

RIVISTA DEGLI STUDI ORIENTALI  
NUOVA SERIE

RIVISTA DEGLI STUDI ORIENTALI  
NUOVA SERIE

SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA  
ISTITUTO ITALIANO DI STUDI ORIENTALI

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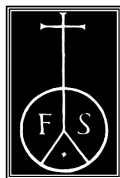
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## CONTENTS

### ISLAM

#### ARTICOLI

- MARIJN VAN PUTTEN, *Noun Prefixes in Eastern Berber* 11  
STEFANO PELLÒ, *The Other Side of the Coin: Shahīd-i Balkhī's dīnār and the Recovery of Central Asian Manichaean Allusions in Early Persian Poetry* 39  
ANGELO ARIOLI, *Ricordo di Renato Traini (1923-2014)* 57

#### NOTE E DISCUSSIONI

- MARIO CASARI, *Fisiognomica e istoriografia: riflessioni su un saggio di storia perso-romana* 75

### VICINO ORIENTE

#### ARTICOLI

- ALESSANDRO DE BONIS, *I Micenei nel levante: il caso di Ugarit (Ras Shamra)* 91

#### NOTE E DISCUSSIONI

- VITALI BARTASH, *New Texts from the Early Dynastic I-II Period. A Review article of: C. Lecompe (author), L. Verderame (editor), Archaic Tablets and Fragments from Ur (ATFU) from L. Woolley's Excavations at the Royal Cemetery. Nisaba. Studi Assiriologici Messinesi (NSAM) 25* 119

### INDIA E TIBET

#### ARTICOLI

- PIERA CAVENAGHI, *Education and Nationalism: Role of the Azad Schools in the Pukhtun National Movement* 131  
JESSE KNUTSON, *Political Pleasures in Late Classical India: Kālidāsa's Spirituality and King Harṣadeva's Imagination of Polygamous Urbanity.* 163  
SATOSHI OGURA, *Incompatible Outsiders or Believers of a Darśana?: Representations of Muslims by Three Brahmans of Śāhmīrid Kaśmīr* 179

#### NOTE E DISCUSSIONI

- CARMINE PISANO, *India and Greece: Methods and Models of Comparison in The Mahābhārata and Greek Mythology by Fernando Wulff Alonso* 215

## RECENSIONI

- Being Bengali – At Home and in the World*. Edited by Mridula Nath Chakraborty (Carola Erika Lorea) 231
- FRANCESCO MANISCALCO, *Arachosia. Terra d'incontro tra Oriente e Occidente* (Natalia Manzano) 233
- SILVIA SCHWARZ LINDER, *The Philosophical and Theological Teachings of the Padmasaṃhitā* (Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz) 235
- PETER SKILLING, JASON A. CARBINE, CLAUDIO CICUZZA, SANTI PAKDEEKHAM, eds., *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities* (Chiara Neri) 237
- FERNANDO WULFF ALONSO, *The Mahābhārata and Greek Mythology*, trans. Andrew Morrow (Nick Allen) 241

## INDIA E ASIA CENTRALE (ARTE E ARCHEOLOGIA)

## ARTICOLI

- PATRYK SKUPNIEWICZ, *The Iconographic Function of Armor in Sasanian Art* 251

## CINA

## ARTICOLI

- LARA COLANGELO, *La traduzione delle fonti del diritto romano e la formazione di un linguaggio giuridico cinese: possibili interferenze grammaticali dal latino* 285
- VICTORIA ALMONTE, *Identification of Some Toponyms: Ibn Battuta in China* 313
- FEDERICA CASALIN, *Talented but Devious: the 'Italian Character' According to the Geographical Sources Published in China between 1815 and 1858* 333

## GIAPPONE

## ARTICOLI

- LAURA DIMITRIO, *Covering one's Face. The Hidden Visages of Japanese Women from the Heian Period to the Edo Period* 371

# NEW TEXTS FROM THE EARLY DYNASTIC I-II PERIOD\*

VITALI BARTASH

The review article discusses the recent publication of 66 early cuneiform documents from the ancient city of Ur by Verderame and Lecompte. These texts belong to the Early Dynastic I-II period, the least represented textual corpus of the 3rd mill. BC Mesopotamia. The review highlights the historical value of these administrative records for the reconstruction of the history of the period which appear to have witnessed major changes in political and socioeconomic spheres in Southern Mesopotamia. The occurrences of the city of Kiš in several inscriptions is connected to the growing influence of this Central Mesopotamian kingdom in the south. The article also discusses the challenges one faces while attempting to date Early Dynastic I-II texts from Ur and elsewhere.

