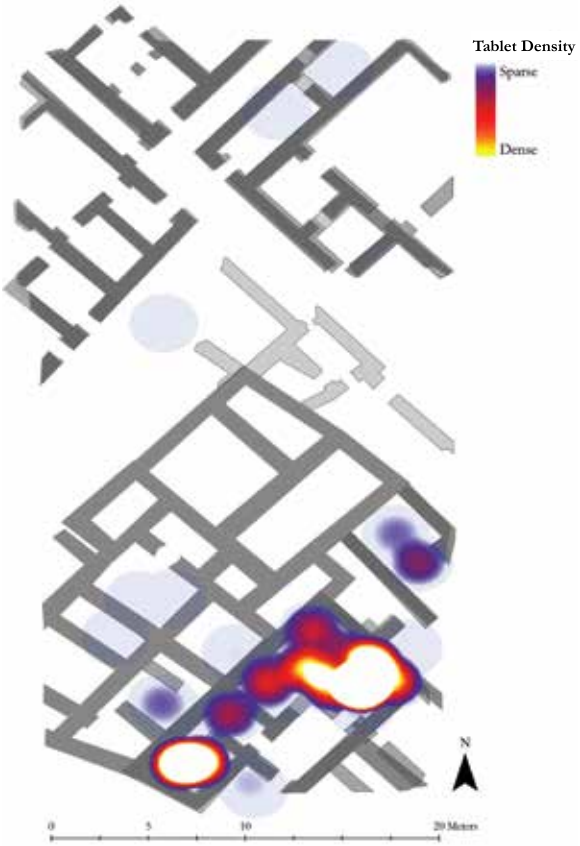


Figure 3.4. Heat map showing the spatial distribution and clustering of cuneiform tablets from the Old Babylonian period discovered in Area TA. Created by MO based on data from McCown and Haines 1967 and Stone 1987.

tablets covering various subjects were held together or separately. And further mixing occurred when the tablets were discarded in their final contexts. In addition to the tablets built into the house's features, many tablets were incorporated into the fill used to level and raise the living surface between Floors 2 and 1, while further tablets were recovered from the leveling fill above Floor 1 and below Level X, especially in Rooms 191 and 205. Delnero (2019) has raised the question whether all the tablets discarded in the house were produced there. Their condition and contexts suggest that they may have been brought in, together with soil from a nearby rubbish dump, specifically to be used as leveling fill. The tablets carefully built into benches

and other features, however, suggest that they, at least, were selected from among materials available in the house. Other scholars have pointed out that it would be unusual for students' practice tablets to have been saved in the numbers recovered from House F—normally, they were recycled for reuse—and that the preservation of so many tablets may be related to political events abruptly disrupting the teaching (Civil 1979, 7; Stone 1987).

The situation is complicated by the fact that joins can be made between tablet fragments found in different rooms within the house. Joins can also be made between fragments found on different floors in the same or different rooms (Robson 2001, fig. 8). These joins across space and time indicate that there was significant post-depositional movement and that many tablets were found in secondary or tertiary contexts, meaning they had been moved one or more times after their use and initial discarding. This situation is not uncommon in Mesopotamia, since construction, excavation of trash pits or graves, cleaning, and other adjustments to a living space can move material culture from one room to another, from indoors to outdoors (or vice versa), and from a lower (earlier) to a higher (later) surface. Post-depositional processes frequently move pieces of broken ceramic vessels both horizontally and vertically from their original locations of use and discarding, and it makes sense to suppose that discarded tablets moved in similar ways. In the case of House F, however, the tablets incorporated into benches or walls were deliberately used as construction materials, thus suggesting there were so many outdated tablets—more than were needed for recycling—that the owners of the house invented other uses for them.

Conclusion

The stratigraphy of houses in southern Mesopotamian cities is never straightforward, and phases assigned across entire neighborhoods may not connect precisely with the internal phasing of individual houses. McCown and Haines (1967, 54) describe the Nippur neighborhood situation best:

> Individual walls and rooms, even entire houses, did change, but the general character remained the same through many rebuildings. Because there was no violent destruction or conflagration we found it very difficult to divide even a small area into a rigid series of building levels, for all houses were not necessarily rebuilt at the same time and the floors of one house could not be reliably equated with those of another.

Adjustments to mudbrick houses were easy to carry out by residents themselves and were constantly undertaken as a family's size or social circle grew or shrank, as the fortunes or professions of the inhabitants changed, or as ownership of buildings crossed generations (Stone 1981). By contrast, the phasing of entire neighborhoods is usually an artificial creation of archaeologists so that chronology and sequences can be discussed and analyzed. In this scenario, the House F tablets were created, recycled, reused, and discarded, and they sometimes became a new type of object—namely, filler material for constructing floors, walls, or interior fixed furnishings. The biography of Mesopotamian objects may be as complex as the stratigraphy of their contexts.

Explore Further

A general overview of the site and excavations at Nippur: https://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=nippur_mod._nuffar.

The excavations of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures at Nippur: https://isac.uchicago.edu/gallery/archaeological-site-photographs-mesopotamia-nippur; https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/projects/nippur-sacred-city-enlil-0; https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/projects/nippur-expedition.

McCown, Donald E., and Richard C. Haines. *Temple of Enlil, Scribal Quarter, and Soundings.* Nippur 1. Oriental Institute Publications 78. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

4

Living the Edubba'a: School as Sensory Experience and Social Identity

Madeline Ouimet

A house based on a foundation like the skies,
a house one has covered with a veil like a secret tablet box,
a house set on a base like a duck(-shaped weight),
one enters it blind,
leaves it seeing.
Answer: the School.

Sumerian Riddle, no. 1 (translation based on Civil 1987, 20)

As the locus of a particular and privileged kind of knowledge acquisition, scholarly (re)production, and process of graduating into one's own socially adult identity as a professional scribe, the Edubba'a was a place of transformation from a state of metaphorical blindness to one of vision—in the sense of coming to know the world. And indeed, as the Sumerian riddle above suggests, Mesopotamian scribal students, teachers, and scholars in Old Babylonian Nippur and elsewhere may have literally, not merely metaphorically, conceived of and experienced their own progress toward learnedness in explicitly sensory terms. If the actors who directly participated in the Edubba'a discursively recognized the importance of sensory experience in their own definitions of what constituted (scribal) knowledge, how it was obtained, and how it was imbued with value, then what new insights might we modern onlookers and narrators of the past gain by taking a "sensory approach"? In other words, what role did the senses and sensory activities—sight, touch, sound, motion—play in shaping the lived experiences of the students in House F and how they came to embody and experience their social identity as scribes?

To understand what it may have felt like to go to school in Nippur 3,500 years ago, we need to question the applicability of our own present-tinted notions of education and knowledge to such a different geographical and temporal context. We need to identify what our own conceptions of knowledge and knowledge acquisition are. And we need to understand how those ideas might actually be more culturally contingent than they are universal. Among

Beaker found in Room 205 of House F in Nippur. **Cat. no. 6**. Photo by DL.

the many ways in which cultures think about their own thinking, we may consider the possibility that knowledge and learning were understood in that ancient social context as primarily "embodied"—as sensory, kinesthetic, and material—rather than as abstract phenomena existing primarily in a dematerialized realm of thought and concept. In short, if we wish to put ourselves in the position of a pupil at House F, we need to take "position" literally and explore how place, space, objects, and the human body interacted there to produce a historically unique experience of the scribal school as both a sensorial built environment and a social-intellectual space—in fact, indivisible.

Through a brief but vivid exploration of the body-centric sensory experiences evoked in going to school in House F, this essay explores the ways in which both archaeological and textual evidence attest to the students' lived experiences of attending school and how their shared experiences in the intimate and esoteric space of the Edubba'a not only shaped how they learned but also crafted their very sense of group identity as initiate scribes. Thus prepared to don the "social skin" of an Old Babylonian scribal student, we may now enter House F.

Just a Normal House?

House F, as its name implies, was indeed just a normal house, one of many in the neighborhood of Area TA (see chapter 3). Yet House F was also a school. Are these functions contradictory? Schools today are expected to be formalized institutions distinct from the home. But in the context of ancient Mesopotamia, learning processes of all kinds took place in domestic contexts, whether among one's family members or outside the kinship group; apprenticeship, or training in developing various physical skills and techniques, probably often occurred in or around the residence of the instructor. That scribal training should have occurred also within a seemingly typical residential structure is not incongruous with this picture, and indeed we might even consider the Edubba'a as somewhere liminal between "school," as we typically think of it, and "apprenticeship." However, what has puzzled many regarding the nature of the Edubba'a comes from the written words of the scribal students themselves, texts that seem to recount firsthand experiences of school life. Certainly, some passages of these texts intuitively feel quite believable (fig. 4.1). But this same "Edubba'a literature" depicts the school as a highly institutionalized edifice, spatially and functionally separate from any sense of domesticity, in which numerous specialized staff enforce order among the ranks of rowdy pupils:

> The man in charge of the gate (said), "Why did you leave without my permission?" (and) flogged me.
> The man in charge of the clay vat (said), "Why did you take clay without my permission?" (and) flogged me.
> The man in charge of Sumerian (said), "He spoke Akkadian!" (and) flogged me.
> My teacher (said), "Your hand(writing) is not good at all!" (and) flogged me.
>
> *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A), lines 38–41
> (see pages 238–39)

Imagining this gaggle of supervisors, each assigned to such minute tasks as keeping track of the water jug or standing watch in the courtyard, all crowding into the confined spaces of House F, immediately highlights a discrepancy between the textual and archaeological record. Does the resolution lie in distrust of the texts or in our translations of them? Perhaps each supervisory role was assigned to various students rather than being a reified "faculty" position. Yet the Edubba'a literature need not be a direct reflection of reality, every word agreeing with the archaeological evidence, nor may the mirroring of lived experience have necessarily been its writers' aims at all; whether in parody or imagination, the contextualization of such obscure terms as "the man in charge of the clay vat" within a narrative text may not have sought to represent school life faithfully but to make student-copyists practice specific vocabulary and textual-productive

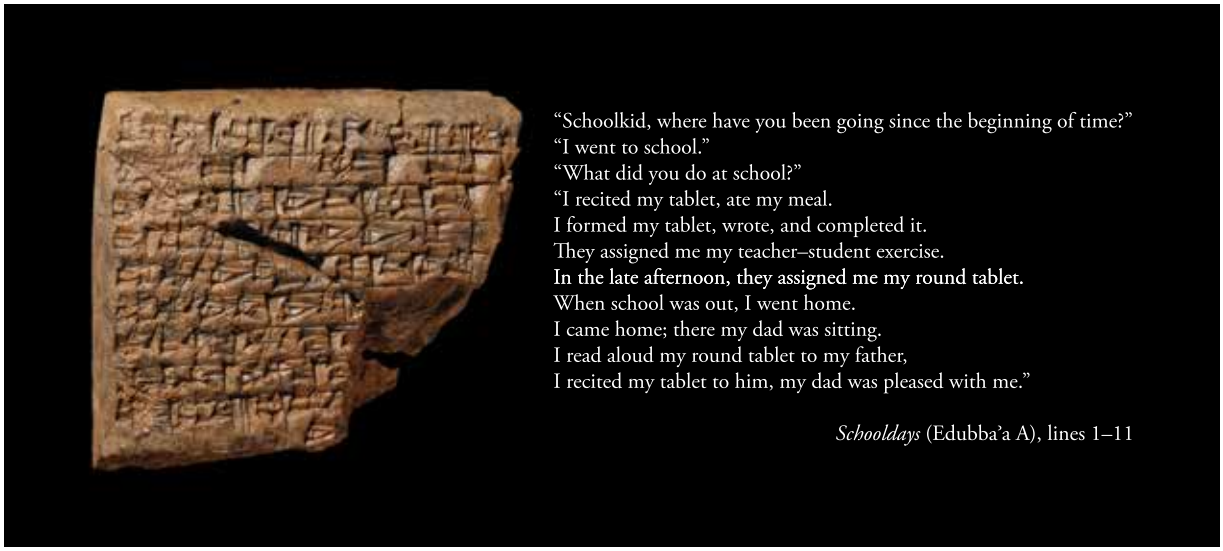


Figure 4.1. Obverse of a fragment of a cuneiform tablet inscribed with *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A). **Cat. no. 15**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by MDH, SP, and RDW.

mechanisms such as repetition. Analyses of the relationship between lexical lists and literary pieces have indeed demonstrated a dialectic between the two, with list vocabulary often informing the structure of literary texts and vice versa (Crisostomo 2015, 132). Beyond the number and variety of persons involved in the Edubba'a literature's imaginings, the institutional nature of education is suggested less by textual evidence than by modern interpretation.

Thus, the fact that House F was at once a "normal" house and a school is no longer viewed as problematic in more recent scholarship. Cooking, serving, and storage vessels (**cat. nos. 5** and **6**) attest to a vibrant cacophony of culinary activities and food smells as the oven smoke from the kitchen, Room 191, permeated the air and wafted into Room 192 (the courtyard) or Room 205 where students were assiduously at work with their tablets—or not, instead indulging in raucous board games whenever the unwitting instructor wandered out of earshot (see fig. 24.3 in chapter 24). Decorative clay plaques with mythological, religious, and animal scenes adorned the walls of these rooms much like those of other "normal" houses throughout Area TA and beyond, an artistic staple of Old Babylonian daily life (**cat. no. 64**; fig. 4.2). The differentiation of House F's rooms into spaces of various sizes, shapes, and degrees of privacy would have accommodated the schoolteacher's living needs, and potentially those of their family as well, as spaces for sleeping, eating, and craft production.

Sounds of the School

Constructed of mudbrick, with reed mats likely strewn across their floors and textiles perhaps draped on their walls, the houses of Area TA through their material properties would have mediated particular "soundscapes" of domestic activity. The clay would have absorbed and partially muted—but nonetheless allowed escape to the ears of passersby on the street—the characteristic sounds of pots clanging, children laughing and crying, and footsteps dashing across sun-seared courtyards. Each sound would have indexed a particular action, actor, and image of daily life to the hearer, even if such goings-on within the households' private interiors were not visually observed. Would House F have sounded this way too? If House F were merely another "normal" house, we would expect it to conform not only to a general architectural aesthetic recognized as residential but also to multisensorial

Figure 4.2. Decorative clay plaque with a striding lion that once adorned the walls of Room 205. **Cat. no. 64**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum.

domestic experience that included both the sounds of domestic spaces and their social uses.

Activities, and by necessary extension the places in which activities unfold, produce sounds that become intrinsic to their very sense of place and help orient the self within spatial experience (McMahon 2013). Would external observers—listeners—on the street outside House F, then, have perceived the sounds emanating from this building as corresponding to "normal" household activity? Aurality and orality were likely central sensory activities of the school experience, as well as central pedagogical techniques. For example, teachers may have sometimes dictated texts for students to transcribe: after all, "A scribe whose hand can keep up with the mouth, he is indeed a scribe!" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 40; Alster 1997, 53). From the teacher's oral instruction to students' recitation of their homework in a Sumerian tongue, from the practice of rhetorical disputation (see chapter 19) to music education, the soundscape of House F cued to the world around it an anomalous sensorial experience and activities taking place in its esoteric interior. An outside observer might overhear an oral performance of a Sumerian composition yet not understand the meaning of the words; the auditory experience thus created was one of social difference, a sense of mysteriousness and otherness arising from the paradoxical position of hearing without listening (in the sense of comprehending). The filtration and partial deadening of sound by the mudbrick walls only added to this sense of inaccessibility both sensorially and linguistically.

Therefore, though certainly not the state-run and many-staffed institutional school complex suggested by the Edubba'a literature, House F may nonetheless have been quite different from the other houses surrounding it—besides the fact, of course, that unlike any of its neighbors it contained thousands of cuneiform tablets. Indeed, in addition

to its soundscape, House F also differed from its neighbors in the experiences of space and visuality it afforded.

Seeing: Too Much and Not Enough

Imagine yourself as a resident of second-millennium BCE Nippur, standing in the street before the entrance to House F. What would you see? Through a succession of three aligned doorways beginning with the unexcavated main entrance (fig. 4.3), ambiguously backlit figures flit across your narrow but deep tunnel of visibility, and sunrays stream into the courtyard beyond the vestibule, the contrasting brightness impairing the penetration of your view into the darker confines of Room 205 in the far back. Is this a normal house? The possibility that an observer in the public street could gaze into the supposedly private back room of House F and gain visual access to it even without (permission for) physical access is a striking anomaly among most Mesopotamian domestic architecture (Brusasco 2007).

Therefore, though in form House F remains a modified but not particularly deviant "courtyard house" (see chapter 3), it does, from a sensory point of view, differ in how it is experienced. It allows a tantalizing glimpse inside the scribal school, even if its activities and participants are only implied in a few shadowy gestures. While the succession of doorways is situated on the right-hand side of the house, most of the action happened on the left-hand side in the intersected rooms, possibly imbuing in the observer a feeling of unfulfilled curiosity about and anticipation for what lay around the corners. Perhaps like the "secret tablet box" of the Sumerian riddle above, these inner spaces embodied the unknown, mysterious, and exclusive. Interestingly, this particular geometrical arrangement of (im)perception (fig. 4.4, left) usually does not occur in domestic contexts. The few exceptions include both House F in Nippur and, curiously, a house at Ur also thought to have been a scribal school (fig. 4.4, right). This floorplan, which directs and circumscribes both outside observers' visibility of the interior and the bodily

Figure 4.3. 3D-model view looking through the doorway of House F toward the sequence of rooms, showing the hypothesized lighting conditions in each. Created by MO.

movements and paths of inside visitors, is more often found in ritual buildings—temples—where the pattern is so common as to have its own name: the "bent-axis" structure.

This observation by no means suggests any ritual function for House F. However, both contexts may share a similar motivation for evoking this sensorial tension between the hidden and the revealed. As a materialization of exclusivity, secrecy, or even power among the in-group of religious elites who circumscribed temple space to control out-group observers' perception and access, the subsequent quoting of this architectural practice in the context of a school may have sought a similar evocation of exclusivity and self-importance indeed central to identity in the scribal "community of practice." Keeping skilled knowledge secret and exclusive is

Figure 4.4. The floorplans of House F in Nippur (*left*) and house Quiet Street no. 7 in Ur (*right*). Red lines represent the similar "bent-axis" structure of both houses. Created by MO based on McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 71; Woolley and Mallowan 1976, 110, fig. 32.

a common cross-cultural feature of craft specialist groups. Again, the frustrating irony of observing without comprehending (like hearing without listening, noted above) is repeated in the form of seeing without seeing enough really to know what happens around corners and behind walls—unless, of course, one is among the select student scribes who physically cross this threshold of tension from outside to inside, entering daily into the physical space of the Edubba'a while also entering daily and increasingly into the affective and moral trappings of scribal identity.

This interpretation applies to the school phase of House F, Level XI (see chapter 3). Interestingly, however, in Level X Floors 3–2, when the building becomes reinhabited as a mere house, the doorway alignments shift, shortening and obstructing the line of sight from an outside perspective. These offset doorways transformed House F into the "typical" sensory environment expected of domestic architecture, finally making it blend in with its neighbors.

Light and Dark: Reading Cuneiform

Now, as one among the limited circle of elite-born children destined for a literate education, you are able to enter the door into House F, your first passage through this space setting in motion your growing sense of identity as part of the scribal community permitted to partake in the "secret tablet box." But what happens next? What will you do, and how will you feel?

Although we cannot necessarily trust every detail of the Edubba'a literature quoted above, certainly the most basic elements of school practice ring true: "'What did you do at school?' 'I recited my

tablet, ate my meal . . .'" (*Schooldays* [Edubba'a A], lines 3–4). But even simply reading one's tablet could be a complicated business sensorially. Often taken for granted today, specific lighting conditions are required for writing and reading cuneiform well. But in Mesopotamia, light comes with heat; in House F, every day may have presented a battle for the scribal student, constantly faced with enduring intense bodily discomfort in the well-lit but eventually scorching courtyard or straining to make sense of shadowed signs in the relief of shade, perhaps in Room 205.

In the final days of the Edubba'a, Level X Floor 4 saw the construction of two mudbrick benches in courtyard 192. Their construction may signal where students had sat previously during Level XI—on the floor but with easy access to either recycled wet clay or drinking water from the baked-brick "box" in the northern corner. Notably, the benches added in Level X Floor 4 are positioned optimally for a balance between light and shadow, between tolerability and readability; the bench against the southeast wall would have been in shadow in the morning, thus shading the students' and teacher's bodies while still providing them enough ambient light to work by. As the day wore on, early afternoon probably forced them inside the refuge of Room 205 or other rooms before resuming their studies in the courtyard once the sun dipped lower and the northwest bench was in shadow. Just as sensory-inclined archaeologists have noted of other Mesopotamian structures, "Darkness and light may have become 'building materials' for creating structures and contrasts serially experienced during movement through the complex" (McMahon 2013, 173).

Touch and Motion: Writing Tablets, Learning the Body

Cuneiform tablets, too, became building materials upholding the very materiality and structural integrity of House F. From the enigmatic bench and box installation against the northwest wall of Room 205 (see fig. 23.1 in chapter 23), to their arrangement in a ring surrounding a vessel sunk into the kitchen floor (fig. 4.5), to each floor layer throughout the house, tablets and tablet fragments served as construction rubble and stand-ins for bricks and were trodden into pieces on the floors. But why would scribal students and teachers seemingly disrespect their own meticulous work by recycling tablets into building materials or fully disintegrating them back into raw clay? How did they understand the value of writing, and was it different from the value of a tablet?

Approaching these questions from the perspective of the body as a constant feature of lived experience shifts our attention to the real people involved in producing the objects they left behind. If the goal of the Edubba'a was for children to transform into learned scribes, then inscribing tablets was a repetitive intermediary practice that aimed to link the original state to the final result. Although it seems natural to think of texts and tablets as themselves containing knowledge, it is instead the persons, the learners, who must somehow come to house knowledge within themselves. Inscribed objects are produced in the process of practicing, or learning by doing, and so are useful to the student while such an object is in the living moment of being actively inscribed. The concept of "object biography" entails that objects have their own lives and life histories, throughout which their meanings and roles change in relation to the people around them. As such, tablets need not have had a singular, static meaning; their meanings changed over time in relation to their use as pedagogical tools or once their pedagogical efficacy expired.

Sensory perception is both a form of individual action, in that it is materially located in and facilitated through the person as an explicitly bodily subject, and a form of learned behavior "socialized" into the individual's bodily disposition. The culturally contingent, socialized set of knowledge and dispositions housed in the body of a person—those things that the body knows before the brain, so to speak—are what we can call "embodied

Figure 4.5. Storage jar sunk into the floor of Room 191, the jar's mouth ringed with discarded tablets. ISACM P. 47258 (3N/212).

knowledge." In light of the treatment of tablets in House F, afforded an unorthodox afterlife in the construction of the house itself, it seems that the point of education, at least in this particular Edubba'a, was not strictly to produce a corpus of inscribed tablets, though certainly those tablets were a necessary side effect of the school's activities. Rather, the point of learning to write was to ingrain the skill—the muscle memory, the motor technique, the knowledge of how to write as both technical and social practice—"within" the person who sought to carry this skill into the future. The point was to embody knowledge.

The embodied memory of the practice of writing lives on in the practitioner. It outlives the specific wedges in the clay that once allowed them to achieve this state but are no longer needed. The skill and art of writing lives now in the body, and external resources such as students' old tablets need not always be preserved as proof of their scribeship, now an internal identity and ability. Indeed, this embodiment was explicitly recognized, even if metaphorically: "A scribe without a hand, a singer without a voice" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 43; Alster 1997, 53). The hand, not the tablet, is experienced as the locus of learning. This is not to say that tablets could not hold prestige value but rather that such values changed over time; and conversely, building tablets into the structure of House F like bricks, or grinding them into dust for the next round of raw clay, need not negate the earlier important roles that tablets played throughout their biographies.

Clay was cheap and available. It was a ubiquitous, inescapable part of the Mesopotamian world. But it was not meaningless. It could be transformed into the grandest of monumental architecture or a

lumpy, lopsided toy figurine, a delicately inscribed tablet or a mudbrick in a humble house (see **cat. nos. 33–35**). Time, effort, and skilled physical techniques—embodied knowledge put in action—allowed clay to take on diverse meanings. But clay objects always remained fungible back to their basic material, the clay assuming one form at a time while already anticipating the next destruction and creation in the cycle, the old form melting into the new. This fungibility meant that the skill and physical actions that initially constructed meaning out of the clay could be easily unraveled; ironically, in House F it was the students themselves who likely facilitated the repeated undoing of their own work through the protracted process of crumbling, macerating (or masticating; see **cat. no. 13**), and reprocessing their tablets into once again raw, pliable clay, all the while reinforcing the transiency and instability of both meaning and material form (fig. 4.6).

However, two constants remained amid the changing meanings and materialities of the tablets produced and destroyed by the students of the Edubba'a. One was their incrementally developing embodiment of technical knowledge (how to write). The other was their social knowledge, as they became increasingly enmeshed in their scribal community, and their expanded understanding of how to enact the identity of a true scribe.

Conclusion

This brief journey into the life of the school at Nippur shows only a glimmer of the rich fabric of experience awaiting future research. The senses are meaningful and cultural; people inevitably establish built material "worlds which *make sense* to them" (Shepperson 2017, 25; emphasis mine). But conversely, people also establish selves that make sense to and in their worlds. The archaeological and textual records of ancient pasts, as the material remains of these sense-making worlds, can offer us a means by which to draw closer to and get to know the sense-making selves who once inhabited them. Into the past we enter blindly—but we might leave it seeing.

Figure 4.6. Obverse of a misshapen tablet fragment cut off from a larger tablet inscribed with a lexical list. The grip left by the hand at the moment of cutting is visible. **Cat. no. 39**. Photo by DL.

Explore Further

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5 Economic Life in the Scribal Quarter of Nippur

Anne Goddeeris

During the third millennium BCE, writing predominantly remained a tool reserved for palaces and temples. Institutional households kept track of their activities via administrative archives. Kings used it in monumental inscriptions for propaganda.

But from the beginning of the second millennium onward, cuneiform writing was increasingly used for recording the transactions of private individuals. Written records became indisputable witnesses of legal ownership, outstanding obligations, and orders given by letter. By the nineteenth century BCE, the advantages of this innovation were widely acknowledged, and its application is attested in all Babylonian cities. All of a sudden, letters, title deeds, loans, and leases informed us about the economic lives of city dwellers.

Archival Documents in the Scribal Quarter

Most of the houses excavated on Tablet Hill at Nippur, including those in which no school texts were found, have yielded small groups of such archival documents (see fig. 3.4 in chapter 3). These documents mainly include title deeds and records of outstanding obligations. Title deeds—sale documents, exchange records, and divisions of inheritance—were kept in the family archive over several generations to certify the ownership of fields, orchards, houses, and cultic offices. When ownership changed hands, the title deeds were passed along with the property in question, thus creating a chain of transmission.

Cat. no. 10 (fig. 5.1; Stone 1987, no. 12) is an example of such a title deed. It contains all the elements essential for a valid proof of ownership: a description of the property (type, size, neighbors), identification of the different parties, an assertion that the silver has been paid, and an oath by the king that the parties will not contest the transaction. As was the custom in Nippur, the title deed concludes with a list of witnesses and the date, was impressed with a newly cut seal identifying the parties giving up their property rights, and was wrapped in an envelope, also sealed. Fragments of this envelope have been preserved (**cat. no. 11**).

Reverse of a field-rental contract, impressed with the seals of people involved in the transaction (see fig. 5.2). ISACM A30136.

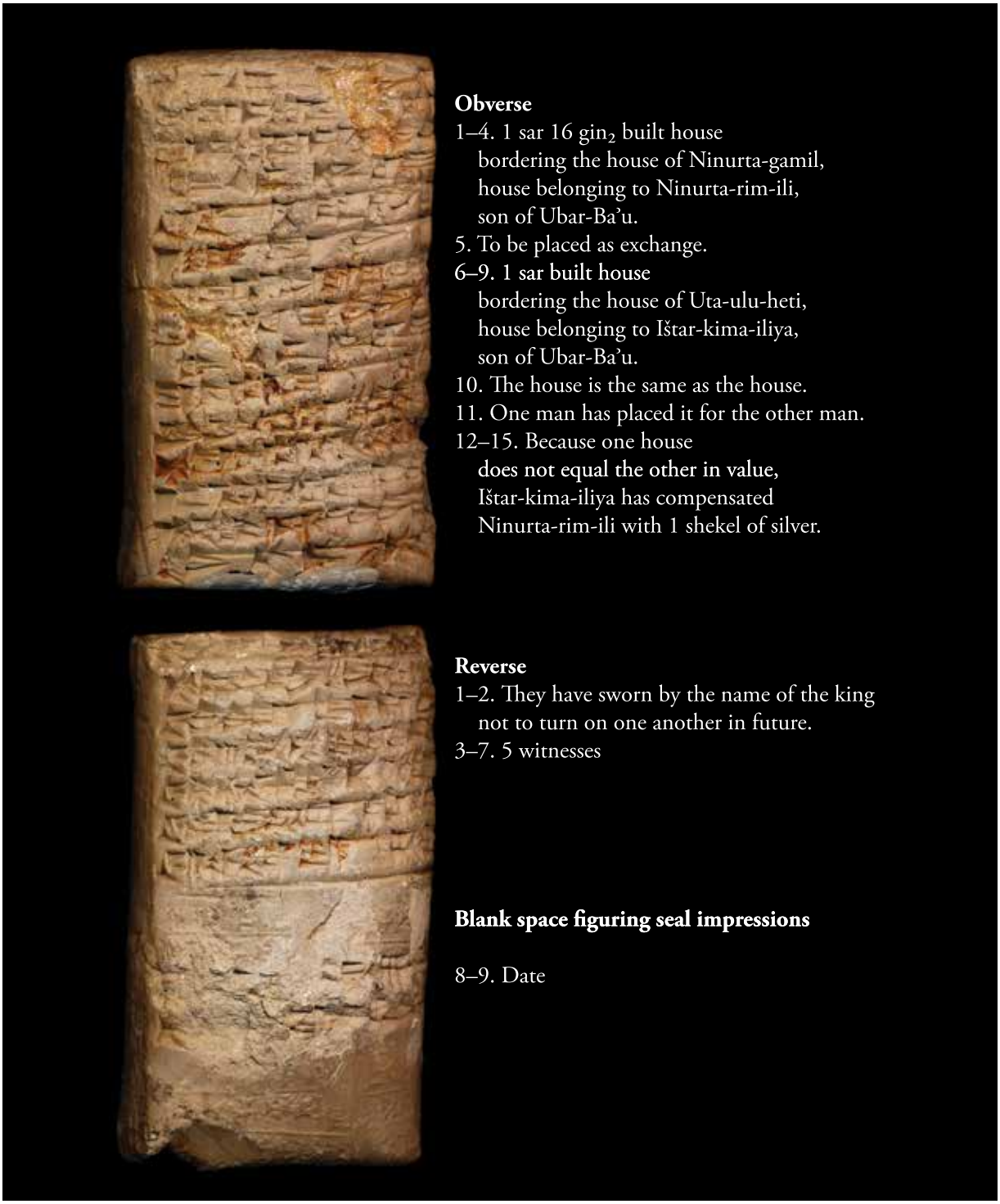

Figure 5.1. Obverse and reverse of a legal record documenting the exchange of two houses. **Cat. no. 10**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; annotations by MDH; translation by Anne Goddeeris.

Figure 5.2. A field-rental contract between Apil-Adad (lessor) and Ili-eribam (lessee), with sealings on all sides of the tablet. ISACM A30136. Photo by DL.

Most marriage contracts and adoption records also functioned as title deeds by listing the properties that the parties (or one of the parties) brought to the transaction. Of course, they also included clauses stipulating the mutual obligations of support between the new family members and the penalties they would face for breach of contract. But marriages and adoptions that did not involve the exchange of sizable amounts of property most often went unrecorded.

Loans and rental contracts were kept by the creditors and real estate owners, respectively, until the outstanding commitments were fulfilled. Figure 5.2, a field-rental contract from the Scribal Quarter, is an example. As on title deeds, the property is described and the parties are identified. However, contracts for leases and loans did not contain an oath by the king, only clauses stipulating the details of the obligations to be fulfilled (e.g., the amount of share in the harvest, the specific commodity, the place and time of repayment). Fewer witnesses were named on such contracts than on title deeds, and the seals impressed on them were not newly made for the contract but already belonged to one of the parties or witnesses.

Since contracts for loans, house rentals, and field leases were meant to be destroyed when they lost their relevance, they have a coarser shape and surface than do title deeds, which were preserved for a much longer time. The former, written in a larger hand, display a more careless alignment.

Despite the existence of written records, transactions could be disputed before a court. Accordingly, family archives also contained court proceedings, and title deeds could also take the form of court decisions.

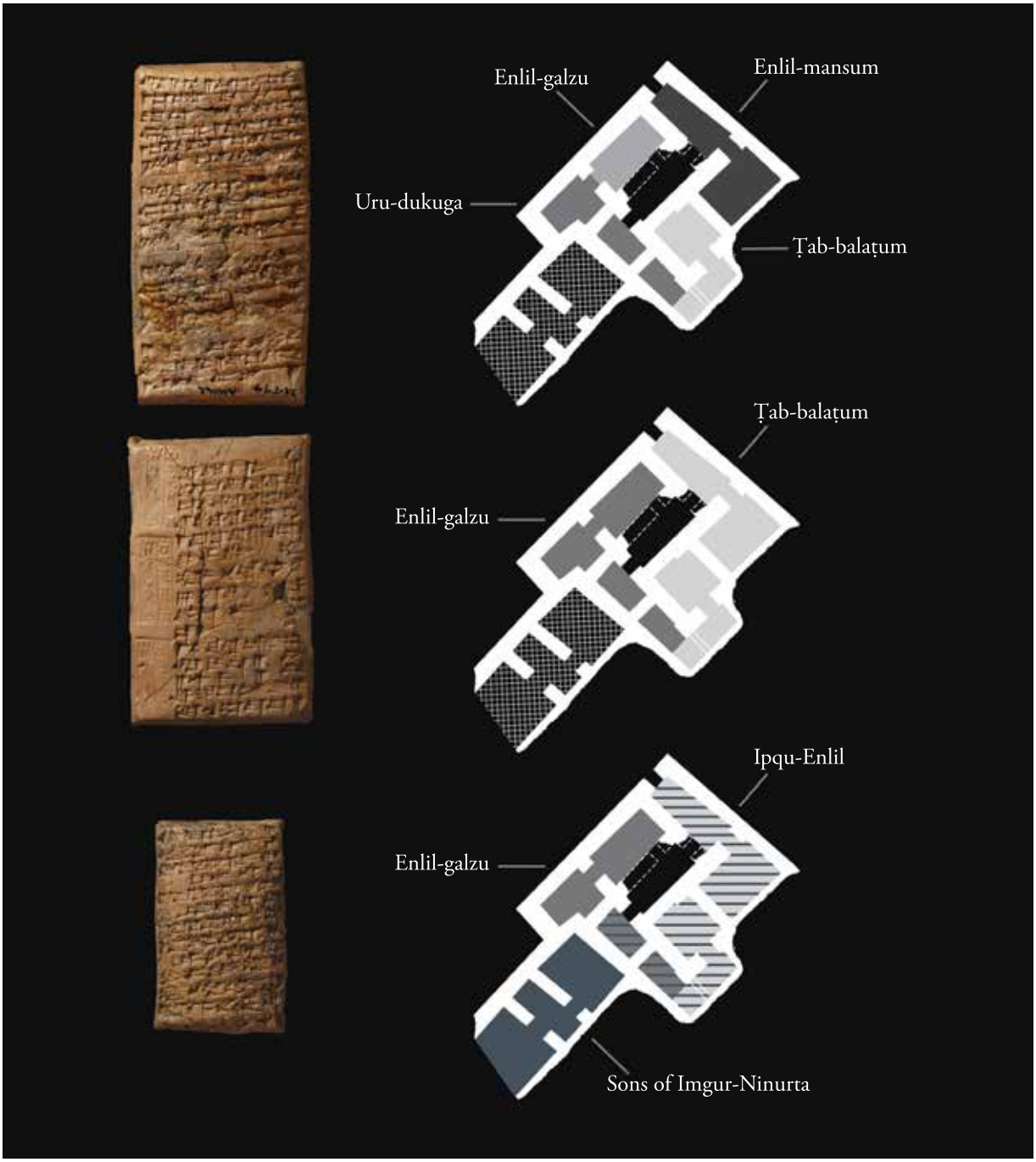

Figure 5.3. Diagram of the ownership changes of House I recorded on tablets ISACM A30142 (*top*), ISACM A30140 (*middle*), and ISACM A3018A (*bottom*). Created by MDH, based on Stone 1981, figs. 2–3.

On the Ownership of the Houses in the Scribal Quarter

In some cases, the archival documents excavated by the Joint Expedition to Nippur have allowed scholars to identify who lived in which houses and even to track over several generations a detailed history of ownership of the parts of a house. Stone (1981) and Charpin (1989, 99–104) have reconstructed how, after the death of Ilum-naši, House I in Area TA was divided among his four sons in keeping with the inheritance procedure of Old Babylonian Nippur, according to which the eldest son received an extra share (fig. 5.3). As often happened in the aftermath of a division of inheritance, two of the brothers, Ṭab-balaṭum and Enlil-galzu, bought their siblings out, thus dividing the house into two plots rather than four. Four years later, one of the remaining owners, Ṭab-balaṭum, sold his combined share to a third party, a certain Ipqu-Enlil, and another four years later, Ipqu-Enlil sold part of this plot to a fourth party, the two sons of Imgur-Ninurta. Ipqu-Enlil was left with one room that did not interest the sons of Imgur-Ninurta. One year later, Ipqu-Enlil exchanged this room for another room of the same size belonging to Enlil-galzu, the only heir of Ilum-naši who still owned his part of the house. Ipqu-Enlil immediately sold this room to the two brothers as well. Finally, one year later, one of the brothers bought the whole plot from his sibling. The house was now divided into two parts, one part still belonging to one of the original heirs and the other part owned by a fourth party. Stone and Charpin were able to correlate the excavated rooms to the parts of the house transferred at various stages.

In the course of these events, the architectural plan of the house underwent several changes. Mudbrick architecture lends itself well to these adaptations. Doorways can easily be created or filled, and walls can be erected to divide rooms. As complex as such cases may seem, they must have been frequent in the residential quarters of Nippur and other Old Babylonian cities. We cannot simply assume that houses remained in the same family. Only when ancestors were buried below the floors of a house—a practice observed in wealthier homes—were families tied more strongly to their residence.

Unfortunately, the most extensive archival dossiers from Old Babylonian Nippur were excavated by the University of Pennsylvania's Babylonian Expedition at the end of the nineteenth century, and the excavation records contain no details concerning their exact architectural and archaeological contexts. Several of the large and well-planned houses in Area TB were largely bereft of finds before the University of Pennsylvania–University of Chicago Joint Expedition could examine them.

The most pertinent question is whether the archival documents found in House F tell us anything about the identity of the individuals writing the school texts. Unfortunately, fewer title deeds than school texts were found in more recent layers of House F; therefore the documents cannot answer this question. According to **cat. no. 10** (see fig. 5.1 above; Stone 1987, no. 12), a tablet found in Room 184, Level XA Floor 1, Ninurta-rim-ili, son of Ubar-Ba'u, was the last owner of House F: in the first year of Iluma-ilum of the Sealand dynasty (right before the written documentation of Nippur comes to a halt), Ninurta-rim-ili gives a 1 sar 16 gin (45.5 square meter / 490 square foot) house plot to his brother Ištar-kima-iliya in exchange for a 1 sar (36 square meter / 387 square foot) plot, which corresponds to the size of House F, plus 1 shekel of silver. This title deed might bear witness to the reorganization of the estate of Ubar-Ba'u, the father of both parties, after his death. **Cat. no. 12** (fig. 5.4; Stone 1987, no. 11), dated thirty-eight years earlier, was found in the same room and relates to the estate of Ubar-Ba'u as well. This document records the division of two temple offices among the brothers Ur-Allamuš, Agu'a, and Ubar-Ba'u. It is probably an addendum to the division of inheritance of their unnamed father, the grandfather of Ninurta-rim-ili, and ended up in Ninurta-rim-ili's house because he had now inherited these cultic offices as well.

Figure 5.4. Obverse and reverse of a title deed documenting the division of two temple offices. **Cat. no. 12**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Management of the Family Estate

Some of the division-of-inheritance records recovered from houses in the Scribal Quarter at Nippur give us an overview of all the properties owned by a given family and show how the estate was managed over several generations. Interestingly, a Nippurean family's most valuable asset did not consist of real estate but rather of cultic offices. These ranged from priestly roles through overseers and musicians to brewers, court sweepers, and doorkeepers, and they came with tracts of agricultural land for subsistence and a share in the temple offerings, not to mention social standing. The temple, shrine, altar, or cultic attribute to which the office was attached also determined its value.

Some cultic-office holders, especially the priests of the temples of Enlil, Ninlil, Ninurta, and Nuska (the divine quartet of Nippur), came up with intricate juristic constructions to prevent their office from being divided—and if that proved impossible, at least to keep it within the family. Cultic offices in the minor temples of Šamaš and Amurrum, on the other hand, appear in sale documents.

Thus, the office of the *paššīšum* priest of Ninlil was the primary asset of the family of Ninlil-ziĝu, who lived in House K in Area TA (Stone 1987, 41; see also fig. 3.2 in chapter 3) and whose archival records span a period of 150 years (Goddeeris 2016, 347–54). In the earliest generation, living around 1880 BCE, the oldest son had to compensate his siblings for the ownership of the *paššīšum* office with fields, silver, and minor cultic offices. Later generations did not own enough property to repeat this solution, and the office became divided and dispersed over several branches of the large family. Although the family kept its high position on the social ladder, its members were no longer wealthy by the eighteenth century BCE.

The family of Mannum-mešu-liṣṣur, another clan from the Scribal Quarter involved in temple management, also went to a great deal of trouble to keep its offices as doorkeepers of various parts of the temple of Enlil, the main temple of Nippur (Meinhold 2015). Family members tried to keep their cultic assets as unified as possible by compensating their siblings, redeeming portions of assets

that had previously belonged to other family members forced to sell them in times of hardship, and probably also pursuing a strategic marriage and adoption policy.

As stated earlier, adoptions and marriages were recorded only if they involved transfers of sizable amounts of property. Besides social factors—such as strengthening social ties, caring for orphans and widows, and taking precautions for one's old age—managing the family estate and entering exclusive social circles may also have played a role in marriages and adoptions. Whereas this system rendered the priestly offices of the main temples of Nippur inaccessible to outsiders, a royal scribe attached to the palace in Babylon was able to become a *nešakkum* priest of Enlil through adoption (Goddeeris 2016, 51–54). It must be noted, however, that this happened at the very end of Samsu-iluna's eventful rule over Nippur, less than three years before written documentation comes to a halt, and that the amount of the compensation paid by the royal scribe to his adoptive family was very high.

The office of *nadītum* also linked the cult of the Nippur temples to social status and management of the family estate, and this institution was widespread among the inhabitants of the Scribal Quarter. *Nadiātum* were property-owning women dedicated to a god, in Nippur most often the city patron Ninurta (fig. 5.5). At their consecration, these women received a share in the family estate of the same size and nature as their brothers, while nonconsecrated daughters received a dowry that did not include landed property. It seems that *nadiātum* could marry but were prohibited from bearing children—although permission to marry may have depended on the god to whom they were devoted. When married to a *nadītum*, a man could continue his family line via adoption or a secondary wife.

In theory, a *nadītum* owned enough real estate to provide for her own needs. Reality sometimes proved different. After selling and redeeming one of her fields, Lamassum, *nadītum* of Ninurta and daughter of Enlil-mansum, adopted an unrelated married woman, Šat-Šamaš. In return for providing support to her adoptive mother, Šat-Šamaš received all landed property belonging to Lamassum, as well as a field belonging to Lamassum's brother. This transaction took place at the peak of an economic crisis, and Lamassum's family seems to have been one of its victims. In ideal circumstances, a *nadītum* could turn to her brothers for support.

The Economic Ups and Downs of Nippur and Its Inhabitants

The archival documents from the Scribal Quarter of Nippur span more than 200 years. The earliest documents remain isolated witnesses of the long and well-established tradition of archive-keeping in Old Babylonian Nippur. The records of the descendants of both Ninlil-ziĝu (Goddeeris 2016,

Figure 5.5. Seal of the woman Maṣiya, daughter of Sin-eribam, possibly a *nadītum*. ISACM P. 47542 (3N/496).

346–54) and Mannum-mešu-liṣṣur (Meinhold 2015) cover a timespan of 150 years, and the oldest title deeds kept in these archives date from the reigns of Sumu-El of Larsa (ca. 1880 BCE) and Lipit-Enlil of Isin (ca. 1871 BCE), respectively. The existence of uninterrupted chains of transmission gives an impression of relative continuity and stability. However, the same cannot be said about the economic ups and downs of the city and its inhabitants in the nineteenth century BCE. Politically, Nippur continually changed hands between the dynasties of Isin and Larsa during this period. In his nineteenth regnal year (1804 BCE), Rim-Sin of Larsa regained control over Nippur and the entire Babylonian Euphrates region, and with this feat he initiated a long period of political stability (see chapter 2). After his death forty years later, Hammu-rabi of Babylon filled the power vacuum with no perceptible break in the city's social or economic fabric. The majority of archival documents date from the reign of Samsu-iluna, Hammu-rabi's successor, who ruled over Nippur until he was evicted by Ilumailum, king of the Sealand, whereupon the archival documentation from Nippur abruptly ends.

The economic problems hovering over Larsa during the second half of Rim-Sin of Larsa's reign (Charpin 2004, 125–26, 384) are undetectable in the archival records of the inhabitants of Nippur's Scribal Quarter. Perhaps the troubles did not reach the clerical circles of Nippur, or perhaps the sources do not mention them. Recognizing economic instability in historical documents is a difficult undertaking. Apart from explicit references in letters or royal decrees, economic crises can be discerned through conspicuously large concentrations of loans or sale documents during a short period. Fluctuations in prices are also good indicators, but since many elements determining the value of a property remain unknown, the evidence gained from the prices of property is circumstantial at best. Also, since archives were regularly cleaned and reorganized, only the more recent phases may offer conclusive evidence in this respect.

Accordingly, we are best informed about economic instability in Nippur during the reign of Samsu-iluna of Babylon. The effects of the territorial and political turbulence at this time are reflected repeatedly in the archival record of Nippur's citizens. Even before the rebellion of Rim-Sin II breaks out (in Samsu-iluna's regnal years 8 and 9), an accumulation of (unpaid) loans can be observed. When Samsu-iluna reestablishes his rule over the city, during his regnal years 11–13, we see an increase in the quantity of sale documents and a decrease in prices (Stone 1977). However, a crisis beats to multiple rhythms, some of which resonate for years. Lamassum's adoption of Šat-Šamaš, a married woman, referred to above, may serve again as an example. In Samsu-iluna's regnal year 22, nine years after Lamassum's adoption of Šat-Šamaš, Lamassum's brother reclaimed from Ṭab-ṣillašu, the son of Šat-Šamaš, the properties lost through this adoption. The properties could be redeemed in return for the expenses incurred by Ṭab-ṣillašu and his father. These expenses are calculated on a unique document, which lists the yearly fluctuating barley prices. During the first six years, the barley cost more than double the standard price; then, "after Enlil had established an abundant rate in the land," barley became much cheaper—by as much as half the standard price (Goddeeris 2016, 367–68). Enlil's establishing "an abundant rate in the land" may be how a scribe in Nippur referred to a *mīšarum* edict, a royal debt cancellation. The Old Babylonian kings used this measure to restore economic balance, and Samsu-iluna had to proclaim at least four *mīšarum* edicts during his eventful reign. In Nippur, these edicts seem to have helped families redeem properties sold in times of hardship, though often a different branch of the family recouped the original family estate.

Conclusion

The inhabitants of the Scribal Quarter in Nippur were closely involved in temple management and derived part of their income from it. With varying success, they tried to keep their family

assets—consisting of cultic offices, agricultural land, and houses—together over several generations. We witness competition within and among the wealthy families of the city. And further, the political and territorial instability during the reign of Samsu-iluna had a direct effect on the economic fate of the citizens of Nippur, as evidenced by the many loans, sales, and redemptions that transpired in that period.

Explore Further

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6 Literacy in the Old Babylonian Period

Dominique Charpin

For many years, the image of a Mesopotamian world prevailed in which the mastery of cuneiform writing was the prerogative of a group of specialists—scribes. Characteristic in this respect was the opinion of one of the great figures of the University of Chicago, Benno Landsberger. More than sixty years ago he wrote:

> One must castigate as false romanticism the conception of the so-called *Priesterweisheit* [priestly wisdom], still to be found in secondary handbooks. The scribes, although a great number of them were deeply religious, were completely a lay group. The priests as well as the kings (not counting some exceptions among the latter), and the governors, and the judges were illiterate. (Landsberger 1960)

This view of an illiterate elite persisted for a long time. In the past twenty years, however, the approach of Assyriologists has changed radically.

The reasons for this change are manifold. The first is theoretical: it has become clearer that there is no direct relationship between the difficulty of a script and the percentage of the population able to master its use. Contemporary Japan, whose script has a large number of signs belonging to two systems, has a lower rate of illiteracy than Western countries with an alphabet of only twenty-six letters. Moreover, Assyriologists have probably overestimated the difficulty of learning cuneiform writing; modern-day graduate students in the academic field of cuneiform studies have to master all types of texts written over three millennia, but in antiquity, for those who simply wanted to read or write a letter, learning was much simpler since it was only a matter of writing down one's mother tongue. However, the paradigm shift comes above all from a factual observation: the number of members of the elite who could read and even write has proven to be large. Beyond Nippur, the evidence from the whole of Mesopotamia in the first half of the second millennium BCE—the period most often referred to as "Old Babylonian"—is now clear.

Stela of the *Code of Hammu-rabi* (see fig. 6.4). © 2009 RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux.

A Literate Clergy

The clergy not only knew how to read and write but also were involved in training apprentices in their homes, as demonstrated by the study of a house excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in the EM quarter of the city of Ur—house Quiet Street no. 7 (see Charpin 1986, 419–34). Archival records reveal that a family of purification priests lived there in the decades before Ur was abandoned by its population in Samsu-iluna's year 12. However, numerous school texts were also found in this house that testify to advanced stages of training (Charpin 2019, 30–32). The house contained no trace of the most elementary phase of learning, such as the *Syllabary* TuTaTi or other syllabaries, but it did contain copies of lexical series and grammatical texts used to teach the Sumerian language. Also discovered there were a number of small, lentil-shaped tablets limited to a few lines, such as an extract of the *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B. A more difficult exercise consisted of copying Sumerian letters, either royal letters or those belonging to the corpus recently named *Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany* by Alexandra Kleinerman (2011). Six mathematical tablets were also discovered, as well as an exercise for calculating the surface of a field. The copying of historical inscriptions constituted one of the typical exercises an apprentice had to practice: three inscriptions of the Akkad period and three of Ur III kings were found, as well as a copy of the *Laws of Ur-Nammu*, two inscriptions of a king of Isin, and three of kings of Larsa. A good number of what are generally labeled "literary texts" were discovered: *Song of the Hoe*, *Farmer's Instructions*, the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B), the *Hymn to Nippur and Išme-Dagan* (Išme-Dagan W), and others. But more interesting in this house is the presence of texts that lack parallels elsewhere. First, it contained five hymns that end with the doxology "Rim-Sin of Larsa, my king." Some of them seem to have been composed on the occasion of the visit of Rim-Sin of Larsa shortly after his victory over Uruk. There are also hymns to the gods Haya and Nanna. Samuel Noah Kramer has summarized the latter as "an hitherto unknown hymn to Nanna . . . according to which Enki plays a major role in the building of the Ekišnugal [the main temple of Nanna in Ur] and its purification, as well as in its diverse rites, particularly those concerned with lustration and purgation" (Gadd and Kramer 1963, 8). The hymn was a way for the purification priests, devotees of Enki of Eridu, to legitimize their presence in the sanctuary of Nanna by reproducing the words and deeds of their divine master. In the same way, an Akkadian composition called *At the Cleaner's* by its first editor is not "a sketch from the life at Ur" (Gadd 1963) but an exercise in Akkadian, in which the god Enki is evoked as the patron of cleaners.

Recent discoveries at Ur have completed this picture: between 2017 and 2022, Adelheid Otto excavated a large residence in the south of the site (Area 5). The first occupant of this house was identified as an administrator of the temple of the goddess Ningal named Sin-nada (Charpin 2019; Stone et al. 2021). Among the tablets discarded during a change of this house's inhabitants in 1835 BCE were school exercises that included elementary texts, such as *Syllabary* A (fig. 6.1); proverbs and extracts from royal hymns, such as the *Praise Poem of Iddin-Dagan* B; and a long extract from the *Lament for Sumer and Ur*. Sin-nada was not only responsible for the management of the temple of Ningal but also able to train future scribes in his home.

Finally, we can cite the case of a house excavated from 1974 to 1979 at Sippar-Amnanum (Tell ed-Der). In the courtyard of this building was a basin containing approximately a hundred school tablets (fig. 6.2).

Michel Tanret has noted that the exercises found are not repetitive, so in his opinion they correspond to the training of a single individual; he identified this individual as Ur-Utu, son of Inana-mansum, a chief lamenter (galamah) who was the last occupant of this house before it was destroyed by fire in year 18 of Ammi-ṣaduqa. Since these exercises do not go beyond the most elementary level of cuneiform learning, Tanret concluded:

Figure 6.1. Fragment of a school tablet inscribed with *Syllabary* A, with traces of remodeling, found in the house of Sin-nada at Ur. Ur 2022-72. Photo by Dominique Charpin.

Figure 6.2. Bin filled with school tablets in the house of Ur-Utu at Sippar-Amnanum. Photo from Tanret 2002, 144, fig. 12a.

> The gala.maḫ should not have been able to write his texts himself, there were professional scribes for that. Because of his high responsibility in the temple and his important social status, he had to be able to ascertain what was written for him. The other, more important part of his "cultural capital" would be provided by the training for his high religious and social function. There can be no doubt about the identity of the person responsible for this teaching. Inanna-mansum had to train his son. This training was obviously not written, but oral. (Tanret 2002, 171)

Wouldn't a chief lamenter have been literate? More recently, Paul Delnero has hypothesized that "the cultic officials responsible for performing cultic laments, known as gala-priests, had to have been able to read and copy the numerous lamentations they performed" (Delnero 2015, 118); this is even more so the case with their hierarchical superior, the galamah. Thus there is a contradiction here: did Ur-Utu really only learn the rudiments of cuneiform writing? However, examination of the stratigraphy shows that the exercises could have been deposited in the basin only at the time of work carried out a few months before the end of the house's occupation. It is unlikely that these were exercises performed by Ur-Utu in his youth, kept for some unknown reason, then suddenly disposed of. It seems more logical to view them as exercises done just before the courtyard was renovated and, following usual practice, recycled right away. So these tablets reflect Ur-Utu's activities not as a pupil but more likely as a teacher: if one considers that the tablets reflect the training of a single individual, one can hypothesize that this individual was a son of Ur-Utu, perhaps the one he was thinking of as his successor (Charpin, forthcoming).

Recent research has thus led to a picture of the clergy that is quite different from the one portrayed by Benno Landsberger: the purifiers, lamentation priests, and administrative officials of the temples all received a high level of training in cuneiform

writing, and they were themselves capable of transmitting it to the next generation.

Administrators: Military and Others

The image of basically illiterate high officials has long prevailed in studies of the kingdom of Mari in the Old Babylonian period. Thus one connoisseur of these archives wrote about the reading of letters: "Written communications were read aloud by scribes to illiterate officials" (Sasson 1995, 607 n. 21). Without being able here to offer an exhaustive list of officials in the kingdom of Mari who were able to read, the idea that those in power depended entirely on professional scribes to have their mail read to them is clearly inaccurate (Charpin 2010). Indeed, several texts show that high officials of Mari were capable of reading or writing letters themselves. For example, in the time of Yahdun-Lim at the end of the nineteenth century BCE, the seal of the main administrator of the palace, Hamatil, describes him as a scribe. A few decades later, under Zimri-Lim, we know that Yasim-Sumu, described on his most recent seal as "chief accountant" (*šandabakkum*), first had a seal on which he bore the title "scribe" (*ṭupšarrum*). The steward Mukannišum, whose importance in the management of handicrafts is well known, is referred to as a scribe in one text and as a steward in another; his case is not unique.

What was the case for the provincial governors? A letter from Yassi-Dagan is interesting for the distinction it makes, among the governors of Qaṭṭunan, between uneducated persons and the recipient of the letter, Iluṣu-naṣir, a scribe by training: "Previously, Akin-urubam the Bedouin was vested with the function of governor in Qaṭṭunan, then it was Iddin-Annu, a fool with no experience, who was installed there" (see Charpin 2010, 14). Yassi-Dagan's letter proceeds to enumerate the misfortunes he suffered under these two governors and expresses his hope that everything will change thanks to the competence of the new arrival: "Now [it is] you, a clear-eyed scribe who, since your early childhood, were brought up at the gate of the palace" (see Charpin 2010, 14). How to interpret such a description? It suggests that not all governors were able to handle cuneiform. But one must consider the flattery contained in this letter: its author criticizes the previous holders of the post because he had not been able to obtain anything from them and pins all his hopes on the new governor.

Many army officers were also able to read, if not write. We have proof that the general Yasim-El could read; Zimri-Lim sent him secret tablets with the instructions: "Read these tablets yourself and give them to Himdiya" (fig. 6.3). The precise command given by Zimri-Lim shows that Yasim-El normally had his mail read by a scribe. In this case, because it was a confidential matter, he had to read the tablets himself and then literally "make Himdiya hear them," that is, read them aloud to the king to whom he had been sent on a mission. Other texts allow us to see that not only generals but also lesser officers were able to read.

Examination of the letters sent to the king of Mari, Yasmah-Addu, by his chief musician Rišiya allowed the editor of the tablets to distinguish several hands: the letters with the most personal tone are all by the same hand, possibly that of Rišiya himself (Ziegler 2007, 98). Other members of the royal entourage were able to read and write, including Dariš-libur, Zimri-Lim's barber.

In Palaces

The palaces of the Old Babylonian period have only rarely yielded school tablets. Room 24 of the palace of Mari, interpreted by André Parrot as a school, was actually a storehouse in which jars were stored and documents belonging to the archives of the merchant chief Iddin-Numušda were found (Charpin 2015, 215). That school tablets were found in the palace of Sin-kašid in Uruk and in that of Enlil-bani in Isin, however, shows that some apprentice scribes were trained within the palace walls even if most of them were trained outside, as at Mari in the house of "Chantier K" (Cavigneaux and Colonna d'Istria 2009, 52–53; Nicolet 2016).

Princes themselves could receive an education in writing. Evidence comes from the residence

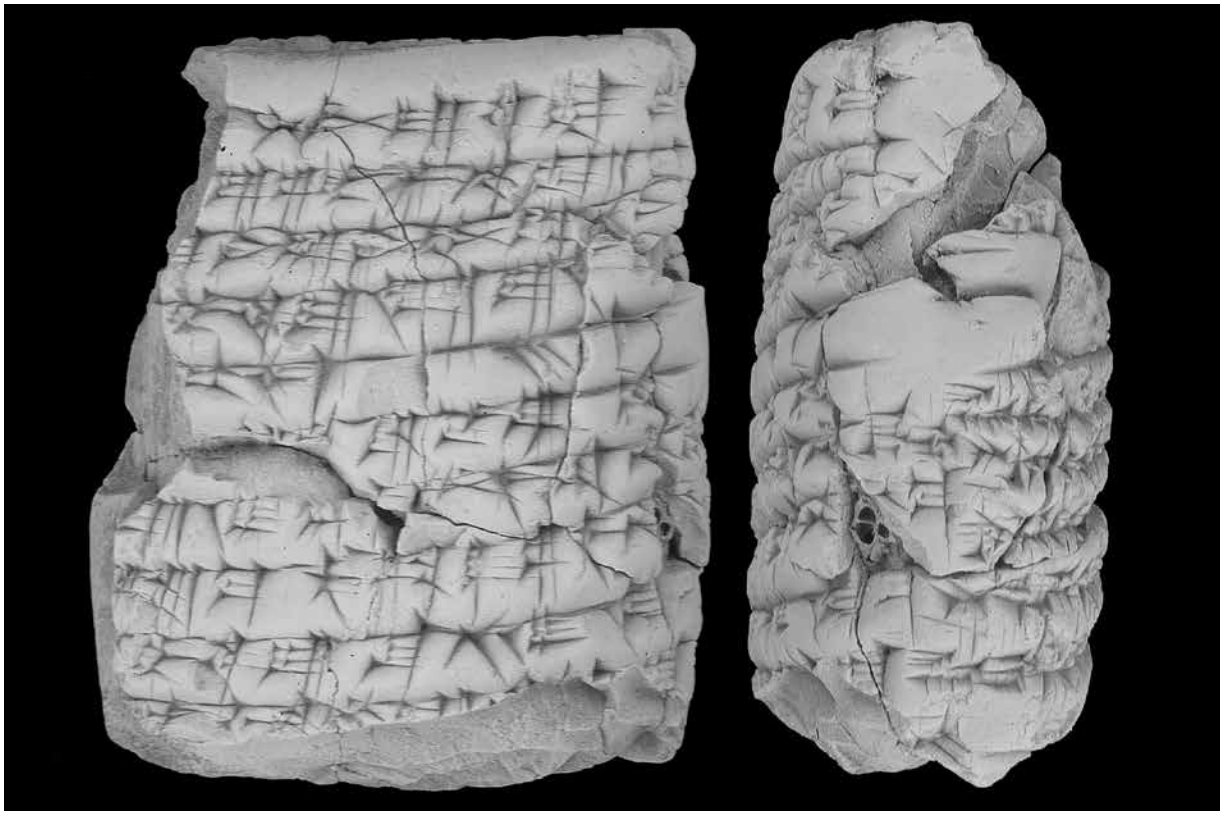

Figure 6.3. Obverse and right-hand edge of a letter written by the general Yasim-El to the king of Mari, Zimri-Lim. ARM 26/2 429 (M.7338). Photo courtesy of Archibab.

of "Chantier A" at Mari, where three school texts were discovered. Since the school texts date from the building's last phase of occupation, they should perhaps not be linked to the time when this small palace was inhabited by the diviner Asqudum (Charpin 1985). We know that Queen Šibtu resided there with her twin sons, Hadni-Addu and Šubultum, toward the end of Zimri-Lim's reign (Ziegler 1997), and one cannot exclude the possibility that these school texts were used by those royal children when they learned to write.

A letter from Zimri-Lim to his steward Mukannišum might give the impression that this king of Mari knew how to read, but the interpretation of the text is not certain (Charpin 2010, 18). Zimri-Lim is depicted as choosing the inscription to be engraved on a statue for the temple of the god Addu of Aleppo. Two drafts were composed, the first by a certain Nab-Ištar, the second by another scribe whose name has not been preserved. The king wrote to Mukannišum:

> Hence, as for the votive inscription to have written (on the statue), quickly send me the votive inscription that (name$_1$) made, as well as the one made by Nab-Ištar, so that I may see them and have the votive inscription I have chosen taken (to you).

Note the use of the verb "to see": if Zimri-Lim did not wish (or was unable) to read the two texts personally, he might have expressed himself differently—for example, "so that I can have them read to me."

The Reading of Royal Inscriptions

Assyriologists have often viewed the texts of royal inscriptions as works of "propaganda." But many of the ancient media used did not allow the kings'

subjects to access these texts: some inscriptions were engraved on door sockets buried under passageways, for example, and others on bricks inserted into walls whose facades were covered with plaster. However, some texts were intended for public display. One of the most famous is the *Code of Hammu-rabi* (fig. 6.4). In the epilogue of this text, the king of Babylon gives his ideal instructions for its use:

> May the wronged man who faces trial come before the statue of me as king of justice, may he read my inscribed stela, may he hear my precious words, may my stela show him his case, and may he see its verdict.
>
> *Code of Hammu-rabi*, column 48, lines 3–17

Traditionally, the passage has been translated using the phrase "may he have my inscribed stela read out," but the text actually says "may he read." The next words show that the king envisions someone as reading aloud to himself ("may he hear . . ."). How could a mere subject of Hammu-rabi have been able to find his case among the 275 laws in the code? Doing so would have been especially difficult given that the stela's layout includes no guidelines. Nonetheless, we must dismiss the idea that the people of the kingdom could not read the stela because they were illiterate.

A text from Mari dispels this notion. In it, the chief accountant, Yasim-Sumu, writes to his master, King Zimri-Lim:

> I have just sent to my lord the inscription for the chariot of the god Nergal and the inscription for the palanquin of the god Itur-Mer. Should the inscription of Nergal be written on the front or on the back of the chariot? May my lord reflect on the fact that the inscription should be inscribed on the back

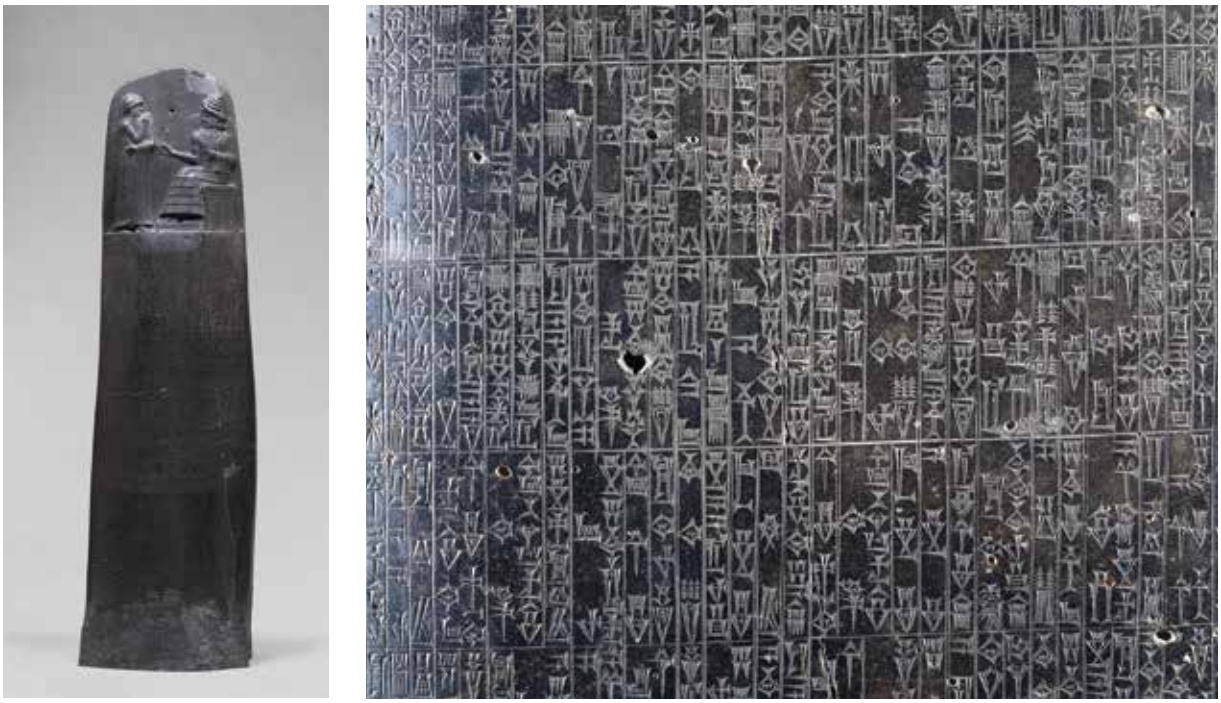

Figure 6.4. Stela of the *Code of Hammu-rabi* originally from Sippar (*left*) and detail of the inscription written in archaic script (*right*). © 2009 RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux; © 2002 Musée du Louvre / Raphaël Chipault.

> of the chariot, where the coat of arms is located, so that whoever will [see][2] it and the reader can read it. Also, should the inscription on the palanquin . . . be written on the front or on the back? May my lord write me one or the other, so that before my lord's departure these inscriptions shall be engraved.
>
> (See www.archibab.fr/T6837)

This letter from Mari has the dual advantage of being more realistic as well as less suspect in terms of ideological motivation than the passage from the *Code of Hammu-rabi* cited above. It seems clear that, in Yasim-Sumu's mind, some of the people assembled along the future procession route would have been able to read these inscriptions.

What about Women?

Female scribes are occasionally attested in the Old Babylonian period in two particular contexts. The first is the world of the temples: among the *nadītum*-nuns (see chapter 5) of the city of Sippar, some had obviously learned to write cuneiform, and a woman belonging to this milieu identifies herself as a scribe (Lion 2011). Moreover, within the palace harems, the scribes were women (Ziegler 1999)—two of them kept accounts of the food consumed in the palace of Mari (Ziegler 2016). We also know that the dowry of princesses sometimes included a female scribe among the maids assigned to them.

A house excavated at Sippar (Abu Habbah) between 1978 and 1982 revealed a vase containing a hymn to the god Marduk, school texts (so far unpublished), and debt records in the name of Tarib-ilišu and her sister Humṭi-Adad, who was a *qadištum*-nun. One has the impression that all these tablets were destined to be recycled—the usual fate of school exercises—and one can suppose that the same was true for the debt records, which predated Samsu-iluna's year 8 and thus had been canceled by a royal edict. Although it is unclear what connection Humṭi-Adad had with these school tablets, one of them is a model fostering contract, and at this time *qadištum*-nuns were involved in the fostering of children, at whose birth they sometimes assisted (Barberon 2009).

Conclusion

A reading of private correspondence from the Old Babylonian period supports the impression gained from the abovementioned dossiers: neither the sender nor the receiver needed an intermediary to write or read the missive. Of course, only members of the elite had recourse to writing, but the fact that literacy was so widespread in the Old Babylonian period probably explains why the widest range of documents is available from this period—and why literature in the Babylonian language proliferated so rapidly and remarkably.

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Syllable Alphabet B

Lists of personal names

List of Hides (part of Ura)

Acrographic List Izi

List of Simple Signs (Ea)

List of capacity measures

List of Compound Signs (Diri)

Model contracts

Proverbs

7 Reconstructing the Elementary Nippur Curriculum

Niek Veldhuis

Old Babylonian scribal education has been reconstructed using two types of sources. First, several literary texts in Sumerian are set in a scribal school and give an impression of how a school day evolved, including how pupils interacted with school staff and with each other. One such text starts with an unnamed character's asking, "Boy, are you a pupil of the scribal school?" After an answer in the affirmative, the protagonist proceeds to ask about the customs of the school—a thinly veiled excuse for the boy to describe a full day, from early morning when he gets up to go to school to the moment when he comes home and proudly shows off his achievements:

> When I go to the scribal school,
> while the night is in its first watch, I wake up and eat.
> After I have eaten,
> after I grab my stylus, my exercise tablet, my supplies,
> and the things one needs at school,
> while humbly being on my way to the scribal school, I do not look around.
> When I enter the scribal school,
> my clothing is straightened, and one prostrates oneself.
> . . .
> When the pupil of the scribal school has entered his father's house
> he calls out about his exercise tablet to his father, his mother, his sister, and his brother:
> "Take it! Touch it!"
>
> *School Regulations* (Edubba'a R), section A, lines 9–16; section D, lines 23–25

The text tells us that the pupils recite multiplication tables and word lists to each other, that the master and the "big brother" (an advanced pupil) correct exercises, and that the pupils bow before Nisaba, the goddess of writing. But the composition also talks about daily chores, such as fetching water, sweeping, and sprinkling water, and even describes ordinary activities, such as eating, drinking,

Teacher–student exercise tablets found in House F, showing how, through the progression of the content written on each side, they enable scholars to reconstruct the first phase of the curriculum. **Cat. nos. 26**, **27**, **31**, **29**, and **32**, shown to scale. Image by MDH.

and urinating. Not surprisingly, the school staff speaks primarily in imperatives, and the pupils do what they have been told.

We know of several such "schooldays" compositions, which provide a lively but hard-to-understand picture of life at a scribal school (see also chapter 4). Particularly difficult to judge is how realistic the descriptions are and how much of their content reflects exaggeration, irony, or rhetoric. The pupil in our text claims that he gets up at the first watch of the night (before midnight) to have breakfast and be on his way to school. This assertion sounds industrious and ambitious, but also implausible. Furthermore, the text mentions a large number of staff members—besides the schoolmaster and the big brother, we learn about "the one of the courtyard," "the one of the water," "the one of the tamped floor," "the one of the water jug," and several others. These mentions are puzzling, for excavated sites of scribal teaching (see chapter 3) are very small and would not accommodate so many people. Among the staff in our text is a person called the "You all give it to me" man, which may be a nickname that schoolboys gave to their masters but does not give us any insight into the organizational structure of a typical scribal school.

A very different kind of data for understanding the ancient scribal school is offered by the material remains that actual school activity has left behind (see chapter 3). Such remains include exercise tablets written by scribal pupils at various stages of their education. We have evidence of a student's very first attempts to use a stylus on clay (fig. 7.1)—not because someone chose to preserve such an exercise for posterity but because students did their work on clay and, under the right circumstances, clay is almost indestructible.

Scribal exercises from the Old Babylonian period have been found at many sites in southern Iraq, and there are many other such texts of unknown provenience. From Nippur alone we currently have more than 3,000 exercises, ranging from very early scribbles to advanced lists of words, proverbs, and model contracts. The quantity of this

Figure 7.1. Round tablet found at Nippur in Area TB, locus 41, Level D, inscribed with a series of simple wedges written over another scribal exercise. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. UM 55-21-28.

material from Nippur allows us to understand this method of education in great detail and to reconstruct the order in which exercises were introduced. In current scholarly literature, this order is referred to as the "Nippur curriculum" for a number of reasons. First, Nippur may have been an important intellectual center in the Old Babylonian period, and one text states explicitly that the Nippur school was the most important school in the area. For our purposes, it is not so much its scholastic reputation that makes Nippur special but rather the abundance of material that comes from that site. Most other sites that have been properly excavated have yielded exercise tablets, but usually only a handful at most. Although the exercises from these other sites demonstrate that school traditions were similar all over Babylonia, they were certainly not identical. For example, whereas in Nippur a list of divine names was introduced among the advanced word lists, in Uruk and at other centers similar lists were copied at a much earlier phase of scribal training. Second, and related to the first point, the concept "curriculum" may invoke the idea of a school board

or other administrative unit enforcing a particular sequence of learning content, but such was certainly not the case in Babylonia. Schoolteachers were private citizens who had undergone scribal education themselves and took some students on (perhaps their own children) to transmit the craft to the next generation. The relative uniformity of this education across Babylonia was not the result of government regulation but rather of a shared sense of suitability or propriety. We can show that even within Nippur there were differences, usually minor ones, in how teachers approached their job.

By the Old Babylonian period, Sumerian was a language of the past, yet the exercises in the scribal school focused on Sumerian much more than on Akkadian, the vernacular of the time. Although scribes, after graduating, would be tasked with writing letters and administrative texts in Akkadian, only a tiny fraction of what they learned at the scribal school prepared them for those duties (see chapter 10). The main focus was on the Sumerian language, the Sumerian writing system, and Sumerian cultural heritage.

In the early stages of scribal education, exercises were mainly written on two very distinct types of tablet: the round or "lentil" type, and the "teacher–student" type. Both types feature an example text by a teacher or advanced pupil and a copy of that text by a student. Round tablets (fig. 7.1) were most likely taken home to showcase one's progress (as in the quote above). Teacher–student tablets provide an extract of five to twenty-five lines from a standard textbook. The teacher wrote this extract in the leftmost column of the tablet, often in a beautiful and elaborate hand, leaving one or two columns open to the right for the pupil to copy his example. After doing so, the pupil would erase his work by removing a thin layer of clay and then copy the teacher's example again, repeating this process until he knew the passage by heart. As a result, we have several exercise tablets whose right-hand side—where the pupil wrote and erased—is much thinner than the left-hand side—where the teacher's example was written (**cat. no. 19**) (fig. 7.2, left). Much more frequently, however, the tablet would break when the right-hand side became too thin, so that what we have today is only the left- or right-hand side. A good example is **cat. no. 29** (fig. 7.2, right), which looks like a long rectangular tablet but in fact preserves only the left-hand portion of the original tablet, which was approximately three times wider than what we see today.

Most important for our purposes, the reverse of a teacher–student tablet was used by the pupil to write out something he already knew by heart. Thus **cat. no. 4** (fig. 7.3) preserves on the obverse the teacher's example with an extract from the list of Sumerian place names (marked with the determinative ^{ki} ). Most of these places are known to be outside Babylonia, places such as Gubin (presumably in the Zagros Mountains), Magan (today's Oman), and Meluhha (the Indus Valley). The lines represented here are lines 250–56 of the *List of Geographical Names* (part of Ura) that includes field names, place names, water names, star names, and (as a kind of appendix) words for ropes. The list in its entirety has been reconstructed by modern scholars from dozens of such extracts, with a total of 431 lines.

The reverse of this same tablet is badly damaged, but enough is preserved to show that it contains an extract from the *List of Domestic Animals* (part of Ura), specifically, the sections dealing with the Sumerian terminology for oxen, cows, and calves. The extract started with the entry "ox" (gud), which is line 174 in scholars' current reconstruction of the list, and extended to "white calf" (amar babbar), which is line 233. It thus had a length of some sixty lines divided over three columns of text.

The fact that the extract from the list of animals is found on the reverse while the list of geographical names is on the obverse shows that the list of animals was introduced before the list of place names, and that the pupil who wrote this tablet could copy the list of animals without the benefit of a teacher's model because he already knew it by heart. This arrangement (animal vocabulary before

Figure 7.2. Obverse and reverse of two teacher–student exercise tablets found in House F: **cat. no. 19** (*left*, photo by DL) and **cat. no. 29** (*right*, courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI). Image by MDH.

geographical names) is confirmed by other such exercise texts. For other combinations in the order of the curriculum, see page 66 and table 7.1.

Cat. no. 27 shows that the *List of Hides* (part of Ura) was studied after lists of personal names, and **cat. no. 26** indicates that *Syllable Alphabet* B (a very elementary sign exercise) was studied before lists of personal names. All in all, there are more than 800 teacher–student tablets from Nippur for which both obverse and reverse can be identified. Together, they allow a good reconstruction of the curriculum's order:

Sign exercises (see chapter 8)

- *Syllable Alphabet* B 317 lines
- *Syllabary* TuTaTi 116 lines

Lists of personal names (see chapter 8)

Thematic Lists of Words **(Ura), consisting of:**

- *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* 706 lines
- *List of Reeds and Reed Objects*, including pottery, clays, leather objects, metals, and metal objects 657 lines
- *List of Domestic Animals, Wild Animals, and Meat Cuts* 506 lines

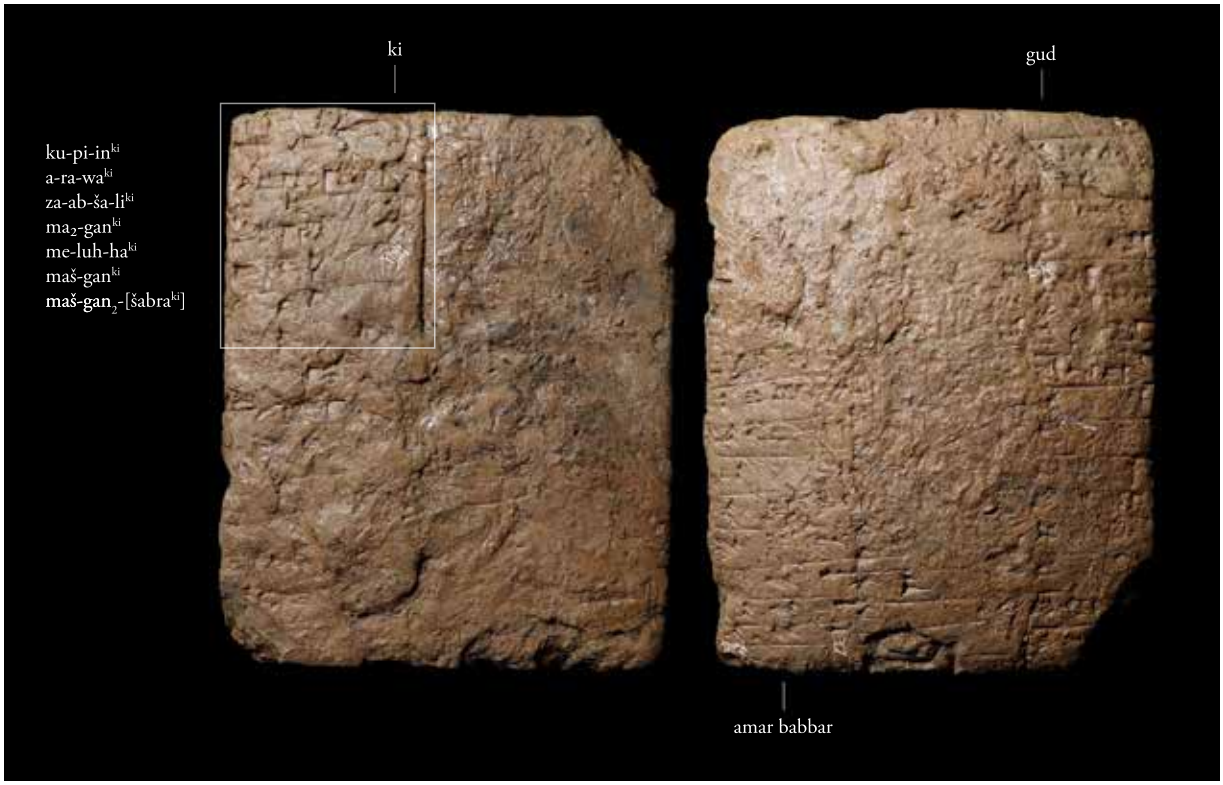


Figure 7.3. Obverse and reverse of **cat. no. 4**. The obverse contains a teacher–student exercise of the *List of Geographical Names* (part of Ura). On the reverse the student inscribed a portion of the *List of Domestic Animals* (part of Ura). Photos by CM; annotations by MDH.

Table 7.1. Overview of the teacher–student exercises from House F, showing how their structure allows scholars to reconstruct the curriculum.

Tablet	Obverse	Reverse
Cat. no. 26	List of personal names	*Syllable Alphabet* B
Cat. no. 27	*List of Hides* (part of Ura)	List of personal names
Cat. no. 28	*List of Simple Signs* (Ea)	List of personal names
Cat. no. 4	*List of Geographical Names* (part of Ura)	*List of Domestic Animals* (part of Ura)
Cat. no. 29	*List of Compound Signs* (Diri)	*List of Simple Signs* (Ea)
Cat. no. 20	*List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)	List of personal names
Cat. no. 19	Multiplication tables	*List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)
Cat. no. 30	List of capacity measures	*List of Body Parts* (Ugumu)
Cat. no. 31	Model contracts	*Acrographic List* Izi
Cat. no. 32	Proverbs	List of capacity measures

- *List of Stones, Plants, Fish, Birds, and Textiles* 626 lines
- *List of Geographical Names* 431 lines
- *List of Foodstuffs* Length unknown

Advanced lists (see chapter 9)
- *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) 918 lines
- *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) Length unknown
- *List of Gods* (Nippur God List) 268 lines
- *List of Body Parts* (Ugumu) About 300 lines
- *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) 847 lines
- *Acrographic List* Izi More than 1,000 lines
- *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal) 550 lines
- *List of Things* (Niĝga) 578 lines

Numerical lists (see chapter 13)
- Multiplication lists
- Metrological lists

Proverbs (see chapter 12)

Model contracts (see chapter 14)

This sequence of exercises follows a logical progression: the sign exercises focus on individual signs, while the various lexical lists (lists of personal names, thematic lists, and advanced lists) focus on the next larger unit—a word or brief expression. Proverbs and model contracts introduce fully fledged sentences, but they are essentially structured as lists, so students copied one proverb or one model contract after another in a fixed sequence.

The order of the curriculum for the advanced lists is not as clear; apparently after finishing the thematic lists, the order of the exercises became much looser. Most interesting among the advanced lists is the position of the *List of Simple Signs* (called Ea after its first line). Cuneiform signs usually have more than one reading, and those readings are enumerated in the list of simple signs. Thus, the sign (IB) may be read ib, uraš, or $dara_2$ depending on the context. In the list of simple signs, this is represented as follows (lines 592–94, where each line begins with a single vertical wedge):

	ib_2	IB
	da-ra	IB
	u_4-ra-aš	IB

Each of these sign readings is used in a particular context: the reading ib is found as a verbal prefix, $dara_2$ means "belt" and is usually preceded by the determinative for leather objects ($^{kuš}dara_2$), and ^{d}uraš (with the divine determinative) is a deity. Such information is not included in the list. It may have been provided by a teacher, but one can also imagine that students at this stage already knew it. When this list was introduced, students had already copied long lists of personal names and thousands of Sumerian words in the thematic lists. The *List of Simple Signs* (Ea), therefore, does not introduce new material but instead systematizes information that students have already acquired. Information about signs, sign forms, and sign readings was thus initially introduced in the very first stage of education (sign exercises), reinforced in copying lists of personal names and thematic lists, and finally systematized in studying the list of simple signs.

After studying all these lists, proverbs, and model contracts, the students would finally start copying Sumerian literary texts: hymns to gods and kings, narrative texts about gods and heroes, and lighthearted texts such as the debate between the hoe and the plough—in *Hoe and Plough*—about which is the more useful tool (see chapters 15–20). The curriculum, as we have reconstructed it above, culminated in the study of Sumerian literary texts—the heritage with which the students were supposed to identify, written in a language that was accessible to them but not to the general public. The lexical texts, proverbs, and other exercises prepared the students to master the vocabulary and grammar necessary to engage vigorously with this heritage. Surprisingly, however, the lexical exercises

provided a vocabulary that far exceeded what the students would find in the literary material. For example, the list of birds had about 115 entries, but only about 30 were ever used in the literary material. The Sumerian heritage that was transmitted to the next generation of scribes included not only the literary texts but also all aspects of Sumerian language and writing.

Scribal pupils, such as the boy at the beginning of this chapter, suffered through an excessive number of signs and words not only to acquire the ability to read, copy, and study Sumerian myths and epics but also to become experts in Sumerian. The overkill of the lexical texts shows that the curriculum was designed to preserve every aspect of the Sumerian language, Sumerian writing, and Sumerian literature.

Explore Further

Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts. http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/.

Veldhuis, Niek. "Elementary Education at Nippur: The Lists of Trees and Wooden Objects." PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1997.

Veldhuis, Niek. *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Tradition*. Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record 6. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014.

8 Learning the Basics: The First Steps at School

Klaus Wagensonner

In contrast to ample depictions of scribes and their writing utensils (Schnitzlein 2023, 85–126), there is no portrayal illustrating the preparation of the writing medium. There is no evidence of scribes having taken pride in creating their writing materials. Therefore, modern research must rely on a scant few ancient descriptions and on modern scientific analysis of artifacts to determine their character and composition (Taylor and Cartwright 2011, 297–300; Schnitzlein 2023, 38–53).

The few surviving descriptions we have from Mesopotamia of how tablets were manufactured are terse and usually riddled with uncertainties. One among them, a bilingual school exercise, states the following:

> [Qu]ick, come here, take the clay,
> knead it, flatten it,
> [calc]ulate (the amount needed), fold it (over itself),
> reinforce the core, form (the tablet),
> [. . .] plan it, [. . .] hurry, [. . .],
> lift up the flap-clay, trim it off.
>
> *Bilingual Teaching*, lines col. i 5′–10′ (Taylor 2011, 12)

As brief as these instructions are, they confirm some of the observations we can make about textual artifacts. On many broken tablets it is easy to spot an inner core, often made of a different, coarser type of clay, and in some periods a thin layer laid on top is clearly recognizable (see, e.g., Ryholt and Barjamovic 2019, 18, fig. 1.5). On being asked what he did at "school," the pupil responded, "I made my tablet, wrote it, and finished it" (*Schooldays* [Edubba'a A], line 5). Even though this text is a literary reflection on schooling and education in the early second millennium BCE, young scribes surely prepared their exercise tablets in the same place where they learned how to read and write. We can assume that in the course of his career, a young scribe would learn to make all sorts of clay

Small prism inscribed with *Syllable Alphabet* B, an elementary writing exercise practicing syllables. **Cat no. 41**. Photo by DL.

media: lenticular tablets, rectangular one-column tablets, larger multicolumn tablets, and prisms (see fig. 1.5 in chapter 1).

The First Days at School

The modern observer is often amazed when confronted with a cuneiform tablet—at how hundreds of impressions of a stylus at different angles can make up an intelligible text and how complex ideas can be conveyed on a malleable medium such as clay. The first days in the life of a young scribe, probably at age five or six (Volk 2011, 272–73 with n. 17), must have been overwhelming. It is probably mere coincidence that some of the earliest exercises survive in the archaeological record, as they were certainly not meant to be kept for posterity. Many of these exercises were destined, quite literally, for the trash, to be recycled and reused. Occasionally they also served as suitable filling material for benches and walls, or they could even be used, as in House F, to construct the walls of recycling bins (see fig. 23.1 in chapter 23).

The Sumerian word for "writing utensil" is giduba, literally "tablet" (dub) "reed" (gi). A reed stalk, cut down and split, could provide raw material for many styli. It was certainly only one of the raw materials used. From Sippar in northern Babylonia comes evidence that bone served this purpose as a more durable material; there, a group of such styli was found in the old archive room in Inana-mansum's house (Cammarosano 2014, 62–63). In a nearby courtyard, a recycling bin made of fired bricks contained more than thirty exercise tablets (Tanret 2002, 4–6; see fig. 6.2 in chapter 6). The exercises cover the very basics: simple sign exercises, syllable lists, and extracts of thematic lists.

The first exercise the student had to master was holding the stylus correctly and impressing it into the damp clay repeatedly. Exercises from Nippur and elsewhere, often on crudely formed lumps of clay, demonstrate the students' early attempts. A round tablet from Area TB in the Scribal Quarter (see fig. 7.1 in chapter 7) nicely illustrates that a new student probably just got admitted to the "Tablet House." This tablet is a palimpsest, a text written by the instructor for a student who already knew the basics; it was reused and covered with numerous wedge impressions.

Recycling or reusing tablets was probably a common sight in the day-to-day business of House F, and three recycling bins built of baked bricks evidence this practice (see fig. 23.1 in chapter 23). A much later literary source, the so-called *Examenstext* A, hints at how important this basic exercise was; it states, "The onset of the scribal art is the single wedge." This statement could not be more to the point, as the single wedge is indeed the essential building block for any cuneiform sign (fig. 8.1). Perhaps related, elementary exercises of the first millennium BCE are often framed by decorative rows of single-wedge impressions (fig. 8.2).

Holding the "tablet reed" correctly was not a mundane matter and certainly required some practice. Writing cuneiform tablets was a job for two hands, and neither tablet nor stylus was in a steady position. For the typical early school exercise, the round tablet was ideal for this purpose since it could

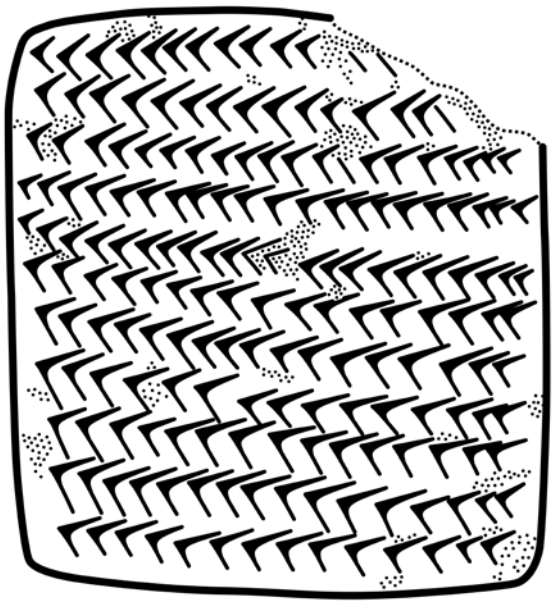


Figure 8.1. Reverse of an exercise tablet from Nippur with single-wedge impressions. UM 29-15-846. Drawing by Klaus Wagensonner.

Figure 8.2. Exercise tablet dedicated to the god Nabu with decorative borders and divisions made of single-wedge impressions. YPM BC 002842, EAH 197. Photo by Klaus Wagensonner, courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, Babylonian Collection.

be easily rotated in the pupil's hand. Hence we can assume that a left-handed individual could write a tablet as easily as a right-handed person. Larger tablets and other inscribed clay artifacts, however, may have favored right-handedness.

Syllables

How quickly a student could move on to the next exercises certainly depended on how gifted the student was and on the "persuasive" skills of the instructor. Here, one is reminded of a line from a composition dubbed *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A) by its first editor: "My master said, 'Your hand(-writing) is not good,' and beat me" (line 41). It was time for the student to engage with more complex signs. The instructors in Nippur and elsewhere drew from a body of syllable lists that were suitable for this next stage in the curriculum. One of the syllable lists used in teaching is mentioned in another literary source portraying schooling in this period. This text lays out a road map for the student:

> You recite and write out the Sumerian and Akkadian tablets from the *a-a me-me* list to the [. . .].
> You write out various lines from the Inana-teš list [i.e., the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš]
> to the "Wild Animals of the Plain" as far as the *lu = ša* list [i.e., the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)].
>
> *Scribal Activities* (Edubba'a D), lines 1–14

The text referred to here as "a-a me-me" is one known today as *Syllable Alphabet* B. From House F alone we know of seventy manuscripts preserving this text; it was the go-to list for instructors at Nippur. The list's entries contain combinations of simple signs. Every few entries, a new sign is introduced and combined with previous signs. Its first entries are a-a, a-a-a, a-ku, a-ku-ku, me-me, me-me-a, pap-pap, and so forth. Most of the examples from House F are extracts. Among the Nippur exercise tablets are also a few manuscripts containing a sort of index that lists the signs of this syllable exercise in the order of their appearance (Veldhuis 2014, 146–47).

Students must have spent quite a bit of time on this exercise. A noteworthy example of it is a small, four-sided prism from House F that contains a longer extract from *Syllable Alphabet* B (fig. 8.3). Each side is divided into two columns. The script is still rather crude and suggests an inexperienced hand—further confirmed by the erroneous turning of the prism after the scribe had finished the first side (see **cat. no. 41**).

