



UNIVERSITÀ CA' FOSCARI VENEZIA

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“FEASTING AND FESTIVALS IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA”

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Conveners: Adelheid Otto and Walther Sallaberger)

## FESTIVAL PROVISIONS IN EARLY BRONZE AGE MESOPOTAMIA

Walther Sallaberger<sup>1</sup>**1. Bau's Festival at Early Dynastic Girsu (24<sup>th</sup> century BCE) as case study***1.1. Introduction*

Feasting can be defined as common eating and drinking in a ceremonial context (e.g., Dietler – Hayden 2001, 3-4; Pollock 2003, 26), and Mesopotamian festivals of the Early Dynastic period are no exception to this, as both the imagery and the documentary evidence demonstrate impressively. The written sources allow us to go beyond the statement that various people participated and help us to identify groups of participants, both in the large calendrical festivals and in the more restricted banquets in the palace. In the Early Dynastic imagery of feasting scenes, the supply of food and drink delivered by various individuals was considered an essential element. The providers were prominent participants at the festival, and they were represented in the same way as those eating and drinking.<sup>2</sup>

1. This study is part of a larger book-project on *Festivals and Feasting in Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia*, to which Adelheid Otto contributes the archaeological perspective and this author deals with the philological evidence. Therefore, I thank first of all Adelheid Otto for taking the initiative to start this project and for the information she provided on her work and the input she gave to improve our research. Felix Seifert prepared many prosopographical tables for this project, which allowed much progress in understanding the textual evidence, for which I am very grateful as I am for his insights and discussion. The Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS) at LMU approved our project and Annette Meyer and Julia Schreiner provided the best working conditions during our time as senior researchers in residence during the academic year 2016/2017. The article profited from the input of Lucio Milano and of Glenn Schwartz who stayed with us in 2017 and shared their knowledge and ideas. To my colleagues Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, Friedhelm Hartenstein and Frank Heidemann from LMU, I am very grateful for their suggestions concerning issues of anthropology and religious studies. Conventions: Sumerian words are given in italics (e.g. *lugal*). Dates BCE refer to the Middle Chronology and follow Sallaberger – Schrakamp (2015).
2. Often the individuals delivering food and drink in the images of votive plaques or cylinder seals are called “servants”, thereby presupposing a lower hierarchical rank of the providers than those people who are represented as drinking. As Adelheid Otto will argue in detail in the work mentioned in fn. 1, from an



Fig. 1: Individuals bringing food for banquet. Votive plaque from Tell Agrab, Main “Shara” Temple, Early Dynastic period, 2700-2600 BCE, Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago. DSC07369.JPG from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki>

The written evidence allows us to place the mute images in the context<sup>3</sup> of a festival. From all third-millennium southern Mesopotamia with its tens of thousands cuneiform documents, the most detailed and most varied data exists for Bau’s Festival in Early Dynastic Girsu, the festival to venerate the divine wife of the city-god Ningirsu and organized by the wife of the ruler of Lagash. The tablets from her organization, called *Emunus* “Female Quarter”, are our main source, stemming from the last two Ladies, namely Paranamtara, wife of Lugalanda, and Sasa, wife of Urukagina (ca. 2330-2315 BCE).<sup>4</sup> At this festival, high officials brought fresh foodstuffs as a special donation from the cities of the state, and they must all have arrived personally for the four-day-

iconographical perspective, the similarity of dress and habitus of all persons, both those carrying goods and those feasting, along with the very fact that they are represented in the banquet scenes underlines their relevance for the festival.

3. Concerning the representation of *mašdaria* in ED III imagery, Prentice (2010, 189) already pointed to the motif of a man bringing a lamb and followed by a woman.
4. The *Emunus* retained its name for the central building even after the organization was renamed “the house of Bau” by Urukagina in the course of his reforms. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Bau was venerated in a temple building of her own in Early Dynastic Lagash, but she was most probably venerated in her cella, perhaps in a separate wing, within the Ningirsu temple. One strong argument in this regard is the fact that no *saĝĝa* “temple-lord” is attested for Bau and that the deceased temple-lords of Ningirsu, first of all Dudu, are venerated during Bau’s Festival. Therefore, the often-used designation of the organization of the Lady of Lagash as “Temple of Bau” (or Baba), is at least misleading in various regards.

festivities. With a modest quantity of various foodstuffs, each city of the state contributed to the festival of the divine Lady Bau in the capital Girsu. Specialized economic sectors sent their share as well, such as animals and milk products from the herds or fish from the marshes.<sup>5</sup> These donations for festivals were called *mašdaria* in Sumerian, a term derived from the expression “to direct, to lead kids alongside”,<sup>6</sup> and indeed sheep and goats constituted an important portion of these donations.

### 1.2. Festival provisions (*mašdaria*) and expenditures from the *Emunus* organization

At Bau’s Festival, large amounts of foodstuffs were presented to the deities and the ancestors in religious sacrifices. Regarding the source of the goods consumed at the festival, some texts concerning festival provisions (*mašdaria*) come into focus, since they list contributions delivered to Girsu for Bau’s Festival.<sup>7</sup> In order to compare the expenditures with the incoming *mašdaria*-deliveries, we concentrate on two texts preserved for the same year (year 3 of Lugalanda of Lagash), both of them dealing with the commemorative rites for the ancestors (Table 1). The expenditures of foodstuffs stem from the Female Quarter, the organization of the Lady of Lagash, and are designated in the tablet’s subscript as “beer, bread, oil and fruit to be distributed for the lords” (RTC 58); “lords” is the general term for the ancestors venerated at Bau’s festival, Dudu, the former temple-lord of Ningirsu, and Enentarzi, Lugalanda’s predecessor as city-ruler. The income was described as “festival provisions (*mašdaria*) for the mortuary chapel (*ki-a-naĝ*) at Bau’s Festival, they were delivered to Enentarzi” (DP 59). One may now assume that the incoming foodstuffs were more or less the same as those offered to Enentarzi according to the expenditure list RTC 58. Contrary to such expectations, however, a simple comparison of the quantities of foodstuffs listed in these two documents reveals enormous differences between them (Table 1).