KEYWORDS: cuneiform, Early Dynastic I-II period, 3rd mill. BC Mesopotamia

THE main aim and contribution of the book by Verderame and Lecompte is the edition of 65 cuneiform texts and fragments from the ancient city of Ur dating back to the Early Dynastic period I-II. The majority of them are of administrative content. A single fragment of the Sargonic period (no. 14) is also included. It is well-known that the majority of early Ur texts was published by E. Burrows in 1935.<sup>1</sup> The 66 documents edited in the reviewed book represent the last remaining early texts from Ur excavated by L. Woolley. Since the entire corpus of Early Dynastic I-II cuneiform inscriptions comprises less than one thousand manuscripts, making it the least represented corpus of the 3<sup>rd</sup> mill. BC Mesopotamia, any new material published to augment it is of great value.

The editor of the volume, Lorenzo Verderame, focuses on the study of Neo-Sumerian archives and Mesopotamian celestial divination. As his *Editor's Foreword* recounts, he was responsible for the publication of the texts edited in the volume and took measurements and pictures of the tablets as well as cataloging them. According to the editor, the tablets were stored in two small containers together with Old Akkadian tablets from Ur. I presume that the latter are those tablets that were published as A. Alberti, F. Pomponio, *Pre-Sargonic and Sargonic Texts from Ur*. Studia Pohl: Series Maior 13, Rome 1986.

Camille Lecompte, the author of the book, concentrates his attention on the study of 3<sup>rd</sup> mill. Mesopotamia and has published on different periods,

\* Review article of: C. Lecompte (author), L. Verderame (editor), *Archaic Tablets and Fragments from Ur (ATFU) from L. Woolley's Excavations at the Royal Cemetery*. Nisaba. Studi Assiriologici Messinesi (NSAM) 25. DiCAM, Messina, 2013, pp. x+210, 4 plates.

<sup>1</sup> *Ur Excavation Texts 2. Archaic Period*.

ranging from Late Uruk to Neo-Sumerian. The geographical horizon of his works spread from Girsu to the South to Mari to the North. Lecompte took over the project of editing early Ur texts from L. Verderame in 2010.

The importance of ED I-II texts cannot be overestimated. First of all, these texts bridge the gap between Late Uruk and ED IIIa (“Fara”) texts. Recent studies show that Late Uruk texts were indeed written in Sumerian (Monaco 2012; Monaco 2013; Krebernik 2013: 192). Needless to say, their orthography is very different from what is considered “normal” Sumerian (ED IIIb – Old Babylonian Sumerian). It is common knowledge, however, that the orthography of ED IIIa texts differs from that of texts of subsequent periods as well. Thus, the importance of the ED I-II textual material lies in bridging a gap between the still poorly understood texts of Late Uruk and the far better understood texts of ED IIIa.

Secondly, despite the scarcity of historical inscriptions in the strict sense of the word, the existing textual and archaeological data suggest that considerable changes in political, socioeconomic and, probably, ethnic spheres were occurring during that period. For instance, there are more individuals whose personal names included the element **lugal** “king” or, more neutrally, “big man” in administrative documents. Furthermore, the institution **e<sub>2</sub>-gal**, literary “The Big House”, which is usually associated with the household of rulers in subsequent periods, seems also to appear for the first time in script (Andersson 2012: 35, 84 and *passim*). These changes may imply the growing power of kings in Southern Mesopotamia during that period.

The geopolitics of Central and Southern Mesopotamia was likely defined by the presence of a large and powerful regional kingdom of Kiš. Its existence, originally proposed by Gelb, is increasingly substantiated by new data from Steinkeller. He argues that the growth of the twin-city of Kiš in the ED I period, must be connected with the influx of Semitic people into the region. Steinkeller attributes the greatest territorial expansion to the ED II period (2013: 146-148). The idea won support among other scholars as well. Veldhuis has recently identified half a dozen lexical and literary compositions that belonged to the “Kish tradition” and emphasized the alleged role of Kish scribal schools as transmitters and modernizers of the Late Uruk writing tradition in Mesopotamia and beyond, in Syria (Veldhuis 2014). In this connection I need to underline multiple references to the city of Kish and its **ensi<sub>x</sub>** (PA.SI) “governor” found in texts edited in the volume. Both cities and governors of Kish and Ur appear side by side in several texts. This surely provides important historical implications and requires further study. It may eventually elucidate whether Kiš and Ur had been allies, or alternatively, whether Ur was subject to the power of the northern state.