Much more widespread outside Nippur was another exercise dealing with syllables. Its first entries are me-me, pap-pap, and a-a and thus reminiscent of *Syllable Alphabet* B. Although much shorter than its cousin, this so-called *Syllable Alphabet* A exhibits a fascinating story of transmission. While it was used as a scribal exercise in the first half of the second millennium BCE and is thus found on different types of exercise tablets (figs. 8.4 and 8.5), in one baffling occurrence of this list we find it "attached" to a creation myth from Assur

Figure 8.3. Four-sided prism containing an extract of *Syllable Alphabet* B. **Cat. no. 41**. Photos by DL.

dating to the thirteenth century BCE: the entries of *Syllable Alphabet* A run in a separate column alongside the literary composition, whose Sumerian and Akkadian versions are arranged in columns. Even though this tablet contains a colophon marking it as "secret knowledge," the association of the myth with a list of syllables was not a whimsical way for an Assyrian scribe to confuse modern researchers. An earlier version of the myth from Isin, but only in Sumerian and dating roughly to the same time as House F, sandwiches the myth between a column of *Syllable Alphabet* A and a corresponding column of Akkadian terms associated with these syllables. As has been aptly shown, the two compositions form a unit (Cavigneaux and Jaques 2010). Probably no scribal student in House F or elsewhere who was attempting to impress the stylus and form his first written syllables could have imagined that the text he was painstakingly memorizing and writing would be used as a source for speculative philology (Veldhuis 2014, 220–22; Boddy 2020, 109–13).

What is surprising, however, is House F's lack of another well-known list of syllables, the *Syllabary* TuTaTi. Although its absence could be attributed to chance of discovery, more likely this list was not part of the curriculum taught in this location. In any case, from a pedagogical point of view the *Syllabary* TuTaTi merits comment here. The list, named after the first sequence of syllables, is otherwise well attested at Nippur. Its structure is easy to recognize—each group consists of three syllabic signs with alternating vowels: tu ta ti, nu na ni, bu ba bi, and so forth. Usually, after each sequence the preceding entries are summarized. Some exemplars of this list continue with elements of Akkadian names or expressions relevant for Akkadian letters (see chapter 10). The text in figure 8.6, a tablet that certainly originates from outside Nippur, is a short exercise containing four triplets without summaries.

One other list warrants a few remarks: the so-called *Syllabary* A (not to be confused with *Syllable Alphabet* A discussed above). Although attested at Nippur, examples of this sign list come mostly from northern Mesopotamia. Early exemplars of it are simple lists of signs, sometimes

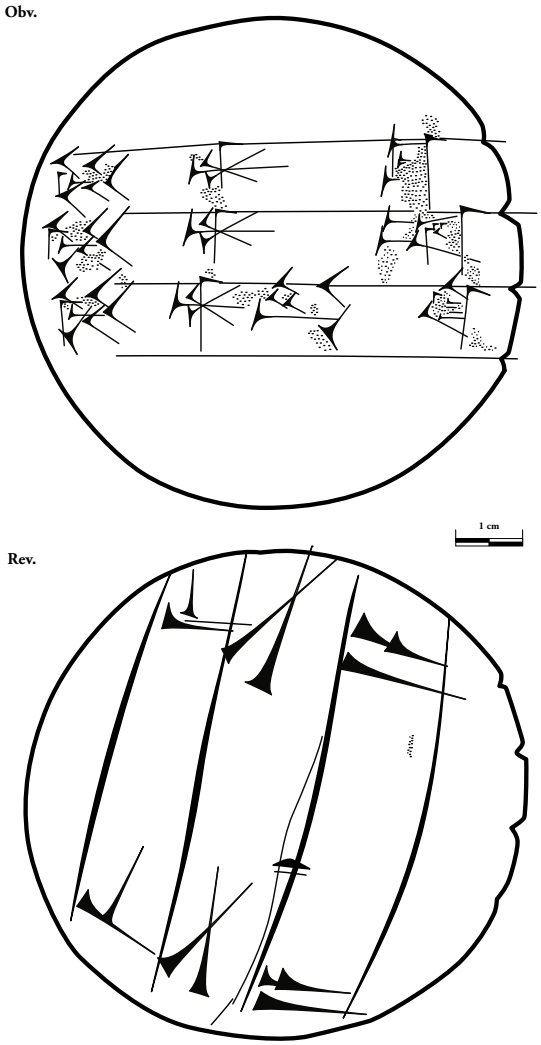


Figure 8.4. Lenticular tablet with instructor's model text on its obverse, three personal names starting with the element 𒂗 "maidservant" (geme), and the student's exercise of the first three entries of *Syllable Alphabet* A on its reverse. YPM BC 004280, NBC 1308. Drawing by Klaus Wagensonner.

repeated, in which the repetition corresponds to the different readings of a given sign (fig. 8.7). The later examples often add information such as the associated readings. This sign list eventually became the main exercise for students to study their first meaningful signs.

Later scribes modeled two new types of texts on the entries of *Syllabary* A. One type comprises collections of paleographic sign forms, which aim

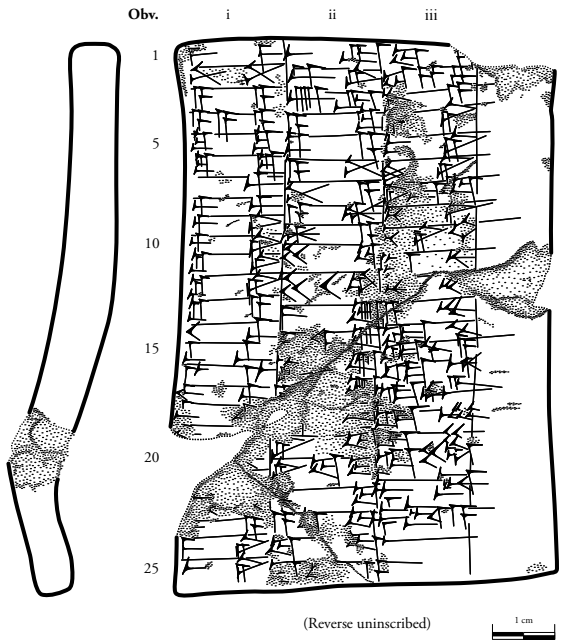


Figure 8.5. Small tablet with long extract of *Syllable Alphabet* A. The tablet was deformed already in antiquity. YPM BC 020868, YBC 6802. Drawing by Klaus Wagensonner.

to render cuneiform characters from an earlier stage of script, often annotated with contemporary signs. The other type is the so-called "number–syllabary," which pairs signs of *Syllabary* A with numerals written in sexagesimal notation. In the first millennium BCE, this numerology triggered sportive writings that used numbers to represent cuneiform signs, particularly in personal names.

Personal Names

Archaeologists found more than eighty copies of lists of personal names in House F. Together with the examples of *Syllable Alphabet* B discussed in the previous section, these lists formed the first phase of the curriculum taught here (Robson 2001, 48). Writing personal names for scholarly purposes is not a novelty of the second millennium BCE. Already by the mid-third millennium, several extensive lists of names circulated in the scholarly community. They were inscribed on large rectangular or square tablets and later also on multifaceted clay prisms and

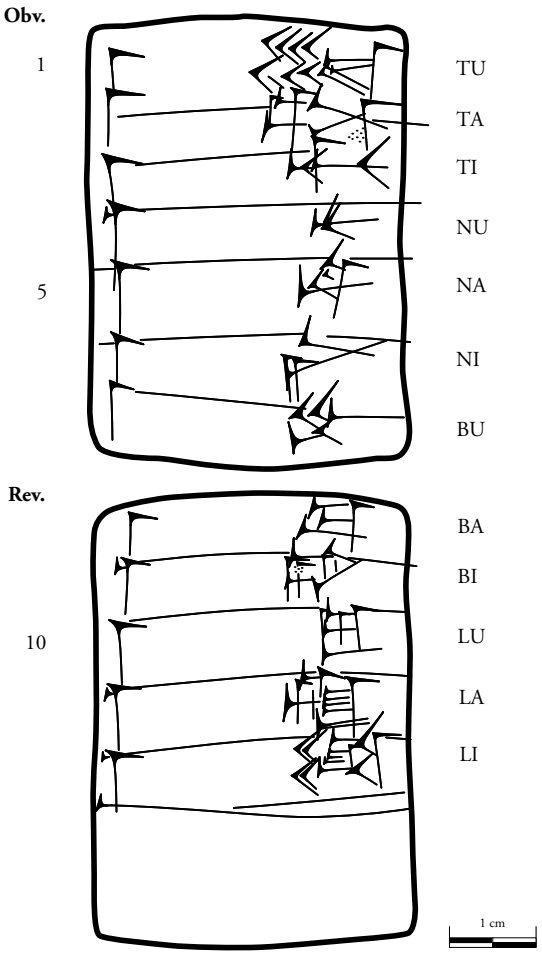


Figure 8.6. Obverse and reverse of a tablet inscribed with the *Syllabary* TuTaTi. YPM BC 012526, NBC 9560. Drawing by Klaus Wagensonner.

Figure 8.7. Obverse of a tablet fragment inscribed with a section of *Syllabary* A. YPM BC 001531, MLC 1533. Photo by Klaus Wagensonner, courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, Babylonian Collection.

clay cylinders. These collections of early (Sumerian) names must have appeared alien to the eye of the Old Babylonian apprentice, if he ever encountered them. A large unpublished tablet dating to the first half of the second millennium BCE contains a compilation of several ancient compositions, among them three name lists that were compiled hundreds of years earlier. It is unlikely that this tablet was the product of a school. Like collections of third-millennium BCE royal inscriptions, it seems more plausible that such manuscripts were part of a library. These early lists and the names they contain are fundamentally different from the lists copied by students in the first half of the second millennium BCE and later.

Instructors chose from a wide variety of lists. The go-to list for the masters and "big brothers" (advanced pupils) of House F was obviously one starting with the name Inana-teš, "(Goddess) Inana is (my) pride." The striking feature of this list is that it is composed almost entirely of short sections of three entries each and is thus suitable for short extracts on lenticular tablets. It features sections on Sumerian, Akkadian, and even Amorite personal names (Peterson 2011, 248–49). As an example of a triplet, one may cite the names Nur-ili, Nur-iliya, and Nur-ilišu, which translate to "Light-of-god," "Light-of-my-god," and "Light-of-his-god," respectively (fig. 8.8).

Figure 8.8. Obverse of a multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš, with the example of the short section of names highlighted. **Cat. no. 44**. Photo by DL; annotation by MDH.

Instructors could also choose from other lists of Sumerian and Akkadian names. Some of these lists are organized according to the initial sign used. The *List of Personal Names* Lu-Enlil contains three long sections with Sumerian names starting with the elements 𒇽 (lu) "man," 𒈗𒇽 (lugal) "king," and 𒋀 (ur) "servant." There were different compositions in circulation that dealt with names starting with the latter element, ur. Some of these lists were more advanced than others. The *List of Personal Names* Ur-ki, for instance, was probably introduced only when the student had to tackle more advanced material, such as sign lists or metrological lists. The *List of Personal Names* Ur-aba was probably another of these more advanced texts, as demonstrated by a teacher–student exercise from House F (Peterson 2021b, 37).

On the same level as syllable exercises stands the *List of Personal Names* Ur-Nanše, predominantly attested outside Nippur. The few attestations from Nippur suggest that it was a beginner's list of personal names following *Syllable Alphabet* A. Students inscribed the list on different types of exercise tablets. The example in figure 8.9, a rather misshapen tablet, shows clear signs of reuse: a previous extract was erased and the writing surface reused for a new extract, probably by the same student. Erased entries on the reverse of this tablet, which are still partially visible (indicated in gray outlines in fig. 8.9), are entries that in the complete list occur directly before those that were written on the extract last.

Several other compositions that circulated in and around Mesopotamia are attested only outside the Nippur "schools." Although otherwise very different, two of the lists start similarly. One begins with the names Ur-me, Ur-teš, and Ur-a, and the other with Lugal-me, Lugal-teš, and Lugal-a. The

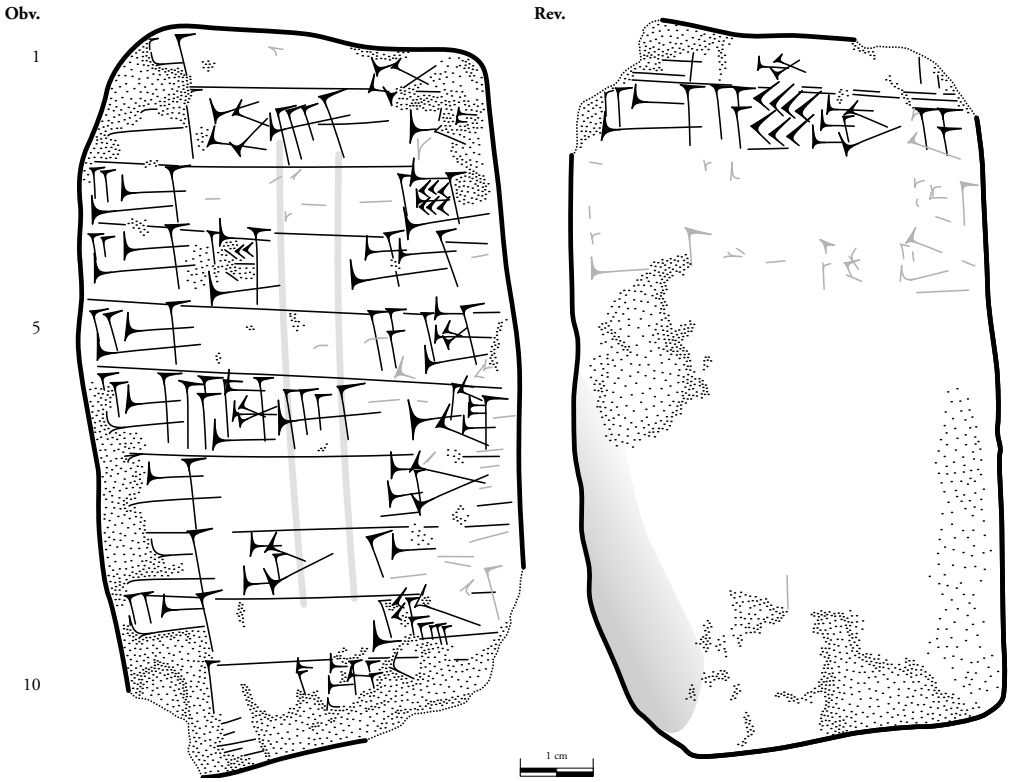


Figure 8.9. Obverse and reverse of a tablet inscribed with a short extract from the *List of Personal Names* Ur-Nanše, with erased entries from an earlier exercise. YPM BC 016723, YBC 1981. Drawing by Klaus Wagensonner.

latter was recognized only recently as a list in its own right (Wagensonner 2022). Most of the exemplars of this list are short extracts on lenticular tablets; in all cases, the entries start with the element 𒈗 "king" (lugal). One prism, which probably dates to the end of the third millennium BCE, preserves major parts of this name list. Its summary mentions 212 lugal-names (fig. 8.10). Many of these names are short and well attested in economic and legal texts of the last third of the third millennium BCE. Other names are very elaborate and span several lines. This list—which, parallel to Ur-me, can be referred to as Lugal-me—has surfaced in many places and was even copied in neighboring Iran.

Both the *List of Personal Names* Ur-me and *List of Personal Names* Lugal-me list only Sumerian personal names. But in the brief discussion of the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš, we have already seen that Akkadian names were not absent from the basic curriculum.

Figure 8.10. Different manuscripts of the *List of Personal Names* Lugal-me. Photo by Klaus Wagensonner, courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, Babylonian Collection.

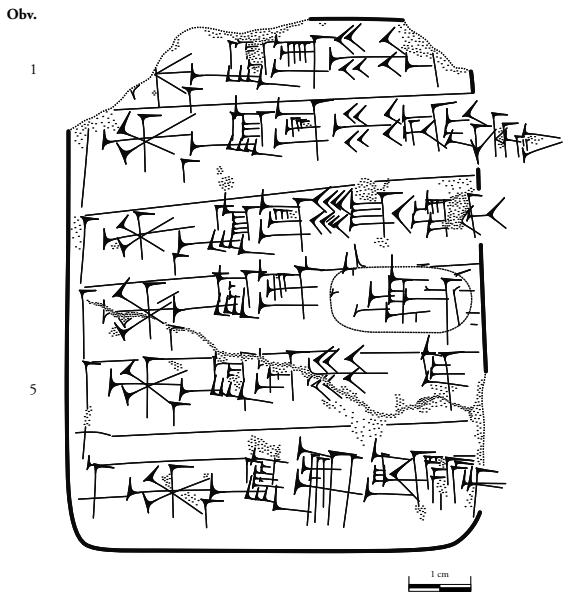


Figure 8.11. Obverse of an exercise tablet with Akkadian names. YPM BC 019472, YBC 5408. Drawing by Klaus Wagensonner.

Although attested on lenticular tablets, short extracts of Akkadian personal names are also often inscribed on rectangular tablets. The tablet in figure 8.11 is a fine example of such a simple exercise. Written in archaizing sign forms, it lists twelve names, all but two of them beginning with the name of the moon god Sin; the remaining two start instead with the name of the sun god Šamaš. The organization of such texts and the exact sequence of the names listed are not always clear. Since these names are not attested in the same order in larger compendia, it is likely that such exercises were ad hoc lists dictated to the student. The use of archaizing script, the numerous erasures, and the still somewhat inexperienced scribal hand are clearly indicative of a student's practice piece.

Conclusion

By memorizing and writing out syllables found in the basic exercises discussed in this chapter, the student was aptly prepared for the next steps on the arduous road to mastering the scribal arts. Up to this point, the young apprentice would have engaged with a wide spectrum of signs, though not necessarily their many different readings and meanings. The second large corpus of basic knowledge, the lists of personal names, represented the first texts that contain Sumerian and Akkadian grammar. For the first time, the apprentice encountered combinations of signs forming meaningful expressions, such as the Sumerian name Lugalašuma, "the king is granted authority," or the Akkadian name Sîn-muštešer, "the moon god is the one who makes prosper." By completing this basic training, the student was now ready to tackle the Sumerian lexicon.

Explore Further

Peterson, Jeremiah. "The Personal Name Lists in the Scribal Curriculum of Old Babylonian Nippur: An Overview." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 101 (2011): 246–73.

Taylor, Jon. "Tablets as Artefacts, Scribes as Artisans." In *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Cultures,* edited by K. Radner and E. Robson, 5–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Wagensonner, Klaus. "The List Lugal-me, Some Preliminary Notes." *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 2022, no. 1: 31–38.

9

Complex Lists: Between Didactics and Erudition

Marta Díaz Herrera

Lexical lists were a fundamental pillar of scribal education in ancient Mesopotamia. Dating as early as the late fourth millennium BCE, lexical lists are among the oldest cuneiform texts found in Mesopotamia and the earliest scholarly texts attested in human history. In Old Babylonian scribal schools, they were used to introduce students to both the Sumerian language and the overwhelmingly large repertoire of cuneiform signs at their disposal. As a result, almost all the lexical compositions that archaeologists have recovered from Old Babylonian sites, including House F in Nippur, are school exercises.

Although lexical lists had been around for more than a thousand years, most of the lists excavated from House F were composed in the Old Babylonian period. The early second millennium BCE saw the blossoming of lexical compositions as pedagogical tools and as modes of scholarly expression—to the point that a new, Old Babylonian lexical corpus was created (Veldhuis 2014, 223). This corpus continued to be copied over the centuries and eventually evolved into the so-called "canonical series" of the first millennium BCE, which proved essential for the early decipherment of cuneiform writing in modern times.

From Words to Signs: What Are Complex Lists?

The concept of a complex or advanced list is a modern scholarly construct used to distinguish the more advanced lists of words and signs, which were introduced during the third phase of the scribal curriculum, from simpler lists such as syllabaries and lists of personal names, which were taught at the initial stages of education (see chapter 8). These complex lists contain hundreds—in some cases even thousands—of lines providing, in their most complete format, the appropriate orthography, pronunciation, and meaning of Sumerian words or cuneiform signs (fig. 9.1).

Generally speaking, complex lists are classified into two types: word lists and sign lists. Word lists concentrate on the orthography and meaning of Sumerian vocabulary, while sign lists focus on the reading and meaning of cuneiform signs.

Obverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu). **Cat. no. 47.** Photos courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI and by CM; virtual join by MDH.

Figure 9.1. Obverse of a tablet with six columns inscribed with half of the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea), which comprised 918 lines during the Old Babylonian period. **Cat. no. 52**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Further, word lists are subdivided into thematic or acrographic lists based on the principle that internally organizes their entries—semantic or graphic, respectively. Thematic lists arrange words according to their semantic field or subject and group thematically related words together. Acrographic lists organize words according to the graphic form of the first sign used to write them. As such, all entries or groups of entries in these lists begin with the same sign (fig. 9.2)—somewhat similarly to sign lists. Indeed, sign lists are primarily organized according to the shape of the signs, generally progressing from simpler to more complex forms and grouping signs that look alike into "families."

Six standardized complex lists were mainly copied in the advanced phase of lexical education: the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), *Acrographic List* Izi, *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal), *List of Things* (Niĝga), *List of Simple Signs* (Ea), and *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) (Crisostomo 2019b, 79).

Figure 9.2. Tablet fragment inscribed with a section of the *List of Things* (Niĝga). The sign 𒁹 (niĝ) "thing" is repeated at the beginning of every entry, thus visually structuring the list. ISACM A30273. Photo by CM; annotation by MDH.

More than a hundred copies of these compositions were found during the excavations at House F (Robson 2001, 48–49, table 3). However, our knowledge of these lists is incomplete, as some of their parts have not yet been fully reconstructed, and some tablets and fragments still await identification. Moreover, we know that these lists were not the only ones copied at House F or elsewhere. Scholars have identified copies of other, apparently less popular lexical compositions in this Nippurean school (Robson 2001, 48). The much larger number of copies of the six standardized lists tells us that the teacher in charge of instruction at House F clearly preferred them.

The *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)

The *List of Professions and Human Beings*, which we call "Lu" after the first entry in the list—𒇽 (lu) "person, man"—is the most frequently copied thematic word list discovered in House F. This composition comprises almost a thousand entries and focuses on the human world in listing titles, functions, professions, kinship terms, and other human activities (fig. 9.3).

Figure 9.3. Obverse and reverse of a carefully written five-column tablet inscribed with the first half of the thematic *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu). **Cat. no. 47**. Photos courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI and by CM; virtual join by MDH.

Sometimes, however, Lu also includes words that at first seem out of place. For example, in the section on scribal professions preserved in **cat. no. 47**, the profession of the  (gabsar) "engraver" is followed by the entry  (musara) "inscription," which in turn precedes the word  (dubsar) "scribe." In this sequence, "inscription" does not immediately fit the theme of professions and human beings, so why is it included? As it turns out, this sequence can be explained by various structural principles. Even though Lu is organized primarily by theme, it also makes use of graphic analogy to determine which entries to include (Crisostomo 2019b, 83). To return to our example, one of the tasks of the gabsar "engraver" was to engrave inscriptions on objects such as stelae, cylinder seals, and statues; hence the word "inscription" is inserted because it can be considered a by-product of human action—in this case, the result of the engraver's professional activity. Furthermore, the second sign of both gabsar and musara is SAR; thus "inscription" is also attracted by this graphic connection. The same interplay of semantic and graphic analogy is subsequently established between musara "inscription" and dubsar "scribe," since inscription is associated with writing—the main skill of a scribe—and the sign SAR is also used to write dubsar. In fact, the use of SAR in these three terms is not casual, as the word sar actually means "to write" in Sumerian.

The *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) mostly follows a unilingual, Sumerian format—a common feature it shares with acrographic lists (Veldhuis 2014, 162). However, scholars believe that lexical compositions were most likely taught in a bilingual manner, even in cases where Akkadian meanings were not written down (see chapter 10). **Cat. no. 48** may reflect this practice: this prism

fragment preserves a section of Lu that apparently repeats—as many as seven times—the same Sumerian word, 𒋼 (kar). Crucially, in every entry, the word is preceded by a gloss in Akkadian. Thanks to these glosses, we know that the repetition of this word is motivated by the existence of several homonyms in Sumerian, each of which has a different rendering in Akkadian (fig. 9.4). The presence of these Akkadian glosses has led scholars to assume that Akkadian was the underlying language of instruction for these lists but that students only selectively wrote down the translations for specific passages.

Remarkably, this combination of thematic, graphic, and bilingual principles allows Lu to contain words other than nouns, such as the verbs "to run" and "to take away," which were also written and pronounced 𒋼 (kar) (fig. 9.4). This feature once again sets Lu apart from the other thematic lists, which exclusively contain nouns, and brings it closer to the acrographic lists (Veldhuis 2014, 162).

The *Acrographic List* Izi

Another complex list closely related to Lu is the *Acrographic List* Izi, which is a list of simple and complex words. This list seems originally to have functioned as an appendix to two other thematic lists, the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura) and the *List of Human Beings and Professions* (Lu), as it deals

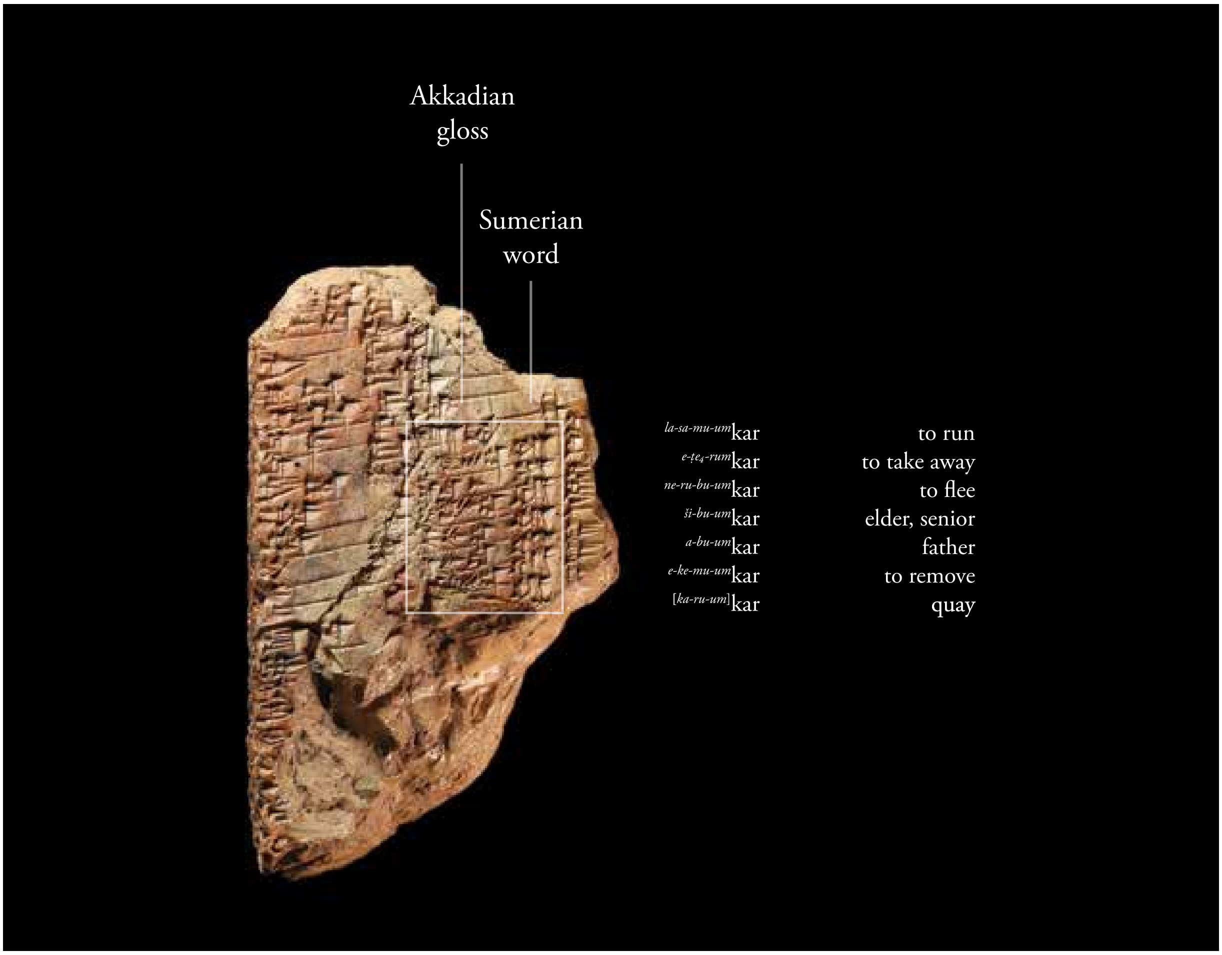


Figure 9.4. Fragment of a prism inscribed with the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), with Akkadian glosses in superscript to the Sumerian homonyms of kar. **Cat. no. 48**. Photo by CM; edition and annotations by MDH.

with various topics that fall outside the scope of these other lists (Civil 1971, 3). Izi is the longest and most frequently attested list in Nippur. In its most complete version, it is usually divided into two tablets (fig. 9.5). The first tablet begins with  (izi) "fire" and the second with  (a) "strength." Jay Crisostomo (2019b, 93–112) has identified as many as eighty-three sections in this list, all following a wide range of organizational principles. Certainly, even though Izi is primarily an acrographic list, acrographic and thematic sections alternate across its more than a thousand lines, with multiple analogical criteria triggering the transitions between its entries (Civil 1971, 7–9; Veldhuis 2014, 170; Crisostomo 2019b, 79–80).

Interestingly, Izi is the lexical list whose vocabulary is used most often in Sumerian literary compositions, especially in the *Decad* and Enheduana's poems. However, whether Izi was created as a pedagogical aid to teach these Sumerian literary compositions or whether these compositions drew from the lexical material collected in Izi is, at present, impossible to know (Crisostomo 2019b, 195–97).

The *List of Things* (Niĝga) and *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal)

The most acrographically organized lexical composition is the *List of Things*, named "Niĝga" after its very first entry, (formerly read niĝ-ga, now

Figure 9.5. Obverse and reverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the first section of the *Acrographic List* Izi. **Cat. no. 56**. Photos by CM.

niĝ-gur) "property." This list was likely taught after Izi, as was the *List of Gates and Buildings*, which scholars call "Kagal" after its first entry  (kagal) "gate" (Crisostomo 2019b, 192). In Nippur, both lists had a fairly stable structure, with various sections defined by the initial sign of their entries, but they also frequently displayed variations in the order of the individual entries and their Akkadian glosses (Veldhuis 2014, 166, 170; Crisostomo 2019b, 125). The *List of Things* (Niĝga) consisted of six sections, the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal) of three sections (table 9.1). Even though these sections were substantially longer than those found in Izi, the lists themselves consisted of only about 500 entries each—half the length of Izi.

In terms of their contents, the two lists diverge. The *List of Things* (Niĝga) is consistently acrographic, with very few thematic analogies and only a few instances in which the first sign is displaced to a noninitial position. In contrast, the first section of the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal) forms a thematic unit that invites the inclusion of beautiful analogies. For instance, the last lines of this section not only all begin with the sign  (e_2) "house," as expected, but also list only temples dedicated to the goddess Inana, with one apparent exception: the House of the True Divine Powers of Enki. It is surely the case that the advanced students of House F were able to recognize the connection between Inana and this temple through the mythological narrative *Inana and Enki*, wherein Inana steals the divine powers of Enki.

The *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) and *List of Compound Signs* (Diri)

Most cuneiform signs have multiple readings. One of the important novelties of the Old Babylonian curriculum is the inclusion of sign lists that systematically collect all possible readings or pronunciations. Although sign lists likely existed since the third millennium BCE, early copies of these compositions are rarely attested. In contrast, hundreds of copies of Old Babylonian sign lists have been recovered at virtually all sites where school tablets have been found (Veldhuis 2014, 177). In this period, two advanced lists of signs were created: the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) and the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri), both of which were copied at House F.

As their names indicate, these lists are concerned with the signs themselves and focus on the relationship between their form, sound, and

Table 9.1. Overview of the organization of the *List of Things* (Niĝga) and the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal).

Composition	Sections	Organizational Principle
List of Things (Niĝga)	 $niĝ_2$ "thing"  šu "hand"  sa "bundle"  bal "to turn"  gu_2 "entirety"  ki "place"	Acrographic
List of Gates and Buildings (Kagal)	 ka_2 "gate" and  e_2 "house"  a "water"  ĝeš "wood"	A mostly thematic section dealing with buildings Acrographic section beginning with the sign A; includes some compound signs Short acrographic appendix with words beginning with the sign ĜEŠ that are not included in the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura)

meaning, thereby introducing students to the more abstract, scholarly aspects of cuneiform writing. The *List of Simple Signs*, called "Ea" after the first entry of the first-millennium BCE canonical series, is the most important sign list attested in Mesopotamia. In its Old Babylonian recension, Ea consisted of more than a thousand entries providing the more usual readings of basic Sumerian signs (Civil 1979, 4; 1995, 2309–10). Each entry of the example in figure 9.6 is introduced by an initial vertical wedge (first column), then provides the pronunciation (second column) and the writing (third column) of a Sumerian sign. Occasionally, Akkadian readings of signs are included, as is the case with *ilum* "god."

Meanwhile, the *List of Compound Signs*, named "Diri" after the reading of its first compound, SI.A (diri), focuses on signs that are constructed through the combination of two or more simple signs. For example, when the signs SI and A in the initial compound are written together, they are read not as "sia" but as "diri." While these readings were often memorized rather than written down, copies of these lists could include Sumerian glosses indicating the appropriate pronunciation of a sign (figs. 9.6 and 9.7). Additionally, Diri is the only lexical composition that is systematically bilingual—that is, it always includes the Akkadian meaning of the signs, sometimes even providing additional information on their appropriate use (Veldhuis 2014, 182–83; Crisostomo 2019b, 81). In the two lines translated in figure 9.7, the Akkadian translations of ĜEŠ.ŠU.LU$_2$ and ĜEŠ.LU$_2$ inform us that the meaning of both compound signs is

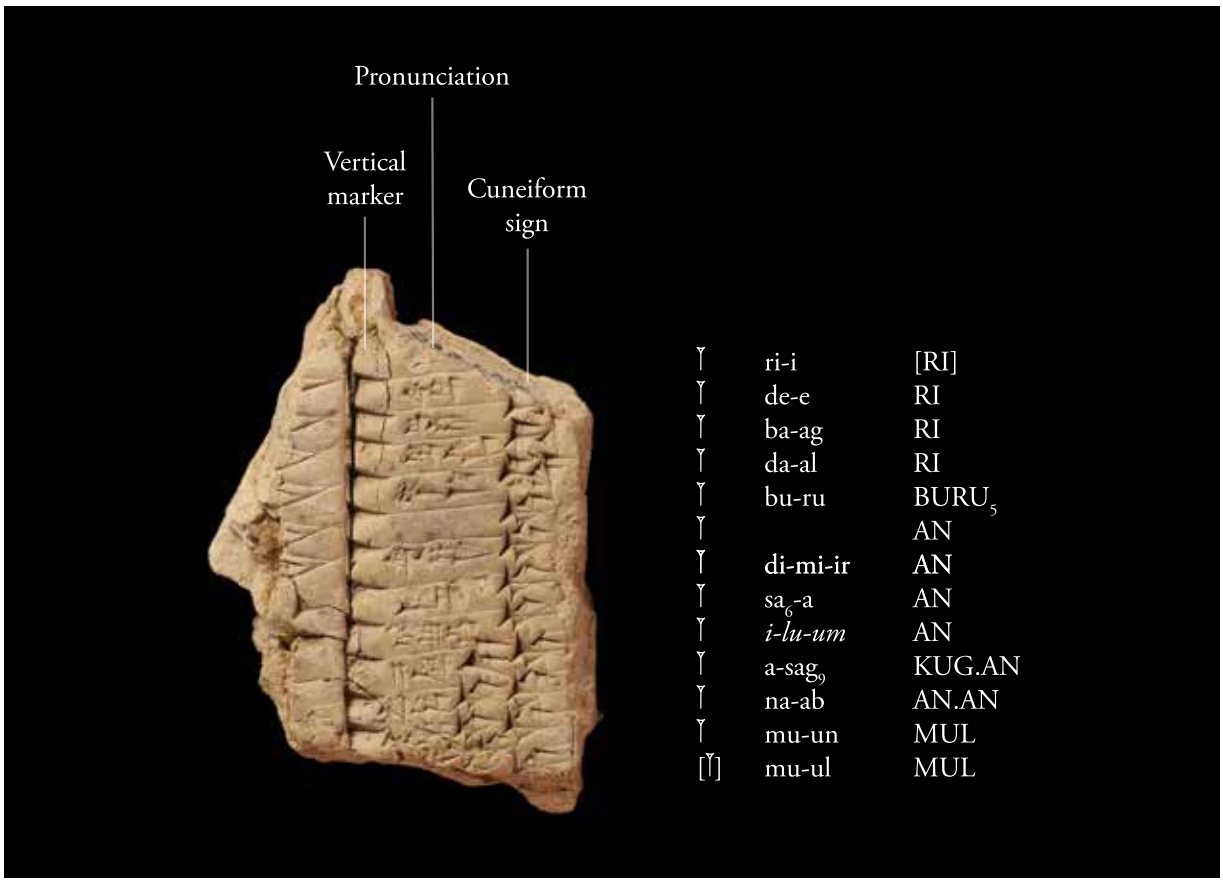


Figure 9.6. Tablet fragment inscribed with a section of the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea). ISACM A29977. Photo by CM; transliteration and annotations by MDH.

Figure 9.7. Fragment of a teacher–student exercise inscribed with an extract of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri). **Cat. no. 53**. Photo by CM; translation and annotations by MDH.

"staff" but then further narrow down their specific use to staffs owned by men and staffs owned by gods, respectively, even though both compounds are read as ĝešgiri in Sumerian. Diri was the very last lexical list taught at House F and, alongside Ea, constitutes one of the primary sources for the reading and understanding of Sumerian signs—indeed a priceless treasure for modern scholarship.

A Powerful Teaching Tool: Uses of Lexical Lists in Old Babylonian Education

As a scholarly genre, lexical texts preserve the most precious piece of wisdom for ancient Mesopotamian scribes: "the knowledge of writing" (Veldhuis 2014, 2). As pedagogical tools, lexical lists in the Old Babylonian period were arranged into a coherent curriculum meant to introduce students progressively to the Sumerian language and its writing system (Veldhuis 2014, 202).

This dual nature of lexical texts, as both didactic and scholarly tools, finds its reflection in their contents and purpose. At the most prosaic level, complex lists were used to introduce students to a more varied linguistic spectrum of Sumerian words and signs, all the while exposing them to written Akkadian in the form of glosses and translations (Veldhuis 2014, 207). Furthermore, at this stage of the curriculum, word lists incorporated not only nouns but also pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and even phrases, such as conjugated verbal forms or questions (fig. 9.8; see also fig. 9.5). In fact, this feature is distinctive of acrographic lists, as they are not subject to thematic restrictions.

At a more intellectual level, however, complex lists also included a sizable share of vocabulary that had no practical use for the day-to-day writing of legal or administrative documents. Instead, this vocabulary was a prerequisite for understanding Sumerian literature, which would allow the

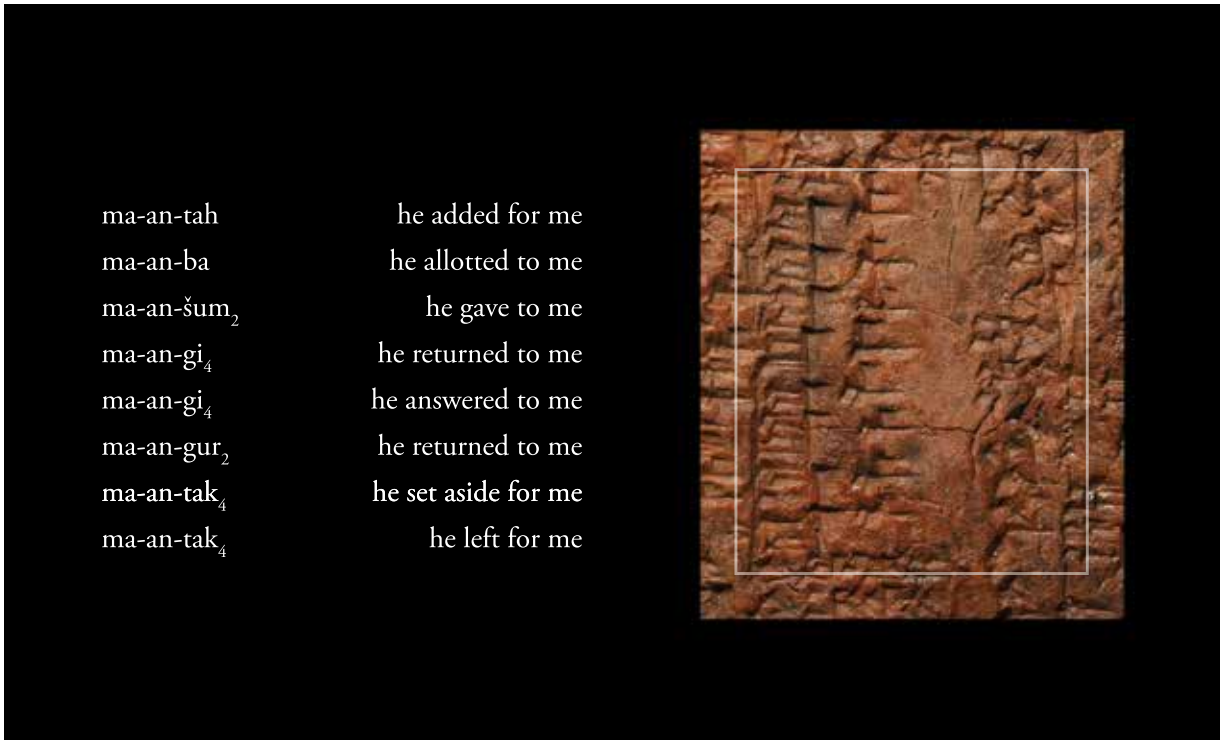
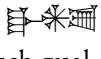


Figure 9.8. Detail of **cat. no. 56** (fig. 9.5) with a section of the *Acrographic List* Izi containing Sumerian conjugated verbs with identical grammatical structure ("someone did something to me") but different lexical verbs. Photo by DL; edition and annotations by MDH.

students to partake in the culture of the Sumero-Babylonian elite (Veldhuis 2014, 211; Crisostomo 2019b, 45–46). Similarly, the sign lists of this phase opened the door to the more speculative aspects of cuneiform writing. Indeed, the fundamental contribution of these lists was not to teach the signs themselves, most of which were already familiar to students, but rather to teach the new generations of scribes how to conceptualize and organize those signs (Veldhuis 2014, 208).

Finally, there was also a strong ideological component to complex lists. It is ultimately not coincidental that the abovementioned passage of Lu dedicated to literate professions—including the  (šatam) "(a high-ranking) administrator," the  (gabsar) "engraver," and the  (dubsar) "scribe"—begins with the word  (ummia) "expert" and ends with the word  (galanzu) "wise," thus clearly associating such qualities with scribal practice.

Explore Further

Civil, Miguel. "Ancient Mesopotamian Lexicography." In *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, edited by Jack M. Sasson, 4:2305–14. New York: Scribner's, 1995.

Civil, Miguel (ed.). *The Series lú = ša and Related Texts.* Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 12. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969.

Civil, Miguel (ed.). *Izi = išātu, Ká-gal = abullu, and Níg-ga = makkūru*. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 13. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1971.

Civil, Miguel (ed.). *Ea A = nâqu, Aa A = nâqu, with Their Forerunners and Related Texts*. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 14. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1979.

Civil, Miguel (ed.). *The Series DIRI = (w)atru*. Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon 15. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2004.

10 Bilingualism and Akkadian

Jay Crisostomo

Scribal education at Nippur focused on learning cuneiform and Sumerian. The majority of the texts featured in this catalog were inscribed by students practicing their signs, writing lists of Sumerian words, or copying Sumerian literature. Occasionally, however, we gain insight into the role that Akkadian—one of the vernacular languages of the time—played in scribal education. While other essays in this book focus on how and why scribes at Nippur learned Sumerian, this chapter considers how scribes learned Akkadian, as well as the place of Akkadian in scribal education.

How to Write in Akkadian

When students learned to write cuneiform, they learned the basics that would allow them to write in multiple languages (see chapter 8). A sign is generally written the same whether the language represented by that wedge is Sumerian, Akkadian, or another one. These early sign exercises, including the list *Syllable Alphabet* B (**cat. nos. 40** and **41**), were helpful for teaching broader literacy. Whereas students, when learning to write Sumerian, could focus on a single sign or group of signs to write a single word—for example,  (uri) "Akkadian"—when writing Akkadian students would need to learn how to divide words into syllables appropriately, with correct grammar—for example,  *ak-ka-du-u*$_2$ for *akkadû* "Akkadian" in the nominative case or *ak-ka-da-a* for *akkadâ* in the accusative case.

Students encountered two types of exercises through which they would actively learn to write Akkadian: lists of personal names and the list known as *Syllabary* TuTaTi. Many examples, such as the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš, included both Sumerian and Akkadian names (**cat. no. 44**; see also chapter 8). These exercises taught students the grammatical structure and spelling conventions of names and reinforced how the cuneiform writing system could be applied to multiple languages, including Sumerian, Akkadian, and Amorite. For example, within a few entries, students learned how the sign BI could be

Obverse of **cat. no. 56**, a manuscript of the *Acrographic List* Izi with Akkadian glosses.

used in etymologically Sumerian names or as a syllable in etymologically Akkadian names:

Ur_5-**bi**	Urbi (Sumerian name)
Temen-**bi**	Temenbi (Sumerian name)
*Ra-**bi***	Rabi (Akkadian name)
*Na-**bi***-^{d}En-lil_2	Nabi-Enlil (Akkadian name)
*Na-**bi***-^{d}Suen	Nabi-Suen (Akkadian name)
*Na-**bi**-i_3-li_2-šu*	Nabi-ilišu (Akkadian name)
*Ya-an-**bi**-i-lum*	Yanbi-ilum (Amorite name)

Although these name lists do not necessarily map to language use in the school or in Nippur, they certainly demonstrate how students learned to write etymologically differentiated words and trained them in writing practices and conventions. Personal names also tended to use readings for signs that were uncommon in other contexts, and these name lists gave students practice in switching between languages in writing. The name lists were, in many respects, more practical for use outside the schools than were other compositions used in the curriculum, not least because they exposed students to written norms for Akkadian.

The *Syllabary* TuTaTi gave students further practice in writing syllabic signs. Although this list is not known at House F, it is found elsewhere in Nippur (see chapter 8). In this list, students wrote a set of three signs that represented the same basic syllable but with changing vowels; they then repeated the entire set on a single sign:

tu
ta
ti
tu-ta-ti

lum
lam
lim
lum-lam-lim

The latter part of the list is poorly attested at Nippur but seems to have been adaptable to a particular teacher's or student's needs. One copy of the end of the list, now in the Hilprecht Collection in Jena, Germany (HS 1801), applies the principle of the list to a variety of Akkadian phrases:

a
na
ša
ši
im
a-na ša-ši-im (*ana šašîm* "for him/her")
a
na
ka
ši
im
a-na ka-ši-im (*ana kašîm* "for you")

By incorporating full Akkadian phrases into a curricular list designed to teach writing syllables, the *Syllabary* TuTaTi illustrates how enmeshed the practice of writing Akkadian was in scribal learning generally. The absence of this composition at House F suggests that students there learned the principles of writing Akkadian through other means, such as the personal name lists (which are abundantly attested at House F) or other curricular lists.

Akkadian in Curricular Lists

After completing basic writing exercises and lists, students at Nippur began learning Sumerian vocabulary through lists of words and expanded their repertoire of cuneiform signs through complex sign lists (see chapters 7 and 9). Most of the lists in this part of the curriculum are written in Sumerian only. There are clear indications, however, that Akkadian remained an essential component of scribal education. Akkadian is apparent in these curricular lists in both implicit and explicit ways.

Although the majority of school texts at Nippur are monolingual—in Sumerian only—there are several indications that Akkadian served an important implicit teaching function in the curriculum. Since Sumerian was likely no student's

vernacular language, the language of instruction in the school was probably Akkadian given the use of Akkadian elsewhere, both in schools and in broader society. Thus, the Sumerian-only texts needed to be explained. Niek Veldhuis refers to this two-dimensional character of the lists:

> In the Old Babylonian period the two-dimensional format becomes the standard format of lexical lists—even if the explanatory column is often implicit and not written on the clay tablet. We assume that the thousands of exercises written in Sumerian only were committed to heart by the students in a bilingual fashion, providing traditional Akkadian renderings to each of the Sumerian words. The lists were produced in the context of learning how to write Sumerian—the Akkadian equivalents needed to be known, but writing them down did not actually add anything to the exercise. Several aspects of the lists become more intelligible if we look at them as, in essence, bilingual texts. (Veldhuis 2014, 202)

A classic example of this characteristic is the repetition of a single Sumerian word in consecutive entries (fig. 10.1). On a tablet with an extract from the *Acrographic List* Izi from House F (3NT-910x, Iraq Museum), we find three lines:

𒆳 (kur)
𒆳 (kur)
𒆳 (kur)
3NT-910x, reverse ii′ 5–7

These same lines are given different Akkadian translation glosses in **cat. no. 56**, also from House F (fig. 10.1). These two tablets, with the same section of the same composition from the same school, strongly imply that the students were, at least occasionally, provided Akkadian translations alongside the Sumerian they wrote. In the first instance, this bilingualism is only implicit; in the second, the bilingualism is explicit.

Explicit Bilingualism

Akkadian can also appear explicitly, either in the form of glosses or as a formal part of the composition, such as a vertical column providing Akkadian correspondents to the Sumerian. Akkadian glosses occur intermittently on nearly fifty lexical tablets

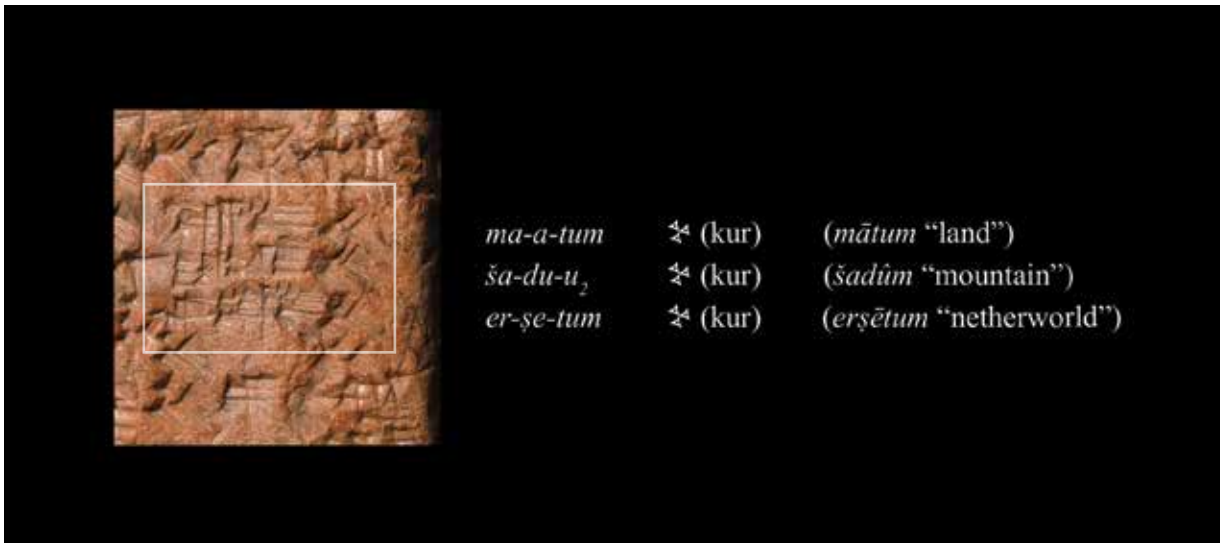


Figure 10.1. Detail of **cat. no. 56** showing the entries for the sign 𒆳 with translation glosses. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; edition by Jay Crisostomo.

from Nippur. These glosses are usually written smaller and above the line relative to the main Sumerian word, like a superscript. **Cat. no. 56**—a copy of the advanced *Acrographic List* Izi—offers excellent examples of Akkadian glosses scattered throughout a curricular list. This tablet provides glosses for the sign AŠ (fig. 10.2; Akkadian glosses are italicized; the English translations are based on the Akkadian only).

In these cases, the Akkadian glosses are sometimes translations of the Sumerian word and sometimes examples of an alternative type of bilingual juxtaposition that is not contingent on equivalent word meanings. The type of analogical reasoning on display was a key aspect of this advanced phase of lexical education and is especially evident in such choices of Akkadian glosses. The use of these Akkadian translations here underscores the importance of writing Akkadian to the intellectual project that was part of scribal training, an element that affirmed the development of these students from being trainees learning to write personal names to scholars capable of negotiating multiple languages on their own.

Whereas, on tablets with glosses, Akkadian translations are secondary to the base Sumerian composition, on formally bilingual tablets Sumerian and Akkadian are granted essentially equal footing as part of the structure and layout. Tablets such as **cat. no. 54** from House F provide a Sumerian word and a corresponding Akkadian word on the same line, each in its own column. These types of bilingual tablets are sometimes attested as rare variants to curricular lists that are typically monolingual (Sumerian) or at least attested with only occasional glosses. For example, the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal) (see chapter 9), with more than fifty unilingual exemplars at Nippur, is also attested in a bilingual version with seven known exemplars. While the information and knowledge presented in these lists is the same, the presentation—what is written down—differs.

The important curricular *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) (see chapter 9), with more than 300 Sumerian-only exemplars, also has a bilingual version, often called Aa. At House F, this version is found on only five of twenty to twenty-five exemplars. The

Figure 10.2. Detail of a tablet inscribed with the *Acrographic List* Izi showing the sign ⊢ and its combinations with Akkadian glosses. **Cat. no. 56**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; edition by Jay Crisostomo.

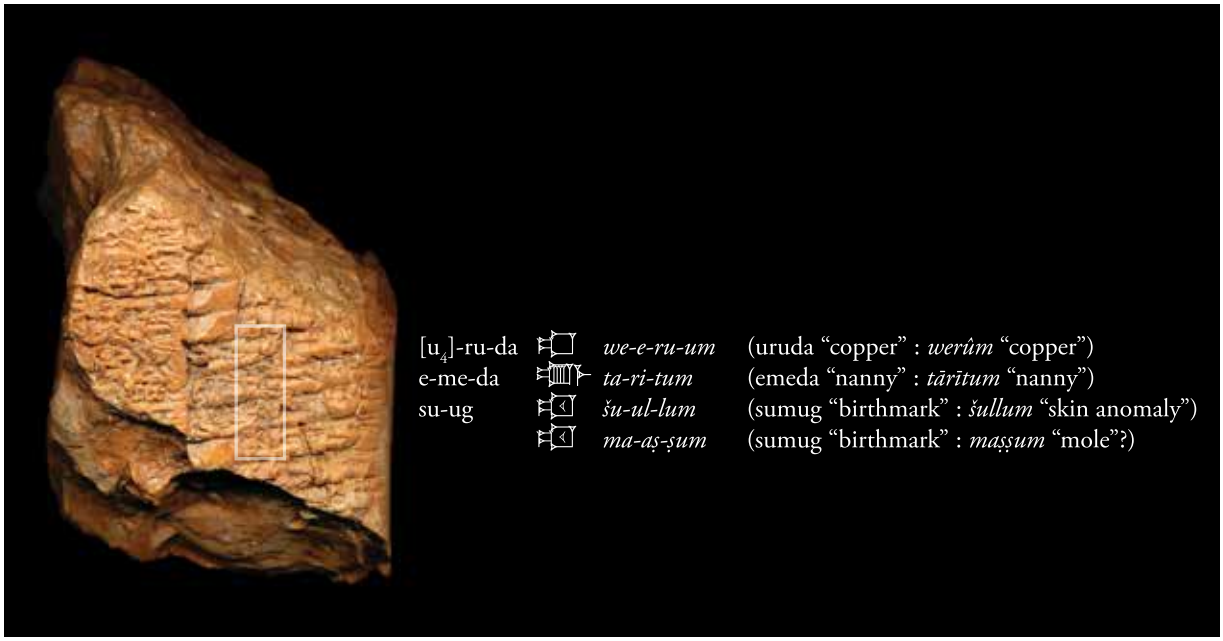


Figure 10.3. Fragment of the reverse of a tablet inscribed with the bilingual version of the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea). Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. UM 55-21-298; annotations by MDH; edition by Jay Crisostomo.

examination of signs on one of those tablets is shown in figure 10.3, where the first column is the reading of the sign, the second is the sign itself, and the third is the Akkadian translation.

The other important advanced curricular sign list, the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) (see chapter 9), is always bilingual. As such, it is an anomaly among the curricular lists; only one other common curricular list, the *List of Human Beings* (Lu-Azlag) is always bilingual. Diri has a strong presence at House F, with at least sixteen exemplars of the forty-seven total from Nippur. **Cat. no. 55** (fig. 10.4), which presents the beginning of the list, exemplifies the list's characteristic bilingual format. These entries provide Akkadian correspondents for the Sumerian word diri ("to exceed"), written with the combination of two signs SI.A.

Like the glossed translations discussed above, the Akkadian correspondents given in the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) are not always contingent on meaning. Instead, the given Akkadian translations may focus on other aspects related to the cuneiform signs, contextualized/technical vocabulary, or other features that might be unclear to modern interpreters.

Given the relative rarity of explicitly bilingual curricular lists elsewhere at Nippur, these types of texts seem to have been featured as part of the scribal training at House F. This emphasis on writing Akkadian is further validated by the presence of other Akkadian rarities in Nippur schools.

Writing Akkadian

Apart from the curricular lists, Akkadian writing was not a standard feature of scribal training in the schools at Nippur. Therefore, any writing for professions or genres that required the use of Akkadian was likely taught and developed outside schools such as House F. While some knowledge attained in schools was easily adaptable and even useful for other professions—the knowledge of how to write personal names or even conceptualize writing syllabically, for example—the standard curriculum was not practical for drafting Akkadian texts such as royal inscriptions, divinatory lists, prayers, literature, or letters, though with some exceptions.

Figure 10.4. Reverse of a tablet fragment inscribed with the beginning of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri). **Cat. no. 55**. Photo by DL; edition and annotations by MDH.

Letters

The modern scholarly literature emphasizes that personal letters were written almost exclusively in Akkadian. Yet letter writing was not part of the standardized curriculum in the way that copying word lists, royal hymns, or historicized narrative correspondence was. As demonstrated by Marine Béranger, the repertoire of signs and vocabulary differed from what was taught in scribal schools, so the skills and conventions for composing Akkadian letters were almost certainly developed elsewhere, perhaps at home or as needed for a specific task (Béranger 2018). Some practice letters, however, attest a systemized way of teaching this form of literacy.

Although the number of tablets identified as practice letters is small (just over a hundred), they do provide insight into training in letter-writing conventions at the scribal schools. But as Béranger emphasizes, practice letters offered only minimal tutelage in letter writing, since their length and complexity bear little resemblance to those of actual letters. Exercises in letter writing did expose students to some of the basic phraseology of letters and offered practice in writing sign forms and vocabulary that differed from those familiar to the students from the standard curriculum. Nevertheless, it is clear that these school exercise letters were not typically featured as part of regular scribal training, though a letter found at House F (fig. 10.5) may offer one of only a few examples found at Nippur.

Literature

The Old Babylonian period saw the emergence of Akkadian literature, with the first attestations of famous narrative stories such as those of Gilgameš and the Flood. Yet, at Nippur, Akkadian literature was rarely found in schools or as part of the curriculum. One school text now in Philadelphia (CBS 15217) provides a copy of the *Akkadian Sargon Letter* on one side and an extract from the curricular list Lu on the other. Another text found at House F (**cat. no. 115**; see chapter 16) appears to represent an *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale*, depicting Gilgameš and Enkidu's approach to the Cedar Forest to kill

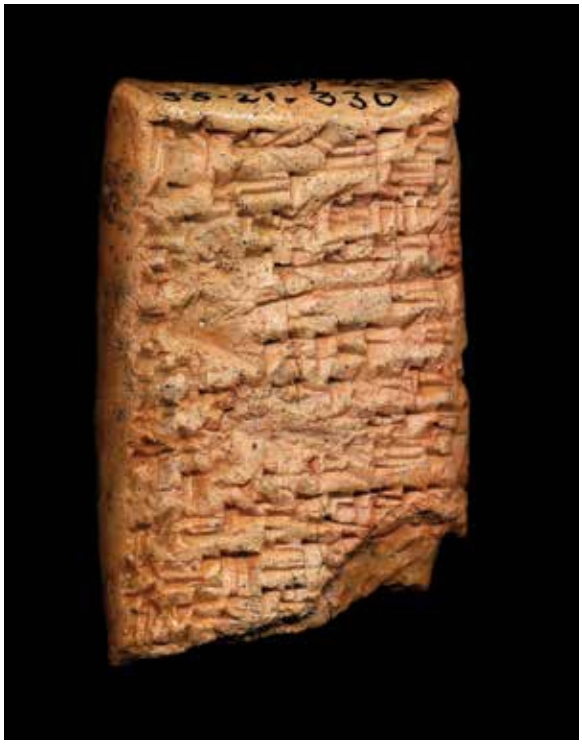


Figure 10.5. Obverse of a tablet inscribed with a letter in Akkadian starting with the typical introduction and greeting formula. **Cat. no. 57**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

the guardian Huwawa. Although neither Gilgameš nor Enkidu is actually named on the tablet, the extract is so reminiscent of the later epic that it is unmistakably part of the story where Gilgameš recounts his dreams and his companion interprets them. The text begins:

ibrī niqterib qištiš	"My friend, we have approached the forest;
šunātum qitrubā aruh tāhāzum	the (outcomes foretold in) dreams are imminent; battle is coming quickly."

Akkadian Gilgameš Tale, lines 1–2

The presence of this tablet at House F does not necessarily indicate that a scribe-in-training copied it, but some of the spelling "mistakes" and erasures give credence to that possibility (George 2003, 241). And if the tablet does record a school exercise, it gives us one of the few examples of an Akkadian literary text written by a student.

Conclusion

It is likely that formal training in scribal schools could be limited to the initial stages of training, so that those whose professions demanded some literacy, but not the literary literacy of the later stages of the curriculum, could take the basics of writing they acquired and adapt them as needed (Michalowski 2012). In other words, formal scribal training such as that which took place at House F could provide the fundamentals for basic and practical literacy, and students could then proceed to higher levels of training for cultural literacy by learning Sumerian literature. Or they could take what they had learned about writing personal names, stock phrases, and conventions and utilize those basics as needed in their professional capacities. Regardless, the students of scribal schools such as House F acquired the foundational elements and competencies for writing whatever they needed, including writing in Akkadian.

Explore Further

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11

Sumerian Grammar for Babylonians

Colton G. Siegmund

> Grammar is the account books of language.
> They must show the actual transactions of language,
> everything that is not a matter of accompanying sensations.
>
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein 1933 [1974]

Setting aside debates surrounding Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, one cannot help but acknowledge his ability to express a profound thought in few words: "Grammar is the account books of language." By the end of this chapter, it will become apparent how literary texts served as the Wittgensteinian account books of the scribal school. But first, it is important to establish the background of the typical scribal student in Nippur during the Old Babylonian period.

The scribal students under consideration here were native speakers of Akkadian, a Semitic language. That Akkadian was important in the extracurricular lives of scribal students is without doubt, but as burgeoning members of the literati they all had the formidable task of learning Sumerian to some degree of proficiency. A language typologically dissimilar to Akkadian, Sumerian had lain dead for centuries as a mother tongue but been kept alive in the academy as a written language of great cultural import. The situation of the Old Babylonian schoolchild was not too far afield from that of a well-to-do European child learning the languages of classical antiquity in an eighteenth-century CE boys' school. Although not all scribes chose to continue their education past the elementary stages of learning basic orthography, core principles of Sumerian grammar, document structure, and practical mathematics, those who did had to master this esoteric language.

For these ambitious scribes, however, fluency in Sumerian could no longer be acquired organically in everyday life. Rather, those students who advanced past the rudimentary phases of schooling learned Sumerian in a complex way that transcended straightforward grammatical lessons taught in the classroom. Many readers of this book have probably learned a secondary language either

Reverse of a tablet containing section VII of the *Old Babylonian Grammatical Texts* (see fig. 11.3 for obverse). ISACM A24189. Photo by DL.

by sitting in a library memorizing paradigms or by enrolling in an immersion course with a focus on spoken proficiency. Babylonian scribal students underwent a procedure both similar and dissimilar.

Learning with Lists

At Nippur there is evidence of vocabulary lists and grammatical paradigms, and these topics will be contextualized here as the prerequisites a student needed to master to make use of literary texts as sources of grammatical lessons. After discussing these foundational stages of education in Sumerian grammar, my focus will shift to how students learned the intricacies of grammar via its implementation in curricular compositions.

The vocabulary lists used by ancient students were a subset of the "lexical list" corpus. The lexical lists of Mesopotamia were "compilations in which one may find the correct form, usage, or reading of a word or a cuneiform sign" (Veldhuis 2014, 6; see chapters 7–10). These texts also served as intellectual curio cabinets of sorts and were reservoirs of cultural knowledge. Accordingly, it is reductive to describe these compositions as mere vocabulary lists. Nonetheless, they undeniably served as sources of lexical knowledge for student scribes learning Sumerian. In this way, they provided the student with a substantial prerequisite to understanding Sumerian grammar—namely, the lexical building blocks to be combined in sequences dictated by established conventions. To cite just one exemplar, **cat. no. 79** (fig. 11.1) preserves part 4 of the Old Babylonian *Thematic List of Words* (Ura). This fragment records the Sumerian words for various stones (see chapter 7).

One might rightly ask how a monolingual list could be used to learn vocabulary, as indeed

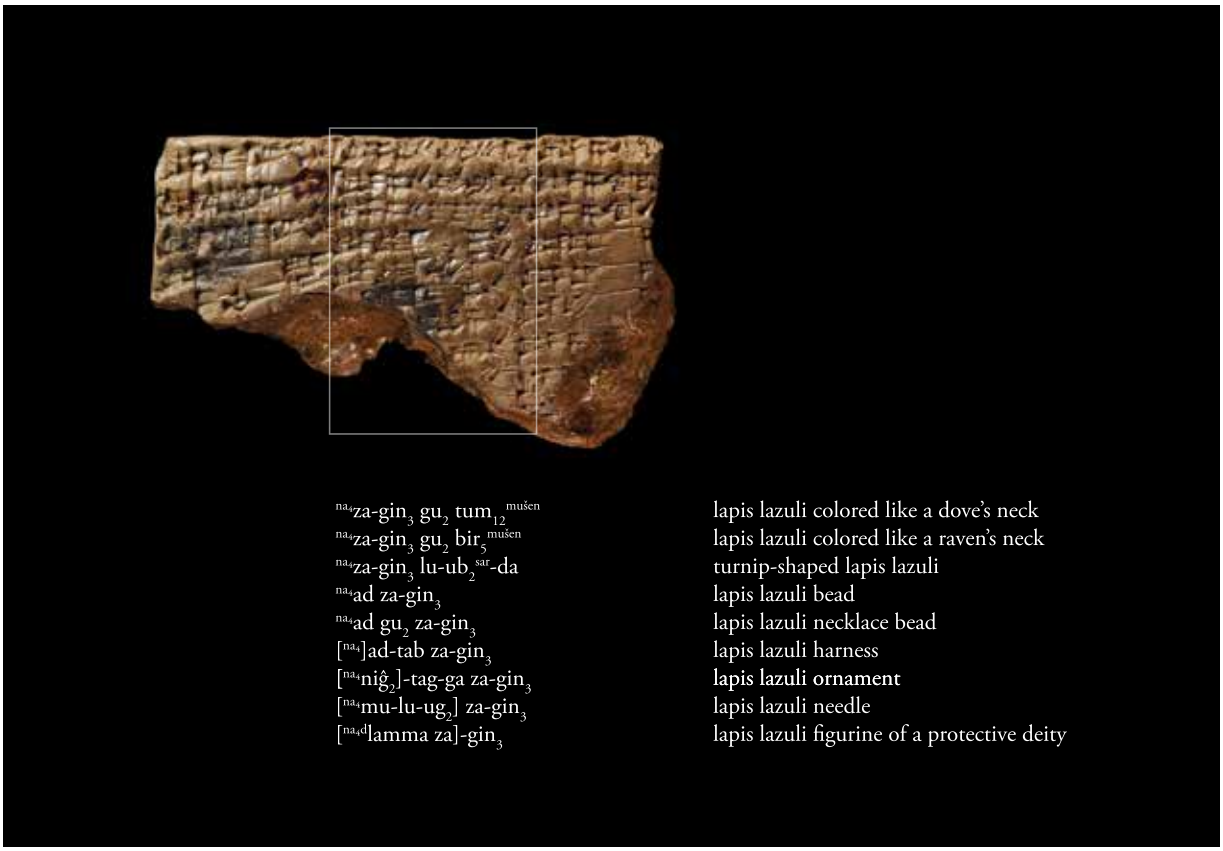


Figure 11.1. Reverse of a tablet fragment inscribed with part of the *List of Stones, Plants, Fish, Birds, and Textiles* (part of Ura). **Cat. no. 79**. Photo by DL; edition, adapted from DCCLT, and annotations by MDH.

most tablets of this composition from the Old Babylonian period are written exclusively in Sumerian. The existence of occasional Akkadian glossing (fig. 11.2), however, strongly suggests that students memorized the Akkadian half of the equation when copying such lists (Veldhuis, 2014, 151; see chapter 10). Entries in the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura) lack inflectional endings (i.e., entries lack case post-positions that indicate what role their referent would play in sentences). The student was introduced to the declension of nouns and conjugation of verbs through various means: other lexical lists, such as the *Legal Phrasebook* (kiulutinbiše) (see chapter 14); the reading of proverbs and model contracts after the lexical material had been mastered; and perhaps listening to lectures, though evidence is lacking. Once introduced to these topics, the student had acquired two additional crucial sets of grammatical knowledge: the fundamental principles of morphology and syntax.

Linguistic Thinking in the Academy

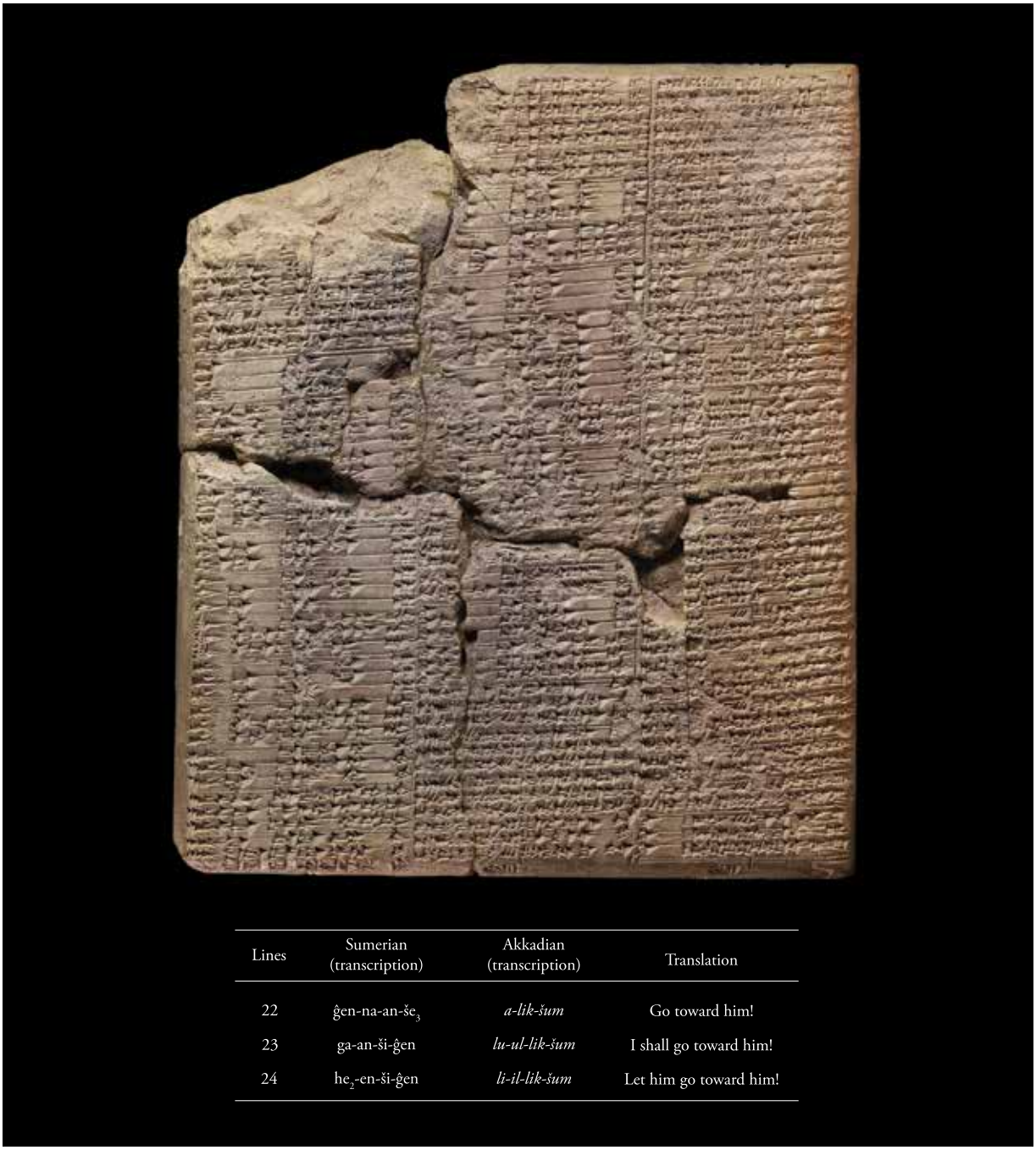
Before turning to the way grammar was practiced via the copying of literary texts, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly the lexical lists that were dedicated to Sumerian grammar on a meta level. The clearest instantiations of the ancient Mesopotamians' own interest in grammar as a phenomenon are the paradigms and the grammatical vocabularies. These documents constituted the *Old Babylonian Grammatical Texts* (OBGT), but only the paradigms will be examined here. The OBGT paradigms are written in the lexical-list tradition and juxtapose Sumerian verbal forms with their Akkadian correlates. One set of paradigms is preserved on tablet ISACM A24189, which constitutes section VII of the OBGT (fig. 11.3). The table in the figure provides an extract from the paradigm ĝen = *alāku* "to go."

The lines cited in figure 11.3 juxtapose three verbal forms expressing duty or obligations (deontic modal notions) from each language. Functionally, two of these forms express utterances by which the speaker attempts to get someone to do something

Figure 11.2. Reverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the *List of Domestic Animals* (part of Ura), with occasional Akkadian glossing. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. CBS 2178+; annotations by MDH.

(directives; imperative in line 22, jussive in line 24), and one expresses a type of utterance by which the speaker commits himself or herself to a future action (commissive; promissive in line 23). These forms are also similar in that each includes "toward him," a third-person indirect object with a spatial dimension. Although these forms conform to the Sumero-Akkadian grammatical expectations gleaned from organically produced documents in both languages, it will be shown below that such was not always the case in the OBGT.

The OBGT are undoubtedly fascinating works of ancient scholarship, but they almost certainly played no role in the teaching of Sumerian grammar. They are never found on typical school tablets, and they require an extensive knowledge of Sumerian even to work with. Furthermore,



Lines	Sumerian (transcription)	Akkadian (transcription)	Translation
22	ĝen-na-an-še$_3$	*a-lik-šum*	Go toward him!
23	ga-an-ši-ĝen	*lu-ul-lik-šum*	I shall go toward him!
24	he$_2$-en-ši-ĝen	*li-il-lik-šum*	Let him go toward him!

Figure 11.3. Obverse of a three-column tablet inscribed in microscript with OBGT VII, the paradigm of ĝen = *alāku* "to go." ISACM A24189. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; table by CGS.

their content is often not a reflection of the organic Sumerian language but rather the product of the scholarly pursuit of expounding its grammatical principles on a theoretical level; in this way, the OBGT are more akin to omen compendia and mathematical problem texts than to any pedagogical material (Veldhuis 2014, 195). Despite the fact that the OBGT were not used in the instruction of

Sumerian grammar, they have been included here because they attest to the Babylonians' interest in Sumerian grammar as a topic worthy of thorough examination.

Grammar Lessons in Literature

Whereas the OBGT were irrelevant to the ancient student, the above discussion of the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura) and other pedagogical documents has demonstrated that the rote study of carefully constructed lists and model documents was an important endeavor for those learning the basic components of Sumerian (i.e., root lexemes, simple inflected forms, and formulaic syntactic schema). Mastery of these components alone, however, did not equate to fluency in Sumerian. To become truly fluent, a scribe needed a grammatical framework far more robust than the one provided by the model documents. He needed to understand fully how the lexical and morphological building blocks introduced in his early education could be ordered to express any thought imaginable, just as he did subconsciously in his daily life as a native speaker of Akkadian. What he needed was a thorough understanding of Sumerian morphosyntax.

As was the case with inflectional morphology, it is unknown what sort of lectures a scribe may have heard on morphosyntactic matters, if he heard any at all. What is known is that in the late stages of a scribe's education, he learned and copied many different literary compositions to strengthen, and ultimately perfect, his grasp of the Sumerian language. In doing so, the scribe learned nearly all the cooperative principles that allowed the chunks of grammatical knowledge acquired in his early education to be combined in dexterous ways befitting a fluent speaker. Although the scribe already understood aspects of Sumerian grammar, it was in these literary texts that he found his Wittgensteinian account book—actual transactions of the Sumerian language at work. He could thenceforth truly master Sumerian grammar.

Compositions from a set that modern scholars refer to as the *Decad* featured heavily in the scribe's arsenal of covertly didactic literature (see chapter 15). The *Decad* comprises ten Sumerian literary compositions that were grouped together in antiquity for pedagogical purposes. In terms of their content, the members of the *Decad* share little thematically, yet their inclusion in a single set is validated by literary catalog tablets that list each composition by its incipits—its first lines. Beyond these catalogs, the fact that multiple *Decad* compositions are often recorded on individual compilation tablets also lends credence to the notion that they formed a cohesive set in antiquity. Although members of the *Decad* share little thematically, they have a commonality in their relative lengths: each composition in the *Decad* is approximately 200 lines long. Being a manageable length greatly increased their utility as educational materials. Compositions that were too short might have been less effective at conveying complex lessons, whereas overly long compositions ran the risk of obfuscating the intended instruction. At face value, the *Decad* compositions are clearly fascinating examples of art and propaganda. When one looks beyond their narrative surface and sees them as cogs in a curricular machine, however, one realizes the sophisticated grammatical architecture from which the attentive student could absorb most aspects of Sumerian grammar.

In the *Decad* composition *Inana and Ebih*, for example, the reader is confronted with an epic tale of the goddess Inana hell-bent on retribution against the mountain Ebih. This tale is no doubt of great poetic beauty and cultural significance, but it is also a pedagogical masterpiece in the way the Sumerian language is articulated. **Cat. no. 76** (fig. 11.4) records only lines 144–63 of this composition's 184 lines, yet within this meager sample a wealth of grammatical knowledge can be gleaned. The text describes Ebih's demise before transitioning to the triumphant goddess's haughty victory speech. The narrative complexity of these scenes (one a narrator's description of the antagonist's undoing, the other a simile-laden boast by a goddess) is mirrored by the intricacy of the grammar:

Figure 11.4. Obverse and reverse of a fragment of a single-column tablet inscribed with an extract of the *Decad* composition *Inana and Ebih*. **Cat. no. 76**. Photos by DL.

The rocks forming the body of Ebih,
indeed clattered down its flanks!
From its sides and crevices great serpents spat venom!
She spoke damning words to its forests and **cursed** its trees.
She killed its oak trees with drought.
She poured fire on its flanks and **made its smoke dense**.
The goddess established authority over the Mountain.
Holy Inana did as she wished.
She went to the mountain range of Ebih and addressed it:
"Oh Mountain Range! Because of your elevation, because of your height,
because of your attractiveness, because of your beauty,
because of your reaching up to heaven,
because of your wearing a holy BA-garment,
because you did not put your nose to the ground (in obeisance),
because you did not rub your lips in the dust,
I have killed you and brought you low.
As with an elephant, **I have seized** your tusks.
As with a great wild bull, I have brought you to the ground by your thick horns.
As with a bull, I have forced your great strength to the ground and pursued you savagely.
I have made tears the norm in your eyes.
I have placed laments in your heart.
Birds of sorrow are building nests on those flanks (of yours)."
For a second time, indeed rejoicing in fearsome terror, **she indeed speaks** out righteously:

Inana and Ebih, lines 144–66 (translation closely following Black et al. 2004, 338; boldfaced sections discussed below)

In just these twenty-three lines, the student scribe would have encountered a wide swath of grammatical phenomena. In the narrative description, verbs refer to completed events in the past—for example, "she made its smoke dense" (line 149)—whereas in the direct speech, the verbs denote actions/states that hold in the present—for example, "I have seized" (line 160). In some instances, verbs in these sections display nuanced stem or pronoun alterations seemingly contrary to the conventions established in early education; these verbs are proof not of grammatical error but rather of pedagogical sophistication. Such verbs delve into the complex relationship between temporal views (aspects) and pronominal verbal morphology in Sumerian. In this extract, scribes practiced the different pronominal patterning schemes Sumerian uses to contrast transitive and intransitive verbs—for example, "she cut the fate = she cursed" (line 147, transitive) and "she went" (line 152, intransitive). In addition, scribes would have been exposed in these lines to irregular verbs (verbal suppletion). Whereas all Sumerian verbs display aspectual nuance via a shift in pronominal patterning, and many via co-occurrent root reduplication, a small number of verbs do so by implementing entirely different roots for each aspect in addition to the patterning shift. For example, the verb "to say" is irregular; the root is written  (dug_4) in "she spoke damning words" (line 147) but  (e) in "she indeed speaks" (line 166). Finally, the grammatical lessons were not confined to the verbal domain. For example, the scribe also learned how to use the terminative case, normally denoting direction toward something, to express causality: "because of your attractiveness, because of your beauty, because of your reaching up to heaven" (lines 154–55).

The precise linguistic nature of whatever aspects of Sumerian grammar the scribe practiced in these lines is of little relevance here. What is important is that *Inana and Ebih* served a greater purpose than extolling the goddess or propagating some latent agenda. It was an enrapturing tale for scribes to engage with that subtly instructed them on lessons of grammar. Other compositions in the *Decad* spun similarly captivating narratives intended to package often abstruse Sumerian grammar lessons. It is in these pieces of literature that the scribe confronted the Sumerian language in motion, unfettered by the rigidity of lists. After mastering them, a scribe could say he had truly learned Sumerian.

Explore Further

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12 Sumerian Proverbs

William A. Younger

The designation "Sumerian proverbs" refers to a diverse group of texts inscribed on clay tablets in the Sumerian language. These texts vary in length from proverbial phrases to short stories. Sumerian proverbs are attested as early as the middle of the third millennium BCE in the Early Dynastic version of the *Instructions of Šuruppak*. Scribes continued to copy Sumerian proverbs down to the late first millennium BCE, when they were typically given Akkadian translations. However, the overwhelming majority of Sumerian proverb sources were copied during the Old Babylonian period. By that time, Sumerian had likely died out as a spoken language, but students continued to copy Sumerian texts, including proverbs, as part of their scribal training.

We do not know whether Sumerian had a specific word meaning "proverb." Moreover, the term "proverb" is technically a misnomer for many text types associated with Sumerian proverbs. The variety of generic categories that have been suggested demonstrates the diverse nature of the collections. The most significant ones include proverbs, proverbial phrases, maxims, fables, short stories, quotations from literary compositions, sententious sayings, riddles, insults, jokes, and phrases from incantations and laments.

Terminological issues surrounding proverbs are not unique to cuneiform studies. They also exist in the modern field of proverb studies (paremiology) and the related field of phraseology. However, not every linguistic unit is a proverb. In fact, there are some commonly agreed-upon definitional criteria. The linguist Neal R. Norrick gives the following working definition: "What we generally call proverbs are traditional, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognizable units. Proverbs are characteristically used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or to perform a speech act in a speech event" (Norrick 2014, 7). This definition highlights not only formal and stylistic aspects of proverbs but their functional and pragmatic aspects as well.

Proverbs are set phrases that circulate in a given speech community. Thus, they are generally linked to spoken discourse. A primary concern addressed in

Reverse of a fragment of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with *Proverb Collection* 2 (see fig. 12.3 for obverse). **Cat no. 58**. Photo by CM.

the scholarly literature is whether the Sumerian sayings were indeed "genuine" proverbs originating in daily speech contexts. The main problem for cuneiformists is the virtual absence of all pragmatic contexts sufficient for proverb identification. Most significantly, given that the proverb sources are a written corpus, we simply do not know whether a saying was "traditional" or "current." However, one window into the pragmatics of proverb use by scribes in the Old Babylonian period is provided by the intertextual connections between proverbs and other literary compositions.

Sources

The sources of Sumerian proverbs reflect the same tablet typology known for other scribal exercises (see chapter 7). Perhaps the most iconic type are the lenticular or bun-shaped tablets. These typically have one proverb written twice on the obverse: first by the instructor, then directly below by the pupil. In addition to lenticular tablets, medium-sized square or rectangular tablets were used. The obverse of these tablets contained a new exercise, written first by the instructor on the left-hand side, then copied by the student on the right-hand side. The reverse of tablets with such teacher–student exercises contained an exercise the student had learned previously. The teacher–student tablets from Nippur almost always have proverbs on the obverse and an advanced lexical list or mathematical exercise on the reverse, but not the other way around (fig. 12.1; Veldhuis 1997, 62).

Finally, there are single-column and multi-column tablets with successive entries of proverbs. Cuneiformists have classified more than thirty of these tablet types as "proverb collections." Prisms

Figure 12.1. Obverse and reverse of a fragment of a teacher–student exercise. The obverse contains two proverbs, the reverse a metrological list with grain capacities. **Cat. no. 32**. Photos by DL.

containing proverbs are very rare. With respect to format, the sources of Sumerian proverbs are often recognizable because a double ruling usually follows each entry.

Edmund I. Gordon published the first two Sumerian proverb collections in his 1959 monograph, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*. In 1997, Bendt Alster edited all the known proverb sources in his landmark publication *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections*, which is still the primary resource for Sumerian proverb scholarship. (Unless otherwise noted, all proverb citations in this essay are from this work, Alster 1997.) Today, more than thirty collections of Sumerian proverbs are known, and additional collections have been published since Gordon's and Alster's initial works (including Alster 2005, 2007; Alster and Oshima 2006). Beyond the collections are additional proverb sources, often grouped by provenience or the museum collection in which they are found. In antiquity, no Sumerian term designated a "collection" or any other source of proverbs, so numberings and groupings of sources reflect modern concerns (Taylor 2005).

The organizational principles governing proverb collections are those found in lexical lists (see chapter 9). Most salient is acrography, whereby two entries are tied together by the shapes of their initial cuneiform signs. In some collections, acrography may generate a new section or subsection within the list. In addition, attraction of entries may be based on phonology, theme, semantics, grammar, or a combination of these characteristics (Seminara 2009). Polyvalency, or different readings of the same sign—an inherent feature of the cuneiform writing system—can lead to playful associations. For example, one section in *Proverb Collection* 2 contains proverbs about singers, foxes, liars, and crabs. In English, these terms are unrelated. But in Sumerian, each one is written with the sign  LUL, which can have multiple values and meanings: "singer" (nar), "fox" (ka_5), "liar" (lul), and "crab" (allub, lub being written with the sign LUL). Therefore, such proverbs were listed together on the basis of graphic analogy (Crisostomo 2019a, 152).

Proverbs in Education

Niek Veldhuis (1997) demonstrated that, in the scribal curriculum, proverbs were introduced after advanced lexical lists and mathematical exercises. According to the data, Sumerian proverbs, along with model contracts, were the last text types copied in the elementary phase of scribal education. Literary compositions, on the other hand, constituted the advanced phase of the curriculum (see chapter 7). Proverbs occasionally appear on compilation tablets with compositions learned early in the advanced stage of education (Kleinerman 2011, 57–74). Thus, based on tablet typology and emic groupings, proverbs came at the pivot point of the elementary and advanced phases. Why was this the case?

Introduction to grammar may have been one reason (see chapter 11). While pupils encountered signs, values, and vocabulary throughout the elementary phase, their first significant exposure to sentences began with model contracts and proverbs. Veldhuis has suggested that the first entry of *Proverb Collection* 2 (see fig. 12.3) may have served as an introduction to certain grammatical categories (Veldhuis 2000, 386–87). Indeed, the passage displays a clear structure: Sumerian prefixes marking grammatical voice and modality are repeated in three groups. Thus, it is plausible that introduction to grammar was a pedagogical consideration for teaching proverbs. However, elsewhere in the proverb collections the grammar and lexicon are obscure (Crisostomo 2019a, 142), and phrases are often cryptic because of ellipses (omission of words) (Alster and Oshima 2006, 36). While grammar was likely one consideration for teaching proverbs, there were likely other reasons as well.

Another explanation is rooted in the understanding of the proverb collections as examples of listing scholarship. According to this perspective, proverb collections, like lexical lists, provided an "ideal medium for the habituation and exploration

of the scribal practice of analogical hermeneutics" (Crisostomo 2019a, 156). In this way, proverb collections continued and expanded the hermeneutical strategies learned earlier in the curriculum. The strength of this explanation lies in its identification of a rational process. Education is not solely about content; it also includes ways of thinking about things. However, analogical reasoning—in the form of graphic or interlingual associations—does not exclude the possibility that genuine proverbs are in the collections. The imposition of a graphic system may obscure the spoken discourse it entextualizes, but that oral background cannot be ruled out altogether.

There is a final explanation that has yet to be considered. In secondary language acquisition, beginning students struggle with set phrases such as proverbs. In the 1970s, the Russian paremiologist Grigorii Permjakov established a "paremiological minimum," which refers to the minimum set of proverbs both native and foreign speakers need to know "in order to communicate effectively in that language" (Mieder 2007, 399). Discussions of Mesopotamian scribal education rarely consider poetics, style, and phraseology as elements in scribal training. However, proverbs were a necessary component in deepening students' comprehension of Sumerian. Not just grammar and vocabulary were important elements of language acquisition—knowing how and when to apply discourse units was important, too. It is no wonder scribes drew on proverbs to demonstrate their command of the language in the Edubba'a literature. Doing so was perhaps the best way to display academic prowess outside strictly narrative contexts.

Style and Content

Proverbs are "artistic miniatures," as Permjakov put it, possessing a high degree of stylistic potential. Traditionally they have been considered rhetorical devices, but in recent years emphasis has been placed on their functional-pragmatic aspects in communicative contexts (Jesenšek 2015). Sumerian proverbs reflect stylistic features attested cross-linguistically. For instance, many languages use proverb introducers such as "as they say" or "as the old saying/proverb goes" to signal the use of a proverb (Rozumko 2011). Sumerian has a clitic quotative particle -eše that often serves the same function. Given that -eše can also function simply to record direct or indirect speech, its presence does not necessarily signal a proverb. However, its common usage throughout the proverb sources indicates that the context of many entries was understood to be one of spoken discourse. Furthermore, more than 85 percent of the proverbs quoted in Sumerian literary texts occur in direct-speech contexts.

Other stylistic features of Sumerian proverbs include parallelism, metaphor, hyperbole, productive types, and ellipsis. Alster has correctly pointed out that the latter is significant for the classification of the collections as "proverb collections" (even though not every saying is a proverb) given that ellipsis is a well-established feature of proverbs worldwide. The best example from the Sumerian proverb collections is the saying "Tell a lie, tell a truth" (*Proverb Collection* 7, no. 89), which is a truncated form of "Tell a lie, (and) then tell a truth, it will be counted as a lie" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 71). One needs the last phrase of the proverb to get the gist—in modern terms, "Don't cry wolf" (Alster 2007, 5–6).

Many Sumerian proverbs deal with daily life and social situations. For example, "May a clever farmer live with you in the house" (*Proverb Collection* 3, no. 162) or "Marry a wife according to your choice! Have children to your heart's desire" (*Proverb Collection* 1, no. 146). Animals are the subjects of many traditional sayings. *Proverb Collections* 5 and 8+20 contain entries almost exclusively about animals. These sayings vary considerably in length; some are mere phrases—"a pig digging in the house" (*Proverb Collection* 8, section A 1)—while others stretch over twelve lines and could be classified as "fables" (e.g., *Proverb Collection* 5, no. 102). In addition, a number of "wellerisms" can be found in Sumerian animal sayings. According to Alster, "a wellerism is a proverb that contains (1) a short description of a situation;

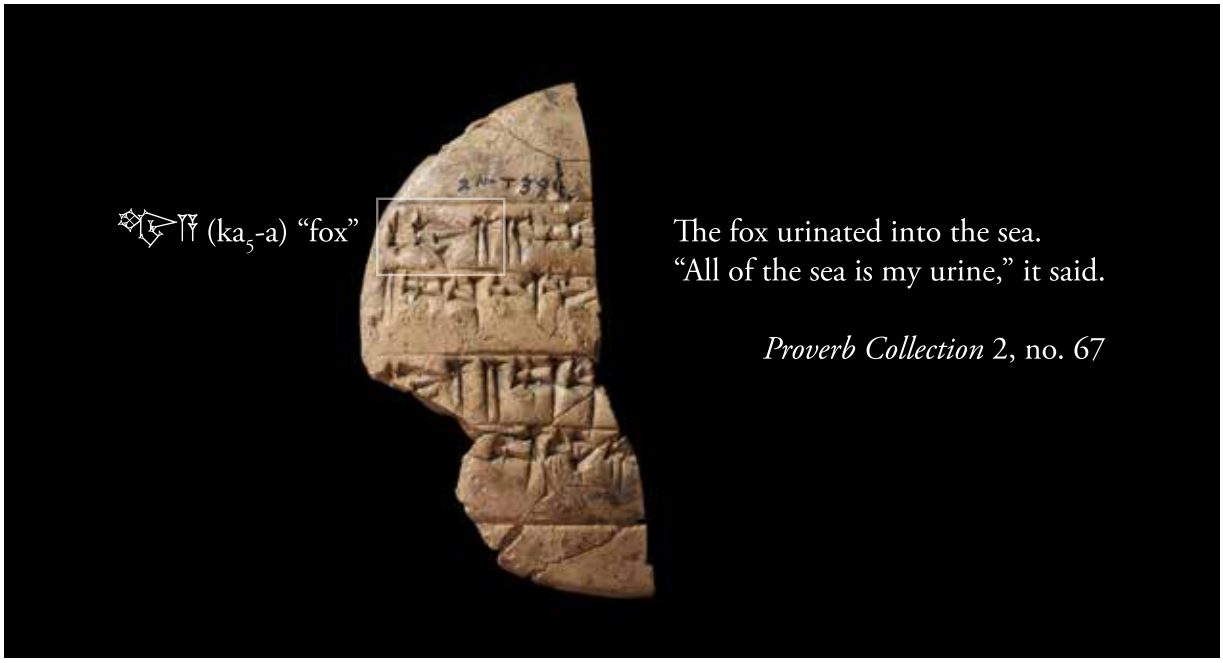

Figure 12.2. Obverse of a lenticular tablet inscribed twice with *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 67. **Cat. no. 61**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation from Alster 1997, 58.