5. Prentice (2010, 153-203) discusses “reciprocity” in Early Dynastic Lagash, and thereby concentrates on *mašdaria* as a mode of internal “reciprocity” (*ibid.* 172-203). Prentice has already repeatedly noted the importance of festivals. It is worth citing some of her conclusions (Prentice 2010, 200-201): “... within Lagash it would seem that the presentation of ‘gifts’ generally took place in association with festivals, which meant that the act of giving and receiving was likely to be witnessed by a large number of people.” (p. 210) “The many festivals throughout the year, whether agricultural or religious, provided an ideal opportunity for an exchange of ‘gifts’. ... During the festivals the wife of the ruler ... visited sanctuaries and temples and presented them with offerings. Food was distributed to the workers, presents given to a few individuals, and milk and malt was presented to the wives of important persons.” (*ibid.* p.201).
6. The term *mašdaria* was discussed intensively in the secondary literature: for the Early Dynastic evidence by Rosengarten (1960), Selz (1995), and Prentice (2010, 188 with a summary of the history of research), for the Ur III period by Maeda (1979), Sallaberger (1993, 160-170, with bibliographical references p.161 fn. 754); the translations of *mašdaria* vary widely according to the focus of the scholar and the textual corpus under investigation; for Visicato – Westenholz (2010, 8), for example, *mašdaria* “denotes gifts for the ruler and his family”. As the following discussion will clearly show, the *mašdaria* was collected as a kind of tax on production, delivered to the political centre, and there used to equip festivals; this was essentially the conclusion already made by Rosengarten (1960), although based on much less textual documentation.
7. Selz (1995, 31-39 and 69-78) also collected the administrative sources pertaining to Bau’s Festival, but not the *mašdaria* deliveries; the most recent treatment of the *mašdaria* with a review of the earlier secondary literature is given by Prentice (2010, 187-203).

Text type:	expenditure for Enentarzi and Dudu	<i>mašdaria</i> -delivery to Enentarzi
text and date:	<i>RTC</i> 58 Lugalanda 3	<i>DP</i> 59 Lugalanda 3
sheep	3	29 + 2 slaughtered
flour, liters	ca. 132-144	204
bread, pieces	ca. 65	147
beer, liters <sup>8</sup>	ca. 220	716
vegetables, bundles	12	175
onions, bundles	10	85
dates, liters	23	12 + 1 “basket”(?)
roasted barley, liters	9	36
fat, liters	3	12 + cream
cheese, liters	3	12+ dairy products
fruit, strings ( <i>niĝ<sub>2</sub>-du<sub>3</sub>-a</i> )	1	5 + others
fish		13
birds		11
firewood, loads		3
wooden objects		4

Table 1: Foodstuffs for the rites of the ancestors in Lugalanda 3, according to the Emunus expenditure list (*RTC* 58) and the tabulation of festival provisions (*DP* 59)

The figures shown in Table 1 indicate that the *mašdaria*-deliveries to Girsu (*DP* 59) are multiples of the foodstuffs used for the rites (*RTC* 58): double the quantity of bread, three-times the amount of beer, fifteen-times the amount of vegetables, etc. The difference becomes even larger if one considers that *RTC* 58 lists expenditures for the rites of both Enentarzi and Dudu, whereas *DP* 59 notes only the festival provisions for Enentarzi. How are we to explain these differences?

First, not all deliveries were actually consumed during the festival, as is the case with the sheep and goats delivered: 29 sheep were brought, but only two were slaughtered for the feasting at Enentarzi’s burial place. Could this correspond to the expenditure text where the figure of three sheep represented two for Enentarzi and another for Dudu? Furthermore, there is evidence explaining where the other sheep went: those from festival provisions were branded and sent with other sheep delivered as taxes to the herds of the Female Quarter (Table 2, group (2)).<sup>9</sup> Perhaps for some readers rooted in modern conceptions it may appear contradictory that the payment of taxes was bound to the celebration of a festival. However, both taxes and festivals can basically be seen as social institutions. The feasting took place in order to commemorate particular women of rank and the last masters of the Ningirsu temple, the city’s central monumental building where the festival took place. The taxes for their part were the materialization of the basic social contract between the ruler as the state’s political heart and the inhabitants of the city-state, represented by the administrators, who controlled the resources of the city-state. They gave a share of their yield

8. Capacity measures of beer: 1 *sadu* = 24 liters, 1 *ding* = 20 liters, following Powell (1994, 101-103).

9. A further good example on the inclusion of sheep from festival provisions in the herds is *RTC* 40 (Lugalanda 4), a document on plucking sheep “belonging to Paranamtara” in the palace: most of them are “sheep on the accounts (lit. tablets)”, a few additional are called “sheep from festival provisions”.

for common use, most importantly for the protection of the state during that bellicose period. By connecting the delivery of taxes with a major festival, the presentation of everybody's share became a public event which incorporated the display of the riches of the country (see below).

The delivery of annual taxes, however, only partly explains the different quantities shown in Table 1. The *mašdaria*-deliveries (DP 59, Table 1) consisted mainly of foodstuffs that were fresh and could not be stored: cream, milk, cheese, beer, bread, and even flour and vegetables had to be consumed shortly after their delivery. Therefore, a second look at the documents is necessary. Although one might assume that the goods brought as *mašdaria*-deliveries were the same as those listed in the expenditure documents, the texts do not allow the reconstruction of such a flow of goods. Therefore, the two types of lists reflect different administrative contexts. Texts like RTC 58 (i.e., the first group in Table 1) clearly listed the foodstuffs that stemmed from the Emunus organization itself and were used up during the festival. Meanwhile, the much larger festival provisions (*mašdaria*; see DP 59 in Table 1) were additional contributions for the same festival that were also consumed there, but these texts focus on the providers, and not on the places of distribution. All festival provisions from the time of Paranamtara (see Table 2) were intended for the ancestor-cults: for the mortuary chapels, for Enentarzi and Dudu, or for their place of veneration, Ekišala.

In conclusion, the analysis of the quantities of foods dedicated to the ancestors at Bau's Festival has demonstrated that the various lists represent different contributions made for the same occasion: one type (i.e., the "expenditure document") details the contributions of the Emunus organization of the Lady of Lagash which organized the festival, and the other variety (i.e., the "*mašdaria* delivery") shows the contributions from various cities, temples and organizations of the state delivered by their representatives. However, no documents are preserved that list the basic, standard offerings furnished by the temple itself.

From the detailed records of the Lady's organization at Girsu, it is known who consumed the foodstuffs, as the Emunus expenditure lists indicate that the family and "those alongside the lords" (*en-en za<sub>3</sub>-ta-be<sub>2</sub>*) "ate" the food. In this case, how many people participated in the feasts celebrating the ancestors? If we assume that one person ate one piece of bread, then the provisions listed in the two texts of Table 1 would feed 212 people (ca. 65 + 147 = 212 pieces of bread). When adding Dudu with a similar share to Enentarzi in DP 59 (i.e. 65 + 147 + 147 = 349) and considering the fact that the ceremony lasted for three days, the number of pieces of bread points to a presence of 116 persons at the first three days of Bau's Festival. According to the wide variety of foodstuffs listed, they must have enjoyed an exceptionally rich meal. If the number of participants is correctly estimated, the feasting at the graves was still quieter than the crowded Courtyard Festival the following day for which some five hundred participants are known.

