House and Household Economies in 3rd Millennium B.C.E. Syro-Mesopotamia

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E₂-mi₂ – ‘women’s quarters’: the earliest written evidence

Vitali Bartash, Frankfurt am Main

Summary

This paper looks at the earliest appearances of the Sumerian term e₂-mi₂ in written evidence from cities other than Girsu. The word is variously translated as ‘women’s quarters’, ‘queen’s household’, etc. Combining evidence from lexical, literary and economic texts, an attempt is made to outline the morphology and possible semantics of the term.

The sign combination E₂-MUNUS1 is found as early as the Uruk III period, in which it might have designated a building or an institution. The term e₂-mi₂ as a household, or part of one, is unambiguously attested in ED IIIb – Ur III texts from Southern Mesopotamia. The combination of evidence from different text genres shows that e₂-mi₂ referred to the ‘women’s part of a house’, where women and also babies lived.

In addition this paper provides the morphological analysis of the term for ama-a-tu/emedu and adopts its new understanding as ‘(the one) born in the women’s part of the house’ supporting its usual understanding as ‘household slave’.

Keywords: Ancient Sumer; 3rd mill. BC; household; women and children; cuneiform texts from Archaic, Early Dynastic and Sargonic periods.

Terms discussed: E₂-MUNUS, e₂-mi₂, ama₂/ame₂, emedu(AMA.A.TU).

1. Introduction

The term commonly referred to as e₂-mi₂ has attracted the attention of scholars since the start of the publication of presently approximately 1800 texts from ED IIIb Girsu, modern Tello/Tall Lawh. These texts of administrative content originate from the time period limited by the reigns of Enentarzi, Lugalanda, and Urukagina, the rulers of the First dynasty of Lagash, which roughly corresponds to 2400-2350 BC, according to the ‘Middle Chronology’.4

The ED IIIb Girsu e₂-mi₂ has been extensively studied by numerous scholars for more than a hundred years. It is common knowledge that e₂-mi₂ at ED IIIb Girsu was renamed as e₂-‘Ba-wa₃ (“the house of (the goddess) Bawa”) during the Urukagina ‘reforms’. Gebhard Selz entitles this and similar early Sumerian institutions as “institutionale Haushalte, die oft als ‘Tempel’ bezeichnet werden” (Selz 2011b: 26). This renaming did not much alter the institution in terms of its economy or administration (Prentice 2010: 4). Therefore it is clear that the Girsu’s e₂-mi₂ has been a temple household.

However the term e₂-mi₂ occurs also in textual evidence from Mesopotamian cities other than Girsu. As will become clear from this paper, e₂-mi₂ was only a name of the above mentioned Girsu temple of the goddess Bawa. However, the evidence from other cities and periods implies that e₂-mi₂ was a term for women quarters of any household. In case of the Girsu’s e₂-mi₂ we have an example of metonymy, where the temple of Bawa receives the name ‘women quarters’ because she is the spouse of the male deity Ningirsu. Therefore, the the Girsu’s e₂-mi₂ is not e₂-mi₂ in its original, social sense. However this does not eliminate the possibility of the origins of the Bawa temple from ‘women quarters’ of the governess Dimtur (cf. citation by Maekawa below).

The fact that the temple name e₂-mi₂ is mentioned in numerous ED IIIb Girsu documents,5 combined with multiple studies which regard this institution as a typical Sumerian social and economic entity, creates an elusive impression of e₂-mi₂ being of enormous economic importance. For instance, one of the papers on e₂-mi₂ in ED III Girsu explains this institution ‘as paradigmatic of an organizational type at ED Lagash’ (Magid 2001: 316). However a detailed

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1 Here and further the sign’s name is given according to MZL.
2 I am deeply grateful to Jerrold S. Cooper (The Johns Hopkins University), Robert K. England (UCLA), Salvatore F. Monaco (Rome), Thomas Richter (Frankfurt/Main) and Age Westenholz (Copenhagen) for reading the draft of this paper and providing me with valuable corrections and suggestions. Any remaining shortcomings in the paper rest solely with the author.
3 For the number of texts available and their probable provenance, cf. recently Prentice 2010: 2.
4 Cf. Selz 2011a for a recent discussion of the ED IIIb Girsu archives, their contents, structure, peculiarities of tablet specimens as well as a summary of their accounting terminology.
5 For instance there are 157 ED IIIb Girsu documents mentioning the term according to the CDLI database (April 2013). The multitude of references to the term e₂-mi₂ in the ED IIIb Girsu texts may be explained by the supposition that the majority of texts from that site and period has been excavated by either archaeologists or looters in the area of the e₂-mi₂ itself. Cf. Bauer 1998: 440-441 for a description of excavation progress at Girsu and a map of the excavations.
study of e₂-mi₂ in ED Girsu reveals that its economic role is largely overestimated.

Maekawa (1973-74) provides a thorough study of the economy of the Girsu e₂-mi₂. Maekawa's figures (ibid: 89 ff.) illustrate that e₂-mi₂ employed a staff of not much larger than 200 individuals. For instance only about a dozen 'craftsmen' (geš-kig₂-ti) are mentioned in the barley rationing lists, which implies that their labor was not aimed at production but was used rather to maintain the e₂-mi₂ itself. Evidently e₂-mi₂ had been a rather moderate-sized natural-economy household. Maekawa's conclusions say much for it: "The organization of e₂-mi₂ was originally smaller and more modest than the temple of Nin-gir₂-su or the 'palace'. Even when it developed during the reigns of Lugal-an-da and Uru-KA-gi-na, the population of the personnel of the e₂-mi₂ was "...only about one-twentieth of that of the temple of Nin-gir₂-su. T. Gomi has assumed the actual temple of Ba-u₂ was forced to be the e₂-mi₂ in the days of En-en₃-tar-zi [i.e. much earlier - VB]. I am disinclined to this view. The personnel of the e₂-mi₂ in those days ... may have been only several dozens of private followers of Dim₃-tur." (Maekawa 1973-74: 139).