(2) a quoted speech uttered in that situation; and (3) identification of the speaker" (Alster 2007, 9). An amusing wellerism is partially preserved on a broken lenticular tablet (fig. 12.2). The proverb, copied twice on the obverse, can be reconstructed from other sources: "The fox urinated into the sea. 'All of the sea is my urine,' it said" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 67). In Sumerian proverbs, foxes are regularly characterized as conceited, boastful, cunning, or mischievous.

Deities show up somewhat intermittently in the proverb collections but are by no means absent: "A man's personal god is a shepherd who finds pasturage for him. Let him lead him like sheep to the grass they can eat" (*Proverb Collection* 3, no. 314). A variety of sayings related to religious life are found. In particular, a number of proverbs in Emesal are related to cultic laments (Gabbay 2011). Emesal was a dialect or register of the Sumerian language used by women and the gala "lamentation priest." Moreover, Gabbay has suggested that the association of the gala with funerary contexts in the late third millennium BCE may lie behind the "elegiac tone" of some of the sayings. For example, the first entry of *Proverb Collection* 2, recorded in the main dialect of Sumerian, has a dirge-like tenor (fig. 12.3). It is perhaps appropriate that the theme of fate follows directly after this proverb. For example:

> Fate is a dog, well able to bite.
> It clings like dirty rags (saying),
> "Who is my man? Let him know it!"
>
> *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 11

Related to the concepts of death and fate are existential statements such as "No one is tall enough to reach the heavens. No one is broad enough to cover the earth" (adapted from *Proverb Collection* 22, vi. 38–41). This saying is cited in two Sumerian literary compositions (*Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, **cat. no. 74**, and *Nothing Is Precious* A) and in one Akkadian text (*Dialogue of Pessimism*). Furthermore, this topos was adapted in several passages of the Hebrew Bible (Samet 2010). *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, lines 107–10, record another series of proverbs (translated in Alster 2007, 90):

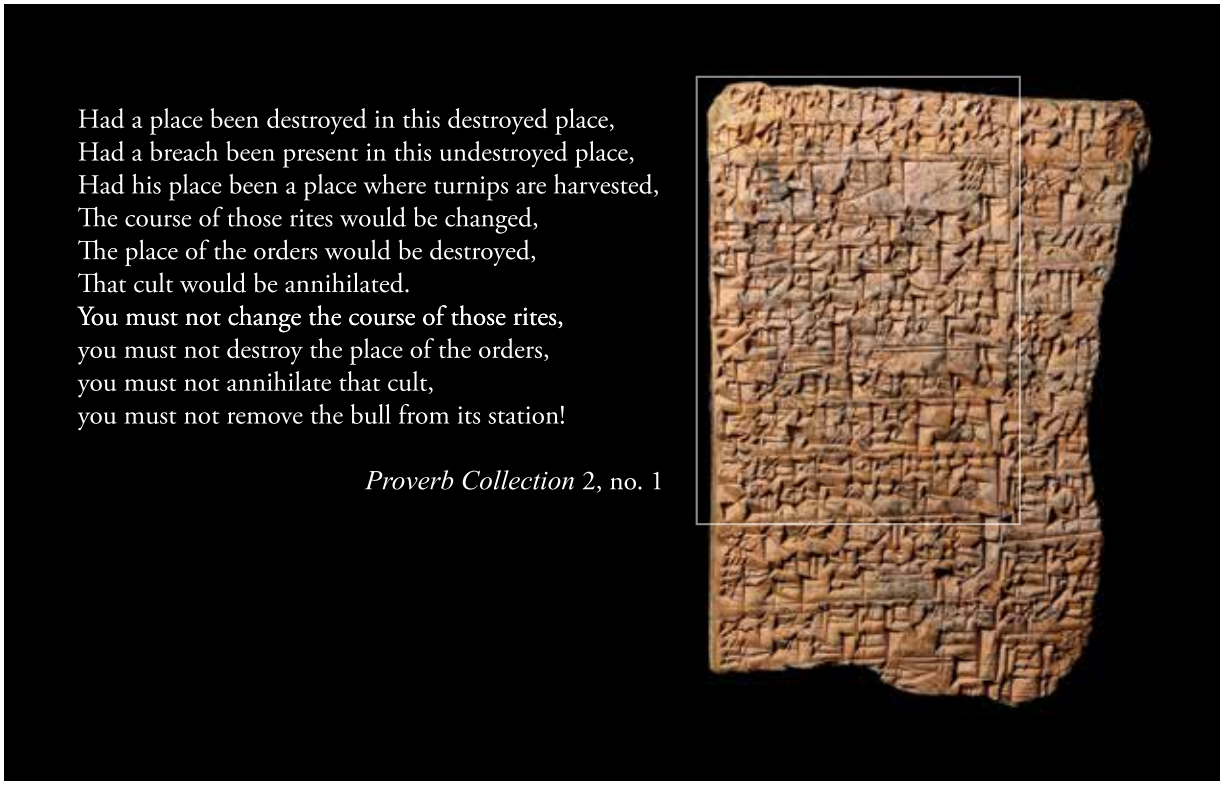

Figure 12.3. Obverse of a fragment of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with *Proverb Collection* 2. **Cat. no. 58**. Photo by CM; annotations by MDH; translation from Gabbay 2011, 51.

> Two men together will not die; bundles of reeds will not sink.
> One cannot cut a three-ply rope.
> Waters cannot wash away men on a wall.
> Fire in a reed house cannot be extinguished.

Variations on these proverbs are found in two separate proverb collections (*Proverb Collection Kroch* 5, 15; *Schøyen Proverb Collection* 3, obv. 1–2). Although the line "One cannot cut a three-ply rope" is not yet found in the proverb collections, it appears in other literary contexts—for example, the fifth tablet of the *Epic of Gilgameš*. Astonishingly, a version of this proverb appears in Ecclesiastes 4:12, "where the context is also two prevailing over one" (George 2003, 822 n. 76)—a possible indication of the proverb's currency throughout the Near East, whether in spoken discourse or the scribal milieu.

On the completely opposite end of the spectrum are humorous sayings, such as:

> Something which has never occurred since time immemorial.
> Didn't the young girl fart in her husband's lap?
>
> *Proverb Collection* 1, no. 12

> A donkey's penis beats (against) its (own) belly.
>
> *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 78

And humorous sexual topics occur rather frequently in proverb sources. Illustrative is the short story *The Fowler and His Wife*, in which the wife of a fowler uses double entendres based on vocabulary related to her husband's profession to complain about his impotency (Alster 2005, 371) (see **cat. no. 60**). Although short stories are related to the proverb

collections, in which they are often incorporated, they are clearly distinct entities, as demonstrated most remarkably by an unpublished compilation tablet recently discussed by Jana Matuszak. It contains multiple short compositions, each divided by a double ruling and each with its own line count, and the tablet's left edge reads "nine short (stories)" (Matuszak 2022, 2). Another short story, *The Old Man and the Young Girl*, served as a satirical morality tale by critiquing the marriage between an impotent man and a fertile wife (Matuszak 2022, 7–11). Sexual innuendo is again couched in metaphorical dialogue, which must have been entertaining to its scribal audience.

Other topics addressed in proverb sources are constructions of power and kingship. The poor seem to bear the brunt of numerous sayings: "The poor man is not appreciated" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 18); "The poor man chews what(ever) he receives" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 19). Interestingly, proverbs simultaneously present positive and negative views of kingship (Konstantopoulos 2017, 156). For instance, the saying "By sunrise decisions are made. When the sun is up, kingship is assigned" (*Proverb Collection* 3, no. 81) seems to legitimize kingship as ordained by the gods, while "The palace is a slippery place which catches those who know it" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 156) appears to poke fun at the royal institution.

The palace is the topic of numerous proverbs, some of which go back to the Early Dynastic version of the *Instructions of Šuruppak*. One saying found there, "The income is unrivaled, (but) the expenditure is endless," is understood as a reference to the palace, as it directly follows the saying "The palace is a huge river; its interior is a goring bull" (Alster 2005, 74). The intertextual scope of the saying is remarkable. In *Proverb Collection* 25, no. 12, the saying is accompanied by the prohibition "Upon the king's property, don't lift your eyes." Moreover, in a later version of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) (see chapter 9), the saying is followed by what appears to be the answer to a riddle: "Property of the king." In Sumerian riddles, the solution typically follows the riddle. Therefore, it is possible that the saying was construed as a riddle in *Proverb Collection* 25, no. 12, and also in the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri). This interpretation is supported by the fact that *Proverb Collection* 25, no. 1 preserves another riddle known from external sources (Civil 1987, 31). On the other hand, the phrase "property of the king" precedes the saying recorded on a lenticular tablet of the *List of Things* (Niĝga) (fig. 12.4; see chapter 9).

Therefore, the original saying may have been a proverb, but scribes applied it differently according to context (Falkowitz 1980, 109–11). In any case, this incredibly popular saying displays the widest intertextual scope, occurring in *Proverb Collections* 25 and 26, the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri), the *List of Things* (Niĝga), the literary collection *Temple Hymns*, and the different versions of the *Instructions of Šuruppak*. It is important further to emphasize the intertextual links between the latter composition and the Sumerian proverb collections. The literary composition most cited in these collections is the *Instructions of Šuruppak*, with eleven citations. Mesopotamian scribes clearly saw a link between them.

Quotations from literary compositions that are cited in the proverb collections, such as the saying from the *Instructions of Šuruppak* discussed above, are only one side of the intertextual coin. Sayings found in the proverb collections were also quoted in literary texts. It is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to determine which text is the source of the quotation. Nevertheless, there are some clues. First, if a proverb occurs in multiple literary compositions, it is plausibly an independent saying. Second, paremiological research has demonstrated recurring patterns of proverb use in communicative contexts; Sumerian proverbs, when quoted in literary texts, tend to follow those patterns. For example, proverbs are often placed at prominent positions in the text for rhetorical effect. Proverbs can also provide a text-structuring function through cohesion. Speakers often foreground

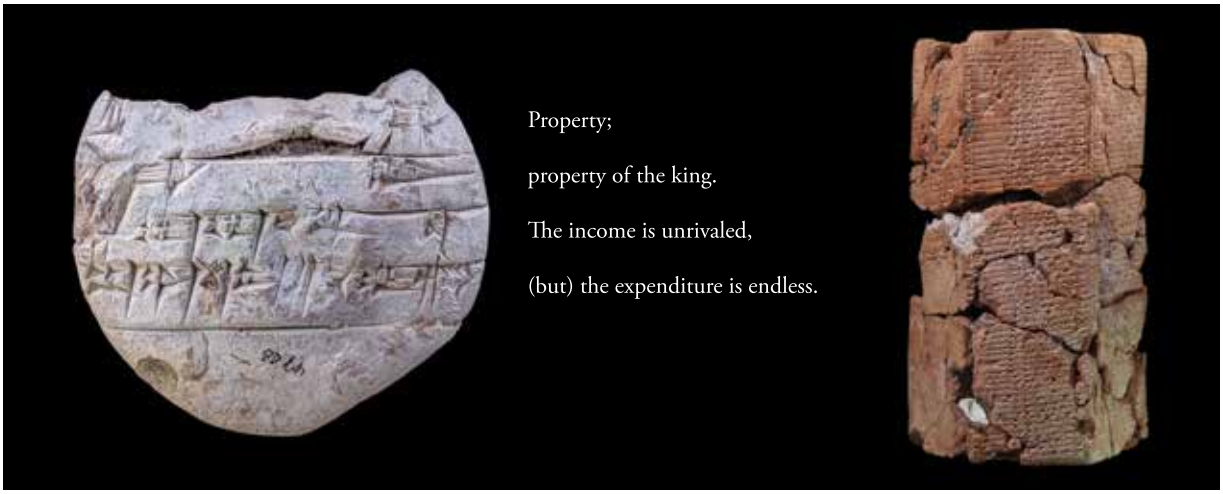

Figure 12.4. *Left:* Obverse of a lenticular tablet inscribed with an extract from the *List of Things* (Niĝga). YPM BC 023907, YBC 9908. *Right:* The lines are also found on a six-sided prism. YPM BC 026991, YBC 13524. Photos by Klaus Wagensonner, courtesy of the Yale Peabody Museum, Babylonian Collection; annotations by MDH; translation adapted from Alster 2005, 74.

traditional material, such as proverbs, for argumentative or didactic purposes.

In *Dialogue* 1 **(cat. no. 14)**, a school dispute between two scribes, proverbs are cited exclusively at the beginning or end of speech turns, marked off by double rulings on the tablet. They are incorporated stylistically—forming cohesive ties to the surrounding discourse—and serve text-structuring and argumentative functions. In addition, speakers regularly draw on proverbs that occur in different collections or independent sources and "splice" them into proverb pairs.

For instance, the saying "He who tells lies is a courier from distant places" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 72) is used in both *Dialogue* 1 and *Dialogue* 2, where it is cited at the beginning and end, respectively, of a speech turn. However, in *Dialogue* 1, the proverb is paired with an independent saying occurring on a lenticular tablet from Nippur (CBS 3811), while in *Dialogue* 2 the proverb is paired with a different saying (*Proverb Collection* 11, no. 42). The fact that the proverb occurs in separate literary compositions and is, in each case, spliced together with proverbs from different sources means that *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 72 is not a quotation *from* literary texts but rather a quotation of a proverb *in* literary texts.

Furthermore, the saying is incorporated into the surrounding textual material through phonological, semantic, and thematic cohesion. The fact that speakers in *Dialogue* 1 spliced together proverbs from multiple sources exclusively at the beginning or end of speech turns indicates that scribes considered these phraseological units to be special types of texts. Speakers drew on a bank of traditional materials and incorporated them stylistically at key points in the debate for rhetorical effect—a well-attested pattern of proverb use.

During the final verdict in the disputation *Ezinam and Ewe* (see chapter 19), a modified form of a proverb serves as an evaluative comment: "Whoever has silver, whoever has jewels, whoever has cattle, whoever has *sheep* shall take a seat at the gate of whoever has *grain*, and pass his time there" (*Ezinam and Ewe*, lines 189–90). The proverb abstracts the particular disputants Ezinam (grain deified) and Ewe (female sheep) by replacing them with general terms, "barley/grain" (še) and "sheep" (udu). Proverbs commonly function in this way: they tend to generalize "from the concrete situation

to a more abstract level, avoiding particular reference and syntactic cohesion with the text/context" (Norrick 1985, 17). In addition, the use of proverbs in judicial contexts is well attested cross-culturally. In *Ezinam and Ewe*, the proverb occurs in a prominent position at the end of the text, directly before the postscript and doxology, and summarizes the theme of the entire debate.

Conclusion

The Sumerian proverbs exhibit a remarkable variety of text types. While not every textual unit is a proverb, many of the sayings certainly are. Furthermore, although the original speech context of the sayings has been lost forever, intertextual links between the proverbs and other literary compositions provide a small window into the nature and use of proverbs in communicative contexts. Instructors considered Sumerian proverbs to be prime teaching material for students transitioning into a more advanced stage of their education. In addition to the nuts-and-bolts of training—sign shapes and values, vocabulary, and grammar—a scribe's ability to copy proverbs and competence to cite them appropriately were demonstrative features of a higher level of language acquisition. It is perhaps appropriate that this cultural value was summed up in a Sumerian proverb itself: "A scribe who does not know Sumerian, what kind of scribe is he?" (*Proverb Collection* 2, no. 47).

Explore Further

Alster, Bendt. *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections*. 2 vols. Bethesda: CDL Press, 1997.

Crisostomo, C. Jay. "Creating Proverbs: The Listing Scholarship of the Sumerian Proverbs Collections." *Kaskal: Rivista di storia, ambiente e culture del Vicino Oriente antico* 16 (2019): 141–57.

Taylor, Jon. "The Sumerian Proverb Collections." *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 99 (2005): 13–38.


A30233

13 What Did They Learn about Mathematics?

Barbora Wichterlová

> There where people regularly went for tutelage in the scribal art,
> I qualified fully in subtraction, addition, reckoning, and accounting.
>
> *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B, lines 16–17

At one of the most important sources of Sumerian literature, House F at Nippur, much of scribal education focused on the development of literacy, which allowed its scribes to produce, in great number, such elaborate literary compositions as the above-cited hymn in the voice of Šulgi, king of Ur (2094–2046 BCE). While these literary compositions, produced by advanced scribes, are scattered across some 600 tablets at House F, the school has yielded only about 120 mathematical tablets, of which all but three belong to the elementary sequence. Still, a sufficient mastery of metrology, arithmetic, and even more complex calculation was an important goal of scribal education there. Sumerian literary compositions such as the hymn of the venerated King Šulgi are themselves testaments to the practical and ideological value placed on the acquisition of numeracy, through which kings were depicted as arbiters of (metrological) justice who encouraged the fair distribution of goods and proper management of assets (Robson 2009, 225–26). During the elementary stage of education, Nippurean scribes learned how to deal with numbers and measures in concrete contexts alongside material objects in thematic lists or in model legal contracts, as well as how to work with them as abstract entities in systematic metrological and numerical lists and tables. The three more-complex calculations found at House F relied on the material internalized during this elementary stage. The mathematical practice of House F scribes was part of the broader tradition of ancient Mesopotamian mathematics, of which perhaps the most fascinating feature was the use of a sexagesimal (base-60) place notation system, which has survived to the present day in the measurement of angles and time; compare the sexagesimal expression "1:15 hours" (i.e., $1 \times 60^1 + 15 \times 60^0$) with the decimal "75 minutes" (i.e., $7 \times 10^1 + 5 \times 10^0$). The following reconstruction of the

Reverse of a multicolumn tablet containing multiplication tables. **Cat. no. 23**. Photo by DL.

mathematical curriculum at House F is heavily indebted to the pioneering work of Eleanor Robson on this topic (Robson 2002, 2008, 2009).

Numbers and Measures in Concrete Contexts

In House F, students were first introduced to numbers and measures alongside material objects rather than as an abstract system. Following practice in sign writing—a prerequisite for mathematical training just as for learning Sumerian—they encountered metrological units in thematic lists during the next stage of the elementary phase. Students were introduced to capacity measures, in descending order, as sizes of boats (ranging from ca. 18,000 to 1,500 liters/4,755 to 396 gallons) or, in the case of smaller units (from ca. 60 to 0.017 liters/15 gallons to 0.57 ounces), as wooden measuring vats. A few basic units of weight were presented alongside wooden scales and then treated more fully (from ca. 60 kilograms to 0.05 grams/132 pounds to 0.0017 ounces), at the very end of a separate thematic list, as stone weights (fig. 13.1). Some lower units of length were listed alongside measuring reeds, but units of length and area in general were not extensively covered (Robson 2009, 205; Veldhuis 1997, 157–63). According to Robson, this absence may reflect the fact that most units of length and area cannot be related to material objects (Robson 2009, 205).

Metrological units were practiced once again in concrete contexts during a later stage of the elementary phase, particularly in model legal contracts, which refer, for example, to capacity and area measures relating to barley loans and inheritance divisions, respectively (see chapter 14). Remarkably, similar operations with metrological units alongside relevant material objects are recorded in a fictional letter of a king of Isin, Išbi-Erra (2019–1987 BCE), to the king of Ur, Ibbi-Sin (2028–2002 BCE), attested in one copy at House F

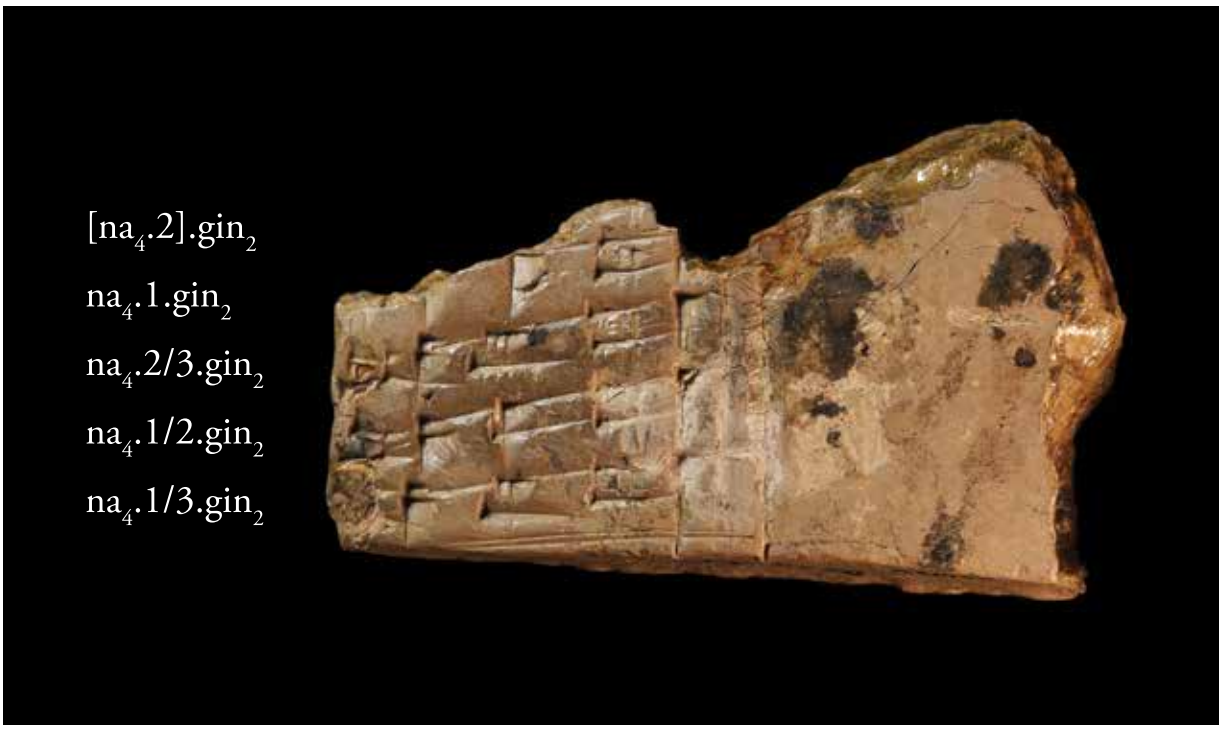

Figure 13.1. Obverse of a teacher–student exercise inscribed with a list of stone weights of two, one, two-thirds, half, and one-third of a shekel (8.3 grams/0.29 ounces). **Cat. no. 79**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

(fig. 13.2) and belonging already to the advanced stage of the scribal curriculum:

> You [Ibbi-Sin] gave me [Išbi-Erra] orders concerning an expedition from Isin to Kazallu to purchase grain. As the market price of grain was equivalent to (one shekel) per kor, twenty talents of silver was invested in the purchase of grain. Word having reached me that hostile Amorites had entered your frontier territory, I proceeded to deliver all the grain—72,000 kor—into (the city of) Isin. But now all the Amorites have entered the homeland, and have captured all the great storehouses, one by one. Because of (these) Amorites I cannot hand over the grain for threshing; they are too strong for me, and I am made to stay put. Therefore, my king should (order) the caulking of 600 barges of 120 kor capacity. [. . .]
>
> *Letter of Išbi-Erra to Ibbi-Sin* 1, lines 3–13 (translation after Michalowski 2011, 417–18)

Figure 13.2. Obverse of an extract tablet inscribed with the beginning of the *Letter of Išbi-Erra to Ibbi-Sin* 1. ISACM A30207. Photo by CM.

Following Robson, the literary letter is but a mathematical problem in disguise, "a pretext to show simple mathematics and metrology at work in a quasi-realistic context" (Robson 2009, 219). Here, using numbers that are easy to calculate with in the sexagesimal system, a student converts silver into 72,000 kor of grain using the given silver-to-grain exchange rate—1 shekel per kor—and the total amount of silver invested, 20 talents—that is, 72,000 shekels. The 72,000 kor are subsequently divided into 600 barges of 120 kor in capacity. Notably, these huge capacity measures—with 1 kor corresponding to about 300 liters/79 gallons—are contextualized in the same way as in the thematic *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (part of Ura), where students first encountered them (Robson 2009, 219). On the other hand, the student knows how to convert talents into shekels based only on familiarity with the *Metrological Series*, introduced after the thematic lists, in which weights and measures are presented as an abstract system—that is, separate from the metrological equipment or commodities weighed or measured.

Numbers and Measures as Abstract Systems

The *Metrological Series* covers, in the following fixed order, units of capacity (in ascending order, from ca. 0.3 to 65 million liters/0.07 to 1.7 million gallons), weight (from ca. 0.025 grams to 1,800 kilograms/0.0088 ounces to 3,968 pounds), area (from ca. 12 square meters to 47,000 hectares/129 square feet to 183 square miles), and length (from ca. 17 millimeters to 650 kilometers/0.67 inches to 403 miles), the latter two having been neglected in the thematic noun lists (Robson 2009, 207). They are presented in two formats: as lists or as tables. Whereas the former simply list metrological units, the latter add their value as multiples of a more basic unit in sexagesimal place notation (Friberg 1990, 542–43). **Cat. no. 83** (fig. 13.3), for example,

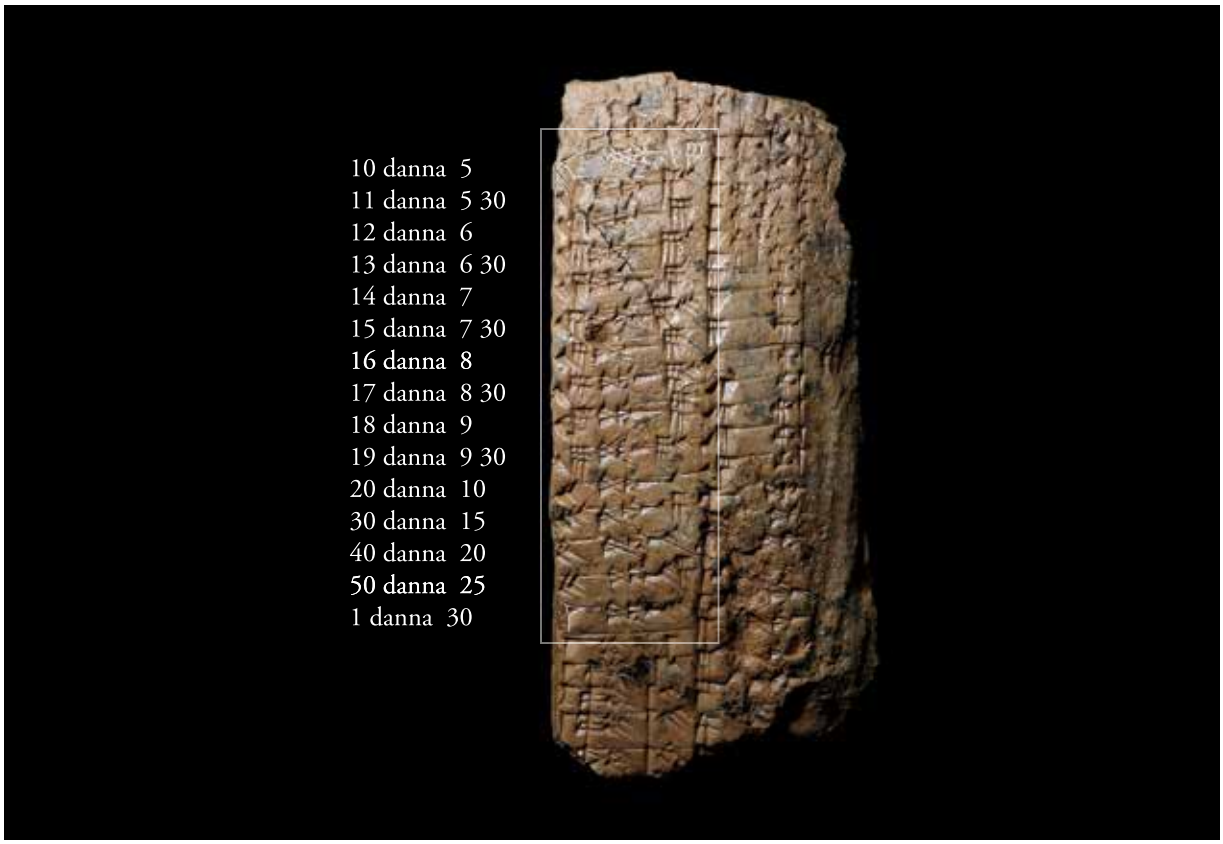

Figure 13.3. Reverse of a teacher–student exercise tablet with an extract of a metrological table of length. **Cat. no. 83**. Photo by CM; annotations by MDH; transliteration from Robson 2002, 335; 2009, 208.

records a portion of a metrological table of length, ranging from 10 to 60 leagues (danna in Sumerian; ca. 10.8 kilometers/6.7 miles), in increments of 1 league between 10 and 19 leagues, and increments of 10 leagues for the rest. Unlike in a metrological list, here each entry is supplemented on the right-hand side by a conversion into multiples of a basic unit, in this case rods (ca. 6 meters/19.6 feet), expressed in the sexagesimal place notation without the presence of the actual word for the basic unit (ninda in Sumerian). The first line, then, which reads 10 danna 5, expresses that 10 leagues equal 5×60^2 rods, corresponding to 18,000 (or 18×10^3) rods in our decimal system. Note that unlike with the Arabic numeral 18,000, where 000 indicates that 18 pertains to thousands (or 10^3), the cuneiform notation is "floating" and so provides no such specification of absolute quantity (Proust 2019, 7). Only by context do we conclude that 5×60^2, rather than 5×60^1 or 5×60^3, is meant. Equally, that the vertical wedge on the left-hand side of the last line represents 60 (i.e., 1×60^1) leagues, rather than 1 (i.e., 1×60^0) league, can be determined only by its position at the end of the sequence, following the 50 danna entry in the preceding line.

This floating sexagesimal place notation characterizes the *Numerical Series*, which follows the *Metrological Series* in the elementary curriculum. At House F, the *Numerical Series* consists of reciprocal and multiplication tables. A reciprocal table presents all the one- and two-place reciprocal pairs between 2 and 81 (or rather 1 21 in sexagesimal place notation) (see table 13.1).

A reciprocal of any number x is defined as 1 over x. Since 60 is represented as 1 in the floating notation, the reciprocal of 15, for example, is 4.

Table 13.1. Reciprocal pairs of regular sexagesimal numbers in reciprocal tables.

2	30	16	3 45	45	1 20
3	20	18	3 20	48	1 15
4	15	20	3	50	1 12
5	12	24	2 30	54	1 6 40
6	10	25	2 24	1	1
8	7 30	27	2 13 20	1 4	56 15
9	6 40	30	2	1 12	50
10	6	32	1 52 30	1 15	48
12	5	36	1 40	1 20	45
15	4	40	1 30	1 21	44 26 40

Reciprocal tables consist of "regular" reciprocal pairs—that is, reciprocals that can be represented with a finite number of digits in the sexagesimal place notation; thus the reciprocal of 7, for example, does not appear (Proust 2019, 9). The beginning of reciprocal tables, such as **cat. no. 84** (fig. 13.4), likewise provides the expression of two-thirds and half (šuriabi) of 1 in sexagesimal place notation—that is, 40 and 30, respectively. Furthermore, **cat. no. 84** is considered "verbose" in that it does not present bare reciprocal pairs, as shown in figure 13.3, but includes the Sumerian expression for a reciprocal of *x*, that is, igi-*x*-ĝalbi.

Next in the *Numerical Series* come multiplication tables, containing a set selection of "principal" numbers between 50 and 1 15 to be multiplied by numbers 1–20, 30, 40, and 50. A verbose multiplication table, such as **cat. no. 85** (fig. 13.5), includes the Sumerian expression "times" (ara). Its first three lines then read "25 times 1 (is) 25; (25) times 2 (is) 50; (25) times 3 (is) 1 15 [i.e., 75 in our decimal notation]."

Several nonverbose multiplication tables are combined in **cat. no. 23** (fig. 13.6), pertaining to the principal numbers 18, 16 40, 16, 15, 12 30, 12, 10, 9, 8 20, and 8, followed by the entry 1 7 30, a catch line indicating that 7 30 is the next principal number in the series. The highlighted line from the multiplication table of the principal number 8 reads 9 1 12, expressing that the implied 8 multiplied by 9 equals 1 12 (i.e., 72 in our decimal system).

Occasionally, following the final multiplication of a principal number by 50, multiplication tables provide squares or square roots of this number (Robson 2009, 211). At House F, we find one entirely separate table of square roots ranging from 1 to 30, in increments of 1 (UM 55-21-356). A sample line reads "of 1 4 [i.e., 64 in our decimal system] the square root is 8." The table's position in the curriculum is debated, but tables of square roots as known from the whole of Nippur likely belong toward the end of the *Numerical Series* (see discussions in Robson 2009, 225; Proust 2007, 137, 141).

The two pillars of the *Numerical Series*, reciprocal and multiplication tables, are inextricably linked in terms of both the numbers with which they operate (Proust 2007, 130–32) and the arithmetical notions they introduce. Most importantly, multiplication by a reciprocal is how division is performed in cuneiform mathematics, since any *x* over *y* can be understood as *x* times 1/*y* (Proust 2019, 9). As far as the *Metrological Series* is concerned, it is unclear what the distinct pedagogical functions of lists and tables were (Robson 2009, 208). Nonetheless, we can think of metrological tables

Figure 13.4. Obverse of a tablet fragment inscribed with a reciprocal table. **Cat. no. 84**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

Figure 13.5. Obverse of a tablet inscribed with an extract from a multiplication table of the number 25. **Cat. no. 85**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

Figure 13.6. Obverse and reverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with multiplication tables for the numbers 18, 16 40, 16, 15, 12 30, 12, 10, 9, 8 20, and 8. **Cat. no. 23**. Photos by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

containing numbers in sexagesimal place notation as a sort of bridge between metrological lists and numerical tables (Proust 2019, 4).

Numbers (and Measures) in Calculations

From thematic lists all the way to multiplication tables, numbers and measures were presented in a highly systematic and standardized fashion in the elementary curriculum, which allowed students to internalize the metrological and arithmetical material simply through rote memorization and reduplication (Robson 2008, 106). The memorized number facts formed the point of reference in the calculations belonging to the advanced curriculum. These advanced calculations operate with numbers primarily as abstract entities, but calculations of reciprocal pairs (fig. 13.7), for example, can also be understood "in terms of very concrete manipulations of lines and areas" (Robson 2009, 222).

Here the student calculates the reciprocal of 17 46 40 (line 1), a number that is regular but cannot be found in a reciprocal table, followed by a verifying calculation of the reciprocal of the resulting reciprocal 3 22 30 (line 3)—that is, 17 46 40 (line 7). The student likely follows a procedure for the solution referred to as the "Technique," laid out in an unprovenienced mathematical tablet—VAT 6505 (Sachs 1947, 226–27). If we plug in the numbers pertaining to the first calculation—that is, the reciprocal of 17 46 40—the instruction would read as follows (translation adjusted from Robson 2009, 222):

> What is the reciprocal of **17 46 40**?
> You, in your working: Find the reciprocal of 6 40.
> You will see **9**. Multiply 9 by 17 40.
> You will see 2 39. Add 1.
> You will see **2 40**. Take the reciprocal of 2 40.
> You will see **22 30**. Multiply 22 30 by 9.

Figure 13.7. Reverse of a cast of IM 58446+58447 inscribed with an extract of *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C), followed by a calculation of a regular reciprocal pair. ISACM C3236+3232. Photo by DL; virtual join and annotations by MDH; transliteration from Robson 2000, 22; 2002, 353; 2009, 221.

You will see **3 22 30**. Your reciprocal is 3 22 30.
That is the method.

The numbers in boldface are those recorded on the tablet in figure 13.7. Rather than as a purely algebraic operation, Robson imagines the Technique as a geometrical calculation of the side of a rectangle, with the area (i.e., 1, the product of any reciprocal pair) and other side (i.e., 17 46 40) given (fig. 13.8a). A portion is measured off from the given length (i.e., 6 40) such that its reciprocal (i.e., 9) is known to the student from a reciprocal table (see fig. 13.4), resulting in a second rectangle of area 1 (fig. 13.8b). This L-shaped figure is then filled in by multiplying the remainder of the original length (i.e., 17 40) by the side of the new rectangle (i.e., 9), thus forming a third rectangle, in this case with an area 2 39 (fig. 13.8c). Adding the area 1 of the second rectangle, the total area of the 17 46 40 × 9 rectangle is 2 40—that is, 2 40 times the area of the original 17 46 40 × ? rectangle with an area 1 (fig. 13.8d). To reach the unknown reciprocal, then, 9 must be divided by 2 40, or, more precisely, multiplied by the reciprocal of 2 40—that is, 22 30 (i.e., half the reciprocal of 1 20, known from a reciprocal table to be 45). The resulting reciprocal 3 22 30 and the procedure of the solution itself are subsequently verified; the rest of the numbers on the tablet pertain to this verification procedure (Robson 2009, 220–23; not detailed here because of space limitations).

Another advanced mathematical tablet, **cat. no. 87** (fig. 13.9), records the calculations of the square of 16 40 (i.e., 16 40 × 16 40 in lines 1–2, with an unexplained extra 16 40 in line 3) and the square root of the resulting 4 37 46 40 (line 4)—that is, 16 40.

The calculation of the square root, known in advance to be 16 40, implements a factorization method—that is, the breaking down of a

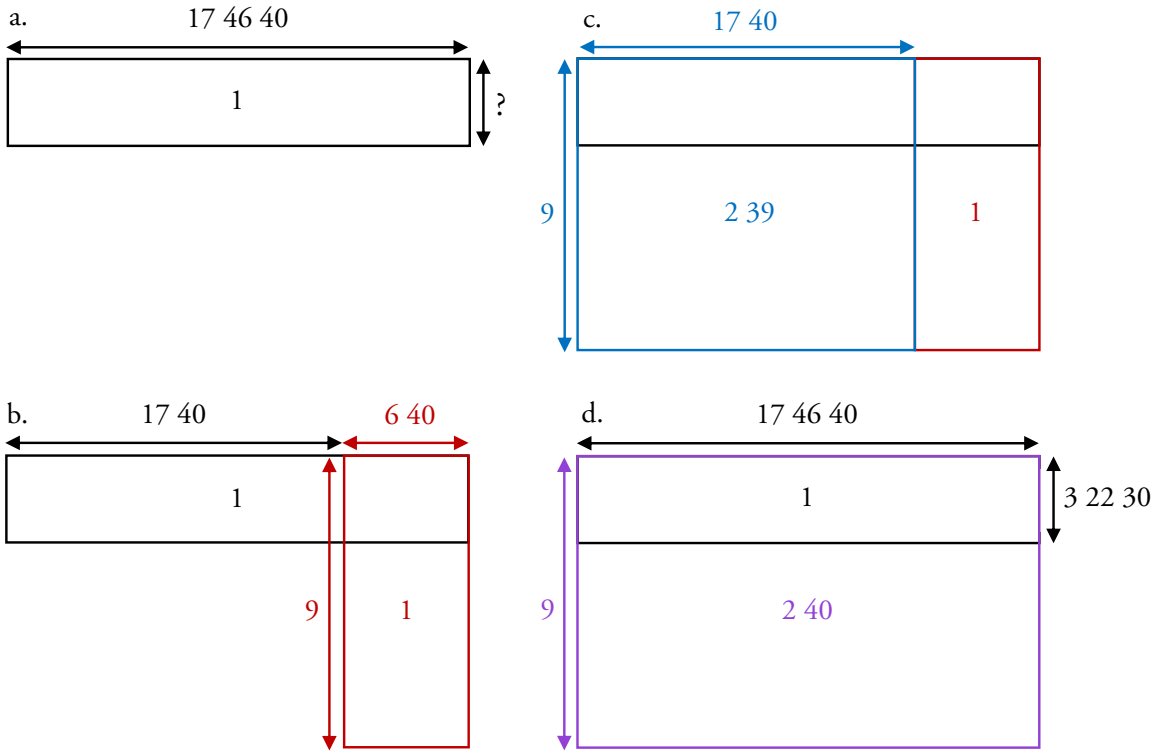

Figure 13.8. Geometrical representation of the "Technique" (modeled on Robson 2009, 223). Diagram by BW.

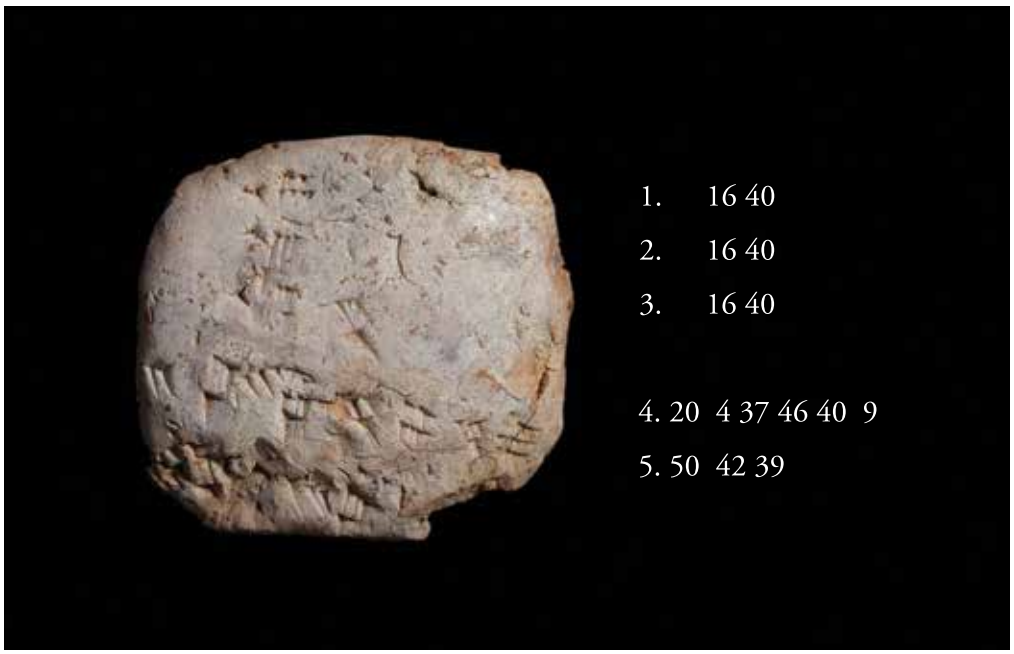

Figure 13.9. Reverse of a round tablet inscribed with a calculation of a square and a square root. **Cat. no. 87**. Photo by CM; annotations by MDH; transliteration from Robson 2002, 354; 2009, 222.

Figure 13.10. Obverse of a tablet inscribed with two lines of an erroneous calculation. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. UM 55-21-357; annotations by MDH; transliteration from Robson 2000, 20; 2002, 355; 2009, 224.

number into a product of factors. It also relies on several number facts given in reciprocal tables (i.e., 1/6 40 = 9) and tables of square roots (i.e., √6 40 = 20 and √41 40 = 50). The student knows that a square root of a product of factors equals the product of the square roots of these factors and so first calculates the square roots 20 (line 4) and 50 (line 5) of 6 40 and 41 40, respectively, the factors of 4 37 46 40. That 6 40, the final sequence of digits in 4 37 46 40, is likely a factor follows from the fact that all the numbers used in these exercises are regular. Multiplying 4 37 46 40 by the reciprocal of 6 40 (i.e., 9 [line 4]) gives us the second factor 41 40. The product of the factors' known square roots 20 and 50 is not recorded on the tablet but does correctly amount to 16 40. Remarkably, though, the student has arrived not at the correct factor 41 40, but 42 39 (line 5), having lost track of the sexagesimal place during the intermediate calculation. In the end, then, the student cheated, not having gotten to 50 from the square root of the number arrived at but knowing very well what was wanted: the square root 16 40—that is, 20 times 50 (Proust 2007, 187–88; Friberg 2007, 39–40).

One House F student completely failed to grasp an assignment (fig. 13.10). Despite having confidence in the result, as indicated by the double ruling underneath it, the student has done nothing more than halved the number 4 26 40 into 2 13 20 instead of calculating its reciprocal (igibi) (Robson 2009, 224).

Conclusion

All in all, there is little evidence for high levels of competence in mathematics at House F, despite the boasting in some Sumerian literary compositions about one's numerical skills. We find no prototypical word problems, otherwise known from

thousands of examples outside House F, operating with areas of trapezoids, volumes of prisms, or agricultural work rates. To appreciate the mathematical heights reached in the Old Babylonian period, we must ultimately turn elsewhere, but House F texts dealing with numbers and measures do provide valuable insight into the foundations of this sophisticated mathematical practice.

Explore Further

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14 Practicing Law

Susanne Paulus

Interactions with the law infused the daily life of Babylonian scribes as they wrote legal documents, were governed by royal legislation, and participated in different roles in legal decision making. Economic and legal texts were the most common documents scribes would write during their career. Many legal documents dealing with family or property law were written by Nippurean scribes and found in the city's scribal quarter (Stone 1987, 215–21; see also chapter 5). Beyond the contractual law reflected in these documents, scribes encountered law collections issued by kings to establish law and order in Babylonia. For the Old Babylonian period, the most influential are the *Laws of Lipit-Eštar* (fig. 14.1), written in Sumerian, and the *Code of Hammu-rabi* in the Akkadian language, preserved on a famous stela (see fig. 6.4 in chapter 6). This stela invites the wronged person facing trial to read the laws and learn about the potential verdict of the case. Naturally, only a literate person would have been able to do so (see chapter 6). In court or legal decision making, scribes participated not only as parties and witnesses in trials but also as court scribes and, most importantly, as judges. In the Old Babylonian period, most trials were conducted locally, and a wide variety of well-respected citizens served as judges on juries (collegia). As laws and written legal documents were essential parts of daily life, one must ask what the students of the Edubba'a learned about the law and legal matters.

Students practiced legal topics in different phases of their education. Toward the end of the first phase of education, once they had mastered advanced lexical lists (see chapter 9), they encountered model contracts, which provided blueprints for writing various legal documents. At the same time, they reproduced parts of law collections, and later, as part of their secondary education, they learned about legal argumentation through model court cases. Instruction about the law and especially the topic of justice were not limited to these genres; justice and punishment also played a central role in many "literary" texts, such as royal hymns.

Obverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with three model court cases, including the *Nippur Murder Trial* (see fig. 14.5 for reverse). **Cat. no. 92**. Photo by DL.

Figure 14.1. Fragment of a black stone stela inscribed in archaic script, likely with the prologue of the *Laws of Lipit-Eštar*, found broken in the first-millennium BCE Parthian fortress at Nippur. ISACM A32768. Photo by DL.

Model Contracts

Model contracts are very similar to actual contemporary legal documents from Nippur, as scribes still wrote those documents using traditional Sumerian phraseology. Model contracts therefore offered practical exercises for training a student in composing legal documents through examples. In the literary text *Scribal Activities* (Edubba'a D), a student boasts that they can write all kinds of needed contracts, from loans and economic partnership agreements to sales and leases, as well as marriages and adoptions:

> Let me write tablets!
> Tablets with (loans) from 300 to 180,000 liters [396 to 47,550 gallons] of grain,
> tablets with (loans) from 1 shekel [8.3 grams/0.29 ounces] to 10 minas [5 kilograms/11 pounds] of silver,
> as well as marriage contracts someone might bring,
> partnership contracts, someone might choose verified (weights up to) 1 talent,
> sales, deeds for houses, fields, gardens (and) slaves,
> security pledges, leases for fields,
> contracts for date growing, [. . .]
> and adoption contracts, I can write all these!"
>
> *Scribal Activities* (Edubba'a D), lines 40–48 (translation after Civil 1985, 70, 72)

Model contracts were not abstract exercises. Simulating an actual contract, they used realistic personal names, weights, and measurements (fig. 14.2).

When writing a contract, students built on the knowledge they had acquired in earlier lessons, when they studied lists of personal names and metrological lists with weights and measurements (Robson 2002, 337; see also chapter 13).

Some scholars have argued that model contracts were also used to introduce students to Sumerian grammar, as they constituted one of the first types of text with actual sentences that the students encountered. However, the didactic value of the contracts' terse and repetitive phraseology is limited compared with the much more varied proverbs introduced at the same stage of education (Veldhuis 2000, 385–86; chapters 11–12). Instead, model contracts seem to have been used to teach the format and elements of a text the students would likely go on to write very often during the course of their careers.

The didactic approach to using model contracts consisted in having students memorize phraseology by repeating words and patterns (Lieberman 1992, 129). Often, students practiced one model contract after another in a list-like format. On **cat. no. 89** (fig. 14.2), the teacher has already included the beginning of the next contract, "1,050 liters (277 gallons) of barley," immediately after the end of the first contract, reflecting how loan contracts were studied one after the other. The small fragment in figure 14.3 (**cat. no. 90**) shows the obverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with several models of barley

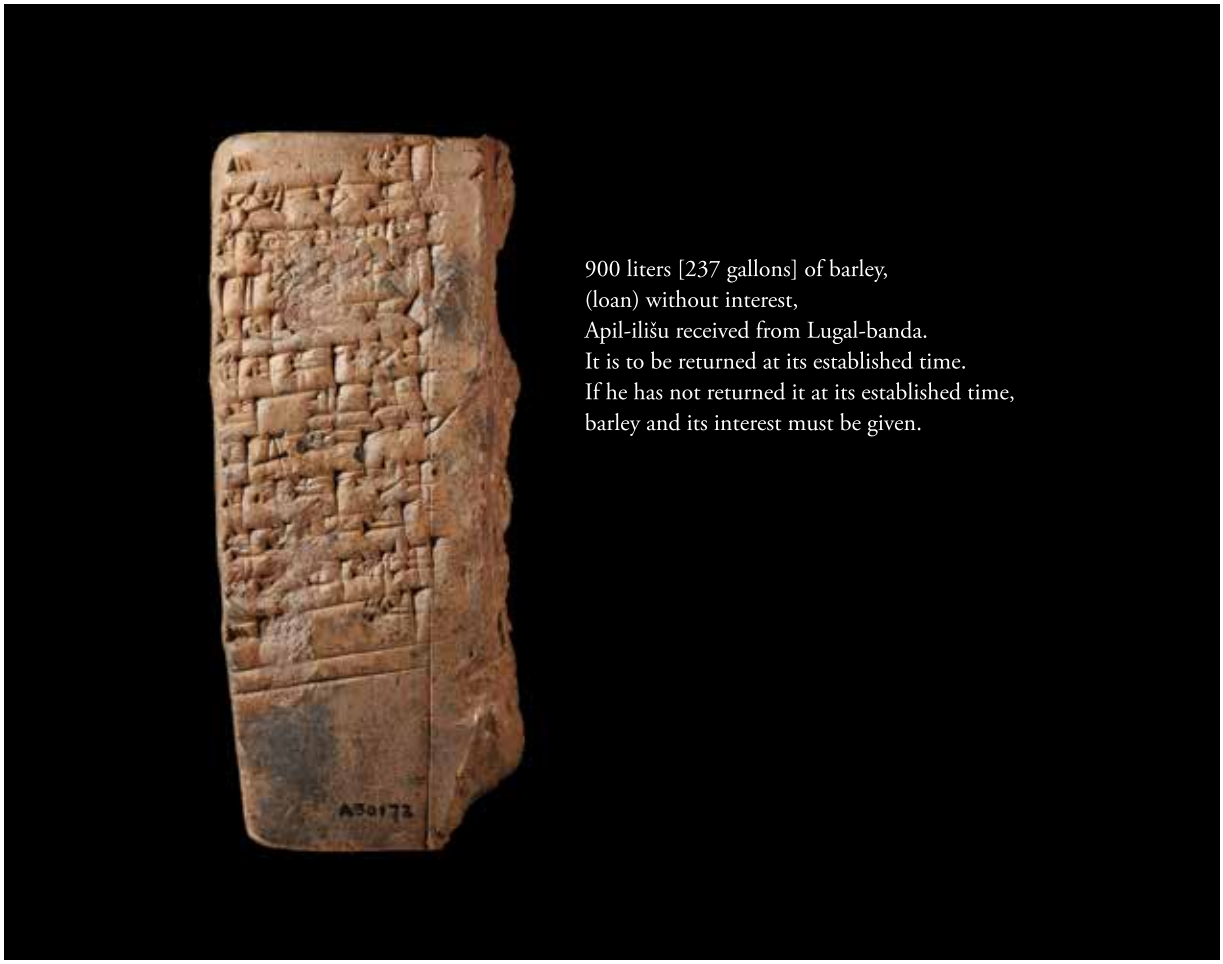

Figure 14.2. Obverse of the left-hand side of a teacher–student exercise inscribed with a model for a barley loan. **Cat. no. 89**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by SP.

loans. It was initially part of a much larger compilation of model contracts and still contains three model loans. Comparing the different contracts, one notices that the exercise is highly repetitive. Often, only the amounts of barley, personal names, and some clauses, including whether the loan was interest free or what happened if the loan was not repaid on time, differed. In similar documents, calculations of the interest—in the case here, 33 percent annually—called for basic calculation skills: "300 liters (79 gallons) of grain, an interest rate of 100 liters (26 gallons) per 300 liters of grain is to be charged" (as on 3NT-914, now in the Iraq Museum; translation after Robson 2002, 337). As is typical in model contracts, the examples in **cat. no. 90** (fig. 14.3) also omit naming the witnesses and date and replace them with a repetitive placeholder: "Its witnesses, its month, its year." Repeating one loan after another was likely not a very stimulating exercise, useful though it was, since loan contracts were some of the most common documents a scribe had to write.

Initiation into the terminology of contracts took place not only through examples but also specialized lexical lists. Elsewhere in Nippur, though not in House F, students used the *Legal Phrasebook* (kiulutinbiše [meaning "at its agreed time"]) (Veldhuis 2014, 188–95), which compiled and organized terminology otherwise used in separate contracts:

76. interest
77. for its interest
78. for its interest and capital
79. the established interest
80. the established interest of (the god) Utu

Legal Phrasebook (kiulutinbiše), entries 76–80 (translation after DCCLT and Roth 1979, 287–302)

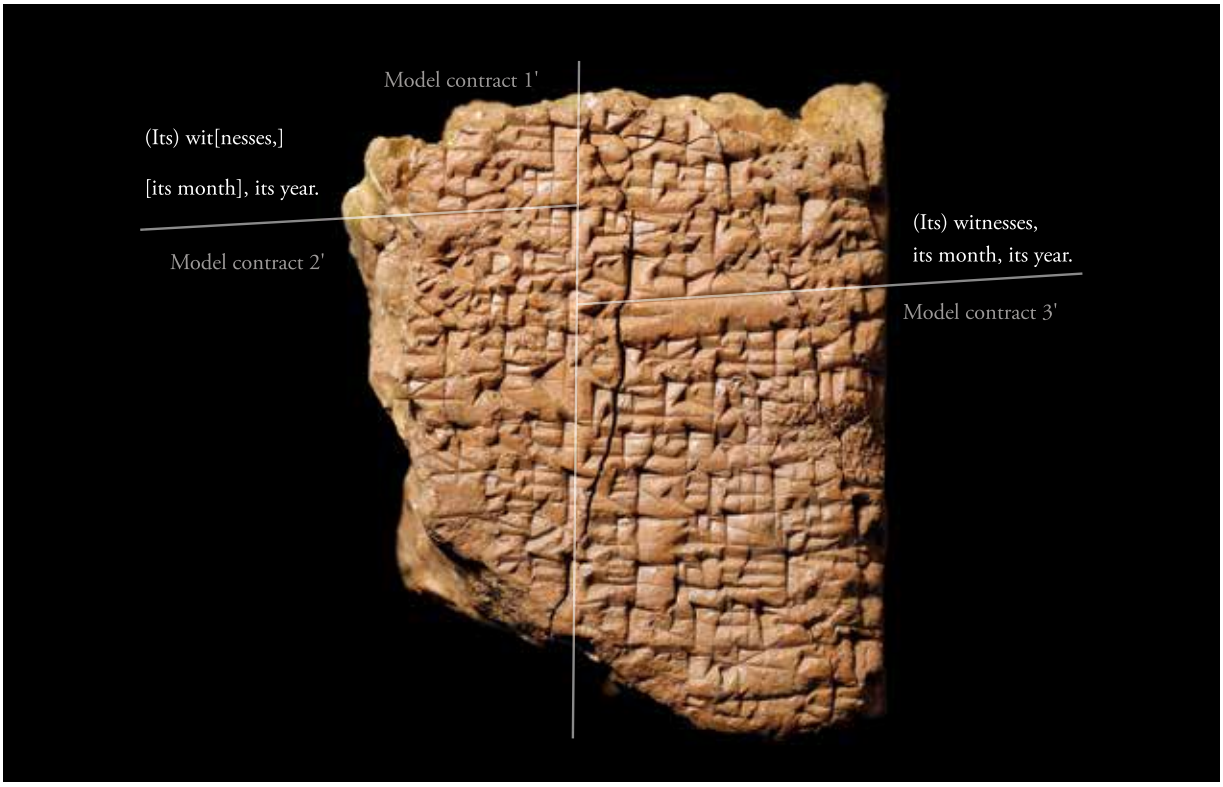

Figure 14.3. Obverse of a fragment of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with several models of barley loans. **Cat. no. 90**. Photo by CM; annotations by MDH.

These lists informed the composition of model contracts as well. Like the loans discussed above, most examples were terse and boring, but some included "unusual features or dramatic details" (Milstein 2021, 25), possibly making them more exciting and memorable. A good example is an adoption contract written with other contracts on a larger tablet from Nippur (fig. 14.4). The circumstances surrounding the recovery of the foundling, who was simultaneously "found in a well" and "saved from the mouth of a [stray] dog," are rather unusual. Here the composer combined separate entries from the *Legal Phrasebook* (kiulutinbiše): "found in a well," "brought in from the street," and "from the mouth of a dog." Another curiosity of the contract is the clause stating that anyone who might contest the adoption must pay the adoptive mother in human milk. In legal practice, contracts would normally include monetary compensation for the adoptive parent. However, the idea that the adoptive mother should be repaid what she invested while raising and nursing the child is—while absurdly impractical—in line with contemporary law and shows the legal practice of directly compensating for damage in kind. Hopefully, this unusual example allowed the scribe to remember the legal stipulation for compensation.

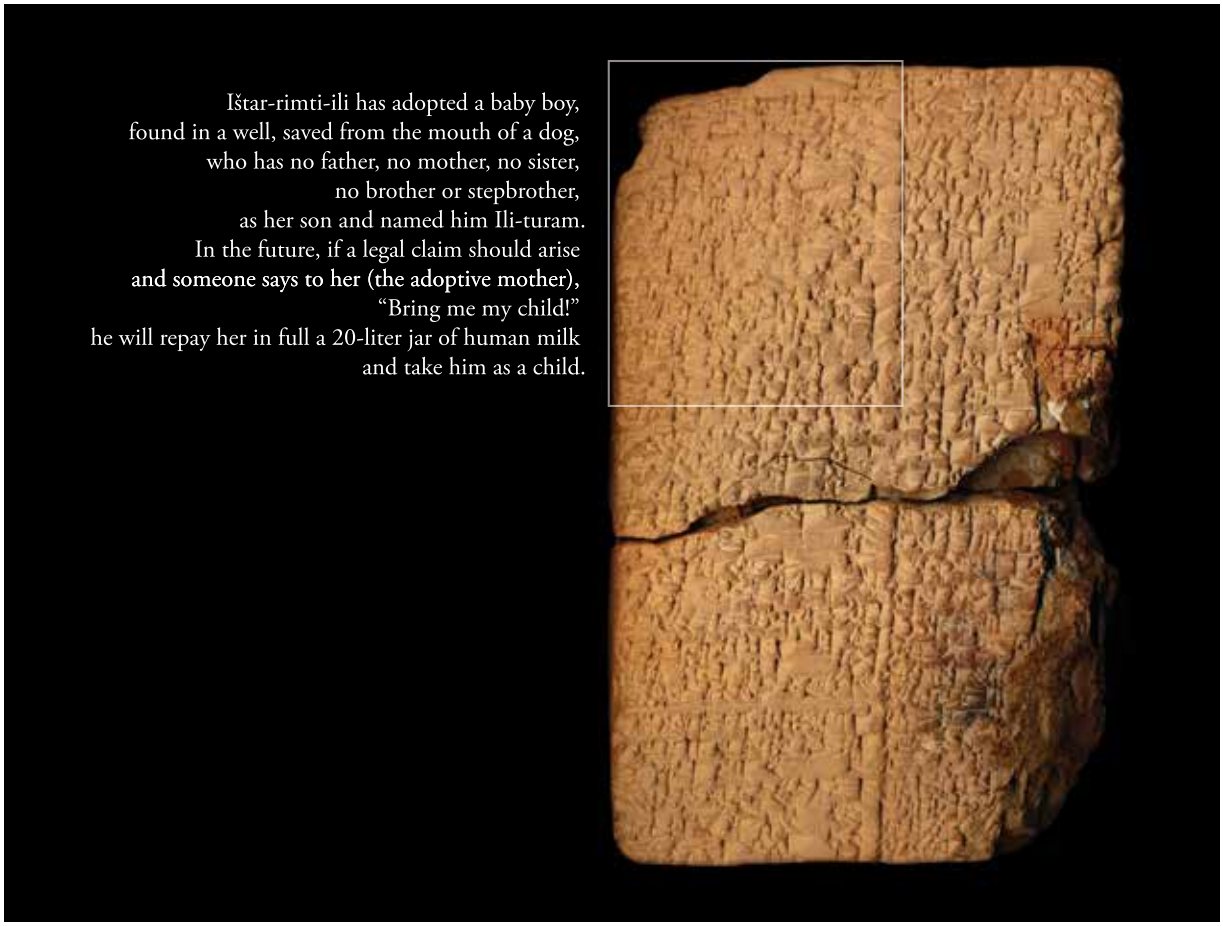

Figure 14.4. Obverse of a two-column tablet inscribed with model contracts and model court cases, including the adoption of a foundling. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. CBS 11324; annotations by MDH; translation after Klein and Sharlach 2007.

Law Collections

Students studied, and also copied, parts of the law collections, another form of legal stipulations dealing with cases of crimes and offenses and followed by suggested punishments. Contemporary to House F is the *Code of Hammu-rabi*, written in Akkadian and issued only a few years before House F served as a school. A stela inscribed with this collection of laws was publicly displayed in Sippar, and its stipulations were also known elsewhere in Babylonia. Students produced copies of this inscription, but in Nippur those copies were written during the so-called "Middle Babylonian" period (1500–1000 BCE), several centuries after schooling in House F had ceased (Oelsner 2022, 46–53). The teachers in House F used, instead, Sumerian resources for scribal practice: the *Laws of Lipit-Eštar* and *Laws about Rented Oxen*. These choices reflect the overall preference for Sumerian over Akkadian and the special position of Lipit-Eštar in the scribal tradition in House F, where two hymns of this king were studied.

Copying the *Laws of Lipit-Eštar* could be understood as part of the same tradition as copying his hymns out of interest in, and respect for, this historically important figure. Student copies of the laws, such as the poorly preserved fragment of the *Laws of Lipit-Eštar* found in House F (IM 58429, courtesy of Eleanor Robson), also included parts of the prologue to the laws, which resembled a royal inscription (Sallaberger 2009) (fig. 14.1). So, did scribal students study the law collections only out of tradition (see chapter 17), or were they interested in the legal provisions that this resource contained?

A detailed look into the *Laws about Rented Oxen* shows that students copied laws reflecting legal situations encountered in model contracts. A small fragment of the *Laws about Rented Oxen* was discovered in House F (3NT-903.139, now in the Iraq Museum) (Roth 1980, 128). Two paragraphs can be reconstructed:

> If (the renter) has destroyed the eye of an ox,
> he will pay one-half of its price.
>
> If (the renter) has cut off the horn of an ox,
> he will pay one-third of its price.
>
> *Laws about Rented Oxen*, lines 1–2
> (translation after Roth 1980, 129)

Both paragraphs are similar to two in the *Laws of Lipit-Eštar*, and similar stipulations are included in the *Sumerian Laws Handbook of Forms*, equally known from Nippur. The exercise based on these examples combined different legal genres. It included parts of model contracts, extracts from the *Legal Phrasebook* (kiulutinbiše), and elements of law collections. Immediately before the stipulations about rented oxen, it introduces oxen as objects of rental contracts. Before doing so, it treats terminology and laws concerning renting a boat together. These sequences and combinations demonstrate that students studied the genres thematically and learned about contracts while reflecting on related legal provisions dealing with damages and compensation resulting from borrowing an ox (Roth 1979; Spada 2019b, 11).

Model Court Cases

Beyond contracts, scribal students encountered complex legal matters in the form of model court cases during their advanced education, when they otherwise mostly dealt with so-called "literature." Like model contracts, the examples in model court cases resemble normal documents—here, records of court decisions—and are studied in compilations, the cases often being more dramatic than most of what is preserved in actual court records. **Cat. no. 92** (page 132 and fig. 14.5) contains three court cases, all held before the assembly of Nippur: an inheritance dispute, one trial for a murder, and another trial for the rape of a female slave.

Considering the case of the raped slave, one can argue that these texts inform the students about the typical elements of trial procedure. The text starts with a summary of the events and is followed by an accusatory statement of the plaintiff before the assembly of Nippur, whose members serve as judges. Following this opening statement

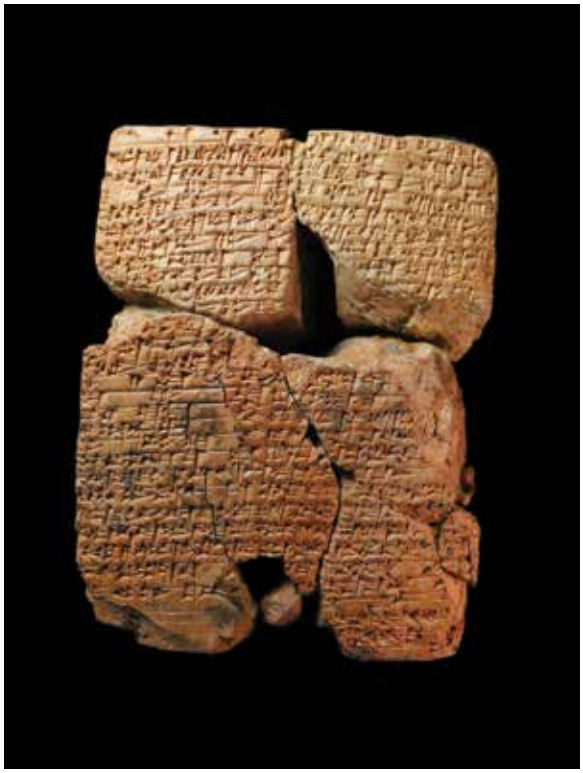

Figure 14.5. Reverse of a two-column tablet inscribed with three model court cases, including, in the left-hand column, a case concerning the rape of a female slave (see page 132 for obverse). **Cat. no. 92**. Photo by DL.

is a response by the defendant. Witnesses give decisive evidence, but their statements are not recorded. Based on their declarations, the assembly decides in favor of the plaintiff:

> Lugal-melam, the son of Nanna-aramugi,
> seized Ku-Ninšubur,
> the female slave of Kuguzana, made her enter a
> warehouse (and) deflowered her.
> After he had deflowered her, Kuguzana, her owner,
> confronted (him),
> appeared in the assembly of Nippur, and said:
> "(Lugal-melam) seized my female slave, made her
> enter (a warehouse) and deflowered her."
> Lugal-melam appeared before him, (and)
> said: "I have not seized his female slave and
> deflowered her!"
> His [likely the plaintiff's] witnesses came forth and
> confirmed it.
> The assembly of Nippur appeared before them and
> said:
> "Because he deflowered the female slave without
> authorization of her owner,
> Lugal-melam has to pay Kuguzana, her owner, half
> a mina of silver."
> The assembly that took the case has decided
> the case.
>
> **Cat. no. 92**, reverse, lines iv 2–27

What is the pedagogic value of this rather terse case? While it is unclear how likely the scribe would have encountered a similar issue in real life, the judgment of the case is founded in contemporary law. The punishment was a simple fine that took into account the loss of the female slave's value through her "deflowerment" but not the harm done to her. The case corresponds directly to paragraph 8 of the *Laws of Ur-Nammu*, but, perhaps by mistake, the punishment is higher in our case (Neumann 2004, 83). While students learned about the offense and the connected fine, they had to recall the relatively rare vocabulary word a gi$_4$ "to deflower," which they had learned earlier in both the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) and the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal). However, our scribe, likely writing the text from memory, did not remember the terminology well and so wrote, instead of 𒄑𒂍 (gi$_4$), a simple 𒄑 (gi). Following these observations, one could assume that model court cases comprised just another genre of writings that connected laws, legal vocabulary, and legal practice and that facilitated students' practice with standard phraseology (Milstein 2021, 37–38).

The use of model court cases arguably prepared the students for legal discussion and argumentation (Neumann 2004). The best evidence for this view appears in the legal discourse recorded in the *Nippur Murder Trial*, a model court case preserved in several copies—one of them **cat. no. 92** (page 132). Like the trial of the rape case, the *Nippur Murder Trial* starts with a description of the crime. The victim is

a *nešakkum*-priest, a prominent figure in the Nippur priesthood (see chapter 5). After killing him, the three murderers inform his wife, who decides not to report the case but instead to remain silent:

> Nanna-saga, the son of Lu-Su'en, Ku-Enlila, the son of Ku-Nanna, the barber,
> and Enlil-ennam, the servant of Adda-kala, the gardener,
> killed Lu-Inana, the son of Lugal-urudu, the *nešakkum*-priest.
> After Lu-Inana, the son of Lugal-urudu, the *nešakkum*-priest was killed,
> they told Nin-adda, the daughter of Lu-Ninurta, the wife of Lu-Inana,
> that her husband was killed.
> She did not speak up [literally, "open her mouth"], but covered it with a cloth.
>
> **Cat. no. 92**, lines 1–9

The figurative term for concealing, "to cover with cloth," links this case to another model court case, one dealing with a negligent housewife who is cheating on her husband (Neumann 2004, 85–86). Perhaps the allusion to the cloth already sets the scene for savvy students, who deduct that the wife was to blame as well.

The king then refers the case to trial before the assembly of Nippur, where the hearing takes place. Nine men from the assembly suggest that not only the three men but also the wife of the victim should be killed:

> "These men who have killed a man are not living men.
> These three men and this woman should be killed
> before the chair of Lu-Inana, the son of Lugal-urudu, the *nešakkum*-priest."
>
> **Cat. no. 92**, lines 23–28

The proposed capital punishment mirrors the punishment for similar crimes according to the law collections, such as the *Laws of Ur-Nammu*: "If a man did commit murder, one has to kill that man." However, the collections do not have a corresponding case for the behavior of the woman. The closest case might be paragraph 153 of the *Code of Hammurabi*, where a wife orchestrates the murder of her husband in order to pursue a relationship with another man. But indeed, our model case does not mention any infidelity or involvement of the wife in the murder itself. Consequently, two members of the assembly present a minority argument:

> "Has Nin-adda, the daughter of Lu-Ninurta, the wife of Lu-Inana,
> really killed her husband?
> What did the woman do (to deserve) *not* to be killed?"
>
> **Cat. no. 92**, lines 34–36

This speech has puzzled both the ancient scribe and the modern scholar. The student writing our tablet failed to understand why the wife should *not* be guilty and turned the second sentence of the speech into its opposite by assuming the wife did have to be killed: "What did the woman do (to deserve) *not* to be killed?" Although by mistake the student turns the counterargument into a second argument in favor of punishing the wife, most scholars understand this passage as a defense of the wife, while still debating the underlying reasoning. Some believe the argument is based on whether inaction—not reporting the murder—is considered a crime, while Martha Roth interprets the phrase as an argument for the "'diminished capacity' or 'weaker sex'" by translating it as "but a woman, what can she do, to warrant to be killed?" (Roth 1998, 177, 179; cf. Neumann 2004, 80 n. 45, for other interpretations).

During the trial, the majority strengthens with a second speech its original suggestion that the wife receive the death penalty:

> "A woman who does not respect her husband may indeed know his enemy.
> [He may (then) kill her husband.]*

She may then hear that her husband has
been killed.
Why should she then not keep silent for him?
It's she who killed her husband. Her crime exceeds
that of the murders."

*Line forgotten by the scribe of this tablet.

Cat. no. 92, lines 40–46

The argument is complex and has at least two legs. First, the majority implies that the woman was cheating on her husband and thereby establishes the missing link to paragraph 153 of the *Code of Hammu-rabi*. By using the word "know" (zu), they imply—at least for the savvy scribe—that the woman may know one of the murderers sexually (Roth 1998). Further, they argue that remaining silent about a crime implies being guilty of a crime and merits the same punishment. They connect the case to other laws, such as those about selling stolen goods in which the fence is punished in the same way as the thief (Neumann 2004, 81–82). As the majority's argument is now founded strongly in the legal tradition, while the minority fails to strengthen its case similarly, the majority argument prevails: the assembly convicts the woman and orders her death alongside that of the murderers.

The presentation of the case with argument and counterargument shows deep engagement in legal thinking and rhetorical tradition. While such a detailed discussion is unique in the model court cases, scribal students trained in rhetoric through study of the disputation poems (see chapter 19). Notably, the dispute in *Two Women* B also culminates in a trial before the assembly (*puhrum*) (Matuszak 2021a, 107–38; see also chapter 20).

Given the many mistakes made on **cat. no. 92**, it is questionable whether the student writing it understood the complexity of the case. But students likely felt connected to the legal process, since most model court cases took place in Nippur and before the local assembly (*puhrum*) (Lieberman 1992). There is a good chance that, as future members of the local elite, our scribes became involved in similar trials as parties, witnesses, and, most notably, judges. In the Old Babylonian period, most judges were not professional magistrates but well-respected citizens. Indeed, the students of the Edubba'a may have heard cases as members of the assembly, and it was vital that they were informed about all matters of the law and able to argue vigorously for justice.

Conclusion

In summary, the legal training materials that modern scholars group into the categories of model contracts, legal handbooks, law collections, and model court cases show a high degree of intertextuality. Together, they prepared students to write mundane contracts, informed them about laws and policies, and trained them to act and argue in different roles in court proceedings. Legal topics were not confined to those genres. Hymns of kings showcased what it meant to protect justice, and the *Hymn to Nungal* A informed them about the frightfulness of prisons. Finally, the *Instructions of Šuruppak* gave practical advice to the future judges: "You should not pass judgment while drinking beer" (line 126).

Explore Further

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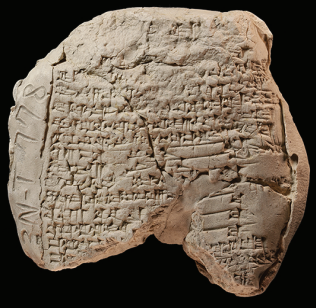

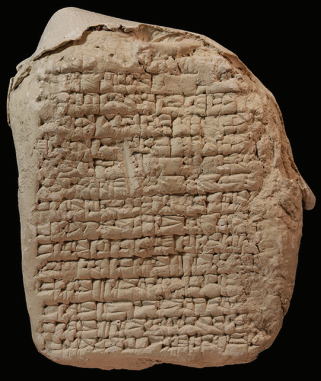

15 The *Decad* and Scribal Errors

Paul Delnero

After completing the elementary stages of scribal training, apprentice scribes learned a group of ten Sumerian literary compositions known as the *Decad* (table 15.1; fig. 15.1). The first two compositions, *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A and *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A, are hymns that praise Mesopotamian rulers from the late third and early second millennia BCE. The *Song of the Hoe* is a praise hymn to an essential agricultural tool filled with wordplays involving the sign  AL, the Sumerian word for "hoe." The *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B) is a plea to Inana, the goddess of love and war, delivered by Enheduana, the daughter of the ruler Sargon of Akkad (ca. 2334–2279 BCE), to restore her to her cultic office of priestess of the moon god Nanna, an office from which she had been expelled by her enemy Lugalane. *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) and the *Keš Temple Hymn* are hymns that praise temples in Nippur, the religious center of Mesopotamia in the third and early second millennia BCE, and in the city of Keš. The second of these two texts—the *Keš Temple Hymn*—was originally composed as early as 2400 BCE, more than 500 years before it was copied at Nippur and House F. *Enki's Journey to Nippur* and *Inana and Ebih* are mythological narratives involving Enki, the god of wisdom, and Inana. The *Hymn to Nungal* A addresses the goddess of prisons, and *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A is a narrative about Gilgameš and his companion Enkidu's quest to defeat a monster that dwells in the Cedar Forest; the episode was included in an extended and modified form in the later Akkadian *Epic of Gilgameš*. All these compositions are in Sumerian and known primarily from copies produced as scribal exercises in the early second millennium BCE, during the "Old Babylonian" period.

At Nippur during this period, scribal students learned the Sumerian language, the cuneiform writing system used to write it, and how to copy and produce cuneiform texts by copying and learning a sequence of elementary to advanced lists and compositions (see chapter 7). The pupils first learned how to write basic cuneiform signs using sign lists, such as *Syllable Alphabet* B and *Syllabary* TuTaTi. Then they learned the most common pronunciations of these and many other signs by copying lists of Sumerian and Akkadian personal

The texts in the *Decad* (see fig. 15.1). Image by DL.

Table 15.1. Overview of the compositions of the so-called *Decad*.

Modern title	Ancient catch line quoted in the *Nippur Catalog* (cat. no. 62)	Tablet
1. *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A	I, the king, from the womb . . .	Cat. no. 63
2. *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A	King, treated with respect . . .	Cat. no. 65
3. *Song of the Hoe*	The lord, the everlasting thing . . .	Cat. no. 66
4. *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B)	Lady of all divine powers . . .	Cat. no. 67
5. *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A)	Enlil, forever . . .	Cat. no. 68
6. *Keš Temple Hymn*	The princely lord . . .	Cat. no. 69
7. *Enki's Journey to Nippur*	In those remote days . . .	Cat. no. 70
8. *Inana and Ebih*	Lady of the fearsome divine powers . . .	Cat. no. 71
9. *Hymn to Nungal* A	House, furious storm of heaven and earth . . .	Cat. no. 73
10. *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A	The lord to the mountains of the living one . . .	Cat. no. 74

names (see chapter 8) and the more advanced *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) (see chapter 9), which contains a nearly complete list of all the cuneiform signs in use at the time, together with all their pronunciations. Finally, scribal pupils began applying this knowledge to write words and then complete sentences.

Apprentice scribes learned to write words by copying word lists grouped thematically, including lists of domestic animals, stones, plants, geographical names, foodstuffs, trees, wooden objects, objects made of reeds, leather, and metals, and more (*Thematic List of Words* [Ura]). They first encountered complete sentences with model legal contracts (chapter 14), collections of Sumerian proverbs (chapter 12), and then, at the end of their elementary scribal training, a group of four short Sumerian hymns known as the *Tetrad*, which comprises the texts *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B **(cat. no. 59)**, *Praise Poem of Iddin-Dagan* B, *Praise Poem of Enlil-bani* A, and *Hymn to Nisaba* A, a hymn to the goddess of writing, the patron deity of the scribal art. The copying of sentences continued at the beginning of the following, advanced phase of scribal education with the compositions in the *Decad*. In contrast to the sentences in the *Tetrad*—which are short and syntactically basic, consisting almost entirely of simple, formulaic sentences with common nouns, adjectives, and participles and only rarely relative clauses and inflected verbal forms—the *Decad* contains more complex constructions with more elaborate syntax, connected clauses that extend over multiple lines of text, and conjugated verbs of all tenses, modalities, and types.

The popularity of the *Decad* as a text corpus for training scribes, and the prominent place it occupied at the beginning of the advanced curriculum at Nippur and in House F specifically, are evident from the large number of copies from these locations. The compositions in the *Decad* are among the most frequently copied texts during the early second millennium BCE, and they survive in more duplicates than nearly all other Sumerian literary compositions from any period or place. In contrast to other Sumerian literary texts, which are preserved in an average of two to ten copies per text, there are more than 800 known sources for the texts in the *Decad*, with an average of 60–100 copies per text. Among these, more than 550 copies are from Nippur, and approximately half of these copies come from House F. This house—almost certainly a place where scribal training was conducted—contained a representative cross section of the

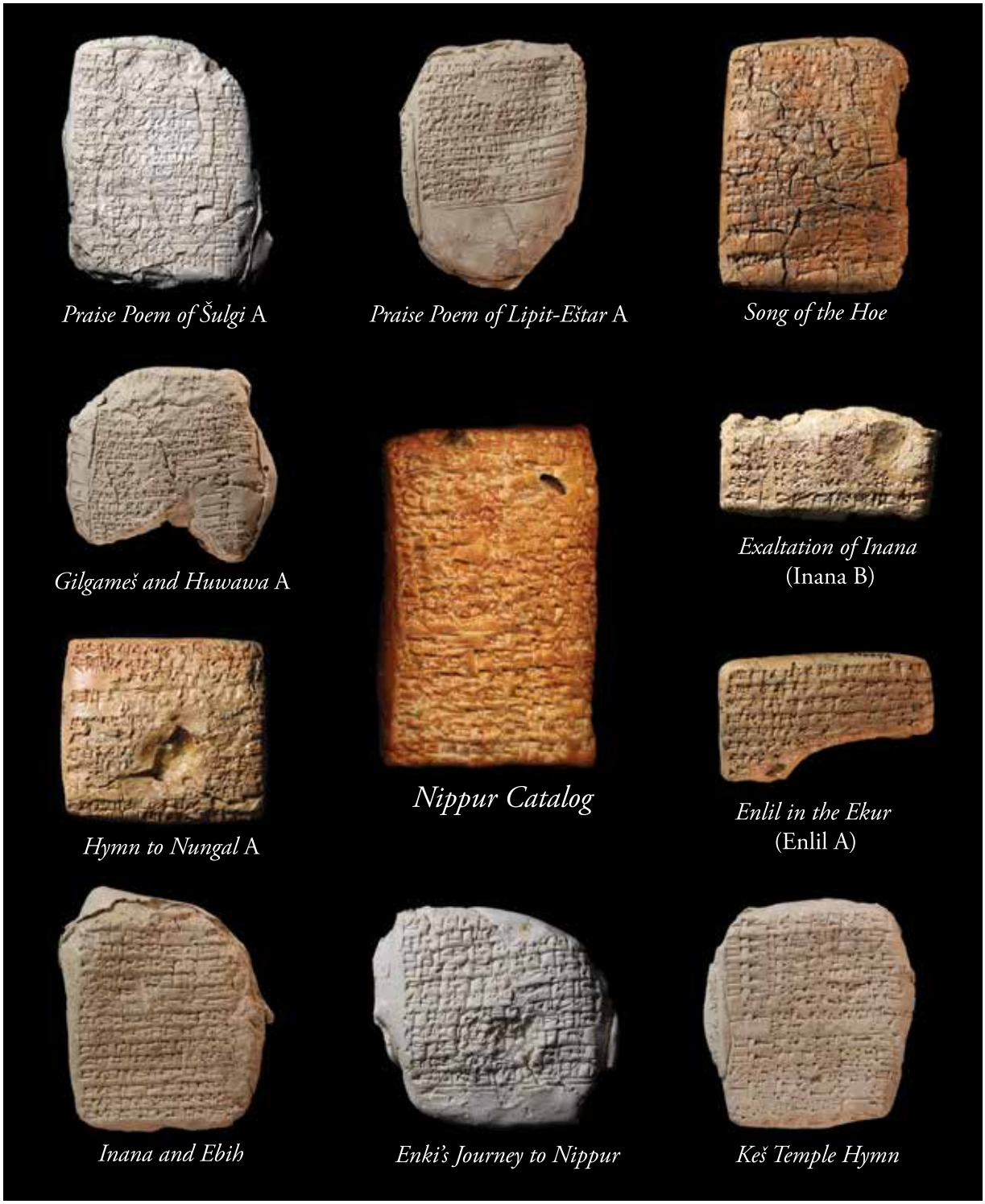

Figure 15.1. Composite image with exemplars of all ten compositions of the *Decad* written on one-column extract tablets. Image by DL.

literary compositions copied as part of the scribal curriculum throughout Mesopotamia at the time. The high percentage of copies of texts from the *Decad* found at Nippur and in House F attests to the frequency with which these compositions were copied as exercises, as well as the importance of the *Decad* in scribal education at the time.

Another aspect of the *Decad* that distinguished the compositions in this group from other Sumerian literary compositions copied during this period is that they were copied as a group in a fixed sequence. The most compelling evidence that the compositions in the *Decad* were copied together in sequence is a list of Sumerian literary texts known as the *Nippur Catalog*. **Cat. no. 62** (fig. 15.2), from Nippur, is a small, square-shaped tablet, approximately 6 centimeters in height and 4 centimeters in width, written in a small but careful cursive script characteristic of archival and administrative texts from the period. It contains a list of sixty-two Sumerian literary compositions classified by the beginnings of their first lines, or "incipits." The first ten texts listed in the *Nippur Catalog* are the ten compositions in the *Decad*. A double ruling after the tenth entry separating this set of entries from the next series of entries suggests that these ten texts constituted a fixed group that did not include any other compositions. Furthermore, a similar list from

Figure 15.2. Obverses of two literary catalogs beginning with the catch lines of the ten compositions of the *Decad*. *Left:* **Cat. no. 62**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI. *Right:* AO 5393. © 2016 RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Mathieu Rabeau.

Figure 15.3. Three sides of an originally six-sided prism preserving three compositions of the *Decad*: *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A, *Song of the Hoe*, and *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B). Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. UM 89-14-1.

the same period, but probably from a different location—a list known as the *Louvre Catalog* (AO 5393) (also shown in fig. 15.2)—begins with the same ten entries as the *Nippur Catalog*. Although the first four entries in this list are broken, the entries that follow the break duplicate entries 5–10 of the *Nippur Catalog*, making it probable that the first ten entries of both lists are identical and are the ten compositions in the *Decad*.

The occurrence of the same ten texts in the same sequence at the beginning of both lists is unlikely to be coincidental and attests to both the fixed grouping of the compositions in the *Decad* and the importance of these texts as a group. While the two lists are probably tablet inventories, not curricular lists listing in sequence the compositions learned in the advanced phase of scribal training, it is probable that the texts listed were stored together for archival purposes and may have been master copies intended to serve as models for teaching apprentice scribes.

Further evidence that the compositions in the *Decad* were copied as a group include collective tablets with two or more compositions copied in the same sequence in which they are listed in the Nippur and Louvre catalogs. A six-sided prism from an unknown location (UM 89-14-1; fig. 15.3) contains, in sequence, texts 2–4 of the *Decad*—*Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A, *Song of the Hoe*, and *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B)—on its four preserved sides, and it almost certainly had *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A and *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) on its broken first and last sides. Similarly, a small tablet, approximately the size of a postcard, from Isin (IB 1511), has texts 6–10 of the *Decad*—*Keš Temple Hymn*, *Enki's Journey to Nippur*, *Inana and Ebih*, *Hymn to Nungal* A, and *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A—written in sequence in a tiny microscript. This tablet and

the prism, UM 89-14-1, taken together, confirm the entire sequence of the *Decad*.

The sequence of the compositions in the *Decad* is also confirmed by the catch lines (see table 15.1) at the end of some of the individual sources for these texts. "Catch lines" are the first line of the next part of a text, or of the next text in a series, and are written at the end of tablets to connect the copied text with the next text in the sequence, or to connect part of the text being copied with its continuation on another tablet. Sources with catch lines connecting compositions in the *Decad* include a tablet with the catch line for the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B) following a copy of the end of the *Song of the Hoe* (CBS 9856), a prism with *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) followed by the catch line for the *Keš Temple Hymn* (UM 59-15-1), and a tablet with an extract from the end of the *Keš Temple Hymn* with a catch line for *Enki's Journey to Nippur* (CBS 2155a).

Although Mesopotamian texts could be grouped together for different reasons, including their performance in sequence in ritual contexts or because they were part of a cycle of texts with common themes, it is very likely that the *Decad* represents a grouping for pedagogical purposes. One of the clearest indications that the compositions in the *Decad* were copied as scribal exercises is the format of the tablets inscribed with these texts. In the elementary phase of scribal education at Nippur, lists and texts were frequently copied on square-shaped tablets with a short extract on the tablet's front side (obverse), written in the hand of a more advanced scribe, to be copied by the pupil in the space to the right of the extract. Since the space with the pupil's copy was often erased so that the model extract could be copied repeatedly, it is often effaced or only partially preserved. The back (reverse) sides of these tablets contain a longer extract either from an earlier section of the same text written in extract on the tablet's obverse or from a list or text learned before it (see chapter 7). This tablet format was ideally suited for early education, since it enabled scribal students to learn new material by imitating a model text while also improving their knowledge of previously learned texts by copying them without a model. By contrast, tablets with this format were rarely used in the advanced phase of scribal education. Instead, the Sumerian literary compositions learned in that stage were copied on multicolumn tablets containing an entire composition or on single-column tablets with a short, typically twenty- to forty-line extract from a text (fig. 15.4). Tablets with these formats never contained model extracts, and the known examples are inscribed entirely with the handwriting of scribes who had already mastered the essential aspects of the writing system and could reproduce longer passages and continuous narratives without the aid of a model.

In the advanced phase of training, scribes learned primarily by memorizing texts and passages from texts and by copying what they had memorized. The role of memorization in the copying of Sumerian literary compositions such as the texts in the *Decad* is evident in the use of multicolumn and single-column tablets for copying these compositions. In most instances, on single-column tablets there is no apparent relationship between the content of the passages copied and the literary structure of the text from which they were excerpted. Extracts rarely begin at a point in the narrative that appears to correspond to the logical beginning of a literary unit in a text, and they rarely end at the point at which a literary unit seems to end. However, the number of lines in a single-column extract is frequently equivalent to approximately one quarter of the total length of the text from which the extract was taken, indicating that Sumerian literary texts were generally copied on a series of four extract tablets containing the entire composition. Moreover, when the total number of known single-column tablets for a given composition is compared with the total number of multicolumn tablets with the same text, the ratio of single-column to multicolumn sources is frequently four to one. This correlation suggests that single-column tablets were used in the initial stages of learning a new composition for practice in writing shorter sections of the text from memory before

Figure 15.4. *Left:* Obverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the full composition *Inana and Ebih*. **Cat. no. 77**. *Right:* Obverse of a single-column extract tablet with lines 36–52 of the composition. **Cat. no. 71**. Photos by DL; annotations by MDH.

writing the entire text from memory on a multicolumn tablet, once each of the individual sections had been sufficiently memorized.

However, the most decisive evidence that most, if not all, of the extant duplicates of Sumerian literary compositions were copied from memory consists in the types of errors these sources contain. Copying errors originating from a faulty memory are distinct from the types of errors that occur when copying from dictation or from another exemplar. Research on "memory errors" in copied texts has been carried out for other text corpora, including Old English poetry, Middle English romances, the first printed editions of Shakespeare's plays, Homeric epics, and many others. The criteria established in these studies for identifying memory errors is also corroborated by the results of more than a century of laboratory research on memory by cognitive psychologists. One of the most common types of memory error in texts is the conspicuous omission of signs, words, phrases, and entire lines or passages of a text. Short-term memory, by its nature, is able to store information only temporarily and is thus subject to a continual process of decay. As a consequence, mistakes made while copying from memory often result from the inability to recall specific details. In this light, it is very likely that there were instances in which the scribes who produced these sources could not remember all the details of the composition they were copying and, after unsuccessfully attempting to remember more clearly, either guessed and wrote something they

Figure 15.5. Reverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the composition *Inana and Ebih* evidencing an omission by mistake. **Cat. no. 78**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH.

thought could have been correct or simply omitted entirely what they had forgotten.

Conspicuous omissions occur frequently in the sources for the compositions in the *Decad*. One of many examples is the omission of the sequence of signs -an-ši-in- in the writing ba-ti instead of the correct verbal form ba-an-ši-in-ti in a source of *Inana and Ebih* from House F (**cat. no. 78**, line 140) (fig. 15.5). Others include the omission of the phrase gub-ba me-en from *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, line 40 (3NT-927,525), and the form ki bi_2-ĝar for ki-si_3-ga bi_2-ib-ĝar in *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B), line 69 (IM 58802), also from House F.

However, the types of mistakes that are the most diagnostic of memory errors are "memorial-transfer" errors, or mistakes that involve the erroneous replacement, addition, or omission of grammatical elements or words and phrases as a result of confusing them with similar expressions or passages within the same text or another text known to the copyist. The three main types of memorial-transfer errors are anticipations, preservations, and borrowings. Anticipations are errors in which words and phrases that occur in a similar context later in the same text are erroneously copied earlier in the text. Preservations are instances in which words and phrases that occur in a similar context earlier in the text are mistakenly copied later in the same text. Whereas anticipations and preservations involve the erroneous transfer of details from within the same text, borrowings comprise instances in which content is transferred incorrectly from a different text. Because transfer errors have identifiable cognitive causes that are evidently rooted in memory, they are difficult to explain as anything other than memory errors. Moreover, since errors of this type involve transferring material from one part of a text to another, it is inherently unlikely that they originated in copying from dictation or from another exemplar, which typically results in minor

alterations to words or forms the scribe has just seen or heard.

Although cases in which forms are erroneously transferred from one part of a text to another are frequently influenced by similar forms that occur later or earlier in the same line or in a different line in the same composition, there are also at least two examples involving the confusion of forms from different compositions. From catch lines connecting *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A and *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A and collective tablets containing both texts, it is known that these two compositions were copied in sequence. Line 84 of *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A and line 24 of *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A are identical in all but two details. In *Šulgi* A, "crown" (aga) is qualified with "pure" (kuge) instead of "true, majestic" (zi mah), and the verbal chain preceding the verb "to make firm" (gin) is he_2-em-mi-in- (with the modal prefix he_2-) instead of the indicative form mu-ni-in-. A Nippur source for *Šulgi* A (UM 29-16-198+, line 84) has zi mah instead of ku_3-ge after aga, anticipating the form of *Lipit-Eštar* A, line 24; and in *Lipit-Eštar* A, line 24, another source from Nippur (UM 29-13-615) has the verbal chain he_2-em-mi-in- instead of mu-ni-in-, preserving the verbal form from *Šulgi* A, line 84. Both of these examples are instances of anticipations and preservations in which similar forms are transferred erroneously from different texts, and provide clear indications that the sources with these mistakes were copied from memory.