## 2. Festival provisions for Bau's Festival: goods and contributors

### 2.1. *The presentation of sheep, milk-products, fish and other food at the festival*

Various lists of foodstuffs and other provisions brought as the city-state's contribution to Bau's Festival are preserved, and a simple overview (Table 2) illustrates the constant flow of goods from



all economic sectors of the state, including fish from the fishermen (group 4) and milk-products<sup>10</sup> from the cowherds (group 3). Whereas similar festival provisions and transfers of fish also occurred for other festivals in the state of Lagash that were co-sponsored by the Emunus organization, the special milk-products *nišsiga* and *kišgura* are known exclusively as a donation for Bau's Festival<sup>11</sup> within the whole corpus of Emunus documents. As such, beyond the fact that feasting was characterized by a variety of foodstuffs unattested in an everyday context, the festival of the Emunus's divine patron Bau was singled out by the delivery of a special type of cheese.

Text	Date	Festival provisions ( <i>mašdaria</i> ), providers	Recipient	administrative remarks (without year number)
<i>(1) Various foodstuffs from the temple-lords and other officials</i>				
BIN 8 356	Lug 2	at Bau's Festival, Lugalanda, city-ruler of Lagash,	left it over to the <u>Ekišala</u>	
DP 59	Lug 3	festival provisions for <u>the mortuary chapel</u> at Bau's Festival;	they delivered it to <u>Enentarzi</u> .	Lugalanda, city-ruler of Lagash
Gen 26 1	Lug 3	these are the festival provisions of Bau's Festival;	they delivered it to <u>Dudu</u> .	Paranamtara, wife of Lugalanda ...
DP 82	Ukg 01	festival provisions of <b>the temple-lords</b> at Bau's Festival;	they delivered it to Sasa ... into the palace;	
Nik. 1 146 and TSA 4	Ukg 2	at Bau's Festival,	they delivered it to Sasa, ... into the palace;	
<i>(2) Sheep and cattle, received and mostly banded over to herdsmen or other recipients</i>				
Nik. 1 167	Lug 2	(1 sheep) festival provisions	for Paranamtara; at Bau's Festival, he delivered it to the Emunus.	The animal fattener Enku took it with him
Nik. 1 195	Lug 3	(25 sheep) these are the festival provisions for the <u>mortuary chapels of</u> <u>Enentarzi and temple-</u> <u>lord Dudu</u> . At Bau's Festival,		colonel Eniggal branded them. He transferred them to the shepherd Lugalsaga. Paranamtara ...
DP 205	Lug 4	(6 sheep) festival provisions of the <b>temple-lords</b> at Bau's Festival;	they delivered it to Paranamtara.	The animal fattener Enku took them with him

10. The Sumerian terms can be translated literally as “tiny things” (*niš-sig-ga*) and “bent work” (*kiš-gur-ra*). The latter item, then significantly qualified as “old” (*šumun-šumun*), appears in inventories of households between sheep hides and wooden objects (*VS* 25 75; *VS* 27 26) and at the end of a similar list (*DP* 490); the term probably refers to a milk-product in this context as well, and this perhaps identifies *kiš-gur-ra* as a kind of hard cheese.
11. *VS* 25 18 (in group (3) of Table 2) proves that these two products are made from milk. The document lists “milk”, “cream” and the two special milk-products *nišsiga* and *kišgura* from the three cowherds Namdam, Mesagnudi, and Uršugalama. In the subscript this is summarized as “cream and milk of the cowherds” (*i<sub>3</sub> ga unu<sub>3</sub>-de<sub>3</sub>-ne*). The two milk-products *nišsiga* and *kišgura* appear as not only in the texts of group (3) in Table 2, but once also in the large group (1)-document *DP* 59 iv 12-13 within the donation of the “cowherd” (*gud-lab<sub>3</sub>*).

<i>Nik.</i> 1 219	Ukg 2	(1 cow) this is the festival provisions of the <b>temple-lord of the Ebabbar</b> ; at Bau's Festival,	Sasa gave it to Aiaenragub, the prince, as a gift.	U'u let it live with the cowherd Igizi.
<i>VS</i> 14 35	Ukg 2	(100 sheep) this is the field tax of Bau;	colonel Eniggall brought them out (to the shepherds). At Bau's Festival,	Urukagina ... branded them, when they had entered the Bau Temple
<i>RTC</i> 39	(Lug) 5	(11 sheep) these are the festival provisions for princess Geme-Nanshe.		Colonel Eniggall branded them. Urigimaše, colonel of the princes, led them away.
<i>(3) Special milk products from cowherds</i>				
<i>DP</i> 569	(Lug) 1	At Bau's Festival, the cowherds		delivered it hither. Colonel Eniggall took it over.
<i>DP</i> 570	(Lug) 4	At Bau's Festival, the cowherds		delivered it hither. Colonel Eniggall brought it into the <u>Ekisala</u> .
<i>DP</i> 571	(Lug) 5	At Bau's Festival, the cowherds		delivered it hither. Colonel Eniggall took it over in the Emunus
<i>VS</i> 25 18	(?) 1	Cream and milk of the cowherds, at Bau's festival		it was delivered hither
<i>(4) Fish from fishermen</i>				
<i>DP</i> 318	(?) 3	These are the (three) fishermen of Bau. At Bau's Festival		they delivered it hither. Colonel Eniggall brought it to the Lady's place.
<i>VS</i> 27 83	(?) 3	At Bau's Festival, the sea fishermen		delivered it hither. Colonel Eniggall brought it to the Lady's place.
<i>(5) Various documents</i>				
<i>Nik.</i> 1 127	(Ukg) 2	5 kor of wheat: at Bau's Festival,		Urmud, the caretaker ( <i>agrig</i> ), received it
<i>VS</i> 25 58	(no date)	(8 vessels) beer for filling up, for the (eight) foremen (named above)	Colonel Subur filled it up for them from <u>Ekisala</u> at Bau's Festival	

Table 2: Provisions for Bau's Festival (*mašdaria*): Translation of the subscripts of the pertinent documents. Abbreviations: Lug = Lugalanda (year), Ukg = (king) Urukagina (year)

As is sometimes indicated in the subscripts of the texts (Table 2), the most important contributors were the temple-lords (Sumerian *saĝĝa*), the directors of the sanctuaries of the city-state. The verbal expression is noteworthy: "they (the temple-lords) delivered it", namely the goods, either to the ancestors Enentarzi and Dudu or to Sasa, the Lady of Lagash, in the palace. The documents from the Emunus archive are characterized by similarly direct descriptions of the actions underlying the transfer of goods, as a few examples show: the temple-lords themselves "delivered" the goods, the Lady herself "sacrificed" the animals (e.g. *VS* 14 74), she "gave" the textiles to the dead (e.g. *VS* 14 164). Evidently, the Lady did not place all food in front of the deities herself, nor could a temple-lord personally carry such large amounts of foodstuffs (Table 1), nevertheless the responsible office-holders were presented as performing the transfers themselves. Where a modern observer would perhaps expect offices, the third millennium records generally placed individuals, and the rank as representative of a temple or an organization was always

combined with a personal liability for the whole organization. In this way, the transportation of large quantities of foodstuffs to the location of the festival is presented as a personal delivery performed by high dignitaries of the city-state.