Therefore the e₂-mi₂ of ED IIIb Girsu must have been a small temple institution, very likely dependent on a larger central institution, such as the ED IIIb Girsu e₂-mi₂ 'palace' was. One of the most striking distinctive marks in administering this institution is that it had always been under the authority of a ruler’s wife (Prentice 2010: 3). These persons were Dimtur, the wife of Entarzi, Baranamtara, the spouse of Lugalanda, and Sasa, the consort of Urukagina. This led numerous scholars to the conclusion that e₂-mi₂ was a sort of 'queen’s manor'. For instance Rosemary Prentice writes: "The term ‘e₂-MI₂’ may be translated as ‘house of the woman’, and assuming that ‘the woman’ refers to the ruler’s wife, a translation of ‘household of the ruler’s wife’ is possible ‘...’\footnote{10}.\footnote{10}

Here it is important to stress the fact that we have a clear example of a household which can be described as both ‘temple’ (because in was a temple of goddess Bawa) and ‘palace household’ (because it was ruler wives manor) in case of the Girsu’s e₂-mi₂. This fact should be taken into consideration by those studying the history of the ‘palace/temple households’ relationships in the 3rd mill. BC.

E₂-mi₂, in the time of the Second dynasty of Lagash, which partly preceded and partly was synchronous with the Ur III dynasty (Steinkeller 1988), remains unstudied, most likely due to the insignificant number of references to the term available hitherto.\footnote{10}

E₂-mi₂, is also present in Ur III documents from Girsu. W. Sallaberger follows the translation ‘Frauengemach’ – ‘women’s chambers’ – established by Adam Falkenstein, who had also identified the writing a₂-mi as a variant for e₂-mi₂ (Falkenstein 1966: 144 ff.; Sallaberger 1993: 289 and footnote 1351). Sallaberger adds an interesting quotation from an Ur III document BM 12364 (published in Sauren 1970: 74 and also republished as MVN 17, 129; rev. 2): (female name, the wife of a goldsmith) mu a₂-mi₂-a i₁₃-in-ti-la-še₃, ‘because (female person) lived in the ‘women’s chambers’’ (Sallaberger 1993: ib.), which shows that women lived in e₂-mi₂.

Sallaberger mentions Ur III Girsu’s e₂-mi₂, in his article ‘Palast’ in the Realexxikon für Assyriologie. He writes the following about parts of a Mesopotamian palace: ‘Besides a throne room and places of worship, a harem appertaining to the ruler and her maidservants is also attested in the Old Sumerian Lagash as an institution (e₂-mi₂) and likely as a part of ‘palace’ in Ur III’ (Sallaberger 2003: 203; translation from German - VB). He also provides references to two Ur III texts from Ur which imply that e₂-mi₂ was part of a palace complex: a₂-mi₂ ša a₂-gal-še₂ zi₂-ga₂ ‘(goods) withdrawn for Emini inside the palace’ (UET 3, 1566 obv. 3-4 and 1718 obv. 2-3).

We do not have any evidence yet to support the assumption that the e₂-mi₂ had been the predecessor of what is known in the Islamic world as *harem*. However the evidence supporting the thesis that e₂-mi₂ could have been part of the e₂-gal ‘palace’ is discussed further.

2.1. Reading and meaning of the term

The sign combination E₂-MUNUS is ‘house’ plus ‘woman’ at face value. The rendering of the term evoked a considerable discrepancy in the translation and understanding: the majority of scholars prefer e₂-mi₂ nowadays; however the rendering e₂-munus is also present from time to time in some publications. However the correct reading is undoubtedly e₂-mi₂, as was proved long ago.

The term in its writings ama/ame₂ (GA₂×MUNUS and E₂×MUNUS), with syllabic renderings a₂-ma and a₂-me, is compared with the Akkadian word maštaku in lexical lists and translated as ‘living quarters’ by the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary. The references also illustrate that this building was mainly the abode of goddesses and women (CAD M₁, p. 392 f.).
It is commonly held since Krecher’s *Sumerische Kallityrik* that qa-mi₂ is the variant of e₂-mi₂, and that e₂-mi₂ is the older spelling of ama₄(GA₂×mi₂) and ama₄(E₂×mi₂) of literary compositions (Krecher 1966: 110-112). He transposes the term as ‘Frauen-Wohnstätte’ and especially as ‘Kulttraum weiblicher Gottheiten’ (ibid: 110).

Selz referred to the evidence collected by Krecher, where e₂-mi₂ is paralleled by ame₄, ama₄=eme₄, in his edition of the ED IIIb Girsu administrative texts in American collections. Selz accepted Krecher’s suggestion that the Sumerian word for ‘(human and animal) female’ is */eme/, which is concealed under the sign AMA. Thus the sign AMA should be read eme₄.