Conclusion

Unlike the act of copying for the utilitarian and functional purpose of creating a new copy of a particular composition, the copying of texts for didactic reasons is a means to an end, not an end in itself. In the context of ancient scribal training, tablet writing was an exercise. The primary purpose of this exercise was not functional but pedagogical. As an exercise, the completed tablet was the accidental by-product of the learning process, not the primary motivation for its production. In general, education is practical and is used to teach a certain set of skills. However, it is also often put in the service of an ideology and used as a means of indoctrination, and in most forms of education, the pragmatic and ideological aspects of pedagogy are integrated. Copying the *Decad* at the beginning of the advanced phase of ancient scribal training undoubtedly had both practical and ideological functions. Practically, copying texts that are graphically, grammatically, syntactically, and semantically complex would have enabled student scribes to develop and master the essential skills for copying cuneiform texts they had learned during the elementary phase of their training. Ideologically, learning texts that glorified Mesopotamian rulers of the past, the most important deities in the pantheon, and the epic deeds of mythological kings such as Gilgameš would have taught and reinforced the basic tenets of kingship and religious practice, while at the same time anchoring scribal practice in a distant and glorious past. But as likely as it is that the *Decad* served practical and ideological functions, it should not be assumed that copying these texts was entirely passive. It is equally conceivable that the compositions provided templates for composing new texts of the same types. Learning the structure and the types of words and phrases that occurred in royal and divine hymns, mythological narratives, and epics would have given apprentice scribes the fundamental tools to create their own hymns and narratives for use in cultic practice and as models for training future scribes.

Explore Further

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Delnero, Paul. "Sumerian Extract Tablets and Scribal Education." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 62 (2010): 53–69.

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16 Adventures in a Legendary Past: Tales of Long-Ago Kings as Cultural Education

Jane Gordon

As scribal students in House F advanced in their education (see chapter 15), the literary texts they studied included narratives about long-ago kings of the city of Uruk: Lugalbanda, Enmerkar, and Gilgameš. The status of these figures at the time fell somewhere between history and myth. For instance, in a chronicle known as the *History of the Tumal*, Gilgameš is simply one of a long line of kings who participated in the cult of Enlil and Ninlil, the divine couple venerated at Nippur. But in a similar text, referred to by scholars as the *Sumerian King List* (see chapter 17), we are told that "Gilgameš, whose father was a ghost, was lord of Kulaba [a district of Uruk] for 126 years" (*Sumerian King List,* lines 112–15). Likewise, "Enmerkar . . . the king of Uruk, who built Uruk, was king for 420 years. Lugalbanda, the shepherd, was king for 1,200 years" (lines 102–8). While kings of the more recent past, such as Šulgi and Lipit-Eštar, who also featured in the school curriculum (see chapter 15), receive straightforward descriptions in the list, the kings of Uruk appear to be the children of nonhuman beings and to have reigned for inhumanly long amounts of time. They are envisioned as part of Babylonian history, but in a heightened, even fantastical way. This portrayal is paralleled by their depictions in the narrative texts that the students studied. In these stories, Lugalbanda, Enmerkar, and Gilgameš engage in battles of wits, travel into the wilderness, encounter fantastical beings, save their city from defeat or attack, and even learn about what happens to human beings after they die. Their stories are full of dramatic confrontations, triumph, humor, and pathos. They are a pleasure to read, and in that sense their value is clear.

What role, however, did these stories play in the education of scribes, and why were they included in the curriculum? These questions are harder to answer; we know that students copied extracts of these texts, likely through memorization, but it is difficult to know what they made of them (Delnero 2012; see chapter 15). These narratives may have been selected to reinforce knowledge and concepts from earlier in the curriculum in an enjoyable way, to communicate ideals of kingship, or to provide the students who studied them with shared canonical knowledge that set them apart from those around them (Michalowski

Reverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with a passage from *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* (see fig. 16.2 for obverse). **Cat. no. 117**. Photo by DL.

2003; Veldhuis 2004, 66–80). While the stories do not provide a single, straightforward image of heroism, they do reinforce a vision of the world in which Babylonia is at the center and its kings are, in the end, those whom the gods most favor.

In total, there are nine Sumerian-language tales about the kings of Uruk—two each about Lugalbanda and Enmerkar and five about Gilgameš (table 16.1). The nine stories formed part of the Old Babylonian scribal curriculum to greater or lesser degrees, and most are known from manuscripts found in House F at Nippur (Robson 2001), though not *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, Gilgameš and Akka,* or *Death of Gilgameš*. This chapter will focus on the two Lugalbanda stories, *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, and *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, highlighting passages that students in House F copied out as part of their education.

We know for several reasons that these texts played a role in the curriculum not only in House F but also more broadly. First, the stories are found on the types of tablets used in school contexts, such as extract tablets on which students copied portions of longer texts (Vanstiphout 2003a, 13; Delnero 2010a; see chapter 15). Their canonical status is also indicated by their repeated presence in literary catalogs of the era (Vanstiphout 2003b). The first three texts examined here are grouped together in the *Nippur Catalog* (fig. 16.1) as the thirty-eighth to fortieth entries in the list, cited, as all the entries are, by their opening words:

38. When long ago the sky from the earth . . . (from *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*)
39. Lugalbanda . . . (from *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*)
40. Bricks, from the shining platform . . . (from *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*)

The grouping of these texts together in the catalog suggests they were considered to be connected, and their content links them as well: they tell, in two different ways, the story of Uruk's rivalry with, and its eventual victory over, Aratta—a dazzling city to the east beyond the mountains that was Uruk's opposite and its rival for the affections of the goddess Inana (Vanstiphout 2003a, 1–8).

The first story opens by transporting its audience back to "long ago" (*Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, line 1) when Enmerkar, the son of the sun god, "decided to conquer Aratta, the mountain of shining powers" (line 22). The army of Uruk and Kulaba sets out, with seven heroes leading the men; the eighth is Lugalbanda, who "goes forth quietly" (line 73). In the mountains on the way to Aratta, Lugalbanda falls gravely ill, and

Table 16.1. Overview of the Sumerian tales of the legendary kings of Uruk.

Lugalbanda	Enmerkar	Gilgameš
1. *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*	1. *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*	1. *Gilgameš and Akka*
2. *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*	2. *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*	2. *Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven*
		3. *Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*
		4. *Gilgameš and Huwawa* (known in two different versions, A and B)
		5. *Death of Gilgameš*

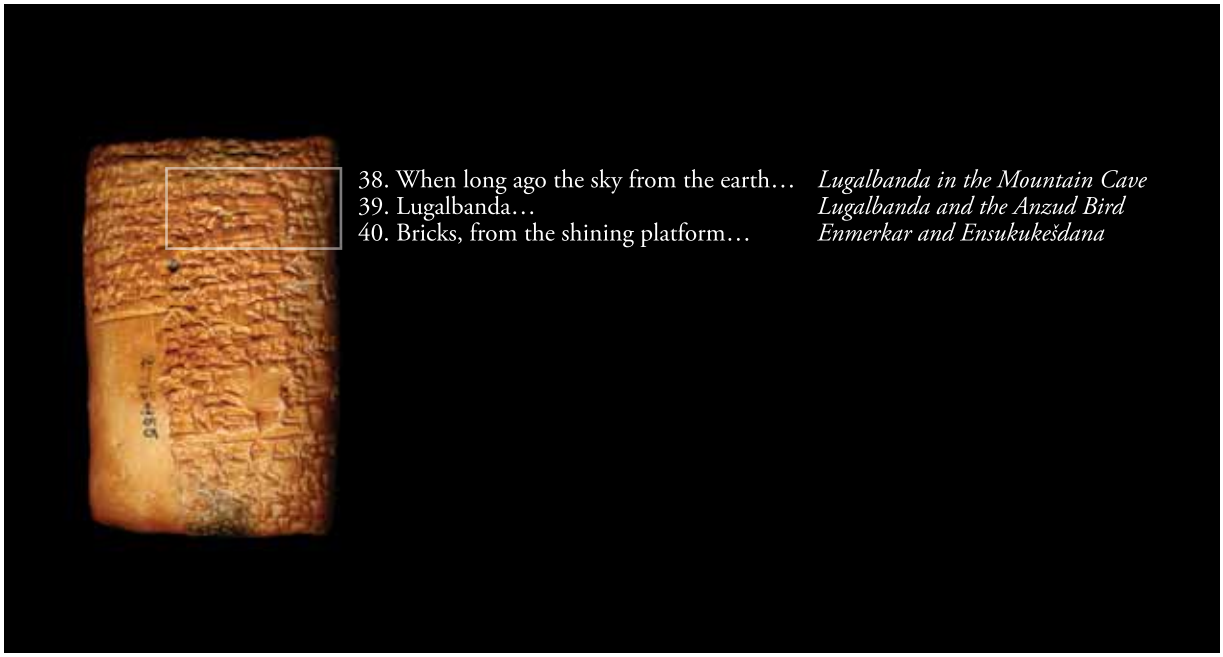

Figure 16.1. Reverse of the *Nippur Catalog* with the catch lines of three compositions, two about Lugalbanda and one about Enmerkar. **Cat. no. 62**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; annotations by MDH; translations by JG.

his companions, unable to bring him back to Uruk, leave him with provisions in a cave—provisions that will either sustain him if he gets better or, on a macabre note, be funeral offerings if he dies.

For two full days and most of a third, Lugalbanda lies ill in the cave. Then, "as the sun looked toward his home / as the animals raised their heads toward their pens" (lines 143–44), Lugalbanda lifts his eyes to the setting sun and prays to the sun god, lamenting his dreadful solitude in the mountains and entreating, "Let me no longer be ill" (line 151). This is the first of four prayers: to the sun god as the sun sets, to the goddess Inana (who is also the evening star), to the moon god ("the holy calf"), and to the sun again as it rises. The successive prayers reflect and portray the passage of time; as day passes into night and then another day dawns, the celestial bodies move above Lugalbanda's head (Wee 2014). An extract tablet from House F begins toward the end of his prayer to Inana and transitions to the one addressing the moon god (fig. 16.2). Although this tablet preserves only the end of each line, we can reconstruct the rest of the story from other manuscripts:

> [In solace like the sleeping sun] she made him sleep;
> [in happiness Inana] covered him as with a cloth
> [then as if . . . *unclear*] she went to Kulaba.
> [The bull who darkness] eats,
> [the star, the holy calf, his post] took up;
> [as the star at dawn] he shines in the sky;
> [bright light at night] he spreads.
>
> *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, lines 198–204

The beautiful imagery here is characteristic of the text. The next day, restored to health via consumption of the plant and water of life, Lugalbanda bounds about the landscape. Like the heroes of countless adventure stories written long after his own—from Robinson Crusoe to Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò to Brian, the protagonist of *Hatchet*—Lugalbanda turns out to be conveniently resourceful; for instance, though the text states that he does not know how to bake, he nevertheless produces a particular kind of coal-baked bread. His time in the wilderness leaves him more

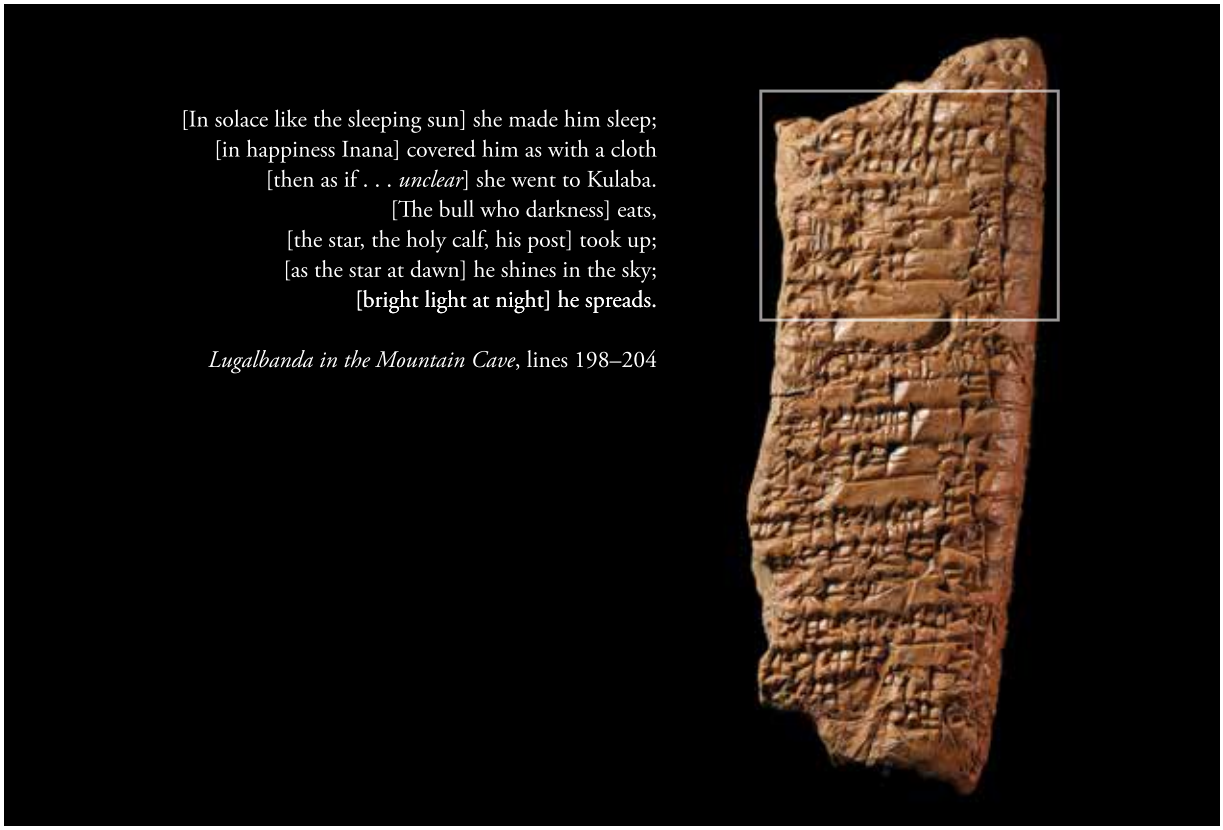

Figure 16.2. Obverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*. **Cat. no. 117**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by JG.

experienced, as well as grateful—he prepares an elaborate feast for the most important gods. But other, more malevolent spirits arrive as well. Unfortunately, the text becomes both fragmentary and challenging to understand at this point, but luckily there is a second part to Lugalbanda's story: it continues in the literary catalog's next entry, *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*.

Alone in the mountains with no one to guide him, Lugalbanda decides to seek out the Anzud bird, an eagle with a lion's head, as "Anzud will set me on the path of my brothers" (*Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*, line 27). He finds the bird's nest with its chick inside. "Lugalbanda knows much, and brings about much" (line 50)—he seizes the opportunity and charms the chick by, among other things, employing his newfound skill of making coal-baked bread. Anzud returns and, in response, grants Lugalbanda a wish. Lugalbanda is offered riches of various kinds but turns them all down in favor of being granted incredible speed, which he uses to reunite with his comrades, then help them triumph in the conflict with Aratta by appeasing Inana.

The next text in the catalog, *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, begins by extolling the "bricks" of Uruk. Indeed, though Enmerkar travels to Aratta in the tales about Lugalbanda, when he himself is the protagonist of the story, he stays firmly put in Uruk, achieving the goal of conveying Uruk's supremacy in the eyes of Inana through wit, ingenuity, and rhetorical flourish (see chapter 19). Ensukukešdana, the lord of Aratta, picks a fight with the illustrious Enmerkar, declaring that the king of Uruk should

submit to him on the grounds of his inferior relationship with Inana:

> "He may lie with her on a bed of wood,
> but I lie with her there sweetly sleeping on an ornamented one.
> He may gaze at Inana at night in dreams,
> but I talk with her in the light of her dawn."
>
> *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 29–32

When a messenger arrives with this challenge for Enmerkar, he adroitly counters it by replying, for instance, that "He may lie sweetly sleeping with her on an ornamented bed, but I do so on the flowering bed of Inana in its spreading jeweled plants" (*Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 80–81). The extract tablet **cat. no. 118** (fig. 16.3) begins in the middle of Enmerkar's reply; he goes on to remark that

> "No city whatsoever has been built like her city.
> Inana lives in Uruk; as for Aratta, what of it?
> She lives in the brickwork of Kulaba—what would she do at the mountain of shining powers?"
>
> *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 101–3

Confronted with this rhetoric, Ensukukešdana frantically asks everyone around him for advice: "What could I say to him? What could I say to him?" (line 120). He receives the devastating reply that the entire situation is his own fault, but instead of accepting defeat, he rather dramatically declares,

> "My city may become a ruin, and I a broken piece of pottery in it,
> but I will never bow my neck to the lord of Uruk, the lord of Kulaba."
>
> *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 133–34

Figure 16.3. Obverse and reverse of an extract tablet inscribed with a section of *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*. **Cat. no. 118**. Photos courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

At this point, the dispute shifts to the domain of magic as a sorcerer enters the picture and goes to the Mesopotamian city of Ereš, the city of the goddess Nisaba. There he makes the cows and goats stop producing milk, and the land falls into desolation, only to be saved through a new contest in which Uruk emerges victorious. The sorcerer and a wise woman take turns magically pulling animals from the river, and each animal the sorcerer so creates is overpowered by a predator created by the wise woman. As the text proclaims, the wise woman's victory is Enmerkar's and Uruk's victory. Aspects of this story may have held special appeal for scribal students, who had an affinity with Nisaba, the goddess of writing and administration. They were also very familiar with debates—the genre the text identifies itself as belonging to—from elsewhere in their education (see chapter 19).

The legends of Lugalbanda and Enmerkar show each king of Uruk negotiating his fate, closely intertwined with that of his city, in the eyes of the gods. Though the particular form this takes in these stories closely connects them, the stories' concerns and their legendary genre link them to another group of stories from the scribal curriculum as well: the ones about Gilgameš. This third king of Uruk has had a much longer and more varied narrative life than the other two and is still well known today from the later Akkadian-language *Epic of Gilgameš*. In contrast to the Akkadian epic, though, the Sumerian narrative texts about Gilgameš do not form a coherent narrative; instead, they depict independent episodes in the life of a figure of inconsistent temperament. He scorns Inana in one text (*Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven*) and in another text comes valiantly to her aid when others have refused (*Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*). Though he successfully averts a siege of his city (*Gilgameš and Akka*) and leads the young men of Uruk on a quest (*Gilgameš and Huwawa* A and B), he does not always heed advice or treat people well.

One version of Gilgameš's own adventure into the wilderness, *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, was a popular text in the school curriculum, one of the ten regularly studied texts known as the *Decad* (see chapter 15). In this story, Gilgameš, perturbed by the sight of dead bodies floating in the river, sets off with his servant Enkidu and young men of the city to the mountain of cedars to achieve renown before his own death by defeating the guardian of the Cedar Mountain, Huwawa, and plundering the forest of its trees. Thus, in sharp contrast to Lugalbanda, Gilgameš is not alone in this unfamiliar landscape, and the climax of the story, in a passage copied by a student in House F, shows how fortunate he is not to be so. Though Gilgameš successfully reaches his destination and the men of Uruk chop down the trees, Gilgameš is "seized by a force like sleep," while "silence fills" the world around him (*Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, lines 68, 73). Enkidu desperately rouses him, at which point Gilgameš cries out, swearing, as he will do repeatedly throughout the rest of the text, "by the life of my mother Ninsumun and my father, holy Lugalbanda" (line 90). Thus, though Lugalbanda does not appear directly as a character in Gilgameš's story, as Enmerkar does in Lugalbanda's, he still has a presence in the text. The force that seized Gilgameš turns out to have been the power of Huwawa, whom Gilgameš and Enkidu go on to defeat through a mixture of cunning and brute force.

Intriguingly, another tablet from House F features Gilgameš, Enkidu, Huwawa, and Lugalbanda, though it is written not in Sumerian but in Akkadian, the language the scribal students spoke. While much of the Sumerian literature studied by the students was likely centuries old, the practice of writing Akkadian literature was a comparatively recent development—and rare in Nippur at this time. In fact, this tablet contains the only Akkadian-language literary text known from the house: the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale* (Delnero 2016; fig. 16.4; see also chapter 10). The tale takes the form of a dialogue in which Gilgameš recounts his dreams to Enkidu, who interprets them in the context of the fight with Huwawa that is to come—a

Figure 16.4. Casts of the obverse and reverse of IM 58451, a single-column tablet containing the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale*. **Cat. no. 115**. Photos by DL.

dynamic familiar from both the Old Babylonian and later versions of the longer Akkadian-language epic, even though the specific imagery used in this passage is unique (George 2003, 20–22, 241–46). For instance, Enkidu interprets a figure in one dream as "the one who created you, Lugalbanda," while Gilgameš describes how, in another dream, "I saw the Anzud bird in the sky" (*Akkadian Gilgameš Tale*, lines 8, 11). The characters from the stories populate a wider world and can recur in different configurations and roles; Lugalbanda and Anzud, elsewhere characters in the narrative itself, are here figures in dreams. And if the Sumerian narrative texts represent a fixed and traditional canon, this piece of Akkadian literature reflects how stories existed in many versions and how new forms of storytelling emerged alongside older ones.

In considering these stories' and their protagonists' appeal, we might think of the satisfaction of observing Lugalbanda's growth from solitary invalid to savior of his people, Enmerkar's clever skill with words, or Gilgameš's bravery and sense of adventure. The stories inevitably feature conclusions in which the hero, and by extension Babylonia, emerges on top, while also poignantly depicting each hero in moments of fear. The tales also had practical utility, since the vocabulary learned by the students earlier in their education—words for everything from trees to bread to domestic and wild animals—appears in these stories in engaging scenarios, and the texts form intertextual connections among themselves and with other curricular material.

Yet what does it mean to encounter narrative literature in a school context? In considering

curricula as zones where ideology is communicated, the practice of young students industriously studying literature in a dead language may make us think of elite education during imperial Britain, when boys who went on to participate in the civil service and the imperial mission studied ancient Greek and Latin literature—an educational practice declared by some at the time to have little practical purpose or solely moral value even as it created and demarcated a distinctly elite class (Larson 1999). A similar process may have left its traces behind in House F at Nippur, as students, who could have gone on to work in the institutions of the royal court and temple, studied literature depicting a heroic past written in a dead language (Michalowski 2003, 2012). Or the tales' portrayal of Babylonia's past could make us reflect, for instance, on the visions of an American past communicated by *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and other texts frequently included in high-school English classes in the United States today (Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber 2006; Stallworth and Gibbons 2012).

We may be wrong, though, to seek analogies between ourselves or our more recent historical predecessors and ancient Babylonian scribes. Our only clue as to what they thought of this literature is what they did with it—namely, to pass it on in school, but in a way unfamiliar to us. Engaging with a text by copying out extracts of it is very different from the kinds of tasks we ask of students of literature today. At the same time, the presence of the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale* in House F may suggest that those who taught and studied there were interested in vernacular poetry as well as in the Sumerian literary canon and reminds us that stories spread easily across contexts and languages. Gilgameš, the most unruly of the three kings discussed here, achieved the most widespread and lasting renown: as his story traveled throughout the ancient Middle East and into the modern world, it became part of a new canon—that of world literature.

The only evidence we have of engagement with these stories in the Old Babylonian school is what was written down; there likely existed a whole world of oral discussion, disagreement, and appreciation that we cannot access. In the end, while we may have neither fully nor accurately reconstructed why these stories were selected for inclusion in the scribal curriculum, we can be pleased that they were—for because those ancient students encountered and rewrote them, so can we.

Explore Further

For English translations of the stories about Lugalbanda and Enmerkar, see:

Black, Jeremy, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson, and Gábor Zólyomi. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Vanstiphout, Herman. *Epics of Sumerian Kings: The Matter of Aratta*. Writings from the Ancient World 20. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.

For translations of both the Sumerian stories about Gilgameš and the Akkadian-language *Epic of Gilgameš*, see:

George, Andrew R. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin Classics, 2020.

For an alternative recent translation of the *Epic of Gilgameš* accompanied by interpretive essays, see:

Helle, Sophus. *Gilgamesh: A New Translation of the Ancient Epic with Essays on the Poem, Its Past, and Its Passion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

On Sumerian poetics through a reading of *Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird*, see:

Black, Jeremy. *Reading Sumerian Poetry*. London: Athlone Press, 1998.

For different perspectives on the question of *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*'s genre, see:

Mittermayer, Catherine, and Pascal Attinger. "Enmerkara und Ensukukešdana." In *mu-zu an-za$_3$-še$_3$ kur-ur$_2$-še$_3$ ḫe$_2$-ĝal$_2$: Altorientalistische Studien zu Ehren von Konrad Volk*, edited by Jessica Baldwin and Jana Matuszak, 191–262. Dubsar 17. Münster: Zaphon, 2020.

Wilcke, Claus. *The Sumerian Poem Enmerkar and En-suḫkeš-ana: Epic, Play, Or? Stage Craft at the Turn from the Third to the Second Millennium* B.C. American Oriental Series Essay 12. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2012.

17 Learning History

Piotr Michalowski

Ancient Mesopotamians had no word that we today would translate as "history," but this absence does not mean they lacked emotional and intellectual investment in contemplating their past. To the contrary, throughout the more than three millennia's worth of extant cuneiform documentation, we can sense a profound interest in times of old on the part of learned individuals—an interest that was always restricted to their own collective past. Evidence of this interest is best gleaned from the surviving written remains, but they tell only part of the story; in antiquity, urban settings were filled with visual reminders of days gone by, from walls that surrounded the core areas of cities to stone monuments, plaques, chapels, temples, and other buildings, all of them memorializing ancient kings, from legendary larger-than-life heroes to down-to-earth rulers who lived but a few generations earlier.

In the city of Nippur, at the time of the educational processes described in this catalog, the courtyard of the Ekur, the city's main temple and the central shrine for the whole land, was filled with elaborate commemorative stone monuments that went back many hundreds of years, as rulers who claimed hegemony commissioned testimonials to their deeds and offered them to the god Enlil. Some of these monuments were elaborately illustrated, providing a multimedia experience for scribes and literate elites but also ensuring that the rulers' deeds would be remembered by those who could not read the old monumental script, which differed from the everyday script of the Old Babylonian period. Such reminders of ancient times were not limited to urban settings: in the flat countryside rose hills, or "tells" in modern parlance, that constituted the remains of human habitations of various sizes built up over generations of occupational activity, most of them destroyed and abandoned in perilous times.

In complex stratified cultures such as those of Mesopotamia, various groups' access to information and their uniformity of opinion likely differed substantially: women in textile sweatshops, agricultural laborers and their bosses, carpenters, businessmen, high priestesses, and medical specialists most probably had very different levels of knowledge and interest in imaginary pasts than

Obverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the composition *Curse of Agade*. **Cat. no. 107**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

did Sumerophone poets, teachers, and their students (see chapter 6). These realms of investigation lie out of our reach, however, so we must be content to analyze the copious written remains, while acknowledging that we are studying the learned domain of but a small segment of the population and recognizing that worldviews of the educated could hardly have been uniform, even if many of them read the same texts.

During the long trajectory of literate Mesopotamian civilizations, ways of acknowledging, documenting, and interpreting the past underwent many changes, even if some guiding principles endured. One prosaic constant was material: the durability of the inscriptional vehicles, stone in particular. With some exceptions, an unwritten principle signaled that writing on stone was a royal prerogative. This restriction may have been driven partly by ideological notions but was, in practice, a matter of the medium's availability and the great cost of acquiring hard stone from faraway sources by trade and plunder. The deeds of kings were inscribed in diverse media and in various genres of writing, from poetic celebration to commemorative inscriptions that ranged from small figurines under the foundations of buildings to large stelae. In ideal conditions, clay tablets can last as long as stone, but they are otherwise prone to breakage and loss. Ironically, the precious nature of large stone pieces worked against their intended eternal survival, as they were often reworked and repurposed by later monarchs and their enemies (see fig. 14.1 in chapter 14). Cumulatively, however, at any given moment educated royal, institutional, or private scribes, scholars, and collectors had access to extensive heterogeneous records from the past.

Another constraint on the way in which Mesopotamians of all periods dealt with the past in writing was generic and conceptual: in history as in all other areas of inquiry, be it mathematics, astronomy, mythology, or technology, they never resorted to narrative descriptive prose to delineate abstract principles, relying instead on exemplification or poetic storytelling. But there are definite hints that they contemplated implicit underlying rules and concepts that were transmitted orally.

Inexorably linked to a sense of history are the experience and expression of time, another concept lacking labels. The events of past, present, and future time were thought to be controlled by the gods; therefore, the anxiety of everyday existence dictated inquiry about future prospects and inspired ways of discerning and even influencing divine decisions. Discernment and influence were usually handled by divination, most often by reading signs in sheep entrails, signs thought to be set down by the gods that only specialists could decipher and interpret. Such experts would perform rites and recite, chant, or sing, imploring the gods to determine a good "fate" or future for the petitioner and often for his or her family as well. In this manner, those who could afford these practices participated in the broader orders of the world, in which deliberations of a divine assembly, as well as more capricious decisions by the highest gods, were believed to dictate the fate of every human being, commoner or king, and of every kingdom. The future and the past met in this concept of fate, which was linked to the preservation of one's name. Most individuals were remembered after death in regular family offerings to feed ancestral spirits in the afterlife, but the names of kings were inexorably linked to their deeds, which were performed to "establish one's name (forever)." Thus, cultural memory in the form of written history was built around the names of kings.

The elementary phase of learning focused on the cuneiform script, mathematics, and the Sumerian language and in its final stage introduced short sentences in the form of proverbial sayings and one- or two-line extracts from poetry (see chapters 7–8 and 11–13). Those who progressed to the advanced phase, mainly children of entrepreneurial, temple, and administrative elites who were not destined to be scribes, were then usually introduced to a set of four short hymns, commonly referred to as the *Tetrad* (though only two of them were used in the excavated residential area of Nippur): three were to kings who had lived more than two centuries

earlier, and an older one was dedicated to Nisaba, goddess of accounting, measurement, and grain and agriculture, as well as divine scribe and protective deity of students and their work. Most if not all of these hymns were likely composed with pedagogical goals in mind, but in addition to offering exercises in grammar and rhetoric, they immediately introduced the names of kings, thus perpetuating their memory and indoctrinating youngsters to the idealized glory of Mesopotamian civilization, its elite intellectual world, and the celebration of its hierarchical social and political order. Such matters were reinforced as students' studies moved on to more complex texts—a set of ten poems called the *Decad* (see chapter 15). This selection of texts sampled the broader curriculum to come in the form of hymns and narratives concerning major deities, but it also included four compositions that expanded on the excursion into the past initiated in the *Tetrad* by introducing more problematic perspectives.

These poems referenced the four major periods that were the focus of Old Babylonian imagined perspectives on the past: a heroic time represented by three kings of the city of Uruk—Lugalbanda, Enmerkar, and semidivine Gilgameš (see chapter 16); the Akkad dynasty founded by Sargon of Akkad, who created the first state that unified all Babylonia (2292–2173 BCE); the Third Dynasty of Ur (2110–2002 BCE) that followed soon afterward; and the kingdom of Isin, whose kings often presented themselves as Ur's successors and under whose patronage the main outlines of the Old Babylonian pedagogical curriculum were redacted (see chapter 2). The earliest of these eras was represented by a dark, ominous story of an expedition by Gilgameš and his servant companion Enkidu into the eastern mountains to cut down a gigantic symbolic cypress tree, resulting in the murder of Huwawa, guardian of the forest sacred to the sun god. These actions constituted dramatic disrespect of Enlil, the top active Mesopotamian god, whose caprice controlled human events, and resulted in a divine verdict of death for Enkidu (see chapter 18). The focus on memory, death, and royal hubris, leading to tragedy directed by Enlil, turns up again in other contexts as a driving force in the history of Mesopotamian states and royal rule. The other three texts, known today as the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B), *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, and *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A, took the students back to the very words of the ancestors; unlike the *Tetrad*, these stories were told in the first person by people who may have composed the very words they were studying, or so tradition claimed. The *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B) was set in the mouth of the eminent high priestess Enheduana, daughter of Sargon of Akkad, ousted from her position but restored with divine help. The two royal hymns, in the names of the only two early monarchs who claimed to be literate, set down the classic parameters of the genre. Šulgi may have been the first ruler to fully exploit writing and the Mesopotamian literary and scholarly tradition for contemporary political purposes, though some precedents to elements of his grandiose self-representational strategies did exist. The text, or one like it, clearly served as a model for the Lipit-Eštar hymn. Šulgi, who explicitly designated himself as a god, began his self-praise (fig. 17.1) with the following words:

> King am I, from my mother's very womb a warrior am I,
> Šulgi am I, from my very birth a commanding man am I,
> fierce-eyed lion borne by a lioness am I,
> king of the world am I,
> herdsman, shepherd of the black-headed people am I,
> preeminent, god of all lands am I,
> child born of divine Ninsumun am I!
>
> *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, lines 1–7

Further on, he explains:

> That my name be established for all time and never perish from memory,
> that my fame resonate throughout the homeland,
> that my praises be sung in all lands,
> being a runner, I mustered my strength, and to test my speed in racing,

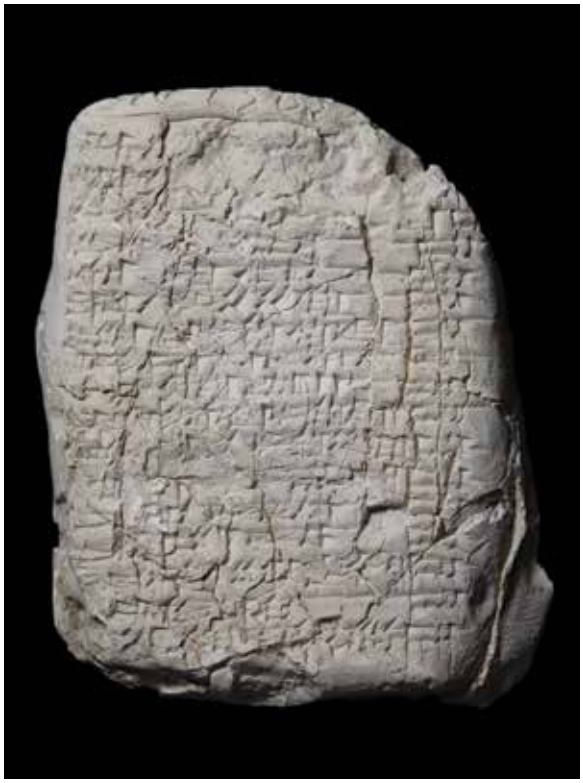

Figure 17.1. Cast of the obverse of IM 58454, an extract tablet inscribed with the beginning of the *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A. **Cat. no. 63**. Photo by CM.

from Nippur to the brickwork of Ur
I decided to make round trip, as if it were but a single mile.

Praise Poem of Šulgi A, lines 36–41

And once he had returned to Ur, he feasted and proclaimed,

I go wherever my will takes me,
wherever my heart prompts me to, I challenge.
An has placed the consecrated crown on my head,
and once I received the scepter in shining temple Ekur,
I lifted (my) head toward the heavens on the bright dais, on the firmly founded throne
and exalted the power of kingship.
I made all the foreign lands bow down but fortified the homeland,
and the world's people, made safe (by me), shall speak of my name,
and sing of me in sacred song.

Praise Poem of Šulgi A, lines 85–93

Thus, as young pupils began their study of Sumerian literature and their initiation into the wonders of a great literary culture recreated by Old Babylonian scholars, they learned how an ancient king had insisted that all his deeds not only were for the benefit of his homeland but also were to be etched in clay and stone for all time. In the longer *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B (fig. 17.2), he boasts of all sorts of knowledge but is particularly concerned with the written tradition, claiming to have studied cuneiform as a youth and, as king, to have ordered the recovery of old songs for preservation, added them to the standard repertoire of singers, and at the same time prompted future rulers to safeguard and learn from the poetic works created in his name in academies he established for this specific purpose. Seen as history, royal literary works driven by the search for immortal memorialization were designed to create a glorified social legacy rooted in a far-reaching imaginary past that was fundamental for the creation of the cultural identity of scholars and children of the well-to-do in Old Babylonian cities such as Nippur. It is important to keep in mind, however, that it is misleading to single out royal texts from other types of narratives concerning the divine world and other matters. In literary perspective, they all worked together to create a constructed cultural tradition intended to generate and reinforce complex social identity formation in those who studied them, young or old.

As pupils progressed in their studies, the commemoration of the glories of individual kings was offset by stories about how and why the big state orders, Sargonic and Ur III, lost their hegemony. In both cases, the role of humans was curtailed by the whims of the gods at crucial historical moments. In the *Curse of Agade* (fig. 17.3), King Naram-Sin of Akkad grows tired of waiting for omens from the gods that would permit him to rebuild the great

Figure 17.2. Obverse and reverse of an extract tablet inscribed with a section of the *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B. **Cat. no. 110**. Photos by DL.

Figure 17.3. Obverse and reverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the composition *Curse of Agade*. **Cat. no. 107**. Photos courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Ekur temple; finally, in an act of desperate hubris, he destroys the shrine, thus provoking the god Enlil to send foreign armies to demolish the kingdom. Although probably written when witnesses' memories of the actual historical events were still fresh, this narrative was fundamentally untrue even if it cleverly played with historical facts. The fall of the subsequent Ur III kingdom as described in the *Lament for Sumer and Ur* ultimately told a similar story, though it cast no royal blame: Enlil and the divine assembly simply decided that the hegemony of Ur had had its day and it was time for a change. There was no room for appeal.

A specific vision of native perceptions of the long arc of early Mesopotamian history is succinctly portrayed in the *Sumerian King List* (fig. 17.4), which enumerates the hegemonic cities that in turn governed Mesopotamia, starting with one before the flood and continuing with all the postdiluvian ones into the middle of the Old Babylonian period. The document is monotonous, consisting of royal names grouped in sets associated with cities as they took their turn ruling the land, with the length of the individual reigns then summarized for each dynasty. The first lines of the fuller version, which includes antediluvian times, give a good idea of the composition's tenor:

> Once the office of kingship descended from the heavens, kingship was established in Eridu town: Alulim became king in Eridu and reigned for 28,800 years, Alalgar reigned for 36,000 years. (In sum), two kings, their years of reign were 64,800. Eridu was vanquished and its (turn at) kingship was carried to Badtibira.
>
> *Sumerian King List*, lines 1–10

After three more cities and six other kings ruled the land,

> The flood swept over the land, and once the flood had swept (everything away) and the office of

Figure 17.4. Four sides of a prism of unknown provenience inscribed with the *Sumerian King List*. Photo courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, object no. AN1923.444.

kingship descended (once again) from the heavens, kingship was established in Kiš. Gušur became king in Kiš and reigned for 1,200 years.

Sumerian King List, lines 39–45

From a factual point of view, much of the early part of this text is fictional; some dynasties are made up, while others were contemporary with one another, and the reigns at the beginning have fantastic lengths, slowly evolving into believable human time spans. The *Sumerian King List* propagated a clear message: it celebrated the notion of a centralized polity uniting all areas of Babylonia—an anomaly in early Mesopotamian history, which was dominated by competing local city-states. But even this convention in the composition of the list was exploited for polemical purposes: the well-documented long line of kings of the sizable state of Lagaš, which would become the largest province of the Ur III polity, is nowhere to be found in any of the preserved manuscripts—an explicit slight that reflected complex events leading to the rise of the dynasty that would settle in Ur. The *Sumerian King List*, more than any other composition of the time, illustrates the profound antiquity of the homeland's political economy but also celebrates an idea of territorial unity not shared by all.

Yet it is difficult to define the curricular place and pedagogical role of this composition in learning and to ascertain whom it affected. It was probably used somewhere in the curriculum after the basics had been learned, and it incorporated principles and basic tools of writing studied earlier in the form of name lists and numerical exercises. The *Sumerian King List* was widely used and is documented on tablets found in many cities from Syria through Mesopotamia to Susa in present-day Iran. Intuitively, such prevalence is what we would expect from a composition that provided an ordered road map of the imagined past, but the twenty-three currently known Old Babylonian copies of it, though widely distributed, do not necessarily testify to its regular use in education. Only seven of these copies were found in Nippur (fig. 17.5), and we cannot identify the precise archaeological context of even one of them because they were discovered by old excavation projects when the locations of artifacts went unrecorded. Conspicuously, not one exemplar was found during the better-documented modern explorations in House F or in any of the smaller collections of properly excavated student tablets from the elite residential areas of the city.

The example of the *Sumerian King List* is indicative of the uneven access to knowledge of the past transmitted in Old Babylonian instruction in reading and writing. It is obvious that the general curriculum reconstructed by modern scholars was not rigidly applied by all ancient teachers, who picked favorites and idiosyncratically added items from a common stock of literary teaching materials. Even if we have doubts about their students' universal knowledge of the *Sumerian King List*, it is evident that the composition resonated among those who composed Sumerian texts and taught them to others, because the list generated at least

Figure 17.5. Fragment of the obverse of a multicolumn tablet from Nippur inscribed with the *Sumerian King List*. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. CBS 14220.

two polemical parodies before it fell out of fashion after the Old Babylonian period.

The first parody, the *History of the Tumal*, purports to chronicle royal works by kings of old in the sacred precinct of the god Enlil in Nippur and at Tumal, a small habitation about 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of that city. The composition reintroduces Enlil's wife Ninlil into her sanctuary in Tumal after each cycle of ruination. This town was apparently of little significance earlier, but administrative documents record massive work there during the second half of the reign of Šulgi, who apparently moved much of the state's central administration there and made it one of his principal residences (Steinkeller 2013, 362), though the *History of the Tumal* nowhere mentions his name. The text ascribes the restoration of various cult places to various kings—some of them imaginary, all of them known primarily from other literary sources, thus making a mockery of these fanciful historical traditions. To top it off, the short piece was written according to the words of a leatherworker, an ascription surely intended to be humorous.

The second parody—a longish, 200-line composition referred to by modern scholars as the *Rulers of Lagaš*—begins with the same phrase used in the *Sumerian King List* to introduce the dynasties after the Flood and describes how kingship arose in Lagaš. Its long list of imaginary kings with fantastical reigns ends with the mention of several historical monarchs, while omitting many others known from royal inscriptions and with nary a mention of any other city or state. It is generally assumed that this parody was intended to lampoon the glaring omission of Lagaš from the *Sumerian King List*. Only one manuscript of this parody has been found, and the text may not have been in general circulation. Other pedagogical texts questioned the established ideological order, including some about the heroes of Uruk, but that is a longer story that cannot be told here.

Thus far, we have concentrated on poetic works of earlier days but have not mentioned the study of prosaic royal inscriptions of times past. As already mentioned, inscribed stone monuments in the name of many kings of old, some illustrated with scenes of war, divine offerings, and other royal duties, were still standing in Mesopotamian cities in Old Babylonian times. Copies of such texts, apparently made by students, have been found in Nippur, Ur, and a few other cities, but their educational role is difficult to pin down. Most preserved tablets displaying copies of monumental inscriptions of Sargonic and Ur III kings were found in Nippur (fig. 17.6), but not a single one was found in House F or in any of the city's other properly excavated Old Babylonian houses that held pedagogical texts. Some of the Nippur tablets are large ones—often with long texts, sometimes more than one—and at least one tablet specifies that the original monument stood in the courtyard of the Ekur, the city's main temple. Is it possible that this work was directed by just a few teachers who had a particular interest in inscriptions of ancient times? Or was it part of an attempt to preserve older written legacies as the armies of Samsu-iluna were approaching, or perhaps even later when disastrous events—including a documented raid on the temple—led to the final abandonment of much of the city?

Yet even if the circumstances surrounding the copying of older inscriptions in Old Babylonian times remain unfathomable, the fact is that some people knew such texts very well. Outside the old literary centers such as Nippur and Ur, a new literature in the Akkadian language was being developed; it included stories about kings of old and focused mainly on the Sargonic rulers. Some of these stories were demonstrably based on real inscriptions of Naram-Sin and perhaps others. The northern Babylonian city of Sippar has revealed three very similar copies of a fantasy inscription about a legendary early king of a different city. The name of this king, Lugalanemundu, was likely simply lifted from the *Sumerian King List*, and the inscription ascribes to him various military exploits modeled loosely on those of Naram-Sin of Akkad. Judging from this fantasy, it seems that some literati of the age knew the old inscriptions and had internalized their style and contents well enough to create

Figure 17.6. Obverse of a large, multicolumn tablet from Nippur inscribed with copies of royal inscriptions of the Sargonic kings Sargon of Akkad, Rimuš, and Maništušu. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI, object no. CBS 13972+14545.

new fictional texts that riffed on the old historical materials.

Much more could be said on this subject, and many other ancient texts could be referenced, but this brief and incomplete survey reveals some of the more salient issues involved with the perspectives on history offered to Old Babylonian learners. This period was a time when many acquired basic literacy skills but relatively few were exposed to the complexities of Sumerian literature. Those few, however, were made aware at an early age that theirs was an ancient civilization with deep political, religious, and intellectual roots in a world of uncertainty—one in which human agency had its boundaries—and that their own futures, as exemplified by the past, were curtailed by complex relationships with the transcendent divine world. And yet all indications are that children were taught to read and write in private houses, in organizational settings, even in the palace, but not in temples, such that the religious aspects of historical consciousness were divorced, institutionally at least, from the formal practice of religion even if some parents and teachers were associated with such matters. They were also taught to accept the present social order, as elements of their identity formation were provided charter and legitimacy by the past, though not without some signals of dissent (Michalowski 1983). For them, as for us today, history was, in the famous words of the philosopher Walter Benjamin, "not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now" (Benjamin 1969 [1940], 261).

Explore Further

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18 What Did They Learn about Myths and Religion?

Christopher Metcalf

House F at Nippur occupies a special place in the modern study of ancient Mesopotamian myth and religion. As discussed elsewhere in this catalog (see chapter 3), the modest building itself may not be especially remarkable in archaeological terms. Yet we are indebted to its ancient occupants for a very rich trove of Sumerian literary sources: on the basis of the excavated evidence, it is thought that House F contained approximately 600 clay tablets that document about eighty literary compositions. The other major set of tablets recovered from House F consists of lexical texts—lists of cuneiform signs and Sumerian words, some of which have close affinities to literary works (see chapters 7–10). This remarkable concentration of lexical and literary tablets has led to the suggestion that House F was a private house that functioned as some kind of ancient scribal school (Robson 2001). While in a modern reader that term may induce anachronistic associations, House F was certainly a center of scribal training in Old Babylonian Nippur—one that particularly emphasized the study of literature in Sumerian. This language declined in everyday use during the Old Babylonian period, but it remained important as a language of religious cult and of myth-based poetry.

To gain an impression of the kinds of religious texts that were studied and copied in House F, it seems appropriate to begin with a hymn that was known to ancient scribes by its Sumerian incipit, "Enlil, forever" (Enlil sudraše); modern scholars, using a different system of classification, tend to refer to the hymn as *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A). According to its most recent edition (Attinger 2020), this poem is today attested by about ninety ancient manuscripts from sites including Nippur, Babylon, Isin, Kiš, Sippar, and Ur (and possibly other sites in the case of tablets whose provenience is unknown). Of these ninety copies, twenty-four were found in House F (fig. 18.1).

It is easy to sense why this hymn of praise to the god Enlil was particularly important to the scribes of Nippur, for Enlil was believed to reside in the Ekur temple located in that city only about 250 meters/820 feet north of House F. Furthermore, Enlil was considered to be the chief deity of the Sumerian pantheon:

Reverse of a multicolumn tablet containing the *Lisina Group* (see fig. 18.4 for obverse). **Cat. no. 103**. Photo by DL; virtual join by MDH.

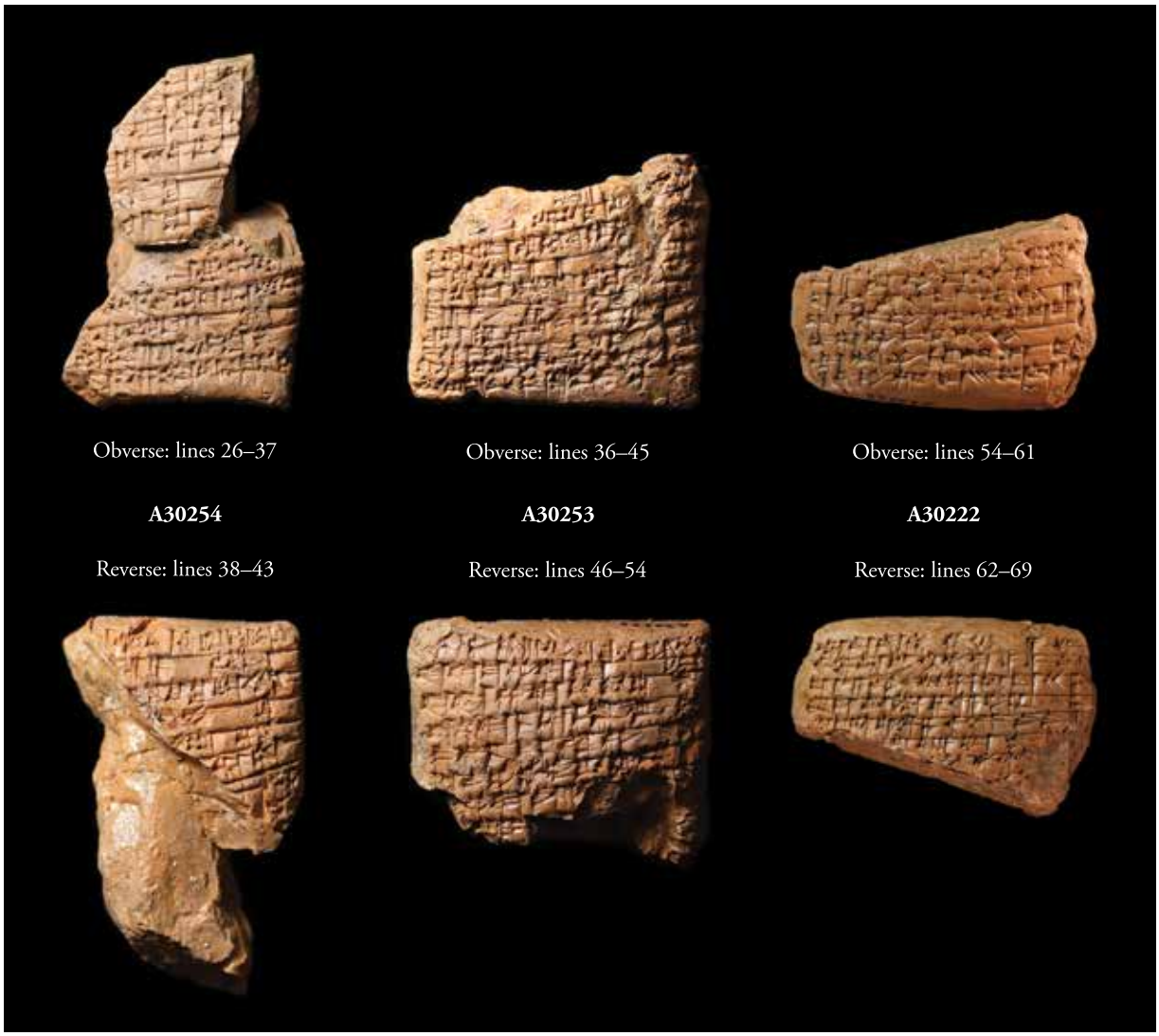

Figure 18.1. Three fragments of extract tablets inscribed with the composition *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A), found in House F. ISACM A30254, ISACM A30253, ISACM A30222. Photos by CM and DL; annotations by MDH.

in epic poetry he presided over divine assemblies, and in hymnic poems of the Old Babylonian period there was no higher form of praise than to associate a god or king with the sphere of Enlil in Nippur (Metcalf 2015; fig. 18.2).

The city's central position in the cosmos was captured by its common Sumerian epithet "bond of heaven and earth," and the hymn *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) indeed contains extensive praises of Nippur and of the Ekur temple, from where the power of Enlil is said to radiate all over Sumer. The following extract describes Enlil's all-encompassing influence:

> Without Enlil, the "Great Mountain,"
> the city is not built, the settlement is not founded,
> the cattle-pen is not built, its sheepfold is not founded,
> the king is not installed, the prince is not born,
> the oracle does not determine the priest or priestess,
> the troops have no general or lieutenant,

Figure 18.2. Baked-clay plaque showing a bearded male deity, possibly Enlil, with quadruple-horned crown, found in Room 205 of House F and now in the Iraq Museum. 3N-303. ISACM P. 47362 (3N/315).

the early flood at its peak does not furrow its way through the riverbed,
the river's lower reaches, at the delta, are not maintained, its branches do not reach far,
at the seashore, bounteous treasure-houses do not appear as if by themselves,
the freshwater fish does not spawn in the reedbed,
the bird of the sky does not build a nest in the wide land,
in the sky, the massed clouds do not burst,
in the fields, the crop does not cover the land,
in the steppe, fragrant herbs—which make its prosperity—do not grow,
the trees of the orchard and the broad trees of the mountain do not bear fruit.

Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A), lines 109–23
(translation after Attinger 2020)

Thus, *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) (fig. 18.3) offers a panorama of the world as seen from a southern Mesopotamian perspective—from the city to the steppe and the mountains that lie beyond it, and from the rivers and canals to the seashore (that is, the modern Persian Gulf). Both the natural world (clouds, birds, fish, herbs) and forms of human cultivation (cattle pen, sheepfold, fields, orchards) are represented. In the human sphere, the focus lies on the king and the priests, they being the most distinguished members of human society in the sense that they were thought to be especially close to the gods. All these features of the human and natural environment are said to depend on Enlil, who is here called by his epithet "Great Mountain" (kur gal); the word "mountain" (kur) also underlies the name of his temple in Nippur, the Ekur. To illustrate this influence, the hymn uses a remarkable form of double negation: "without Enlil," the various phenomena described would "not" exist. This form of divine praise draws on a phrase of religious language that has ancient roots in Mesopotamia (Metcalf 2015): it is attested already in personal names of the mid-third millennium BCE, when individuals bore names of the type "Without Enlil" (an abbreviated version of the fuller phrase "Without Enlil, such-and-such is not"). Such phrases remained popular in later Sumerian and Akkadian religious poetry, as well as in neighboring cultures. As a later echo, one may compare "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" in the prologue of the Gospel of John.

Naturally the question arises why the scribes working in House F produced so many copies of this beautiful hymn. To begin, the Sumerian language was, as mentioned above, still the main idiom of religious poetry in the Old Babylonian period, and the transmission of such poetry depended on the written form. Two extracts from a hymn composed in a slightly earlier period, under King Šulgi of Ur, demonstrate the links between the performance of religious poetry and the Ekur of Enlil in Nippur, as well as the interaction between scribe and singer:

"My songs, be they the adab, the tigi, the malgatum,
the sergida, the praise of kingship,
be they the šumunša, the kunĝar, the balbale,

Figure 18.3. Obverse and reverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A), lines 74–81 and 109. **Cat. no. 68**. Photos by DL and CM.

be they the gigid, the zamzam
—so that they would not slip from memory or be cast from (the people's) mouth
let no one abandon them in the cult places,
let them not cease in the gleaming Ekur,
let them be sung for Enlil at the new moon festival!
(. . .)
Let my songs be in the mouths,
let my songs not slip from memory! (. . .)
So that (these songs) would not be forgotten in the future,
I [Šulgi] founded the very expert temple of Nisaba-wisdom like the (heavenly) stars,
and no one shall let (the songs) slip from memory in future,
(. . .) not be forgotten; to these unchanging heavenly stars, my eternal verses,
let the singer bring the scribe, let him make him look at them!
It is the wisdom and intelligence of Nisaba:
let him [the scribe] read out to him [the singer] as if from a tablet of lapis lazuli!
Let my songs gleam like a lode,
let them be sung in all the cult places,
let no one neglect them at the festival of the new moon!"

Praise Poem of Šulgi E, lines 53–60 and 240–54 (translation after Metcalf 2015)

On the one hand, the various types of cultic songs that King Šulgi lists are oral in the sense that they are intended for performance in the temple of Enlil. Yet their transmission is said to depend on the wisdom of Nisaba, the goddess of scribal art; other, similar passages confirm that the act of writing was thought to be vital to the future survival of such poems. And indeed, the textual record of the Old Babylonian period abundantly reflects many of the types of songs enumerated here. Although the scribal expertise described in this passage seems to have been located in the palace or temple rather than in an apparently private setting such as House F, one may still conclude in general that the copying and recopying of a hymn such as *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) was necessary simply to ensure its continued use, and also no doubt to train scribes in the vocabulary and phraseology of Sumerian religious poetry. Furthermore, scholars have shown that Enlil A played an important role in the scribal curriculum at large, being the fifth text in the so-called *Decad* of relatively advanced Sumerian literary compositions that were widely copied for educational purposes (see chapter 15).

What role did *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) itself play in the practical religious worship of the gods, such as in the cult of Enlil in Nippur? This question is more difficult to answer: the performance context of an ancient poem can usually be deduced only from indications contained in the text of that poem itself, and hymnic poetry (both in Sumer and cross-culturally) tended to be intentionally vague in this respect, since a suitable level of generality was required to permit future performance. An older generation of Sumerological scholarship would generally have taken it for granted that a hymn such as Enlil A was composed and performed in a cultic setting for the worship of Enlil in Nippur and probably elsewhere. In that sense, the purpose of the poem was to praise the god to secure his favor. One may note here that Enlil A not only attributes the institution of kingship to Enlil but also describes a cultic scene in which certain unnamed "lords" (enene) and "(occupants of the) throne"

(barabarakene) are said to present offerings, accompanied by prayers and sacrifices, to Enlil. A religious poem (such as Enlil A itself?) could thus be conceived as a kind of nonmaterial complement to the material offerings, both of which were presented by the king or by priests on behalf of the king, to obtain Enlil's goodwill. The anger of the gods and human attempts to appease them are frequent topics of Sumero-Akkadian literature: if Enlil were to withdraw—in anger at a lack of appropriate material and nonmaterial offerings, for instance—then the normal workings of the world, as described in Enlil A, would cease.

In connection with the temple cult, it is also worth noting the following passage in Enlil A describing the religious officials of the Ekur:

> The temple's en-priest, who has grown with the temple,
> and the lagal-priest, who raises his hand in prayer, are (the temple's) ornament.
> Its gudu-priests of the Abzu are made for the rites of purification,
> and the nu'eš-priests are suited for the holy sacrifice.
>
> *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A), lines 56–59 (translation after Attinger 2020)

According to a recent study of cultic officials in the Ur III period, which immediately preceded the Old Babylonian period, this enumeration conveys a simplified but nevertheless accurate impression of the hierarchy within a Sumerian temple (Huber Vulliet 2019). The en-priest (or en-priestess) is the high priest "grown with the temple," and the lagal-priest is in charge of prayer: these officials, the "ornament of the temple," are imagined to be in the closest proximity to the god. Further removed, and apparently in greater number, there follow the gudu, who look after the Abzu (a basin of water for ritual ablutions and also the name of the pure freshwater that lies underground), and the nu'eš, who attend to the sacrificial meals that are offered to the god. In this way, the hymn presents a stylized but nevertheless recognizable impression of the inner workings of a Sumerian temple: in other words, Enlil A conveys not only a memorable image of Enlil's all-encompassing power in the abstract but also a sense of the practical religious worship offered him.

While these considerations point to a performance context within the temple, it must be admitted that *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) has none of the specific liturgical notations that were in use in the Old Babylonian period and is not known to have been assigned by ancient scribes to any of the specific hymnic genres listed by King Šulgi (in the passage cited above). It is ultimately impossible to determine, at a temporal distance of about 4,000 years, what was "religious" about this hymn. Yet a reasonable distinction may be made between primary contexts of performance, such as in a temple cult, and secondary contexts in which a religious poem was subsequently copied and recopied for didactic purposes, as happened in House F. Therefore, the fact that a given literary text was demonstrably used in scribal training does not exclude the possibility that it was originally composed for a different purpose, such as cultic performance. Finally, even the act of copying a text such as Enlil A in a scribal context such as House F could be seen as a form of worshipping the god, given the concluding line of the hymn: "Great Mountain, father Enlil, your praise is great!"

Not all the literary texts found in House F belong to such well-attested compositions in praise of prominent deities as Enlil A, however. A very different type of religious poem is represented on **cat. no. 103** (fig. 18.4), a fragment of a large, five-column tablet that contained, among other texts, a lament revolving around a relatively little-known female deity known as Lisin.

According to an earlier literary source of the mid-third millennium BCE, Lisin was the deity of a city written with the cuneiform signs  ĜEŠ.GI; though the reading of the signs is unclear, the city has been tentatively identified with the site of Abu Salabikh, not far northwest of Nippur (Krebernik

Figure 18.4. Obverse of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with several compositions, including *Lament of Lisin* A. **Cat. no. 103**, including a cast of IM 58427. Photo by DL; virtual join by MDH.

and Lisman 2020). The Sumerian composition about Lisin attested on **cat. no. 103** introduces us to a very different—but equally characteristic—theme of Sumerian religious poetry: the lamenting goddess (Kramer 1982). In this instance, Lisin bemoans the disappearance of her unnamed son, for which she appears to blame her mother Ninhursaĝ, venerated especially in the city of Adab southeast of Nippur. The following are extracts from the *Lament of Lisin* A attested on **cat. no. 103**, with restorations based on duplicate manuscripts:

"Then, she [Ninhursaĝ] cut down my fir tree, she laid low my almond tree."
Lisin was distressed, she sat there on her own.
"Ah, ah, she has seized him!
I shall sit there and cry like a bachelor,
having nothing like a neighbor, I shall eat for myself,
having nothing like a girlfriend, shedding tears for myself!"
(. . .)
As for the rushes, (. . .) Lisin (. . .),
your mother has taken him, your mother has taken him,

your son—your mother has taken him,
your little one—your mother has taken him,
your son—your own mother Ninhursaĝ!
Lisin's cries reached the heavens and reached the earth,
all her cries covered Adab like a garment,
she tore her hair like rushes,
she beat her breast like a holy drum,
she tore at her eyes for him, she tore at her nose for him,
she tore at her groin, the place not spoken of with men.
Up to her ears she was scratching herself deeply(?).
"What place will I reach, what place will I reach,
O me, what place will I reach?"

Lament of Lisin A (translation after Metcalf 2019; Peterson 2021a)

Such lyrical and frequently metaphorical language is characteristic of Sumerian laments. Unlike in the case of *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A), it is unfortunately impossible to give a full translation of the text, or indeed anything more than an approximate outline of the underlying mythical story pattern, in part because several known textual witnesses remain unpublished. According to one scholar, Lisin's lost son should be taken to stand for the "unfortunate ruler" of the city of Adab (Kramer 1982). Seen in this historicizing perspective, the *Lament of Lisin* A would echo another well-documented theme in Sumerian literature: the destruction of a city and the fate of its king (see **cat. no. 108**). In that sense, the lament would ultimately be connected to notions of kingship, as Enlil A is. Further, the verse "She beat her breast like a holy drum" could suggest that Lisin's search was somehow ritually reenacted.

While the constitution of this text and a more detailed attempt at its interpretation remain topics for future research, the *Lament of Lisin* A and **cat. no. 103** illustrate the vast potential still held by the study of Sumerian literature. Yet to judge from the limited evidence currently available, the contexts in which the *Lament of Lisin* A is attested are clearly remarkable and relevant to the purposes of this chapter. The manuscript from House F, **cat. no. 103**, also includes a variety of other, seemingly unrelated, literary compositions, and given that this compilation appears on at least one other large tablet, scholars have called it the "Lisin group" (Civil 1974–77; Cooper 2017). Further, the Lisin lament is elsewhere attested on tablets that clearly belonged to the elementary phase of scribal training, and in a literary letter a Nippur scribe mentions not only "songs" and "praise(-poetry)" but also the "art of the singer of laments" as topics for instruction (Peterson 2021a). Whatever the content and origin of Lisin's powerful, lyrical lament over her lost son may have been, we can certainly say that this distinctively (to the ancient mind) feminine genre was also an object of study in Nippur's House F.

Explore Further

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19 Learning Rhetoric through Sumerian Disputations

Catherine Mittermayer

Among the thousands of clay tablets excavated in the past two centuries at Nippur, especially in House F, are numerous manuscripts, written by students in the context of their advanced scribal training, that hand down to the modern reader one of the oldest literatures of humankind. Written in Sumerian, these cuneiform tablets comprise religious and historical texts, royal praise poetry, and narratives about gods, kings, and heroes, as well as a group of texts called "adamin" in Sumerian and referred to by modern scholars as "precedence debates."

An adamin, written  (a-da-min$_3$)—literally a "contest (between) two"—is carried out on a verbal level. Its goal is to determine the superior of two protagonists. They can be two individuals (as in *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana* and *Dumuzi and Enkimdu*; see chapter 16); but more frequently, two personified nonhumans, such as animals (as in *Bird and Fish*), plants (as in *Tree and Reed*), tools (as in *Hoe and Plough*), materials (as in *Copper and Silver*), abstractions (as in *Winter and Summer*), or a combination of two categories (as in *Ezinam and Ewe*) face off against one another.

Two among these adamin stand out because they were copied particularly often by students and are thus handed down on an unusually high number of tablets. *Ezinam and Ewe*, the only adamin with two female protagonists—the deified grain and the animal—appears on a total of sixty-eight manuscripts. *Hoe and Plough*, opposing the female Hoe to the male Plough, is preserved on sixty-two presently fragmentary tablets. Several of these manuscripts are included in this catalog, with **cat. no. 119** originally having contained a complete edition of *Ezinam and Ewe* and IM 58416 once displaying the entire text of *Hoe and Plough* (fig. 19.1). Several single-column manuscripts give extracts of about thirty to fifty lines of either *Ezinam and Ewe* (**cat. no. 120**) or *Hoe and Plough* (**cat. nos. 121**, **122**, and **123**).

Reverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with *Hoe and Plough*. **Cat. no. 122**. Photo by DL.

The Structure of the Precedence Debates

All eight Sumerian precedence debates show a five-part structure. They usually begin with an introduction in which the opponents are created. In *Winter and*

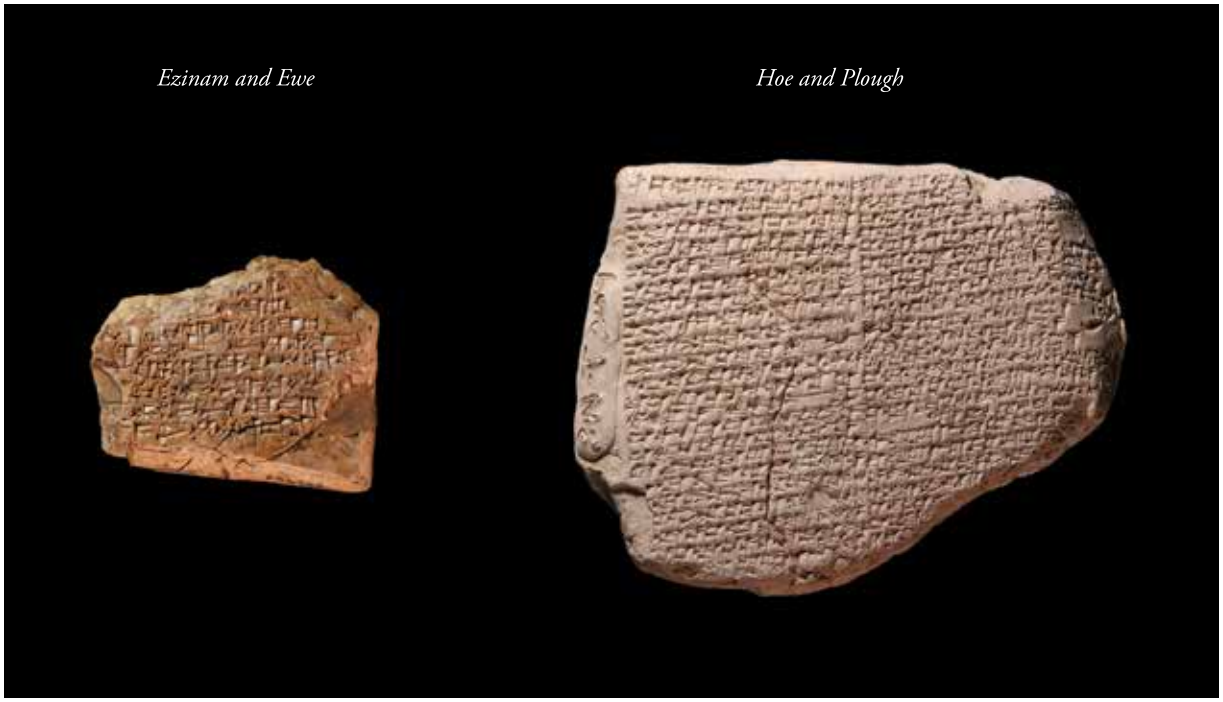

Figure 19.1. Obverses of two fragments of multicolumn tablets originally inscribed with the full compositions of *Ezinam and Ewe* (**cat. no. 119**, *left*) and *Hoe and Plough* (ISACM C2979, cast of IM 58416, *right*). Photos by DL; annotations by MDH.

Summer, for example, the protagonists are conceived through the union of the supreme god Enlil with a mountain range probably representing the mother goddess Ninhursaĝ, "Lady of the mountain range":

> Enlil, the lord of all mountain lands, directed his attention to it.
> He copulated with the majestic mountain range, to the mountain land he gave its share.
> Summer and Winter, abundance and life of the land, he poured into the womb.
>
> *Winter and Summer*, lines 11–13

The prologue of *Bird and Fish* focuses on the creation of the disputants' living area. It describes Enki, the god of wisdom, as founding cities, building canals, and creating swamps, in which he finally settles fish and birds. The introduction to another adamin—one in which two city lords, Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana, face each other—starts with a description of Uruk, the magnificent city of the future winner of the debate, Enmerkar:

> Brickwork rising from a shining platform,
> Kulaba, the city grown with heaven and earth,
> when the name of Uruk reaches the sky like a rainbow,
> it is a colorful iridescent horn;
> when it is in the sky, it is the new moon crescent.
> (City) of great divine powers, anchored in the depths,
> untouched mountain, founded on an auspicious day.
>
> *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 1–7

After the setting of the story is established in an adamin, the opponents are assigned their place in the world and their function in society. However, this initial state does not last long. For different reasons, which are specified in the second part of the adamin, a quarrel breaks out between

the protagonists. In the disputation between Ezinam and Ewe the motive is quite simple. It was originally part of an extract tablet (ISACM A30291; fig. 19.2), but the lower part of the tablet is no longer preserved:

> They drink sweet wine
> and enjoy sweet beer.
> After having drunk sweet wine,
> after having enjoyed sweet beer,
> they start to dispute on the cultivated fields.
> They engage in a disputation at the place of the banquet.
>
> *Ezinam and Ewe*, lines 64–69

In other adamin, the quarrel is provoked by the misbehavior of one of the two opponents. This is the case in *Tree and Reed*, where Reed (who will lose the contest) does not respect the established order and dares to step in Tree's way. In *Winter and Summer*, Summer triggers Winter by boasting about products that only grew in the fields thanks to Winter's hard work. The situation is somewhat different in *Bird and Fish*, where Fish complains about Bird's constant "screaming" in the marshland. Incidentally, this screaming will turn out to be the reason for Bird's prevailing over Fish, since the gods and the king praise Bird for his lovely voice.

The verbal contest is the core of the adamin and constitutes its third and longest part. It is held at a high rhetorical level, and the speakers try their best to outdo their opponent with clever arguments. The number of speeches in each adamin varies greatly, but in most of them both protagonists give at least one speech. Generally, the winner opens the disputation.

After the debate, a transition leads to the final verdict. In this fourth part of the adamin, one of the two opponents may call on a judge. In cases such as *Winter and Summer*, however, the protagonists

Figure 19.2. Obverse and reverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with *Ezinam and Ewe*. The obverse still contains lines 50–55 immediately before the cause of the dispute is stated. ISACM A30291. Photos by DL.

continue the quarrel on a physical level after running out of arguments:

> At that time—the Ekur (temple) was in celebration
> and Sumer in abundance—
> both of them were at ease, they stood up
> triumphantly.
> In order to slash each other like giant bulls,
> Summer and Winter went to their knees in the
> main courtyard like wild bulls,
> they braced themselves against the ground.
>
> *Winter and Summer*, lines 284–87

In the fifth and final part of the adamin, the winner is proclaimed. The verdict is normally given by a god. Only in *Tree and Reed* is King Šulgi of Ur found in the role of judge, choosing Tree as the winner because he is more useful to kingship:

> "Tree is the lofty throne of kingship; he came down
> from heaven.
> The crown clad in an awe-inspiring radiance
> arouses fear, nothing can compete with it.
> The august scepter that has been given a majestic
> name inspires great respect.
> The reed mat may serve as a canopy above;
> below, it may be rolled out as a lining."
>
> *Tree and Reed*, lines 247–51

In *Ezinam and Ewe*, not surprisingly, the deified grain triumphs over the animal. The verdict takes up an argument that was given in Ezinam's last speech. It is her value as a means of payment that cannot be countered by Ewe. In his judgment, Enki expresses the same idea in a more implicit way:

> "Of the two, Ezinam is truly the greater,
> (Ewe) shall bow down to Ezinam.
> Numerous (people) will kiss her feet.
> From sunrise to sunset,
> Ezinam's name shall be invoked,
> let (them) bow down to the workforces of Ezinam.
> The one who owns precious metal, who owns
> precious stones, who owns oxen or sheep,
> will sit at the gate of the one who owns grain.
> There, he is spending the days."
>
> *Ezinam and Ewe*, lines 183–90

Enki also judges the verbal contest between *Bird and Fish*. As it was he who created the living area of the two animals, it seems to be his prerogative to reestablish order between the two. In this unique case, the preeminent feature that now allows Bird to win is literally the same as that which earlier triggered the quarrel, as the Sumerian word zapaĝ means "singing" as well as "screaming":

> "Bird's walking around in the Ekur (temple) is an
> adornment, his singing is lovely.
> At the glamorous table of Enlil, Bird takes precedence over you.
> In the temple of the great gods, he sings
> (and) the Anuna-gods delight in his song.
> At the evening meal he is an ornament to the great
> dining hall of the gods.
> (In) Šulgi's palace his chirping is lovely."
>
> *Bird and Fish*, lines 167–72

All the precedence debates end with a similar subscript that emphasizes the winner. Further, it reveals their emic designation, thus allowing us to identify the adamin debates clearly. *Hoe and Plough* shows the classic form of the subscript, as it is also preserved on IM 58416 (fig. 19.3):

> For the fact that in the contest that Hoe fought
> with Plough,
> Hoe surpassed Plough,
> praised be Nisaba!
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 194–96

The Verbal Contest

The choice of the winner at the end of the verbal contest does not constitute a moment of surprise. The

Figure 19.3. Reverse of a cast of IM 58146, a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the composition *Hoe and Plough*. The subscript is written in the left column before the double ruling. ISACM C2979. Photo by DL; annotation by MDH.

entire text builds up to his or her triumph. Thus, the winner occupies more speaking time than the loser either by having a larger number of speeches or by simply speaking longer. In *Ezinam and Ewe*, the speeches are about the same length. However, Ezinam, as the winner of the contest, is given the advantage of a third speech, while Ewe gives only two speeches. In *Hoe and Plough*, the distribution of the speaking time is carried to perfection and reflects an argument made by Hoe, the winner, as part of her second speech:

> "My working time extends over twelve months,
> whereas you are only on hand for four months.
> The time you are absent is eight months.
> You are away twice as much as you are on hand."
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 105–8

Plough's presence for one-third of the year is reflected in his speaking time: his one speech covers one-third of the verbal contest, and he is thereby absent for the two-thirds during which Hoe is speaking. This allotment corresponds exactly to the numbers given by Hoe to describe Plough's work assignment.

The verbal contest is primarily about presenting one's positive attributes, comparing them to those of the opponent, and attempting to outdo that opponent with good arguments. Vanstiphout (1990, 280) already assumed that "in most cases the victor wins on *rhetorical* points: he is the cleverest debater." This rhetorical superiority indeed appears throughout all precedence debates and becomes obvious when the structure and argument of the winner's speeches are compared with those of the loser (Mittermayer 2019). The contestants employ a wide range of argumentation techniques:

- self-praise (of the speaker)
- denigration (of the opponent)

- self-presentation (of the speaker)
- comparison (with the opponent)
- relation (to the opponent)
- refutation (of the opponent's argument)
- outdoing (of the opponent's argument)
- anticipation (of the opponent's argument)
- demand
- reproach
- threat

Self-praise and denigration represent the basic techniques, of which the latter must be used with care. Ideally it should relate to one's own merits rather than simply serve to insult the opponent, as can sometimes be observed in the speeches of the loser who angrily rages against his opponent. This is the case in *Bird and Fish*, for example, where Fish, the eventual loser, opens the debate with a speech that focuses only on the denigration of Bird. Fish accuses Bird of screaming, being gluttonous, and scattering his excrement. However, Fish forgets to present his positive traits, and this is of course not the ideal way to start a rhetorical contest.

Within self-praise and denigration, the speaker can use other techniques. Some of them, such as self-presentation, are mainly attested in the winner's speeches. The opening speech of Ezinam may serve as an example. It is based entirely on self-praise and contains two classic self-presentations, one at the beginning and another at the end of the first speech:

> "Sister, I am superior to you, I stand before you.
> Of the lights of the country, I am the most
> splendid."
>
> *Ezinam and Ewe*, lines 71–72

> "I am Ezinam-Kusu, I am Enlil's daughter."
>
> *Ezinam and Ewe*, line 88

Self-presentations are all built as copular clauses, generally translated as "I am X." If perfectly applied, the speaker combines this rhetorical device with the technique of relation not only by introducing himself but also, at the same time, by positioning himself as superior to his opponent. This is the case in Ezinam's initial self-presentation. In her very first sentence, she states that she is superior to the opponent. Ewe tries to counter this argument toward the end of her second and final speech by asking:

> "When you lie (as bread) on the table,
> am I above (or) below you?
> Ezinam, look at yourself!
> You too, like me, are something to eat.
> (Only) because the eye has been directed to your
> power,
> am I second?"
>
> *Ezinam and Ewe*, lines 160–65

Whereas Ezinam argues that she occupies first place, Ewe wonders whether she should be second. But with this sentence she degrades herself, especially because, in Sumerian, interrogatives are not marked in any particular way. The reader could likewise interpret her words not as a question but as a statement, "I am second." Here her attempt stands in sharp contrast to Ezinam's first argument.

Refutation and the even stronger outdoing of the opponent's argument can be illustrated by examining *Hoe and Plough*. This precedence debate is somewhat unique, as Hoe, in her first speech, introduces modesty as the highest value; thus self-praise should be used cautiously and only in response to denigration. Nevertheless, the much larger Plough (fig. 19.4), though the loser, starts his only speech by praising his yearly first appearance on the field, which takes place during a solemn ceremony:

> "When in the month of sowing my festival is held
> in the fields,
> the king slays bulls and numerous sheep,
> and the beer flows into the bowls.
> (. . .)
> Cymbals and drums resound for me.
> When the king has seized my lead handle

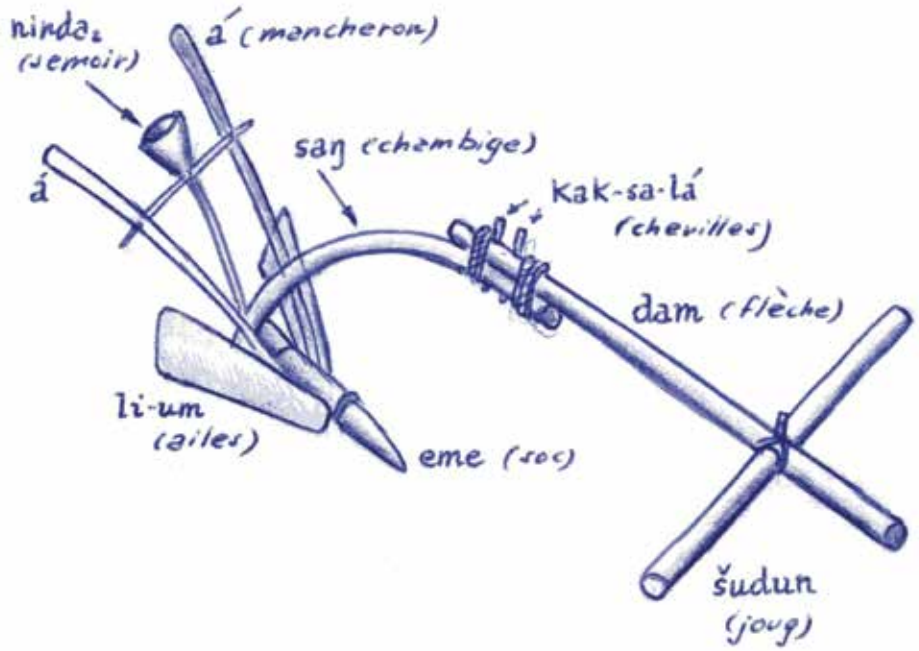

Figure 19.4. Drawing of the Sumerian seed-plough by Miguel Civil based on the descriptions in *Hoe and Plough* and *Farmer's Instructions* and illustrating the complexity of the plough. Image courtesy of Lluís Feliu.

and yoked my oxen,
the great dignitaries step aside.
All the countries look on in admiration
and the people look at him joyfully."

Hoe and Plough, lines 24–33

In her response, a rhetorical masterpiece, Hoe takes up the idea that Plough goes to the field, but she replaces the accompanying king and priests with ordinary men—namely, the farmer complaining about the broken Plough and the numerous craftsmen who constantly have to fix him:

"When you step out into the field thanks to me,
your single furrow is not pleasing to the eye.
When you plunge your head into labor,
when you get tangled in roots and thorny bushes,
your share breaks and a new share is put in,
(but) you cannot hold it.
Your farmer titles you 'this plough is finished!'
A second time a carpenter is hired for you, (more) men are sent for you,
at the house of the craftsman, they let them stand around you."

Hoe and Plough, lines 91–99

Hoe's self-praise is a reaction to her denigration by Plough. The latter insults Hoe by describing her as a malicious digging and plucking tool that is dirty from spending all day in the mud. Hoe opens her self-praise, which is preserved in the two successive extracts on **cat. nos. 121** (fig. 19.5) and **122**, with the sentence, "nobody should say this, but I am important" (*Hoe and Plough*, line 118), expressing her unease about the following:

"I am a servant who follows its owner,
it is me who has built houses for the owner,
it is me who has made stalls long and sheepfolds wide.
I mix clay and build brickworks;
I lay foundations and build houses.
(. . .)
I am Hoe, I lay wide roads straight.

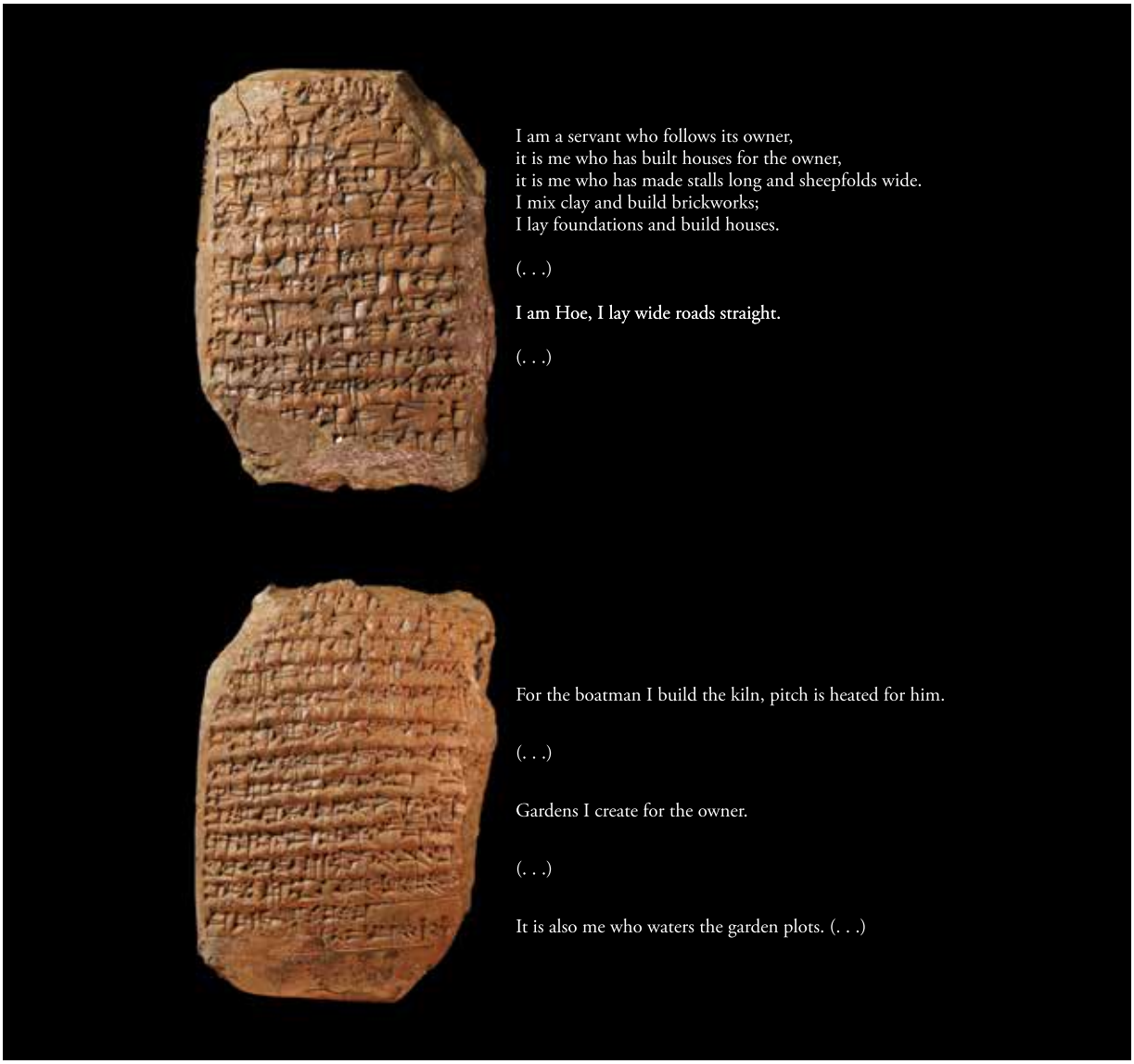

Figure 19.5. Obverse and reverse of an extract tablet inscribed with *Hoe and Plough*, lines 117–37 and 139–47. **Cat. no. 121**. Photos by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by Catherine Mittermayer.

(. . .)
For the boatman I build the kiln, pitch is heated
for him.
(. . .)
Gardens I create for the owner.
(. . .)
It is also me who waters the garden plots.
(. . .)
In the steppe and in the dry land where there are no
wet soils,
after I have dug there (for) good water,
the man who is thirsty seeks refuge at the edges of
my wells.

Hoe and Plough, lines 119–23,
126, 139, 142, 147, 160–62

With this reply, Hoe outdoes her opponent's argument. She takes up an insult by Plough, turns it into her own argument, and uses it to prove her superiority. The more complex techniques of comparison

and relation are attested for both parties. However, the loser often applies them at the wrong moment and thus the argument fails.

Conclusion

In the Sumerian precedence debates, an eloquent speaker faces an opponent whose rhetorical skills are rather limited. The disparity of the opponents adds a humorous touch to the text. Furthermore, and more importantly for rhetorical education, it provides the students of advanced scribal training with not only positive examples but also negative formulations, thereby warning them about the mistakes a speaker can make. In *Bird and Fish*, for example, the loser is in a very bad mood because he feels irritated by Bird. He opens the debate with an appalling speech that consists mainly of insults. Only thanks to the model provided by Bird's first speech can Fish improve his argumentation in his second speech. However, this second effort is still not enough to win the debate.

In *Hoe and Plough,* Plough is not attentive to Hoe's call for modesty in the opening speech. At the first occasion, he brags about his size and importance. In *Ezinam and Ewe*, one of the most balanced disputations, Ewe's deficiencies are less obvious. Before Ezinam's third and final speech, however, the sentence "at that time, Ezinam became angry at Ewe's arrogance" (*Ezinam and Ewe*, line 168) hints toward misbehavior by the loser.

Thus, in addition to rhetorical skills, the precedence debates also convey appropriate behavior to the students. Considerate and modest speakers are rewarded, whereas aggression and arrogance are attributed to the loser. Thus, in *Hoe and Plough* the modest and diligent Hoe triumphs over the bragging Plough, and in *Summer and Winter* the hardworking Winter is victorious over Summer. In *Bird and Fish*, the graceful Bird prevails over the aggressive Fish, which even dares to attack his opponent physically.

The Sumerian precedence debates represent the oldest examples of a text genre that enjoyed great popularity for several millennia, especially in the Near East but also in medieval Europe (Jiménez and Mittermayer 2020). In modern times, disputations of this type continue to be performed in religious or festive contexts.

Explore Further

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20 What Did They Learn about Women?

Jana Matuszak

What did students of the Edubba'a learn about women? In practical terms, the short answer is: probably not much more than they knew already. But in theoretical terms, some of the Sumerian texts they studied during the more advanced stage of their education invited them to learn about, and perhaps even participate in, the world's oldest academic discourse on gender roles.

While knowledge about the role of women was, unsurprisingly, not a key component of scribal education, women do feature in a variety of written sources that scribal apprentices studied and copied during their education. These sources range from proverbs to instructional texts, from literary letters to short stories, from law collections to model court cases, from disputations to work songs, and from elegies to lamentations. In most of them, women feature as paradigmatic types, but not as individuals. Their roles are defined via kinship terms (mother, daughter, sister, wife), age group (young girl, childbearing age, old woman), social status (slave girl, queen), or profession (barkeeper, priestess, housewife) and thus had the potential to express what the authors considered to be general truths. The male authors' perspective is evident throughout the texts—whether women shared these views is impossible to know.

Father-Son Instructions on How to Treat and What to Expect from Women

The oldest moralizing text, the *Instructions of Šuruppak*, contains Šuruppak's advice to his son Ziusudra. According to the *Sumerian King List*, Šuruppak was the last king before the deluge and his son Ziusudra was the Sumerian Flood hero, equivalent to Atram-hasis and Uta-napištim in the Akkadian tradition and to Noah in the Hebrew Bible. Thus set at the threshold between mythical and historical time, the text conveys age-old lessons for life, which—to judge from the impressively long time span of the text's transmission—never lost their relevance, at least in scribal circles. First written down in the mid-third millennium BCE, it was continuously copied and redacted for more than a thousand years and also translated from Sumerian into Akkadian and Hurrian. The version that is best

Clay plaque of a nude female figure, found in House I, a house near House F in Nippur. **Cat. no. 98**. Photo by DL.

known today is reconstructed from manuscripts written by apprentice scribes in the Old Babylonian period. Eighteen of these manuscripts were found in House F at Nippur; they represent one-third of the fifty-four manuscripts found across the city. Eleanor Robson therefore counted the composition among the "House F Fourteen," a group of fourteen texts particularly well represented by exercise tablets found in various locations throughout the scribal school (Robson 2001, 54).

The *Instructions of Šuruppak* cover many topics, from agricultural and commercial matters to moral precepts, such as not to steal or kill (see **cat. nos. 93** and **94**). Among the instructions on how to treat women, we read advice such as "Don't make merry with a married girl, the slander (arising from it) is great! My son, don't sit in private chambers with a married person!" (lines 33–34); "Don't have sex with your slave girl, she will neglect you!" (line 49); "Don't rape a citizen's daughter, the courtyard will find out about it!" (line 62); "Don't abduct a wife, don't make her cry(? for help?)!" (line 258); "Don't buy a prostitute, she is a mouth with sharpened teeth!" (line 154; fig. 20.1); and "Don't buy a slave girl from the palace, the house will certainly go down the drain" (line 157; fig. 20.1). All these admonitions instruct how *not* to behave; they address Ziusudra directly, and hence the predominantly male readers/copyists indirectly. Sometimes they are buttressed with an indication of the consequences for the perpetrator, should he ignore the warnings; consequences for the woman, on the other hand, are never considered. Bendt Alster has aptly described this rather selfish motivation for not harming others as "modest egoism" (Alster 2005, 31).

The same stance is also reflected in the endorsement of married life, which is supposed to afford a man comfort and care: "A married man is well equipped; an unmarried man sleeps in a haystack" (line 186). However, Šuruppak contends that a wife must be chosen wisely. He reminds his son that "a weak wife is always seized(?) by fate" (line 118) and that "a woman with her own property ruins the

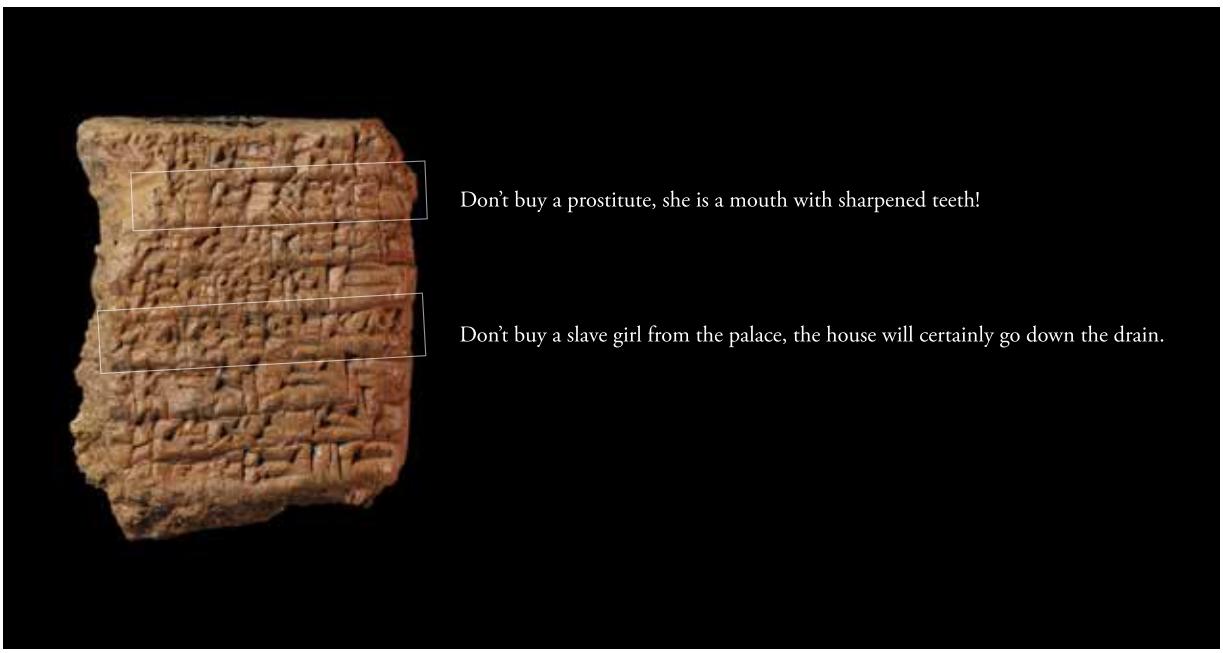


Figure 20.1. Obverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with a section of the *Instructions of Šuruppak*. ISACM A30265. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by JM.