Changes in administrative practices of institutional households are reflected in the innovations in mensuration practices, which may be attributed to this period. The systems of mensuration represented in ED I-II economic



documents share many traits with those of the Late Uruk period. However, the first appearance of the weight measures and several distinct novelties in other mensuration systems suggest that a metrological reform took place during the ED I-II period (Bartash 2013: 46 ff. and *passim*).

The history of the ED I-II period has yet to be written. Illustrative in this respect is the absence of a chapter dedicated to the ED I-II period in the volume on the early periods of Mesopotamia.<sup>2</sup> New material is sorely needed to reconstruct political, economic, social and religious events and processes taking place during that time. That is why each scrap of new information is welcome and the publication of new texts in the reviewed book is a major event, since it is not known if and when a considerable number of ED I-II texts will be available to the scholarly community in the nearest future.

Proceeding to the discussion of the book, some words should be said about its title. The abbreviation (ATFU) is already present in the title. The author made this choice, as far as I can tell, to make it the only advisable way to cite the book. Introducing the abbreviation in the title appears to be a way of avoiding possible confusion with the abbreviation ATU (*Archaische Texte aus Uruk*).

Far more importantly, regarding the title, is its use of the word “archaic” to designate early cuneiform texts. The word “archaic” does not convey any real information about the date of these texts. Moreover, scholars of cuneiform use it differently: whereas some reserve it for Late Uruk texts, others include texts of a later date into this designation. The terms “archaic”, “classic”, and “neo...”, are common in cuneiform studies. They represent a rather unsuccessful and unconvincing attempt to emulate the periodization of the Greco-Roman world in Ancient Near Eastern studies. The periodization used by the *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative*, namely “Uruk IV”, “Uruk III” and “ED I-II”, is neutral and more accurate since it attempts to bind early manuscripts to corresponding archaeological periods.

Another fundamental matter is the term “ED I-II period” which is used throughout the book but is never discussed in detail. As in almost all early textual material from Mesopotamia, the accurate dating of the Ur ED I-II texts is problematic. Camille Lecompte dates the texts within a broad temporal frame of 2950 to 2600 BC. He also refers to Englund who dates them from 2800 to 2700 BC (p. 3 + n. 9). Since the editor remarks that “most of these texts were in the same condition as when they were first discovered, with neither excavation nor museum catalogue number”, there are no direct archaeological clues which would contribute to elucidating the find-spots of the manuscripts, which in turn would give a hint as to their date.

The opinion of Steinkeller may be added to those of Lecompte and Englund on the dating of the early Ur texts. He tentatively dates an inscribed

<sup>2</sup> J. Bauer, R. K. Englund, M. Krebernik, *Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 160/1, Freiburg Schweiz/Göttingen 1998.

plaque from Kiš, which he discusses, to ED II. He does so because of the script, which is similar to “archaic texts from Ur”. The latter “seem to belong to the ED II period” (Steinkeller 2013: 132). Here we have an example of circular reasoning: dating an undated document by a number of documents that cannot be dated positively themselves. In my opinion, before having conducted a comprehensive paleographic study of all extant “ED I-II” texts, any attempts to divide these texts into smaller temporal subgroups are highly unconvincing.

It is evident that scholars use the term “ED I-II texts” as a designation for a period in cuneiform palaeography. The term, however, originates in archaeology. The definition of the temporal frame and subdivision of the archaeological period “ED I-II” is itself obscure. Here I limit myself to mentioning the doubts of several scholars that the “ED II period” may be traced in Southern Mesopotamia at all (Frayne 2009: 38-39; van Ess et al. 2009: 2). The question is therefore complex and requires not only a palaeographic but also further archaeological investigation.

A final remark about the book’s title pertains to the so-called “Royal cemetery of Ur”. The title suggests that the tablets were excavated there. Naturally, it raises a question: how it is possible that the tablets were excavated in a gravesite? Burying archival records with deceased individuals was not common practice in early Mesopotamia. It seems that the texts edited in the book must have been discovered elsewhere. According to the author “the find-spots [within the Royal cemetery - *VB*] are scattered” (p. 4). The same page mentions that the tablets published by Burrows had been found in a secondary archaeological context in the stratigraphic layers “SIS IV-V”. Some light on the actual find-spots of the earliest Ur tablets is shed on page 6 where three places are identified. Lecompte also cites Woolley who states that the tablets were found “below the Royal Cemetery graves”. This, to my mind, shows that using “the Royal Cemetery” in the book’s title is unnecessary and misleading, since the tablets probably have no connection at all with the burials.