The readings eme₄ and imi₂ are attested in the following lexical texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>Sumerian</th>
<th>Akkadian</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSL 14 (Ea), p. 364, lines 239-240</td>
<td>e-me = i-mi-ka-a-nu- eme₄, ama</td>
<td>GA₂×AN um</td>
<td>AMMA.A.TU₅ (= slave born in the house)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSL 12 (Lu), p. 228 iii 13’</td>
<td>lu₄, ilītī bitī ‘emedu</td>
<td>GA₂×AN ‘mother’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lexical evidence displays two or even three phonemic variants of the Sumerian word mother: /ama/, /eme/ and /imi/. On the other hand the phonemic shape /ama/ for ‘mother’ is confirmed by the variation in the writing of a personal name: Igi-amaše vs. Igi-maše (ED IIIb – Ur III passim). Therefore, /eme/ and /imi/ must have been either (dialectic?) variations of the Sumerian term for ‘mother’ or refer to e₂-mi₂ instead.

Very important for the present discussion is the fact that lexical evidence clearly distinguishes between the sign AMA in the reading eme₄, ‘mother’ and AMA in emedu ‘house-born slave’.¹¹ This means that AMA of ama-a-tu = emedu ‘house-born slave’ and of ama₄ ‘mother’ are different words. Further we show that ama in the term for ‘house-born slave’ should be read eme₄ and is identical with the term e₂-mi₂.

Krecher saw the element eme₄ ‘mother’ – ‘Weibchen’ according to him – in the word emedu which he understood as ‘jemand (= der Sklave bzw. die Sklavin) von der Art, wie er (sie) durch eine /eme/ geboren wird’ (Krecher 1987: 9-10). Therefore he analyzes emedu(AMA.A.TU) as eme₄ in the meaning ‘female’ plus tud(d) ‘to give birth’ (ib.: 9 ff.).

We suggest here a completely different understanding for the term emedu ‘house-born slave’. We regard the sign AMA in the reading eme₄ as referring to the term e₂-mi₂, which is combined with a verbal form a=tud(d)=Ø. The a= should most likely be associated with the ‘prefixed indicator (a/’ (Edzard 2003: 111 ff.), with the notion of ‘state’ as opposed to ‘action’. The whole term thereby means ‘(the one) born in/of the Emi’. Another possibility is to interpret the term as: eme₄=a tud(Ø) ‘born in the Emi’. The latter seems more probable grammatically. In any event here the term e₂-mi₂ is likely to be hiding under the writing AMA.

This provides an important implication that e₂-mi₂ must have been simply the ‘women’s part of a(ny) house’ where births must also have taken place.

As stated previously, the word e₂-mi₂ takes the form ama₄=mašatu ‘living quarters’ in later lexical and literary texts. Based on the occurrences of ama₄=ame₄ in Old Babylonian copies of Sumerian literary compositions, P. Michalowski comes to the conclusion that it is “… clear from the references cited above that in OB Sumerian literary texts this lexeme refers to the private quarters of women and young children …” (Michalowski 1989: 76-78). The discussion on emedu and the evidence examined further show that e₂-mi₂ was a place where women lived and where births occurred. Therefore Cooper’s definition of ama₄=ame₄ as “a part of a house or a special building reserved for women” (Cooper 1983: 236) holds true.¹²

The phonetic realization of the term as /ame/ is attested already in texts from the 3rd mill. BC. The ‘Instructions of Suruppak’ may deliver the earliest evidence for it. The following figure is the comparison of the earliest Abu Salabikh version of the text according to the copy by Biggs (OIP 99, 256+323). Two fragments were joined by Civil (1984). The composite transliteration of the Old Babylonian version originates from ETCSL:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Early Dynastic’ IIIb, Abu Salabikh: originally OIP 99, 256+323 rev. v 8</td>
<td>a₂:mi še₂₇ <em>(x)</em>-aƙ₂ The Emi … (a verb)¹³</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Old Babylonian’, ETCSL c.5.6.1, I. 254</td>
<td>emeda(U.M.ME)₃- ga-la ama₄-a-ke₂₄ lugal-bi-ir nam si-im-mi-ib-tar re ‘The wet-nurses in the women’s quarters determine the fate of their lord’ (ETCSL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹¹ They are written: a) ama-tu, ama-u₄-tu, with ama-tu-da compared to Akk. alītām ‘progenitress’ (cf. CAD A₁, p. 340), whereas ‘house born slave’ emedu is written AMA.A.TU (cf. e.g. MSL 15, p. 30, 7:21-24).

¹² Note that the semantic field of ama₄=mašatu had widened in the second and first millennium and the term meant just ‘living quarters’ and sometimes even ‘storeroom’ (Michalowski 1989: 78).

¹³ For the verbal prefix še₂ cf. Alster 2005: 212-216 with references. As
The earliest from the ED IIIb Girsu administrative texts. e2-MU-l. 160: ‘Proto-Kagal’

On the other hand the Old Babylonian version had under -
cal lists. The sign combination e2-mi2
erences in administrative texts from Ur III Girsu where
it has to be noted that the interpretation must be ‘wet-nurses of …’ instead, since the first two words represent a gen-
tive construction put in the ergative case: (emeda=gala
ama5=ak)=e.

The earliest a2-mi which may be surely identified with the later
ama2/ame2 occurs in a much later composition, the so-called ‘Gudea Cylinders’ (ETCSL c.2.1.7):

B ii 23 4Ba-wa,gu2 a2-mi-zu ‘My Bawa, I have set
ma-ra-ğar up your Emi for you!’

B v 10 4Ba-wa, a2-mi-ni-še ‘Bawa going to her
du-a-ni Emi ...