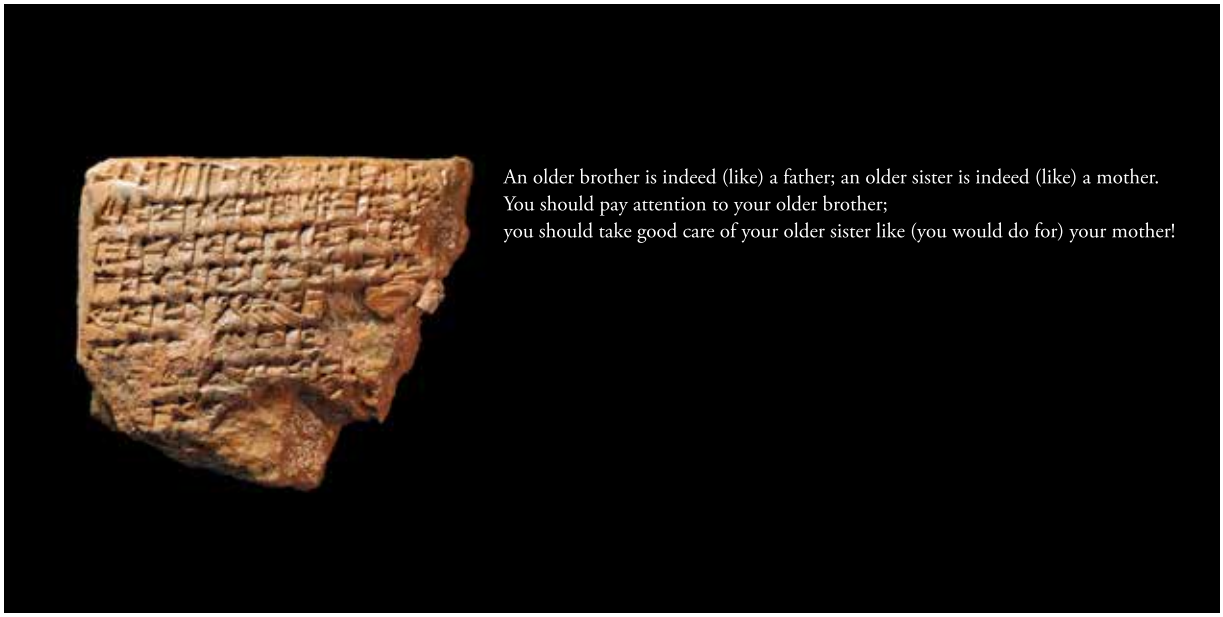


Figure 20.2. Reverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with a section of the *Instructions of Šuruppak*. **Cat. no. 94**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by JM.

household" (line 220). Moreover, he warns: "Don't choose a wife during a festival! Inside it is (all) borrowed, outside it is (all) borrowed: The silver is borrowed, the lapis lazuli is borrowed, the dress(?) is borrowed, the linen(?) is borrowed" (lines 208–10). Rather, Šuruppak states that "a man [appoints(?)] a reliable woman for a reliable household" (line 215).

While the status and well-being of the male head of the household are the focus of Šuruppak's advice to his son, he also demands respect and support for all family members: "An older brother is indeed (like) a father; an older sister is indeed (like) a mother. You should pay attention to your older brother; you should take good care of your older sister like (you would do for) your mother!" (lines 172–74; fig. 20.2). He further praises motherhood and forbids disrespectful behavior: "Don't speak arrogant words to your mother, it will cause hatred against you. Words against your mother and words against your personal god, do not utter them! A mother is (like) the sun god Utu: s/he gives birth to people" (lines 265–67). The age-old yet continually relevant advice from the last king before the deluge thus paints an ultimately positive image of dutiful, competent, and caring wives and mothers, while warning against the kinds of women who can make a man's life difficult or harm his status in society.

Didactic Texts Defining the "Ideal Woman"

This ambivalent view of women is also found in a small corpus of didactic texts that were probably newly composed in the Old Babylonian period for the benefit of scribal apprentices. The corpus comprises two disputations between women, called *Two Women* A and *Two Women* B, and at least one still-unpublished mock hymn against a wicked woman worthy of insult. Of *Two Women* A, only a dozen manuscripts found during the nineteenth-century CE excavations in Nippur are known. These tablets, preserved to differing degrees, represent six unconnected text segments that probably belong to more than one text. Hence *Two Women* A serves as an umbrella term for any text segment containing a disputation between women that does not belong to *Two Women* B. *Two Women* B, on the other hand, is attested on roughly sixty manuscripts written in locations throughout

the Old Babylonian kingdom. More than half of them were found in Nippur—six in House F; one of these six appears on **cat. no. 97**. Another one, **cat. no. 96**, was found in House J, in the immediate neighborhood of House F, but may be older than those from House F, which all date to the mid-eighteenth century BCE (Matuszak 2021a, 154).

Since *Two Women* B is the longest, best preserved, and most informative text about conceptions of ideal womanhood, it enjoyed widespread popularity in schools throughout Babylonia. Further, it was the only text of its kind that was at least partially translated into Akkadian and demonstrably studied at House F. This text, therefore, lies at the center of our discussion here. Being a truly didactic composition that, at least in the eighteenth century BCE, probably had little relevance outside scribal contexts, *Two Women* B helped students gain a wide variety of knowledge—and all of it in Sumerian, already a dead language one had to learn at school.

The text resembles a three-act drama (Matuszak 2021a, 37–43) in which two neighbors engage in a quarrel about who is the better woman. The initially playful exchange eventually spirals out of control, culminating in a fateful incrimination. Thereupon the verbal duel ends abruptly, and the woman wrongly accused of adultery seeks justice against her slandering rival by appealing to the judges. After a prolonged trial, she finally emerges victorious, and her wicked neighbor is convicted. The entire text can be studied as a lesson in rhetoric, starting with the alternating speeches of the verbal duel and ending with the orations in court. Moreover, the final part of the text (preserved on **cat. no. 97**) taught students procedural law and prepared them for different roles in the judicial system: how to bring charges against someone, how to defend oneself in court, and how to adjudicate a case as complex as slander (see also chapter 14). The main part, however, of which **cat. no. 96** (fig. 20.3) preserves a section, taught them the characteristics of the "ideal woman."

From a modern perspective, the definition of an ideal woman is achieved in a curious way: nowhere in the texts do we find any instructions on how to be an ideal woman or a description of what she should be like. The genre employs the exact opposite: allegations of doing it *wrong*. Thus, what we read are mutual accusations of failing at womanhood, often culminating in variations of the rhetorical question "And you, you are a woman?"—the implied answer, of course, being no.

The text segment partially preserved on **cat. no. 96** offers a good example of such a rant. Although the fragment is tiny and the obverse in particular is damaged, we can reconstruct the original text with the help of duplicates:

> "Her (ever so) pure womb is finished—(it means) financial loss for her house!
> Always buying beer, always eating ready-made food!
> Don't you say 'everything is plenty,' (even though in reality) you're incurring losses?
> Your husband has no clothes to wear, you yourself are wearing rags:
> your butt sticks out from them.
> One liter of barley is all you find.
> One can't stop her from constantly buying beer (and) bringing ready-made food.
> And you, you belong to womankind?"
>
> *Two Women* B, lines 48–55

The speech abounds in accusations and derisive remarks, grossly exaggerated to arouse gleeful laughter in the audience: who wouldn't want to picture the woman's husband naked or catch an imaginary glimpse of her butt? When these insults are mentally converted into their opposites, however, one realizes that these lines contain a relatively comprehensive concept of an ideal woman: first, she should be fertile, since having many children ensures the prosperity of the household. Rather than constantly "eating out," she should provide her family with home-cooked meals (perhaps the

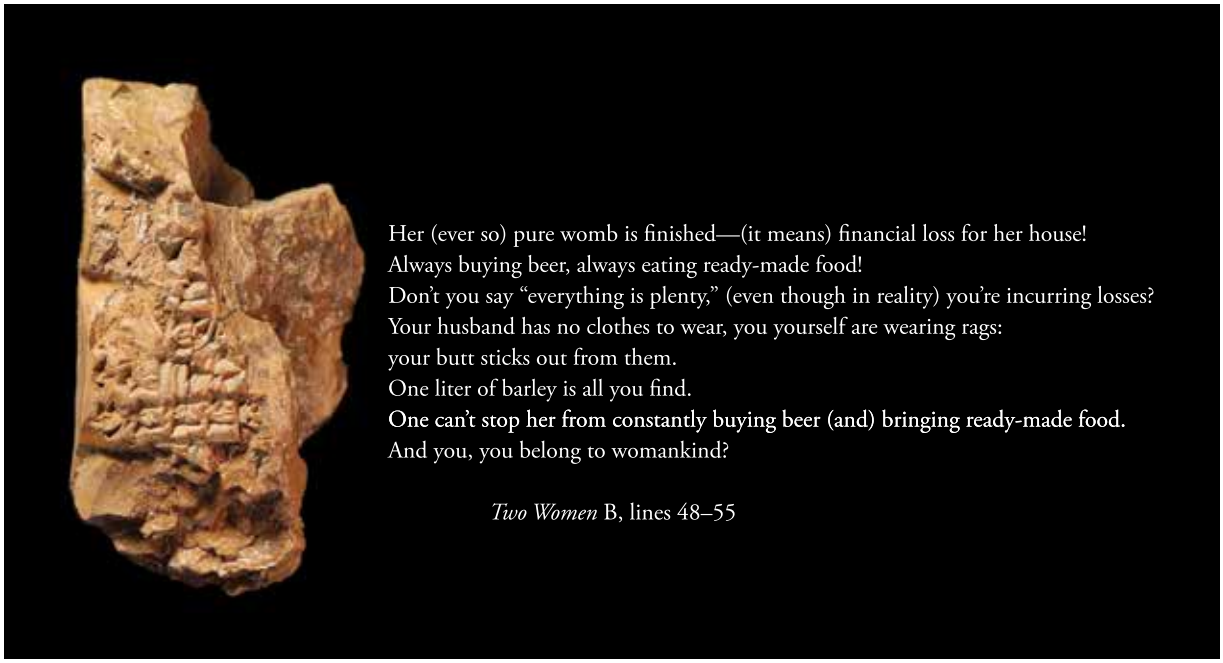


Figure 20.3. Obverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with a section of *Two Women* B (see fig. 20.4 for reverse). **Cat. no. 96**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by JM.

world's oldest condemnation of store-bought fast food). Moreover, it was a woman's responsibility to produce clothes for her family. The importance of textile skills is also stressed a few lines later, where we read, "She is not fit for womanhood: she cannot comb wool, she cannot operate a spindle" (lines 66–67). Given that the addressee of the speech in lines 48–55 translated above is allegedly incapable of essential tasks—giving birth, cooking food, making clothes—the skepticism conveyed in the final rhetorical question hardly comes as a surprise. After this impressive list of failures, the audience, whom the speaker invites to consider whether this woman can in fact belong to "womankind," can only agree that she has not proved herself worthy.

The speech partially preserved on the reverse of **cat. no. 96** is less broad in scope but has other qualities. Thanks to better-preserved duplicates, we can read the full passage (fig. 20.4). The message here is clearly that the addressee fails at even the most basic tasks: drawing water and baking bread. The process of baking bread is told in meticulous detail, all leading up to the unexpected punchline of her burning everything. While that remark was probably already very funny, the character of Sumerian made it sound even funnier when recited: the discrepancy between following all the necessary steps and still ruining everything is heightened by strictly parallel verbal forms and internal rhymes, which are difficult to replicate in English. The same also applies to the first line of the speech: what the translation renders as "doing nothing but grind, grind, grind" is a string of three repetitions of the Sumerian verb "to grind flour," which imitated the sound of the grindstone. It probably sounded something like "ararara" (pronounced with the *r*'s rolled). Apart from producing a comical sound effect, the tripling also conveyed the strenuous nature of the task, which was normally assigned to slave girls and hence implied that the addressee was of low social status. This is also conveyed by a particularly nasty slur in line 98—"The lower grindstone is her husband, the upper grindstone is her child"—which evokes the relative dimensions of the large, flat lower grindstone and

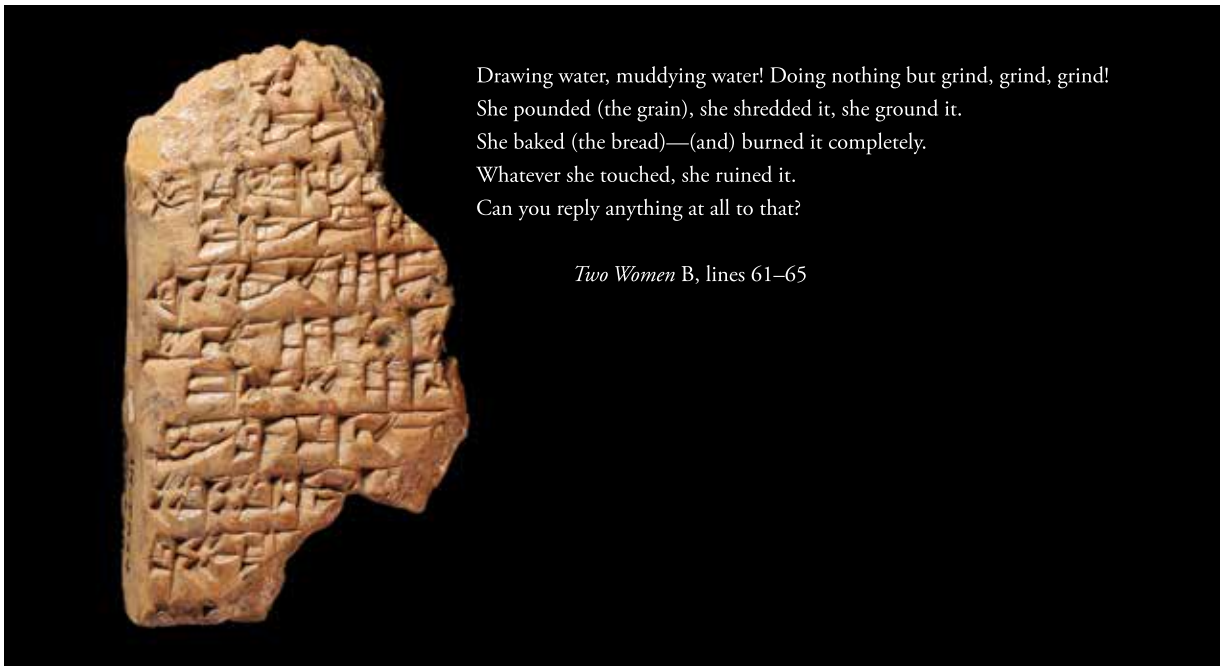


Figure 20.4. Reverse of a fragment of an extract tablet inscribed with a section of *Two Women* B (see fig. 20.3 for obverse). **Cat. no. 96**. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by JM.

Figure 20.5. Excavation photo of a kitchen with grinding stones and pottery. Nippur Area TA, House I, Room 173. ISACM P. 47082 (3N/32).

the small, fist-sized upper grindstone (fig. 20.5) and implies that the addressee is all but married to her menial work, leaving her no time for a real family.

Reading the entire verbal duel (cf. Matuszak 2021b), we can add aspects of an ideal woman that were not mentioned in the extract recorded on **cat. no. 96** and obtain a remarkably holistic picture. Perfection in womanhood was indirectly defined according to four categories: (1) character traits and behavior, (2) social status, (3) professional skills, and (4) health and beauty. Among the desired character traits were humility, moderation, honesty, integrity, diligence, and discretion. The ideal woman was supposed to come from a respected and reasonably affluent family, marry according to her rank, and not be forced to perform menial labor. As a matron, it was her task to manage the household, provide food and clothes for her family, please her husband sexually, and bear him children. Finally, she was supposed to be attractive and, even more importantly, physically and mentally capable of performing the work expected of her.

While none of the above may sound very surprising, it is striking that the image of the ideal woman coincides with that of the ideal wife, thus revealing the perspective of the male authors. Equally interesting is the fact that being a housewife is presented as a profession—and not just any profession, but the female profession par excellence. This becomes particularly apparent when the disputations between housewives are compared with those between male scribal apprentices, which contend that the "ideal man" is an "ideal scribe." Very much like the cantankerous neighbors in *Two Women* B, they accuse each other of failing at various school disciplines, such as writing, reciting, calculating, and accounting, only to ask, "And you, you are a man?" Again the implied answer is, of course, no, imparting the message that only capable housewives are "women" and only competent scribes can be considered "men." While the texts thus propagate a clear gender division when it comes to professions (and all too clearly reveal the bias of the authors, likely male scribes themselves), all the other criteria for excellence apply to men and women alike: scribal apprentices were measured against the same moral and social standards, and they too were supposed to be of sound body and mind. What differs besides the occupational profiles is that the ideal woman is construed in relation to a man, her husband, while the disputations between scribal apprentices never speak of men's obligations toward women.

Only Housewives?

In the previous section, we saw that the literary disputations construe ideal women as capable housewives and ideal men as competent scribes. It is conspicuous that, according to these texts, literacy does not feature among the skills expected of a woman. Moreover, none of the numerous literary works describing, romanticizing, satirizing, or idealizing scribal education ever mention women as engaging in the scribal arts. The image of the scribal school, which these texts evoke and promote, is populated exclusively by men: the pupils are male, the teachers and staff are male, and women are nowhere in sight. If they are mentioned at all, they are at home, not at school. In *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A), for example, a parodic account of a day at scribal school, the mother is mentioned as the one preparing a sandwich for her son in the morning, while the father tests his son's academic progress in the evening. Probably because of its direct relation to scribal education, the text was another favorite at House F and features among the "House F Fourteen" (Robson 2001, 54). Two similar compositions, *A Scribe and His Perverse Son* (Edubba'a B) and *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C) (**cat. no. 125**), feature no women whatsoever. Scribal education is presented as a man's world.

As so often, the ideal conflicts with reality. Not only do we know of literate women, who were trained in a similar way to men (Lion and Robson

2005; Lion 2011; Robson 2007; cf. chapter 6), but also Nisaba, the patron deity of scribal arts, was female, and the only named author known at the time was a woman: Princess Enheduana, who lived in the twenty-fourth century BCE and was remembered in the Old Babylonian period as the author of no fewer than five literary compositions (Helle 2019). One of them, a uniquely moving hymn known as the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B) (**cat. no. 67**), was included in a group of set texts now called the *Decad* (Tinney 1999; see chapter 15), which were particularly popular in the advanced level of scribal education. Thirty-six manuscripts of the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B) were found in House F alone—nearly half of all Nippur sources for this extraordinary composition (Robson 2001, 53).

Conclusion

Returning to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter—"What did students of the Edubba'a learn about women?"—we can thus give a nuanced answer. While several didactically oriented and moralizing compositions promoted the idea that women should be dutiful, competent, and caring wives and mothers, other literary texts studied during the advanced stage of scribal education illuminated other aspects of female agency. The heroine of *Two Women* B, for instance, takes matters into her own hands, personally appears in court to seek justice against her slandering rival, and wins the case. Meanwhile the case of Enheduana shows that an elite woman could become a famed author remembered for centuries. And finally, exercise tablets written by women suggest that—contrary to what the texts idealizing scribal education want their readers to believe—the scribal arts were not such an exclusively male domain after all (Lion and Robson 2005).

Explore Further

For an edition, translation, and study of the *Instructions of Šuruppak*, see:

Alster, Bendt. *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 31–220. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

For an edition, translation, and analysis of *Two Women* B, see:

Matuszak, Jana. *"Und du, du bist eine Frau?!" Editio Princeps und Analyse des sumerischen Streitgesprächs "Zwei Frauen B."* Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie 16. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021.

Matuszak, Jana. *Two Women* B, online edition and English translation. http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/Q000771, 2021.

For further information on women in the ancient Near East, see:

Budin, Stephanie Lynn, and Jean Macintosh Turfa (eds.). *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

Chavalas, Mark W. (ed.). *Women in the Ancient Near East: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Lassen, Agnete W., and Klaus Wagensonner (eds.). *Women at the Dawn of History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

Lion, Brigitte, and Cécile Michel (eds.). *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 13. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

Stol, Marten. *Women in the Ancient Near East*. Translated by Helen and Mervyn Richardson. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

PART II
Catalog

21 Discovering a School in Nippur

Madeline Ouimet and Susanne Paulus, with Laura D'Alessandro and Alison Whyte

> Wish us luck and hope with us that each next lower level we are about to dig will be even more interesting.
>
> —Donald McCown, 1951

The discovery of House F, an Old Babylonian school in Nippur, was a lucky find. During its third excavation season (1951–52), the Joint Expedition to Nippur of the University Museum of Philadelphia (now Penn Museum) and the Oriental Institute (OI) of the University Chicago (now Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—ISAC) excavated two neighborhoods in Nippur with the goals of better understanding the chronology of the site and discovering exciting tablets inscribed with literature. And tablets they did find! House F alone yielded, among other artifacts and architectural remains, more than 1,400 tablets and fragments, witnesses of the ancient schooling that took place there. Beyond the ancient objects, which are now divided among the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, the Penn Museum, and the ISAC Tablet Collection and Museum, the excavations produced rich documentation in the form of photographs, films, correspondence, and field journals. (SP)

The OI Excavates Nippur (cat. no. 1)

"The city of Baghdad gleam[ed] in the bright, hot noon-day sun," wrote director Donald McCown to his colleagues at the OI, practically a hemisphere away (McCown 1951, 1). As the first foreign member of his team to arrive in Iraq, McCown began to wade through the onslaught of logistical tasks that attend the start of an archaeological field season—in this case, the third season of the Joint Expedition to Nippur. Soon, more colleagues would arrive from abroad: Marian Welker as artifact illustrator, Francis Steele as epigrapher, Harry Whitney as physical anthropologist, and codirector Richard Haines with his wife Irene as field recorder (all pictured, along with Iraqi Directorate General of Antiquities representative Mohammad Ali Mustafa, in fig. 21.1). The Haineses also brought their young children, Alice and Carleton, who "romp over the mound of Nippur when

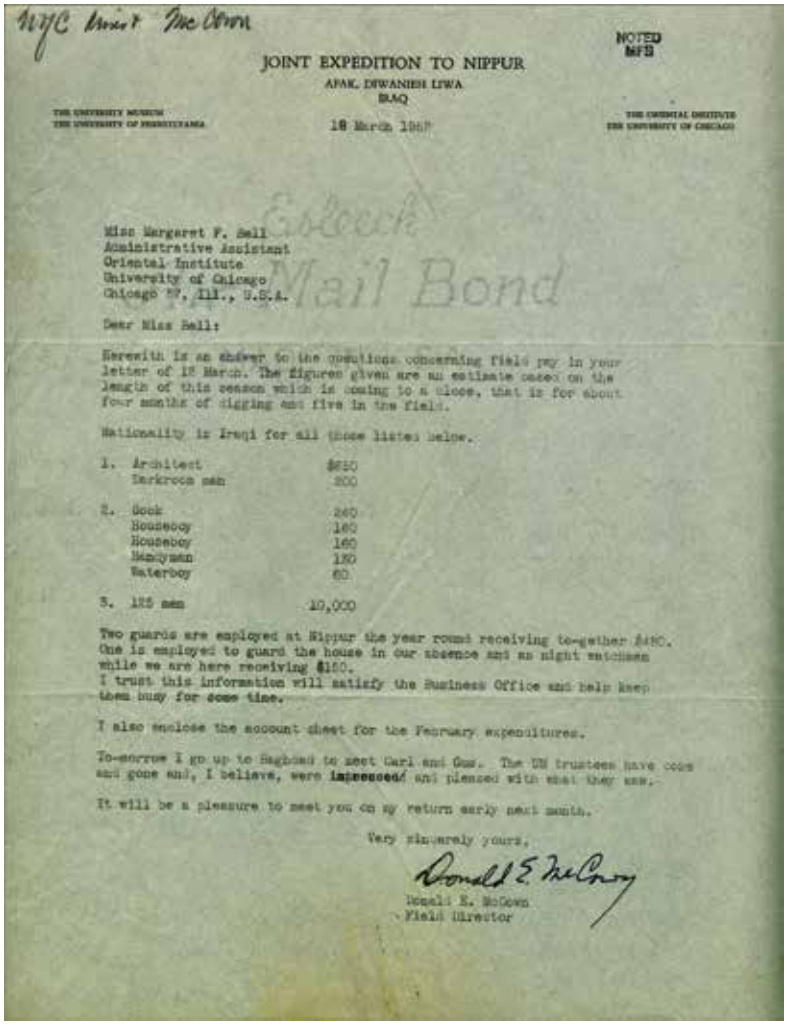
Plaque depicting a *kusarikku*, a mythical being with features of both a human and a bull, found in House K, a house near House F in Nippur. **Cat no. 3**. Photo by DL.

they are not doing their lessons," unwittingly reenacting the daily motions of students who lived at the site more than 3,000 years ago (McCown 1951, 2).

The project's goals for the winter of 1951–52 were to focus on the Scribal Quarter, or Areas TA and TB, of the Old Babylonian period as well as the Religious Quarter or temple complex. Excavations in Area TA had already begun in 1948. However, occupied for millennia, the mounds of Nippur were layer cakes of stratigraphy, the oldest levels usually found only deep below the modern surface; from 1948 to 1951, therefore, the team dug backward through time, carefully peeling away and recording the more recent deposits. In the autumn of 1951, they were now tantalizingly close to the Old Babylonian layers below, and anticipations ran high, for as McCown penned hopefully, "this should be our 'gold mine' for the literary tablets" (McCown 1951, 3). The team also sought to "learn the material culture of this period at Nippur," continue previous work in Area TB with its exposed Ur III layers, and investigate the ziggurat of the god Enlil (McCown 1951, 3–4). Archaeological questions were, however, mostly seen as secondary and supplementary. Much of the motivation for the 1951–52 season was decidedly text-centric, aimed at the discovery of cuneiform tablets.

To tackle these ambitious plans, the project required a few more hands—132 local Iraqi workers, to be precise, according to the 1952 payroll account (**cat. no. 1**). Unfortunately, because their names were not recorded, it is difficult to attribute credit and recognize each individual properly for their contributions to the research. However, the workers feature in many field photographs and film reels, clearly displaying their skill as field archaeologists (figs. 21.2 and 21.3). This visual record gives us, if not personal names, an appreciation of their contributions to the successes of the excavation and ultimately the opportunity we have today to study the archaeology and texts from ancient Nippur. (MO)

Figure 21.1. Some of the team members of the Joint Expedition to Nippur, third season (1951–52). *Left to right:* Donald McCown, field director; Richard Haines, field director and architect; Mohammad Ali Mustafa, representative of the Directorate General of Antiquities of Iraq; Marian Welker, artifact illustrator; Francis Steele, cuneiform epigrapher; Harry Whitney, physical anthropologist and archaeologist; Irene Haines, field recorder; and Alice and Carleton Haines, children of Richard and Irene Haines. ISACM P. 47527 (3N/481).



JOINT EXPEDITION TO NIPPUR

AFAK, DIWANIEH LIWA

IRAQ

THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

18 March 1952

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Miss Margaret F. Bell
Administrative Assistant
Oriental Institute
University of Chicago
Chicago 37, Ill., U.S.A.

Dear Miss Bell:

Herewith is an answer to the questions concerning field pay in your letter of 18 March. The figures given are an estimate based on the length of this season which is coming to a close, that is for about four months of digging and five in the field.

Nationality is Iraqi for all those listed below.

1.	Architect	$650
	Tarkroom man	300
2.	Cook	240
	Houseboy	180
	Houseboy	180
	Handyman	180
	Waterboy	60
3.	125 men	10,000

Two guards are employed at Nippur the year round receiving to-gether $180. One is employed to guard the house in our absence and as night watchman while we are here receiving $120.
I trust this information will satisfy the Business Office and help keep them busy for some time.

I also enclose the account sheet for the February expenditures.

To-morrow I go up to Baghdad to meet Carl and Gus. The UN trustees have come and gone and, I believe, were impressed and pleased with what they saw.

It will be a pleasure to meet you on my return early next month.

Very sincerely yours,

Donald E. McCown

Donald E. McCown
Field Director

1. Field Correspondence

Directors Correspondence [McCown, 1952]
ISAC Museum Archives

Director Donald McCown writes from Nippur to Margaret Bell at the Oriental Institute in Chicago, itemizing the estimated payments due to the project's Iraqi team members.

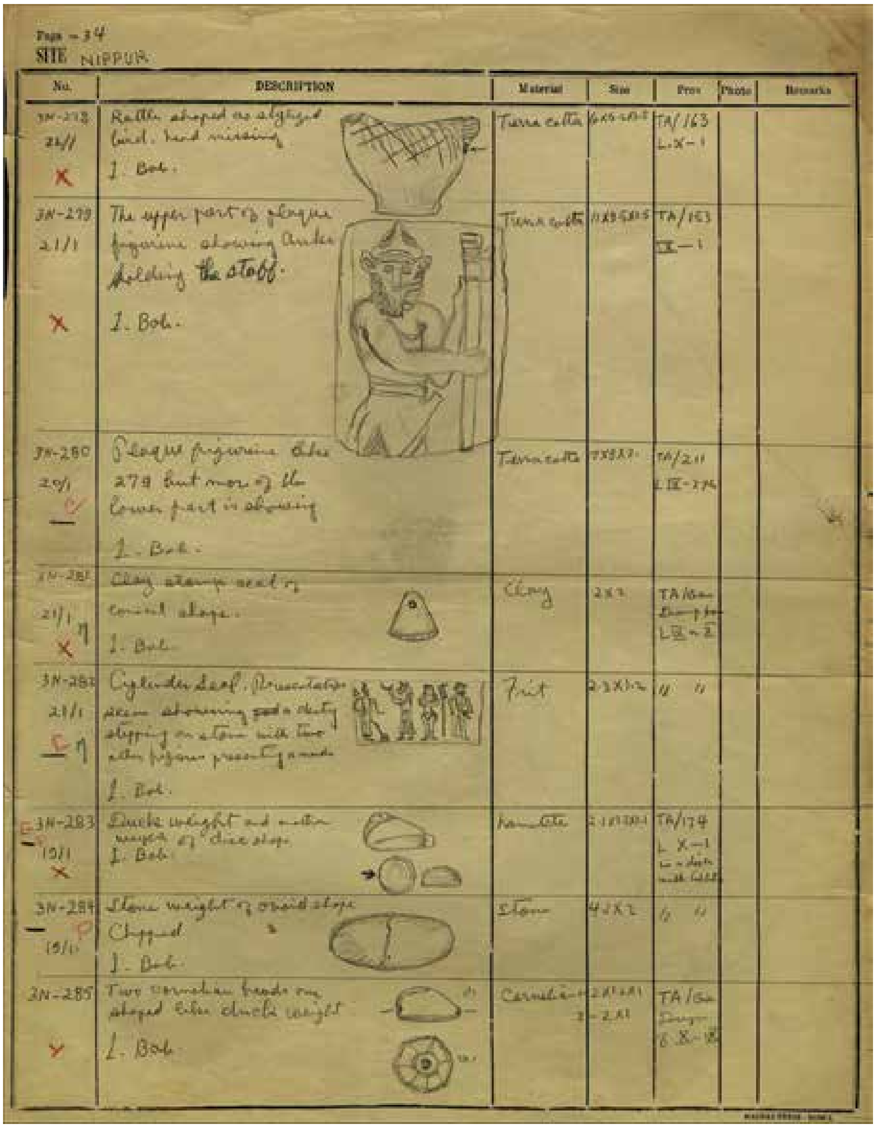
Figure 21.2. An Iraqi field archaeologist works in Nippur Sounding A, Level II, during the 1951–52 season. The view is from the northeast corner. ISACM P. 47073 (3N/23).

Figure 21.3. Iraqi field archaeologists excavate the late Old Babylonian layers (Level IX and Level X Floor 1 visible) in Area TA during the 1951–52 season. The view is from the northeast toward the south. ISACM P. 47251 (3N/205).

The Afterlife of an Excavation (cat. nos. 2-3)

Gazing across the site of Nippur today, what would you see? Beneath the rippling patchwork of mounds hide the remains of ancient pasts still waiting to be discovered. But other features tell a story of a more recent past—the activities of archaeologists themselves. Despite seventy years of aeolian accumulations in the form of sand dunes, large depressions persist where excavation trenches were cut in the 1950s. "Spoil heaps" or "upcast," the piles of dirt displaced from these trenches, still stand alongside them. Looters' pits also pepper the scene, mementos of a long, parallel history of illicit digs.

These lives and afterlives of an excavation are historical narratives in their own right; methods of excavation and the distribution of artifacts to museums, for instance, are products of particular moments in history, in this case the early 1950s. Finds from the third season of the Joint Expedition to Nippur were cataloged in the field and assigned to one of three museums. Entries marked with a red "C" in the field catalog—for example, the third entry in **cat. no. 2**, a clay plaque of a mythical *kusarikku* (bull-man) creature—were to be shipped to the OI in Chicago, those with a "P" were destined for the University Museum in Philadelphia, and those with an "X" were allocated to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. This past system of "find division," a practice legal at the time, is why the OI then received and today as ISAC continues to curate Nippur objects, including the *kusarikku* (**cat. no. 3**), in its collections. However, since those early years of the Joint Expedition, international antiquities laws have undergone significant changes; as fieldwork at Nippur continues to the present day, all finds now remain in their country of origin—Iraq. (MO)



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SITE NIPPUR

No.	DESCRIPTION	Material	Size	Prov	Photo	Remarks
3N-278 21/1	Rattle shaped as a stylized bird. head missing 1. Bab.	Terra cotta	[illegible]	TA/163 L.X–1		
3N-279 21/1	The upper part of plaque figurine showing Ankie holding the staff. 1. Bab.	Terra cotta	[illegible]	TA/163 IX–1		
3N-280 20/1	Plaque figurine like 279 but more of the lower part is showing 1. Bab.	Terra cotta	[illegible]	TA/211 L IX–[illegible]		
3N-281 21/1	Clay stamp seal of conical shape. 1. Bab.	Clay	2x2	TA/[illegible] [illegible] L IX–I		
3N-282 21/1	Cylinder Seal. Presentation scene showing a deity stepping on a stone with two other figures presenting a [illegible] 1. Bab.	Frit	[illegible]	" "		
3N-283 15/1	Duck weight and another weight of disc shape 1. Bab.	[illegible]	[illegible]	TA/174 L X–1 [illegible]		
3N-284 15/1	Stone weight of ovoid shape Chipped 1. Bab.	Stone	4x2	" "		
3N-285	Two carnelian beads one shaped like duck weight 1. Bab.	Carnelian	[illegible]	TA/[illegible] [illegible]		

2. Field Catalog of Finds

Records of the Nippur Expedition
[Season 3, 1951–52]

ISAC Museum Archives

Handwritten field catalog containing object notes (object number, description, material, measurements, findspot) and sketches from the third season of the Joint Expedition to Nippur; the page shown here includes entries for several Old Babylonian ("1. Bab.") objects from Area TA, including 3N-280, a well-preserved clay plaque of a *kusarikku* (see **cat. no. 3**).

3. Plaque with a Mythological Figure

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House K, Room 211, Level X
Floor 3 foundation

Old Babylonian

Length 161 mm, width 90 mm, depth 26 mm

ISACM A29440 (3N-280)

Clay plaque depicting a *kusarikku*, a mythical being with features of both a human and a bull, holding a pole.

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 92, 174 (catalog entry, discussion)

Photo by DL.

Nippur in the Old Babylonian Period

The first three seasons of the Joint Expedition to Nippur largely focused on the Ekur, the temple complex of Enlil (fig. 21.4), to investigate the religious importance of the site in the Old Babylonian and other periods. This temple and ziggurat, still standing tall today, were regularly rebuilt by successive rulers, likely including the Old Babylonian kings. With each new brick laid—or especially as each wall was toppled and past foundations were torn out—the archaeological record of this structure became more and more complicated, like a millennia-long game of Jenga. Consequently, although the excavators "found neither stamped bricks nor other evidence to indicate any construction or repair work during the Old Babylonian period," we can be nearly certain that the temple of Enlil did indeed exist during this time and that its remains were likely removed by later rulers (McCown and Haines, 1967, 11; see also chapter 2). Contemporaneous cuneiform tablets tell us the Ekur was alive and well: texts describe it as the center of Old Babylonian religious life and an important economic institution not only in Nippur but also throughout the wider social, ritual, and even cosmogonic landscapes of Mesopotamia (see **cat. no. 68** in chapter 23). Literary depictions even conceptualize the Ekur as the nexus—the very "mooring rope"—of heaven and earth.

After only a short walk to the south, we arrive in the Scribal Quarter (see fig. 2.4 in chapter 2). In addition to religious life, excavators were interested in unearthing an Old Babylonian neighborhood, especially Area TA. This area was inhabited from the Akkadian to the Achaemenid period and was consistently used as a neighborhood of private houses (McCown and Haines, 1967, 34). Old Babylonian houses came in an array of sizes (see fig. 3.2 in chapter 3), varied in their internal organization of rooms, and were generally constructed of mudbrick walls, earthen floors, and roofs probably of alternating layers of clay and organic materials, such as wood and reeds. Artifacts recovered from such domestic spaces included pottery for storage and cooking; tools for craft production, such as bone needles, awls, and stone and metal blades; items of personal adornment, such as beads and bracelets; and figurines of humans and animals, decorative plaques, game pieces, miniature chariots, and clay rattles (McCown and Haines, 1967, 77–112). Cuneiform tablets, too, were recovered from houses other than House F, though in smaller numbers; the tablets often deal with matters of

Figure 21.4. Nippur Area EN in 1950. The view is from the north side of the Ekur—the temple complex of Enlil—toward the south, with the temple in the foreground (*left*, or east) and the ziggurat of Enlil in the background (*right*, or west). ISACM P. 47787.

household management, such as property holdings and economic transactions. From what people wore and ate to what they wrote and made, the Scribal Quarter thus provides important evidence for the daily social, familial, and economic lives of Nippur's residents. (MO)

A School in Nippur and Its Tablets (cat. no. 4)

> I must dash off a note to you both, for I have just come in from watching a workman dig out the most interesting wall we have found at Nippur . . . the "bricks" were all literary tablets. It formed a small box against the room wall and a neighboring bench. . . . Two or three of the "bricks" may be lexical fragments but the rest are literary. . . . The bench next to it is only slightly less interesting. It is filled with tablets. . . . I know you will share with me my elation.
>
> —Donald McCown, letter to Froelich Rainey and Carl Kraeling, January 21, 1952

The excavation of House F began as that of any "normal" house would—that is, by documenting the locations of walls, cataloging finds, discerning floor surfaces, and taking measurements of all features. But when the excavators reached stratigraphic Levels X and XI, tablets began to appear at every turn. In itself, this development would not have been startling, as many Old Babylonian houses at Nippur contained at least a few cuneiform documents. However, as these exciting days of excavation unfolded, three major clues pointed to House F's specific role as a school.

First, the sheer quantity of tablets recovered from House F outstripped by several thousand that of any other context yet excavated at the site (see fig. 3.4 in chapter 3). Second, the contents and physical forms of the texts were different from those recovered from most other houses at Nippur. As field director McCown's letter above attests, most of House F's tablets were vocabulary lists or literary compositions such as poems, songs, rhetorical debates, and proverbs—not the daily-life records of sales, purchases, or property ownership that were typical of contemporary households. Furthermore, House F's texts came in forms both small and large, some single-column tablets, others multicolumn; some were broad and weighty and time-consuming to produce; others were clearly cleaved, torn, or warped by their users. Some contained the same text repeated on either side of a dividing line and scrawled in two "hands" or styles of handwriting, one seemingly less practiced than the other or even streaked by the trails of fingers dragged in dissatisfied erasure (**cat. no. 4**). Only later was it realized that these diverse forms of interaction between inscription and inscribed material correlated with stages in the school curriculum and served different pedagogical roles—**cat. no. 4**, for instance, being an exercise in student copying from a teacher's example.

Third, many of House F's tablets were found in unexpected archaeological relationships to the house itself by being built into the very benches and box-like features furnishing the building (see fig. 4.5 in chapter 4). The peculiarity of this treatment of tablets as secondhand construction material—together with the quantity and quality of the texts—demonstrates that the activities that took place in House F were in many ways different from those of its neighbors at Nippur—that is, different from the textual practices associated with a family archive. The hypothesis that House F functioned as a school explains the observed phenomena well: the large quantity of tablets must be the result of many students practicing their writing; the lexical and literary genres were useful for teaching vocabulary, grammar, and complex social ideas; and the unexpected incorporation of tablets into the architecture, while possibly reflecting merely an inclination to reuse and recycle, was perhaps also symbolic, transforming House F in the most literal sense into an Edubba'a, a "house where tablets are distributed." (MO)

Today the tablets from House F are divided among the three museums mentioned above: the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, and the ISAC Tablet Collection in Chicago. Sometimes fragments of the same tablet ended up in different museums, making it more difficult to reconstruct the tablet. The excavators foresaw this problem and developed a clever solution: after careful recovery and basic conservation of the tablets, including baking and cleaning in the field (fig. 21.5), they created a latex mold of every tablet found during the excavations. With the help of these molds, plaster copies of the tablets were created (see **cat no. 4**). Today the ISAC Tablet Collection houses plaster copies of every tablet discovered during the third season of the Joint Expedition to Nippur.

The foresight of the excavators allows modern scholars to study all the tablets from House F together in Chicago. Through digitization (fig. 21.6), the ISAC Museum's Tablet Collection team makes these finds available to the scholarly community worldwide through ISAC's integrated database (isac-idb.uchicago.edu/). (SP)

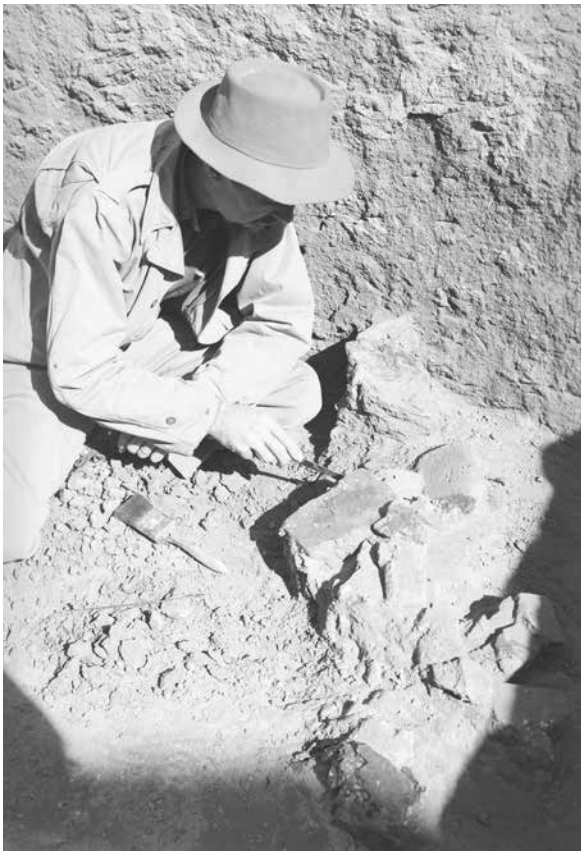
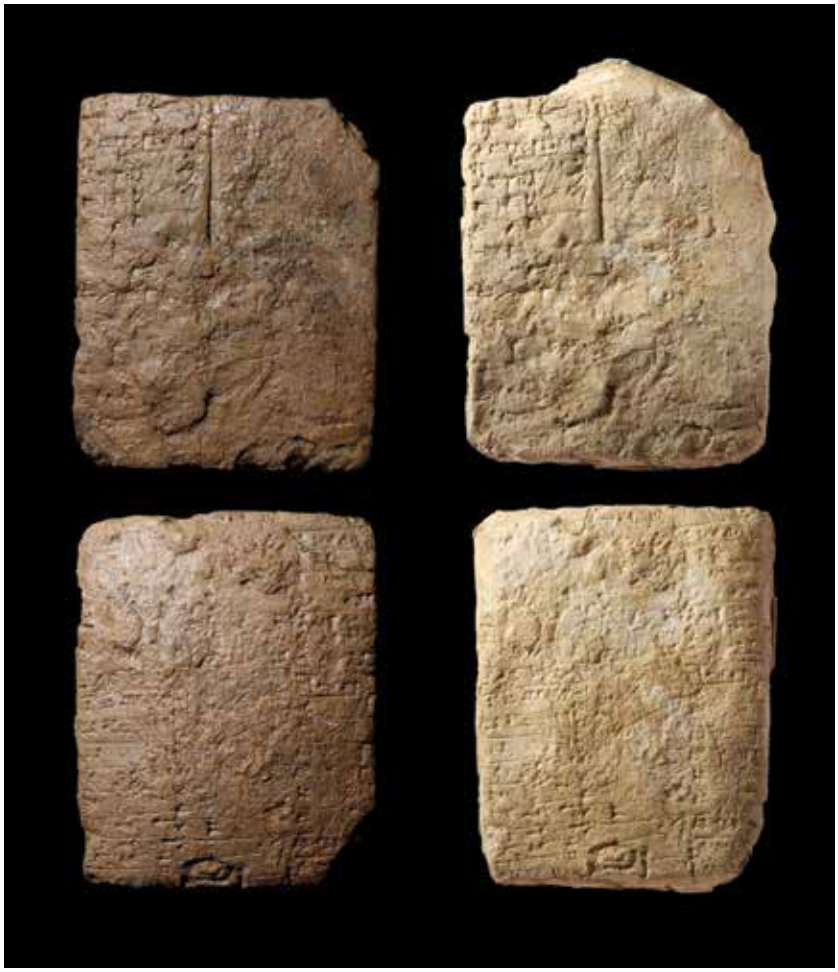


Figure 21.5. Field director Donald McCown cleans Old Babylonian cuneiform tablets discovered in Nippur Area TA, Level XI Floor 1, along the northeast wall of House F, Room 205, in 1952. ISACM P. 47163 (3N/118).

Figure 21.6. Undergraduate student researcher Danielle Levy digitizes a tablet from House F. Photo by SP.



4. Typical School Tablet from House F

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 155 mm, width 125 mm

ISACM A30232 (3NT-391)

Plaster casts of obverse (ISACM C3261C) and reverse (ISACM C3261D)

The tablet is inscribed with an excerpt from the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura), later known as tablet 13, entries 250–65 on the obverse, the left column being the teacher's model and the right being the student's copy, mostly erased; the reverse contains three columns of another excerpt of the same list text, later known as tablets 20–22, entries 174–236.

Literature:

Landsberger, Draffkorn Kilmer, and Gordon 1960, 82, 86–88 (composite transliteration)

Reiner 1974, 96, 104 (composite transliteration, source V30)

Photos of the tablet itself (*left*) by CM and of the casts (*right*) by DL.

Preservation of Clay Tablets at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures from the 1930s to Today

Laura D'Alessandro and Alison Whyte

Unbaked clay tablets present many challenges to the archaeologist in the field. From the earliest excavations of these materials in the Middle East, archaeologists recognized that the region's soil contained soluble salts. These salts, in their liquid state, are readily absorbed by the porous clay of the tablets and create great difficulty in stabilizing the unbaked clay once the tablets are excavated. In the burial environment, prior to excavation, the amount of moisture in the soil remains fairly constant. As the clay dries out following excavation, however, water begins to evaporate from the surface, drawing the salt-bearing solution toward the surface of the tablet. Soluble salts respond readily to changes in relative humidity, and as water is absorbed and evaporated, the salt crystals respond accordingly. As the solution on the surface dries, the salt crystals assume solid form and can disrupt the layers of clay, resulting in catastrophic failure of the clay body. The untold damage caused by this change in state was readily understood by the early excavators, and a variety of materials and processes were developed in an effort to stabilize the clay and preserve the tablets and their surface inscriptions.

By the early 1930s, it was already common for excavated cuneiform tablets to undergo low-fired baking in a kiln in a storeroom or museum. But the transport of such fragile material from the field to its final destination often led to significant losses during transit. To address this continuing problem, early excavators pioneered the baking of clay tablets in the field. Edward Chiera may have been the earliest archaeologist to fire tablets on-site. Pinhas Delougaz used plans based on a kiln prototype, previously developed for Edward Chiera, at sites such as Tell Asmar in Iraq (Delougaz 1933, viii, 39–57).

Rudimentary kilns were constructed on-site, and the clay tablets were fired in slow increments to 1,000–1,500 degrees Celsius. At lower temperatures, free water in the clay structure is driven off and water can still be reintroduced into the clay. As the temperature rises, the bound water within the clay is also driven off. At this point, the changes in the clay structure are permanent and cannot be reversed.

Baking the clay tablets in the field was intended to harden the clay sufficiently to allow for mechanical cleaning and treatment with water to remove soluble salts. But the method was not ideal—even low-fired baking was not without risk, for controlling the temperature in these kilns was challenging. Driving off water held within the clay structure produces steam, which may cause the clay to explode if the temperature is raised too quickly. And clay may contain inclusions that can explode upon heating, even with careful modulation of the temperature. After firing, the tablets still required significant work to make the inscriptions legible and to join broken fragments.

Stabilization of the salt-bearing clay tablets, whether during the excavation process or following excavation, required the addition of materials that would have been available during the 1930s and 1940s for use as both an adhesive and a consolidant. They included shellac and a very unstable form of cellulose nitrate that could be either prepared on-site from celluloid film or purchased commercially as Ambroid. Paraffin wax was also commonly applied in the field. The wax was heated and applied by brush, either to help stabilize a single tablet or to help remove a block of tablets that were found crushed together during excavation. Once the tablet(s) had been successfully stabilized, the clay was heated to remove excess wax. According to accounts from the time, a final step in the cleaning process might involve applying gasoline to the tablet to remove any remaining wax on the surface—a technique not in use today!

Until the early 1990s, clay tablets in the collection of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (ISAC) were baked in a kiln to a temperature of about 900 degrees Celcius by students and research associates under the direction of the curator of the Tablet Collection. In 1995, the kiln was dismantled during preparations for the construction of a new wing and was not replaced.

Today, the firing of unbaked clay artifacts has become somewhat controversial. It is understandable that archaeologists in the early twentieth century were overwhelmed with the urgent need to stabilize and transport hundreds, if not thousands, of unbaked clay tablets in a limited amount of time and with finite resources. By the latter half of the twentieth century, though, the professions of art conservation and conservation science had developed in response to the needs of the cultural heritage community. Access to advanced analytical technology led to a better understanding of the processes of deterioration, which led in turn to the development of a wider range of techniques and conservation materials that offer alternative methods to deal with unstable cultural material.

While some institutions continue to bake the clay tablets in their collections, many museums have adopted a more conservative approach. Understanding that recovering the text inscribed on the surface of the clay tablets is the primary goal of any preservation intervention, it is still important to note that the clay itself can hold important information, even if secondary to the text. Any procedure that permanently alters an ancient material may be destroying information that will be lost forever. And the unbaked clay may hold critical information that could become measurable in the not-too-distant future. Today, conservators have numerous options available when considering how to approach the stabilization of unbaked clay.

The ISAC conservation department had to face many of the issues outlined above when undertaking the treatment of the tablets selected for display in the *Back to School in Babylonia* exhibit. Fortunately, we have more resources and tools at our disposal today—a climate-controlled museum environment, improved analytical instrumentation, and adhesives and other chemical compounds that have been thoroughly tested and vetted by the conservation science community.

Conservation efforts in preparation for this exhibit focused on ensuring the stability of the tablets. When any artifact is selected for display, it must endure more handling as it goes through the various processes involved in its preparation for exhibit. Study, catalog photography, and mount making all entail significant movement for display objects, as opposed to those that sit quietly in storage. Furthermore, in this exhibit the tablets are mounted vertically on the wall. Although this orientation enhances their visibility, it can place more stress on the tablets than would a display that allows the tablets to lie flat on the deck of a display case.

So the ISAC conservation team's first step was to examine each tablet to determine how well it would stand up to these potentially stressful situations. Using a stereo microscope, we examined the tablets' surfaces carefully to look for loose fragments or friable areas. It was obvious from the start that most of the tablets had already been treated in some way. As noted above, various procedures—including baking, desalination, and consolidation or reconstruction with different compounds—were carried out on the collection after excavation. During our examination, we noted that many of the compounds applied previously appeared to have degraded. We observed brittleness

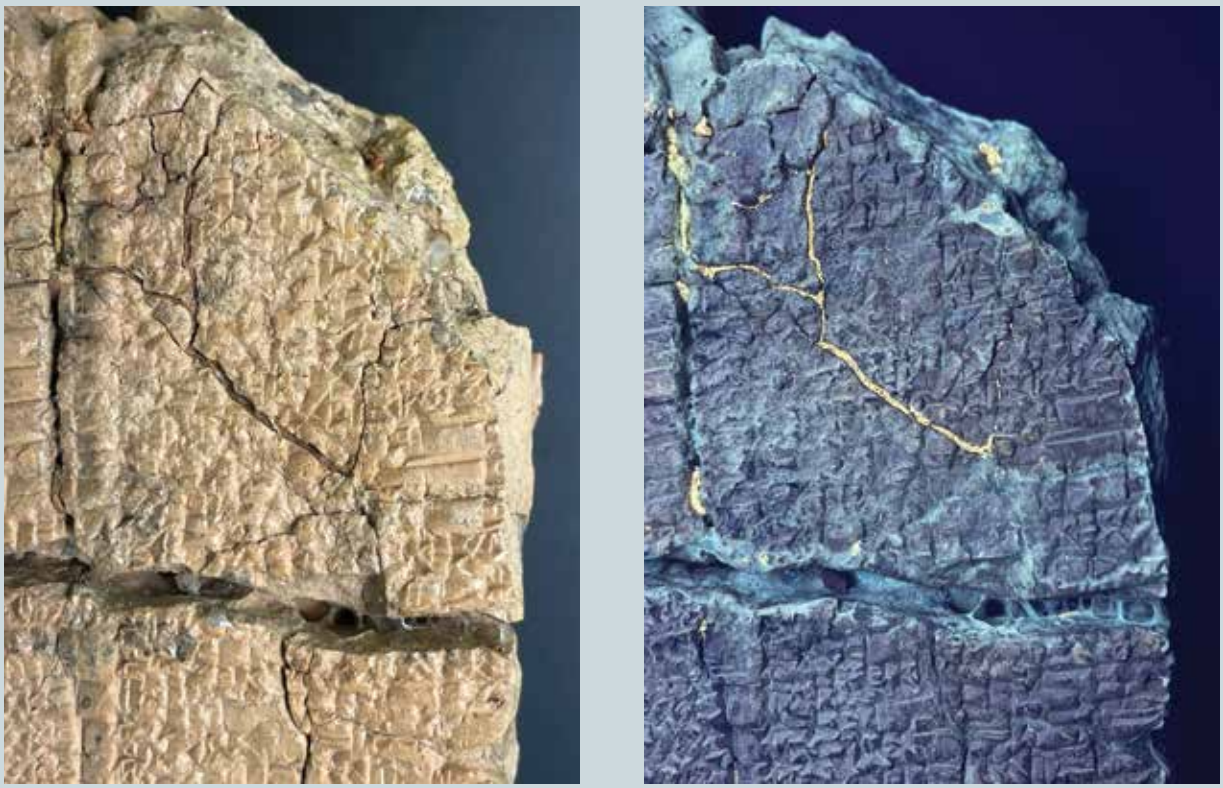


Figure 21.7. Detail of **cat. no. 77** showing degraded adhesive compounds (*left*) and the same section viewed under longwave ultraviolet light (*right*). Photos by AW.

Figure 21.8. **Cat. no. 19**, one of a number of tablets included in the exhibit that were recorded with high-resolution digital photography before conservation treatment. Photo by AW.

and yellowing of old adhesives, and some of the adhesives looked stringy, almost as though the pieces that had been adhered to one another had subsequently moved apart (fig. 21.7). In many instances, the adhesive was applied more heavily than we would typically choose to do today, as our goal now is to introduce the minimum amount of adhesive or consolidant necessary to ensure stability. In our approach to assessing the various tablets for display, we took into account the state of the previously applied adhesive along with the weight of the tablet. We considered whether the old adhesive could support the weight of the tablet and withstand its vertical installation.

We also examined many of the tablets using long-wave ultraviolet (UV) light. This technique can help identify the compounds on the surface of objects that are not obvious in visible light. For example, the presence of restorations can often be seen better under UV wavelengths. In this instance, UV light was particularly helpful in identifying the existence of different adhesives and consolidant compounds on the tablets. Figure 21.7 shows a portion of a tablet under both visible light (left) and UV light (right). One adhesive compound on the surface fluoresced a bright orange, whereas another adhesive showed virtually no fluorescence. Bright-orange fluorescence is consistent with shellac-based compounds, whereas acrylic adhesives, such as Paraloid B72, typically do not fluoresce (Measday 2017). While a definitive identification of these compounds would require more analysis, we can say for certain that at least two adhesive compounds were used on this tablet.

More than a hundred tablets were selected for display, of which seventeen were determined to require treatment. Prior to treatment, the condition of each of these tablets was recorded with high-resolution digital photography (fig. 21.8) and in a written report.

Our aim for the conservation treatment of these tablets was to improve their stability and return them to a state that more closely resembles their original appearance. Having noted the deteriorated condition of some of the old adhesive compounds, we were concerned about the risk of join failures and the losses such failures might produce. In addition, the thick shiny coating of adhesive seen on many of the tablets substantially changes the original matte appearance of their surfaces. So where possible, we removed or reduced old, deteriorated adhesive compounds using an appropriate solvent. This activity—which proved difficult and time consuming—was carried out under a microscope to ensure that no deformation of the clay's surface occurred. Where necessary,

Figure 21.9. **Cat. no. 23** during its preparatory treatment for display, showing the space between a join filled with an adhesive mixed with an inert silica-based material (*left*) and the white fill toned using acrylic paints (*right*). Photos by AW.

a conservation-quality adhesive that has been tested extensively and is known to be stable and reversible over time was applied in the affected join cavities.

In some cases, because of superficial losses, a large space existed between joined fragments. The surface area of these joins was minimal, making them inherently unstable. In these situations, the space was filled using a combination of the aforementioned conservation-quality adhesive mixed with an inert silica-based material. The fill was recessed from the inscribed surface of the tablet. Since this mix of acrylic adhesive and inert silica-based material is naturally white (fig. 21.9, left), in consultation with the exhibit's curator the decision was made to tone the white fills using acrylic paint so they would match the surrounding surface of the tablet (fig. 21.9, right). While still detectable to a trained eye using typical observational techniques, the toned fills do not draw the museum visitor's attention away from the tablets themselves.

At least one treatment involved the joining of two separate fragments. A join between tablets A30241 and A30271 **(cat. no. 77)** had previously been discovered, and, with guidance from the tablet curator, the optimal alignment of the inscription on the two fragments was determined (fig. 21.10). Again, a conservation-grade adhesive was selected to adhere the two fragments.

Even after examining and treating the tablets, the ISAC conservation department continued to play a role in developing the exhibit. At this stage, our work focused on preventive conservation activities that aimed to protect the artifacts from potential damage and eliminate the need for further intervention in the future. We advised mount makers on the best way to handle particularly fragile tablets and which tablets would need mounts with special accommodations. We reviewed the materials slated for use in the exhibit to ensure they were inert and would not expose the objects to compounds that might cause or accelerate their decay. Finally, we advised on the optimal environmental conditions for display. We hope that with these precautions in place, this special collection of artifacts will be available for many future generations to study and enjoy.

Figure 21.10. Detail of **cat. no. 77** showing the join alignment of two separate fragments. Photo by AW.

22 School Life in House F

Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Danielle Levy, Madeline Ouimet, Susanne Paulus, and Ryan D. Winters

A Schoolhouse

When I go to the scribal school,
while the night is in its first watch, I wake up and eat.
After I have eaten,
after I grab my stylus, my exercise tablet, my supplies,
and the things one needs at school,
while humbly being on my way to scribal school, I do not look around.

School Regulations (Edubba'a R, section A, lines 9–14; translation from Veldhuis 2022)

At first glance, House F, with its modest size of 48 square meters/525 square feet, looks more like a house—not much different from its neighbors—than like a school building. Built-in architectural features, such as an oven, and finds of kitchen ceramics, such as dishes and beakers, underline its domestic character. At second glance, special installations, such as benches for studying and boxes for creating teaching materials—clay tablets—give proof of school life in this structure. School stories, the so-called "Edubba'a literature," give us insight into the daily grind of school life and let us explore who went to school. The inhabitants of House F left behind legal documents recording real-estate purchases that allow scholars to learn more about who lived and taught in the space. Archaeologists use ceramics and legal documents to establish when and how long House F operated before it was abandoned toward the end of the Old Babylonian period (ca. 1720 BCE). (SP)

House F as a Home

House F may not have initially struck excavators as anything other than a normal house (fig. 22.1; see also figs. 3.2 and 3.3 in chapter 3). And indeed, it was a normal house in many respects. A common design for houses in the Old Babylonian period was the "courtyard house"—a central courtyard space flanked by rooms

Four-sided prism containing an extract of the elementary scribal exercise *Syllable Alphabet* B. **Cat. no. 41**. Photos by DL.

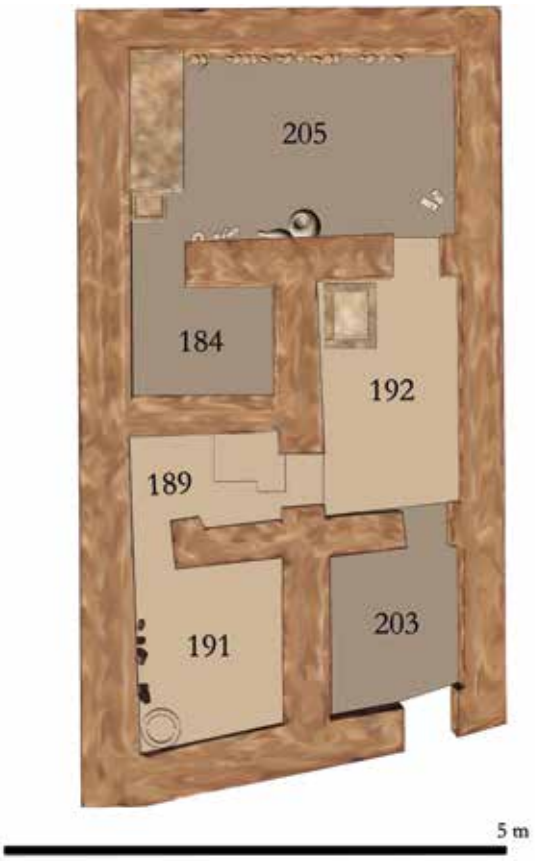


Figure 22.1. 3D-model top plan of Level XI Floor 1 of House F in Area TA. This level dates to the Edubba'a phase of House F (Old Babylonian period). Note the bench in Room 205 and the boxes in Rooms 192 and 205. Created by MO based on McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 71, and data from McCown and Haines 1967 and Stone 1987.

on all sides (Brusasco 2007). Although House F does not have rooms on all four sides of the space presumed to have been its courtyard (numbered 192 on the plan), it does generally evoke this form. But more than merely in ground plan, House F's affinities with contemporary homes signal that it probably also *felt* like a typical home in important ways. What made a house a home in the Old Babylonian period was, at least in part, defined by how rooms were divided conceptually into public and private spaces. The courtyard, being a sizable open space easily accessible from the main doorway and apt for receiving guests or negotiating business deals, was likely used for activities near the public end of the spectrum. With every threshold crossed while winding one's way into the depths of the house, rooms may have felt increasingly intimate as well as increasingly dark, reserved for the more private, personal activities of residents.

In addition to functioning as an Edubba'a, the six rooms of House F therefore served double duty as spaces for mundane domestic activities such as cooking, eating, sleeping, producing crafts, and socializing. The kitchen, Room 191, exemplifies this duality of uses, both domestic and didactic: ordinary household pottery and cooking ovens were found alongside tablet fragments (seen ringing the mouth of a pot sunk into the floor in fig. 4.5 in chapter 4) and raw clay, suggesting that the kitchen was used for both cooking and tablet recycling/production.

Edubba'a students likely arrived at school in the morning and returned to their own homes in the evening, but House F did not sit empty in the interim. Its permanent residents may have included the Edubba'a instructor and family members, as well as nonfamily household members such as servants or slaves. During the daytime, the building may have been crowded with rambunctious young scribes-to-be, especially in Rooms 205 and 192, as indicated by installations that seem specially built to service students, such as bench seating and boxes for storing and recycling clay (fig. 22.2), in addition to many tablets. But where could the nonteaching residents of House F locate themselves during the day? Did they have enough space for their own needs and privacy despite the gaggle of unfamiliar children encroaching into their home?

Some scholars suggest that, given the limited space in House F, the Edubba'a instructor could not have had a family here (Stone 1987, 57). However, other residents may have performed their daily chores in an interior room less trafficked by the students, such as Room 184, 189, or perhaps 191—the kitchen. Alternatively, they could have coexisted more interactively by participating in the Edubba'a themselves, possibly in some of the managerial roles described in Sumerian literary texts about school life (see chapter 4). Or they might have spent

Figure 22.2. Excavation photo looking northward into Room 192 with its benches, baked-brick box, and rounded storage vessels (Level X Floor 4), as well as deeper strata excavated in the middle of the floor. Room 189 is in the background (*upper left*), with a mudbrick platform visible (Level XI Floor 1). ISACM P. 47262 (3N/216).

most of their time outside the house, working, shopping, and socializing in the streets and other public spaces. In light of these various hypotheses, House F indeed could have comfortably sheltered a nuclear family much like its neighbors, Houses G, H, and I. (MO)

Ceramics: From the Kitchen to Chronology (cat. nos. 5–7)

House F's pottery similarly speaks to domestic life. From every room came vessels of all shapes and sizes—a typical domestic assemblage. Round pots, platters, open bowls, jars, miniature forms, and even a geometrically painted vessel attest to the cooking, serving, consumption, and storage of food, the activities of a normal household.

These ceramics are as important for archaeologists as they were for their ancient users. Given that their forms changed over time, ceramics are the most common means of assigning relative dates to the archaeological levels in which they are found. Thus, observing that Levels IX and X in House F are filled with typical Old Babylonian forms, such as the common dish (**cat. no. 5**), we can posit that the floor levels on which the vessels sat date to the Old Babylonian period and that the cuneiform tablets associated with them are contemporaneous.

Room 205, where the most tablets were found, was also the space from which the greatest diversity of pottery was recovered. In contrast, Room 184, which may have been reserved for more private

aspects of household life, contained almost exclusively beakers (such as **cat. no. 6** from Room 205), another typical Old Babylonian find. In Room 192, a baked-brick box held a large storage jar containing many small pots; perhaps students used the pots to dip water from the jar for rewetting their tablets (Stone 1987, 57). Curious, however, is the lack of vessels recorded for Room 191, the kitchen, where one might expect a few cooking pots. Because House F was excavated in the 1950s, one possible explanation may be that archaeologists' decisions about recording and preserving finds differed from research norms today; many objects were discarded in the field with only a terse record about them in a discard log, while a subjective selection of finds made it into the "Pot Book" with full context data, description, and sketches (**cat. no. 7**).

Although House F's kitchen was ambiguously preserved, House I allows a clearer look at the spatial organization of tasks and the kinds of tools that characterized similar culinary spaces (see fig. 20.5 in chapter 20). Mid-excavation in December 1951, director Donald McCown wrote home excitedly that the team had found "one fine room" where "vessels and grinding stones still lie undisturbed on the floor of [the] kitchen, reviving for a moment the scene of domestic activity which was once there" (McCown 1951, December 22–23). Since the kitchen in House F is about half the size of that in House I, the partial view of the latter shown in figure 20.5 in chapter 20, photographed from the middle of the room, approximates the size of House F's Room 191; several House F residents could easily have worked together in such a space while producing barley flour at multiple grinding-stone stations, chatting with each other, and eavesdropping on the arcane goings-on of the Edubba'a just around the corner. (MO)

5. Fragment of a Dish

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level X
Floor 4, in upper part of the fill

Old Babylonian

Height 53 mm, diameter 240 mm

ISACM A29567 (3P-397)

Fragment consisting of two sherds of tan ware, forming approximately one-half of a plate or dish; fine plant material (temper) was mixed with the clay to prevent cracking or warping during production; cream-colored outer surfaces (slip); flat circular base (string-cut), curved profile, body widening to the rim (open form), thick groove around the rim.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 82 (other examples of the ceramic type)

Stone 1987, 173 (catalog entry)

Photo by DL.

6. Beaker

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Height 212 mm, diameter 80 mm

ISACM A29563 (3P-377)

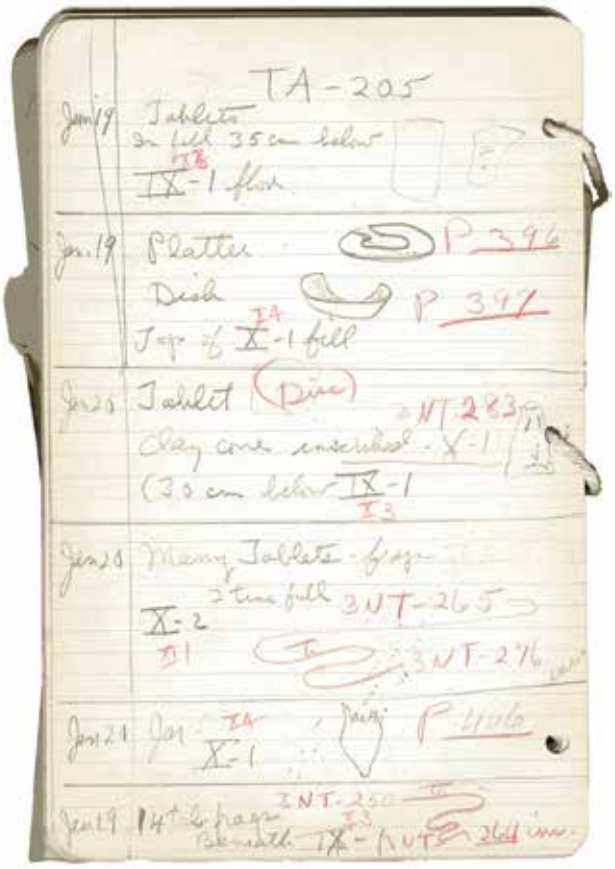
Beaker or vase, tan ware; fine plant material (temper) was mixed with the clay to prevent cracking or warping during production; cream-colored outer surfaces (slip); low circular base, long ovoid body, short neck ringed with an incised groove; dark-brown/black band painted around both the inner and outer surfaces of the rim.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 95 (other examples of the ceramic type)

Stone 1987, 173 (catalog entry)

Photo by DL.



7. Pottery Field Notebook

Records of the Nippur Expedition
[Season 3, 1951–52]

ISAC Museum Archives

Handwritten entries from the excavators' "Pot Book" field journal, including entries for **cat. nos. 5** and **6**. The entries from the pages labeled "TA-205" record both pottery and tablets from Area TA, House F, Room 205 in the Old Babylonian levels, including sketches.

Inhabitants and Chronology (cat. nos. 8–12)

Albeit in far smaller numbers than the literary and school texts, everyday legal and economic tablets were also discovered in House F. Two of the texts, **cat. nos. 9** and **10** (along with the latter's envelope, **cat. no. 11**), record house sales. **Cat. no. 12** records the division of two temple offices among three individuals.

While scribes sometimes wrote model legal texts for practice, we can be certain that the tablets presented here are valid documents because of the presence of seal impressions and names of witnesses—elements that made a document legally binding and proved its authenticity. **Cat. no. 8** is a cylinder seal from House F similar to the ones rolled across **cat. nos. 9**, **10**, and **12**. Its iconography is of a typical type, a so-called "presentation scene." It would have functioned for its owner like a signature, being rolled across a tablet to certify a transaction.

Sometimes seals also had a cuneiform legend identifying the owner. Envelopes such as **cat. no. 11** functioned as an added layer of security. When the writing of a legal document was finished, it could be enclosed in another layer of clay on which a second copy of the document was inscribed and sealed. If necessary, the envelope could be opened and compared with the text inside—a way to prevent forgery. Legal texts were often inscribed with a date, including the year, month, and sometimes day.

Thus these house-sale documents have the potential to tell us not only when the scribal school at House F was in operation but also who lived there. Through these texts, we can potentially identify its scribal teachers by name and learn something about their social and economic status. We might also find out precisely when the Sumerian literary texts discovered in the schoolhouse were written, which would give us important information concerning the history of the language. However, the use of these documents for this purpose, in combination with the archaeological data, is fraught with difficulties and uncertainties.

A general problem is that such texts are often found in a secondary context—that is, in material that was moved around in ancient times during renovation or rebuilding so that they ended up in a historical layer that is earlier or later than the one to which they originally belonged. On the other hand, certain types of texts may have been kept by families for a very long time after they were first written. The documents discussed here, for example, were found in the layer of House F that dates to a time when archaeologists believe the building was no longer used as a school. But according to the traditional dating of the school, **cat. nos. 9** and **12** should actually predate the school's end by more than half a century.

According to this view, the destructive event that separated the school and post-school layers—and that preserved the school tablets for us—is to be connected to the upheavals that took place in Samsu-iluna of Babylon's eleventh regnal year, about 1739 BCE (see Stone 1987, 57). A potential problem, however, is that not a single tablet dating to the reigns of either Samsu-iluna or his predecessor, Hammu-rabi, was found in the school layers of House F. The few dated tablets that have been found are significantly earlier, dating to the reign of Sin-iddinam of Larsa, thus opening the possibility that the destructive event in question took place between that king's reign and the reign of Rim-Sin, whose line usurped Sin-iddinam's (see Charpin 1990, 6–7). It is also possible that the scribal school at House F operated over a much longer period than previously thought—some school tablets, though only a few, were found in the "post-school" layer of House F, so the school may have continued to function after the destruction. In any case, **cat. no. 10**, dated to Iluma-ilum (a king who rebelled successfully against Samsu-iluna), must mark the end of any activity at House F, with Nippur itself abandoned soon thereafter (see also chapter 2).

Concerning the inhabitants and potential teachers living in House F, the evidence is also equivocal. In the exchange of house plots by the sons of Ubar-Ba'u recorded on **cat. no. 10**, the

brother Ištar-kima-iliya receives a larger house than his sibling Ninurta-rim-ili, providing an additional small payment in silver. Interestingly, the dimensions of the house received by Ninurta-rim-ili as described on the tablet seem to match the excavated dimensions of House F, so Ninurta-rim-ili may have been the house's final occupant, even if by then it might have no longer functioned as a school.

Proof that Ubar-Ba'u lived in House F before bequeathing it to his sons could come from **cat. no. 12**, found in the same layer as **cat. no. 10** but dated more than fifty years earlier. **Cat. no. 12** names Ubar-Ba'u and two other individuals as the owners of certain temple offices. If this Ubar-Ba'u is the same person as the father named on **cat. no. 10**, and if he really lived in House F, then the presence there of **cat. no. 9** remains difficult to explain, for it describes a house sale between two men named Ur-dukuga and Amurru-bani, individuals not otherwise known to have a connection to the family of Ubar-Ba'u. Ur-dukuga could be the brother of an individual mentioned in texts from another house in the neighborhood of House F, but this identification is uncertain.

All these considerations demonstrate the difficulty of situating the scribal school at House F in a precise historical context and of identifying its inhabitants. (RDW)

8. Cylinder Seal

Stone

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Height 35 mm, diameter 20 mm

ISACM A29445 (3N-293)

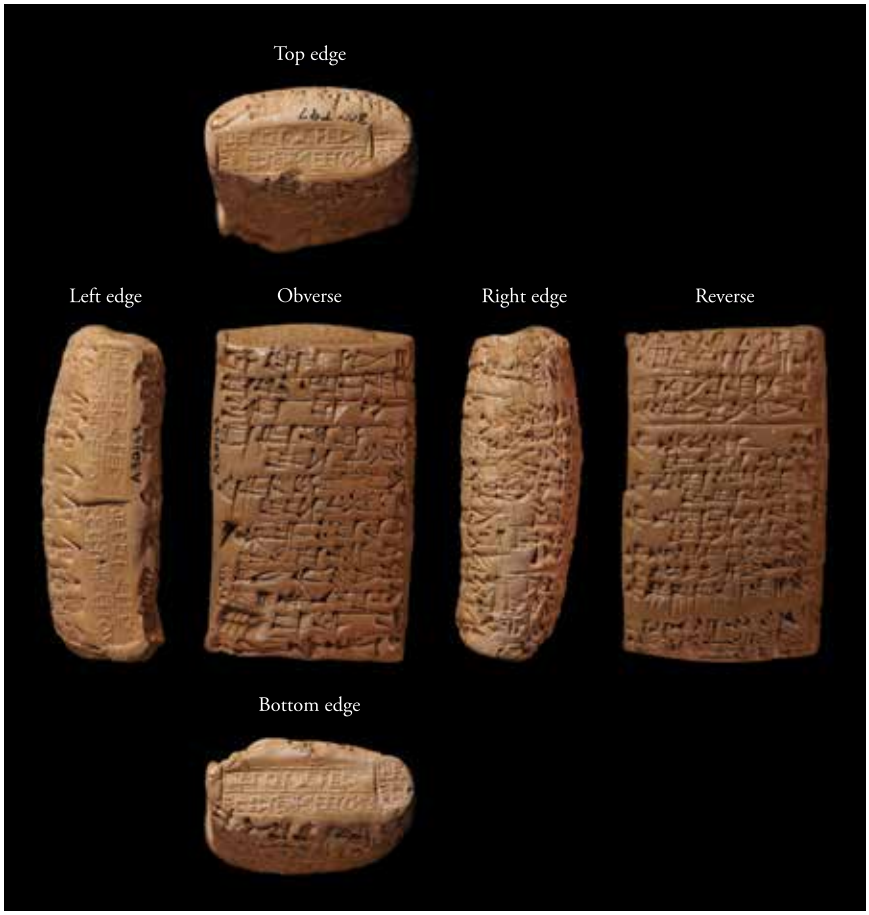
Perforated cylinder seal depicting a figure leading a second figure before an enthroned deity. The figure in front, probably a lesser deity, holds the wrist of the rear figure and raises his arm in greeting.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 174, pl. 112:13 (catalog entry, photograph)

Stone 1987, 173 (catalog entry)

Photo of seal (*left*) by DL. Photo of modern impression (*right*) ISACM P. 47542 (3N/496).



9. Tablet Recording a House Sale

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 184, Level X Floor 1

Old Babylonian

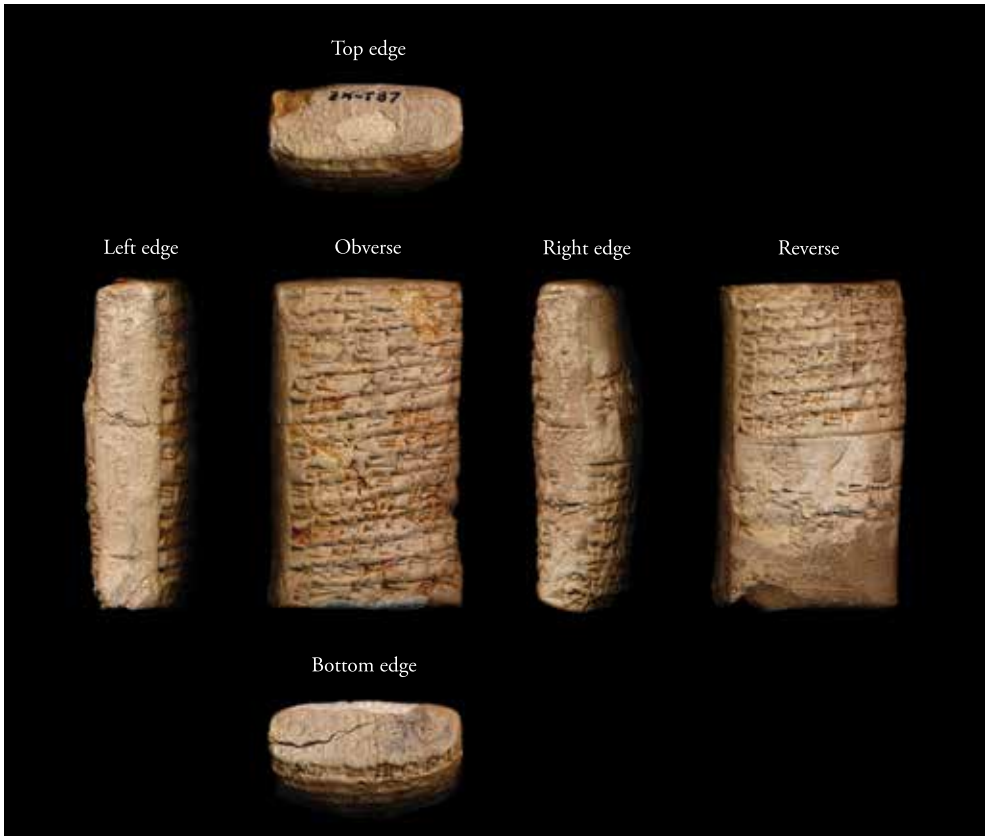
Length 77 mm, width 47 mm

ISACM A30143 (3NT-97)

Tablet recording a house sale by Ur-dukuga to Amurru-bani. The former sells to the latter a house measuring 30 square meters/323 square feet in area for 8 shekels of silver. Six witnesses are listed. Sealed by Ur-dukuga, the seller, on the left, top, and bottom edges of the tablet. Dated to the forty-eighth year and fourth month of the reign of King Rim-Sin of Larsa (ca. 1775 BCE).

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 76, 180 (catalog entry)
Stone 1987, 169, 216, pl. 44 (catalog entry, description)

Photos by DL; annotations by MDH.



10. Tablet Recording a House Exchange

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 184, Level X Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 76 mm, width 45 mm, depth 26 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-239 (3NT-87)

Tablet recording a house exchange between two brothers, Ninurta-rim-ili and Ištar-kima-iliya, the sons of Ubar-Ba'u. Ninurta-rim-ili gives a house measuring 39.6 square meters/426 square feet in area to Ištar-kima-iliya in exchange for a house measuring 36 square meters/323 square feet (possibly House F itself), as well as 1 shekel of silver. The names of two neighbors and five witnesses to the transaction are recorded. Sealed by both brothers on the top, bottom, left, and right edges and the lower half of the reverse of the tablet. Dated to the first year, seventh month, and sixteenth day of the reign of King Iluma-ilum of the Sealand Dynasty (ca. 1721 BCE).

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 76, 180 (catalog entry)
Stone 1987, 168, 216 (catalog entry, description)

Photos courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; annotations by MDH.

11. Fragment of an Envelope

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 184, Level X Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 29 mm, width 27 mm, depth 14 mm

ISACM A35326 (3NT-87)

Corner fragment of the clay envelope that once enclosed **cat. no. 10**. The seal impressions of Ninurta-rim-ili and Ištar-kima-iliya are partially preserved.

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 76, 180 (catalog entry)
Stone 1987, 168, 216 (catalog entry, description)

Photo by DL.

12. Tablet Recording the Division of Two Temple Offices

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 184, Level X Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 67 mm, width 49 mm, depth 23 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-240 (3NT-88)

Tablet recording the distribution of two temple offices (prebends) to three individuals: Ur-Lulal, Agua, and Ubar-Ba'u. Eight witnesses are listed. The seals of the three recipients are impressed along the edges of the tablet. Dated to the fifty-fourth year and ninth month of the reign of King Rim-Sin of Larsa (ca. 1769 BCE).

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 76, 180 (catalog entry)
Stone 1987, 168, 216 (catalog entry, description)

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Who Went to School? (cat. nos. 13-14)

One of the biggest challenges for modern scholars is understanding who the students in the Edubba'a were. What was their age, their gender, and their social and intellectual status? These questions are tricky to answer, because the names of the student scribes are not recorded on the school tablets. However, tablets such as **cat. no. 13** allow us an unusual glimpse in this regard.

In addition to typical cuneiform signs imprinted on this tablet fragment, **cat. no. 13** has another peculiar indentation—bite marks. Yet besides its amusing reminder of human playfulness, this tablet reveals more about the ages and lives of these scribal students. The lexical content inscribed on the tablet was likely learned by students at the end of their first year in scribal school. Dental analysis of the teeth marks on this tablet indicates the biter was probably a child aged twelve or thirteen. So from this information we can infer that scribal students began their education at about eleven years old (Guinan and Leichty 2010).

Cat. no. 14 similarly grants us unique insight into the lives of these scribal students, revealing both their self-perceptions and perhaps the perceptions of broader Babylonian society about the social status of scribes. Inscribed on the tablet fragment are lines from a larger school disputation text called *Dialogue* 1 (see **cat. no. 124** in chapter 24), wherein through alternating insults two young scribes compete over which one of them is a better student. Insults offer a unique demonstration of the scribes' internal conception of an ideal scribe by highlighting the most egregious faults a scribe could have. By analyzing such denunciations, we learn inversely what scribes perceived a scribal student's most significant traits to be. Frequent throughout the text are also accusations of indebtedness, poverty, and homelessness (lines 42, 61, and 75), so it appears that the opposite of these conditions—moderate wealth and elevated socioeconomic status—are the necessary traits of the ideal scribal student. A particularly notable indication of required status is the direct derogation of one scribe for "not [being] a child of righteous people" (line 41). The taunts that the other is a "convict" or a "liar" further emphasize the importance of a scribe's having a principled and dignified character (lines 71 and 64).

Dialogue 1 also includes insults concerning another's ability to read aloud clearly, recite scribal lore accurately, write neatly, and comprehend concepts intellectually (lines 55, 59, 133–34, and 138). Memorization is revealed as a particularly important skill for a scribal student. Indeed, an almost metalevel understanding of its importance is innate to the very tablet itself: the scribal student who produced **cat. no. 14** wrote, likely from memory, a dialogue in which two students argue over which one of them is better at reciting memorized dialogues (line 51). (DL)

13. Tablet with Bite Marks

Clay

Nippur, unknown provenience

Old Babylonian

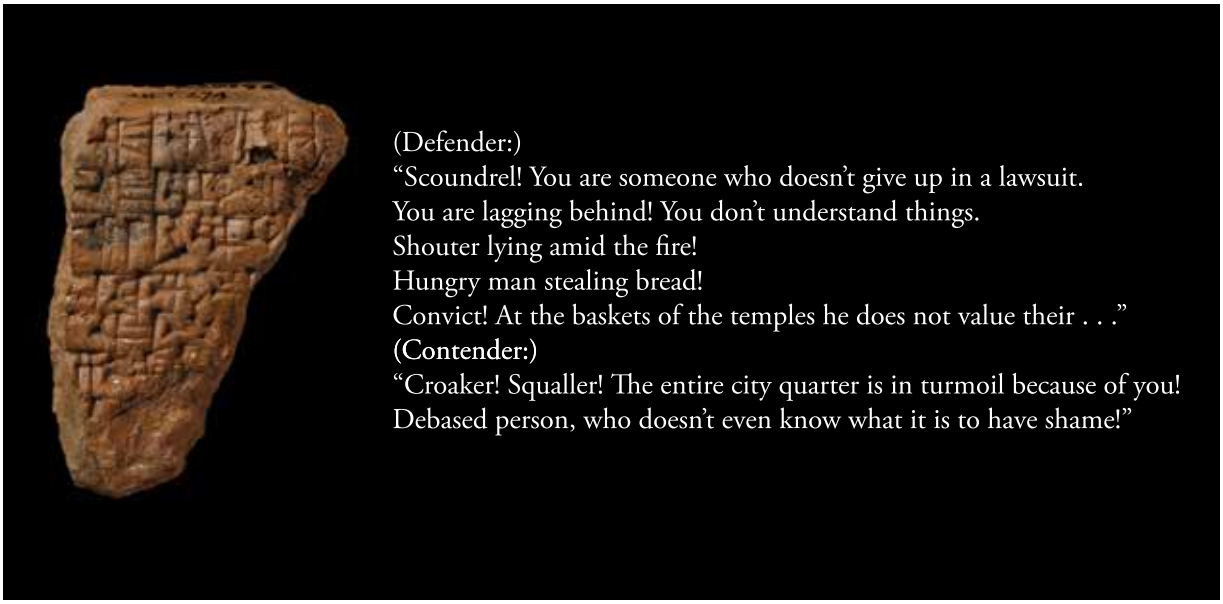
Length 65 mm, width 45 mm, depth 26 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, N5326B

School tablet with bite marks of a twelve- or thirteen-year-old child. The inscribed lexical text is an excerpt from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea).

Literature:
Guinan and Leichty 2010, 49–50 (discussion)

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.



14. Tablet with a School Disputation

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 53 mm, width 38 mm

ISACM A30192 (3NT-274)

Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian school disputation *Dialogue* 1, lines 120–26. Seven lines from the middle of the disputation are preserved on the obverse.

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 116, 180 (catalog entry)
Johnson and Geller 2015 (edition, source Y')
Matuszak 2019, 1–47 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, discussion)

See special section in chapter 24, pages 408–11.

Photo of obverse by DL; annotations by MDH; translation by JM.

A Day at School (cat. nos. 15-18)

What would a day in the life of a Babylonian student look like? The composition *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A), **cat. no. 15**, provides an idea. Early in the morning the students rose, ate their breakfast, took their lunch, and went to school. There the day was filled with making and writing tablets and working their way through the curriculum. This lively composition also describes some of the strict school rules: pupils had to dress properly, were allowed to speak only when asked, and needed to complete exercises without mistakes. According to *Schooldays*, each misstep was punished with a flogging. Indeed, the poor protagonist could get nothing right and received multiple beatings. As a result, they lost interest in becoming a scribe. However, their father turned the situation around by inviting the teacher home and bribing them with good beer, a hearty meal, and precious gifts. Rather than abandoning their pupil, the scribal master started praising the student and advocated for them before the goddess of scribes, Nisaba.

Schooldays (Edubba'a A) is clearly a satirical story, and many elements, including the numerous school staff, are exaggerated (see also chapter 4). On the other hand, the pedagogical methods are likely genuine, and the tablets mentioned in the composition correspond to those found in House F. The student first practices on a teacher–student exercise tablet, on the left side of which the teacher has written some lines for the student to copy (**cat. no. 16**; see also below). At the end of the day, the protagonist takes a round tablet or "hand-tablet" (imšu) home to show his father (**cat. no. 17**). (Such round tablets contained short extracts of only two lines written by the teacher and copied by the student. None have been found in House F but only in the surrounding houses, where the students likely lived.) Later in the story the student complains about difficult calculations such as those on **cat. no. 18**, a small tablet with a multiplication table of the number 12,30 (750). But whether it was math or literature the students found difficult, most of them likely lacked all recourse to shortcuts via bribery—they had to master everything through hard practice and many long days at school. (SP)

15. Tablet with the Literary Composition *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A)

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 72 mm, width 69 mm

ISACM A30217 (3NT-338)

Tablet fragment inscribed with the literary composition *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A). The obverse contains lines 1–8 of the composition, the reverse lines 85–91.

Literature:

Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur (composite score and transliteration by Pascal Attinger, Sebastian Borkowski, and Catherine Mittermayer; translation by Pascal Attinger)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

16. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 147 mm, width 112 mm

ISACM A30269 (3NT-573)

Teacher–student exercise tablet. Only the left side is inscribed—with fifteen lines of personal names organized similarly to the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš. Perhaps this inscription is an unidentified section of that list. The reverse is uninscribed.

Identification of the content by Paul Delnero.

Photo of obverse by DL.

17. Round Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House K, Room 196, foundation of Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Diameter 73 mm

ISACM A30182 (3NT-231)

Round tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (part of Ura). Only the obverse is inscribed; it contains two copies of lines 294–294a.

Literature:
Falkowitz 1983–84, 42 (catalog entry and transliteration)
Veldhuis 1997, 158, 230, 324 (composite transliteration, score edition, and catalog, source Ni IV-20)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

18. Tablet with a Multiplication Table

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 72 mm, width 46 mm

ISACM A30282 (3NT-614)

Single-column tablet inscribed with a multiplication table of the number 12,30 (750).

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Schooldays (Edubba'a A)

This translation by Marta Díaz Herrera, Susanne Paulus, and Ryan D. Winters is indebted to those by Pascal Attinger for the Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur and by Konrad Volk (2015, 101–7).

"Schoolkid, where have you been going since the beginning of time?"

"I went to school."

"What did you do at school?"

"I recited my tablet, ate my meal.
I formed my tablet, wrote, and completed it.
They assigned me my teacher–student exercise.
In the late afternoon, they assigned me my round tablet.
When school was out, I went home.
I came home; there my dad was sitting.
I read aloud my round tablet to my father,
I recited my tablet to him, my dad was pleased with me.
As I was standing before my dad, (I said:)

'I am thirsty. Give me water to drink!
I am hungry. Give me bread to eat!
Wash my feet! Make my bed! I want to sleep!
Wake me at dawn!
I must not be late, my teacher will flog me!'

When I woke up at dawn,
I looked at my mom, and said to her:

'Give me my meal, I have to go to school!'

My mom gave me two breads for the meal, I sated my hunger behind her back.
My mom gave me (another) two breads, and I went to school.
At school, the man of duty asked me: 'Why are you late?' I became afraid, my heart skipped a beat.
I entered bowing before my teacher.
My father of the Edubba'a read my tablet to me,
'This is because you skipped a line!' (and) he flogged me.
When the overseers called mealtime, the one in charge of breads set the meal out for each of us.
When the teacher asked about the school rules,
the man in charge of discipline said: 'Someone was looking around in the street—
your garment was not (properly) adjusted!' (and) he flogged me.
My father of the Edubba'a assigned me my tablet.
The courtyard attendant said: 'Write!' and so I sat at my place.
I took my tablet in hand. The model was drawn (on a tablet) at my feet.
I was writing my tablet (and) reciting the assignment,
I never opened my mouth (to talk) about matters not asked.
The man in charge of keeping silence (said): 'Why did you open your mouth without my permission?'
(and) flogged me.
The man in charge of preparing the clay (said): 'Why did you not sit up straight?' (and) flogged me.
The man in charge of the model (said): 'Why did you stand up without my permission?' (and) flogged me.
The man in charge of the gate (said): 'Why did you leave without my permission?' (and) flogged me.
The man in charge of the clay vat (said): 'Why did you take clay without my permission?'
(and) flogged me.
The man in charge of Sumerian (said): 'They spoke Akkadian!' (and) flogged me.
My teacher (said): 'Your hand(writing) is not good at all!' (and) flogged me.

I ended up hating the scribal art. The scribal art . . .
But my master did not ignore me,

for the sake of the scribal art, he exhausted his effort on me.
Nobody assigned me anything,
from the basic vocabularies of scribal art,
to the apprentice stage of the Edubbaʾa.

(To his father):
'Give me his gift!—he shall give to you multiplication tables!
He shall free me from the calculation and bookkeeping.
The vocabularies which are used in the Edubbaʾa,
which every schoolkid recites, I shall recite them too!'"

Their father responded to that which the schoolkid had said,
he had someone pick up the teacher from school.
When he had entered into the house, he sat at the place of honor.
The schoolkid bowed and faced him.
Everything that they had learned about the scribal art,
they laid out for their father.
The father with a joyful heart
spoke happily of the father of the Edubbaʾa:

"My child, he has made you wise through opening (your) hand.
He has chosen you for the many skills of the scribal art.
Because he has demonstrated for you (them) the explanation of the inner (meaning) of the tablets,
the calculations (and) the bookkeeping,
he has enlightened you (them) as to the intricacies of cuneiform signs.
Pour him good beer, set the table for him!
Someone anoint him abundantly on the shoulders and belly with good oil like water!
I shall dress him with a garment, give him a gift, and put a ring on his hand!"