The book is divided into three major sections: introduction, text edition, and indices. The first section briefly addresses questions of date and archaeological context, writing, format, language and numerical systems found in the texts. It also provides a concise discussion of the ED I-II period and its written evidence. Since the introduction rests upon the entire corpus of ED I-II Ur texts, remarks about the writing, language, and content of these manuscripts will be valuable to anyone studying this period.

The content of the texts falls within the usual range of topics characterizing administrative records of the 3<sup>rd</sup> mill. Mesopotamia: accounts of grain and grain products, animals, pots and containers, lists of personnel, etc. Several texts are described as “school”, one among them being “lexical” (p. 7). The physical condition of a number of texts makes it impossible to establish their contents with certainty.

The author makes a passing but important remark on the origin of the Ur ED I-II texts: “this corpus of texts, similarly to the archives from the Uruk period, is a mixture of different kinds of texts because they came from an institution where both school and administrative offices were present” (p. 8). I can attest to this after studying Early Dynastic and Sargonic texts from the Cornell and Schøyen collections: finished and unfinished administrative accounts on one hand, and student exercises (or “school texts”) on the other, are very similar in their shape, arrangement of text on tablets, and palaeography of signs. This may suggest that “schools”, or rather, training centres for future bureaucrats, were located on the same premises that accounts were stored and written down in.

Several important observations are made in the introduction. The author identifies several personal names that are already mentioned in Late Uruk period texts (p. 14). This shows that ED I-II texts indeed represent a link between Late Uruk texts and texts from later periods. On the same page the author introduces several names mentioned in ED I-II Ur texts, which may be Semitic.

The author meticulously discusses the problem of numerical and metrological values of numerical signs found in ED I-II Ur texts on pp. 15-20. He criticizes Chambon’s article on ED I-II Ur measures (Chambon 2003) for too many unproven reconstructions. Lecompte himself invests much effort in discussing and identifying the values of numerical signs. However, as he correctly states, the number of tablets and their poor state of preservation do not allow us to reconstruct the systems of mensuration<sup>3</sup> with a plausible degree of certainty. The metrological systems of ED I-II period may also be regarded as a transitional one from Uruk to ED IIIa.

The edition of texts follows the usual Assyriological practice: each text is provided with photographs, copy, transliteration, translation, and commentary. All edited texts are written in Sumerian. Transliterations follow Mittermayer’s list:<sup>4</sup> for example readings such as **para<sub>10</sub>** on p. 67. In those cases where no interpretation is offered, the author follows the transliteration system employed for transliterating Late Uruk texts.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the photographs of the tablets are too dark and lack contrast. This, together with the fact that the book is printed on paper with a yellowish shade, makes it difficult to verify the transliterations against copies. Fortunately, Lecompte generously provided me with pictures. Another shortcoming is the absence of pictures of tablet edges. It leaves the reader with no other option other than to trust the author’s transliterations, since there is no way to check the correctness of readings. I know from my own experience,

<sup>3</sup> Basically there are two types of measures mentioned in early Ur texts: capacity measures and surface calculation measures.

<sup>4</sup> C. Mittermayer, *Altbabylonische Zeichenliste der sumerisch-literarischen Texte*, Fribourg/Göttingen 2006.

<sup>5</sup> M. Green – H. J. Nissen’s *Zeichenliste der archaischen Texte aus Uruk*, Berlin 1989.

though, that sometimes it is the editor(s) rather than the author who decides which pictures to include in the book.

The bibliography has some minor flaws, including typos and omissions. For instance, there is an erroneous blank in the sign ŠEN (p. 208 *sub* Steinkeller 1981). The same page lacks the number of the volume of the *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (*sub* Steinkeller 1987). The volume's main text also suffers from a number of typos in the main text, for example "the lords fills Kul-aba<sub>4</sub>" or "omette" instead of *omitted* (p. 13).

When discussing verbal prefix chains which occur in the edited texts, the author speaks about "prefixes I, II, and III" (e.g. p. 12) but never mentions the system or "school" of Sumerian grammar he follows in his study.