The documents concerning deliveries in the second year of Urukagina (Table 3) present a most informative overview of the providers and their goods. Some professional groups that belonged to the Emunus organization delivered their goods directly to the festival location in Girsu, namely the herdsmen of sheep and of cattle and the fishermen. Significantly these groups produced food, but were stationed neither in the city nor on the grain fields and thus worked fairly independently without superiors. Shepherds had to look for appropriate grazing lands in the wider region, whereas cattle was kept in the marshes that were present in abundance in the Lagash region, and this is also where the fishermen carried out their activities.

sheep	beer	bread, pieces	roasted barley, ltrs.	vegetables, bundles	fish	milk products	<i>provided by</i>
2	10 <i>sadu</i>	30	144	120			temple-lord of Nanshe (in Nigen)
2	10 <i>sadu</i>	20	72	90			temple-lord of Ninmarki (in Guaba)
1	5 <i>sadu</i>	80	36	120			temple-lord of Ebabbar (temple of Ningirsu in Lagash)
1	5 <i>sadu</i>	60					temple-lord of Dumuzi(-abzu) (in Kinunir)
1	5 <i>sadu</i>	30					temple-lord of Bagara (temple of Ningirsu in Lagash)
1					3 baskets		Lugal-dalla (temple-lord of Pasira)
				360			temple-lord <i>of things</i>
2	5 <i>mud</i>						Il, colonel
				180			Urigi, colonel
						1 <i>nigbanda</i> cream, 1 <i>dug</i> milk	Urdu, livestock-controller
						1 LAK.749 cream, 6 liters cheese	Namdani, (herdsman of cows)

Subscript: At the festival of Bawu, for Sasa, wife of Urukagina, king of Lagash, it was brought into the palace.

Table 3: Festival Provisions (*masdaria*) for Bau's Festival in Urukagina year 2 (*Nik* 1 146, and *TS*A 4). Note: The entries are grouped according to goods and providers and do not follow the sequence of the texts

The food-stuffs delivered by the temple-lords and other officials included beer, bread, cream and milk products, and fish (Tables 1 to 3), thus fresh products that had to be consumed straight away. This implies that the festival provisions did not arrive bit by bit over an extended period of

time, but rather that they must have been delivered simultaneously. With this situation in mind one realizes why various providers contributing to one particular occasion were grouped together in a single cuneiform document: they arrived together at the ceremony to deliver their foodstuffs, and the scribes booked both the goods and the responsible officials at the same time. The delivery of festival provisions was the prime occasion for a presentation of the various products of the land, which included, as we have seen above with the two commodities *niġsiga* and *kiġgura*, delicacies not otherwise known. Besides that, one has to point to the large quantities of vegetables (Table 3), since vegetables were not part of the daily diet, but rather characterized festive meals (Brunke 2014). This analysis inevitably suggests a sumptuous entrance ceremony with the dignitaries of the state presenting their delicacies delivered for Bau's Festival.

## 2.2. *The organizations of the land and their people*

Temple-lords from the most important sanctuaries of the city-state sent their donations to Bau's Festival in Girsu (modern Tello) according to documents such as those shown in Table 3: the temples of Ningirsu at Lagash (al-Hiba), of Nanshe in Niġen (Tell Surghul), and of Ninmarki in Guaba. The temple of Dumuzi-abzu in Kinunir contributed less, and an even more modest contribution came from the small sanctuary in Pasira, a place richer in fish than in grain, as the deliveries indicate. Furthermore, high officials like colonels (*nubanda*) or commanders (*gal-uġ*) gave contributions and some herdsmen delivered milk-products from their herds. Looking at the numbers in Table 3, e.g., the number of sheep, one notes that various shares were distributed evenly among the providers, whereas in other cases one detects notable differences, even including details like different kinds of bread or of vegetables.

This evidence suggests that regional or local delicacies were probably prepared for the festival, which were then publicly displayed in Girsu upon their arrival and/or at the dedication to the ancestors and the subsequent feast. Besides fulfilling fixed quotas, such a scenario invited an internal competition between the various temples and organizations to deliver the best products. Each of the representatives of the temples and other organizations presented the products of his group of people, and those preparing the festival provisions were surely also aware of the subsequent public presentation of their products, an incentive to produce high-quality work.

Documents such as the examples shown in Table 3 list officials like temple-lords or colonels as contributors, but these individuals represent communal organizations of a structure similar to that of the Emunus, the Female Quarter, which organized Bau's Festival. In the Emunus organization, around 740 persons, namely ca. 482 men, 172 women and 83 children, received grain allocations in the year Urukagina 2.<sup>12</sup> Based on the assumption of an even gender distribution of male and female

12. Data based on Prentice 2010; note that the precise numbers represent only the persons present at a given time, not the total number of dependents (those missing the allocation of grain were simply not listed). Numbers for the year Urukagina 2: Group 1: 261 holders of sustenance land (*lu<sub>2</sub> šuku dab<sub>5</sub>-ba*; Prentice 2010, 79); Groups 2+3 (*ibid.* p. 65): 436 individuals, of which 353 adults; (*ibid.* p. 66): 181 male + 172 female; to the 442 men, another 40 persons are added to account for the "sea fishermen" (42 or 44 fishermen received allocations in the year Urukagina 4; *STH* 1 29 and *TSA* 19); the "sweetwater fishermen" were included in the normal allocations of grain.

individuals and not counting children, at least 960 adult citizens depended more or less directly on the redistributive economy of the Female Quarter. To produce an estimate of the total number of people that formed the Emunus, one often uses a number of 3 or 4 individuals per household (Steinkeller 2017, 546–547), and on this assumption the Emunus community comprised around 1,500 to 2,000 people including children, menials and others.