Someone poured good beer, set a table for him,
and anointed him abundantly on the shoulders and belly with good oil like water.
He dressed him with a garment, gave him a gift, and put a ring on his hand.
The teacher with a joyful heart prayed for them:

"Child, who has not despised my words, you did not ignore them,
having mastered the scribal art in its full scope while (still) being in its rudiments,
having proven that nothing can stop you,
now your father having given a gift far exceeding (my own) toil, you have indeed grown in prestige!

May Nisaba, the lady of (all) protective deities, be your personal goddess!
May she guide your reed stylus well!
May she take away all mistakes from your assigned round tablet!
May you be the leader of your brothers!
May you be the foremost among your peers!
May you be outstanding among the other schoolkids!
Satisfied, frequenting the palace of the king,
child, your father knows: Now, I am the one following you!

May your father and his personal god bestow upon you
the prayer that I have spoken for you, the fate that I have determined for you.
He will pray, petition, and entreat Nisaba, your lady, as if she were your own personal goddess.
Your teacher shall pray for you as if he were your own father!
As you treated with due deference
the importance of the master and the rank of the big brother,
may your dependents bring in good things for you forever!
You were attentive to the school rules, child, you are (now) knowledgeable!"

He proclaimed the greatness of Nanibgal, the lady of the place of knowledge.

Praised be Nisaba!

School Materials

If one laid all the inscribed objects found in House F next to each other, one would quickly notice an enormous range of sizes and forms, from minuscule tablets barely bigger than a thumb to large and heavy tablets the size of this book. The predominant forms are rectangular tablets less than an inch thick, but there are also four-sided cuboids called "prisms" and even a cone. Scholars have discovered that the different shapes tell about the underlying pedagogical methods employed in Babylonian schools: the large and heavy tablets accommodated teacher–student exercises meant for continuous practicing; the smaller, rectangular tablets helped students memorize new material, especially later in their studies. Students used densely written, multicolumn tablets to show off their knowledge. Most tablets contained only one type of exercise (or a group of similar texts), whether a lexical list or a literary composition, but teacher–student tablets combined two exercises: on the obverse (front) of the tablet the teacher introduced new material for practicing, while on the reverse (back) of the tablet the student wrote previously studied material. Scholars have used these combinations to reconstruct the sequence of the scribal-school curriculum. (SP)

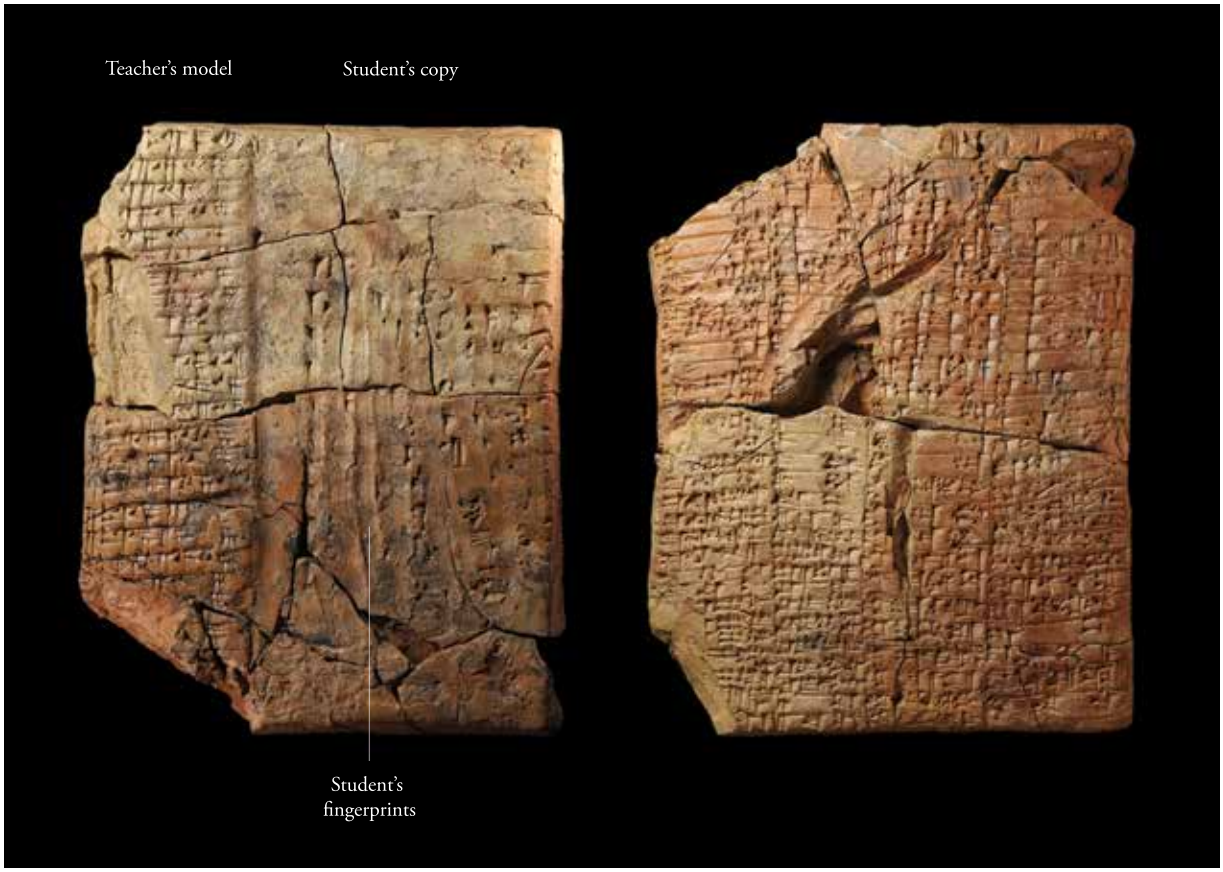
Taking the First Steps: Teacher-Student Exercises (cat. nos. 19-20)

During the elementary phase of scribal education, students at House F learned to shape and write on a medium-sized, right-angled tablet (labeled "Type II" by scholars) characterized by having different content on each side. The obverse contained a teacher–student exercise consisting of a model, written in the left column by the teacher, and the student's copy of it to the right. Students repeatedly copied and erased their work until they learned the text by heart, a practice visible on **cat. no. 19**. On the obverse of this tablet, the marks left by the student's fingers after such an erasure are perfectly preserved.

Meanwhile, the reverse of this type of tablet contained a copy of previously studied material in multiple columns. In the case of **cat. no. 19**'s reverse, the student wrote, most likely from memory, an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) in four columns, while on the obverse the teacher introduced the multiplication table of number 7,12 (432).

Teacher–student exercise tablets have been crucial for the reconstruction of the early stages of scribal education because they contain new material on the obverse and old material on the reverse, thus helping establish the curricular sequence of texts (Veldhuis 1997, 31–37). For example, the obverse of **cat. no. 20** preserves a teacher's model with an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), while its reverse contains a list of personal names, probably Inana-teš. This positioning on the tablet indicates that the former list of words was taught after the latter.

But how can we distinguish the teacher's hand from the student's? If we look closely at both sides of **cat. no. 20**, we see that the signs and rulings on the obverse are much smaller and more regular than those on the reverse, indicating that the former were made by someone with a much higher mastery of cuneiform writing. In fact, after students finished practicing with a given tablet, they could cut the right half off and keep the teacher's model alone, likely for future reference. This is why only the left half of **cat. no. 20** is preserved. (MDH)



19. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 169 mm, width 134 mm

ISACM A30276 (3NT-598–599)

Tablet inscribed with a multiplication table of the number 7,12 (432) on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), entries 1–126, on the reverse.

Literature:
Civil 1969, 31, 29–37 (composite transliteration, source J)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

20. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 190 mm, width 57 mm

ISACM A30272 (3NT-579)

Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), entries 796–840 and 845–46 on the obverse and lower edge, and from a list of personal names (perhaps Inana-teš) on the reverse. The tablet closes with "Praised be Nisaba!"

Literature:
Civil 1969, 31, 62–64 (composite transliteration, source E)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

Learning to Fly Solo: Extract Tablets (cat. nos. 21-22)

Once the students no longer required a teacher's model for copying, they began using extract tablets. These one-column, pillow-shaped, rounded-corner tablets (labeled "Type III" by scholars) were first used to write sections of lexical lists, mathematical exercises, model contracts, and other texts; but later, students used them mainly for copying passages of literary compositions. Thus, such tablets became the primary type employed during the advanced phase of the scribal-school curriculum (Tinney 1999, 160; Delnero 2010a, 59–60).

From a pedagogical perspective, extract tablets were used mainly to teach compositions in a progressive way by dividing the text into shorter sections (Robson 2002, 339–44; Delnero 2010a, 62–63). **Cat. no. 21** is an extract tablet inscribed with thirty lines—the average length of this type of tablet—from the literary composition *Dumuzi's Dream*. The section does not correspond to a narrative unit within the poem's structure but reflects a division of the text meant to make its memorization easier (Delnero 2010a, 56–57).

Using extract tablets, students not only learned the assigned compositions but also practiced how to foretell the size of the tablet needed based on the text to be written—a necessary skill scribes had to master (Taylor 2011). Indeed, the size of the tablet had to match both the width of the lines (respecting poetic units) and the length of the excerpt copied. Correct judgment in this regard surely required a great deal of practice. Whereas the student who shaped and inscribed **cat. no. 22** did a good job in this material aspect, the student working on **cat. no. 21** fashioned an oversized tablet and, as a result, left some unused space at the end of the exercise, which he set off with two parallel horizontal lines.

The Babylonians referred to extract tablets as "long tablets" (imgida). In fact, the student who copied the table of squares on **cat. no. 22** signed the exercise with his name in the colophon "imgida of Lu-Enlil" (Proust 2007, 88). (MDH)

21. Extract Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 113 mm, width 70 mm

ISACM A30267 (3NT-555)

Tablet inscribed on the obverse and reverse with lines 188–218 from the Sumerian literary composition *Dumuzi's Dream*.

Literature:

Alster 1972, 45–135, pl. 13 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, hand copy, source x)

Neugebauer and Sachs 1984, 243–44 (discussion)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

22. Mathematical Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TB, northwest of House C, Room 187 or 190, Level III

Isin-Larsa

Length 68 mm, width 49 mm

ISACM A30016 (2NT-585)

Mathematical tablet inscribed with a table of squares.

Literature:
Proust 2007, 88 (comment)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; transliteration and translation of the colophon, based on Proust 2007, 88, and annotations by MDH.

Becoming a Grown-Up: Copies in Complex Formats (cat. nos. 23–25)

Once students had memorized all the sections of a composition, be it lexical, mathematical, or literary, they could be asked to write a full copy of the text (or a large portion of it) as a sort of final examination on the material learned thus far (Veldhuis 1997, 28–31; Robson 2002, 344; Delnero 2010a, 68–69). Such copies were written on large, multicolumn tablets and prisms (labeled "Type I" by scholars). **Cat. no. 23**, for example, is a five-column tablet inscribed with an exercise containing a series of ten combined multiplication tables; each side of the tablet is divided into five columns, in which the multiplication tables of ten numbers are copied one after the other.

The number of columns and sides on these objects was conditioned by the length of the text to be copied on them. Multicolumn tablets could have as few as two or as many as six columns per side, sometimes even more. **Cat. no. 24** is a two-column tablet inscribed with the full composition of the *Fable of the Heron and the Turtle*. In Sumerian, this fable was named by its first line, or incipit—"What do they say in the reed-beds whose growth is good?"—as the colophon at the end of the copy tells us. Here, instead of including the name of the student who copied the tablet and the length of the text, as is common with these copies but uncommon in such finds from House F (Veldhuis 1997, 30), the colophon contains the name of the composition and its total length: 115 lines.

Meanwhile, prisms typically had four or six sides, each of which contained as many as four columns, and a hole running from top to bottom (Veldhuis 1997, 29–30). **Cat. no. 25** is a four-sided prism with two columns per side that contains a very long list of Akkadian personal names. The infrequent discovery of prisms, their formal complexity, and the presence of mistakes in the copies on them have prompted some scholars to speculate that they represented the "final exam" completed by advanced students on a given composition (Veldhuis 1997, 31). (MDH)

23. Multicolumn Tablet with Multiplication Tables

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 162 mm, width 130 mm

ISACM A30233 (3NT-392)

Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a combined multiplication table. The complete table contains a multiplication series of numbers 18 (1080); 16,40 (1000); 16 (960); 15 (900); 12,30 (750); 12 (720); 10 (600); 9 (540); 8,20 (500); and 8 (480).

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

24. Multicolumn Tablet with a Literary Composition

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 170 mm, width 113 mm

ISACM A30209 (3NT-313)

Two-column tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Fable of the Heron and the Turtle*.

Literature:

Gragg 1973, 51–56, 60–65, 67–72 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, source A)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; translation, after Gragg 1973, 52, and ETCSL, and annotations by MDH.

25. Prism with Personal Names

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI
Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 216 mm, width 87 mm, depth 90 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of
Archaeology and Anthropology,
Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-365 (3NT-643)

Prism inscribed with a list of Akkadian personal names.

Photos of the prism's four sides courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Reconstructing the Curriculum (cat. nos. 26–32)

Using clues found on the tablets from the scribal school, modern scholars have been able to reconstruct the order in which concepts and topics were covered in the curriculum. A particular format of tablet—the teacher–student exercise or "Type II" tablet as labeled by modern scholars—has made it possible to reconstruct this sequence in detail at Nippur. Students used the back side (reverse) of the tablet to practice already-studied material, while on the front side (obverse) the teacher introduced new material in the left column that the student practiced writing in the right column.

Cat. nos. 26–32 are examples of Type II tablets written by scribes in House F as they progressed through the elementary phase of the curriculum. The content on both sides of the tablets forms a chain from the earliest schooldays, when students were just learning how to copy signs, through the writing of increasingly complex lists of words and signs, up until they could copy out whole sentences in the form of proverbs and model contracts, which provided a foundation for the next phase of the curriculum, when they would write out hymns and other literary texts. **Cat. no. 26**, for example, records the efforts of a beginner student of the cuneiform writing system: the pupil was still practicing individual signs on the reverse while starting to write people's names on the obverse. The students who wrote **cat. nos. 27** and **28** were a bit farther along—they solidified their knowledge of name writing on the reverse of each tablet and began to study lexical lists on the obverse. **Cat. nos. 29** and **30** represent the next stage, when students focused on lexical lists and were introduced to mathematics and metrology. Meanwhile, **cat. nos. 31** and **32** reflect the material studied toward the end of the elementary stage, at which point students had the ability to record mathematical calculations, model contracts, and proverbs and were ready for longer and more grammatically complex texts. All these topics will be explored in the sections that follow. (JG)

New material: list of personal names

Already-studied material: *Syllable Alphabet* B

26. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 63 mm, width 71 mm

ISACM A30225 (3NT-377)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet bearing a probable teacher's model of a list of personal names with theophoric elements on the obverse and an extract of *Syllable Alphabet* B on the reverse.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

27. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Length 55 mm, width 76 mm

ISACM A30181 (3NT-229)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with excerpts from the *List of Hides* (Ura 2), later tablet 11, entries 47–49, on the obverse and from the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš on the reverse.

Literature:

Landsberger 1959, 210, 215 (composite transliteration, source V_9)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

28. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House K, Room 166, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Length 92 mm, width 103 mm

ISACM A30144 (3NT-104)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with an excerpt from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea), entries 1–5, on the obverse and a list of personal names on the reverse.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

List of Compound Signs (Diri) *List of Simple Signs* (Ea)

29. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 150 mm, width 63 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-349 (3NT-580)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with an excerpt from the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) on the reverse.

Literature:
Civil 2004, 9, 12–15 (composite transliteration, source B_1)

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; annotations by MDH.

30. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House J, Room 163, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 87 mm, width 44 mm

ISACM A30183 (3NT-234)

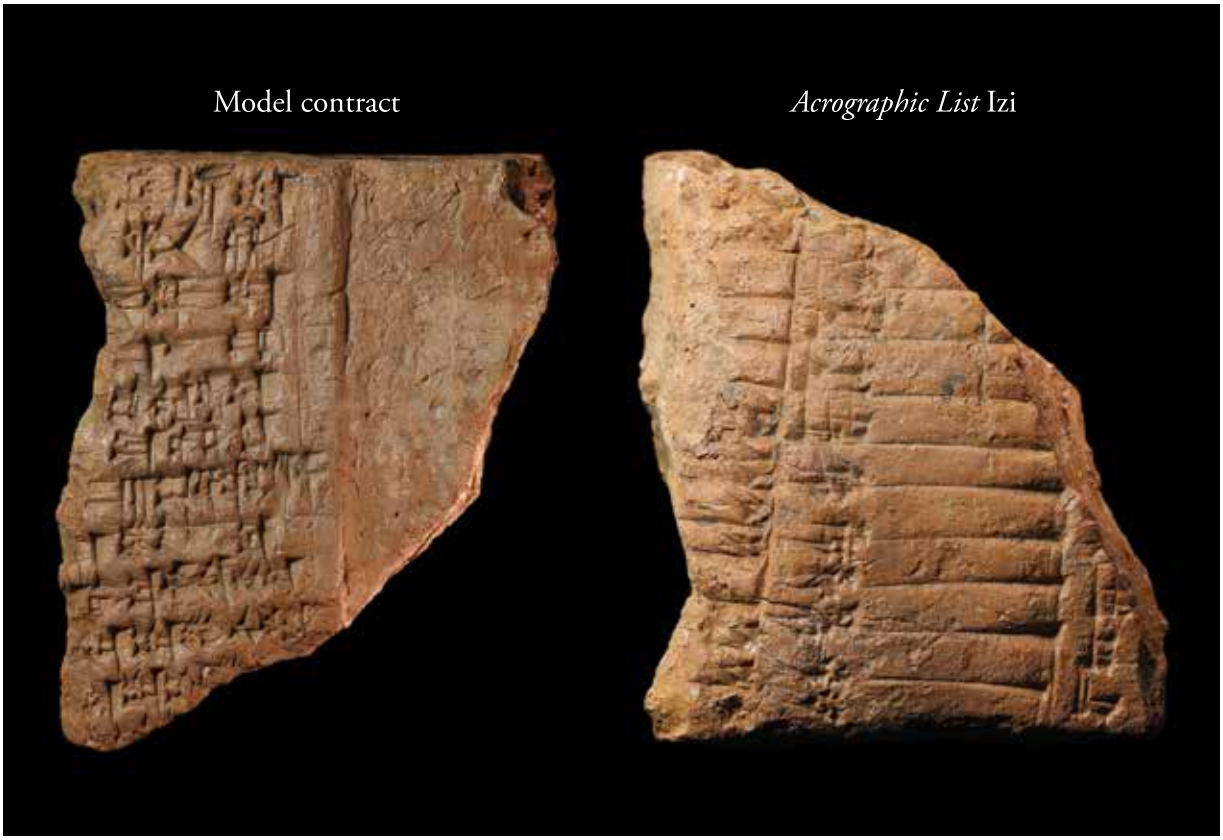
Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with a metrological table on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Body Parts* (Ugumu), possibly entries 92–93, 95–96, 98–100, 113–17, 122–26, 150–56, 165–74, and 176–77, on the reverse.

Literature:

Landsberger and Civil 1967, 51, 54–57 (composite transliteration, source S_{12})

Couto Ferreira 2009, 20, 31–36, 39–41 (description)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.



31. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 90 mm, width 74 mm

ISACM A30214 (3NT-329)

Teacher–student exercise tablet showing a likely teacher's example of a model contract on the left side and the space where the student would have practiced it on the right, while the reverse contains an excerpt from the *Acrographic List* Izi. Unusually, the scribe did not turn the tablet following the typical convention of rotating it bottom to top but instead turned it right to left.

Literature:
Civil 1971, 14, 19–20 (composite transliteration, source P_1)
Crisostomo 2019b, 215, 239–45, 247, 501 (transliteration, translation, commentary, photograph)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

32. Teacher-Student Exercise Tablet

Clay

Nippur, Area TB, House O, Room 75, Level I Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 109 mm, width 48 mm

ISACM A29980 (2NT-385)

Teacher–student exercise tablet with an excerpt from *Proverb Collection* 2, with nos. 63–64 preserved, on the obverse and a metrological table of grain capacities on the reverse. The fragment joins IM 57976b.

Literature:

Gordon 1968, 219–21, 519 (composite transliteration, translation, photograph, source NNNN)

Alster 1997, 43, 57–58 (transliteration, translation, commentary, source NNNN)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

23 The Curriculum: From Signs to Literature

Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Madeline Ouimet, Susanne Paulus, and Colton G. Siegmund

The training of a Babylonian scribe was lengthy and complex. This chapter follows the training of students from the first wedges they clumsily impressed into clay to their copying out complex literature in Sumerian, a language they had to learn alongside reading and writing. As most writing in Mesopotamia was done on clay, students first had to master working with this material so they could form tablets as writing media. Like modern students learning the alphabet, they started by practicing syllables—the basic building blocks of the script—followed by names. Subsequently, they worked through long lists of words and simple and complex signs before writing full sentences. The use of lists as pedagogical tools was undoubtedly influenced by the complexity of the cuneiform writing system, whose hundreds of signs each have multiple readings and meanings. Though the knowledge students committed to memory exceeded the needs of practical literacy, it prepared them to understand—and perhaps even enjoy—Sumerian literature. (SP)

Writing on Clay

> At the place where one crouches, after pounding up a lump (of clay),
> if the lump is dry, he rubs it.
>
> Someone trying to make a tablet, makes a tablet,
> until he finally made his tablet.
>
> *School Regulations* (Edubba'a R), section 1, lines 18–19;
> section 2, lines 6–7 (translation from Veldhuis 2022)

Writing is the physical representation of language using a medium such as paper, papyrus, digital formats, or—principally in the case of Babylonia—clay. The Babylonians used clay everywhere: for making bricks and structures, ceramics, and tools, and as a medium for writing. Children likely encountered and played with clay long before entering school. Once they began their education, one of the first tasks they had to master was shaping clay for use as a writing surface, followed

Obverse of a tablet containing the literary text *Inana and Ebih*. **Cat. no. 77**. Photo by DL.

by impressing a reed stylus on the clay to make wedge-shaped marks. All cuneiform signs are composed of only five distinct wedges, made by tilting the stylus in different directions—horizontally, vertically, diagonally—or by using only the head of the stylus while impressing it into the clay. (SP)

Making Meaning from Mud (cat. nos. 33–35)

Young scribes-in-training eager to learn their first cuneiform signs, already envisioning the day when—hopefully soon—they would effortlessly transcribe the adventures of Gilgameš from memory, would first face a much more mundane task: shaping their first tablet.

In ancient Babylonia, clay was a ubiquitous feature of everyday life and the primary medium of the Mesopotamian built world from monumental palaces to unassuming nonelite homes. Surely, scribes-in-training would already as children have made many of their own charmingly lopsided toys from clay, including perhaps the humble humanoid lump **cat. no. 33**. Having seen better days, once presumably with outstretched arms and defined feet, this figurine nonetheless reveals its maker's incipient skill in rendering a schematic but recognizable form; with a mere pinch of two fingers and indentations on either side, the prominent nose and wide eyes of a human face emerge from formerly lifeless clay.

Although fragmented, what is left of the animal figurine **cat. no. 34** shows an increasing sensitivity to representing a realistic body. The contours of the back, underbelly, and connections between the trunk and legs are smoothed and proportionate. And significantly for one scribe-to-be, this figurine already served as a canvas for practicing inscriptional methods and motions, such as the use of a pointed tool to make lines—**cat. no. 34** bears incised stars on its shoulders.

The more detailed baked-clay human head **cat. no. 35** elaborates this manipulation of contrast between impression and relief. Not only does the head demonstrate more skillful control over form, with the clay pulled into a delicately pointed nose and chin, but its maker also took care to decorate the basic form with additional features, combining multiple techniques of incising lines, stippling cuneiform-like impressions under the chin to indicate a beard, and applying clay pellets as large, emphasized eyes—a feature that would characterize Mesopotamian artistic traditions of human representation across the millennia.

Learning by play and experimentation how to effectively communicate meaning through clay, scribal students would be expected to draw on this tool kit of embodied knowledge when they began their first days in the Edubba'a. (MO)

33. Human Figurine

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Height 51 mm

ISACM A29738 (3D-534)

Small clay human figurine with arms and legs missing.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 114, 176, pl. 122:6 (catalog entry and photograph)

Stone 1987, 116, 174, pl. 131:6 (catalog entry, object photograph, and discussion)

Photo by DL.

34. Animal Figurine

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House J, Room 160, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 46 mm

ISACM A29723 (3D-460)

Small clay animal figurine, possibly a lion, head and legs missing, stars incised on shoulders.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 176, pl. 141:4 (catalog entry and photograph)

Stone 1987, 163 (catalog entry)

Photo by DL.

35. Human Head

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 191, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 36 mm

ISACM A29450 (3N-308)

Clay male human head with long neck, pellet eyes, pronounced nose, wedge-impressed beard under the chin, and no mouth.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 174, pl. 130:5 (catalog entry and photograph)

Stone 1987, 171 (catalog entry)

Photo by DL.

Impressing Wedges for the First Time (cat. nos. 36–37)

Writing a tablet did not consist only of impressing cuneiform signs on clay. The students of House F likely began their training by learning how to combine clay and water properly to form a tablet that would resist wear and preserve the text written on it. This task, of course, was not easy. First, a lump of clay had to be carefully kneaded so that it contained no impurities or air pockets; then, the resulting mixture had to be fashioned into different, preestablished shapes (Taylor 2011, 7–12). The unfortunate student who fashioned **cat. no. 36** experienced some difficulty in giving the expected round shape and soft surface to their exercise tablet.

Once students shaped their clay—more or less satisfactorily—they were introduced to "writing" wedges using a stylus. Young students had to content themselves with a reed stylus, but if they made it through school they may then have "graduated" to using styli made of fancier materials, such as bone, bronze, and, more rarely, precious metals (Cammarosano 2014, 62–63).

With stylus in hand, students practiced impressing the different wedge types that formed the basis of cuneiform signs. **Cat. no. 37** offers a fine example of this type of exercise: on a long tablet with rounded corners, the pupil has impressed several times a basic type of wedge formed by tilting the stylus horizontally. The student also practiced rotating the tablet in the usual way by turning the bottom upward and continuing the columns of wedges on the reverse. When students mastered the technique of impressing each type of wedge, they proceeded to write their first "complex" signs (**cat. no. 36**), while still struggling to shape their tablets. (MDH)

36. Round Tablet with a School Exercise

Clay
Nippur, Area TA, general fill, Level VIII
Old Babylonian
Diameter 56 mm
ISACM A30127 (3NT-62)

Unevenly shaped round tablet inscribed with an unidentified school exercise on the obverse and reverse.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

37. Tablet with Simple Horizontal Wedges

Clay

Nippur, Area TB, House I, Room 207, Level IV Floor 1 fill, disturbed

Ur III

Length 97 mm, width 53 mm

ISACM A30055 (2NT-679)

Long tablet inscribed with three columns of horizontal wedges on the obverse; the horizontal wedges wrap around the lower edge and continue on the reverse.

Photos of obverse, bottom edge, and reverse by DL.

Tablet Making and Recycling (cat. nos. 38-39)

With all this initial practice in shaping tablet forms and impressing their first awkwardly angled wedges, students' first days in the Edubba'a must have been filled with many mistakes and frustrations from which to learn. But what to do with a tablet on which you have made a few too many mistakes, now wishing to start over?

In modern cultures that use paper as a medium for writing, overly scribbled sheets are usually destined for the trash can, often followed by a long, protracted process of transport to an industrial recycling facility; meanwhile, the determined writer must seek out a fresh sheet for another try. In ancient Mesopotamia, however, clay could be recycled rapidly and easily by its user so long as the clay had retained some moisture.

If a mistake was rather small—involving a single sign, for example—a scribe could use one finger to erase it by gently smearing the clay. During the whole writing process—and especially for erasing—scribes probably kept near them a small water source, possibly a miniature vessel such as **cat. no. 38**, into which they could dip their fingers for rewetting the clay's surface and maintaining its pliability. In the case of more significant mistakes or a tablet simply no longer needed after finishing an exercise, the entire object could be squeezed, pressed, and rolled by hand back into a wet lump of new possibilities. Archaeologists have even discovered tablets that preserve the impressions of a gripping hand, the object frozen in time mid-destruction (**cat. no. 39**).

If not needed immediately for a new tablet, the newly recycled clay could be returned to the larger clay supply kept on hand in the Edubba'a. But where exactly did the inhabitants of House F store all this clay?

Archaeologically, House F tells us that its students were skilled in the practice of recycling their work and how they did so: a box-like structure was built into the northwest wall of the large back room, Room 205, immediately left of a bench, possibly where students sat to write (fig. 23.1). A similar but better waterproofed box was constructed in courtyard 192 as well. Such box structures are likely what in Sumerian was called, literally, a "cistern of clay" (pu'ima), where old tablets were recycled and new clay stored for future use (Tanret 2002; see also fig. 6.2 in chapter 6). The cuneiform sign  (pu), meaning "cistern," "hole," or "container," even pictographically resembles a square box with an object inside (Steinkeller 1981).

But tablets were not only recycled into yet more new tablets—they were also sometimes repurposed for use as construction materials in the very architecture of House F. In fact, as can be seen in figure 23.1, Room 205's tablet recycling box was itself built of tablets laid in rows as though they were bricks. (MO)

Figure 23.1. Excavation photo of House F, Level XI Floor 2, showing a box structure against the northwest wall of Room 205, southwest of the bench. The box is constructed of cuneiform tablets. ISACM P. 47250 (N3/204).

38. Small Pot

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 182, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Height 32 mm, diameter 44 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-11-174 (3P-368)

Small, round, handmade pot, tan ware with buff slip covering the outside surface and inner rim.

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 179, pl. 94:16 (catalog entry and drawing)

Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum.

39. Deformed Tablet Fragment

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House H, Room 187, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 105 mm, width 70 mm

ISACM A30169 (3NT-158)

Fragment of misshapen tablet clay cut from a larger tablet. Note the impression left by a hand gripping the clay while tearing. The obverse is inscribed with a few legible signs of a lexical list.

Literature:
Stone 1987, 170 (catalog entry)

See also figure 4.6.

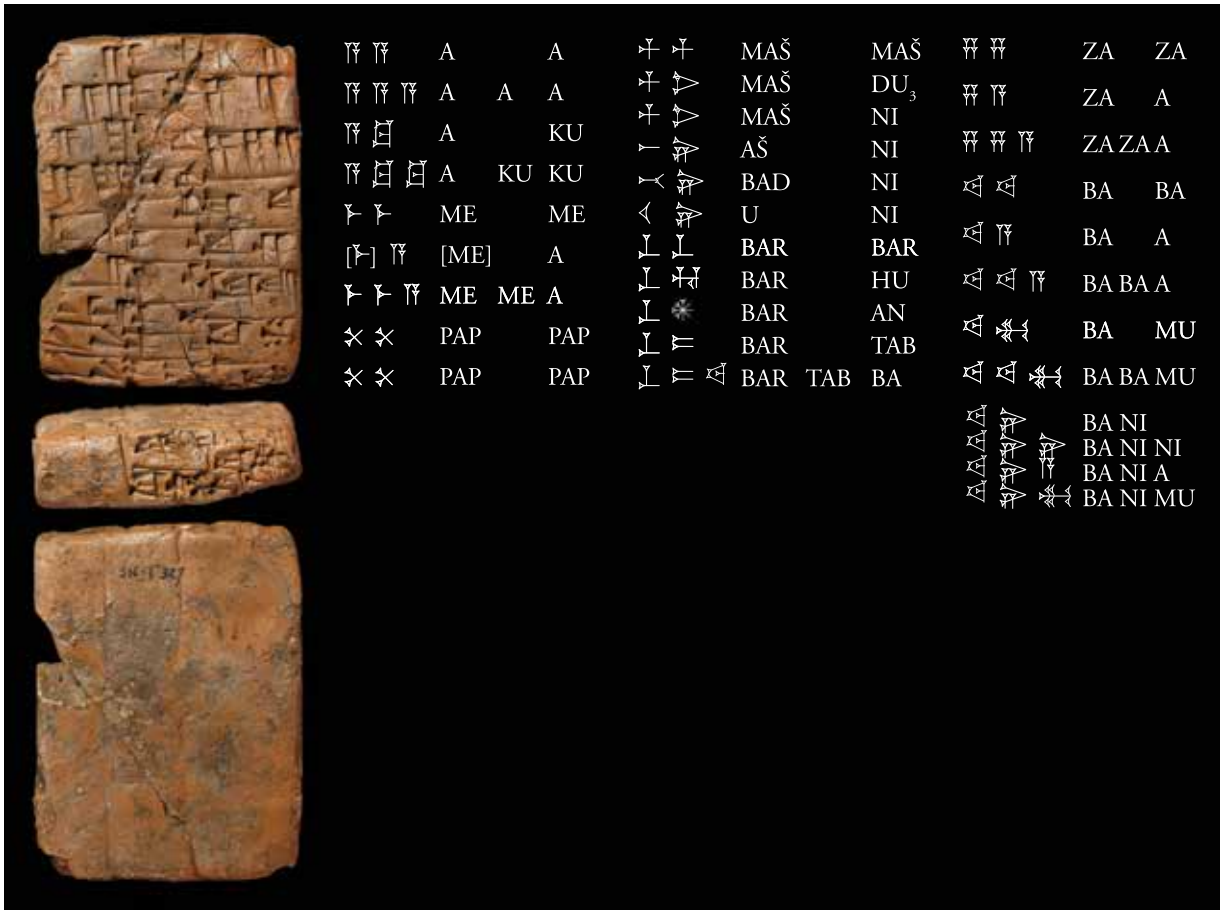
Photos of left edge, obverse, and reverse by DL.

From Syllables to Writing One's Name

The journey of most children into writing today starts modestly: tracing the letters of the alphabet and writing their name. But cuneiform does not use an alphabet; it is written in signs—syllables and logograms (word signs). Babylonian students first practiced simple signs with few wedges and memorized their syllabic readings. Another elementary exercise was practical: the writing of names, which allowed students to write their names alongside those of their family, friends, and neighbors. In doing so, students practiced writing syllables and easy logograms. Knowing how to spell frequently encountered names also had a practical application, as names were ubiquitous in the documents of daily administration. (SP)

Syllables, Syllables, Syllables! (cat. nos. 40–41)

If there was one thing the student scribes of Babylonia were deeply familiar with, it was that practice makes perfect. Early in their education, novice scribes would undergo the rote study of lists of syllabic cuneiform signs. In these exercises, students would grapple with the fundamentals of writing: handling the tablet, gripping and turning the stylus, and impressing wedges. By combining multiple wedges into a cuneiform sign, students wrote their first syllables, albeit in mostly meaningless combinations (**cat. nos. 40** and **41**). On **cat. no. 40**, the scribe practiced *Syllable Alphabet* B—an exercise attested only in Nippur. **Cat. no. 41** is a four-sided prism perforated at both ends that also records *Syllable Alphabet* B (Veldhuis 2014, 144–47). Beyond the elementary concepts recorded on these artifacts, one can discern by their materiality that they were components of early education. The large signs on **cat. no. 40** were impressed in a manner characteristic of novice scribes. **Cat. no. 41** shows itself to be a part of primary education by the somewhat clumsy look of its manufacture and the unrefined handwriting impressed on it. This artifact is an unusual piece, as prisms were commonly written by advanced scribes, yet the imperfect signs betray the neophyte scribe's relative inexperience with the script. (CGS)



40. Tablet with an Exercise for Writing Syllables

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

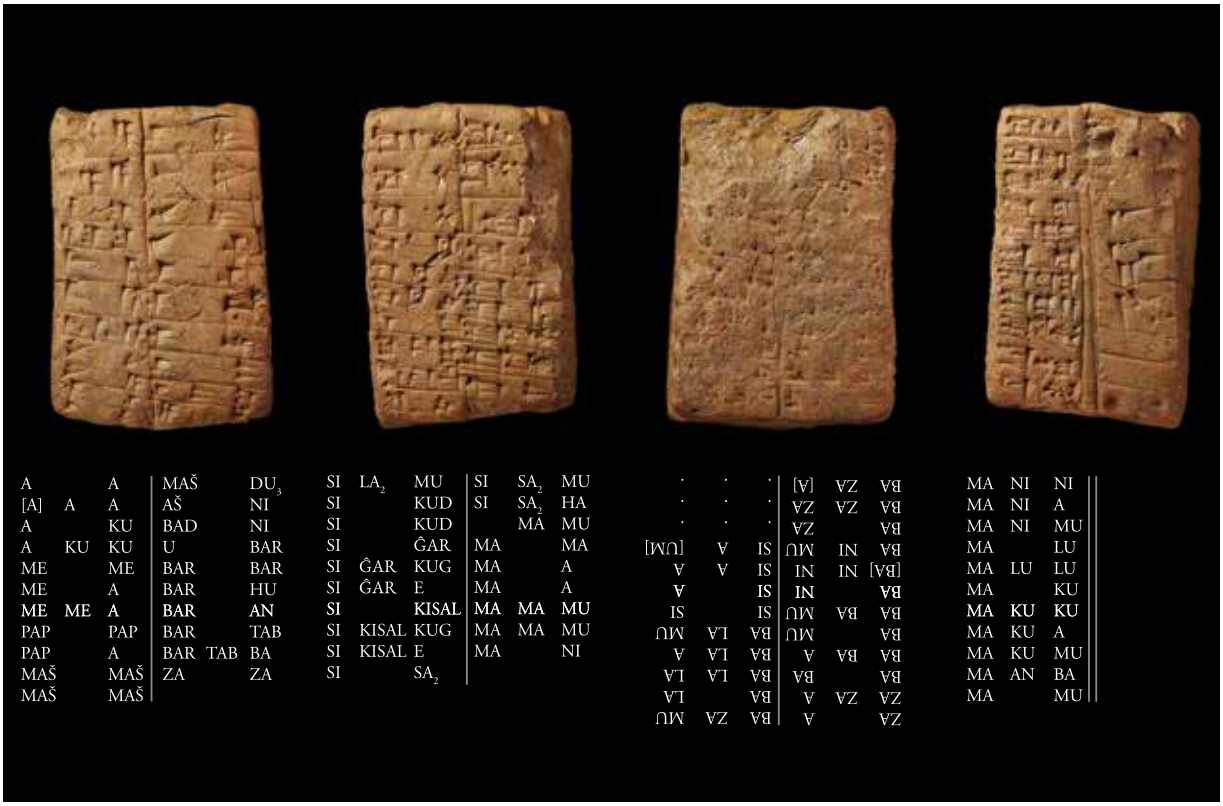
Length 81 mm, width 60 mm

ISACM A30213 (3NT-327)

Long tablet inscribed with an extract of the exercise *Syllable Alphabet* B.

Literature:
Stone 1987, 174 (catalog entry)
Civil 2010, 282 (composite transliteration)

Photos of obverse, bottom edge, and reverse by DL; edition and annotations by MDH.



41. Small Prism with an Exercise for Writing Syllables

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 64 mm, width 44 mm, depth 40 mm

ISACM A30286 (3NT-636)

Prism inscribed with the exercise *Syllable Alphabet* B. The text runs over all four sides. The scribe first inscribed one side (the left-most side in the photo), then turned the prism over like a tablet and inscribed the "reverse" (the third side in the photo). Once the scribe realized their mistake, they turned to the second side and finally finished inscribing the fourth side.

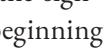
Literature:
Stone 1987, 174 (catalog entry)
Veldhuis 1997, 29 n. 79 and 31 n. 92 (commentary)

See also figure 8.3.

Photos of the prism's four sides by DL; edition and annotations by MDH.

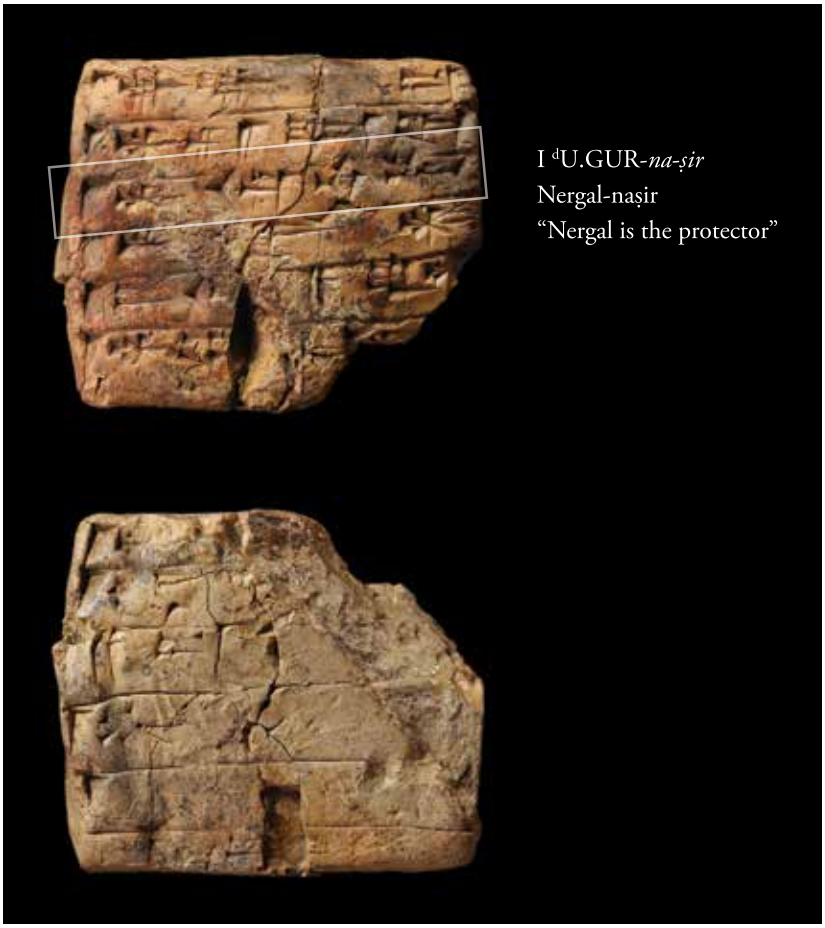
The (Didactic) Power of Names (cat. nos. 42–44)

Personal names are very useful pedagogical tools. In House F, they were used to introduce students both to easy cuneiform signs and to the many languages spoken in Mesopotamia. Names had meaning in the ancient Near East: the name Nergal-naṣir on **cat. no. 42**, for example, means "Nergal is the protector." This name taught the students how to write a god's name (Nergal) using the logogram (word sign) DIĜIR, which indicates that the name that follows is that of a divinity, and the signs U and GUR, which combined (U.GUR) are read Nergal, as well as the Akkadian verbal form *naṣir*, composed of the syllables NA and ṢIR.

During the early stages of their training, students copied name lists that included masculine and feminine names. **Cat. no. 43** is a small tablet likely inscribed with two names, a masculine one beginning with the sign  (lugal) "king" and a feminine one beginning with the sign  (ereš) "queen." As it happens, these logograms contain the signs used to write the words for "man" () and "woman" (). Name lists could be quite long and have different features. The most frequently copied text in Nippur was the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš, a long and very standardized list whose names in the Akkadian, Sumerian, and Amorite languages were organized in groups of three, each group beginning with the same element—a divine name, a verbal form, or a noun—repeated three times (Peterson 2011, 248–49).

Cat. no. 44 is a multicolumn tablet with the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš written on it. On this tablet, every new entry is marked by a vertical wedge—a common scribal practice. Two of the highlighted groups begin with the Akkadian verbal forms *iṣṣur* "he protected" and *nabi* "named" followed by the name of a god or a phrase. In contrast, all names in the other highlighted group start with the name of the moon god Nanna followed by a phrase in Sumerian.

Ultimately, a sizable part of the future scribe's job would be to record many of these names in economic and legal texts. Crucially, while learning other people's names, the students also practiced how to write their own names. As a matter of fact, the names of some of the scribes who wrote these texts have been preserved on the many tablets found in Nippur. (MDH)



42. Square Tablet with Personal Names

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 67 mm, width 80 mm

ISACM A30284 (3NT-633)

Square tablet inscribed with Akkadian personal names.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; edition and annotations by MDH.

43. Tablet with Male and Female Names

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House Q, Room 162, Level X Floor 2

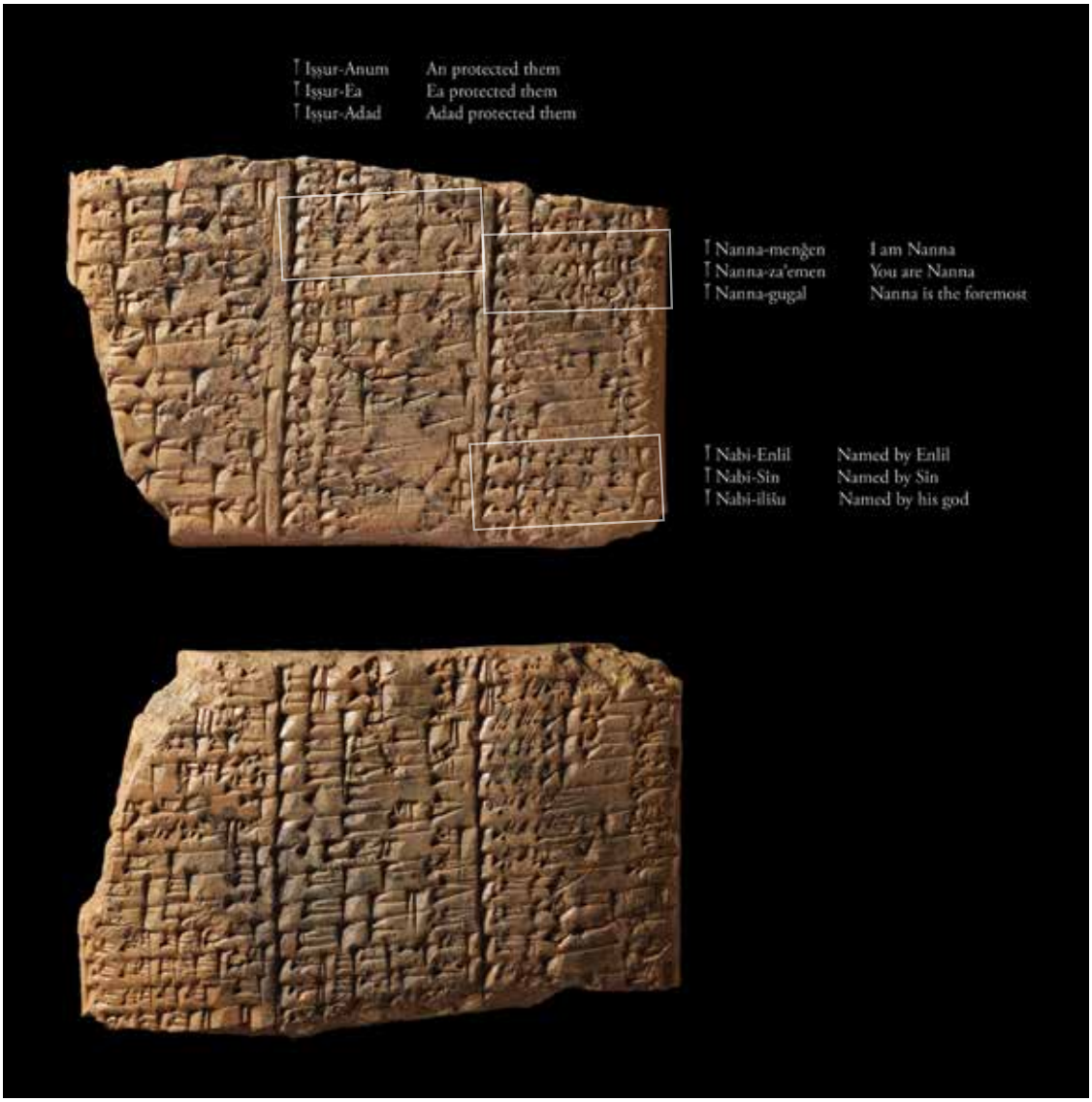
Old Babylonian

Length 35 mm, width 42 mm

ISACM A30177 (3NT-186)

Small, pillow-shaped tablet inscribed with a male and a female personal name. A line of fingernail marks is impressed at the end.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.



44. Multicolumn Tablet with Groups of Personal Names

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 81 mm, width 125 mm

ISACM A30190 (3NT-266)

Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 116 and 180 (catalog reference)

See also figure 8.8.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; edition and annotations by MDH.

Learning Signs, Acquiring Vocabulary

> The individual lines from the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš$_2$ to the (names of) the wild animals of the plain, to the end of the list of lu-šu (the *List of Professions and Human Beings*) I wrote.
>
> *Scribal Activities* (Edubba'a D), lines 13–14
> (translation after Delnero 2006, 70)

The outstanding tool of early scribal education was the lexical list. Students copied and memorized long lists containing mostly nouns organized thematically and by the acrographic principle (visual repetition of the same first sign). Students learned how to represent their environment in writing and learned the signs for objects made from different materials, for professions, for buildings, and for various other things by writing word after word, totaling more than 5,000 entries. It is likely that oral instructions by the teacher accompanied the exercises to help the students understand the meaning of the words. (SP)

New Words for an Ordered World (cat. nos. 45–46)

Scribal students began to learn Sumerian words by studying a thematically organized list of nouns, which scholars commonly refer to as Ura, the *Thematic List of Words*. At Nippur, this list covered concrete entities in the world, beginning with words for objects made of wood and progressing through sections covering reed, clay, leather, and metal objects, as well as their raw materials; animals; aspects of the natural world, such as stones and plants; place names, including the names of stars; and food (Veldhuis 1997).

These thematic groupings were not only conceptual but also expressed by the writing system. For instance, all the objects represented by the entries in the first section share the characteristic of being made of wood; therefore, all these entries are written with the same first sign, 𒄑 (ĝeš), meaning "wood" or "tree." There is thus a readily apparent visual coherence to the list, as we can see on **cat. no. 45**, a fragment of a prism containing the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects*, or ĝeš section of Ura, with three columns of text on each side. On the side shown here on the left, the beginning of the first column is broken away, but in the second and third columns the stacked ĝeš signs form a visual pattern, which is also visible at the start of each of the two columns preserved on the more effaced side shown on the right. This fragment details forms of transportation and tools; on the side shown at left, the first two columns contain words associated with wooden boats and the third column words associated with wooden wagons, while the side shown at right lists parts of tools and agricultural implements. **Cat. no. 46** demonstrates how students progressed through the overall thematic list. In the left column on the tablet's front side, the teacher introduces new vocabulary from the next section: words for reed baskets containing different types of flour, all of which begin with the sign for "reed," 𒄀 (gi). The student would have practiced writing this new vocabulary in the right column, repeatedly wiping it off and starting over, so that it ended up uninscribed and comparatively worn away. Meanwhile, on the back of the tablet, the student continued to practice tree vocabulary from the wood section. (JG)

45. Prism with a List of Wooden Objects

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 72 mm, width 62 mm, depth 52 mm

ISACM A30187 (3NT-259)

Fragment of a prism inscribed with the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (part of Ura), entries 260–67, 299–310a, 349–57a, 397–408, and 440–42.

Literature:

Veldhuis 1997, 48, 174, 176, 229–42, 293, 347–48 (score transliteration, translation, and commentary, source Ni P-06)

Photos of the two sides of the prism with preserved text by DL.

46. Teacher-Student Exercise of Objects Made from Reeds and Wood

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 91 mm, width 110 mm

ISACM A30274 (3NT-595)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet inscribed with entries 53–55b of the *List of Reeds and Reed Objects* (part of Ura) on the obverse, and entries 4–11, 21–29, and 40–47 of the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (part of Ura) on the reverse.

Literature:

Landsberger 1957, 91 (commentary)

Landsberger 1959, 179, 186 (composite transliteration, source V19)

Veldhuis 1997, 191–206, 311 (score transliteration, translation, and commentary, source Ni II-148)

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

Making Sense of the Social World (cat. nos. 47-49)

It was important for students to learn how to designate the social and professional roles one could play in Mesopotamian society, as many text genres they could encounter in their probable career as scribes demanded a command of such titles, how to write them, and the social hierarchies and heterarchies (implicit or overt) that they entailed. A scribe needed to know which professional and other titles should accompany the personal names they had already mastered. As with learning vocabulary for thematically grouped objects of the inanimate world, copying lexical lists again served as a way to absorb both the necessary vocabulary and the cultural taxonomies of the lived social world.

Cat. no. 47 offers an example of the Old Babylonian version of the lexical *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), its name conferred by the first entry in the list, the sign for "man" or "person" (lu). However, unlike the thematic object lists described above, the entries in the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) do not necessarily all start with  (lu_2). Still, one can observe grouped sequences of entries in this list in which some of the signs, usually the first one or two, are repeated. For example, scribes copied and learned words related to their own roles and professional possibilities in the second column of this tablet, visible on the detail photo of **cat. no. 47**.

Here, Sumerian  (dubsar), "scribe," is repeated with various subsequent qualifiers to expand the differentiated types of possible scribal occupations or statuses. These patterns of internal similarity and disjuncture with preceding and following sections create categorized blocks of "objects" (in this case, people) whose membership in these implied relational groups is imparted by both the mechanism of spatial juxtaposition on the surface of the tablet and by the acrographic principle.

Similarly, on **cat. no. 48** the Sumerian word  (nar) "musician" is repeated and each time qualified as a different kind of musician according to various aspects, such as quality of voice or level of training. Most interesting is what precedes the string of "nar" terms: semantically related but visually unrelated entries for kinds of "noises," musical instruments, and a verb for "tuning," demonstrating that this lexical list was about much more than the rote copying of a series of bounded, categorized "persons." The idea that a profession such as "musician" (nar) gained meaning through its relations to a constellation of agents, objects, and the surrounding world can also be found in artistic form in the clay plaque relief **cat. no. 49.** This object depicts a seated "musician" (nar) playing the lute with the vocal accompaniment of a dog barking in front of them and, possibly, a pig snuffling about behind them. (MO)

47. Two Pieces of a Tablet with the List of Professions

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 87 mm, width 65 mm (ISACM A30236); length 230 mm, width 165 mm, depth 39 mm (UM 55-21-313)

ISACM A30236 (3NT-413)

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-313 (3NT-351)

Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), entries 1–445, with small gaps.

Literature:
Civil 1969, 34–35, 47–48, 422–25 (composite transliteration, source D)

See also figure 9.3.

Detail of obverse with the entries for dubsar "scribe" highlighted. Photos courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI and by CM; edition, virtual join, and annotations by MDH.

48. Prism with the List of Professions

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 111 mm, width 66 mm, depth 48 mm

ISACM A30188 (3NT-260)

Fragment of a prism inscribed with a section of the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu), entries 633–42, 646–49a, 651–53, 680–703, 719–32, and 770–75b, with Akkadian glosses. Other joining fragments of the prism include UM 55-21-363 (3NT-641), UM 55-21-367 (3NT-652), UM 55-21-366 (3NT-648), and 3NT-915cc.

Literature:
Civil 1969, 28, 55–61 (composite transliteration, source B)

See also figure 9.4.

Photos of the two sides of the prism with preserved text by DL.

49. Plaque with a Seated Musician and Animals

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House L, Room 226, Level XIII Floor 2

Old Babylonian (Isin-Larsa)

Height 80 mm, width 115 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 53-11-90 (3N-469)

Mold-made clay plaque in low relief of a person playing a musical instrument between two animals.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 175, pl. 138:1 (catalog entry and photograph)

Stone 1987, 177 (catalog entry)

Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum.

A Window into the Mesopotamian World (cat. nos. 50–51)

Lexical lists have been, and still are, a key resource for the decipherment of cuneiform writing and the understanding of Sumerian: in the same way teachers used such lists to train Nippurean students, Sumerologists and Assyriologists have used them to study and learn the meanings of signs and their Akkadian translations. Moreover, the relevance of lexical lists goes beyond lexicographical studies by providing a window into the cultural and intellectual history of ancient Babylonia. With the help of these lists, modern scholars have gained insight into how Babylonians conceptualized and organized their writing system and, by extension, their knowledge of the world (Veldhuis 2014).

The lists preserved on **cat. nos. 50** and **51** are good examples. These lists are mostly organized following an acrographic principle (visual repetition of the same sign). However, sometimes the entries relate to each other thematically—that is, by association with a similar sign, sound, or meaning. Thus, in the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal) on **cat. no. 50**, the name of the main temple of Nippur, Ekur, triggers a series of entries with the names of its units, including sanctuaries, storehouses, and other enclosed areas of Nippur, even though many of them do not begin with the sign  (E_2) "house."

Additionally, **cat. no. 51** illustrates the broadness of acrographic lexical lists. On this multicolumn tablet, two sections of the *List of Things* (Niĝga) are preserved—one beginning with the sign ($NIĜ_2$) "thing" and another with the sign  (ŠU) "hand." Despite the common initial sign, the vocabulary included in these sections is variegated, ranging from questions such as "What is something called?" to nouns containing the sign $NIĜ_2$, such as "fruit" (niĝsaha).

Importantly, the study of these lists and their Akkadian translations has helped modern scholars reconstruct the meaning and pronunciation of the less well understood Sumerian vocabulary. One of the chief achievements of this research has been the publication of the *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon* series. (MDH)

50. Tablet with a List of Buildings

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 73 mm, width 80 mm

ISACM A30220 (3NT-365)

Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal), entries 112–17, 119–20, 122–24, 162–63, 166–85, 221–22, and 224–33.

Literature:
Civil 1971, 65–77 (composite transliteration, source L)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; edition, after George 1993, and annotations by MDH.

51. Tablet with a List of Things

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 115 mm, width 114 mm

ISACM A30270 (3NT-576)

Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Things* (Niĝga), entries 37–54(?), 80(?)–109(?), 131–60, and 193–206. The tablet may originally have contained the complete list, displaying five or perhaps six columns per side.

Literature:
Civil 1971, 91–112 (composite transliteration, source V)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; translation and annotations by MDH.

The MSL Project: From Benno Landsberger to Miguel Civil

Marta Díaz Herrera

Lexical lists have been major objects of study in Assyriology and Sumerology ever since the very first lexical compositions were discovered. Indeed, the first lexical lists were published between 1866 and 1884 (Civil 2017 [1975], 47). It is, however, thanks to the massive effort led by Benno Landsberger and Miguel Civil at the University of Chicago that we can now access these texts through full scholarly editions.

In the late 1920s, Landsberger embarked on an enterprise to reconstruct all known cuneiform lexical lists systematically. Indeed, committed to this task until his death in 1968, he gathered all known sources of the major lexical series and published a sizable portion of them during his lifetime. One of the most important outcomes of this work was the publication of the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura) series, a massive undertaking that required eight volumes to complete and involved many other scholars, among them Erica Reiner and Miguel Civil, who assumed the editing of the volumes after Landsberger passed away (Civil 2017 [1975], 47).

This collective effort, which lasted almost a century, resulted in the publication of *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon* (MSL), the most complete series dedicated exclusively to the study of the Mesopotamian lexicographical tradition. Its eighteen volumes contain editions of almost all known lexical compositions, ranging from the Early Dynastic *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) (MSL 12) to the Neo-Babylonian grammatical texts (MSL 4). The volumes also include all the major copies of the compositions known at the time of publication from all over the ancient Near East, from Uruk (Iraq) to Boğazköy (Turkey).

We owe a great debt to Miguel Civil for making the complex lists in this catalog accessible to us (figs. 23.2 and 23.3). Civil studied and published all but one of the included complex lists, the exception

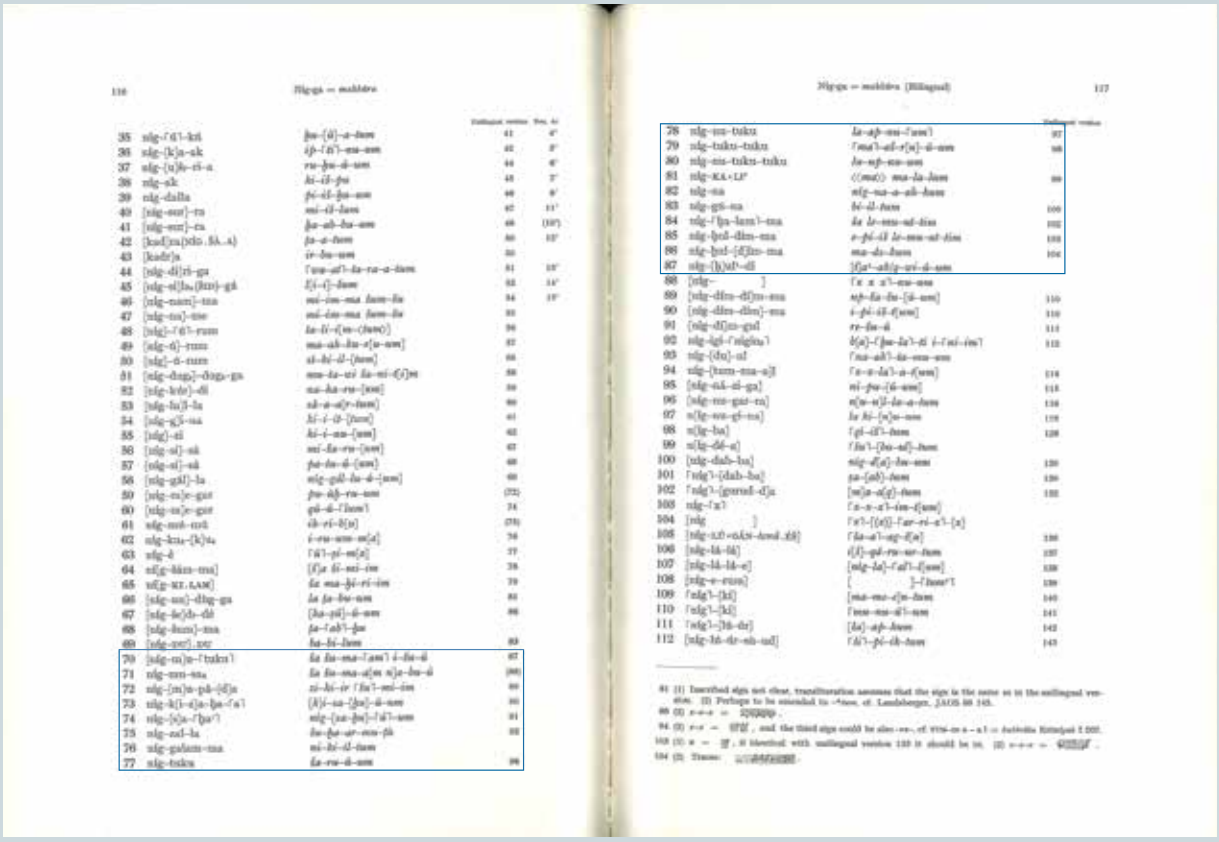


Figure 23.2. Edition by Miguel Civil of the bilingual version of the *List of Things* (Niĝga) in MSL 13. The first column contains the Sumerian text, the second its Akkadian translation, and the third the corresponding line in the unilingual (Sumerian) version of the list. The section that apprears on **cat. no. 51** is highlighted.

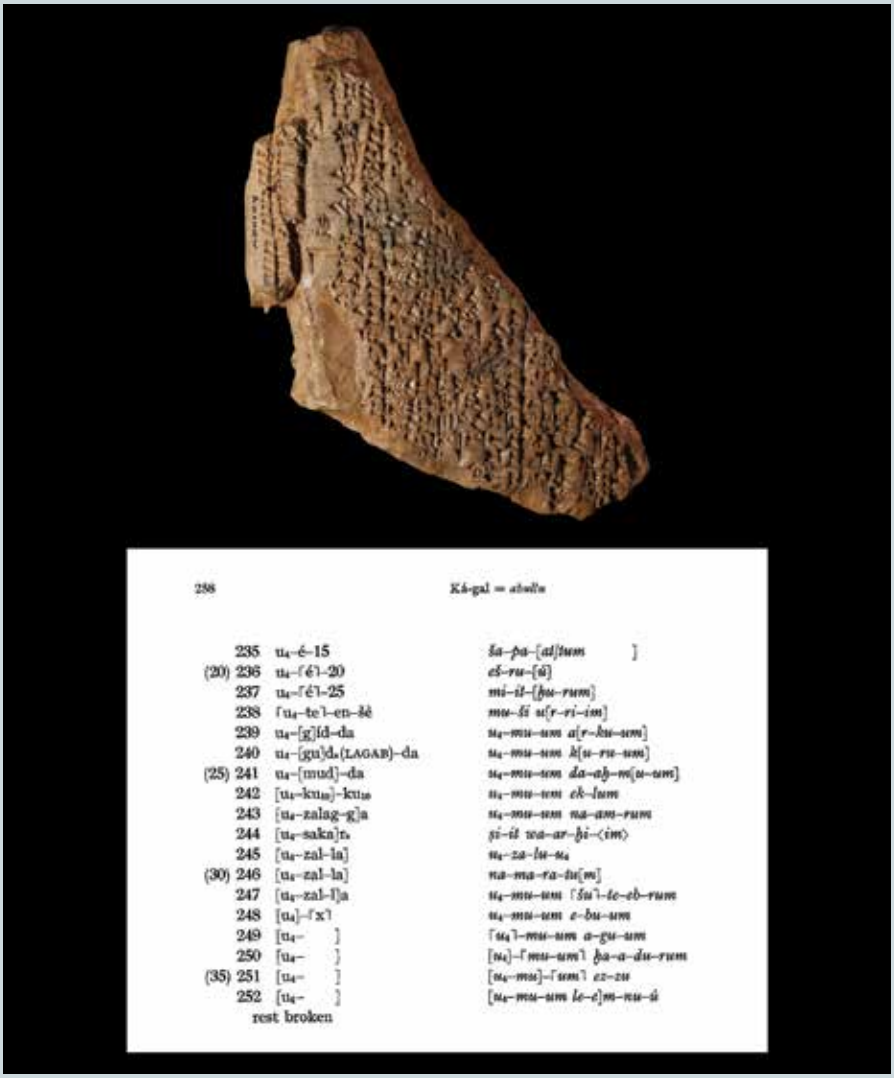


Figure 23.3. Fragment with a bilingual lexical list containing terminology for days (**cat. no. 54**) and its edition by Miguel Civil, based on Benno Landsberger's partial reconstruction, in MSL 13. Photo by DL; composite image by MDH.

being the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) (see below, "Reading Signs and Writing in Two Languages"), whose initial publication was prepared by Landsberger in MSL 2 and then revised by Civil in MSL 14. It was Civil, moreover, who saw the importance of the Old Babylonian Nippur recensions that his predecessor had dismissed. He brought the study of these texts to the forefront of lexicography. Furthermore, Civil not only edited all known Old Babylonian lexical manuscripts in the MSL volumes but also was responsible for the now-standard classification of school tablet types. This classification system (summarized in Civil 1995) was fundamental for the later reconstruction of the scribal curriculum (see chapter 7).

Today, lexical lists remain crucial for the ongoing study of Sumerian, as they instruct us on how to read and understand this language. At the same time, they are essential for the reconstruction of the cultural and intellectual history of Mesopotamia (Veldhuis 2014, 1–6). In Civil's own words, cuneiformists are "lucky to have at [their] disposal an enormous wealth of ancient lexical material without which [their] understanding of the Sumerian language and texts would be very meager indeed" (Civil 2017 [1975], 35–36). It is ironic that most of such a crucial body of knowledge is preserved only on school exercise tablets written by apprentices—tablets meant to be recycled or simply discarded.

Reading Signs and Writing in Two Languages

> The man in charge of Sumerian (said): "He spoke Akkadian!" (and) flogged me.
>
> *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A), line 40

Cuneiform signs are complex. Each sign could be read in different ways. Students used sign lists to learn the various readings of each sign. These lists were often organized according to graphic principles, where similarly shaped signs appeared together. When practicing the many readings, students sometimes added translations (glossing) in their native language, Akkadian, thus creating bilingual vocabularies. Cuneiform was likely developed to write Sumerian but could be adapted to write Akkadian, a language with different sounds. Although Akkadian was commonly written during the Old Babylonian period, students rarely practiced writing in Akkadian in the Edubba'a, where speaking Akkadian was also discouraged. (SP)

Delving Deeper into the Universe of Signs (cat. nos. 52–53)

As their training progressed, students moved from the concrete to the abstract: having mastered the basics of writing words in cuneiform script, they delved into the different readings—that is, the different pronunciations—of the Sumerian signs while at the same time learning how these signs were conceptualized and organized (Veldhuis 2014, 208). To do this, they memorized and copied various lists of signs.

Cat. no. 52 contains more than 500 lines of the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea). The pedagogical goal of this list was for students to learn the possible readings of individual signs. In this outstanding copy, an advanced pupil repeated the same pattern entry after entry: a vertical wedge, the syllabic pronunciation of a sign, and the sign itself. Such entries had to be read: "(the sign) 𒁀 (is read) uš (which means) 'to die'" or "(the sign) 𒁀 (is read) ziz (which means) 'a moth'" (Civil 1979, 15). Only the last entry of the sign 𒁀 (BAD) is pronounced as "bad" (fig. 23.4). The meanings in Akkadian were not added in this copy but were surely memorized by the student.

The very last list that students had to learn was the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri). This list focused on mastering the complexity of compound signs—that is, sign combinations whose readings cannot be deduced from their individual signs (Civil 2004, 3). The obverse of **cat. no. 53** contains

Figure 23.4. Detail of **cat. no. 52**. Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; transliteration and annotations by MDH.

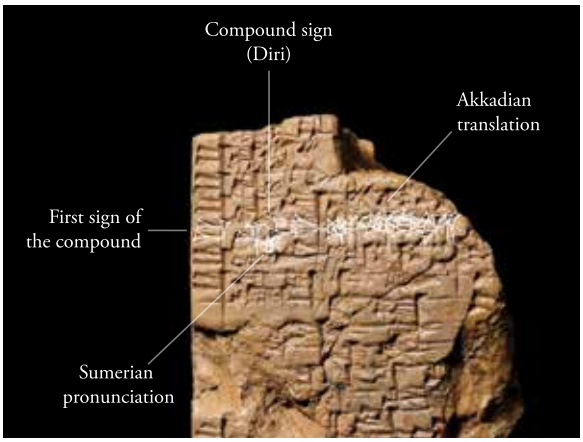


Figure 23.5. Detail of **cat. no. 53**. Photo by CM; annotations by MDH.

a list of "diri-compounds" whose first element is the sign 𒄑 (ĜEŠ) "wood." As was the case with **cat. no. 45**, the initial ĜEŠ sign conceptually and visually governs the list. However, the pronunciation of the words here is not straightforward. Thus the student copied each complex sign, its pronunciation, and its Akkadian meaning: "(The sign combination) ĜEŠ.ŠU.LU$_2$ (is read) ĝešgiri (which means) 'staff of a man'" (fig. 23.5).

Although focusing more on form and sound than on meaning, these lists had an inherently practical function, as scribes would regularly use these simple signs and diri-compounds in their professional lives. (MDH)

52. Multicolumn Tablet with a Sign List

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 174 mm, width 145 mm, depth 27 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-347 (3NT-563)

Multicolumn tablet inscribed with entries 269–589 of the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) on the reverse.

Literature:
Civil 1979, 18–55 (composite transliteration, source Bb)

See also figure 9.1.

Photo of reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

53. Tablet with a List of Compound Signs

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 95 mm, width 70 mm

ISACM A30239 (3NT-422)

Teacher–student exercise tablet inscribed with two sections of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri), entries 100–114, 213–18, and 220–30. The fragment joins UM 55-21-312 (3NT-349) and UM 55-21-388 (3NT-909aa).

Literature:

Civil 2004, 16 and 20 (composite transliteration and commentary, source P)

See also figure 9.7.

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

Using a Flexible Writing System to Full Effect (cat. nos. 54–56)

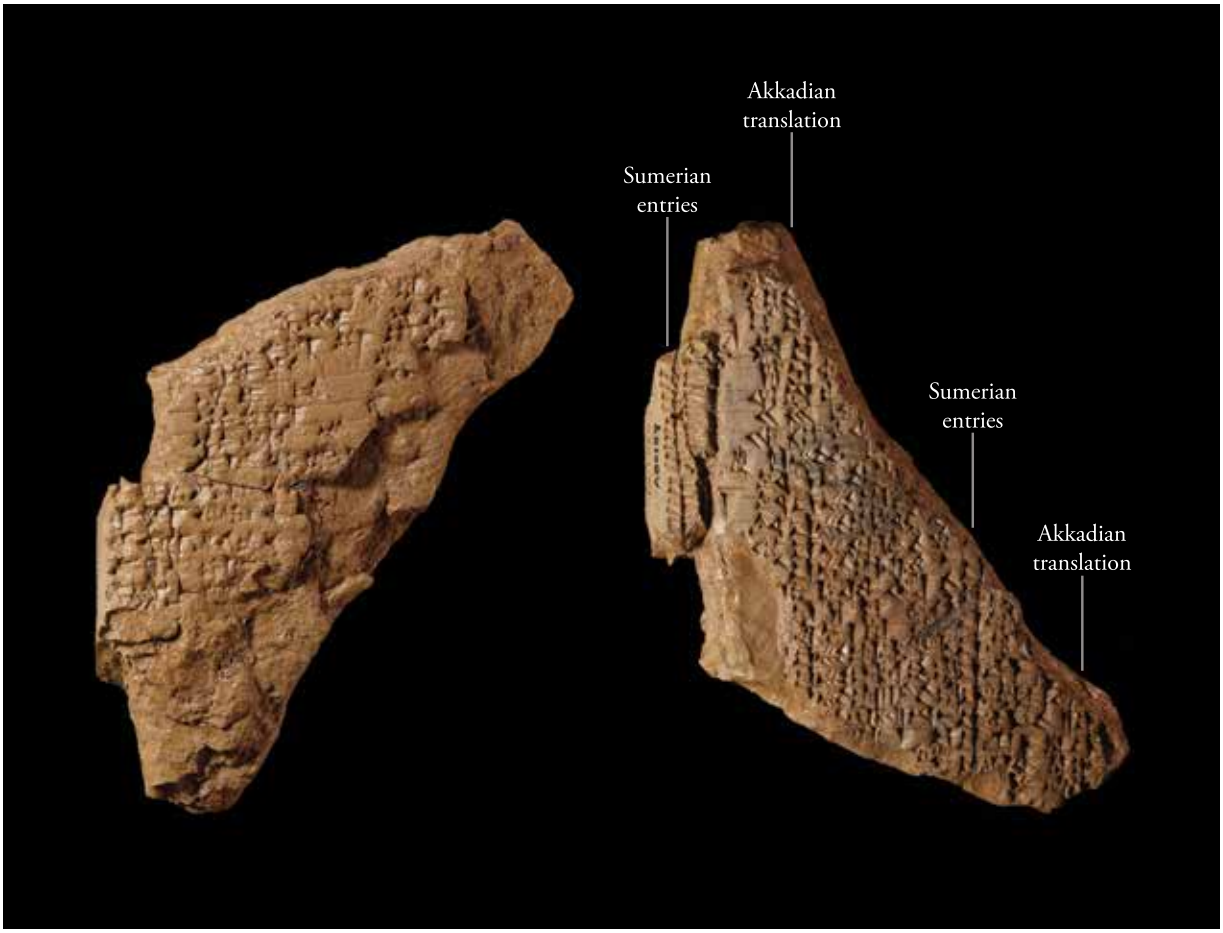
While the focus of scribal education was on writing in Sumerian, **cat. nos. 54–56**, each inscribed with a different list, are united by their bilingualism, as all of them contain not only Sumerian entries but also translations of those entries into Akkadian.

Translation into Akkadian operates differently in each of these texts. On **cat. no. 54**, a fragment of an acrographically organized list that was later incorporated into the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal), terms for and descriptions of days are written first in Sumerian, followed by the Akkadian translation in the next column. The list includes words for the fifteenth day of the month, for the evening, and descriptive phrases such as "long day" and "short day," with each Sumerian term having a single corresponding Akkadian entry.

By contrast, on **cat. no. 55**, a fragment with the beginning of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri), a single sign receives many translations. In the broken space to the left of the first line, the scribe would have written the sign 𒋛𒀀 (DIRI). Each of the words written here on the right—whether *watrum*, "exceeding," or *nahdurum*, "to become eclipsed"—translates an aspect of the Sumerian word diri. This equivalence of meaning is reflected in another dimension of the cuneiform writing system: Akkadian could be written using syllables, but it could also be written with word signs, or logograms. Thus *watrum*, here spelled syllabically *wa-at-rum*, could be written logographically with the sign 𒋛𒀀 (DIRI) instead, just as in English the number 2 can be spelled out as "two" or written with the numeral. The eleven possible translations for DIRI written here, with likely more continuing below what is preserved on this fragment, demonstrate the breadth of the scribe's lexical knowledge and understanding of the sign's range of meanings.

Similar erudition is on display on **cat. no. 56**, a beautiful copy of the *Acrographic List* Izi. Here the Akkadian translations gloss the Sumerian words; written in front of the words in the line and in smaller script, these glosses appear only intermittently throughout the list, in sections where a singular Sumerian sign possesses a range of values and meanings. Thus in the section covering the sign 𒆳 (KUR) in the fifth column, the meanings of the word on its own—from "land" to "mountain" to "netherworld"—are given in Akkadian preceding the Sumerian word kur. The next two lines are Sumerian entries that lack Akkadian glosses but build on the initial meaning of the word kur as "land": a plural form of the word, "all the lands" (kurkur), then a fixed phrase, "land of green pasture" (kur usala). Much of the fourth column contains significant Akkadian glossing, as the scribe traverses many possible readings of the sign 𒁁 (BAD) and the similar-looking signs (IDIM) and 𒀸 (AŠ).

Through these bilingual writings, the scribes demonstrated not only their linguistic knowledge but also their ability to work with a flexible and capacious writing system, one that could convey meaning in multiple ways and follow multiple lines of reasoning. In doing so, they left behind traces of their thought that continue to enlighten, puzzle, and assist modern scholars as we translate Mesopotamian texts into our own languages. (JG)



54. Tablet with a List of Days

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 111 mm, width 87 mm

ISACM A30189 (3NT-265)

Fragment of a tablet inscribed with the Old Babylonian unlabeled acrographic lexical list that later became part of the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal) Tablet G, containing the section listing days, entries 21–33, 199–209, and 230–52. The fragment joins UM 55-21-425.

Literature:
Civil 1971, 255–59 (composite transliteration, source A)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH.

55. Tablet with a List of Complex Signs and Akkadian Translations

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 55 mm, width 53 mm

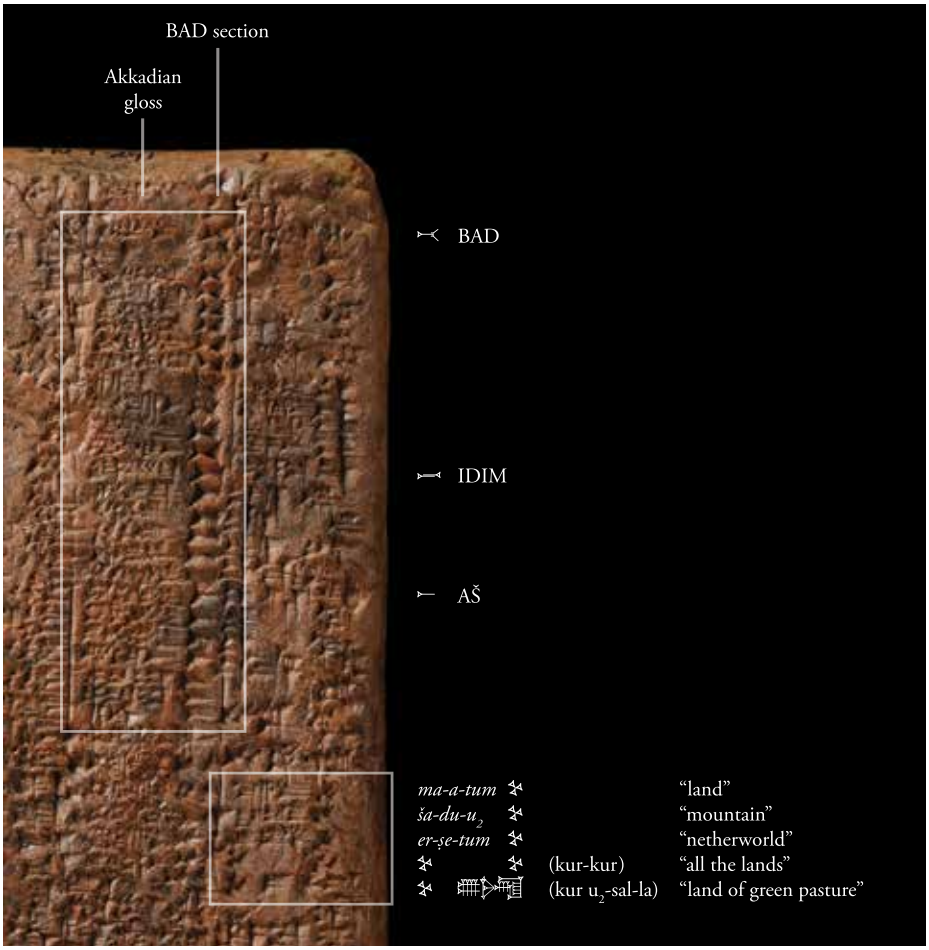
ISACM A30283 (3NT-631)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise containing the beginning of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) on the reverse (entries 1, 3–5, 11–12, and 18a–c), with the obverse divided into two columns but containing no preserved text.

Literature:
Civil 2004, 8, 12–13 (composite transliteration, source D)

See also figure 10.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.



56. Multicolumn Tablet with a Lexical List with Akkadian Glosses

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 145 mm, width 91 mm

ISACM A30200 (3NT-291)

Ten-column tablet (five columns per side) inscribed with the first section of the *Acrographic List* Izi, with many of the entries glossed with their Akkadian translations.

Literature:

Civil 1971, 14, 17–34 (composite transliteration and score, source U).

Crisostomo 2019b, 201, 228–79, 433–36, 500 (transliteration, translation, commentary, and photograph, source N_1-04*)

See also figures 9.5, 10.1, and 10.2.

Detail of obverse with sections of the fourth and fifth columns highlighted. Photo by DL; annotations by MDH; edition by JG after Crisostomo 2019b.

Gaining Skills for Real Life (cat. no. 57)

Glossing complex advanced lexical lists in Akkadian may have had a practical aspect, for while learning to translate Sumerian, students practiced writing their native language, Akkadian, with word signs and syllables. Knowing how to spell Akkadian words was especially important, as most functional documents in the private and administrative spheres, including letters—a vital mode of day-to-day communication—were written in Akkadian (Kleinerman 2021). A few examples from House F show us that students practiced writing letters in their native language. Identifying practice letters is tricky because in their appearance and content they resemble everyday correspondence (Béranger 2018, 2019). The scribbles of oversized signs on its reverse show **cat. no. 57** to be an exercise tablet. In this letter, the student practiced typical elements of letter composition and orthography. These elements included the greeting formula "Speak to the addressee, thus (says the sender)" and a blessing, "May (the gods) Šamaš and Amurru keep you alive for my sake forever." As most letters contain requests to the addressee, it is unsurprising that the letter ends with the common appeal for urgency: "Don't delay, please!" (SP)

57. Tablet with an Akkadian Practice Letter

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 65 mm, width 42 mm, depth 23 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-330 (3NT-455)

A single-column tablet inscribed with a practice letter in Akkadian.

See also figure 10.5.

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Learning Grammar: Writing Sentences

I came home; there my dad was sitting.
I read aloud from my round tablet to my father,
I recited my tablet to him, my dad was pleased
with me.

Schooldays (Edubba'a A), lines 9–11

When learning Sumerian, students were confronted with not only new vocabulary but also grammar and sentence structure (syntax) that differed from their native Akkadian. In lexical lists, students encountered mostly individual words and rarely verb forms. Teachers taught Sumerian by using practical texts—proverbs, short sayings, and short stories, for example—and easy literary texts, such as a hymn specially written for beginners venturing into Sumerian literature. Easy texts may have been introduced early in the curriculum and became the dominant instructional material only after the students mastered the lexical lists. We can assume that junior scribes were rather proud about writing such texts, as proverbs are often found on round tablets the students took home to show their parents. (SP)

Covert Knowledge: Grammatical Lessons in Literary Contexts (cat. nos. 58–59)

Scribal students were introduced to Sumerian organically. Rather than mechanically reproducing grammatical paradigms, students learned the rules of inflectional grammar and syntax via the copying of literary compositions. **Cat. no. 58** records the first three proverbs of *Proverb Collection* 2 on its obverse. The first proverb is ten sentences in length, and it can be grammatically subdivided into three parts. The first three sentences have medio-passive commands addressed to an unspecified person—for example, "In those places that have been destroyed, *let more places be destroyed*" (line 1). In the next set of three sentences, the predicates are simple medio-passive statements—for example, "Their rituals *were alienated*" (line 4). This proverb concludes with a set of four sentences that shift back to commands in the form of prohibitions issued to a second-person plural addressee in the active voice: "*You all should not alienate* their rituals!" (line 7). Setting aside the meaning of this proverb (see chapter 12), its utility as a grammatical lesson is transparent. In just ten lines the student encountered positive and negative directives, the medio-passive and active voices, singular and plural addressees, and second- and third-person addressees. This document betrays a clear pedagogical bent, given the wealth of complex predicates in a short space and the proverb's internal grouping of lines by verbal semantics.

Cat. no. 59 provides unique insight into a scribe's early education in the Sumerian language. The obverse of this object records a portion of the literary text *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B—a common pedagogical example of simple Sumerian syntax in practice. The reverse records *Syllable Alphabet* B, a radically different type of text that was copied by students learning syllables. This artifact attests to the fact that students were sometimes introduced to literary texts alongside simple lexical lists, thereby allowing them to learn the orthography, vocabulary, and syntax of Sumerian simultaneously. (CGS)

58. Tablet with Proverbs

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 112 mm, width 80 mm

ISACM A30205 (3NT-304)

Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt of *Proverb Collection* 2, nos. 1–4, 9–17, 68–73, and 84–97.

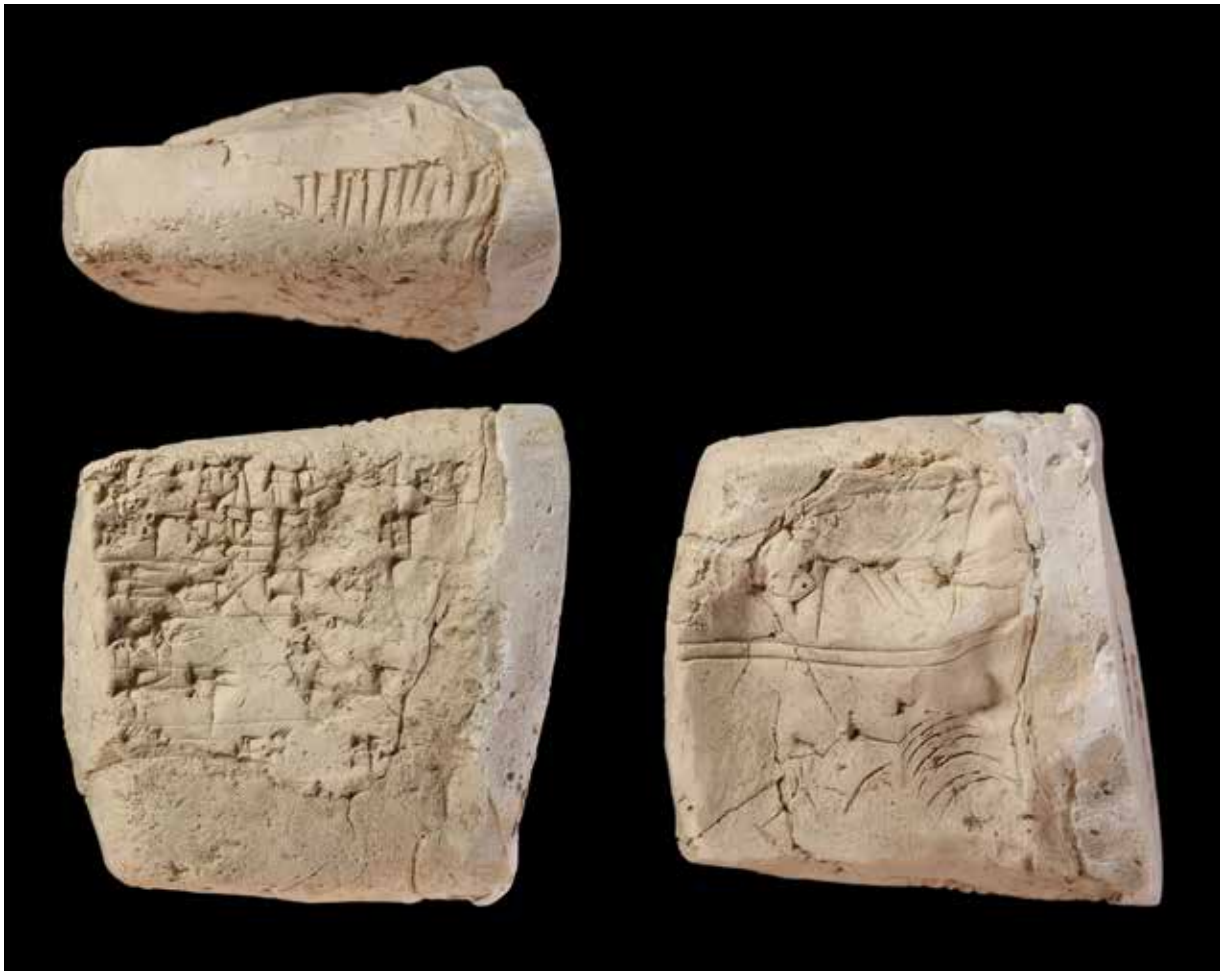
Literature:

Gordon 1968, 169, 176–246, pls. 67–68 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, photograph, source PPPP)

Alster 1997, 42, 44–65, 359–71 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary)

See also figure 12.3.

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.



59. Tablet with an Easy Hymn and Syllables

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 203, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 65 mm, width 63 mm

ISACM C3688 (3NT-819)

Cast of IM 58736 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a tablet fragment inscribed with portions of the *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B on the obverse and *Syllable Alphabet* B on the reverse. The student impressed his fingernails on the reverse and wrote a series of vertical wedges on the upper edge.

Literature:
Tinney 1999 (discussion, source N_{11})

Photos of upper edge, obverse, and reverse by DL.

Comic Relief (cat. nos. 60–61)

Although scribal training took serious dedication, the Edubba'a was not all work and no play. Even in their exercises, students could have some fun, especially now having entered the stage of education in which syntax and grammar were practiced. Newly able to form complete sentences in Sumerian, students could draw on previous lessons on lexical lists, synthesizing old vocabulary and abstract interpretive skills, to create metaphoric, ironic, or comedic effects in the form of proverbs.

The morals and humor entangled in the proverbs can be difficult for modern scholars to penetrate, however, removed as they are by several thousand years from the proverbs' original context. For example, in the short story *The Fowler and His Wife*, inscribed on **cat. no. 60**, the fowler's wife clearly rebukes her husband, but her true meaning remains enigmatic: "O fowler, let your net be stretched out, (but) may the bird rise!" (Matuszak 2022, 25). The short story has been interpreted as a double entendre, encoding the wife's dissatisfaction with the fowler's capabilities as a husband (Alster 1997), or specifically with his lack of sexual desire (Matuszak 2022). But did the student-copier understand these undertones? The student probably inscribed this passage many times to learn it well, given the worn area on the right of **cat. no. 60**'s obverse, likely the workspace for copying, erasing, and copying again the teacher's model provided on the left.

With their newfound grammatical skills, students unlocked their ability to narrate stories and convey deeper meaning. But eloquence and profundity need not always have been the goal, particularly when the opportunity for a good joke presented itself instead: copied twice on the circular tablet **cat. no. 61** is the proverb, "A fox urinated into the sea. 'All of the sea is my urine,' it said" (Alster 1997, 58). Perhaps this proverb was more sophisticated than it might appear . . . or perhaps young students in Mesopotamia, too, just needed some comic relief amid their serious studies—or rather, *for* their studies, as humor was and is an effective way of engaging students and helping them learn. In any case, this student was almost certainly cheekily proud to rush home at the end of the school day, tablet in hand, eager to show off their newly discovered ironic use of the erudite language of Sumerian. (MO)

60. Tablet with the Short Story *The Fowler and His Wife*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House H, Room 186, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 69 mm, width 69 mm

ISACM A30175 (3NT-168)

Fragment of a teacher–student exercise inscribed with the Sumerian short story *The Fowler and His Wife* on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) and mathematical exercises on the reverse.

Literature:

Michalowski 1981, 170 (collation and commentary)

Alster 1992, 186–201 (commentary)

Alster 1997, 253–54, 274, 442 (composite transliteration and translation)

Veldhuis 2000, 390–95 (commentary)

Civil 2004, 9, 26–27 (composite transliteration, source A_1)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

61. Circular Tablet with Humorous Proverb

Clay

Nippur, Area TB, House B, Room 10, Level II Floor 1

Old Babylonian (Isin-Larsa)

Diameter 98 mm

ISACM A29982 (2NT-391)

Fragment of a circular tablet inscribed twice with *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 67, on the obverse and a few wedge impressions on the reverse.

Literature:

Gordon 1968, 171, 222–23, pl. 71 (composite transliteration, translation, and photograph, source AAAA)

Alster 1997, 42, 58 (transliteration, translation, and commentary, source AAAA)

See also figure 12.2.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

The *Decad*: An Introduction to Sumerian Literature

Praised be Nisaba!

—A common ending of Sumerian literary texts

Some books are read by millions of schoolchildren or studied by students as part of their core education. Students in the Edubba'a had a similar group of texts, the so-called *Decad*, a set group of ten compositions they studied when they entered the second phase of education, dominated by "literature." In our modern view, those texts encompass a wide variety of genres and content. They include hymns or poems praising kings, gods and goddesses, and important temples. Others narrate stories about the exploits of the hero Gilgameš; the conquests of the warrior goddess, Inana; and the travels of the god of wisdom, Enki. One text is solely dedicated to a tool—the hoe. Teachers may have selected these texts not only for their content or as an introduction to the poetic styles of Sumerian literature but also as tools for practicing a variety of grammatical phenomena—and especially all those words and signs learned by memorizing lexical lists. As different from each other as the compositions are, students often concluded them with a declaration of praise to the goddess of the scribal art, Nisaba. (SP)

So Many Texts! (cat. no. 62)

So many texts to read and study! We can only speculate about the thoughts of advanced students starting their journey into Sumerian literature. Were they excited about all the stories to be discovered, or intimidated by the sheer number of lines to memorize? Thanks to a group of texts called the *Decad*, we can reconstruct how their journey into the second phase of education began. The ten compositions listed at the beginning of **cat. no. 62** are those of the *Decad*. These compositions were also the most frequently studied literary texts in House F. From House F alone, we have between nine and thirty-six surviving copies of each composition; these copies are often extracts or "long tablets" covering about thirty lines (Robson 2001, 53). The rare tablets combining several compositions show that the texts were studied in a fixed sequence (see chapter 15). This sequence is also known from so-called "catalogs," such as the *Nippur Catalog* (**cat. no. 62**), which were probably simply inventories covering the tablets held in an individual library (Delnero 2010b). Unlike modern books, Babylonian stories lacked a title, but they were indexed in catalogs using the first words of the first line of the text. Thus a composition labeled by modern scholars with the rather boring title *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A was known to the Babylonians as "I the king, from the womb . . . ," while *Inana and Ebih* was known as "Lady of fearsome divine powers. . . ." Scholars prefer the generic titles because several ancient texts share the same first words, and in some texts the first line is not preserved because the edges of a tablet are prone to damage over time.