The author translates both verbs **ak** and **mud** as "to create" in personal names (p. 13), which is imprecise. Further on the same page Lecompe translates the personal name **Ak-<sup>d</sup>Inana** as "created by Inanna", while leaving **Lugal-ak** untranslated. It seems to me that they should be translated as "The work (lit. "the deed") of Inana" (genitive construction) and **Lugal-ak** "The king has done" respectively, since the stem **a<sub>5</sub>.k** takes different syntactical positions.

Several pages at the end of the volume are needlessly designated as "plates". They are printed on the same paper as the rest of the volume. Besides that, they have no numbering typical for plates, such as the usual "Plate I", "Plate II", etc. This part of the volume consists of a chronological figure of Mesopotamia 3200-2000 BC and two maps reprinted from publications by other authors. The chronological figure provides the chronological table, the names of archaeological/historical periods that are explained by corresponding major and well known textual and archaeological finds. Strangely, the Sargonic and Ur III periods of the figure remain without the benefit of any of these explanations.

The author undertook a heroic task in studying these tablets, which would otherwise remain unpublished. The reason that Burrows did not publish them along with the other texts he edited is clear: most tablets and fragments are badly defaced. I congratulate the author for providing mostly reliable copies<sup>6</sup> and transliterations of these texts. The copies are well drawn and reflect the time and effort he invested in their preparation.

Almost every edited text is followed by an exhaustive commentary and includes a list of the personal names mentioned in it. The commentaries mostly discuss how to interpret a broken sign or how to read a sign combination as a personal name. The author's command of literature is impressive. The literature cited is largely complete and up-to-date.

The publication of 65 texts from Ur constitutes a significant contribution to the limited corpus of ED I-II inscriptions and will doubtlessly stimulate

<sup>6</sup> See Lecompe's corrections published in *Cuneiform Digital Library Notes 2014:21*.

keen interest by scholars and students of cuneiform and Ancient Mesopotamia. The well-structured introduction, solid edition of the texts, convincing interpretation of broken passages, exhaustive commentaries, use of up-to-date secondary literature as well as references to texts of earlier and subsequent periods alongside detailed indices, make the book invaluable to the study of the script, language, history, and culture of the ED I-II period of Ancient Mesopotamia. Anyone interested in studying this pivotal time frame will benefit greatly from this work. I thank both the author and the editor wholeheartedly for their important contribution to the field and admit that I have learned a great deal from this notable publication.

What follows below are remarks pertaining to individual pages or specific texts edited in the volume. They do not include additions and corrections to the volume published by Lecompte elsewhere.

**P. 13:** Personal name **Lugal-mu** may be an abbreviation for several personal names including **Lugal-mu-da-kuš<sub>2</sub>**, **Lugal-mu-še<sub>3</sub>-gal<sub>2</sub>**, etc. (see Andersson 2012: 364-366) and should not be rendered **Lugal-ġu<sub>10</sub>** “My king”.

**P. 13, n. 31:** AK of the personal name **MUNUS-alan-ak** cannot be genitive case: the writing would be \***MUNUS-alan-na** in that case. Furthermore, before proceeding to analyze the name grammatically one should understand what the name means.

**P. 22:** The connection of an official **kiġgal** to “assembly” (**ukkin**) has never been proven. The lexical attestations **kiġ<sub>2</sub>-gal** = GAL.UKKIN = *mu’erru* “commander, director” (Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, Vol. M<sup>2</sup>: 178) provide no proof that the sign UKKIN of GAL.UKKIN refer to “assembly”. UKKIN in GAL-UKKIN of the “Archaic Lu A” line 16 should not be taken as “chief of the assembly”. Rather, it is a clear quasi-phonetic writing **UKKIN-gal** that helps to read the word as /kiġgal/, thus **kin<sub>3</sub>-gal** (already ZATU 580), which corresponds to the later **kiġ<sub>2</sub>-gal**.

**P. 23:** Personal name **Me-Ararma<sub>2</sub>**: why not **Me-Larsa<sub>2</sub>** “Divine powers (come out of) Larsa” then? This name falls into the type of names **Me**-(temple name)-**ta** (Kreberník 2002: 41).

**No. 1:** Oo102’: The sign SU has a distinct KUR inscribed. However it is absent in the copy. The name **Ur-Sud<sub>x</sub>**((SU×KUR).RU) is amply attested in later periods.

Oo103’: Likely **Ma:U<sub>2</sub>**.

Oo201’: There are clearly visible traces of a sign before the number.

**No. 2:** Oo102’:  $\overline{\text{PAD}}_3^7$  ME EN. A personal name, of course.

**No. 6:** Oo101: 2N<sub>1</sub> še.

**No. 13:** Oo101’-02’: The sign is DUG; there is also a sign preceding DUG in both cases.

Oo104’: The first sign seems to be A.