Here it is ‘the abode of the goddess Bawa’, which corre-
sponds to what we know about e2-mi, as a temple of Bawa
from the ED IIIb Girsu administrative texts.

The final /i/ of the term e2-mi, is confirmed by several refer-
ences in administrative texts from Ur III Girsu where
e2-mi, is written e2-mi in the personal name E2-mi-ni-še3,
(HLC 28 obv. i 11; MVN 2, 277 obv. ii 14):
14 The cited above Ur III Girsu text MVN 17, 129 rev. 2 has the writing
a2-mi instead which corresponds to the practice found in the
literary compositions discussed.

In addition to the discussed GA2/E2×MUNUS = ama2/ame2,
found in early literary and later lexical texts, the original
sign combination E2-MUNUS-a occurs in the
Old Babylonian lexical list ‘Proto-Kagal’ (MSL 13, p. 71)
and is reconstructed in the bilingual ‘Kagal Bogazköy I’
(MSL 13, p. 150). The references are:

‘Proto-Kagal’ ‘Kagal’ Bo. I, D

1. 160: e2-MUNUS-a 1. 5: [e2-munus-a] ‘woman’s house’

= r bi 3-li ši-in-ni-
iš-ti

1. 161: e2-nita 1. 4: [e2-nita] = ‘man’s house’

= r bi 7-it zi-ik-ri

seen from the OB version, this morpheme was written with the value
i(ti) instead.

The need of the sign A is uncertain here. It might be a pho-
etic complement which hints to the actual pronunciation
of the term: either ‘ame or ama2. The Akkadian trans-
lation of the term confirms identification of e2-mi2 with
‘women’s quarters’.

The semantics of the term e2-mi2 = /ami/ is far more compi-
cated as it might appear. The first part of the compound
is undoubtedly e2 ‘house’, which is realized as *a/ according
to variant writings15. The interpretation of the element
written mi2 is much more complicated. Selz accepted Kre-
cher’s interpretation of the term e2-mi, as e2 + eme4 (Selz
1993: 401 with references to Krehner). Let us see how the
reading mi2 is represented in the lexical tradition.

The value mi2 occurs rarely in lexical lists (cf. MZL no.
883, p. 223-224) and its full form seems to be min, instead.
This is confirmed by variant writings of the word za-mi2,
‘lyre’, e.g. as za-me-in (cf. lexical section in CAD S, p.
118 sub sa-ma3). Therefore the phonemic shape of the
Sumerian term for ‘lyre’ had a final dropped consonant:
*zami(n)/. Since the etymology of za-mi2, is uncertain,
it’s ‘element’ mi(n) cannot be connected to that of e2-mi2.

The element mi2 is the part of the compound verb mi2...
dug and its substantive mi-dug, which means something
like ‘to care for’ and ‘care’ accordingly. The evidence for
this identification is provided by lexical texts which compa-
are mi2-du-a-ga with Akkadian kunnu ‘to treat a person
kindly’ and taknitum ‘care, solicitude’ (MSL 13, p. 213, ii
20-21; CAD K, p. 540; CAD T, p. 84). Further, since the
value mim is also compared with kunnu (MSL 14, p. 401,
l. 230) both mim and min, are here solely the representa-
tions of one and the same meaning of the sign MUNUS.
The sign MUNUS is compared with both teknitum and
kunnû also in ‘Proto-Ea/Aa’ (MSL 14, p. 126, l. 825-
826; Old Babylonian date) implying the reading mim/
min. However it is supplemented by the interpretation
mi2<dug> in the DCCLT which implies that both Akka-
dian equivalents refer to mi2<dug> rather than to mi2 alone.

The only separate meaning for mim (as a variant of min)
seems to be ruppusa ‘to widen, to make wide, to enlarge,
to extent, to increase’ but also ‘to strengthen (weak per-
sons)’ (cf. MSL 13, p. 213, ii 19 and CAD R, p. 153 ff.).
Unfortunately it is impossible to see any connection be-
tween this evidence with the term e2-mi2.

Unfortunately the meaning of the element mi2 in e2-mi2
remains uncertain. Taking into account the suggestion that
e2-mi2 should be ‘women’s part of a house’, it should stand
obviously for ‘woman’. However /mi/ or (mi(n)) cannot
be ‘woman’, since the latter is munus in Sumerian. Should
one regard this term as an adjective related to munus?

15 It is common knowledge that the real pronunciation of this Sumerian
word must have been /hay/ or similarly.
16 For further evidence in favor of /zami/ or /zamen/ cf. Attinger 1993:
755-761.
This question cannot be answered positively or negatively without a thorough study of Sumerian nominal formation, which is still insufficient.

2.2. \( E^{2}+M\text{UNUS} \) of the ‘Early Dynastic Lu\(_{1}\) E’

The sign combination \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) occurs long before the ED IIIb period. The earliest lexical text in which it is found is known as ‘Early Dynastic Lu\(_{1}\) E’ from Abu Salabikh and dates back to ED IIIa (ca. 2600 BC). This text is a list of professional titles, occupations, social statuses, etc. The reference is as follows (MSL 12, p. 19; the passage present on OIP 99, 59 obv. iv’4’-9’):

172 maš:ga\(\_\)en (EN.MAŠ.DU\(_{3}\)) A class of dependent persons

173 ĝem2-kar\(\_\)karkid (MUNUS. US\(_{2}\).AK) woman of leisure

174 \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS-HAR} \) ???