While **cat. no. 62** was found outside House F during the early excavations in Nippur and we therefore lack precise information about its archaeological context, many of the sixty-two compositions listed on the tablet were studied during the second phase of the curriculum, including epics such as *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave* (**cat. no. 117**), myths such as *Enlil and Ninlil* (**cat. no. 102**), historical compositions such as the *Curse of Agade* (**cat. no. 107**), debates such as that between *Hoe and Plough* (**cat. no. 121–23**), and school compositions such as *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A) (**cat. no. 15**). Taken together, they allow a glimpse into the richness of Sumerian literature, which students only began to discover with the texts of the *Decad*. (SP)

62. Tablet with a Catalog of Literary Compositions

Clay

Nippur, unknown context

Old Babylonian

Length 62 mm, width 41 mm, depth 23 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 29-15-155

A two-column tablet called the *Nippur Catalog*, inscribed with the first words of sixty-two distinct compositions. The annotations show where the compositions listed in the catalog appear on the tablet—those annotated in white are known from manuscripts from House F; those in gray are not (following Robson 2001).

Literature:
Black et. al. 2004, 301–4 (translation and commentary)
Delnero 2010b (discussion, source N2)

See also figures 15.2 and 16.1.

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; annotations by MDH.

"I the King, from the Womb . . .": A Lion among Men (cat. nos. 63–64)

In the composition "I the king, (was a hero already) from the womb . . . ," or *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, the student scribe learned lessons in kingly supremacy, topoi for aggrandizing royalty, and modal language characteristic of royal inscriptions and simple literary texts. One motif commonly encountered in *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A is the king as animal. Twice in the composition's first fifteen lines, King Šulgi (2094–2046 BCE) is referred to as a fierce lion. The connections between lions, heroism, and Mesopotamian kingship are well attested in the archaeological and textual records (Watanabe 2000). In House F itself, a student copied the opening lion lines of *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, as attested on **cat. no. 63**, under the gaze of a striding lion on a plaque adorning the wall of the structure (**cat. no. 64**). The augustness of the king is expounded in *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A when the titular sovereign is deemed perfect for his station by being compared to animals that excel at theirs:

> I am a mule, most suitable for the road.
> I am a horse, whose tail waves on the highway.
> I am a stallion of Šakkan, eager to run.
>
> *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, lines 16–18

These lines are also simple grammar lessons teaching the basics of copular "to be" clauses. In lines 19–25, Šulgi is described as a wise scribe and fair judge intolerant of wickedness, the latter being a particularly common attribute of the ideal Mesopotamian king. Beyond the thematic shift, these lines also display a grammatical shift, as some of the predicates here are marked with a modal prefix to denote that the associated sentiments are braggadocious. The closing lines of **cat. no. 63** introduce a theme for the remainder of the composition—namely, that of Šulgi as a runner, the paragon of athleticism. Ultimately, this composition taught students how to construct fawning descriptions of royalty that could be used in royal propaganda, all the while indoctrinating them into the propagandistic system itself. (CGS)

63. Tablet with a Praise Poem of King Šulgi

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 100 mm, width 68 mm

ISACM C3253 (3NT-383)

Cast of IM 58454 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a long tablet in the Iraq Museum inscribed with the beginning of the composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A, lines 1–17 and 18–27.

Literature:

Delnero 2006, 692, 1864–76 (score transliteration and commentary, source N_{III12})

See also figure 17.1.

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

64. Plaque with a Striding Lion

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 89 mm, width 132 mm, depth 14 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 53-11-95 (3N-340)

Clay plaque with a striding lion, likely produced using a mold.

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, pl. 142:10 (description and photo)
Stone 1987, 174 (catalog entry)

See also figure 4.2.

Photo courtesy of the Penn Museum.

"King, Treated with Respect . . .": The Ideal, Manly King (cat. no. 65)

When writing the hymn "King, treated with respect . . ." (*Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A), students encountered a king they already knew from previous exercises: Lipit-Eštar of Isin (1936–1926 BCE). Earlier, still struggling with signs and their readings, they practiced a short hymn praising him as "king of justice, wisdom, and learning" (Vanstiphout 1978; see **cat. no. 59** above). This text ended with an invocation: "May your praise never disappear from the Edubba'a!" Indeed, Lipit-Eštar's glorification continued in this more extended hymn where he is stylized as the ideal Babylonian ruler with a distinctively manly physique, awe-inspiring beauty, and outstanding intellect. Written in the first person, constantly repeating "I am" in every line, Lipit-Eštar praises himself as a ruler who is selected by the gods, crowned by An, bestowed with wisdom by Enki, and the husband of divine Inana. Bringing offerings to temples and praying piously, he provides for many deities. In addition, he invokes the picture of the good shepherd who brings agricultural prosperity and protects his people as a warrior and king of justice. The following section is preserved on **cat. no. 65**:

> I am the one who raises the abundant harvest, the life of the land.
> I am the farmer who piles up his (harvest) heaps.
> I am the shepherd making ghee and milk abundant in the stable.
> I am the one who makes growing fish and birds in the swamp.
> I am the river of abundance, bringing flowing water.
> I am the one who increases the splendor of the great mountains.
> I am the one given great strength by Enlil.
> I am Lipit-Eštar, his respectful young man.
>
> *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A, lines 43–50

Because the poem's grammar is relatively easy, thanks to its repetitive structure familiar from the previous poem, students could focus on using their vocabulary. In this section, pupils recalled signs they had previously memorized in the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea). While Ea introduced them to reading signs systematically based on the shape of a sign, they could now practice them in context, bringing together elements such as "ghee" and "milk," "fish" and "birds." In the short section quoted above, they also encountered three readings (ni, zal, i_3) and four meanings of the sign  , the meanings being the pronoun "his" (ani) and the words "ghee" (i), "flowing" (zal), and "joy" (girizal). (SP)

65. Tablet with a Praise Poem of King Lipit-Eštar

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House K, Room 199, Level XII Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Length 81 mm, width 62 mm

ISACM C3720 (3NT-851)

Cast of IM 58761 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a single-column tablet inscribed with an extract of the composition *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A, lines 1–14 on the obverse and lines 31–42 on the reverse.

Literature:

Delnero 2006, 881–82, 1912, 1917–60 (score transliteration, source N_{III12})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

"The Lord, the Everlasting Thing . . .": A Pun of Scribal Virtuosity (cat. no. 66)

"The lord made appear once more an everlasting thing . . . ," called by modern scholars *Song of the Hoe*, stands out as a singular literary work: what seems to be a frivolous exaltation of a hoe is actually a brilliant exercise of intellectual play on sign, sound, and interlingual meaning (Michalowski 2010b).

The composition is simultaneously a creation story and a debate poem (Black et al. 2004, 311–12). In primeval times, the god Enlil sets out to create the world—and with it, humankind. To that end, the god uses a precious golden, silver, and lapis lazuli hoe—the perfect tool for such momentous endeavors. Once the world has been properly organized, it is humans' turn to use the hoe and build the gods' abodes. After relating such industrious enterprises, the hymn ends with praise to the hoe and its virtues.

This poem challenged students to identify all instances of the syllable  (al) hidden in the text. At the most basic level, this syllable is overtly repeated in all occurrences of the Sumerian word "hoe" (al), as well as in other nouns and verbs. But there is another layer of cunning that includes Akkadian translations of words and alternative readings of signs containing the sequence vowel + l/r (Michalowski 2010b). For example, the Sumerian word "lord" (en) is translated into Akkadian as *bēlum*, containing el as a variant for al, while a possible alternative reading of the sign  "to establish" is kal. The following section is preserved on **cat. no. 66**:

He brought (ĝ**ar**) it into being with (the help of) the hoe (**al**) and so day broke forth (**al**-ed).
He established (k**al**) the work assignments (ešĝ**ar**)—the destinies being thus decreed (**al**-t**ar**).
He established fair wages for the hoe (**al**) and the basket.
Enlil praised his hoe (**al**):
His hoe (**al**) was of gold, its head of lapis lazuli.
His hoe (**al**) was tied with a cord (s**a** **l**a) of bright (kug = ***el****lum*) metal and gold.
His hoe (**al**)—the edges of its pins are a lapis lazuli plow,
Its blade is a battering ram raging against a great (g**al**) wall!
The lord (en = *b****ēl****um*) reckoned the hoe (**al**) and decreed (**al**-t**ar**) its destiny there.

Song of the Hoe, lines 8–16

The now-advanced students had internalized this type of analogical and interlingual hermeneutics while learning lexical lists (Crisostomo 2019b). Hence this composition is an excellent example of the recursiveness of the scribal curriculum: throughout their time in school, students would be exposed again and again to the same kind of information displayed in different ways. Here the scribes-to-be had to retrieve all their lexical knowledge to comprehend fully the multiple puns hidden in the text. (MDH)

66. Tablet with the *Song of the Hoe*

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 191, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 68 mm, width 63

ISACM C3544 (3NT-674)

Cast of IM 58609 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a single-column tablet inscribed with the beginning of the *Song of the Hoe*, lines 1–16.

Literature:

Delnero 2006, 40, 978, 1964, 1969–2019 (score transliteration, source N_{III23})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

"Lady of All Divine Powers . . .": A Discourse of Female Agency (cat. no. 67)

This tempestuous hymn, *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B), opens with praise of a fearsome goddess whose storm-like presence is felt throughout the world. Though the addressee is at first unnamed, she may be easily recognized from this description as Inana, the goddess of love and war. The identity of the hymn's speaker is no less noteworthy—"I am Enheduana, the high priestess," line 67 asserts; she goes on to recount how Lugalane has cast her out from her position, so she has turned to Inana and the moon god for aid. Enheduana was a real historical figure—a daughter of King Sargon of Akkad (2316–2277 BCE) who served as priestess of the moon god in the city of Ur 500 years before a student wrote this extract tablet (**cat. no. 67**). If Enheduana did indeed compose this text, as well as the others attributed to her, she would be the world's first known author. (On Enheduana's authorial identity, see Helle 2019 and Konstantopoulos 2021.) While we cannot settle that matter for certain, since we have manuscripts dating only to several centuries after she lived, it is nonetheless striking that in a world in which the authors of most texts were anonymous, this text presents itself as the product of Enheduana's voice and perspective.

The hymn takes the form of Enheduana's direct address to Inana, creating a sense of immediacy and, from a pedagogical point of view, presenting an opportunity for students to practice grammatical forms involving the first and second persons "I" and "you." The text is also rich in figurative language, as in the passage surviving on this fragment, in which Enheduana pleads for intercession and details her predicament:

> He has made me fly like a swallow from a window;
> I have used up my life.
> He caused me to walk through the briars of the mountain.
>
> *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B), lines 105–6

The hymn transports those who encounter it back to the distant days of the Akkadian dynasty, as a woman uses rhetorical power to persuade a goddess to help her. (JG)

67. Tablet with a Hymn to the Goddess Inana

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 37 mm, width 71 mm

ISACM A30186 (3NT-253)

Fragment from the bottom of a single-column extract tablet containing lines 100–110 of the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B).

Literature:

Delnero 2006, 2024, 2081–86 (score transliteration, source N_{III38})

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

"Enlil, Forever . . .": Localizing the Literary World (cat. no. 68)

The composition "Enlil, forever . . . ," "Enlil's commands are by far the loftiest . . . ," or *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A) is unique in the *Decad* for the intimate relationships it constructs between student and place. In contrast to the texts described above about figures long dead and distant (such as Šulgi, Lipit-Eštar, and Enheduana), *Enlil in the Ekur* grounded the realm of literature in territory familiar to students' own life experiences—namely, the Ekur, Enlil's temple complex excavated at Nippur only a few hundred meters from House F (see fig. 2.3 in chapter 2), where a student once sat copying this very hymn on **cat. no. 68**.

This hymn venerates Enlil, patron god of Nippur and head of the pantheon, detailing his divine qualities in reference to the Ekur and Nippur, the religious center of the Old Babylonian world. The composition thereby reified to students the significance of their position in wider geography, literally and cognitively inscribing pride of place. The poem oscillates between direct praise of the god—his righteousness (lines 18–25), power over fate (100–108), justice, and deliverance of prosperity (139–55)—and indirect praise, addressing his temple—its visual brilliance, inspiring trepidation (65–73), and its magnetism, drawing in worshippers and offerings (74–83). **Cat. no. 68** preserves the latter passage:

> Enlil, holy Uraš is favored with beauty for you;
> you are greatly suited for the Abzu [cosmic subterranean waters], the holy throne;
> you refresh yourself in the deep underworld, the holy chamber.

Figure 23.6. The Ekur of Enlil, Levels V and VI, looking southeast. ISACM P. 47002 (2N/1150).

Over the Ekur, the shining temple, the lofty dwelling, your presence spreads awesomeness.
Its fearsomeness and radiance reach up to heaven,
its shadow stretches over all the foreign lands,
and its crenellation reaches up to the midst of heaven.
All lords and sovereigns
[regularly supply holy offerings there,
approaching Enlil with prayers and supplications.]

Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A), lines 74–83
(translation after ETCSL 4.05.01)

The divine personality and his earthly structure, the Ekur, are thus ambiguated and conflated as one and the same. The radiance of the Ekur is the radiance of Enlil himself, the god manifest as material and material power over the physical world.

Beyond grammar, students practicing this text would reflect on their own lived experiences of this real, immediate space dominating their urban landscape (fig. 23.6), a space they all probably visited for festivities such as those described in the poem, gathering in its courtyards for rituals and feasts (lines 44–55). Envisioning themselves in this context while they wrote, students could personally connect with this composition, a factor perhaps motivational in their learning. (MO)

68. Tablet with a Hymn to Enlil and His Temple

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 191, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 43 mm, width 72 mm

ISACM A30292 (3NT-681)

Fragment of the upper part of a single-column tablet inscribed with *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A), lines 74–81 on the obverse and line 109 on the reverse. The fragment is shown here virtually joined with UM 55-21-338 (3NT-528), the lower part of the obverse and upper part of the reverse preserving additional lines.

Literature:

Reisman 1969, 41–102, pl. VII (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, and photograph, source FF)

Delnero 2006, 41, 2110, 2059–60, 2115–71 (score transliteration, source N_{III21})

Attinger 2020, 54–120 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary)

See also figure 18.3.

Obverse and reverse. Photos by DL and CM and courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; virtual join by MDH.

"The Princely Lord . . .": A Song Praising a Temple of Glorious Proportions (cat. no. 69)

The *Keš Temple Hymn* opens on what is easy to imagine as a bright, sunny day, as Enlil, "the princely lord," steps out of his house and surveys the lands, which grow "green like an orchard" under his gaze. His eye falls on the city of Keš, "lifting its head among them," and he begins spontaneously to praise the city's temple. The hymn portrays itself as those words of praise, recorded on a tablet by Nisaba, the goddess of writing.

This text is one of the oldest-known works of literature in the world—it was already written down in the mid-third millennium BCE, and it changed very little between the version of that time and the one a student studied when copying an extract from it on **cat. no. 69**. While it is an open question why this work remained popular in the Old Babylonian period, even as the city Keš itself ceased to be a major locality (Black et al. 2004, 325), this extract engages the patterns of thought and logic that students developed earlier in their education.

The extract on this tablet represents the hymn's third section (or "house," as the text calls it), a litany of identically structured parallelisms in which both ends of the temple are described through images ranging from measurements to wild animals to natural phenomena:

> The house—above 10 šar,* below 5 šar;
> the house—above 10 bur,* below 5 bur;
> the house—above a wild buffalo, below a stag;
> the house—above a wild goat, below a ram.
> The house—above a many-colored wild goat,
> below a pale ram.
> The house—above like a green snake-eating bird,
> below floating on the water like a wild goose.
> The house—above it emerges like the sun, below it
> shines like the moon.
> The house—above a mountain, below a spring.
> The house of the sky and earth—it is threefold.
> What man could bring into being something as
> great as Keš?
> What mother could give birth to one as great as
> that hero, Ašgi?
> Who has seen one as great as the goddess Nintu?
> The third house.
>
> *Keš Temple Hymn*, lines 44–56
> (line numbering following Delnero 2006)

*A šar is approximately 388 hectares, or 1.5 square miles; a bur (1/60 of a šar) is about 6.5 hectares, or 0.025 square miles.

The passage begins with the challenge of complex writings for measurements and then contains parallelisms grounded in different forms of association. For instance, in line 46 the animal terms are similar-sounding words—"wild buffalo" (alim) and "stag" (lulim)—whereas "wild goat" (šegbar) and "ram" (durahmaš) in the next line are written with similar-looking signs—  BAR and  MAŠ. The next line adds contrastive adjectives, and the passage continues building opposed alignments at the level of meaning. Therefore, the hymn makes poetry using the analogical reasoning also found in the lexical lists the students have already studied. The section then ends on the hymn's refrain, declaring through rhetorical questions the greatness of the place it describes. (JG)

69. Tablet with a Hymn Praising a Temple in Keš

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 78 mm, width 64 mm

ISACM C3645 (3NT-776)

Cast of IM 58699 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of an extract tablet containing the third section (or "house") of the *Keš Temple Hymn*, lines 44–57.

Literature:

Gragg 1969, 165, 169–70 (composite transliteration, score, and commentary, source O)

Delnero 2006, 2176, 2199–206 (score transliteration, source N_{III27})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

"In Those Remote Days . . .": An Effervescent Celebration of Enki Building His Temple (cat. no. 70)

The joyful story of *Enki's Journey to Nippur* recounts how, "in those remote days . . . when people broke through the earth like vegetation," Enki, the god of wisdom, built for himself a house of precious stones and metals, the E'engur temple in Eridu. This city was located in the marshes of southern Mesopotamia—an appropriate place for Enki, the god of the cosmic subterranean waters (Black et al. 2004, 330). In fact, as is fitting for a narrative celebrating Enki, this composition is very watery in general—both the temple and Enki himself are praised through water-based imagery, and after the structure has been built and extolled, Enki embarks on a journey by boat up the Euphrates toward Nippur, where the flowing waters of the first part of the text are complemented by flowing beer at festivities honoring his architectural achievement.

Together with the two previous texts in the *Decad*, this one forms a trio of compositions featuring extensive praise of temples; in addition to cementing this type of poetic language in the scribal students' repertoire of knowledge, this text provided a point of encounter with a range of vocabulary—not only words for parts of the building but also words for fish, musical instruments, and types of beer, as featured on extract tablet **cat. no. 70**. On the reverse of the tablet, Enki arrives in Nippur and begins busily to prepare and perfect beer of various kinds for the celebration:

> He set forth alone toward Nippur.
> Arriving on the terrace of the shrine in Nippur,
> Enki approached the beer; he approached the strong beer;
> he poured the strong beer into a bronze reed;
> he strained the sweet beer.
> He was partitioning(?) the mash of the excellent beer in the kukurdu-vessel,
> making it taste sweet with date syrup.
> Then he spread its mash, now very sweet, to cool on its own.
>
> *Enki's Journey to Nippur*, lines 93–100

With the beer preparations over, Enki arranges his guests of honor—the gods An, Enlil, and Nintu—in suitably lofty places at the party. Here the extract ends, but the gods go on to drink copious amounts of beer and carouse, inspiring a now happily drunk Enlil to end the text with extravagant praise of Enki's achievement. (JG)

70. Tablet with a Story about Enki Building His Temple in Eridu

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House G or H, Room 181, in the foundations of Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 82 mm, width 67 mm

ISACM C3660 (3NT-791)

Cast of IM 58711 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a single-column tablet containing an extract of *Enki's Journey to Nippur*, lines 76–105 on the reverse.

Literature:

Al-Fouadi 1969, 54, 81–83, 98–103 (translation and commentary, source Z)

Delnero 2006, 2241, 2273–83 (score transliteration, source N_{III31})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

"Lady of the Fearsome Divine Powers . . .": The Wrath of Inana (cat. nos. 71-72)

Inana is a goddess seemingly full of contradictions: she is the goddess of love but also the goddess of war; she is a creative power and a destructive force, at once caring and vindictive. The poem "Lady of the fearsome divine powers . . . ," also known as *Inana and Ebih*, focuses on the bellicose, vengeful aspect of the goddess.

In this composition, also sometimes attributed to the priestess Enheduana (see **cat. no. 67**), Inana sets her mind to conquer Mount Ebih, likely modern Jebel Hamrin, outraged by the mountain's refusal to submit to her. After a hymnic passage praising the warring facet of Inana, the goddess expresses her discontent with Ebih and promises to destroy it. Before doing so, however, she demands the support of An, but the god of the heavens tries to dissuade her. This reaction, instead of appeasing the goddess, enrages her even more, so that in carrying out her initial threats Inana destroys the mountain, imposing her dominion over its spoils, as related on **cat. no. 71**:

> "I will run and play the game of pure Inana.
> (. . .)
> I will make Gibil [the god of fire], the one who purifies, drive in its pure teeth at its reservoir,
> I will spread the fear of Aratta's mountain range, the unreachable, there.
> Like a city which An cursed, let no one ever restore it.
> Like a city at which Enlil became angry, let it never raise its neck again.
> May the mountain observe carefully(?) my steps.
> Ebih shall proclaim my glory, it shall praise me!"
>
> *Inana and Ebih*, lines 39, 47–52

The motif of a divinity fighting a mountain is found in only one other poem: *Ninurta's Exploits* (Lugale), whose main character is the god Ninurta, the male counterpart of Inana in her warrior aspect (Karahashi 2004, 111). Through these parallels, students established connections between the gods and the cities associated with them, constructing a coherent pantheon and reinforcing their sense of belonging to a (perhaps fictitious) tradition (Delnero 2011; see also Michalowski 2012).

This terrifying portrayal of Inana finds its iconographic equivalent in the motif of armed Inana, present on **cat. no. 72**, a small baked-clay plaque from one of the houses in Nippur's Scribal Quarter. On this plaque, we can recognize Inana thanks to her horned crown, which identifies her as a goddess; the carefully combed tresses framing her cheeks; and, crucially, the blade of a scimitar on each side of her (Moorey 1975, 84–86). In fact, in a very similar yet unprovenienced plaque now in the Ashmolean Museum (fig. 23.7), Inana—or her vizier Ninšubur—appears holding a scimitar in each hand while still preserving her copious jewelry, worthy of a goddess (Moorey 2005, 115–16). (MDH)

Figure 23.7. Baked-clay plaque of uncertain provenience depicting an armed goddess. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, object no. AN1949.920.

71. Tablet with a Story of Inana's War against Ebih

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 95 mm, width 70 mm

ISACM A30228 (3NT-382)

Single-column tablet inscribed with a passage of *Inana and Ebih*, lines 36–52.

Literature:

Attinger 1998, 167, 170–71, 184–85 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary, source T)

Delnero 2006, 1574–75, 2293, 2310–15 (score transliteration, source N_{III27})

See also figure 15.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

72. Plaque with the Bust of an Armed Goddess

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, general dump, Level XI or Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 41 mm, width 72 mm, depth 27 mm

ISACM A29442 (3N-289)

Fragment of a plaque showing the bust of a goddess, likely representing armed Inana.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 174, pl. 135:11 (catalog entry and photograph)

Photo by DL.

"House, Furious Storm of Heaven and Earth . . .": The Hope of a Scribe (cat. no. 73)

"House, furious storm of heaven and earth . . ." (or *Hymn to Nungal* A) is a hymn painfully rooted in the real world. Its contents, far apart from heroes and kings, are as mundane as a prison and as humane as the threat of imprisonment.

Described as disorganized in its style and confusing in its metaphors, this composition is thought to have been written by an imprisoned scribe who felt the need to scribble a praise to the goddess Nungal, the prison warden, while awaiting the verdict for a capital offense—perhaps hoping the hymn's lines would gain the prisoner the goddess's pity and a promise of rehabilitation (Civil 2017 [1993], 573).

The poem begins with a lugubrious description of Nungal's prison-temple (lines 1–26), followed by an account of the inmates' experience while detained in the goddess's domains (27–61). This initial, frightful description of the prison—whose parts are equated with dreadful monsters such as scorpions, pythons, and horned vipers, as well as with natural wonders such as a rainbow, storm, and flood—is contrasted with Nungal's own description of her abode as a place of compassion (lines 61–121), equating the prison with a mother's womb, a place of rebirth, from where one can find the way back to a straight path: "Its brick walls crush evil men and give rebirth to just men" (line 56) (Black et al. 2004, 341). The excerpt written on **cat. no. 73** describes the prison as follows:

> When an individual is brought in, he cannot resist her aura.
> The gods of the universe have to bow down toward the tribunal.
> The Lady-of-the-Great-House sits down, high on the lapis lazuli dais.
> She keeps her eyes on judgments and decisions; she knows true from false.
> For her, they throw over the land her casting net of cleverly woven mesh;
> the evildoer who does not follow her path does not escape its reach.
> The gate of the great House is an angry storm, a flood that reaches everybody.
> When a man of whom his god disapproves reaches it,
> he is delivered to the august hands of Nungal, the warden of the prison;
> this man is held by a painful grip, like a wild ox with spread forelegs.
> She makes him go to the house of sorrow.
>
> *Hymn to Nungal* A, lines 34–44
> (translation after Civil 2017 [1993], 574)

The hymn thus offers unique insight on how Mesopotamian prisons were deemed in ancient times, if not how they actually were—information that modern scholars regrettably lack. Indeed, while legal documentation in the form of court records and law codes abounds, little is known about how Mesopotamian prisons operated (Black et al. 2004, 339; see Neumann and Paulus 2012 on the possible functions of prisons and, more generally, Reid 2022 on imprisonment in Mesopotamia). Ultimately, the poem's ominous imagery must have left a stark imprint on the young scribes—a reminder of what awaited them if they dared to commit a crime. (MDH)

73. Tablet with a Hymn to the Goddess of the Prison

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 74 mm, width 81 mm

ISACM A30234 (3NT-399)

Single-column tablet inscribed with a passage of the *Hymn to Nungal* A, lines 30–44. On the upper edge are the scribe's fingernail impressions.

Literature:

Sjöberg 1973a, 27–46; pl. VIII (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary, source O)

Attinger 2003, 15–34 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary)

Delnero 2006, 1672–73, 2361, 2372–76 (score transliteration, source N_{III22})

Photos of upper edge, obverse, and reverse by DL.

"The Lord to the Mountains of the Living One . . .": Who Killed Huwawa? (cat. nos. 74–75)

The final poem of the *Decad*, "The Lord to the Mountains of the Living One . . ." (or *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A), recounts the quintessential hero Gilgameš and his companion Enkidu racing to the Cedar Forest to fell its prized timbers and slay its guardian, Huwawa. However, this version of the poem contains less familiar elements compared to its later adaptation in the Akkadian-language *Epic of Gilgameš*. Whereas in the latter Gilgameš beheads the monster, in this earlier narrative it is Enkidu who slits his throat. When the pair present the severed head to Enlil and Ninlil, the gods do not see their deed as heroic but rather reproach their impetuous behavior.

A fragment from House F (**cat. no. 74**) preserves the precipitous moment in which the pair must make their fateful choice—whether to succumb to the taunts of Huwawa, who piques their egos and challenges them to fight, or to refrain:

> Before a man can approach within even sixty times six yards,
> Huwawa has already reached his house among the cedars.
> When he looks at someone, it is the look of death.
> When he shakes his head at someone, it is a gesture full of reproach.
> "You may still be a young man, but you will never again return to the city of your mother who bore you!"
> Fear and terror spread through his sinews and his feet.
> He could not move his feet on the ground;
> the big toenails of his feet stuck . . . to the path.
> At his side . . .
> (Huwawa addressed Gilgameš):
> "So come on now, you heroic bearer of a scepter of wide-ranging power!
> Noble glory of the gods,
> angry bull standing ready for a fight!
> Your mother knew well how to bear sons,
> and your nurse knew well how to nourish children on the breast!
> Don't be afraid, rest your hand on the ground!"
>
> *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, lines 121–35
> (translation after ETCSL 1.08.01.05.01)

Huwawa calls Gilgameš "heroic bearer of a scepter," evoking an image of the protagonist much like that depicted on the clay plaque **cat. no. 75**. While the trident-shaped weapon suggests its bearer is a god, the figure also wears a cap typical of Old Babylonian kings. Perhaps the maker indeed intended to render Gilgameš by mixing these motifs, blurring the line between human and mythologically divine.

Two Nippur manuscripts attribute the death of Huwawa not to Enkidu or Gilgameš alone but both warriors jointly: "They cut his throat . . . they put his head in a leather bag" (lines 179–80). The shift from singular to plural changed the text's conjugations to less frequent forms, now rhyming the couplet, and redistributed responsibility for the murderous deed across multiple actors. Thus, while the *Decad* may seem cemented as a curriculum to be faithfully copied, this tenth poem demonstrates that even the tiniest alteration could radically change a narrative, reminding us of the mutability of literary texts linguistically and ideologically. (MO)

74. Tablet with the Adventures of Gilgameš

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 92 mm, width 68 mm

ISACM C3647 (3NT-778)

Cast of IM 58700 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a tablet fragment inscribed in Sumerian with the composition *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A, lines 93–134. The fragment joins UM 55-21-378 (3NT-777).

Literature:

Edzard 1990, 1991 (transliteration, translation, commentary, and hand copy, source NiNN)

Delnero 2006, 40, 1766, 2398, 2403–73 (score transliteration, source N_{III35})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

75. Plaque with a God or Hero Holding a Weapon

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House I, Room 206, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 84 mm, width 78 mm, depth 20 mm

ISACM A29449 (3N-305)

Clay plaque depicting a king or a god holding a trident-shaped scepter or weapon.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 174, pl. 135:9 (catalog entry and photograph)

Photo by DL.

Reconstructing Literature from Fragments (cat. nos. 76–78)

Often, tablets are preserved in only a fragmentary state. So scholars must identify and put together all the fragments containing the same composition to reconstruct the original text of a literary composition.

Cat. nos. 76–78 all display the poem *Inana and Ebih*. However, their states of preservation and their contents differ. **Cat. no. 76** is a fragment of an excerpt tablet—a tablet that originally contained only a passage of the poem, not the full composition.

Cat. no. 77 is an almost complete tablet with the full text of the poem. In fact, when excavated, this tablet was found broken into several fragments. One of these fragments, identified as belonging to the same tablet in 2001 by Jonathan Tenney, has been joined by the conservators of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures for this exhibition (see special section in chapter 21). However, the tablet is still missing one corner, and the cracks running all over its surface are clearly distinguishable—features that make the task of the Sumerologist more difficult, as each hole in the tablet represents a lost part of the text.

Finally, **cat. no. 78** is a two-column tablet that also contained the full text of *Inana and Ebih*. Still, not only is the top half of the tablet missing, but all its corners are also lost, and parts of its obverse surface are greatly effaced.

Modern textual reconstructions of literary texts look similar to the passage quoted below, which was put together and translated on the basis of the text preserved on our three tablets. Every line in the passage is incomplete in at least two of the three tablets. The very first line of the excerpt is a good example of this incompleteness. This line is unevenly preserved in the three tablets on display. **Cat. no. 78** (in green), for example, has only one word, "itself." If this were the only preserved copy of the poem, we would never have known that the text refers to Mount Ebih, and we might be unable to identify the composition. In fact, there are still tablet fragments in museum collections around the world whose contents appear to be literary, but their fragmentary state has precluded scholars from identifying the exact composition represented on them. Likewise, a number of literary compositions have not yet been fully reconstructed because of the fragmentary state of the tablets on which they were written.

If we combine **cat. nos. 76** (in red), **77** (in blue), and **78** (in green), we can reconstruct a fuller translation (*in black and italics*):

. . . . .
The rocks of Ebih itself
. . . . itself
The rocks of Ebih itself

. . . . down . .
. with their crushing down its flanks
clattered . . . . . .
clattered with their crushing down its flanks.

. . . . . great horned vipers spat .
from its sides and crevices great millipedes . venom
. . . . . great . spit venom
From its sides and crevices great horned vipers spat venom.

she damned . . and cursed its trees
she damned the forests . . . .
. . . . and cursed its .
She damned its forests and cursed its trees,

she killed its . with beard
. . its oaks with drought
she killed . . with .
she killed its oaks with drought,

she poured fire . . . , making its smoke grow there
she poured fire on its flanks, making its smoke grow there
. . . . . , making its smoke grow
she poured fire on its flanks, making its smoke grow there.

. lady spread silence over the mountain
the lady spread silence over the mountain
. . spread . over . .
The lady spread silence over the mountain.

holy Inana changed it as she wished
holy Inana changed it as she .
. . changed it as . .
Holy Inana changed it as she wished.

Inana and Ebih, lines 143–50 (translation adapted from Black et al. 2004, 338)

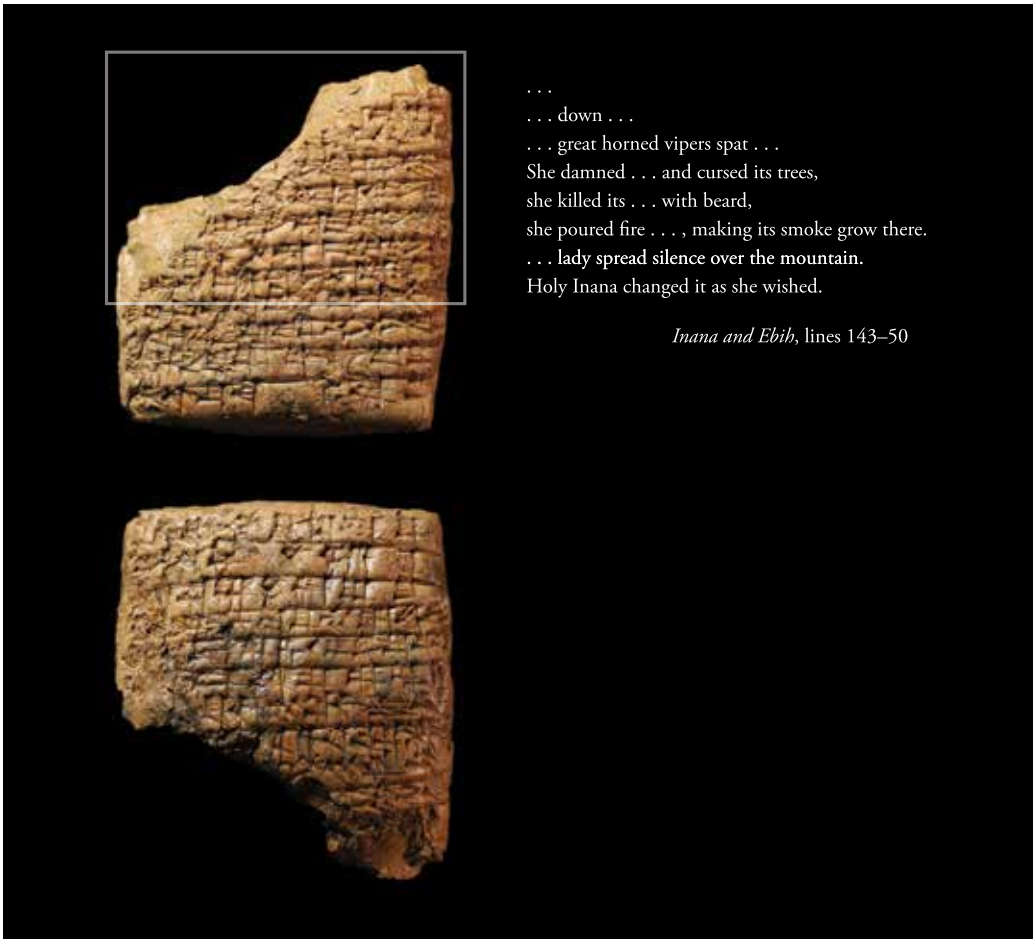
Sometimes we encounter an additional hurdle to textual reconstruction: students make mistakes! On **cat. no. 76**, the student skipped a cuneiform sign. Instead of writing the signs  ,  , and  , which form the word muššagtur, the student wrote only  and , read šagtur. This small mistake resulted in naming a completely different type of vermin. In the now new version of this story, "millipedes" (šagtur), instead of horned vipers (muššagtur), spit venom against the unfortunate mountain Ebih.

In school exercise tablets, the confusion of words and signs is not uncommon. Students had previously learned many of the words and signs used in literary compositions while copying lexical lists, but they sometimes confused the signs or their writing, resulting in comical versions of the text. For example, the word "drought" in the line "she killed its oaks with drought" is written with the sign  ENMEN$_2$—a compound sign formed by the simple signs  (ka) "mouth," which works as the frame of the compound, and  (a) "water," which is written inside . However, the student copying **cat. no. 76** wrote the sign (sa) "gut" instead of (a) "water," which combined with the sign means (sum) "beard." As a result, the line written by this student reads: "she killed its oaks with beard." The proximity of these two words in the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) may have caused the student to misremember the correct writing of the word "drought" (table 23.1). A modern editor of a literary text carefully compares all variants of the text to avoid repeating a student's mistake.

Table 23.1. Extract from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) showing the proximity in the list of the signs for "drought" and "beard." Created by MDH based on DCCLT.

313.	enmen$_2$	en-me-en	KA×A	"thirst, drought"
314.	naĝ	na-ĝa$_2$	KA×A	"to drink"
315.	kab$_2$	ka-ab	KA×A	"to test"
315a.	tukur$_2$	tu-ku-re	KA×ŠE	"to chew"
316.	ma$_5$	ma-a	KA×EŠ$_2$	"to chew"
317.	ma$_8$	ma-a	KA×SAR	"to crush, mangle"
318.	sub	su-ub	KA×GA	"to suck"
319.	sum$_4$	su$_2$-um	KA×SA	"beard"

Together, these tablets provide a good example of how the fragmentary state of manuscripts conditions our knowledge of and ability to reconstruct Mesopotamian literary compositions. When reconstructing ancient literature, scholars compare different versions of the text critically to determine as closely as possible the intended meaning of its lines. The task of the Sumerologist is thus not much different from doing a puzzle, where all the pieces—here the lines preserved on each tablet—must be fitted together to complete the whole picture. (MDH)



76. Tablet with an Excerpt of *Inana and Ebih* and a Scribal Mistake

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 71 mm, width 64 mm

ISACM A30257 (3NT-513)

Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Inana and Ebih*, lines 144–63.

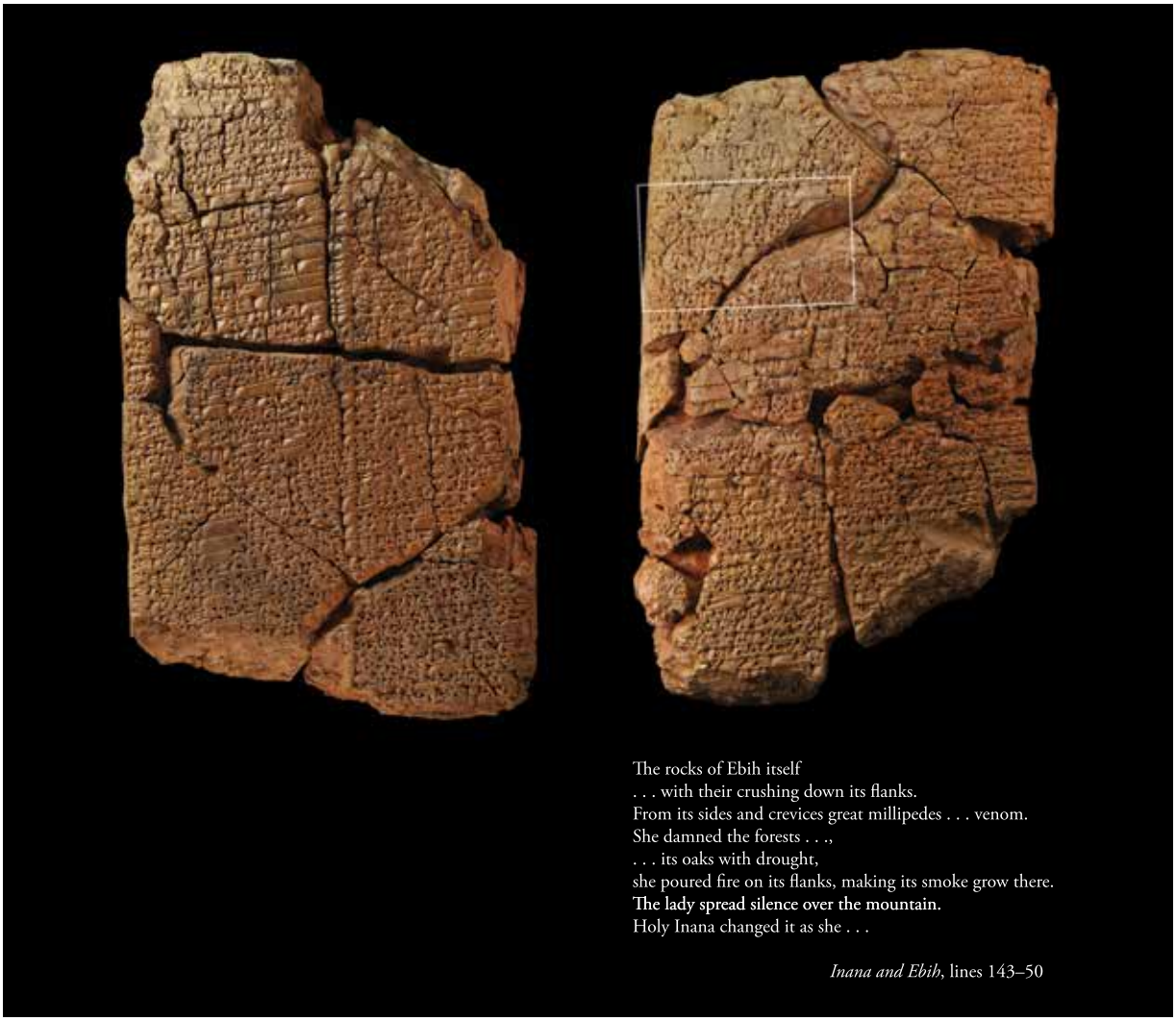
Literature:

Attinger 1998, 167, 176–80 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary, source ZZ)

Delnero 2006, 1580–82, 2294, 2346–54 (score transliteration, source N_{III33})

See also figure 11.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; translation, adapted from Black et al. 2004, 338, and annotations by MDH.



77. Tablet with the Story *Inana and Ebih*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 175 mm, width 113 mm, depth 27 mm

ISACM A30271 (3NT-577) + A30241 (3NT-440)

Tablet inscribed with the complete composition *Inana and Ebih*; preserved are lines 1–42, 52–128, and 136–81.

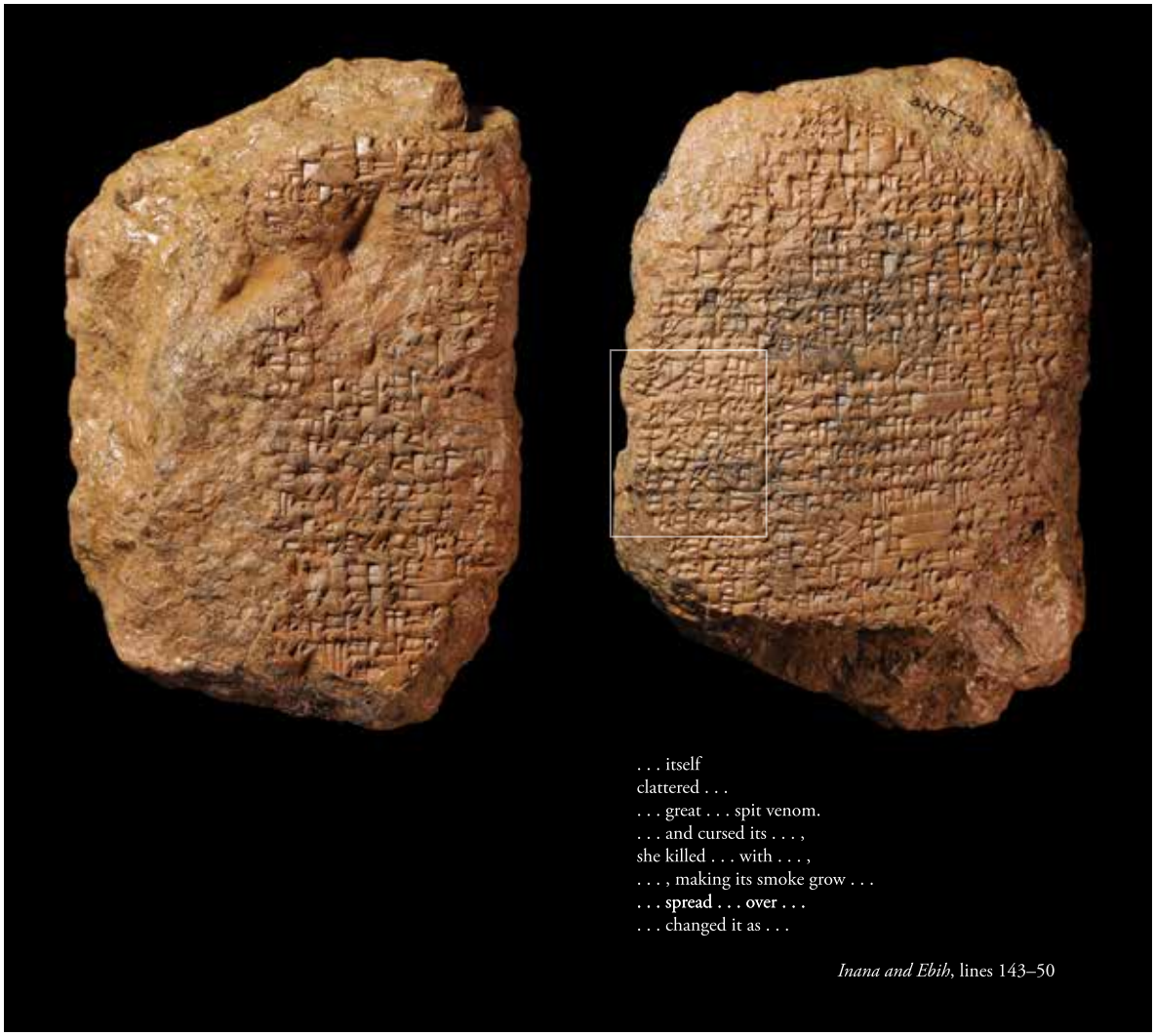
Literature:

Attinger 1998, 167–88 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary, source A)

Delnero 2006, 1540–43, 2291, 2298–358 (score transliteration, source N_{17})

See also figures 15.4, 21.7, and 21.10.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; translation, adapted from Black et al. 2004, 338, and annotations by MDH.



78. Tablet with the Story *Inana and Ebih*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 184, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 121 mm, width 88 mm

ISACM A30294 (3NT-728)

Two-column tablet inscribed with the complete composition *Inana and Ebih*; preserved are lines 51–71, 74–96, and 134–54.

Literature:

Attinger 1998, 167, 170–88 (composite transliteration, translation, and commentary, source Z)

Delnero 2006, 1543–45, 2291, 2314–50 (score transliteration, source N_{I8})

See also figure 15.5.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; translation, adapted from Black et al. 2004, 338, and annotations by MDH.

24 Topics of Education

Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Jana Matuszak, Madeline Ouimet, Susanne Paulus, Colton G. Siegmund, Barbora Wichterlová, and Ryan D. Winters

When I was small, I was at the Edubba'a,
where I learned the scribal art from the tablets of Sumer and Akkad.
(. . .)
The fair Nanibgal, Nisaba,
provided me amply with knowledge and comprehension.
I am an experienced scribe who does not neglect a thing.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 13–14 and 18–20 (translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.2)

King Šulgi praised himself as a stellar student of the Edubba'a and a master of scribal art. His praise poem provides an almost comprehensive overview of what scribal art and knowledge entailed, extending beyond what students learned in House F. It is challenging to divide the often-intertwined topics of education, whether along subject lines, such as mathematics, law, religion, history, and rhetoric, or based on skills acquired, such as calculation, contract writing, and argumentation. Many texts selected by the teachers fulfilled multiple purposes at the same time, such as teaching knowledge and skills and fostering character traits with the goal of forming students into experienced scribes who neglected nothing (SP).

What Did They Learn about Mathematics?

None of the nobles could write on clay as I could.
There, where people regularly went for tutelage in the scribal art,
I qualified fully in subtraction, addition, reckoning, and accounting.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 15–17 (translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.2)

Obverse of a tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B. **Cat no. 111**. Photo by DL.

A future administrator had to master the complex Mesopotamian system of metrology, with different units of measurement for weights, lengths, areas, and volumes. Students encountered this system as part of the lexical lists and needed to be able to apply it later when writing legal texts—for example, to describe the

measurements of real estate or in calculating food distributions when working for a large institution such as a palace or temple.

Teachers also covered basic arithmetic such as multiplication and division, which were memorized in the form of tables, while addition and subtraction, despite what the *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B would suggest, were not similarly covered. Having memorized many tables of multiplication and reciprocals used for division, students could attempt calculations such as the squares and reciprocals of other numbers. Overall, the mathematical knowledge taught in House F was rather basic; during the same period, we know that scribes outside House F solved more advanced abstract problems dealing with the manipulation of lines and areas and practical problems concerning labor management and land surveying (Robson 2009, 225). However, for some of the ancient students (and perhaps some modern readers), the calculations were difficult enough, as errors are common. (SP)

Weights and Metrology (cat. nos. 79–83)

Learning how to operate with metrological units constituted a fundamental part of mathematical education in House F and beyond. Metrology was arguably the most practical area of mathematics taught there, as evidenced, for example, by the presence of capacity and area measures related to barley loans and inheritance divisions in model contracts, composed in more advanced stages of education. Students were first introduced to weights and measures in thematic noun lists—that is, alongside concrete objects or metrological equipment—and only later as an abstract system. The earlier stage is represented by the obverse of **cat. no. 79**, where a student records a list of stone weights of two, one, two-thirds, half, and one-third of a shekel (about 8.3 grams), having mastered the beginning of the stone series on the reverse. Corresponding barrel-shaped weights made from hematite were found at Nippur. **Cat. no. 80** weighs approximately two-thirds of a shekel, **cat. no. 81** half a shekel, and **cat. no. 82** one-sixth of a shekel. Similarly, units of capacity were first presented as sizes of boats or wooden measuring vats rather than independently (Robson 2009). Only later, in the so-called *Metrological Series*, were units of capacity, weight, area, and length systematically presented in the forms of abstract lists and tables. The latter, represented by **cat. no. 83**, include alongside metrological units—here, of length and capacity—conversion into multiples of the most basic unit in sexagesimal (base-60) place notation, a notable feature of cuneiform mathematics. For example, the highlighted line reads "14 danna 7," meaning that 14 leagues (danna, about 10.8 kilometers) equals 7 ($\times 60^2$) rods (one rod equaling about 6 meters). Note that unlike our decimal place notation, which indicates absolute quantity by zeros (i.e., 700 as 7×10^2), this system is "floating"; that 7 pertains to the base 60^2 is determined entirely contextually. Metrological tables containing this conversion served as a bridge between simple metrological lists and multiplication and reciprocal tables, which operate purely with numbers in this notation (Proust 2019). (BW)

79. Tablet with a List of Stone Weights

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 187, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 63 mm, width 112

ISACM A30153 (3NT-128)

Tablet fragment inscribed with a teacher–student exercise comprising excerpts from the stone section of the *List of Stones, Plants, Fish, Birds, and Textiles*, part of the *Thematic List of Words* (Ura), entries 195–99 on the obverse and entries 1–5, 24–31, and 47–54 on the reverse.

Literature:

Landsberger and Reiner 1970, 53–61 (composite transliteration)

See also figures 11.1 and 13.1.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

80–82. Barrel Weights of Two-Thirds, Half, and One-Sixth of a Shekel

Hematite

Nippur, Area TA, House I, Room 178, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Length 29 mm, diameter 9 mm, weight 5.79 g (*left*)

Length 20 mm, diameter 9 mm, weight 4.38 g (*middle*)

Length 16 mm, diameter 5 mm, weight 1.6 g (*right*)

ISACM A29407 (3N-146), A29405 (3N-146), ISACM A29404 (3N-146)

Small, barrel-shaped (sphendonoid) weights made from hematite corresponding to two-thirds of a shekel (*left*), half a shekel (*middle*), and one-sixth of a shekel (*right*).

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 109, 173 (catalog entry)
Hafford 2005 (catalog, analysis, and discussion)

Photo by DL.

83. Tablet with Tables of Length and Capacity Measurements

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 180 mm, width 85 mm

ISACM A30211 (3NT-316)

Tablet fragment inscribed with a teacher–student exercise comprising an excerpt from the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri), section 10, entries 1–29, on the obverse, and metrological tables of length and capacity on the reverse.

Literature:

Robson 2002, 335–36; 2009, 207–9 (partial copy, transliteration, and discussion of the reverse)

Civil 2004, 34–37 (composite transliteration of the obverse, source L_1)

See also figure 13.3.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH based on Robson 2002, 335; 2009, 208.

Reciprocal and Multiplication Tables (cat. nos. 84–86)

From metrology, students moved on to the so-called *Numerical Series*, consisting of reciprocal and multiplication tables, where they further internalized operations with numbers in the floating sexagesimal place notation. Reciprocal and multiplication tables refer to many of the same sexagesimal numbers. The former present reciprocal pairs between the numbers 2 and 1 21 (i.e., $1 \times 60^1 + 21 \times 60^0$, or 81 in the decimal notation), and the latter multiply a set of numbers below 50 by the numbers 1–20, 30, 40, and 50. The two are also arithmetically linked; since a reciprocal of any number x is defined as $1/x$, multiplication by a reciprocal is how division is performed in cuneiform mathematics (Proust 2019). Both reciprocal and multiplication tables may be verbose, that is, include the Sumerian expressions for the two operations—igi-ĝalbi ("its reciprocal") and ara ("times"), respectively. In line 6 of the reciprocal table **cat. no. 84**, for example, we read "igi-6-ĝalbi 10." Since 6 × 10 equals 60, which is represented as 1 in the floating notation, the two numbers amount to a reciprocal pair. Note that what follows is the reciprocal of 8, not 7 as expected, because the reciprocal of 7 is not a "regular" number—that is, it cannot be represented with a finite number of digits in the sexagesimal place notation. The multiplication table **cat. no. 85** is likewise verbose, reading "ara 6 2 30" in line 6, meaning that the implied multiplicand 25, when multiplied by 6, equals 2 30 (i.e., 150). No Sumerian expression is found in the nonverbose **cat. no. 86**, so there line 6 reads simply "6 1 15," with the implied 12 30 (i.e., 12.5) × 6 equaling 1 15 (i.e., 75). In the following line, the student records 12 30 × 7 as 1 22 30 (i.e., 82.5) instead of the correct 1 27 30 (i.e., 87.5), an error likely caused by the 2 30 ending of the multiplicand added each line. (BW)

84. Tablet with Reciprocals

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 52 mm, width 48 mm

ISACM A30277 (3NT-609)

Tablet fragment inscribed with a table of reciprocals.

See also figure 13.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

85. Tablet with a Multiplication Table of the Number 25

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 73 mm, width 42 mm

ISACM A30281 (3NT-613)

Tablet inscribed with a multiplication table of the number 25.

See also figure 13.5.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

86. Tablet with a Multiplication Table of the Number 12 30

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 96 mm, width 55 mm

ISACM A30278 (3NT-610)

Tablet inscribed with a multiplication table of the number 12 30.

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM; annotations by MDH; transliteration by BW.

Calculations (cat. nos. 87-88)

The list and table formats of the tablets from the *Metrological Series* and *Numerical Series* allowed students to memorize, systematically, fundamental number facts, to which they referred in more advanced calculations. In one such advanced mathematical text, inscribed on the reverse of **cat. no. 87**, a student records the square of 16 40, arriving at 4 37 46 40, and subsequently verifies this result by calculating its square root (i.e., 16 40) using a factorization method and with reference to information given in multiplication and reciprocal tables (Proust 2007). But students were not immune to cheating. Here, for example, the student did not record one of the factors of 4 37 46 40 correctly as 41 40 but as 42 39. Still, the student arrived at 50, the square root of 41 40, knowing in advance the desired answer, 16 40, the factor of which is 50 (Friberg 2007).

Though **cat. no. 88** is not from House F but rather from another house in Area TB of the Scribal Quarter, it represents a common practice of finding reciprocals not given in standard reciprocal tables. On the reverse the student records the result—the reciprocal (igibi) of 17 46 40 is 3 22 30—and beneath the double ruling, part of the solution procedure known as the "Technique" (explicitly laid out elsewhere) is preserved (see chapter 13). First, a portion is "measured off" from 17 46 40 such that its reciprocal is known from standard tables—here, 6 40. Its reciprocal, 9, is used to multiply the remainder, 17 40, to which 1 is added, resulting in 2 40. The reciprocal of 2 40, known to be 22 30, is multiplied by 9, resulting in 3 22 30. Again, though, it was no smooth process, as evidenced by the unsuccessful attempt beneath the proverb on the obverse, resulting in 1 30 instead of 2 40 in the intermediate calculation, after which the student stops (Robson 2000). (BW)

87. Tablet with a Calculation of a Square and Square Root

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 62 mm, width 67 mm

ISACM A30279 (3NT-611)

Tablet inscribed with a square (4 37 46 40) and square root (16 40) calculation on the reverse, with meaningless wedges on the obverse.

Literature:

Robson 2002, 354–55 (transliteration, commentary, and hand copy)

Robson 2009, 222–23 (transliteration, commentary, and hand copy)

Friberg 2007, 39–40 (transliteration and commentary)

Proust 2007, 187–88 (transliteration and commentary)

See also figure 13.9.

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

88. Tablet with a Calculation of a Reciprocal

Clay

Nippur, Area TB, House B, Room 10, Level II Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Height 79 mm, width 73 mm

ISACM A29985 (2NT-500)

Tablet inscribed with a calculation of the reciprocal of 17 46 40 and *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 52.

Literature:

Gordon 1968, 171, 210, pl. 70 (composite transliteration of the reverse and photographs, source XXX)

Alster 1997, 42, 55 (transliteration, translation, and commentary of the reverse, source XXX)

Robson 2000, 20–21 (transliteration and commentary)

Robson 2002, 358–59 (discussion)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH; transliteration from Robson 2000, 20.

What Did They Learn about Law and Legal Matters?

When I provide justice in the legal cases of Sumer,
I give answers in all five languages.
In my palace, no one in conversation switches to
another language as quickly as I do.
When I pronounce a completed verdict, it is
heartily welcomed
since I am wise and exalted in kingship.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 218–24
(translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.2)

Kings like Šulgi were tasked by the gods to protect the law and establish justice in Babylonia. The king did so by issuing laws and serving as the highest legal authority. Laws and contracts are important tools to regularize and stabilize society. While many transactions in Babylonia did not result in a written document, the legal system itself was deeply connected with writing, and scribes were involved in all aspects. Consequently, students in the Edubba'a learned how to write everyday contracts, such as those for loans, which had practical applications. They also studied more complex legal matters, such as famous and memorable court cases, as examples for jurisdiction and legal argumentation. In House F, scribal students also copied the laws of King Lipit-Eštar. Beyond individual laws and case studies, royal and divine justice was a recurring topic in many compositions. (SP)

Learning Legal Conventions (cat. nos. 89–91)

One of the most practical topics covered in the scribal curriculum was how to write a contract recording a legal agreement between two parties. Writing such legal records, which are found in both institutional and private archives, would certainly have been how some graduates of the scribal school spent much of their careers as professional scribes. Model contracts introduced students to both the format and the content of these documents through examples from all aspects of transactional law, from loans of barley or silver to real estate and family law (Spada 2018, 3).

Cat. no. 89 contains a model contract a teacher wrote out for a student to copy (see translation in chapter 14, fig. 14.2). Like a real loan, it begins by stating the commodity being loaned, 3 gur (900 liters) of barley, then lists the parties—creditor and debtor—involved, the due date, and the penalty for nonpayment. On the other hand, its status as a hypothetical practice text is reflected in its vagueness about other particulars: the due date here is referred to simply as "the appointed time," and no witnesses or date are mentioned at the end, as they would be in a real contract.

One other aspect of the textual content reflects this loan's curricular context: the last line, which states a new amount of barley slightly greater than the loan of 3 gur, is a "catch line"—a scribal convention of writing the first line of the next text in a series at the end of the previous one to signal that tablet's place in the overall order. Thus, this loan text was probably learned as part of a series of barley loans of increasing quantity. Not only did much of the early scribal curriculum involve learning lists, but the organization of the scribal school overall reflects a general affinity toward lists, with many school texts forming progressive series.

Cat. no. 90, a fragment of a multicolumn tablet containing model barley loans, demonstrates in another format how practice documents were grouped sequentially. On the obverse, the visible horizontal line in the right-hand column demarcates where one contract stops; the contract above it ends with the customary (though optional) way model contracts allude to the record of witnesses and date at the end of a real contract: "Its witnesses. Its month, its year." The next contract picks up after the horizontal line, covering a loan of "12 gur (roughly 3,600 liters) of barley."

Cat. no. 91, a record of a silver loan found in a nearby house, is an example of what scribal students

aimed to produce one day. One noticeable difference is how small the real thing is! Otherwise, it shares the same overall structure as the school practice material but with some key differences—on the reverse, it lists the actual witnesses by name and, below a ruling, the date the contract was drawn up. Model contracts, even with their placeholders for real-life information and other educational conventions, nevertheless inducted students into legal conventions: in learning to write these documents, they also learned the legal and economic rules of their society. (JG)

89. Tablet with a Barley Loan as a Model Contract

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House G, Room 188, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 158 mm, width 68 mm

ISACM A30173 (3NT-163)

Fragment preserving the left-hand side of a teacher–student exercise tablet with a model contract of a barley loan on the obverse and an excerpt of the *Acrographic List* Izi, entries 46–63 and 68–91, on the reverse. The tablet was broken in antiquity to preserve just the teacher's portion.

Literature:

Civil 1971, 14, 18–20 (transliteration of the reverse, source D1)

Spada 2018, 8, 68–69 (discussion of the obverse, transliteration)

Crisostomo 2019b, 213, 233–40, 499 (transliteration and discussion of the reverse, source NII/2-26*)

Spada 2019a (transliteration and translation of the obverse)

See also figure 14.2.

Pictured (*left*) with **cat. no. 91** (*right*). Obverse and reverse of each shown to scale to highlight the difference in size between a model contract and a real contract. Photos by DL.

90. Multicolumn Tablet with Model Contracts

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 75 mm, width 60 mm

ISACM A30212A (3NT-318A)

Fragment of a multicolumn tablet containing a series of model contracts of barley loans.

Literature:
Spada 2019a (publication as 3NT-318 A+B)

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

91. Loan Contract

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House I, Room 185, Level X Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 44 mm, width 38 mm

ISACM A30158 (3NT-135)

Tablet recording a silver loan dated to year 30 of King Rim-Sin of Larsa.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Law in the Classroom (cat. no. 92)

In the Old Babylonian scribal schools, students would sometimes copy model court cases to learn difficult grammar, nuanced legal thinking, and document formatting. These model cases, however, were not dull compositions recounting routine courtroom settlements; rather, they tend to record lurid dramas involving complex legal matters wherein the potential penalties are high and the verdicts are not forgone conclusions. For example, **cat. no. 92** is a compilation tablet that records three model court cases: (1) the trial of a woman made accessory after the fact to her husband's murder (the *Nippur Murder Trial*), (2) a dispute over possession of prebends, and (3) a trial concerning the rape of a slave girl. All these cases involve complicated legal matters, and in the case of the *Nippur Murder Trial* the verdict sometimes changes, depending on which copy of the text is being read—on **cat. no. 92** the woman is declared guilty, but in another manuscript she is deemed innocent. The variable outcomes of the cases suggest that these compositions were not exclusively tools for teaching legal procedure and precedent; rather, their bawdy legal content and pliable conclusions seem primarily to have been means of keeping students' attention while they practiced different types of grammar and engaged in complex legal thinking. In fact, the melodramatic nature of the crimes and the cases' high stakes have caused some scholars to interpret these compositions as types of literary texts (i.e., going beyond pure formulaic document models). No matter what one calls them, these texts had clear pedagogical motivations, and one can imagine the Old Babylonian scribal student's interest in these narratives and the debauched characters therein. As Martha Roth has remarked, these model court cases were adept vehicles for educational lessons because "that which is unusual is interesting, and makes excellent teaching material" (Roth 1983, 279). (CGS)

92. Tablet with Three Court Cases, Including the *Nippur Murder Trial*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 135 mm, width 105 mm, depth 17 mm

ISACM A30240 (3NT-426) + UM 44-21-436 (3NT-273, 3NT-340, 3NT-403)

Compilation tablet inscribed with a collection of model court cases, including the *Nippur Murder Trial* on the obverse, and a dispute over the possession of prebends and a trial for the rape of a female slave on the reverse.

Literature:
Roth 1998 (discussion)
Lafont 1999, 495–97 (transliteration and translation of the *Nippur Murder Trial* and rape case)
Milstein 2021, 20–52 (discussion, photo of the obverse)

See also page 132 and figure 14.5.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

What Did They Learn about Morals and Ideals?

I weigh my words against those of the braggart.
I am a man of the very highest standards of value.
The importance of the humble is of particular value to me,
and they cannot be counterproductive to any of my activities.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 237–40
(translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.2)

Whether King Šulgi was a braggart or humble may be in the eye of the beholder. Forming desirable character traits was part of students' education in the Edubba'a and was emphasized alongside knowledge and skills. Babylonian teachers used instruction to convey morals and values from a variety of sources while also enforcing good behavior in class, often by punishing any deviation. Modern scholars label as "wisdom literature" texts that focus on morals and ideals. Typically in these texts, a wise elder or respected person, such as a king, gives advice to his son or successor. Important mores included honoring parents, choosing a respectable wife, being a good citizen, and respecting the gods. The values taught in the Edubba'a reflected a man's world in line with Babylonian patriarchal society. However, some texts convey how the scribes constructed their female counterpart, the ideal woman, as a proper housewife and mother. (SP)

Wisdom and Morals (cat. nos. 93–95)

What made wisdom literature such a widespread and enduring genre in the ancient world also explains its modern appeal: universal relevance. These texts recorded the moralizing advice of a wise sage who lived in distant times concerning proper personal and social behavior, topics applicable to any cultural context. Known from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, the genre influenced Western civilization through its inclusion in the Bible, such as in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, attributed to King Solomon.

The Sumerian *Instructions of Šuruppak* are the oldest known example of wisdom literature and the cuneiform text with the longest transmission history. Known already in archaic copies from the mid-third millennium BCE, the classical version, **cat. nos. 93** and **94**, was copied by scribes of the Old Babylonian Edubba'a as part of their initiation into cuneiform literary lore. It continued to be transmitted even later, after most Sumerian literature had died out, and was translated into Akkadian and even into a Syro-Anatolian language called Hurrian.

Like Solomon, Šuruppak was believed by the scribes to have been a king, the last one to reign before the Flood swept over the earth. The themes treated are timeless: we find the earliest recorded examples of self-evident moral precepts such as "thou shalt not kill" and "thou shalt not steal." Although the *Instructions* purportedly preserved wisdom from a primordial era, most of Šuruppak's advice is quite down-to-earth. Rather than appealing to a universal or divine moral authority, most of his precepts focus on the practical negative effects of bad behavior. Only occasionally advising what one *should* do, the text mostly centers on what one *should not* do, with the inevitable consequences serving as a deterrent.

Similar in this respect is the *Letter from Lugal-nesaĝe to Enlil-massu* (*Letter from a Disappointed Father to His Son*), **cat. no. 95**. In addition to containing high literary language conducive to education, it provides a negative example of what would happen if the important precept "honor thy father and mother" were violated. The first half consists of an ironic, overly flowery greeting formula: "Say to the son who serves his god, who respects his father and mother . . . epitome of the scribal art . . . who always pleases the heart of the king." This language contrasts sharply with the father's heartbreaking, shame-inducing complaints in the second half: "When you abandoned me, my heart sank, I lost the taste for food and drink . . .

your arrogance shattered me, your insult finished me off" (Kleinerman 2011, 167–70).

Such texts reveal the Mesopotamian conception of an ideal society, composed of familial households headed by a strong father, with well-ordered hierarchical relations among its members, and enjoying good social and economic relations with other households (Sallaberger 2018). The young scribes not only gleaned practical life lessons in copying these texts but also became part of a chain of knowledge transmission that, for them, extended into the deepest recesses of time. (RDW)

93. Tablet with the *Instructions of Šuruppak*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 184, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 106 mm, width 68 mm

ISACM A30293 (3NT-722)

Tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Instructions of Šuruppak*, lines 130–46, 149–50, and 153.

Literature:

Alster 1974, 26–68, pls. 13–14 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, and hand copy, source T 6)

Alster 2005, 50, 56–175 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, and hand copy, source T_6)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

94. Tablet with the *Instructions of Šuruppak*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 55 mm, width 64 mm

ISACM A30246 (3NT-460)

Fragment of a tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Instructions of Šuruppak*, lines 163–79.

Literature:

Alster 1974, 26–116, pls. 13–14 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, and hand copy, source T 10)

Alster 2005, 50, 56–175 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, and hand copy, source T_{10})

See also figure 20.2.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

95. Tablet with a Letter from a Disappointed Father to His Son

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 72 mm, width 50 mm

ISACM A30263 (3NT-530)

Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Letter from Lugal-nesaĝe to Enlil-massu* (*Letter from a Disappointed Father to His Son*), lines 1–7 and 13–20.

Literature:

Ali 1964, 130–36, pl. 46 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and hand copy, source C)

Kleinerman 2011, 167–70, 283–89 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and commentary, source N16)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Insult and Its Inverse: Defining the Ideal Woman (cat. nos. 96–99)

Edubba'a-goers not only sought to embody their own aspired-to roles as scribes but also used their literate skills to negotiate ideal roles of other social agents, including women. Ideas about what made an "ideal woman" and cultural expectations for her proper versus deviant behavior were integrated into the scribal curriculum itself.

For example, the literary debate *Two Women* B was employed in the Edubba'a for scribal practice as well as socialization and moralization, a textual interface with the world beyond the walls of House F. As its modern title conveys, the text is a heated dispute between two women who toss both crass insults and witty turns-of-phrase in Emesal, a dialect of Sumerian often associated with female speakers (the reason some scholars call Emesal a "genderlect"). The speakers enumerate socially recognized transgressions that could be performed by a woman, ranging from gluttonous eating and unkempt dressing to mismanagement of the household as an economic institution and criminally punishable libel. Tablet fragments **cat. no. 96** (see chapter 20) and **cat. no. 97** (quoted below) offer a small sample of what is known from other manuscripts to be a long and unruly match sprawled over 230 lines:

> "Spoiling the debate with excessive words!
> Haughty woman with worthless lips, arrogant, constantly instigating quarrel!
> Squaller, croaker, lacking wit!
> Evil in her house, she is not fit for the women's quarters.
> Prowling around is her lot.
> Only eating and sleeping, seeking forbidden things, scratching her butt!
> How much longer do you want to fight with me?"
>
> *Two Women* B, lines 131–37
> (translation after Matuszak 2021a, 2021b)

Much like in the *Instructions of Šuruppak*, good behavior is defined by its opposite, with each accusation representing the inverse of acceptable female behavior; a good Mesopotamian woman is expected to be diligent but not in menial physical labor, a discerning manager of household finances, caretaker of the family, expert in textile production, and sexually loyal and satisfying to her husband. Fertility is at the heart of the two women's jealousy and pride in this text, and thus to be fertile and bear many children seems a central feature of ideal womanhood (Matuszak 2021a, 139–47). A woman's appearance also falls within the realm of insult and propriety, with comments on one another's beauty and shapeliness of body finding parallels in the world of clay figural plaques, which by the Old Babylonian period conform to a particularly standardized portrayal of a—possibly ideal—woman in the nude (**cat. no. 98**).

The didactic mechanism of the text, the *ex negativo* structure, is not unique to *Two Women* B but appears as well in disputation texts between scribes, similarly delineating the etiquette and accomplishments requisite to earn one's status as a "true scribe" (Matuszak 2016, 228–53). Indeed, in *Two Women* B, the combatants continually retort, "And you, you belong to womankind?" indicating that their statements are not merely creative insults or grammatical practice but categorical thresholds between proper female identity and effective lack of personhood.

Cat. no. 99, an excerpt from *Proverb Collection* 1, further nuances this literary portrayal of women, emphasizing the interactions of men and children with their wives and mothers and the social—auspicious or taboo—consequences of their relationships:

> In marrying a thriftless wife, in begetting a thriftless son, an unhappy heart was assigned to me.

He who does not support a wife, he who does not support a child, is not raised to prosperity.
A thriftless wife living in a house is worse than all diseases.

Proverb Collection 1, nos. 151, 153, and 154 (translation from Alster 1997)

Becoming an ideal scribe thus involved also learning what constitutes an ideal woman, an ideal son, an ideal man—an ideal social constellation—in order to fully grasp the role and status of the scribe in relation to this diverse landscape of lives and livelihoods, normalcy and alterity, moral propriety and transgression. (MO)

96. Tablet with a Dispute between Two Women

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House J, Room 209, Level XII Floor 2

Old Babylonian (Isin-Larsa)

Length 66 mm, width 37 mm

ISACM A30300 (3NT-854)

Tablet fragment inscribed in Sumerian with an excerpt from the literary composition *Two Women* B, lines 47(?)–55 and 62–70.

Literature:

Matuszak 2021a, 229–375, pls. 452, 488 (transliteration matrix, composite transliteration, translation, commentary, hand copy, and photograph, source N_{16})

See also figures 20.3 and 20.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

97. Tablet with a Dispute between Two Women

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 95 mm, width 100 mm

ISACM A30208 (3NT-307)

Tablet fragment inscribed in Sumerian with an excerpt from the literary composition *Two Women* B, lines 127–43, 159–99, and 215–30.

Literature:

Matuszak 2021a, 229–375, pls. 461, 489 (transliteration matrix, composite transliteration, translation, commentary, hand copy, and photograph, source N_{29})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

98. Plaque with a Nude Female Figure

Baked clay

Nippur, Area TA, House I, Room 185, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 110 mm, width 52 mm, depth 22 mm

ISACM A29444 (3N-291)

Clay plaque with a nude human female figure with clasped hands; feet missing.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 174, pl. 127:10 (catalog entry and photograph)

Photo by DL.

99. Tablet with Proverbs about Women

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House H, Room 180, Level X Floor 4

Old Babylonian

Length 76 mm, width 35 mm

ISACM A30298 (3NT-812)

Tablet fragment inscribed with Sumerian proverbs from *Proverb Collection* 1, nos. 151–57 and 174–80.

Literature:

Alster 1997, 4, 31–32, 35–36 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, and photographs, source OO)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

What Did They Learn about Religion?

> I also know how to serve the gods,
> and I can cool the hearts of the Anuna gods.
>
> *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B, lines 244–45
> (translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.2)

The king, and every Babylonian, had to serve the gods—the purpose of humankind was to care for the gods and goddesses through building temples as their residences and providing regular offerings. Religion permeated most aspects of life in Babylonia. People communicated with the gods through hymns, laments, and prayers, while the gods revealed themselves through signs (omens). Creating votives, objects often inscribed to specify their purpose, was another way of interacting with the gods. The pantheon had a long tradition and was complex in its organization. The gods were usually thought to have families, with spouses, children, and other related deities belonging to their household. Myths, or stories in which deities were the main protagonists, provided context about their roles, domains, actions, and relationships. Other types of texts are more representative of individual relationships between humans and the gods by covering, for example, anecdotal encounters between a scribe and a god or appeals by the sick to the goddess of healing. (SP)

Enlil's Complex Personal Life (cat. nos. 100–102)

Cat. nos. 100–102 reflect a range of traditions at Nippur about the city's chief god, Enlil, and demonstrate how different, even contradictory, beliefs about the gods and their relationships could coexist.

In creating **cat. no. 100**, a small cone inscribed with the divine name "Endu," the student who made it engaged with multiple Babylonian ways of relating to the past. The object's shape, which is unusual in a school context, evokes the conical inscriptions buried as foundation deposits or inserted into walls during the building and rebuilding of temples, while the god Endu is one of Enlil's distant ancestors later known from the god-list tradition. These lists, which grouped deities by their connections to the major gods of the pantheon, were one way ancient Babylonians recorded their knowledge about the gods, their many alternative names and epithets, and their relationships. Yet intriguingly, Endu is not attested in any of these lists until several centuries after this cone was made, so precisely why he appeared on this object in this context remains a bit mysterious.

Another way beliefs about the gods were worked out and transmitted was through myths. **Cat. nos. 101** and **102**, for instance, tell quite different stories about how Enlil got together with his wife, Ninlil. The story on **cat. no. 101**, *Enlil and Sud*, provides a narrative explanation of how the goddess Sud—originally associated with the city of Šuruppak and in this story the daughter of Nisaba, the goddess of writing, from the city Ereš—came to be associated with Ninlil. When the story opens, "the name of Ninlil did not appear in the Ki'ur [part of the sanctuary of Enlil in Nippur]" (*Enlil and Sud*, line 10), but upon his marriage Enlil declares to Sud's mother, "Your daughter's name shall be Ninlil . . ." (*Enlil and Sud*, line 35). Enlil and Sud meet in a sexually charged encounter in the street, which is followed by a standard-seeming Babylonian marriage contract between the two divine families, though on a suitably opulent scale.

The gifts Enlil sends Sud, preserved on **cat. no. 101**, provided the students with an opportunity to practice their extensive Sumerian vocabulary, from "wild bulls, stags, elephants, wild goats, gazelles, bears," etc. to "dates from Dilmun piled in baskets, clusters of shining dates / Great pomegranate seeds scooped from their rinds, great bunches of early grapes . . ." (*Enlil and Sud*, lines 107 and 120–21).

In *Enlil and Ninlil*, the two gods also first notice each other in public, but their later relationship is decidedly less decorous and socially sanctioned. **Cat. no. 102**, a beautiful extract tablet, contains the myth's beginning, which roots its story of lofty gods in the familiar geography of its audience's everyday world (Black et al. 2004, 102):

> There was a city, there was a city: the city where we live.
> The city was Nippur, the city where we live.
>
> *Enlil and Ninlil*, lines 1–2

The characters are introduced in similarly simple, recognizable terms:

> Enlil was its young man,
> Ninlil was its young woman,
> Nunbaršegunu was its wise woman.
>
> *Enlil and Ninlil*, lines 10–12

Each divine character goes on to conform to these types—though Nunbaršegunu sensibly counsels her daughter, Ninlil, to avoid walking where Enlil might see her, Ninlil ignores this advice. Enlil admires Ninlil's beauty and pursues her, and though she rejects his advances, they have sex. Enlil faces social consequences; while "he was walking in the Ki'ur" (*Enlil and Ninlil*, line 54), he is seized by other gods and told, "Enlil, ritually impure, go out of the city!" (*Enlil and Ninlil*, line 59). A series of ambiguous sexual encounters between Enlil and Ninlil ensue, resulting in the births of several divine offspring, as Enlil travels farther from the city and ever closer to the netherworld, with Ninlil following him. What exactly the story is suggesting in narrating these sexual encounters is uncertain, but both myths portray their divine protagonists as almost-human, imperfect figures engaging in familiar forms of social connection or driven by strong and transgressive desires. (JG)

100. Cone with the Name of the God Endu

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 50 mm, diameter 30 mm

ISACM A30194 (3NT-283)

Clay cone inscribed with the divine name "Endu."

Literature:
McCown and Haines 1967, 116 (catalog entry)

Pictured (*left*) with a typical conical inscription from this period, ISACM A26393 (*right*), shown to scale. Photos by DL.

101. Tablet with the Myth about Enlil and Sud

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 134 mm, width 102 mm

ISACM A30229 (3NT-385)

Fragment of a multicolumn tablet containing the myth *Enlil and Sud*, lines 87–109, 116–33, 135–50, 154–55, and 159–64(?).

Literature:

Reiner and Civil 1967, 201 (description, source C)

Civil 1983, 48, 50–64 (score transliteration, translation, and commentary, source L)

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM.

102. Tablet with the Myth about Enlil and Ninlil

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 150 mm, width 70 mm

ISACM A30202 (3NT-294)

Single-column extract tablet containing the beginning of the myth *Enlil and Ninlil*, lines 1–57 and 59–64.

Literature:

Behrens 1978, 8, 14–30, 55–160, 213–15, 220–23, pls. III–IV (score transliteration, commentary, composite transliteration, and hand copies, source B)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Enlil and Namzidtara: Be a Good Scribe and No God Will Fool You! (cat. no. 103)

Cat. no. 103 is one of only two tablets ever excavated that contain a collection of texts scholars call the *Lisina Group* (Civil 1974–77; Cooper 2017). This group includes the *Lament of Lisin* A (see chapter 18), an unidentified short letter or Edubba'a text, a version of *Nothing Is Precious* D, the folktale *Enlil and Namzidtara*, and a short composition, very badly preserved, whose contents escape us (fig. 24.1).

The link between these compositions seems to be their approach to human existence. The three texts that scholars have been able to reconstruct so far—the *Lament of Lisin* A, *Nothing Is Precious* D, and *Enlil and Namzidtara*—all reflect, in one way or another, on the futility of mortal life and the triviality of material things (Alster 2005, 266; Viano 2016, 363).

Enlil and Namzidtara is a short fable about trickery. In this story, Namzidtara is a low-level scribe working for the priests of the Ekurigigal temple in Nippur. One day, while Namzidtara is walking home after work, the god Enlil appears to him, but the scribe does not recognize the god and hence fails to pay him homage. Yet Enlil visits Namzidtara again, this time disguised as a raven. In this second encounter, Namzidtara is not fooled by the god and recognizes Enlil. This feat earns a prebend at the temple for him and his successors—indeed a desirable promotion for a scribe and a more perdurable fate than any other material reward (Lämmerhirt 2020, 404).

Now, the gist of the tale lies in the way Namzidtara recognizes Enlil. The clue to the true identity of the god is concealed in the myths surrounding the genealogy of Enlil himself. Indeed, Namzidtara distinguishes the word "raven" hidden in the words pronounced by Enlil in a narrative involving him and his most celebrated ancestor,

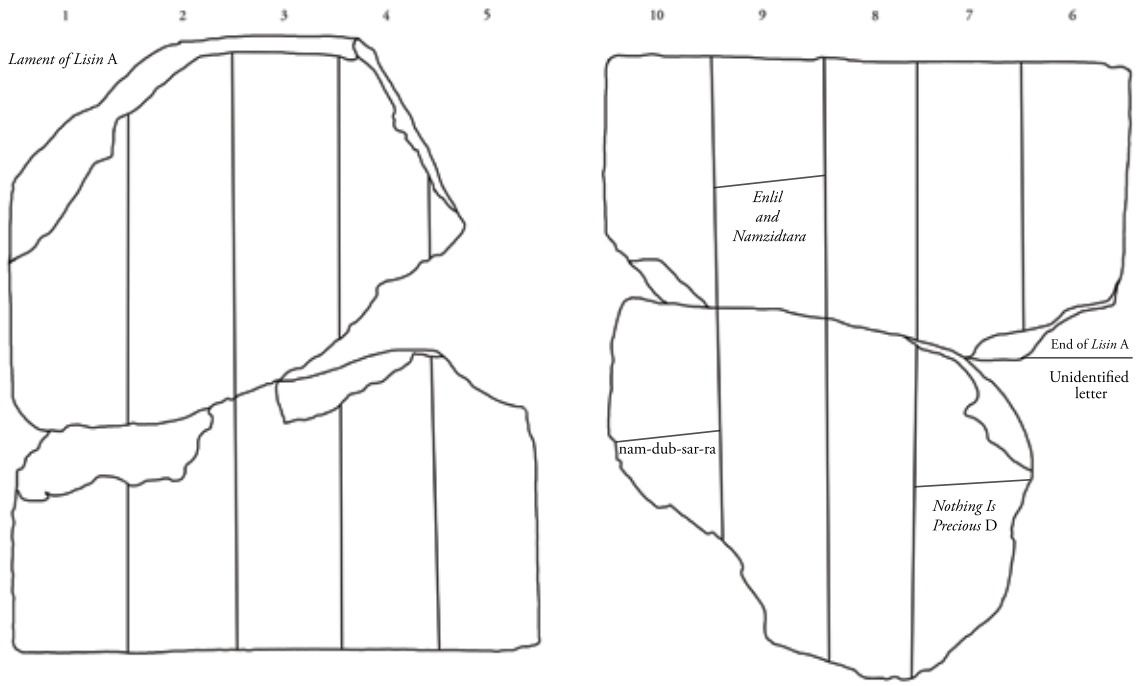


Figure 24.1. Schematic drawing of the obverse and reverse of **cat. no. 103** showing the layout of the compositions in the *Lisina Group* as they appear on the tablet. Drawing by MDH.

Enmešara (Civil 1974–77, 66–67). The moral is clear—because Namzidtara was a good student and remembers his school lessons, he is able to recognize Enlil in the raven:

> Enlil had returned as a raven
> (and) he was cawing (at Namzidtara),
> [Namzidtara:] "You are not a raven, you are Enlil!
> Decree my fate!" [Enlil:] "Indeed, I am Enlil! How did you know?"
> [Namzidtara:] "(Because) when Enmešara, your father's brother, was captive,
> you carried off the Enlilship and said: "As of this day, I want to know the fates!"
>
> *Enlil and Namzidtara*, lines 13–18
> (translation after Civil 1974–77, 69;
> Cooper 2017, 39–40; and Lämmerhirt 2020, 396–97)

This seemingly simple tale is thus saturated with mythological references and moral ingredients, all spiced up with a nibble of scribal wit, illustrating once again the ability of Old Babylonian teachers to impart wisdom in a fun way (Alster 2005, 327; Lämmerhirt 2020, 404). (MDH)

103. Tablet with a Compilation of Texts Including the Short Story *Enlil and Namzidtara*

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 90 mm, width 158 mm (A30218)

ISACM A30218 (3NT-360) + C2996 (3NT-326)

C2996 cast of IM 58427 in the Iraq Museum (Baghdad)

Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the complete *Lisina Group*: the *Lament of Lisin* A, a short letter or Edubba'a text(?), *Nothing Is Precious* D, *Enlil and Namzidtara*, and a short, very poorly preserved composition (beginning nam-dub-sar-ra).

Literature:

Civil 1974–77, 65–71 *(Enlil and Namzidtara*, composite transliteration with variants, translation, and commentary, source A)

Alster 2005, 275–79, pls. 37–38 (*Nothing Is Precious* D, transliteration, translation, commentary, and photographs)

Cooper 2017, 38–40, 46–52 (*Enlil and Namzidtara*, composite transliteration, matrix, and translation)

Lämmerhirt 2020, 384–88, 394–401 (*Enlil and Namzidtara*, transliteration, matrix, translation, and commentary, source A_{1+2})

See also figure 18.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; virtual join by MDH.

Personal Invocations of the Gods (cat. nos. 104-6)

If stories about Enlil reflect a belief in the gods' presence in Nippur, texts directly invoking the gods demonstrate how important these beliefs were for coping in moments of crisis. **Cat. nos. 104** and **105** are written in the voices of people who relied on a god's help—they tell the stories of individuals' personal relationships with Nintinuga, a goddess of healing associated with the cult of Enlil and Ninlil at Nippur. These texts come from a larger series in the Nippur scribal curriculum that modern scholars call the *Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany*, a collection of texts, most of them literary letters, whose writers are historical figures from Nippur (Kleinerman 2011; see also **cat. nos. 95**, **112–13**).

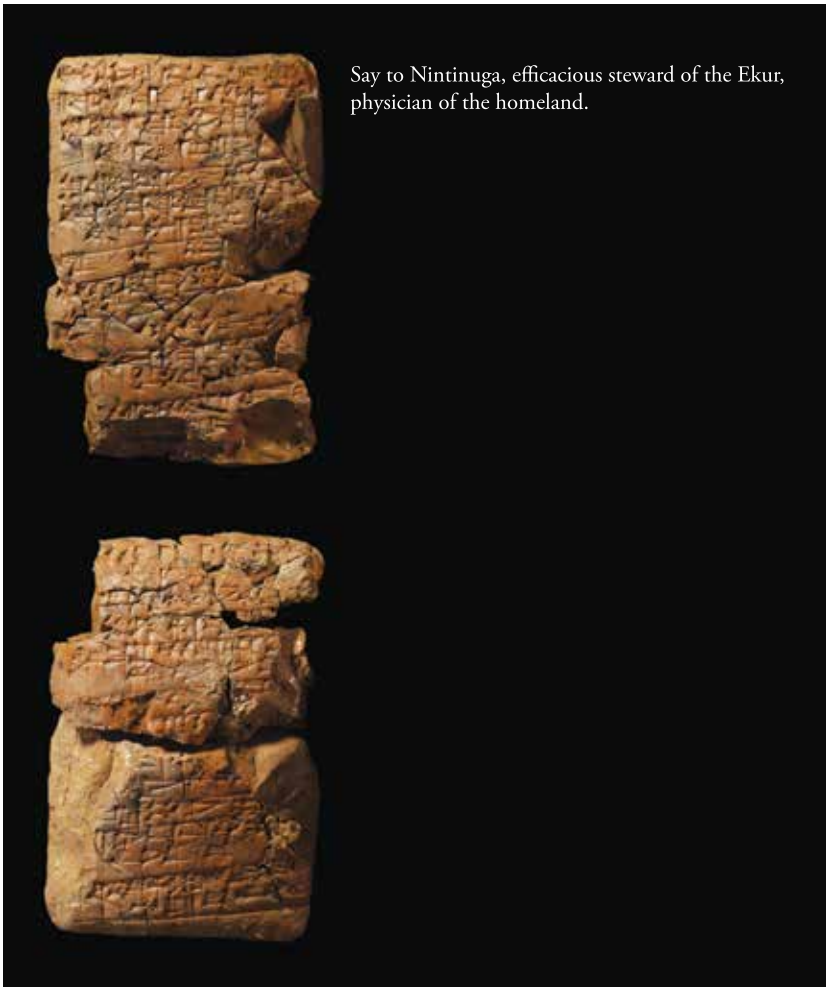
Cat. no. 104 is a prayer written in the form of a letter, with the goddess Nintinuga as its addressee. It was written by Inanaka, the only female sender in this group of letters. Inanaka writes to Nintinuga, praising her as "the compassionate lady who makes people live, who loves prayer, who lifts hearts" (lines 5–6); the letter goes on to explain Inanaka's condition: "Thrown into bed for the second time, I wandered weeping and did not know its [i.e., her illness's] path" (lines 12–13). Inanaka's letter is infused with emotional intensity and a sense of isolation. Her dependence on the goddess for her well-being is clear, as is her willingness to devote herself to the goddess in return for the restoration of her health:

> May she set my feet on the earth of life.
> And let me be her servant.
> Let me be the courtyard sweeper of her house, and
> I will stand before her.
> And when I am well, I will give my lady the name
> "the one who makes whole the injured."
>
> *Letter from Inanaka to the Goddess Nintinuga*, lines 21–25

Cat. no. 105 contains the next text in the curricular series, *Dedication of a Dog to Nintinuga*, which reflects the human–divine relationship at the happy end of the story. The text presents itself as a votive inscription, written on a dog figurine dedicated to Nintinuga in recognition that the writer, Lugal-nesaĝe, is now well, thanks to her intercession. "Lugal-nesaĝe, son of Zuzu, teacher of Nippur, fashioned Tuni-lusag, his canine emissary, for Nintinuga. To this end, the dog wags its tail at its mistress and barks at her" (lines 1–3; translation adapted from Kleinerman 2011, 174). The dog's name, which means "her spell heals a person," is apt given his purpose, and his "barking" consists of praise particularly suited to a healing goddess, celebrating Nintinuga for being "the one who examines the bones, sorting the sinews of life (and) the sinews of death, the one who makes bandages beautiful" (lines 6–7; translation Kleinerman 2011, 174).

Dogs were especially associated with Babylonian healing goddesses, most notably Gula in Isin but Nintinuga as well; dog-shaped votive offerings in the form of figurines like **cat. no. 106** were placed in temples across millennia in Babylonia (Kleinerman 2011, 175). So while it is possible that this particular votive inscription was created in the educational context purely to be a curricular exercise, it reflects a wider religious practice (Kleinerman 2011, 37–40).

Although the extent to which this dog figurine resembles Tuni-lusag precisely is perhaps open to debate, it was created with care, and the person who fashioned it gave it charmingly precise details, from the incised lines around its throat that create a thick, multiringed collar to the carving out of facial features, such as the eyes, mouth, ears, and even dotted nostrils. Whether the figurine served in play or household devotion, the person who formed it may have been thinking of dogs' associations with Nintinuga in the general religious thought of Nippur. (JG and MO)



104. Tablet with a Letter by a Woman to the Goddess Nintinuga

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1 and Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 102 mm, width 65 mm

ISACM A30237 (3NT-418) + A30221 (3NT-369)

Tablet containing the Sumerian literary composition *Letter from Inanaka to the Goddess Nintinuga*.

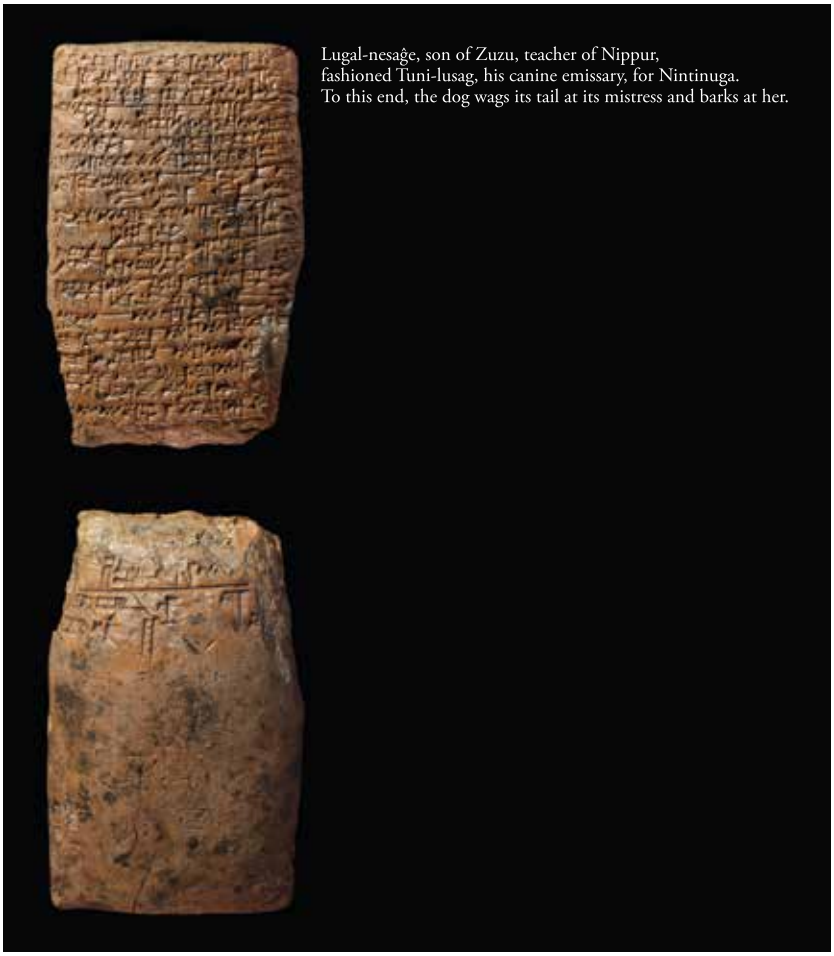
Literature:

Ali 1964, 137–43, pl. li (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, and hand copy, sources D and E)

Römer 2003, 237, 240–49 (score transliteration, translation, and commentary, sources D and E)

Kleinerman 2011, 171–73, 290–98 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, and matrix, source N8)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH; translation from Kleinerman 2011, 171.