Taking this number of people in the Emunus organization into account, the eleven organizations of the Table 3-texts represented around 10,000 adult citizens, or 15,000 to 20,000 inhabitants; but even with a low estimate of an average 500 people per contributing organization, 5,500 adult citizens were – of course often indirectly – involved in the production of foodstuffs that were sent to Bau’s Festival at Girsu. In this way, all cities of the city-state already participated in the preparation of the festival, they contributed their specific shares – like Pasira (location unknown) with its fish – that were consumed at the festival. Since Bau’s Festival was not the only large festival, similar deliveries were sent to other places as well, and in this way labour and products were shared in the name of the gods of the state. The calendrical setting of the festivals allowed this annual cycle of participation, which must have contributed to the political integration of the city-state beyond the level of the individual cities.

### 2.3. *Discussion*

The large communal organizations (e.g., the main temples) of the city-state managed the agricultural land and comprised a large number of people, perhaps the majority of a city-state’s population was grouped according to such organizations.<sup>13</sup> Because of the size of the various organizations, the single contributions could not have constituted a heavy economic burden. Therefore, the festival provisions were of high symbolic value, but would hardly have covered economic needs. Furthermore, the contributions were divided among various organizations, often in very small amounts, and this division also offered the opportunity to integrate more members of the city-state into the festival as active participants, and not simply as spectators or guests.

Thus the arrival of the various delegations loaded with their foodstuffs, coming from all the cities of the state, was an impressive demonstration of the variety and quality of the state’s

13. Since the percentage of people outside the communal organizations (like temples) remains unknown, there exists much room for speculation. In the case study of Bau’s Festival, the various organizations listed cannot represent all communal organizations of their time, since not every organization contributed to every festival (see below). An important argument in this context is the evidence from contemporaneous Tell Beydar, ancient Nabada. Although situated in another region, namely Northern Mesopotamia, the cuneiform documents found there show the same organization of the population into work groups, receiving monthly grain allotments. Sallaberger – Pruß (2015) first calculated the number of people living at Nabada according to the textual evidence, and then the number of people that could have lived on the site of Tell Beydar according to the archaeological data, and they found that most if not all inhabitants of Nabada/Tell Beydar were probably members of the same large communal organization, which thus constituted the city itself. The percentage of people in the institutional economy (as Steinkeller calls it) clearly decreases substantially at the end of the third millennium under the Third Dynasty of Ur, when a royal sector became more and more important. Such a royal sector above the city-state obviously did not exist in the Early Dynastic period, the time of the city-states.

agricultural and culinary production, which also involved competition among the representatives and among the communal organizations. Some participants may have witnessed similar presentations at other festivals of the state, but locally employed workers may have admired this magnificent spectacle just once a year, at the festival of “their” deity, when the delegations honored his or her holiday.

The very existence of the wealth that was displayed at a festival postulated a successful herding strategy, a rich harvest and the preparation of foodstuffs in the various centres of the state (see on this section 6 with reference to Sumerian literature). The recognition of the products of the state and of the labour invested by the participants, and thus the land’s fertility and the people’s productivity, were united at a divine festival, which occurred on a fixed day in the calendar and in a central location, with both its time and place having been determined from time immemorial. As outlined above, the *mašdaria* provisions for Bau’s Festival were consumed during the introductory celebration of the ancestors, the former temple-lords of Ningirsu, in whose temple complex goddess Bau was also venerated. These ancestors were two office-holders that belonged to the ruler’s family. This setting created meaningful connections between such distinct entities as natural fertility, human productivity, producers, representatives, living participants and dead ancestors, humans and gods. Further elements could easily be added to the complex meanings created by the presentation of foodstuffs, most notably that of the city-ruler, to whose family the venerated ancestors belonged, who had perhaps provided the building in which the festival took place, whose predecessors had possibly dedicated some monuments there and who probably supported the supply of food and drinks from his own reserves. Although in the years covered by the archive the ruler executed strong political influence on the social organization of his state and thus on the delivery of festival provisions (see below), a large urban festival could also function without the support, the presence and the representation of the ruler. The involvement of large sectors of the society in the preparation of foodstuffs and their public display contributed fundamentally to the social relevance of a festival.

As already noted above (on Table 2), only a very small percentage of the *mašdaria* animals was slaughtered on the spot for the festivities, with more animals added to the herds of the Lady or her husband for future use. Shepherds delivered the animals, and furthermore fishermen, who likewise produced food outside the cities, sent a part of their yield as *mašdaria* (Prentice 2010, 194-195). In this case, the direct relationship between *mašdaria* and a festival does not become apparent from the documents. Nevertheless, the connection remains probable since fish actually served as food at festivals and since the other deliveries made by the fishermen were designated as “table” (*bansur*), indicating the tables for dinner in the palace, or as “basket, pannier” (*dubsig*), a common term for dues.<sup>14</sup>

There existed a second type of *mašdaria* deliveries that included all kinds of foodstuffs and that were not delivered by the producers themselves, but by the temple-lords from all over the city-state and other high officials (Tables 3 and 4). They included products that had to be consumed within a short time, especially beer and bread, or vegetables, cheese, fish etc. Specifically, the deliveries did not include barley or other grains, but rather beer and bread, fresh products not suited for storage. These

14. See Prentice 2010, 194-195; on the taxes of the fishermen in the Emunus organization England 1990, 91-101.

foodstuffs had to be consumed on the spot, indicating that all the dignitaries listed in a tablet arrived at Girsu at the same time. The tablets furthermore identify the festival donation (*mašdaria*) precisely as belonging to Bau's Festival. This means that the providers were present at Bau's Festival at the same time and in the same place, and in this way they became participants of the festival as well. The foodstuffs enumerated in the *mašdaria* documents alone – even without incorporating the contributions to be expected from the Female Quarter or from the ruler – would feed more than one hundred people who feasted at the days devoted to the ancestors (see above section 1.2).

As the distribution of goods in Table 1 has shown, the cities of the state provided the festival with at least four or five times more food than that prepared by those responsible for the festival, namely the people of the Emunus organization of the Lady of Lagash. The preparation of food for a festival in the early cities of Mesopotamia thus involved people from many different places and, by providing the common meal with food and beer, the citizens of the state also became active participants in the occasion. Beyond the ideological and social aspects, this has practical implications, since the kitchen of a given temple never had to provide for all of the guests who arrived, and thus there was no need to keep an extra-large storage and production centre for the execution of just one annual festival.