175 emedu (AMA.TU) house-born slave (lit. ‘(the one) born in the Emi’; see discussion above)

176 AMA-\(E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) ???

177 arad\(_{2}\) male slave

This section mentions several well-known social terms:

- \( \text{maš-ga} \) (KAK)-en = \( \text{maškênu} \), the term designating a social status for which cf. Steinkeller and Postgate 1992: 20;

- \( \text{arad} \) = wardum ‘slave’;

- and the already discussed \( \text{emedu} \) ‘slave born in the house’ (\( \text{dušmû} \), CAD D, p. 199).

- Line 173 mentions the occupation /karkid/, Akk. harîmtu, which is usually rendered as ‘prostitute’ (CAD H, p. 101). This translation is laden with the image of the prostitute and should not be applied to the Sumerian and Akkadian term. No one would name Greek hetaeras or Japanese geishas ‘prostitutes’. As Copper argues, “Challenges to the conventional translation are, however, a useful reminder that our notion of prostitution carries with it connotations that can hardly apply to ancient Mesopotamian prostitution, a concept whose contours we can only dimly apprehend.” (Cooper 2006: 20).

Lines 174-176 likely play with the vocalic similarity of the terms \( \text{emedu} \) with \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \). The latter may be rendered as /emi/ or /ama/. If the sign AMA may be regarded as a phonetic complement to \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) in line 176 (thus \( \text{ama} \)(\( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \)), the rendering of HAR in 174 is problematic. Krecher suggested that the sign combination HAR-TU which occurs often as a personal name in Early Dynastic texts has to be read either \( \text{eme} \)-\( \text{du} \) `house-born slave’ or \( \text{ur} \)-\( \text{du} \) ‘slave’ (Krecher 1987: 13, 17). Even if it is true, the meaning of both writings \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS-HAR} \) and AMA-\( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) remain obscure to me.

2.3. Earliest occurrences of the sign combination \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) in administrative documents (Uruk III – ED IIIa)

The Uruk III documents witness the sign combination \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) too.\(^{17}\) The identity of the later \( E_{2}^{\alpha} \) with the Late Uruk sign \( E_{2}^{\beta} \) is certain, whereas \( E_{2}^{\beta} \) may also designate a different thing (Englund 1998: 70). Englund proposed recently \( E^{2}+\text{MUNUS} \) as a personal name occurring in the Late Uruk ‘slave accounts’ (Englund 2009: 21; cf. also the name \( AD_{\beta} E^{2} \text{SAL} \), ib.).

The following chart provides the references to Uruk III texts where the sign combination \( E_{2}^{\alpha}\text{-MUNUS} \) occurs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Date / Provenance</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATU 6, pl. 65, W 5774,b</td>
<td>Uruk III Umma obv. ii 1</td>
<td>3N(<em>{\alpha}+\text{PIRIG}</em>{\gamma}) ( E_{2}^{\alpha}\text{-MUNUS ‘DU’} )</td>
<td>The term occurs in the colophon. The text is concerned with daily allocations of beer. 3N(<em>{\alpha}+\text{PIRIG}</em>{\gamma} ) could be a personal name (Englund 2009: 21). It appears in various documents as an assignee of commodities and is qualified by the terms SANG(_{\alpha} ) ‘chief’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\) The sign is transliterated as \( \text{SAL} \) in the editions of the archaic cuneiform texts due to ZATU no. 443: ‘\( \text{SAL}, \text{MI}_{\gamma}, \text{MUNUS} \)’. However \( \text{SAL} \) as the name of the sign is obviously unjustified. Firstly, because \( \text{sal} \) is ‘(to be) thin’ (= Akk. raqāqu, CAD R, p. 168 ff.). This cannot be the original meaning of this sign depicting female genitalia: the original meaning must have been ‘female’ or ‘woman’, of course.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IM 134325 = W 20327,3</td>
<td>Uruk III Uruk column vii 12 (unpublished; cited according to the CDLI)</td>
<td>3N1, ZATU751, E2a, MUNUS</td>
<td>Allocation of some milk product (GA,3[ZATU753]). The sign 3N1 occurs also here, although its meaning may represent the number of deliveries performed. Thus, ‘the 3rd (delivery) of the milk product ZATU751 to E2-MUNUS’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavigneaux, 1991: 153 = W 24214,3 rev. ii 1</td>
<td>Uruk III Uruk</td>
<td>… 3N1, E2a, MUNUS NAMEŠDA ‘x’</td>
<td>The writing occurs in the colophon and is preceded by the sign 3N1. The combination is followed by the sign NAMEŠDA which qualified an office in Late Uruk administration (Englund 1998: 105). The rendering may be ‘the 3rd (delivery) to E2-MUNUS; NAMEŠDA (was responsible)’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSVO 1, 191 obv. ii 2</td>
<td>Uruk III Jemdet Nasr</td>
<td>15 E2-MUNUS PAPa […] (or) E2 SAL-PAPa</td>
<td>Contents uncertain (an account of personnel?). The term is found in the text’s main body. The sign PAP occurs often in Late Uruk ‘personal names’: cf. PAP-MUNUS-N (Englund 2009: 22). Monaco draws attention to the fact that the sign combination SAL PAPa occurs frequently in the corpus and might be a personal name or an office (cf. PA = ugula ‘overseer’). Therefore two variants of interpretation are possible: a) ‘the overseer of E.MUNUS’ or b) ‘the house of the official SAL-PAPa’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSVO 1, 234 obv. ii 1</td>
<td>Uruk III Jemdet Nasr</td>
<td>‘3N1, E2, X+X MUNUS’ (or KAKa)</td>
<td>The passage is damaged. Contents uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSAS 1, 168 obv. i 3</td>
<td>Uruk unkn.</td>
<td>9N1, E2a, MUNUS</td>
<td>An account of beer allocation. The term is found in the main body of the text and thus designates an entity which receives the beer. Note that E2a,MUNUS receives much more beer than any other entry in this document. Therefore the writing may refer to the institution or the abode instead of a person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Secondly, the ancient scribes themselves names the sign munus (cf. Gong 2000: 161).