Oo105’: The first sign is likely GEŠTUG or IGI. The second sign cannot be NAGA.

O0202': Doubtless a geographical name discussed by Lecompte in *Cuneiform Digital Library Notes 2014: 22*. Transliteration of the line:  $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{KIŠ}^{\text{r}}\rceil$ -ERIN<sub>2</sub><sup>ki</sup>. This is not a personal name as claimed in the commentary, but a geographical name: cf. the absence of the numerical "1" before it. A personal name might have been present in the preceding line, thus "PN (of) the city of ...".

R0101: There is a sign after the number: a LAGAB<sup>7</sup> with a sign inscribed in it. The low resolution of the picture makes it impossible to determine what is in there. Requires collation.

R0102: The same applies here: several signs may be distinguished after the number, the first seems to be KAL.

**No. 14:** Judging by the shape of the signs (especially GUR) and thinness of the lines, the fragment can be dated to the Late Sargonic times.

O0102': The first sign is copied incorrectly: it is SAG or one of its derivatives.

**No. 15:** O0102': There are traces of signs before "KI".

**No. 20:** O0201': There is the beginning of a sign after SAG.

O0202': 4 še kaš "4(gur) of barley for beer" then.

**No. 21:** Besides several signs (LU<sub>2</sub>, EN) all interpretations are doubtful.

**No. 22:** O0105': KU-KU.

O0106': Interpretation is doubtful.

**No. 23:** O0302': Me-lam<sub>2</sub>-DU-si?

**No. 25:** O0101': 2N<sub>57</sub> is hardly expected here; probably:  $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{SAG}/\text{UR}^{\text{r}}\rceil$ -E<sub>2</sub>- $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{X}^{\text{r}}\rceil$ .

R0101': NINDA<sub>2</sub>× $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{X}^{\text{r}}\rceil$  is not a "cereal product" here since it is already mentioned as **munu<sub>4</sub>-bappir** "beer malt" in the text. NINDA<sub>2</sub>× $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{X}^{\text{r}}\rceil$  is a capacity measure for cereal products used in Late Uruk texts, the so-called "N-System" (Damerow/Englund/Nissen 1988: 53; Englund 2001: 31-32). The present text confirms, to my knowledge for the first time, that this measurement practice was used during the ED I-II period too. The measures written with sign NINDA<sub>2</sub> were well known to scribes in the ED period as well: cf. Civil 1982: 3 ff. The sign transliterated as "ĜEŠ" is probably correct. In this case the malt was measured by wooden containers of a certain capacity (<sup>ĜEŠ</sup>NINDA<sub>2</sub>× $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{X}^{\text{r}}\rceil$ ).

**No. 33:** O0201: The sign is clearly DIN.

O0205: The use of TAK<sub>4</sub> for ŠU is an important finding. It confirms the suggestion of Steinkeller that ŠU and TAK<sub>4</sub> were merely variants of the same sign in Late Uruk period (Steinkeller 1995: 709 no. 532).

MUNUS TUR could be "women (and their) children" among other possibilities. In this and the following line read: N še **ninda** "N(gur) barley (for) bread".

**No. 57:** O0104': 4N<sub>1</sub>.

O0105': [N]  $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{X}^{\text{r}}\rceil$ -za<sub>7</sub>-za<sub>7</sub>.

O0206': "A" could be KUR instead.

O0307': ŠAM<sub>2</sub> is very unlikely here.

**No. 60:** O0306: ŠAM<sub>2</sub> GI MUD  $\lceil^{\text{r}}\text{GAL}^{\text{r}}\rceil$ .

Oo401: Doubtlessly “6”.

Oo403: Doubtlessly “4”.

Ro203:  $\lceil$ SAR $\rceil$ .

Ro304: AMA GU<sub>4</sub>/TA' GI  $\lceil$ x $\rceil$  KU<sub>6</sub>

**No. 62:** Oo301': The sign is probably UG<sub>3</sub> plus a broken sign rather than E<sub>2</sub>-ban.

Oo402': Probably the number is just 4N<sub>1</sub>.

**No. 63:** Oo101: The first sign could be PAD.

Oo203: The numbers are: 1(bur<sub>3</sub>) 1(eše<sub>3</sub>).

**No. 65:** Ro201: The sign to the left of ŠE could be  $\lceil$ BA $\rceil$ .

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