### 3. Changes in the provisions for Bau's Festival

#### 3.1. *Changing quotas from a single provider*

The *mašdaria* festival provisions consist of a large variety of foodstuffs (see Table 3), but the composition of the *mašdaria* from a single organization can change over the years. Table 4 assembles the lists of goods delivered by a single provider, the very prominent temple-lord of Nanshe. First, quantity and variety of foodstuffs differed according to the recipient. In the same year, Lugalanda 3, more was dedicated to the feasting with the deceased city-ruler Enentarzi (text *DP* 59) than with Ninġirsu's temple-lord Dudu (text *Gen* 26 1). However, the same provider modified the deliveries for the same recipients in consecutive years (Lugalanda 3 and 4 for Dudu, Urukagina 1 and 2 for Sasa in the palace). One can imagine that reductions and augmentations may have balanced each other out and must have led to a more or less equivalent value of the delivery. Just consider in this regard, for example, in Table 4 the large portions of fish and vegetables in Lugalanda 4 (*Gen* 26 3) that balanced out the drastic reduction in bread compared to the preceding year (*Gen* 26 1). The exact mechanisms that allowed for such variation remain unknown. It is of course highly implausible that some director of the festivities (and who would that be? the temple lord of Ninġirsu? the Lady? the city-ruler?) ordered exactly what was needed. In any case some communication between the providers was essential to compile a fitting array of goods for the large festival. The preparation of just one festival thus activated a communicative network within the whole city-state, far beyond the main organizers, which was the Emunus organization in the case of Bau's Festival.

date:	Lugalanda 3	Lugalanda 3	Lugalanda 4	Urukagina 1	Urukagina 2
recipient:	Enentarzi	Dudu	Dudu	Sasa in palace	Sasa in palace
text:	DP 59	Gen 26 1	Gen 26 3	DP 82	Nik. 1 146
sheep	2	1	1	2	2
flour, ltrs.	12	–	–	–	–
roasted barley, ltrs.	12	–	–	–	144
bread, pieces	45	42	5	32	30
beer, ltrs.	96	40	80	240	240
fat/oil, ltrs.	2	1	2	–	–
dates, ltrs.	2	1	2	36	–
cheese, ltrs.	1	1	2	–	–
apples, strings	1	–	–	–	–
birds	10	–	–	–	–
fish, portions	10	2	10	–	–
vegetables, bundles	40	5	10	120	120
Onions	10	5	–	–	–

Table 4: Festival provisions delivered by the temple-lord of Nanshe to the ancestors Enentarzi and Dudu or to the palace, at various performances of Bau’s Festival (in chronological order). Note on metrology: 1 “liter” = 1 *sila*<sub>3</sub>, beer measures *sa<sub>2</sub>-du*<sub>11</sub> = 24 liters, *dug* = 20 liters (after Powell 1987/90, 504-505. 507a)

### 3.2. Specialized providers

The temple-lords represented large estates like the Emunus with the full range of economic activities, and therefore their contributions included all foodstuffs, allowing for some local variation (see above on Table 3). For the most part colonels and commanders only delivered sheep and beer, sometimes also firewood, and before one might think of a typically male contribution to a barbecue party consisting of meat and alcohol, one should not forget colonel Urigi in Table 3, who only brought vegetables. The individuals in charge of the livestock, the commissioners for sheep and the livestock-controllers, provided the festival with goods from their economic sector, namely sheep, milk, and cheese, and this distribution is also true for other festivals.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the “temple-lord of things”, an unfortunately quite meaningless and probably incorrect translation of the Sumerian title *saĝĝa niĝ<sub>2</sub>-ke*, specialized in fruit and vegetables.<sup>16</sup> In comparison to other temple-lords, he was not bound to a temple, so he may perhaps have curated the chapels and sacred monuments situated outside the cities, in the countryside. Urukagina mentioned this temple-lord in his reform texts, and the relevant regulation is clearly intended to prevent reckless confiscations. The relevant passages read as follows: “(Before,) the temple-lord *of things* had cut

15. The chief live-stock controller Amarizim brings 1 kid and a vessel of milk to Lugalurub’s Festival (*VS* 14 171 = Bauer 1972 n. 177 v 13-vi 3); the festival provisions of the goat-herders is one vessel (*dug*) of butter/ghee (*Gen* 26 5 i 1-3: 1 *dug i<sub>3</sub>-nun*, *i<sub>3</sub> maš-da-ri-a*, *si<sub>pa</sub> ud<sub>5</sub>-ke<sub>4</sub>-ne*).

16. References: *DP* 59 vi 13-19, *Nik.* 1 146 v 8-10 // *TSA* 4 vi [...] -vii 2 for Bau’s Festival; *DP* 42 ii 3-9 for Lugaliribara’s festival; *Babyloniaca* 8 pl.12 xiii 4–6 (subscript not preserved). He was also active in onion fields *DP* 399, *STH* 1 51, *Nik.* 1 30.



trees in the garden of a poor mother and had packed portions of fruit” (RIME 1, 1.9.9.1 = Ukg. 4 v 22-vi 3 and parallel); “(but now), the temple-lord *of things* does not plunder any more the garden of a poor mother” (RIME 1, 1.9.9.1 = Ukg. 4 xi 17-19 and parallel). Thus it was his duty to collect fruit, and we know that he did so for the *mašdaria* festival provisions according to documents like those cited in Table 3, but in doing so he was required to spare the poor.

This example underlines that the festival provisions were not understood as ‘personal’ gifts from some friends, but rather constituted a contribution from the organizations that the various officials directed. These contributions were, as seen above, of a greater symbolic than economic value. This implies that everybody in the state provided regular donations for the central festivals within the city-state, and through his or her contribution became a member of the feasting community.

### 3.3. *The providers of Bau’s Festival in a historical perspective. More on Urukagina’s Reforms*

Besides the temple-lords, colonels and commanders, herdsmen, and various other officials sent foodstuffs to Bau’s Festival, and it is useful to give a full enumeration of them to understand better the scope of administrators in the city-state (Table 5).

The changes in the list of providers over the years reflect an important step in the political development of the city-state, namely the so-called Reforms of Urukagina, which he issued during his first regnal year and which marked his change of title from “city-ruler” (*ensiz<sub>2</sub>.k*) to “king” (*lugal*). Urukagina separated the temple’s estate from that of the ruler, that is, domain land from royal property. He stopped the work of various tax collectors within the state and, as was also the case with arable land, the ruler ceased to exert direct control over economic production, instead outsourcing production by handing it over to the temples in his state. This background information is necessary to understand some changes in the lists of providers in Table 5: the controllers of oxen (*gud-lab<sub>5</sub>*) and sheep (*maškim udu* and *u<sub>2</sub>-du udu*) attested in the time of Lugalanda disappear under Urukagina. The Reforms explicitly state that the „chief” or „controlling” shepherd (*u<sub>2</sub>-du udu*) was deposed from his office (RIME 1, 1.9.9.1 = Ukg. 4 viii 17-20 and parallel). Commissioners (*maškim*) who collected the dues from the temples were dismissed as well.<sup>17</sup> Apparently the temples now had to manage economic production, including internal redistribution, autonomously, and they had to meet their obligations to deliver dues. From this perspective one better understands the rising importance of the temple-lords as providers for the state’s most important festivals under Urukagina: according to the data in Table 5, two to five temple-lords contributed under Lugalanda, but six to seven did so under Urukagina.