19 Excavation numbers: W 15774,u, W 15920,b4, and W 20327,3.

20 W 15775.p.

21 MSVO 3, 53-54.

22 W 21254

23 Cf. CUSAS 1, p. 14.
The evidence discussed in the figure implies the presence of an institution \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) in the earliest written records. On the other hand two texts from Jemdet Nasr refer probably to personal names which contain the element \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \). However, the reading of the sign combination for this period is uncertain and, therefore, any link to the ‘women’s quarter’ should have some solid proof, even if this identification is alluring. Text ‘Anonymous 0021’, if interpreted correctly, may be such a proof.

**ED IIIa evidence**

There are also three references to \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) in ED IIIa administrative texts known to me. WF 109 is a list of personnel where a personal name \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) is mentioned in obv. i 3. The writing of the sign MUNUS in WF 109 obv. i 3 is unusual since the horizontal line inside the triangle starts almost at its edge (cf. figure). It is very similar to the one of the recently published ED IIIa text probably from Umma region CUSAS 23, 2 rev. iv 1. There this sign combination could be the name of an institution since the term is an attribute to the personal name (rev. iii 14 – iv 1): \( I A{-}\text{‘Asi} E_2{-}\text{MUNUS} ‘Asi of Emt’). However ‘Asi, (the man/servant of) \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) cannot be ruled out either, but seems doubtful since it would be the only occurrence in this text where personal names are followed by professional titles.

The document is an account of a grain product MUNUS being distributed. The professional term DAM\(^{22}\) appears in all four occurrences of the sign combination \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \). Therefore the understanding ‘DAM-official of the \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \)’ may be suggested. DAM may refer to women living in \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \).

**Notes**


2. If this building is identical with the famous \( e_2{-}\text{mi}_2 \) of Adab, it would speak in favor of the Adab provenance for this document.

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous 0021 (CDLI no. P006381) obv. i 6, ii 3, iii 5, iii 10.</td>
<td></td>
<td>(obv. iii 5) ( 1N_{67} \text{-} \text{GUG}<em>{52} ) DAM ( E</em>{2b}{-}\text{MUNUS} )</td>
<td>The document is an account of a grain product MUNUS being distributed. The professional term DAM(^{22}) appears in all four occurrences of the sign combination ( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} ). Therefore the understanding ‘DAM-official of the ( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} )’ may be suggested. DAM may refer to women living in ( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} ).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJN 0006 (CDLI no. P006389) vbv i 2b4, ii 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>(obv. ii 3) ( \text{ŠEŠ} ) ( E_{2b}{-}\text{MUNUS} )</td>
<td>A document concerned with field allocations to various functionaries (cf. EN(<em>\text{in} ) obv. i 2b3). The first occurrence lists ( 1N</em>{67} \text{-} e_{5e} ) of land for ( E_{2b}{-}\text{MUNUS} ). The second mentions an individual named ( \text{ŠEŠ} ).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ED IIIa evidence**

There are also three references to \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) in ED IIIa administrative texts known to me. WF 109 is a list of personnel where a personal name \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) is mentioned in obv. i 3. The writing of the sign MUNUS in WF 109 obv. i 3 is unusual since the horizontal line inside the triangle starts almost at its edge (cf. figure). It is very similar to the one of the recently published ED IIIa text probably from Umma region CUSAS 23, 2 rev. iv 1. There this sign combination could be the name of an institution since the term is an attribute to the personal name (rev. iii 14 – iv 1): \( I A{-}\text{‘Asi} E_2{-}\text{MUNUS} ‘Asi of Emt’). However ‘Asi, (the man/servant of) \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) cannot be ruled out either, but seems doubtful since it would be the only occurrence in this text where personal names are followed by professional titles.

Another ED IIIa document mentioning \( E_2 \text{-MUNUS} \) is an unpublished, unprovenanced document (CDLI number: P270817). It is an account of textiles distributed to officials. The recipients are referred to by their professional titles only (\( \text{sagga, nu-bandā, } \text{kūsš, } \text{sagi, sukkal, niğir-gal} \), etc.). The only building mentioned in this document is \( e_2{-}\text{sx} \) (obv. iii 2).\(^{24}\) Therefore this text also mentions institutions as recipients. The alleged \( e_2{-}\text{mi}_2 \) is written
E₂:MUNUS (similarly to CUSAS 23, 2) which corresponds to the Late Uruk practice.

The conclusion which can be drawn from the discussed Uruk III – ED IIIa evidence is the following. First, the sign combination E₂-MUNUS was certainly an element in personal names. Since the reading of this element is unknown it cannot be proposed that, for instance, this name had died out after the ED IIIa period.

Second, while it may be suggested that E₂-MUNUS could have designated a building or an institution in Uruk III, the evidence completely excludes this possibility for ED I-II texts where the element E₂-MUNUS is solely a personal name or its component part. The few references in the ED IIIa administrative texts and evidence in ‘ED Lu₃ E’ and the Early Dynastic version of the ‘Instructions of Šuruppak’ are equivocal.