105. Tablet with a Dedication of a Dog to the Goddess Nintinuga

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 100 mm, width 64 mm

ISACM A30201 (3NT-292)

Tablet containing the Sumerian votive inscription *Dedication of a Dog to Nintinuga*. The tablet also contains a catch line for the next text in the series, *Letter from Inim-Inana to Enlil-massu*.

Literature:

Ali 1964, 144–48, pl. xxxii (composite transliteration, translation, and hand copy, source A).

Ali 1966, 289–93 (composite transliteration and translation, source A)

Kleinerman 2011, 174–77, 299–304 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, and matrix, source N5)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL; annotations by MDH; translation adapted from Kleinerman 2011, 174.

106. Dog Figurine

Clay

Nippur, Area SB, Locus 75, fill below Level II Floor 3

Ur III or Isin-Larsa

Length 53 mm, width 30 mm, depth 24 mm

ISACM A30997 (6N-221)

Small, unbaked-clay figurine of a dog wearing a wide collar; the front legs and rear half of the body are broken.

Photo by DL.

What Did They Learn about History?

Since the time that humankind was, from heaven above, set on its path:
I am no fool as regards the knowledge acquired
when I have discovered tigi and zamzam hymns from past days, old ones from ancient times,
I have never declared them to be false, and have never contradicted their contents.
I have conserved these antiquities, never abandoning them to oblivion.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 270–75
(translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.2)

The history of the land of Iraq extends several millennia into the past. Šulgi brags that he protected knowledge reaching as far back as the creation of humankind. While no records from those times survived, students living in Nippur during the Old Babylonian period could discover written documents dating back a thousand years or more. Kings aimed to preserve their own narratives in the form of inscriptions and hymns praising their military successes, piety, and building of monuments, such as temples and palaces. Though also unattested in House F, we know that students in Nippur went on excursions to read inscriptions of ancient kings. Some texts written about historic events found their way into the curriculum. Other stories preserved tragic events, such as the downfall of kingdoms and the destruction of cities. Individual fates were rarely remembered, the exception being the letters of some (fictional?) people conveying private misfortunes and hopes. Students certainly gained an understanding of the fate of Babylonia and recurring events from the past, such as the conquest and destruction of its cities, that may have helped them contextualize their own experiences during troubled times in Nippur. (SP)

Nippur and the Great Kings of the Past (cat. nos. 107–8)

While copying Sumerian literature, the students at House F also learned the history of their city, Nippur, and its relationship with the kings of the past. **Cat. nos. 107** and **108** contain two literary compositions connected with Nippur and its tutelary god Enlil: the *Curse of Agade* (Akkad; **cat. no. 107**) and the *Lament for Nippur* (**cat. no. 108**).

The *Curse of Agade* was one of the most popular texts in Babylonia (Cooper 1983, 7–8). The poem narrates the destruction of Akkad and the demise of the Sargonic dynasty (2292–2173 BCE), almost four centuries before the Old Babylonian period, resulting from the destruction of Enlil's temple in Nippur, the Ekur, by Naram-Sin, fourth king of the Sargonic dynasty. According to this poetic account of the historical events, such a sacrilegious deed was answered with a terrible curse by all the gods of the land, who condemned Akkad to be turned into dust and never recover:

Again, Suen, Enki, Inana, Ninurta, Iškur, Utu, Nuska, and Nisaba, all the gods whosoever, turned their attention to the city,
and cursed Akkad severely:
"City, you pounced on Ekur: it is as if you had pounced on Enlil!
Akkad, you pounced on Ekur: it is as if you had pounced on Enlil!
May your holy walls, to their highest point, resound with mourning!
May your high sacred terrace be reduced to a pile of dust!
May your pilasters with the standing protective-deities
fall to the ground like tall young men drunk on wine!"

Curse of Agade, lines 222–30
(translation after Black et al. 2004, 123)

Although fictional (historians now know that the fall of Akkad happened some sixty years after Naram-Sin's reign), this story took students back to the third millennium BCE, to the time of the great kings Sargon and Naram-Sin and their capital in the north, Akkad. These kings were not unknown to Old Babylonian students. In fact, the kings' original inscriptions, still standing in the Ekur centuries after the Sargonic period, were dutifully copied by the Nippurean scribes, who had privileged access to the great exploits of long-gone kings (Michalowski 2020, 695–96).

The destruction of Nippur appears again in the *Lament for Nippur*. This composition, which falls into the group of texts scholars call "city laments," bemoans the destruction of Nippur and its main temple, the Ekur. As in the *Curse of Agade*, the city's devastation results from Enlil's withdrawal of favor. In contrast, on this occasion Nippur's inhabitants know how to face adversity adequately, and, as a reward, they are granted the reconstruction of their city, as can be read in the following excerpt preserved on **cat. no. 108**. This time, we are told, the king commissioned with such an important task is Išme-Dagan, fourth king of the First Dynasty of Isin, whose son, Lipit-Eštar, was already familiar to students through several of his royal hymns.

> [Now, see! Enlil has set up a good day in the land!]
> The day for Nippur to raise (its) neck to heaven he has even now ordered!
> He himself has provided a good day to shine in the Ekur!
> He himself has raised up the day for the Ki'ur's magnificent manifestation!
> He himself has restored the day for Sumer and Akkad to expand!
>
> *Lament for Nippur*, lines 247–51
> (translation after Tinney 1996, 117 and ETCSL 2.2.4)

Thus both stories taught students the local, albeit fictional, history of their city while connecting it with the great kings of the Mesopotamian past and their dynasties, surely providing a good opportunity to display some local pride. (MDH)

107. Tablet about the Fall of Akkad

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 202 mm, width 156 mm, depth 44 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-301 (3NT-298) + UM 55-21-324 (3NT-424) + ISACM A30204 (3NT-303) + A30235 (3NT-405) + 3NT-900.26 + 3NT-901.53

Multicolumn tablet inscribed with the *Curse of Agade*.

Literature:

Cooper 1983, 44–257, pls. XIV–XV (composite transliteration with variants, philological notes and commentary, translation, and photographs, source A_3)

See also figure 17.3.

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

108. Tablet with a Lament for the Destruction of Nippur

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Height 133 mm, width 62 mm

ISACM A30210 (3NT-315)

Two-column tablet fragment inscribed with the *Lament for Nippur*.

Literature:

Tinney 1996, 91, 96–123, 125–83, 185–249, figs. 8–9, pls. 11–12

Pictured with UM 55-21-304 (3NT-320), to which it joins. Photos of obverse and reverse by DL and courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI; virtual join by MDH.

Local History: Ideal Kings (cat. nos. 109-11)

Old Babylonian scribes of the Edubba'a in Nippur copied Sumerian royal poetry composed under kings who had by then already ruled some three centuries earlier (see **cat. nos. 63** and **65**). Most prominent among these rulers of yore was Šulgi of Ur, the end of whose forty-eight-year reign (ca. 2094–2046 BCE) marked the peak of native Sumerian power, with all lower Mesopotamia united under a highly organized and powerful state. About 150 years later, kings of Isin such as Išme-Dagan still emulated Šulgi's titles and style and had similar royal poetry composed, even if they could hardly have hoped to match his real power.

Throughout the poem scholars call *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B, Šulgi exalts himself in the first person as a kind of superhero: he goes at the front of his army, inspiring fear in his enemies; he kills lions with a spear at close range; he catches wild asses on foot. Yet before he mentions any of these superhuman qualities, he recounts: "When I was a youth, I was at the Edubba'a, where I learned the scribal art from the tablets of Sumer and Akkad" (lines 13–14).

Similarly, on **cat. no. 109** Išme-Dagan boasts of his scribal education, including in skills necessary for administration and bureaucracy:

> That I have understood the contents of tablets,
> counting and reckoning in all their depth and breadth, carrying out assessments,
> coefficients, establishing the surface of a field, and laying out the reed measuring pole . . .
> that I have learned with my talented hands, my pure hands,
> to write the tablets of Sumer and Akkad;
> that I have made the Edubba'a shine
> by completely mastering the reed stylus and the scribal arts . . .
> all these things the scholars and the composers . . .
> have put in my great songs,
> and have declared in my hymns.
>
> *Praise Poem of Išme-Dagan* V
> lines 360–62, 364–66, and 375–77
> (translation after ETCSL 2.5.4.01)

The tablet fragment **cat. no. 110** contains an excerpt of the *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B in which the king boasts of his skill in yet another category of specialized knowledge: extispicy, the determination of the gods' will by reading the entrails of a sacrificial lamb. This example constitutes an early reference to a practice for which a compendious "scientific" scribal literature would later develop in Akkadian:

> As I prepare the lamb with words of prayer,
> my diviner watches in amazement like an idiot.
> The prepared lamb is placed in my hands,
> and I never confuse a favorable sign with an unfavorable one.
> I myself have a clear intuition, and I go by my own eyes.
> I, the king, in the insides of just one lamb,
> can find omens about everything in the universe.
>
> *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B, lines 143–53
> (translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.02)

The tablet **cat. no. 111** preserves a later passage of the *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B in which Šulgi recounts his founding of scribal schools and emphasizes that they are to persist forever:

> In the south, in Ur, I caused a House of the Wisdom of Nisaba [the goddess of writing]
> to spring up in a pure place for the writing of my hymns;

in the north, in Nippur, I established another.
May the scribe be on duty there and transcribe
with his hand
the prayers that I instituted in the Ekur,
and may the singer perform, reciting from
the text.
The Edubba'as are never to be altered;
the places of learning shall never cease to exist.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 308–15
(translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.02)

As they copied these words, the students of the Old Babylonian Edubba'a would likely have seen themselves as helping fulfill that promise, even if the reality of scribal education in their era looked very different than it did under Šulgi. Though it is difficult to know exactly what they thought of these past kings' hyperbolic self-characterization, especially in relation to their own contemporary rulers, they would surely have regarded as positive the ideal of an educated king who supported their institutions. (RDW)

109. Tablet with a Hymn Praising King Išme-Dagan

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 137 mm, width 63 mm

ISACM A30230 (3NT-386)

Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Praise Poem of Išme-Dagan* V, lines 1–63.

Literature:

Castellino 1972, 164, 212, 307 (tablet wrongly identified as Šulgi hymn)

Ludwig 1990, 2, 19–20, 161–74, 176–224, pls. 4–5 (score transliteration, translation, commentary, discussion, and photographs, source A)

Wilcke 1992, 584–87 (discussion)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

110. Tablet with Self-Praise of King Šulgi

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 82 mm, width 68 mm

ISACM A30219 (3NT-364)

Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B, lines 142–58 and 161–67.

Literature:

Castellino 1972, 29–242, pl. XIX (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, and photographs, source t)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

111. Tablet with Self-Praise of King Šulgi

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 117 mm, width 90 mm

ISACM A30203 (3NT-300)

Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B, lines 81–111, 156–84, 235–39, 241–61, and 307–32.

Literature:

Castellino 1972, 30–242, pls. XVII–XVIII (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, and photographs, source q)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Indirect Histories (cat. nos. 112-13)

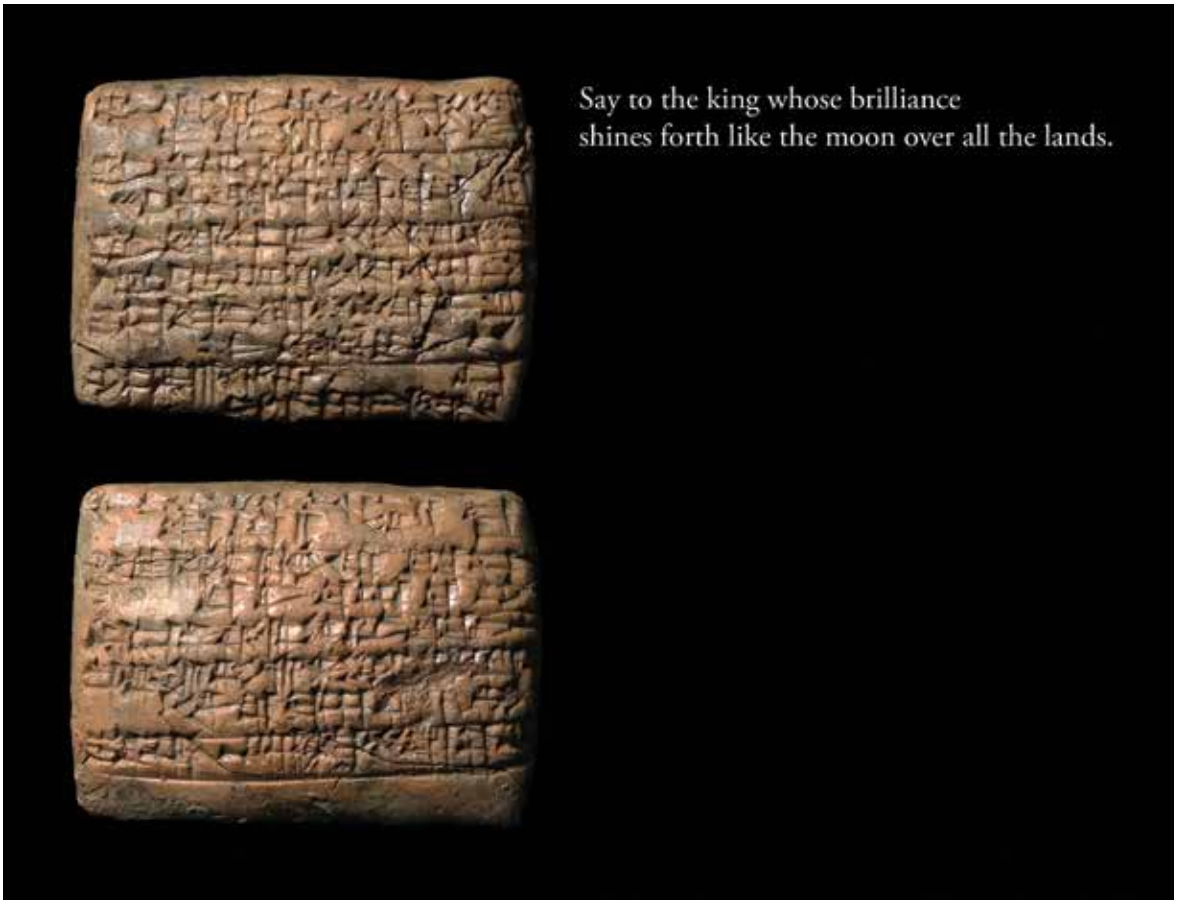
Although the Mesopotamians lacked traditional histories like those in a modern-day textbook or the works of Herodotus, scribal students encountered images of a historical past during their education. One common genre in which students came face-to-face with bits of historical fact was the *Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany*. Compositions in this group recount petitions from an individual who has undergone some misfortune and is requesting a higher authority to return him to his former position—for example, in the letter preserved on **cat. no. 112**:

> In the streets of Nippur, sorrow consumed me.
> A foreign city has entered into my city. I had no protector.
> A foreign house has entered into my house. It exercised authority over me.
> In my city, like a slave, I did not carry silver.
>
> *Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Moon*, lines 11–14 (translation Kleinerman 2011, 131)

The invasion of a foreign city seems to allude to a historical event. In contrast, on **cat. no. 113** the sender complains about personal misfortunes in his appeal to the king:

> My inexplicable punishment makes me glower.
> Wailing in distress became my lot.
> In a city that has become hostile I have been moaning like a dove,
> (but) no one took pity (on me).
>
> *Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Sun*, lines 8–11 (translation Kleinerman 2011, 136–37)

The names of the characters in these letters constitute the most transparent historical realities. Whether or not these names were obvious references to every student, we know they were the names of genuine and often important citizens from earlier times. For example, on **cat. nos. 112** and **113** the petitioner is a man named Lugal-šu, who is known from other literary letters and may have been a notable teacher in the Edubba'a who inserted himself into the curriculum; in variants of the composition, the petitioner is named Lugal-nesaĝe, who is known from the Ur III archival record (and possibly also from **cat. no. 108**) to have been a genuine priest (Kleinerman 2011, 45). The section recorded on this tablet constitutes the petitioner's lament, which would have been followed by his appeal for restitution. Although compositions in the *Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany* were not robust historical reservoirs of facts, they were indirect windows into Nippur's historical past. (CGS)



112. Tablet with an Appeal to the King

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 54 mm, width 72 mm

ISACM A30262 (3NT-521)

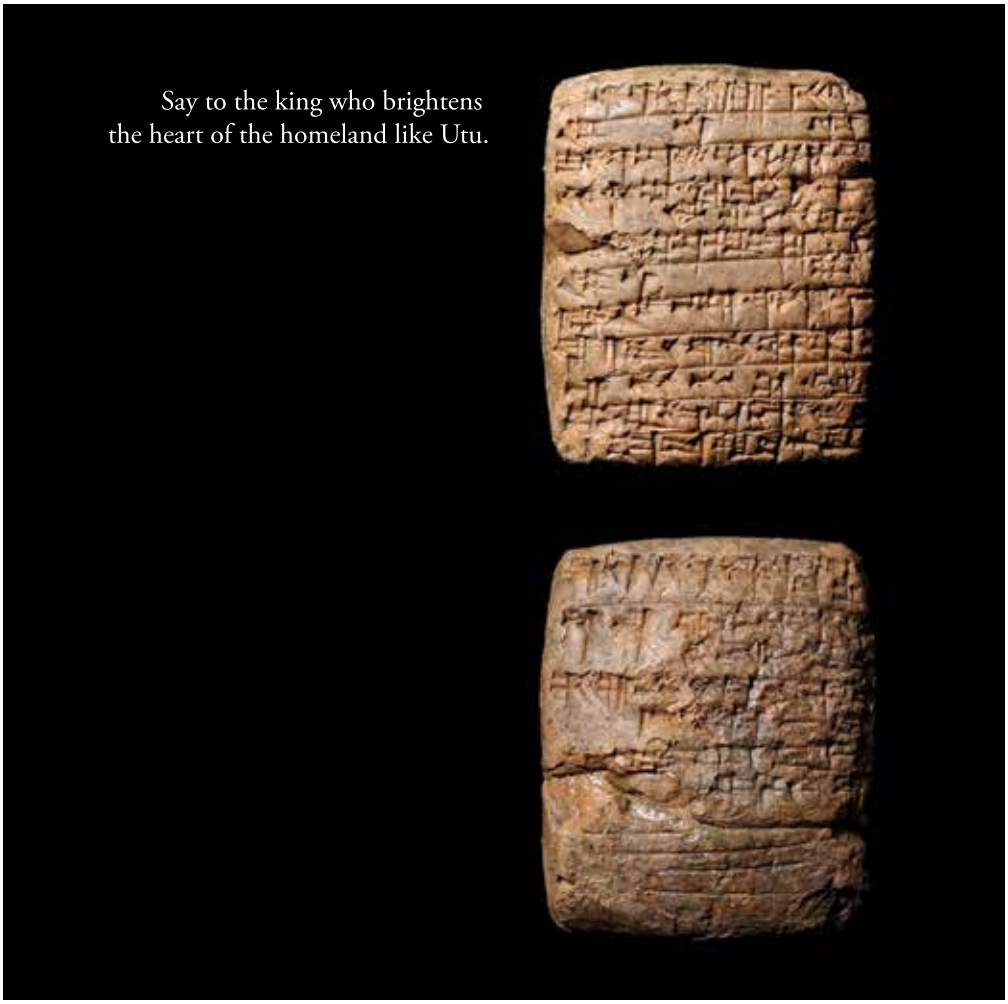
Pillow-shaped tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the *Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Moon*. The obverse contains lines 1–6 and the reverse lines 7–11 of the letter.

Literature:

Ali 1964, 85–91, pl. 28 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and hand copy, source B)

Kleinerman 2011, 130–35, 227–35 (composite transliteration with variants, matrix, translation, and commentary, source N14)

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM; annotations by MDH; translation from Kleinerman 2011, 130.



113. Tablet with an Appeal to the King

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 78 mm, width 64 mm

ISACM A30249 (3NT-480)

Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Sun*. The obverse contains lines 1–11 and the reverse lines 12–15 of the letter.

Literature:

Ali 1964, 92–98, pl. 49 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and hand copy, source A)

Kleinerman 2011, 136–40, 236–42 (composite transliteration with variants, matrix, translation, and commentary, source N12)

Photos of obverse and reverse by CM; annotations by MDH; translation from Kleinerman 2011, 136.

What Did They Learn about Legendary Kings?

Whatever is acquired is destined to be lost.
What mortal has ever reached the heavens?

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 280–81
(translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.02)

With words almost identical to those of Šulgi, Gilgameš, the most famous figure of Babylonian literature, describes his despair in the face of his mortality and sets out to make his name through legendary deeds. Lines between history, legend, and fiction blur when dealing with kings of the distant past. We do not know whether students understood the kings of Uruk Gilgameš, Lugalbanda, and Enmerkar as legendary heroes or as real ancestors of their own kings. They interacted with these figures through pseudo-historical texts, such as king lists, and also through stories relating their adventures in far-off lands and heroic fights against other kings, sorcerers, and the famous guardian of the Cedar Forest, Huwawa. These characters were not only present in stories; objects depicting them have also been found in the houses of the Scribal Quarter at Nippur. While we can only assume that students enjoyed these adventurous tales, we know they certainly helped transmit the stories by copying and memorizing them and, in at least one instance, by writing an otherwise unattested version in their native tongue, Babylonian Akkadian. (SP)

Gilgameš: A Hero without Boundaries (cat. nos. 114–16)

Gilgameš, king of Uruk, is said to be the son of the goddess Ninsumun and the legendary king Lugalbanda, a genealogy truly fit for a hero. For the Mesopotamians, Gilgameš was a real figure of their past, as the pseudo-historical composition *History of the Tumal*, preserved on **cat. no. 114**, illustrates. In this singular composition, a man called Lu-Inana, chief leatherworker of Enlil, recounts how renowned kings of the past built cultic shrines for Enlil and how their respective sons brought Ninlil, the wife of Enlil, to Tumal, a cultic center in the vicinity of Nippur dedicated to this goddess (Michalowski 2006, 149). Crucially, among the kings said to have contributed to these construction tasks—some of them indeed historical—are Gilgameš and his son, Ur-lugal:

Gilgameš constructed the Mound of Rushes,
Enlil's dais.
Ur-lugal, son of Gilgameš,
made Tumal flourish,
and brought Ninlil into Tumal.

History of the Tumal, lines 12–15
(translation Michalowski 2006, 150)

This text was likely a by-product of the scribal milieu (Michalowski 2006, 151–52; Kleinerman 2011, 55). But the popularity of Gilgameš's deeds went beyond scribal schools, as the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale* (**cat. no. 115**) and the bone amulet (**cat. no. 116**) demonstrate. Both objects have as background the same Sumerian story: *Gilgameš and Huwawa* (known in two different versions, A and B), wherein Gilgameš marches to the Cedar Forest and kills its guardian, Huwawa (later known as Humbaba; see also **cat. no. 74**), whose head is carved with refined detail in **cat. no. 116**.

Cat. no. 115 contains a dialogue, written in Babylonian Akkadian, between Gilgameš and his friend Enkidu, in which the latter interprets two of the dreams the king of Uruk has on the travelers' way to the Cedar Forest. The composition does not mention Gilgameš or Enkidu, but the identification of Lugalbanda as the dreamer's father and the mention of Huwawa leave no doubt that this text is related to the Cedar Forest episode (George 2003, 241):

"My friend, we have come close to the forest,
(what was foretold in) dreams is near at hand, battle
is swift (upon us).

> You will see the radiant auras of the god,
> of Huwawa, whom your mind does ever fear.
> You will lock horns and batter him like a bull,
> you will force his head down with your strength.
> The old man you saw is your mighty god,
> the one who begot you, Lugalbanda."
>
> *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale*, lines 1–8
> (translation George 2003, 243)

The fact that the text was composed in Akkadian rather than Sumerian could signal that this composition stemmed from popular tales orally transmitted in Akkadian, the vernacular language of the period—an assumption supported by the existence of abundant artifacts, such as cylinder seals, baked-clay plaques, and amulets, showing episodes of the hero's exploits. Many of these objects, found throughout Mesopotamia, display the motif of Huwawa's severed head, as **cat. no. 116** does (Graff 2013, 131–32). This fearsome head of penetrating gaze was meant to reflect the supernatural power of Huwawa even after his death, thus imbuing with protective power the object on which the head was carved. But Huwawa's head also brought to mind the most dramatic episode of this Gilgameš story and served as a reminder of the permanent threat of bad omens (Graff 2013, 138–41). This complex and multilayered set of functions explains why this depiction was so popular. Ultimately, these daily-life objects reflect the familiarity of common people with the Gilgameš stories beyond the world of the scribal schools, which were dominated by the Sumerian narratives (George 2003, 17).

Gilgameš is one of the most celebrated heroes of Mesopotamia. His fame has surpassed linguistic and cultural frontiers not only in ancient times but nowadays as well. Indeed, his stories have been translated into many modern languages, and the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgameš* is still read in many college courses. (MDH)

114. Tablet with the History of Shrines at Tumal

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House I, Room 144, Level X Floor 3

Old Babylonian

Length 78 mm, width 54 mm

ISACM A30146 (3NT-109)

Single-column tablet inscribed with the *History of the Tumal*.

Literature:

Michalowski 2006, 147–52 (description, and transliteration and commentary of lines 27–30)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

115. Cast of a Tablet with an Akkadian Gilgameš Story

Plaster

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 115 mm, width 67 mm

ISACM C3246 (3NT-376)

Cast of IM 58451 in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Cast of a single-column tablet inscribed with the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale* from Nippur.

Literature:

Cavigneaux and Renger 2000, 91–103 (transliteration, translation, commentary, hand copy, and photographs)

George 2003, 241–46 (transliteration, translation, and commentary)

See also figure 16.4.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

116. Amulet in the Shape of Huwawa's Head

Ivory

Nippur, Area TA, House M, Room 230, Level XIII Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 20 mm

ISACM A29494 (3N-467)

Ivory amulet of the head of Huwawa.

Literature:

McCown and Haines 1967, 99, 175, pl. 147:7 (catalog entry and photograph)

Photo by DL.

A Rivalry and the Many Ways It Unfolded: The Legends of Enmerkar and Lugalbanda (cat. nos. 117–18)

Though today Gilgameš is by far the best-known legendary hero of ancient Mesopotamia, ancient scribal students copied the Sumerian stories about him alongside ones about two other long-ago kings of Uruk: Lugalbanda and Enmerkar.

The stories about Enmerkar and Lugalbanda dramatize, though in different ways, a conflict between the Mesopotamian city of Uruk and its glamorous rival to the east, Aratta. While the stories about Enmerkar depict a series of competitions between the lords of the two cities, the Lugalbanda narratives occur during a campaign undertaken by Uruk against Aratta, though the focus is primarily not on the battle itself but on the adventures of young Lugalbanda, who becomes ill during the journey on the way to Aratta and undergoes a recovery and heroic transformation in the mountain wilderness. Among other skills, both Lugalbanda and Enmerkar use rhetoric to achieve their goals, as the passages copied onto these tablets showcase.

Though unfortunately **cat. no. 117** is broken in half, so that it preserves only the ends of each line, using it and other manuscripts of the story we can reconstruct this passage, which includes a prayer to the moon god, Suen, offered by Lugalbanda while he is ill:

> King, who cannot be reached in the far-away sky,
> Suen, who cannot be reached in the far-away sky,
> the king who loves justice and abhors evil,
> Suen, who loves justice and abhors evil,
> justice with its rectitude carries joy to your heart.
> It is a great poplar staff, that scepter growing for you.
> You release the binds of justice,
> but you do not release the binds of evil.
>
> *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, lines 215–22

Lugalbanda's prayer contains the type of repetition and elaboration on a theme (in this case, justice) that are emblematic of Sumerian literary style, and in response:

> Suen acknowledged his tears and gave him life,
> he made his feet stand firm on the ground again.
>
> *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, lines 226–27

Enmerkar uses language just as effectively in a contest of wits with Ensukukešdana, the lord of Aratta, regarding which city—and which man—the goddess Inana prefers. **Cat. no. 118** begins toward the end of Enmerkar's response to Ensukukešdana, capturing assertions such as the following:

> No city whatsoever has been built like her city.
> Inana lives in Uruk; as for Aratta, so what?
> She lives in the brickwork of Kulaba—what would she do at the mountain of shining powers?
> Inana will not go to Aratta for five years, nor will she go for ten years.
>
> *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 101–4

Ensukukešdana's response underscores Enmerkar's rhetorical brilliance: at first, the other king can only go around saying, "What could I say to him? What could I say to him?" (line 120).

In both stories, the kings' skill with language helps ensure that they, and their city, emerge victorious. Thus these narrative texts not only tell compelling stories but also incorporate other genres studied in scribal school, from hymnic praise of gods to disputation and debate. (JG)

117. Tablet with a Story about the Legendary King Lugalbanda

Clay
Nippur, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2
Old Babylonian
Length 98 mm, width 37 mm
ISACM A30224 (3NT-374)

Fragment of a single-column extract tablet of the Sumerian literary narrative *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*, lines 196–240.

See figure 16.2.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

118. Tablet with a Story about the Legendary King Enmerkar

Clay

Nippur, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 117 mm, width 71 mm, depth 37 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-303 (3NT-308)

Single-column tablet containing a passage from the legend of *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*, lines 98–140.

Literature:

Berlin 1979, 33, 35–36, 44–49, 74–79, pls. 5–6 (composite transliteration, translation, commentary, and photos, source P)

Wilcke 2012, 37, 52–57, 79–80 (score transliteration and translation, source P)

Mittermayer and Attinger 2020, 198, 215–22, 248–50, 258 (score transliteration, translation, and commentary, source P)

See also figure 16.3.

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

What Did They Learn about Rhetoric and Disputations?

So that my consultative assemblies, sitting together
to care for the people,
inspire respect in their hearts when the chief herald
sounds the horn,
they should deliberate and debate;
and so that the council should decide policy
properly,
I have taught my governors to deliberate and to
debate.

Praise Poem of Šulgi B, lines 222–27
(translation after ETCSL 2.4.2.02)

Being able to deliberate and debate were useful skills for a scribal student. Yet even if the Edubba'a was a place of lively debates and witty battles of words, the oral components of Babylonian education are mostly lost to us. While certainly no records of daily voices from school remain, some texts allow us a glimpse into training in oral rhetoric and argumentation. These texts are dialogues or disputations between a variety of speakers: some disputations take place between personified animals or objects; others have the scribal students themselves as opponents. All of them teach lessons in rhetoric and strategic argumentation, where the clever and eloquent prevail over the adversary. Frequently using insults and abusive language, the contestants battle in Sumerian. (SP)

A Battle of Wits: Rhetoric and Oratory in School (cat. nos. 119–20)

Old Babylonian scribal students learned more than orthography, grammar, and document formatting in the Edubba'a. They also learned various aspects of rhetoric while studying and copying what modern scholars refer to as "disputations." In these texts, animals, objects, or humans debate one another. For example, in *Ezinam and Ewe* (**cat. nos. 119–20**) the titular debaters, divine grain and a sheep, trade speeches either extolling themselves or countering the braggadocio of the other (among a few other topics). On **cat. no. 119**, Ewe responds to an earlier attack from Ezinam by describing how it is a material favored by the gods:

An, king of the gods,
made me descend from the holy place, my most
precious place.
All the yarns of Uttu [the weaving goddess], the
splendor of kingship, belong to me.
Šakkan [the god of wild animals], king of the mountain,
embosses the king's emblems
and puts his implements in order.
He twists a giant rope against the great peaks of the
rebel land.
He . . . the sling, the quiver, and the longbows.

Ezinam and Ewe, lines 94–101

To all of Ewe's boasting, Ezinam ultimately responds by turning Ewe's own logic against it. Ezinam asserts that it is superior, a stalwart equal of the storm god Iškur not in need of penning, unlike Ewe. On **cat. no. 120**, Ezinam disparages sheep in line 140: "I am Ezinam, born for the hero. I will not give in for her (Ewe)!"

In the end, Ezinam emerges victorious after its clever, Socratic-like turning of the tables. Disputations such as this one also afford us unique insight into the performative side of the scribal school, for it is probable that the pupils themselves engaged in bouts of debate—either identical recitations of the disputation compositions or speeches merely modeled after them (Ceccarelli 2020, 51). While these disputation compositions further reinforced scribal lessons learned elsewhere, for example in orthography and grammar, it is important to acknowledge that they also served to coach students in the subtle art of argumentation and stand as remnants of performance by students in the Edubba'a. (CGS)

119. Tablet with a Dispute between Divine Grain and a Ewe

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 58 mm, width 72 mm

ISACM A30206 (3NT-305)

Fragment of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the composition *Ezinam and Ewe*. The obverse preserves two columns, one containing lines 44–49 and the other lines 90 and 92–98. The reverse preserves only one column with lines 99–107.

Literature:

Mittermayer 2019, 37–66, 166, 176–227 (composite transliteration, score, translation, commentary, and photos, source Pn)

See also figure 19.1.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

120. Tablet with a Dispute between Divine Grain and Ewe

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 73 mm, width 42 mm

ISACM A30258 (3NT-514)

Tablet fragment inscribed with the composition *Ezinam and Ewe*. The only side preserved contains twelve lines (lines 129–40).

Literature:

Mittermayer 2019, 37–66, 171, 176–227 (composite transliteration, score, translation, commentary, and photo, source VVn)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Humble Hoe and Pompous Plough (cat. nos. 121–23)

Sumerian disputations constitute an entertaining and highly rhetorical genre consisting of a dialogue between personified animals, plants, objects, or concepts, or between human or divine individuals. Each contender brings a series of speeches and rejoinders evidencing their superiority to their opponent, after which a moderator, such as a god or a king, declares the winner. In addition to *Hoe and Plough*, examples include the debates between *Ezinam and Ewe* (see **cat. nos. 119–20**), *Winter and Summer*, *Bird and Fish*, and *Copper and Silver*.

A central theme of *Hoe and Plough* is the humility of the hoe contrasting with the pomposity of the plough. The hoe (or better, mattock) was a simple tool usable by an individual farmer or gardener and also employed year-round for general construction purposes, such as digging canals and making mudbricks. The seeder plough was a complicated contraption, employed in large-scale grain agriculture at sowing time, that required three men and a team of oxen to steer it. The hoe was a working-class, everyman's tool, while the plough was part of the world of "big business" surplus agriculture. The entirely one-sided argumentative triumph of Hoe over Plough thus delighted audiences by representing the victory of the small fellow over the stronger, arrogant one.

Atypically, Hoe does not engage in self-praise but instead references its positive qualities indirectly by pointing out that Plough lacks them. Parts of the following two passages are contained on **cat. no. 121**:

> When water overflows, you cannot dam it up;
> you cannot fill baskets with earth;
> you cannot form bricks,
> lay foundations or build houses,
> or strengthen old walls.
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 11–15 (translation after ETCSL 5.3.1 and Mittermayer 2019)

Hoe portrays itself as a humble servant:

> I am a servant who follows his master;
> I am the one who builds a house for his master.
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 119–20 (translation after ETCSL 5.3.1 and Mittermayer 2019)

A passage from **cat. no. 122** contains part of Hoe's argument that its work is not only in service of the great temple institutions but also enables intrepid individuals of humble professional status to support their families:

> After I have made the apple tree grow, it is I who bring forth its fruits.
> These fruits adorn the temples of the great gods:
> Thus I enable the gardener to support his wife and children.
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 148–50 (translation after ETCSL 5.3.1 and Mittermayer 2019)

Pompous Plough, on the other hand, points to its divine origins:

> I am the plough, fashioned by the great arm (of a god), put together by a great hand,
> the mighty land surveyor of Enlil,
> the true farmer of mankind am I.
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 21–23 (translation after ETCSL 5.3.1 and Mittermayer 2019)

In a passage preserved in part on **cat. no. 123**, Plough quite literally drags Hoe through the mud:

> Hoe, who got stuck in the mud at work . . .
> Wood of the poor man's hand, unfit for the hands of the high-ranking!
> The hand of a man's servant is the only adornment of your head.
>
> *Hoe and Plough*, lines 53 and 57–58 (translation after ETCSL 5.3.1 and Mittermayer 2019)

Ironically, Plough tries to take credit for the harvest even though its actual contribution is limited to sowing.

The victory of Hoe over Plough, declared at the end of the poem by Enlil, can hardly have come as a surprise to the ancient audience. Copying this text thus supplied Old Babylonian scribal students not only with a source of entertainment but also a lesson in the subtleties of argumentation. (RDW)

121. Tablet with a Dispute between Hoe and Plough

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 99 mm, width 69 mm

ISACM A30260 (3NT-517)

Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Hoe and Plough*, lines 117–37 and 139–47.

Literature:

Civil 1965, 51–184 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and commentary, source O')

Mittermayer 2019, 109–37, 292, 297–354 (composite transliteration, score, translation, commentary, and photos, source NNn)

See also figure 19.5.

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

122. Tablet with a Dispute between Hoe and Plough

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 90 mm, width 69 mm

ISACM A30247 (3NT-464)

Single-column tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Hoe and Plough*, lines 147–61 and 188–96.

Literature:

Civil 1965, 51–184 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and commentary, source C′)

Mittermayer 2019, 109–37, 294, 297–354 (composite transliteration, score, translation, commentary, and photos, source VVn)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

123. Tablet with a Dispute between Hoe and Plough

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 189, Level XI Floor 1

Old Babylonian

Length 46 mm, width 68 mm

ISACM A30295 (3NT-754)

Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Hoe and Plough*, lines 57–60 and 62–73.

Literature:

Civil 1965, 51–184 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, commentary, source O)

Mittermayer 2019, 109–37, 288, 297–354 (composite transliteration, score, translation, commentary, photos, source Rn)

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Benches and Board Games

Rhetorical disputations and wordplay were not the only kinds of competition in which Edubba'a students heartily engaged. Board games were also likely a favorite battleground of wits. Although its contextual information remains uncertain, the fragment of a clay game board now in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad (3NT-197.535), seems to have come from House F's kitchen, Room 191. However, the kitchen was probably not the place where the game board was actually used but rather where it was discarded. The many broken tablets and raw clay recovered from the kitchen suggest that it doubled as a recycling zone. Perhaps the game board, frozen in time in its semidestroyed state, was similarly destined for recycling. One of the Edubba'a's more socially frequented spaces would have served better as an arena for play, such as Room 205, which was outfitted with a large bench that could accommodate the seated contestants (fig. 24.2). One might fancifully imagine an irate instructor who, upon discovering the students' chicanerous smuggling of a board game into the Edubba'a, spitefully snatched and tossed it into the kitchen for destruction. Alternatively, games may have been a welcome facet of the school curriculum, fit for teaching the norms and codes of conduct appropriate in competitive situations, whether mere board game matches or formal rhetoric and debate.

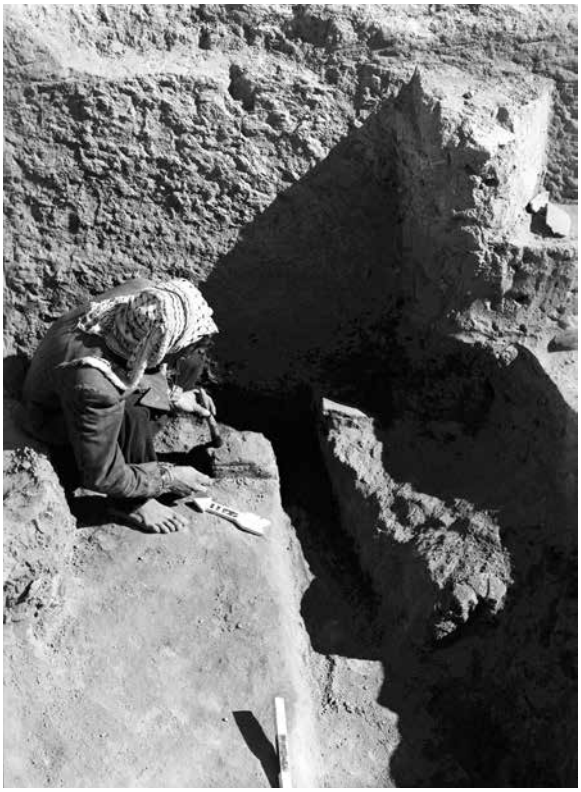


Figure 24.2. Excavation photo, viewed from the southwest toward the northern corner of Room 205 in House F, showing an Iraqi archaeologist crouched on and carefully brushing a section of the large bench structure built against the northwest wall. The bench was initially constructed by House F's inhabitants in Level XI Floor 2 using cuneiform tablets as bricks and fill (ISACM P. 47254).

What remains of this particular game board (fig. 24.3) is reminiscent of the Royal Game of Ur, most famously known from the examples unearthed by Leonard Woolley in Ur's Royal Cemetery and bedazzled with precious inlaid materials such as lapis lazuli and shell. While such luxurious game boards befitted the clientele with whom they were entombed, examples made of mere clay could easily have been shaped by any one of the scribal students, perhaps even the teacher, for its basic form—a rectangular prism—was one with which they were already very familiar, similar to their own rectangular cuneiform tablets and even the more complex prisms from the advanced phases of scribal education. (MO)

Dispute between Two Scribes (cat. no. 124)

Dialogue 1 is the shortest and structurally simplest of the Sumerian school disputations—and the only one currently available in a modern edition (Johnson and Geller 2015; Matuszak 2019, 2020). *Dialogue* 1 is preserved on nearly sixty manuscripts, most of them from Nippur and twenty-two of them found in House F (Robson 2001, 54), including **cat. nos. 14** and **124**.

According to the interpretation put forward by Jana Matuszak (2019), an accomplished scribal

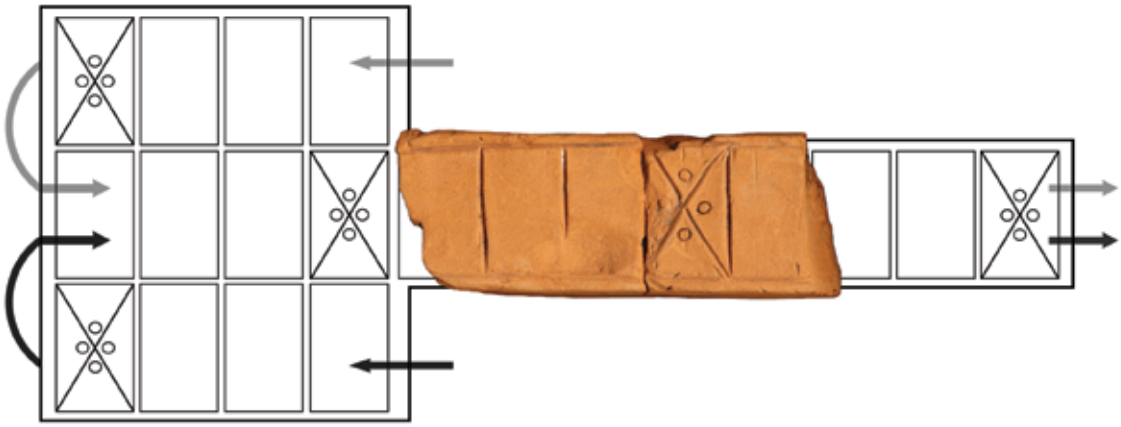
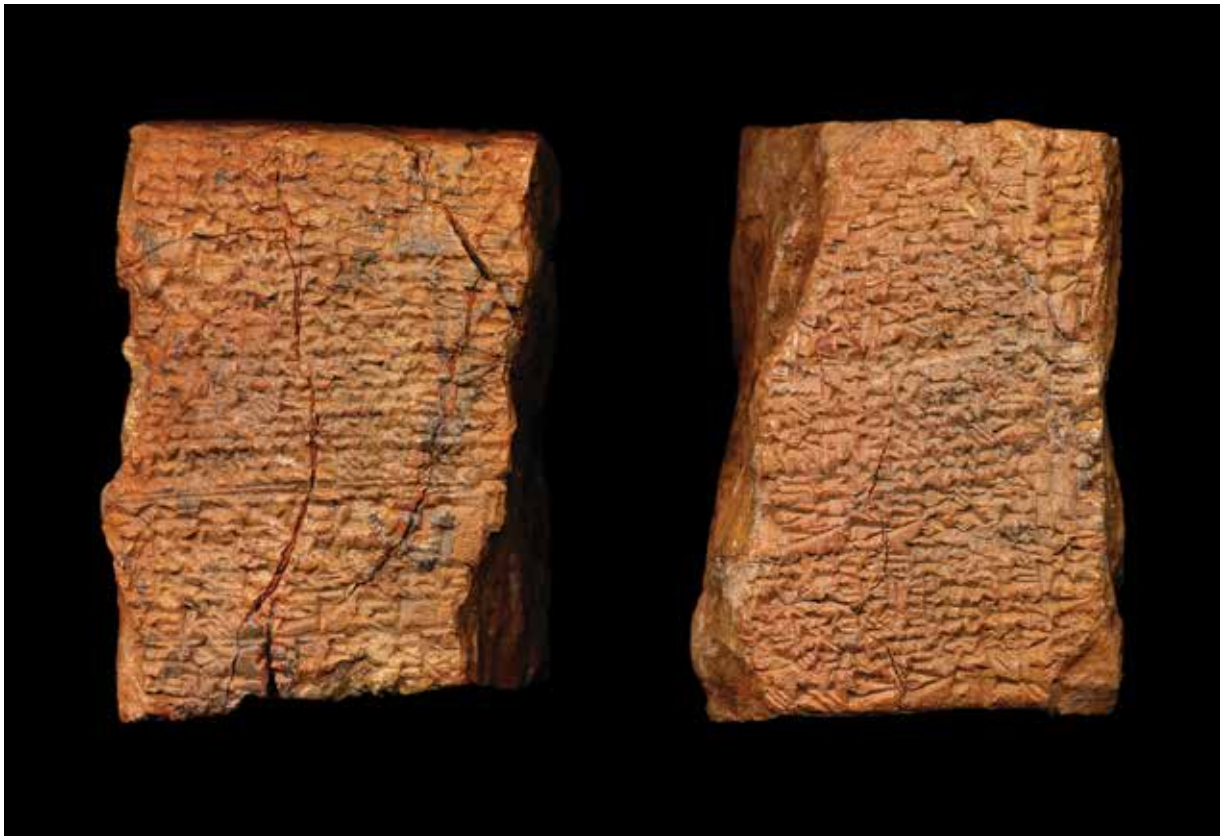


Figure 24.3. Reconstruction of the clay board game resembling the Royal Game of Ur, with square spaces and designs inscribed on the upper surface of the rectangular, prism-shaped fragment (Iraq Museum, Baghdad, 3NT-197.535). The fragment was found in House F, Room 191, Level X Floor 4. Drawing by MDH after Robson 2001, 42.

apprentice, here called the "Contender," challenges his rather hapless fellow student, here called the "Defender," to a rhetorical contest about who is the better scribe. In his opening speech, the Contender defines competence in school disciplines as the topic of the debate. He explicitly mentions knowledge of lexical lists and mathemathics, which were studied in the elementary phase of education, but curiously no contracts or what we like to term "literary texts," which were studied in the intermediate and advanced stages, respectively. However, both contestants clearly knew more than just lexical lists and mathematical calculations: the Contender in particular distinguishes himself as an eloquent speaker by masterfully weaving in numerous proverbs (see chapter 12), which in the scribal curriculum marked the transition from individual words to complete sentences (Veldhuis 2000). Moreover, both were already fluent in Sumerian—though in line 53 the Defender ridicules the Contender's pronunciation.

Much to the benefit of ancient and modern audiences alike, the verbal duel does not actually consist of a dull recitation of lexical lists and reciprocals; rather, the mutual insults give insights into a much more holistic concept of an ideal scribe (see **cat. no. 14**). We learn that they were expected to be diligent and humble and to behave with integrity. Moreover, it was considered important to be of sound body and mind and the descendant of a respected, affluent family. Finally, the text conveys the implicit message that scribes were expected to be accomplished speakers. In fact, the entire text can be read as a powerful lesson in rhetoric, as it contrasts one very self-assured and competent speaker (the Contender) with his rather pitiful opponent (the Defender), who seems incapable of controlling his emotions and commits one strategic blunder after another (Matuszak 2019). While the Contender elegantly demonstrates his prowess and keeps a cool head under attack, the Defender at first only manages to utter incoherent swear words, completely ignoring the topic of the debate. When he finally pulls himself together in his fourth speech, he uses up all pertinent arguments at once, after which he cannot maintain the same level of argumentation. The disparity of the two contestants' rhetorical proficiency is so evident that no external referee is needed to end the disputation: the Contender himself concludes it and puts his opponent in his place. Thereby he demonstrates that he can not only start a quarrel but also finish it in style: he is truly an example to emulate. (JM)



124. Tablet with a Dispute between Two Scribes

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Length 85 mm, width 63 mm, depth 41 mm

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, USA, UM 55-21-315 (3NT-367)

Fragment of a two-column tablet inscribed with *Dialogue* 1, lines 1–15, 84–96, and 122–37. The characteristic double ruling that demarcates speeches is visible on the obverse.

Literature:

Johnson and Geller 2015 (composite transliteration, score, translation, and commentary, source B)

Matuszak 2019 (composite transliteration with variants, translation, and commentary)

Photos of obverse and reverse courtesy of the Penn Museum and CDLI.

Dialogue 1

Jana Matuszak

Although *Dialogue* 1 is preserved on nearly sixty manuscripts, its reconstruction poses challenges because certain sections of the text are preserved only fragmentarily. This situation has resulted in different line counts and different attributions of speeches to one or the other of the two speakers, who are never introduced by name. Particularly toward the end it is not entirely clear where one speech ends and the next one begins, as changes between speakers are indicated only by double rulings, which are not always preserved. In the translation below, the speeches of the Contender are aligned on the left, and those of the Defender are indented.

This presentation of the text follows the reconstruction established by Matuszak (2019). A concordance with the line count used by Johnson and Geller (2015) can be found in Matuszak (2019, 2020). To guide the reader, short descriptive headings for each speech are included in boldface.

First speech of the Contender, challenging the Defender to a rhetorical contest:
"Hey, schoolboy, it's late—come on, let's compete!
If you really know the corpus of scribal lore, then what did you recite?
Every single line of scribal lore, from the thematically arranged word lists up to the list of professional titles—as soon as you've written them down, you have already forgotten them.
Do you know the calculation of multiplications, reciprocals, accounts, as well as volumes?
The rote recitations of the scribal school—let's recite them! I know them better than you.
Come on, position yourself as my rival! I will put an end to your insults!"

First (incoherent) speech of the Defender:
"Idiot! Obtuse! Obstinate!
Flaccid penis, blocked butt, a single testicle hanging down!
Oblong jaw, fat lip, crippled hips, . . . butt!
Are you (really) made like me?"

Second speech of the Contender, using several proverbs:
"Only an idiot stretches out linen for the bugs.
Sand flies cover the reed mats.
A pig weaves a counting cloth.
An elephant tramples the green malt.
A fox was chased from the soup tureen.
A wolf heckles wool.
A mongoose fills the young ones with hunger.
A piglet(?) stretches out its(?) . . .
For a stag a royal *aguhum*-gown is too tight.
. . . return."

Second speech of the Defender, badly preserved:
"Idiot . . . whose mouth is inappropriate
. . .
. . .
. . . dung . . . placed!"

Third speech of the Contender, again quoting proverbs:
"Idiot! The oil spoils the jug, . . . spoils . . .
. . . destroys . . . property . . .
He lazily says: 'May the field I'm supposed to measure be small, I want to go home early!'
He has ruined the gown completely: he has frogged the woollen gown.
First he used up the oil in the jug; then he shed tears over it.
Can anyone work properly in a nest full of vermin?
His rags are soaked as if in water.
You really can't compare this with the good old times.
But I can compare it with future events."

Third speech of the Defender, also using proverbs (not very successfully):
"He has neither water nor beer, neither spent grain nor beer wort, neither flour nor low-quality flour, neither gown nor rag!
He doesn't reach the sky; he doesn't reach the earth.
He has beer but no spent grain; he has flour but no spelt!
Braggart! Can you give me a riposte like I can?"

Fourth speech of the Contender, attacking social status and quarrelsomeness:
"Your family background has been investigated. The result is as follows: you are not a child of righteous people.
In your father's house provisions don't even exceed a monthly ration of beer, flour, malt, and barley.
Even your own mother is given in pawn!
Assembling the viziers(?), loosening the loincloth!
Instigating quarrel the minute he is standing in the street!
You even quarreled with a man who has seized the mouth of a lion [or: who has been seized by the mouth of a lion].
Only after he has engaged in a fistfight with this man does his heart calm down.
Braggart! Why do you always exaggerate so exorbitantly?"

Fourth speech of the Defender, suddenly going full force:
"You may have started a lawsuit, but you can't conclude it successfully.
Your hand can't keep up with your mouth.
You may have recited the corpus of scribal lore, but you can't put it in context.
It may be that you have written the thematically arranged word lists up to the list of professional titles, but your tongue is not adapted to the Sumerian language.
You may have recited multiplications, but you don't know them to the hilt.
You may have solved reciprocals, but you can't grasp the calculation method.
You can't accurately measure volumes.
You stretch out your hand toward the rote recitations, but nobody has even asked you to do that. He keeps it all to himself.
The handwriting is not at all pretty: in the 'Place of Scribal Lore' [i.e., the school], nobody reads out the inscribed clay tablet because of your poor handwriting.
Braggart! Tearing out the hair because of lice, dying of starvation!
You, who walk around infested with vermin—debt is what suits you!
Are you (really) my rival?"

Fifth speech of the Contender, firing back:
"Why should I not be your rival?
Liar, always uttering lies! Messenger from distant lands!

(*continued*)

An ox whose sinews have been cut lies motionless in its yoke, but when one scatters the lowing oxen, they destroy everything!
A fisher's maid spending the day with ban-baskets!
The liar's head lies in the potter's oven!
Merchant's assistant, who squanders the merchant's money!
Brewer, who eats up all the flour and malt intended for making beer!
Convict, who has half of his hair shorn off in punishment, come! Man collecting garbage(?) from the street!
Awkward idiot, spittle dropping from the corner of his mouth [other manuscripts write: whose tongue is hanging from the corner of his mouth]!
Can you yourself really compete with me, me?"

Fifth speech of the Defender, unable to maintain the level of his previous speech:

"Lunatic! Liar! Intelligence of a monkey!
Homeless person, sleeping in the street!
In the 'oven of humanity' he is spreading out flour and malt.
When you take the tureen with arzana-soup from the oven, it breaks because the soup is hot.
On ankle and Achilles tendon your skin gets burned.
You have nibbled on food from the vegetable basket.
He always steals fish from the fisherman's basket.
On many days, your face twitches fearfully even because of feeble fists."

Sixth speech of the Contender, punching back:

"Market peddler! Person who sells roasted barley!
We flee from you as from a lunatic.
When you pinch off clay inside the potter's oven, your joints from your spine down to your butt are filled with wounds.
After you have literally thrown yourself on the lukur-women's baskets with offering breads, the maids of the lukur-women starve.
They tremble before you as they do before piglets.
The gatekeeper and the gudu-priests of all shrines rub the sleep out of their eyes and keep watch because of you.
Liar, who can never eat enough!
Roaming the fields [some manuscripts write: the dust of the country] for his sustenance!
Why do you constantly utter unheard-of insults against me?"

Sixth speech of the Defender, not giving up yet:

"You shouldn't stand behind me; I want to put an end to your insults face-to-face!
He went and wasted time; the work is of bad quality.
Vaunting himself while standing on the field and holding a leather bag in the hand!
Hireling serving prostitutes!
He carries the basket with the collected brushwood (for her).
Even at the time of harvest your wages don't equal your sustenance costs.
You flee from work and stand about babbling on the market square instead."

Seventh speech of the Contender, slowly growing impatient:

"When you went to the house of a . . .-man, who serves beer, you entered directly after the man serving beer.
People are winking about you.
When you bowed your neck down to the earth, you were ridiculed without noticing it.
He is begging for food with hand and feet.
In summer walking about in the shade,
in winter walking about in the sunshine!

Liar lying with the head at the edge of the fire!
When you turn around, you are a cripple whose skin is burned.
Burgling houses, stealing pigs!
Why do you still fight with me?"

Last speech of the Defender, claiming he wasn't hurt by the insults:

"The insults, which you hurled against me, didn't stick.
Come! Go out to the street with me!
The people of understanding shall observe us there!
You are a blunderer! You don't know the meaning of your own words.
You are an insulting person, even though you don't know anything.
Scoundrel! You are someone who doesn't give up in a lawsuit!
You are lagging behind! You don't understand things.
Shouter lying amid the fire!
Hungry man stealing bread!
Convict! At the baskets of the temples he does not value their . . ."

Final speech of the Contender, putting the Defender in his place:

"Croaker! Squaller! The entire city quarter is in turmoil because of you.
Debased person, who doesn't even know what it is to have shame!
Scorned person, eating nothing but . . . !
Lunatic, bastard child!
Leading people down a slippery slope, whom respectable people don't want to know!
Standing there like a hero, but these hands are paralyzed!
When he is on active duty, he doesn't create anything of permanence. When he is in reserve, he doesn't do it well!
You have recited—but you were tripping over words. You have written—but it had to be erased immediately!
He can't even read out aloud what he himself has written.
He is writing clumsily; his hand is incapacitated.
He is not made for reciting, and writing isn't his forte either!
He lazily says: 'May my tablet be small, I want to finish it quickly!'
He has lost his contexts; he confuses his contextualization.
He has lost his mind and moans about it.
Who has ever voluntarily spoken to you?
What is it about you that makes you seek strife?
Stop, you idiot! You may have tried to quarrel, but you really shouldn't!"

25 After School

Susanne Paulus, Colton G. Siegmund, and Ryan D. Winters

A disgraced scribe becomes an exorcist,
a disgraced singer becomes a piper,
a disgraced lamentation priest becomes a flutist.

Proverb Collection 2, no. 54

Leaving aside its satiric tone, this proverb holds some truth about scribal careers after graduating from the Edubba'a: scribes found work in the administration of temples and other institutional households, planning and recording income and expenses and managing agriculture and commerce. Other scribes provided services for their local communities, writing letters and contracts. Prominent scribes served the king as advisors or executive agents, diplomats, messengers, and military officials. Others composed important royal inscriptions, hymns, and literature. Beyond these careers, scribes were also active in cultic professions as priests, exorcists, lamentation priests, singers, and musicians. They observed and interpreted omens and performed rituals. Some members of other professional groups, such as physicians, architects, merchants, and selected craftsmen, were equally literate. However, it remains uncertain whether all of them received an Edubba'a-like education or acquired literacy as part of their professional training. (SP)

Scribal Careers as Household Managers (cat. no. 125)

The acquisition of cuneiform literacy was but one part of an overall educational package that centered above all on preparing students to become part of the administrative class. Most scribes went to school not to become authors, researchers, or mere *literati* but rather accountants, bureaucrats, and managers. Mathematics, calculations, weighing and measuring; the drafting of various kinds of legal and economic documents; the surveying of land to be cultivated; the evaluation of fields, and the calculation of expected agricultural output against estimates of the grain required for seed, fodder, and the payment of worker's wages—skills in these areas were essential to the operation of

Reverse of a tablet inscribed in microscript with the text of *Dialogue* 2. **Cat. no. 126**. Photo by DL.

a complex economy, and this knowhow afforded the scribes no small degree of social power. It may even have been the case that a major reason scribes were drilled in the intricacies of Sumerian literature and lexical texts in the first place was so that these literate administrators could foster a group identity while legitimizing their political power, thus making themselves not only economic managers but also the custodians of an ancient written tradition (Michalowski 1987, 62–64; Steinkeller 2017a, 50–56).

The importance of accounting and managerial skills is illustrated by several quotations from the ancient literature about education: "Do you know multiplication, reciprocals, coefficients, balancing of accounts, administrative accounting, how to make all kinds of pay allotments, divide property, and delimit shares of fields?" (*Examenstext* A, line 27; Sjöberg 1975); "I can handle equally well Sumerian, scribal work, tablet content, calculation, and accounting. . . . I am going to write tablets now: a tablet with (the volumes of) barley from one bushel to 600 bushels (and) a tablet with (the weights of) silver from one shekel to ten minas" (*Scribal Activities* [Edubba'a D], lines 37–42; Civil 1985).

The tablet **cat. no. 125** is a fragment of the composition *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C), a dialogue in which a senior scribal supervisor subjects a pupil to a kind of examination—not only about what he has learned but also his moral stance with regard to the scribal art. The pupil's answer reveals that, after completing his education, he was appointed to be a manager over his master's estate:

> Whatever you showed me from the scribal art has been given back to you!
> You appointed me over your household; you cannot accuse me of a single instance of neglect.
> I always assigned the tasks of servant girls, the servants, and other personnel of your household.
> I soothed their hearts with allotments of food, clothing, and oil.
> I assigned the order of their tasks.
> . . .
> You ordered me to the edge of the field (to supervise work);
> the workforce was already toiling there . . .
> however great the assignment for the (plow) oxen, I always brought in more.
>
> *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C), lines 36–40, 45, and 49

The scribal ideals emphasized throughout the text are thus those that would have applied to the professions generally: hard work, diligence, and precision. As managers, scribes who excelled at their education could have expected to occupy a position near the top of the labor hierarchy. (RDW)

125. Tablet with Advice to a Junior Scribe

Clay

Nippur, Area TA, House F, Room 205, Level XI Floor 2

Old Babylonian

Length 55 mm, width 54 mm

ISACM A30244 (3NT-447)

Fragment of a clay extract tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C). The obverse contains four or five lines, possibly lines 30–34 of the composition, while the reverse contains lines 47–53. The tablet may join IM 58465 (3NT-410).

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Life after Literature: Careers beyond the Scribal Arts (cat. no. 126)

After school, an alumnus of the Edubba'a was likely not restricted to a scribal career. Although many naturally chose to pursue traditional scribal roles—writing up economic exchanges, keeping temple or palace ledgers, or writing letters, legal documents, and the like—some seem to have chosen a different path. One famous literary account of a scribe pursuing a different career seems to be recorded in *Dialogue* 2. One exemplar of this composition is **cat. no. 126**, which records the tale in a form of microscript cuneiform betraying the expertise of its author. Whether the dialogue's two characters, Enkiheĝal and Enkitalu, were peers in the Edubba'a or a pair of musical apprentices is debated (Michalowski 2010a, 201). Should the Edubba'a interpretation prove correct, this composition provides a unique and humorous window into the life of a scribe turned failed musician as recounted by his peer. According to *Dialogue* 2, the floundering musician was inept at making music with the zamin-instrument, lacking a pleasing voice, and incapable of singing Sumerian in a mellifluous fashion. While one cannot cite *Dialogue* 2 as incontrovertible evidence of scribes pursuing careers in music after graduating from the Edubba'a, the fact that scribes had the option of assuming careers outside the prototypical domain of the scribal arts remains likely. (CGS)

126. Tablet with a Dialogue between Enkiheĝal and Enkitalu

Clay

Unknown provenience (purchased in 1933 from Crozier Theological Seminary facilitated by Sumerologist Edward Chiera)

Length 98 mm, width 88 mm

ISACM A24192

Square tablet inscribed with two columns in a microscript form of cuneiform characteristic of a master scribe. The tablet contains the entire *Dialogue* 2.

Literature:

Michalowski 2010a (partial composite edition and commentary)

Ceccarelli 2018 (score transliteration and translation of lines 213–31, source MM_{UN})

Photos of obverse and reverse by DL.

Epilogue

Day after day—except for the six days off each month—students in Nippur went to school, where they learned, struggled, and succeeded in becoming scribes. One day, sometime between 1740 and 1720 BCE when House F was abandoned, pupils went to House F for the last time, as their families left Nippur because of environmental changes and political unrest. Some resettled in a nearby fortress, continuing the cult of Enlil. A subset of the population stayed at Nippur, but writing—and with it, schooling—stopped. The fates of the ancient students resonate with us, for conflicts and environmental challenges still threaten education worldwide, including in Iraq: UNICEF estimates that still today, 3.2 million school-aged Iraqi children are not in school (UNICEF 2017). These challenges and conflicts also threaten cultural heritage, as they leave historical sites vulnerable to destruction and looting.

Nippur's history is also full of hope, however: around 500 years after House F closed, the lady Inbi-Ayyari wrote to her chief administrator, undoubtedly charged with teaching the basics of administration to several students she had assigned to him:

> (Concerning) the sons of the tablet house who are assigned to you,
> keep paying attention to them!
>
> Middle Babylonian Letter HS 111

Indeed, schooling had resumed in Nippur sometime earlier, and students were busy copying lexical lists and writing new stories of Gilgameš, unwittingly preserving knowledge for future generations and modern scholars alike.

Similarly, in 2019, after three decades of interruption, the University of Chicago's Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures restarted its excavation in Nippur to gain new knowledge and protect the site in close cooperation with Iraqi scholars and local communities. New material and approaches will both help answer open questions and introduce new avenues of inquiry. At the same time, scholars continue to study cuneiform sources from Nippur and make new material accessible, thus continuing and expanding the learning these objects have facilitated across millennia. (SP)

List of Compositions

Acrographic List Izi
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000050 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 31 (reverse), 56, 89 (reverse)
Adab to Nanna for Gungunum (Gungunum A)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.6.2.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe (Edubba'a C)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.1.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 125
Akkadian Gilgameš Tale
Electronic Babylonian Library, no. I.4 (www.ebl.lmu.de/corpus/L/1/4)
George 2003, 241–46
Cat. no. 115
Akkadian Sargon Letter
Goodnick Westenholz 1997, 141–69
At the Cleaner's
CDLI Wiki (cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=at_the_cleaners)
Bilingual Teaching
Taylor 2011
Bird and Fish
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.3.5 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Code of Hammu-rabi
Roth 1995, 71–142
Copper and Silver
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.3.6 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Curse of Agade
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.1.5 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 107
Death of Gilgameš
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.1.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Decad
Praise Poem of Šulgi A
Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar A
Song of the Hoe
Exaltation of Inana (Inana B)
Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A)
Keš Temple Hymn
Enki's Journey to Nippur
Inana and Ebih
Hymn to Nungal A
Gilgameš and Huwawa A

Dedication of a Dog to Nintinuga
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.7.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 105
Dialogue 1
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000767 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Cat. nos. 14, 124
Dialogue 2
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000768 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Cat. no. 126
Dialogue of Pessimism
Lambert 1960, 139–49
Dumuzi and Enkimdu
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.08.33 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Dumuzi's Dream
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.4.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 21
Enki's Journey to Nippur
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.1.4 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 70
Enlil and Namzidtara
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.7.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 103
Enlil and Ninlil
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.2.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 102
Enlil and Sud
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.2.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 101
Enlil in the Ekur (Enlil A)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.05.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 68
Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.2.4 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 118
Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.2.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Epic of Gilgameš
Electronic Babylonian Library, no. I.4 (www.ebl.lmu.de/corpus/L/1/4)
George 2020
Exaltation of Inana (Inana B)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.07.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 67

Examenstext A
Peterson 2015 (cdli.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/dl/pdf/P481748.pdf)
Ezinam and Ewe
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.3.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. nos. 119, 120
Fable of the Heron and the Turtle
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.9.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 24
Farmer's Instructions
Civil 1994
The Fowler and His Wife
Alster 2005, 371–72
Cat. no. 60 (obverse)
Gilgameš and Akka
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.1.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Gilgameš and Huwawa A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.1.5 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 74
Gilgameš and Huwawa B
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.1.5.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.1.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.1.4 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
History of the Tumal
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.1.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 114
Hoe and Plough
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.3.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. nos. 121, 122, 123
Hymn to Nanna for Gungunum (Gungunum B)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.6.2.a (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Hymn to Nippur and Išme-Dagan (Išme-Dagan W)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.5.4.23 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Hymn to Nisaba A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.16.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Hymn to Nungal A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.28.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 73
Inana and Ebih
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.3.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. nos. 71, 76, 77, 78

Inana and Enki
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.3.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Instructions of Šuruppak
Alster 2005, 56–102
Cat. nos. 93, 94
Keš Temple Hymn
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.80.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 69
Lament of Lisin A
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Cat. no. 103
Lament for Nippur
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.2.4 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 108
Lament for Sumer and Ur
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.2.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Law collections
Roth 1995
Laws about Rented Oxen
Roth 1995, 40–41
Laws of Lipit-Eštar
Roth 1995, 23–35
Laws of Ur-Nammu
Roth 1995, 13–22
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Roth 1995, 46–54
Legal Phrasebook (kiulutinbiše)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000045 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Letter from Inanaka to the Goddess Nintinuga
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.3.3.10 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 104
Letter from Inim-Inana to Enlil-massu
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.3.3.11 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Letter of Išbi-Erra to Ibbi-Sin 1
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.3.1.17 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Letter from Lugal-nesaĝe to Enlil-massu (Letter from a Disappointed Father to His Son)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.3.3.09 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 95
Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Sun
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.3.3.03 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 113
Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Moon
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.3.3.02 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 112

Letter from Nabi-Enlil to Ilum-puzura
Kleinerman 2011, 193
Lisina Group
(Partially unpublished)
Lisina ("*Lament of Lisin* A")
"14-line letter"
Nothing Is Precious D
Enlil and Namzidtara
nam-dub-sar-ra
Cat. no. 103
List of Body Parts (Ugumu)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q002268 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 30 (reverse)
List of Compound Signs (Diri)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000057 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 28 (obverse), 29 (obverse), 53, 55, 60 (reverse), 83 (obverse)
List of Domestic Animals, Wild Animals, and Meat Cuts (Ura 3)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000001 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 4
List of Foodstuffs (Ura 6)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000043 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
List of Gates and Buildings (Kagal)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000048 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 50, 54
List of Geographical Names (Ura 5)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000042 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 4
List of Gods (Nippur God List)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000261 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
List of Hides (Ura 2, 339–475)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000040 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 27 (obverse)
List of Human Beings (Lu-Azlag)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, nos. Q000301, Q000302 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
List of Personal Names Inana-teš
Chiera 1916; see also Peterson 2011, 248
Cat. nos. 27 (reverse), 44; compare cat. nos. 16, 20 (reverse)
List of Personal Names Lugal-me
Wagensonner 2022
List of Personal Names Ur-aba
Unpublished; see Peterson 2021b
List of Personal Names Ur-ki
Peterson 2021b

List of Personal Names Ur-me
Unpublished; see Gadotti and Kleinerman 2021, 45–46; Peterson 2013
List of Personal Names Ur-Nanše
Unpublished; see Peterson 2021b
List of Professions and Human Beings (Lu)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000047 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 19 (reverse), 20 (obverse), 47, 48
List of Reeds and Reed Objects (Ura 2, 1–215)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000040 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 46 (obverse)
List of Simple Signs (Ea)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000055 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 13, 28 (obverse), 29 (reverse), 52
List of Stones, Plants, Fish, Birds, and Textiles (Ura 4)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000041 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 79
List of Things (Niĝga)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000052 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. no. 51
List of Trees and Wooden Objects (Ura 1)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000039 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 17, 45, 46 (reverse)
Lists of capacity measures
Cat. nos. 30 (obverse), 32 (reverse)
Lists of personal names
See in general Peterson 2011, 2021b; Gadotti and Kleinerman 2021, 45–46
Cat. nos. 25, 26 (obverse), 28 (reverse), 42, 43
Louvre Catalog
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.0.2.02 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Lugalbanda and the Anzud Bird
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.2.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.8.2.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 117
Metrological lists
Proust 2010; Friberg 2007, 101–26
Cat. no. 83 (reverse)
Metrological Series
Proust 2010
Model contracts
Old Babylonian Model Contracts (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/obmc/)
Cat. nos. 31 (obverse), 89 (obverse), 90, 92
Model court cases
Klein and Sharlach 2007

Multiplication lists
Friberg 2007, 67–86
Multiplication tables
Friberg 2007, 67–86
Cat. nos. 18, 19 (obverse), 23, 85; compare cat. no. 22
Ninurta's Exploits (Lugale)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.1.6.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Nippur Catalog
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.0.2.01 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 62
Nippur Murder Trial
Jacobsen 1970, 187–214
Cat. no. 92
Nothing Is Precious A
Alster 2005, 270
Nothing Is Precious D
Alster 2005, 275–79
Cat. no. 103
Numerical Series
Proust 2007; Robson 2009
Old Babylonian Grammatical Texts (OBGT)
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q002272 (incomplete) (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Landsberger et al. 1956, 45–127
The Old Man and the Young Girl
Alster 2005, 384–90
Praise Poem of Enlil-bani A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.5.8.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Praise Poem of Iddin-Dagan B
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.5.3.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Praise Poem of Išme-Dagan V
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.5.4.01, lines 359ff. (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 109
Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.5.5.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 65
Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar B
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.5.5.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 59 (obverse)
Praise Poem of Sin-iddinam A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.6.6.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Praise Poem of Šulgi A
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.4.2.01 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 63

Praise Poem of Šulgi B
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.4.2.02 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. nos. 110, 111
Praise Poem of Šulgi E
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.4.2.05 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection 1
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.01 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 99
Proverb Collection 2
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c. 6.1.02 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. nos. 32 (obverse), 58, 61, 88 (reverse)
Proverb Collection 3
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.03 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection 5
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.05 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection 8
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.08 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection 11
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.11 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection 17
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.17 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection 25
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.6.1.25 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Proverb Collection Kroch 5
Alster 2005, 396–400
Rulers of Lagaš
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.1.2 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
School Regulations (Edubba'a R)
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000767 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Schooldays (Edubba'a A)
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000754 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Cat. no. 15
Schøyen Proverb Collection 3
Alster 2007, 88–95
Scribal Activities (Edubba'a D)
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000754 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Civil 1985
A Scribe and His Perverse Son (Edubba'a B)
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000755 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Sjöberg 1973b
Sin-iddinam and Iškur (Sin-iddinam E)
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.6.6.5 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Song of the Hoe
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.5.4 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Cat. no. 66

Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany
Kleinerman 2011
Sumerian King List
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.2.1.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Sumerian Laws Handbook of Forms
Roth 1995, 46–56
Sumerian Riddle, no. 1
Civil 1987
Syllabary A
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000054 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Landsberger et al. 1955, 15–41
Syllabary TuTaTi
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000060, Q000061, Q000062, Q000063 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Syllable Alphabet A
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000058 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Syllable Alphabet B
Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts, no. Q000058 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus/)
Cat. nos. 26 (reverse), 41, 59 (reverse)
Temple Hymns
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.4.80.1 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)
Tetrad
Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar B
Praise Poem of Iddin-Dagan B
Praise Poem of Enlil-bani A
Hymn to Nisaba A
Thematic List of Words (Ura)
List of Trees and Wooden Objects (Ura 1)
List of Reeds and Reed Objects (Ura 2, 1)
List of Hides (Ura 2, 339–475)
List of Domestic Animals (Ura 3)
List of Stones, Plants, Fish, Birds, and Textiles (Ura 4)
List of Geographical Names (Ura 5)
List of Foodstuffs (Ura 6)
Tree and Reed
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000763 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Two Women A
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000770 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Two Women B
Datenbank sumerischer Streitliteratur, no. Q000771 (oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dsst/)
Cat. nos. 96, 97
Winter and Summer, 185, 186, 187
Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, c.5.3.3 (etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk)

Concordance of Museum Registration Numbers

Registration number	Excavation number	Catalog number	Description
—	3NT-900.26	Cat. no. 107	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Curse of Agade*
—	3NT-901.53	Cat. no. 107	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Curse of Agade*
IM 58427	3NT-326	Cat. no. 103	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the complete *Lisina Group*
IM 58451	3NT-376	Cat. no. 115	Single-column tablet inscribed with the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale* from Nippur
IM 58454	3NT-383	Cat. no. 63	Long tablet inscribed with the beginning of the composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A
IM 58609	3NT-674	Cat. no. 66	Single-column tablet inscribed with the beginning of the *Song of the Hoe*
IM 58699	3NT-776	Cat. no. 69	Extract tablet containing the third section of the *Keš Temple Hymn*
IM 58700	3NT-778	Cat. no. 74	Tablet fragment inscribed in Sumerian with the composition *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A
IM 58711	3NT-791	Cat. no. 70	Single-column tablet containing an extract of *Enki's Journey to Nippur*
IM 58736	3NT-819	Cat. no. 59	Tablet fragment inscribed with portions of the *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B on the obverse and *Syllable Alphabet* B on the reverse
IM 58761	3NT-851	Cat. no. 65	Single-column tablet inscribed with an extract of the composition *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A
ISACM A24192	—	Cat. no. 126	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Dialogue* 2
ISACM A29404	3N-146	Cat. no. 82	Small, barrel-shaped weight made from hematite corresponding to one-sixth of a shekel
ISACM A29405	3N-146	Cat. no. 81	Small, barrel-shaped weight made from hematite corresponding to half a shekel
ISACM A29407	3N-146	Cat. no. 80	Small, barrel-shaped weight made from hematite corresponding to two-thirds of a shekel
ISACM A29440	3N-280	Cat. no. 3	Clay plaque depicting a *kusarikku*, a mythical being with features of both a human and a bull, holding a pole
ISACM A29442	3N-289	Cat. no. 72	Fragment of a plaque showing the bust of a goddess, likely representing armed Inana
ISACM A29444	3N-291	Cat. no. 98	Clay plaque with a nude human female figure with clasped hands, feet missing

ISACM A29445	3N-293	Cat. no. 8	Perforated cylinder seal depicting a figure leading a second figure before an enthroned deity
ISACM A29449	3N-305	Cat. no. 75	Clay plaque depicting a king or a god holding a trident-shaped scepter or weapon
ISACM A29450	3N-308	Cat. no. 35	Clay male human head
ISACM A29494	3N-467	Cat. no. 116	Ivory amulet of the head of Huwawa
ISACM A29563	3P-377	Cat. no. 6	Beaker or vase, tan ware
ISACM A29567	3P-397	Cat. no. 5	Two sherds of tan ware forming approximately one-half of a plate or dish
ISACM A29723	3D-460	Cat. no. 34	Small clay animal figurine, possibly a lion, head and legs missing
ISACM A29738	3D-534	Cat. no. 33	Small clay human figurine with arms and legs missing
ISACM A29980	2NT-385	Cat. no. 32	Teacher–student exercise tablet with an excerpt from *Proverb Collection* 2 on the obverse and a metrological table of grain capacities on the reverse
ISACM A29982	2NT-391	Cat. no. 61	Fragment of a circular tablet inscribed twice with *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 67, on the obverse and a few wedge impressions on the reverse
ISACM A29985	2NT-500	Cat. no. 88	Tablet inscribed with a calculation of a reciprocal (obverse and reverse) and *Proverb Collection* 2, no. 52 (reverse)
ISACM A30016	2NT-585	Cat. no. 22	Mathematical tablet inscribed with a table of squares
ISACM A30055	2NT-679	Cat. no. 37	Long tablet inscribed with three columns of horizontal wedges on the obverse; the horizontal wedges wrap around the lower edge and continue on the reverse
ISACM A30127	3NT-62	Cat. no. 36	Unevenly shaped round tablet inscribed with an unidentified school exercise on the obverse and reverse
ISACM A30143	3NT-97	Cat. no. 9	Tablet recording a house sale by Ur-dukuga to Amurru-bani
ISACM A30144	3NT-104	Cat. no. 28	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with an excerpt from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) on the obverse and a list of personal names on the reverse
ISACM A30146	3NT-109	Cat. no. 114	Single-column tablet inscribed with the *History of the Tumal*
ISACM A30153	3NT-128	Cat. no. 79	Tablet fragment inscribed with a teacher–student exercise comprising excerpts from the stone section of the *List of Stones, Plants, Fish, Birds, and Textiles* (Ura 4)
ISACM A30158	3NT-135	Cat. no. 91	Tablet recording a silver loan dated to year 30 of King Rim-Sin of Larsa
ISACM A30169	3NT-158	Cat. no. 39	Fragment of misshapen tablet clay cut off from a larger tablet, the obverse inscribed with a few legible signs of a lexical list

ISACM A30173	3NT-163	Cat. no. 89	Fragment preserving the left-hand side of a teacher–student exercise tablet with a model contract of a barley loan on the obverse and an excerpt of the *Acrographic List* Izi on the reverse
ISACM A30175	3NT-168	Cat. no. 60	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise inscribed with the Sumerian short story *The Fowler and His Wife* on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) and mathematical exercises on the reverse
ISACM A30177	3NT-186	Cat. no. 43	Small, pillow-shaped tablet inscribed with a male and a female personal name; a line of fingernails is impressed at the end
ISACM A30181	3NT-229	Cat. no. 27	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with excerpts from the *List of Hides* (Ura 2) on the obverse and from the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš on the reverse
ISACM A30182	3NT-231	Cat. no. 17	Round tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (Ura 1)
ISACM A30183	3NT-234	Cat. no. 30	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with a metrological table on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Body Parts* (Ugumu) on the reverse
ISACM A30186	3NT-253	Cat. no. 67	Fragment from the bottom of a single-column tablet inscribed with an extract of the *Exaltation of Inana* (Inana B)
ISACM A30187	3NT-259	Cat. no. 45	Fragment of a prism inscribed with the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (Ura 1)
ISACM A30188	3NT-260	Cat. no. 48	Fragment of a prism inscribed with a section of the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)
ISACM A30189	3NT-265	Cat. no. 54	Fragment of a tablet inscribed with the Old Babylonian unlabeled acrographic lexical list that later became part of the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal)
ISACM A30190	3NT-266	Cat. no. 44	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the *List of Personal Names* Inana-teš
ISACM A30192	3NT-274	Cat. no. 14	Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian school disputation *Dialogue* 1
ISACM A30194	3NT-283	Cat. no. 100	Clay cone inscribed with the divine name "Endu"
ISACM A30200	3NT-291	Cat. no. 56	Ten-column tablet inscribed with the first section of the *Acrographic List* Izi, with many of the entries glossed with their Akkadian translations
ISACM A30201	3NT-292	Cat. no. 105	Tablet inscribed with the Sumerian votive inscription *Dedication of a Dog to Nintinuga*
ISACM A30202	3NT-294	Cat. no. 102	Single-column extract tablet inscribed with the beginning of the myth *Enlil and Ninlil*
ISACM A30203	3NT-300	Cat. no. 111	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B

ISACM A30204	3NT-303	Cat. no. 107	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Curse of Agade*
ISACM A30205	3NT-304	Cat. no. 58	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt of *Proverb Collection* 2
ISACM A30206	3NT-305	Cat. no. 119	Fragment of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Ezinam and Ewe*
ISACM A30208	3NT-307	Cat. no. 97	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Two Women* B
ISACM A30209	3NT-313	Cat. no. 24	Two-column tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Fable of the Heron and the Turtle*
ISACM A30210	3NT-315	Cat. no. 108	Two-column tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Lament for Nippur*
ISACM A30211	3NT-316	Cat. no. 83	Tablet fragment inscribed with a teacher–student exercise comprising an excerpt from the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) on the obverse, and metrological tables of length and capacity on the reverse
ISACM A30212A	3NT-318A	Cat. no. 90	Fragment of a multicolumn tablet containing a series of model contracts of barley loans
ISACM A30213	3NT-327	Cat. no. 40	Long tablet inscribed with an extract of the exercise *Syllable Alphabet* B
ISACM A30214	3NT-329	Cat. no. 31	Teacher–student exercise tablet with a model contract on the obverse and an excerpt from the *Acrographic List* Izi on the reverse
ISACM A30217	3NT-338	Cat. no. 15	Tablet fragment inscribed with the literary composition *Schooldays* (Edubba'a A)
ISACM A30218	3NT-360	Cat. no. 103	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the complete *Lisina Group*
ISACM A30219	3NT-364	Cat. no. 110	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* B
ISACM A30220	3NT-365	Cat. no. 50	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Gates and Buildings* (Kagal)
ISACM A30221	3NT-369	Cat. no. 104	Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian composition *Letter from Inanaka to the Goddess Nintinuga*
ISACM A30224	3NT-374	Cat. no. 117	Fragment of a single-column extract tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave*
ISACM A30225	3NT-377	Cat. no. 26	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet bearing a probable teacher's model of a list of personal names with theophoric elements on the obverse and an extract of *Syllable Alphabet* B on the reverse
ISACM A30228	3NT-382	Cat. no. 71	Single-column tablet inscribed with a passage of *Inana and Ebih*

ISACM A30229	3NT-385	Cat. no. 101	Fragment of a multicolumn tablet inscribed with the myth *Enlil and Sud*
ISACM A30230	3NT-386	Cat. no. 109	Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Praise Poem of Išme-Dagan* V
ISACM A30232	3NT-391	Cat. no. 4	Teacher–student exercise tablet with excerpts from the *Thematic List of Words: List of Geographical Names* (Ura 5) on the obverse and *List of Domestic Animals, Wild Animals, and Meat Cuts* (Ura 3) on the reverse
ISACM A30233	3NT-392	Cat. no. 23	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a combined multiplication table
ISACM A30234	3NT-399	Cat. no. 73	Single-column tablet inscribed with a passage of the *Hymn to Nungal* A
ISACM A30235	3NT-405	Cat. no. 107	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Curse of Agade*
ISACM A30236	3NT-413	Cat. no. 47	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)
ISACM A30237	3NT-418	Cat. no. 104	Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian composition *Letter from Inanaka to the Goddess Nintinuga*
ISACM A30239	3NT-422	Cat. no. 53	Teacher–student exercise tablet inscribed with two sections of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri)
ISACM A30240	3NT-426	Cat. no. 92	Compilation tablet inscribed with a collection of model court cases, including the *Nippur Murder Trial* on the obverse, and a dispute over the possession of prebends and a trial for the rape of a female slave on the reverse
ISACM A30241	3NT-440	Cat. no. 77	Tablet inscribed with the composition *Inana and Ebih*
ISACM A30244	3NT-447	Cat. no. 125	Tablet fragment inscribed with an extract of the Sumerian literary composition *Advice of a Supervisor to a Younger Scribe* (Edubba'a C)
ISACM A30246	3NT-460	Cat. no. 94	Fragment of a tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Instructions of Šuruppak*
ISACM A30247	3NT-464	Cat. no. 122	Single-column tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Hoe and Plough*
ISACM A30249	3NT-480	Cat. no. 113	Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Sun*
ISACM A30257	3NT-513	Cat. no. 76	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Inana and Ebih*
ISACM A30258	3NT-514	Cat. no. 120	Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Ezinam and Ewe*
ISACM A30260	3NT-517	Cat. no. 121	Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Hoe and Plough*

ISACM A30262	3NT-521	Cat. no. 112	Pillow-shaped tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the *Letter from Lugal-šu (Lugal-nesaĝe) to a King Radiant as the Moon*
ISACM A30263	3NT-530	Cat. no. 95	Tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Letter from Lugal-nesaĝe to Enlil-massu*
ISACM A30267	3NT-555	Cat. no. 21	Single-column tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Dumuzi's Dream*
ISACM A30269	3NT-573	Cat. no. 16	Tablet with a teacher–student exercise consisting of a list of names similar to Inanna-teš
ISACM A30270	3NT-576	Cat. no. 51	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Things* (Nigga)
ISACM A30271	3NT-577	Cat. no. 77	Tablet inscribed with the composition *Inana and Ebih*
ISACM A30272	3NT-579	Cat. no. 20	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) on the obverse and from a list of personal names (perhaps Inana-teš) on the reverse
ISACM A30274	3NT-595	Cat. no. 46	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet inscribed with entries from the *List of Reeds and Reed Objects* (Ura 2) on the obverse and from the *List of Trees and Wooden Objects* (Ura 1) on the reverse
ISACM A30276	3NT-598–599	Cat. no. 19	Tablet inscribed with a multiplication table of the number 7,12 (432) on the obverse and an excerpt from the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu) on the reverse
ISACM A30277	3NT-609	Cat. no. 84	Tablet fragment inscribed with a table of reciprocals
ISACM A30278	3NT-610	Cat. no. 86	Tablet inscribed with a multiplication table
ISACM A30279	3NT-611	Cat. no. 87	Tablet inscribed with a square and square root calculation on the reverse, and meaningless wedges on the obverse
ISACM A30281	3NT-613	Cat. no. 85	Tablet inscribed with a multiplication table
ISACM A30282	3NT-614	Cat. no. 18	Single-column tablet inscribed with a multiplication table of the number 12,30 (750)
ISACM A30283	3NT-631	Cat. no. 55	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise containing the beginning of the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) on the reverse, with the obverse divided into two columns but containing no preserved text
ISACM A30284	3NT-633	Cat. no. 42	Square tablet inscribed with Akkadian personal names
ISACM A30286	3NT-636	Cat. no. 41	Prism inscribed with the exercise *Syllable Alphabet* B
ISACM A30292	3NT-681	Cat. no. 68	Fragment of the upper part of a single-column tablet inscribed with *Enlil in the Ekur* (Enlil A)
ISACM A30293	3NT-722	Cat. no. 93	Tablet inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Instructions of Šuruppak*

ISACM A30294	3NT-728	Cat. no. 78	Two-column tablet inscribed with the complete composition *Inana and Ebih*
ISACM A30295	3NT-754	Cat. no. 123	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Hoe and Plough*
ISACM A30298	3NT-812	Cat. no. 99	Tablet fragment inscribed with Sumerian proverbs from *Proverb Collection* 1, including some about women
ISACM A30300	3NT-854	Cat. no. 96	Tablet fragment inscribed with an excerpt from the Sumerian literary composition *Two Women* B
ISACM A30997	6N-221	Cat. no. 106	Small clay figurine of a dog wearing a wide collar
ISACM A35326	3NT-87	Cat. no. 11	Corner fragment of the clay envelope that once enclosed UM 55-21-239 (cat. no. 10)
ISACM Archives	—	Cat. no. 1	Payroll account for archaeological workers
ISACM Archives	—	Cat. no. 2	Handwritten field catalog from Nippur excavations, 1951–52
ISACM Archives	—	Cat. no. 7	Pottery field notebook from Nippur excavations, 1951–52
ISACM C2996	3NT-326	Cat. no. 103	Cast of a multicolumn tablet fragment (IM 58427) inscribed with the complete *Lisina Group*
ISACM C3246	3NT-376	Cat. no. 115	Cast of a single-column tablet (IM 58451) inscribed with the *Akkadian Gilgameš Tale* from Nippur
ISACM C3253	3NT-383	Cat. no. 63	Cast of the obverse and reverse of a long tablet (IM 58454) inscribed with the beginning of the composition *Praise Poem of Šulgi* A
ISACM C3544	3NT-674	Cat. no. 66	Cast of a single-column tablet (IM 58609) inscribed with the beginning of the *Song of the Hoe*
ISACM C3645	3NT-776	Cat. no. 69	Cast of an extract tablet (IM 58699) containing the third section of the *Keš Temple Hymn*
ISACM C3647	3NT-778	Cat. no. 74	Cast of a tablet fragment (IM 58700) inscribed in Sumerian with the composition *Gilgameš and Huwawa* A
ISACM C3660	3NT-791	Cat. no. 70	Cast of a single-column tablet (IM 58711) containing an extract of *Enki's Journey to Nippur*
ISACM C3688	3NT-819	Cat. no. 59	Cast of a tablet fragment (IM 58736) inscribed with portions of the *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* B on the obverse and *Syllable Alphabet* B on the reverse
ISACM C3720	3NT-851	Cat. no. 65	Cast of a single-column tablet (IM 58761) inscribed with an extract of the composition *Praise Poem of Lipit-Eštar* A
N 5326B	—	Cat. no. 13	School tablet with bite marks of a twelve- or thirteen-year-old child, inscribed with an excerpt from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea)

UM 29-15-155	—	Cat. no. 62	A two-column tablet, called the *Nippur Catalog*, inscribed with the first words of sixty-two distinct compositions
UM 44-21-436	3NT-273, 3NT-340, 3NT-403	Cat. no. 92	Compilation tablet inscribed with a collection of model court cases, including the *Nippur Murder Trial* on the obverse, and a dispute over the possession of prebends and a trial for the rape of a female slave on the reverse
UM 53-11-90	3N-469	Cat. no. 49	Mold-made clay plaque in low relief of a person playing a musical instrument between two animals
UM 53-11-95	3N-340	Cat. no. 64	Clay plaque with a striding lion, likely produced using a mold
UM 55-11-174	3P-368	Cat. no. 38	Small, round, handmade pot, tan ware with buff slip covering the outside surface and inner rim
UM 55-21-239	3NT-87	Cat. no. 10	Tablet recording a house exchange between two brothers, Ninurta-rim-ili and Ištar-kima-iliya, the sons of Ubar-Ba'u
UM 55-21-240	3NT-88	Cat. no. 12	Tablet recording the distribution of two temple offices (prebends) to three individuals: Ur-Lulal, Agua, and Ubar-Ba'u
UM 55-21-301	3NT-298	Cat. no. 107	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Curse of Agade*
UM 55-21-303	3NT-308	Cat. no. 118	Single-column tablet containing a passage from the Sumerian literary composition *Enmerkar and Ensukukešdana*
UM 55-21-313	3NT-351+355	Cat. no. 47	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Professions and Human Beings* (Lu)
UM 55-21-315	3NT-367	Cat. no. 124	Fragment of a two-column tablet inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Dialogue* 1
UM 55-21-324	3NT-424	Cat. no. 107	Multicolumn tablet fragment inscribed with the Sumerian literary composition *Curse of Agade*
UM 55-21-330	3NT-455	Cat. no. 57	Single-column tablet inscribed with a practice letter in Akkadian
UM 55-21-347	3NT-563	Cat. no. 52	Multicolumn tablet inscribed with a section of the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea)
UM 55-21-349	3NT-580	Cat. no. 29	Fragment of a teacher–student exercise tablet with excerpts from the *List of Compound Signs* (Diri) on the obverse and from the *List of Simple Signs* (Ea) on the reverse
UM 55-21-365	3NT-643	Cat. no. 25	Prism inscribed with a list of Akkadian personal names

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