17. “He (i.e. Urukagina) removed the commissioners for the dues (lit. “basket”) that the temple-lords had delivered to the palace” (RIME 1, 1.9.9.1 = Ukg. 4 ix 2-6 and parallel).

Goods:	Foodstuffs	Foodstuffs	Foodstuffs	Sheep	Foodstuffs	Foodstuffs
Date:	Lugalanda 3	Lugalanda 3	Lugalanda 4	Lugalanda 4	Urukagina 1	Urukagina 2
Recipient:	Enentarzi	Dudu	Dudu	Paranamtara	Sasa in palace	Sasa in palace
Text:	DP 59	Gen 26 1	Gen 26 3	DP 205	DP 82	Nik. 1 146 and TSA 4
Providers:						
temple-lord of	Nanshe Ninmarki (2) Ebabbar  Hendursag̃ “of things” ( <i>saĝĝa-niĝ<sub>2</sub></i> )	Nanshe Ninmarki	Nanshe Ninmarki Ebabbar	Nanshe Ninmarki  Bagara  Dumuzi	Nanshe Nindara Ebabbar Bagara Ĝatumdu Dumuzi	Nanshe Ninmarki Ebabbar Bagara  Dumuzi xxx “of things” ( <i>saĝĝa-niĝ<sub>2</sub></i> )
Priest	<i>isib</i> Ningirsu	<i>isib</i> Ningirsu			<i>gudu<sub>4</sub></i>	
commander, colonel	3 <i>gal-ug<sub>3</sub></i> 1 <i>nu-banda<sub>3</sub></i>	1 <i>gal-ug<sub>3</sub></i> 1 <i>nu-banda<sub>3</sub></i>			1 <i>nu-banda<sub>3</sub></i>	1 <i>nu-banda<sub>3</sub></i>
cowherds <i>v.s.</i>	1 <i>gud-lab<sub>5</sub></i> 1 <i>musub<sub>x</sub></i>	1 <i>gud-lab<sub>5</sub></i>	1 <i>gud-lab<sub>5</sub></i>			1 <i>unu<sub>3</sub></i> (PN Namdam)
herdsmen and controllers	1 <i>maškim udu</i> 2 <i>šur<sub>3</sub></i> 1 <i>siĉa us</i> 1 <i>u<sub>2</sub>-du udu</i>	1 <i>maškim udu</i>	1 <i>maškim udu</i>			1 <i>šur<sub>3</sub></i>
(chief) scribes	2 <i>dub-sar-maĉ</i>	1 <i>dub-sar-maĉ</i>	1 <i>dub-sar-maĉ</i>		1 <i>dub-sar</i>	
other officials	13 <sup>18</sup>					
named woman (no title)	1				1	
named man (no title)	1 (Saĝkala)	1 (Saĝkala)				1 (Lugaldalla)
Total number of providers	35	9	7	4	11	12

Table 5: Individuals who sent festival provisions (*mašdaria*) to Bau’s Festival (texts in chronological order).

Such a congruence between a royal decree and its reflection in the administrative documentation illustrates an important aspect when discussing the social relevance of festivals, namely social change. The large festivals were rooted in long traditions if one considers the presence of deities bearing the same name for centuries or even millennia, the stability of the sacred places or the continuity of the cultic calendar. On the other hand, as essentially social institutions, festivals reacted to social and political change, since they were the main events to represent and negotiate social order. The changes in the list of providers for Bau’s Festival indicate a social change, and

18. DP 59 (year Lugalanda 3, for the deceased city-ruler Enentarzi) lists the following 13 additional professions and offices: field surveyor (*lu<sub>2</sub>-eše<sub>2</sub>-gid<sub>2</sub>*), caretaker (*agrig<sub>2</sub>*), granary keeper (*ka-kurru<sub>3</sub>*), storekeeper of oil (*ka-samana<sub>4</sub>*), chief carpenter (*gal-naĝar*), herald (*niĝir*) and chief-herald (*gal-niĝir*), envoy (*sugaĉ<sub>7</sub>*, two individuals), chief merchant of the city-ruler (*gal-dam-gara<sub>3</sub> ensi<sub>2</sub>*), sea-faring merchant (*gaeš<sub>3</sub>ga*), farmer of the Guedina field (*engar gu<sub>2</sub>-edin-na*), son of the city-ruler (*dumu ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka*).

thanks to the fortunate discovery of the inscriptions on Urukagina's Reforms, it is possible to correlate the ruler's decree with the actual execution of one of the state's main festivals.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Collecting the festival provisions

##### 4.1. *The Emunus organization as contributor for other festivals in the state of Lagash*

Bau's Festival was celebrated annually in the capital Girsu and it was certainly an important event in the cultic calendar of the Early Dynastic city-state of Lagash. However, this was only one in a series of some eight annual festivals of a similar rank in the state, i.e., besides Bau's Festival, two each for Ningirsu and for Nanshe, called Barley-Eating and Malt-Eating, one festival for Ninmarki in the southern province of the Lagash city-state, one for the Dumuzi-type god Lugalurub, and the bathing ceremony of Lugaliribara, perhaps a by-name of Ningirsu (Selz 1995, 170). In the same way as was done for Bau's Festival, the Lady of Lagash organized collections of various foodstuffs as festival provisions from temple-lords and other high officials of the city-state for the festivals of Nanshe (*DP* 131), Lugalurub (*VS* 14 171; also *DP* 25) and Lugaliribara (text *DP* 42). The representatives of the various organizations thus also participated in these festivals, illustrating the connectivity of many individuals within the state.

The redistribution of foodstuffs at the various feasting locations also necessitated the contribution of the Lady's own organization, the Female Quarter (Emunus). The following paragraphs deal with exactly that evidence concerning *mašdaria* prepared in the Emunus for festivals other than that of Bau, and we will see that kids were regularly sent to Nanshe's temple. One may ask who represented the interests of the Emunus in the same way as the other temples were represented by their temple-lords? To the best of my knowledge, just one single document reveals that it was Colonel Eniggal, the well-known chief manager of the Female Quarter.<sup>20</sup> One may recall (see fn. 4) that a temple-lord (*saĝĝa*) of Bau probably did not exist, as the goddess was most likely venerated in the same temple complex as her husband Ningirsu, and so his *saĝĝa* would have maintained Bau's sanctuary as well.