Third, even if the identity of the Late Uruk ‘element’ E₂-MUNUS with the term E₂-mi₂ of ED IIIb had been corroborated, this should not mean that both were of the same nature due to the considerable time gap between the discussed evidence: 3000 BC vs. 2350 BC.

2.4. E₂-mi₂ in Early Dynastic and Sargonic documents from elsewhere other than Girsu

Unlike Girsu, the references to E₂-mi₂ in texts from other sites are rare. As far as present knowledge allows us to ascertain, the E₂-mi₂ is well attested in Early Dynastic and Sargonic Umma and less well at Adab and probably Nippur.

Obv. i 5 zi, ninda-UD du₃-a 
5 (gur) flour baked into 
du₃-a E₂-mi₂ ensi₂, de₃-a … breads²⁵ brought in 
the Eni of the governor. 
(When)²⁶ the wife of 
the governor gave birth 
to a child. 
7th year, 4th month. 

Rev. (blank)

The passage of interest has to be analyzed as dam=ensi₂=ak(e) dumu=Ø tud(a) ‘the wife, who gave birth to a child’.²⁷ The text unreservedly confirms the nature of E₂-mi₂ in Umma as a place where a ruler’s wife took her residence and bore children.

The tantalizing peculiarity of this text is the phrase E₂-mi₂, ensi₂. It is translated “casa della donna dell’ensi,” by the editors of the text (BdI 2, p. 38) and as “Frauenhaus des Stadtfürsten” by the reviewer of the volume (Schrakamp 2008: 673, 708). This puts forward a historical question whether E₂-mi₂ might have been a part of each patriarchal house and was not confined to palaces only.

Another ED IIIb text from Zabala mentions E₂-mi₂. CUSAS 23, no. 31 is an account of regular offering (sa-du₃) to different households and individuals. The translation of the text is as follows: “17 gur 2 barigu flour: regular offering to the palace. 7 (gur) 2 (barigu) to Emi. Lugal’e (and) LuPAdu (are responsible). 1 (gur) to Nigal. 2 (gur) to the commissar (maškin) of Umma. 1 (gur) to the deity Nin-Dulum of (the temple) E’u’sakar. Il(a), the governor of Umma. Mesduna, the chief administrator of Zabala. 5th year, 2nd month.”

Remarkably enough, the E₂-mi₂ directly follows the ‘palace’ here (E₂-gal) and also has the second largest amount of flour. It is usually taken for granted that E₂-gal was the ruler’s residence and must be situated within the capital, i.e. in Umma in our case. The ‘temple-household’ E₂-u₃-sakar was also probably situated in Umma, since this temple was a sanctuary of the god Šara (George 1993: 153, no. 1136), the city-god of Umma. Therefore the text refers to three institutions in the city of Umma.

The third text from the same period and probably of the same provenance (i.e. Zabala) is CUSAS 14, 282 which is a list of grain rations. Individuals are mentioned by their personal names only. All of the mentioned individuals were probably women since many of their names have the elements nin ‘mistress’ and ama ‘mother’. The term E₂-mi₂ occurs here in the last line which could be a colophon, which led the editor of the volume rightfully to the rendering ‘… gur of … for the Lady’s household’ (CUSAS 14, 282, p. 218). Thus, this remarkable text accounts for grain distributed to the personnel of the Umma’s E₂-mi₂.

Two texts mentioning E₂-mi₂ originate from Sargonic Umma. The first one, Foster 1982: 27 (with reference to an original publication), comes from the Early Sargonic

Obv. i 5 zi, ninda-UD du₃-a 
5 (gur) flour baked into 
du₃-a E₂-mi₂ ensi₂, de₃-a … breads²⁵ brought in 
the Eni of the governor. 
(When)²⁶ the wife of 
the governor gave birth 
to a child. 
7th year, 4th month. 

Rev. (blank)

²⁵ For a discussion of ninda DU₃(a) with an uncertain meaning in Ur

²⁶ Here we follow the translation in Bd II 1/1: “quando la moglie dell’ensi₂ ha partorito” (BdI 2, p. 38), although the presence of U₂(ka) ‘when’ would be preferable at the beginning of the clause.

²⁷ Cf. FTP 107 (ED IIIa) obv. vii 1’ where sign combination also occurs. The lines before are broken off unfortunately.
period since the governor En-na-num, mentioned in the document held his office during the reign of Rimuš (cf. Frayne 1993: 262). This interesting document merits a full citation:

obv.  / Du-du / uₜₗₜₜ Lugal-zaₜₜ ugula E₂-zì nu-bandaₜ ba-deₜₜ

Dudu, the (dependent) person of Lugalza, the overseer, by Ezī, the supervisor, was taken away.

rev.  / I mu 12 iti

The text describes a remarkable event: the governor ascertains the transfer of a dependent of one person to another. He does it in the Emī. This may suggest that Ezī was one of the administrators of the Umma’s Emī. The text may imply that the protagonist of the text, Dudu, might have started his service at Emī as the outcome of this transfer.

MCS 9, 239 = Cripps 2010: 57-58, no. 14 is a Classical Sargonian account of withdrawn barley (šē zi-ga). The text lists two different purposes of barley: lines obv. 1 – rev. 2 is the list of issues subsumed as šē e₂-muₜₜ-nus GAZ-ak ‘barley of the Emī milled’ (rev. 2). The other, smaller part notes an issue of barley to a citizen of Arawa (URUₜₜ×ₜₜ A).

The amount of barley received by officials and artisans of the Umma e₂-miₜₜ, mentioned in this document (mentioned by title are šabr‘a ‘majordomo’ and zadim ‘stonecutter’) is considerable: 560 ɡur. It is not clear from the document itself where the barley comes from. It is very unlikely that e₂-miₜₜ itself had produced it. The person responsible for the issue of barley is a certain Lugal-enₜₜ-tar-su, however further references to this individual in other Umma texts provide no information on e₂-miₜₜ.²⁹

Adab

There are two references to e₂-miₜₜ in the Early Sargonic Adab texts. MS 3789/31 is an unpublished⁵⁰ ED IIIb or Early Sargonic Adab administrative account which is concerned with daily bread deliveries. The bread seems to have been distributed to individuals listed in the main body of the document. The colophon reads (rev. i 1 – ii 1):

rev. i 1     u₂ₜₜ 20—a  (Allocation of the 20th day.
            iti duₜₜ-kuₜₜₜ 180 ninda 3  180 breads 3 (unclear):
           ’e₂-miₜₜ-šeₜₜ  an-DU  delivered (deₜₜ) / let enter
           ’Iṣkur-an-duₜₜₜ  (kurₜₜ). 

Therefore this document relates that the Adab’s e₂-miₜₜ, was daily provided with bread. This in turn illustrates that this institution was a consumer rather than a producer of this commodity and was dependent on a larger institution.

The next document also shows the economic dependence of the e₂-miₜₜ upon the e₂-gal ‘palace’. An unpublished Early Sargonic account of grain (P271235) may be attributed to Adab due to the mentioning of the Adab month as well as the phrasing similar to the preceding document. The lines obv. i 5 – ii 6 are:

obv. i ... (such and such ...)  
           5 e₂-gal  has been delivered (deₜₜ) / entered (kurₜₜ) 
           ii  an-DU  the palace. 
           Lugal-diₜₜ-gir  Lugal-diₜₜ-gir has been given 
           e₂-miₜₜ-šeₜₜ  it for Emī.  
           5 an-na-sum  Etur (was responsible).  
           Eₜₜ-tur  Month Akitti.  
           iti ’aₜₜ-ki-ti

The absence of the terminative =šeₜₜ after e₂-gal is glaring if one compares the presence of cases with e₂-miₜₜ in both MS 3789/31 and ‘Anonymous 0244’. Moreover, two signs after e₂-miₜₜ which are interpreted as ŠEₜₜ here look slightly different (E₂-miₜₜ?). However, if our interpretation of this Adab document is right, the procedure implies that the barley delivered to the palace is being redistributed to e₂-miₜₜ, which shows the economic dependence of the latter on the former.

Nippur

The Sargonic document OSP 2, 93 from the so-called ‘Onion archive’ edited by Aa. Westenholz is probably concerned with the harvest of turnips: unfortunately the first line in broken. Rev. i 6’-7’ probably mentions the term e₂-miₜₜ: 210 Ne-[saₜₜ-gal] e₂-miₜₜ; “210 (loads of turnips for) Nesaₜₜ of the Emī”. Thus the individual named Nesaₜₜ must have been an employee or an official of this institution.

Another text from the same archive OSP 2, 107 mentions the term probably twice in connection with turnip harvest;
obv. 4': lu-'sar e2-mi2-kam ‘turnips of the Emī’ and
rev. 2: [...] e2-mi2-kam ‘... of the Emī’.

3. Conclusions

The 3rd-millennium BC institution hiding behind the term e2-mi2 has to be identified with the ‘women’s part of the house’, where women lived and were children were born and probably lived until a certain age. This institution is found in the ED IIIb – Ur III administrative accounts and probably even earlier, in ED IIIa administrative, lexical, and literary texts. The term e2-mi2 might have been a part of each patriarchal house and was not confined exclusively to ‘palaces’.

The distribution of the material shows that the term is mentioned in archives from southern Mesopotamian, thus proper Sumerian, cities: Adab, Girsu, Nippur, Umma, and Zabala. At least in two cases – Girsu and Zabala – the term refers to e2-mi2, where the ruler’s wife lived. The absence of the references to the term from northern Mesopotamia might be explained by a) the scarcity of material from the Early Dynastic period, or b) by the different structure of the northern households.

Remarkably, the sign combination of the uncertain meaning E2-MUNUS is attested in Uruk III – ED IIIa texts, where it seems to have been an institution and also an element in personal names.

Finally some words must be said about e2-mi2 in Girsu. This Girsu institution is not unique, since it represents a typical temple household of a moderate size. However, its denomination as ‘women’s quarters’ is indeed singular. Evidently, one has an example of metonymy here: the Girsu institution is called ‘women’s quarters’ in order to depict the fact that the goddess ‘Ba-wa3 resides there. Therefore, the original meaning of the e2-mi2 as the ‘women’s part of a house’ has been singularly applied to a temple household. As already stated above, this does not exclude the possibility that this temple household has originated in the ‘women quarters’.

Thus, the Girsu e2-mi2 should be compared to the evidence discussed in this paper with caution, since e2-mi2’s of other cities most probably were not entire households, but parts of households reserved for females, their children, and probably their (maid)servants. The rarity of references to these abodes is hardly surprising taking into account the overall scarce and concise data on women and children in early cuneiform records.

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Abbreviations

| ED | Early Dynastic period. |
| ETCSL | Black, J., et al., The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/. |


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