The administrative documents that constitute our main source were written in the Female Quarter in order to monitor its economic activities, and so we gain some insight into the internal transactions from the producer to the consumption at festivals other than that of Bau. The following three examples illustrate various aspects in the collection of festival provisions (*mašdaria*) within an organization.

19. Social change often follows new political regulations, which themselves usually follow from social change; a classical study on the interrelation between ritual traditions and social change is Geertz 1957. Pertinent examples from the ancient Near East were treated in Ambos – Hotz – Schwedler – Weinfurter 2005.
20. He appeared as provider of animals for a festival (on the threshing floor) together with the temple-lords of the gods Nanše, Ninmarki, Dumuzi, and Nindara and of the temples Ebabbar, Bagara, Aĥuš (of Ningirsu) and Šapa (of Nanše) (*DP* 84, Lugalanda 5).

#### 4.2. *Consignments of beer and sheep*

We start with an account of the deliveries of the chief brewer of the Emunus. He delivered 5 *kurkur* (ca. 50 liters) of high quality beer “at the Malt-Eating Festival of Nanshe to Niĝen”, another 5 *kurkur* “at the *ab'e*-Festival to Lagash”, and then the same quantities of beer to the Female Quarter, when the city-ruler stayed there, or to the palace as requested by the Lady (DP 164, year 5). This text mirrors the delivery of beer from various cities – including Niĝen – to Bau’s Festival (e.g. Tables 3, 4).

The second example illustrates another way that the Lady of Lagash contributed to other festivals from the *mašdaria* fund of the Female Quarter. As we have noted above (see 1.2), sheep and kids had arrived as *mašdaria* tax from various organizations and had been kept in the herds of the Lady. These animals were not only used at Bau’s festival, which was organized by the Emunus organization itself, but, as our example illustrates, at other festivals as well, in this case of the god Ningĝirsu:

1 she-goat, festival provisions (*mašdaria*) (from) the temple-lord of Nanshe,  
1 small kid (from) the temple-lord of Dumuzi:

The animal fattener Muni guided them to the Barley-Eating Festival of Ningĝirsu from the Female Quarter. Paramamtara, wife of Lugalanda, city-ruler of Lagash. (Year) 2  
(*Nik.* 1 189; Edition Selz 1989, 416)

According to the subscript, sacrificial animals for various deities and sanctuaries came from the *mašdaria* fund in a similar fashion:

Total: 8 rams, 1 lamb, 3 kids; at the Barley-Eating Festival of Ningĝirsu, Paramamtara, wife of Lugalanda, the city-ruler of Lagash, sacrificed them. They (the animals) are festival provisions (*mašdaria*). (Year) 2 (DP 62)

Thus animals stemming from the festival represented sacrifices sponsored by the Lady of Lagash and she actually had them slaughtered for Ningĝirsu during his festival.

#### 4.3. *Goats and sheep collected from the most prominent individuals in the Emunus organization*

In the two cases discussed so far, only very few individuals from the Emunus organization were involved in providing food for other festivals taking place elsewhere, namely the brewer who worked for the Lady and her entourage, and the animal fattener. The third group of documents provides us with a completely different perspective, as they document several individuals from the Emunus organization supplying kids and sheep as *mašdaria* provisions. Between ten and twelve “overseers” (*ugula*), as they were called in the texts, contributed one kid or one sheep for one of the two annual festivals of Nanshe, and their names and titles can be found in Table 6 in accordance with the wording of the documents.

Date / Festival	Lugalanda 2/b	Lugalanda 5/a	Lugalanda 5/b	Lugalanda 6/a	Lugalanda 6/b
Text	<i>Nik.</i> 1 173	<i>DP</i> 87	<i>VS</i> 27 41	<i>VS</i> 14 60	<i>Nik.</i> 1 181
Overseers:	5 overseers: Sesludu, Diġirbad, Emelimsu, Lugalmassu, Lukurebigi	4 overseers: Sesludu, Diġirbad, Emelimsu, Enimanezi	4 overseers: Sesludu, Diġirbad, Emelim(su), Enimanezi	5 overseers of guards: Sesludu, Emelimsu, Enimanezi (head of plough- teams), Diġirbad, + Dam- diġirġu	5 overseers: Sesludu, Diġirbad, Emelimsu, + Urdulsaġ, Enimanezi
Farmers:	5 farmers: Urdam, Lugal- massu, Galatur, Puzur-Mama, Urdu	6 farmers: Urdam, Puzur- Mama, Lugal- massu, Galatur, Urdu, + Lugal- pac	6 farmers: Urdam, Puzur- Mama, Lugal- massu, Galatur, Urdu, Lugalpac	6 farmers: Urdam, Puzur- Mama, Lugal- massu, Galatur, Urdu, Lugal- pac	5 farmers: Urdam, Puzur- Mama, Galatur, Lugal- massu, Urdu
Donkey herder:		+ Enku	Enku	Enku	Enku
Total number of animals:	1 ewe, 1 lamb, 8 kids	11 kids	11 kids	12 kids	11 kids
Total number of individuals:	10	11	11	12	11
Translation of subscript (without title of Paranamtara):	At the Malt-Eating Festival of Nanshe they brought it to Paranamtara ... Colonel Eniggal marked them. Animal fattener Enku led them away.	At the Barley-Eating Festival of Nanshe; Paranamtara ...	At the Malt-Eating Festival of Nanshe they brought it to Paranamtara ... Animal fattener Enku led them away.	At the Barley-Eating Festival of Nanshe; Paranamtara ...	At the Malt-Eating Festival of Nanshe they brought it to Paranamtara ... Animal fattener Enku led them away.

Table 6: Festival provisions from the overseers (*maš-da-ri-a ugula-ne*) for Nanshe's festivals (in chronological order). Festival: a = Barley-Eating Festival (months I/II), b = Malt-Eating Festival (months VIII/IX). Individuals: + = new person compared to previous account; | = last attestation of a person in this series of texts.

Who were all these internal contributors? The names of the “overseers” are very well documented in the Emunus texts. From this we know that each of them led contingents of ca. 15 to 25 individuals from the “farmers and warriors” group, the primary group in the Mesopotamian population in terms of their relative position and their recognition, who were persons active in agriculture and serving as soldiers in periods of war.<sup>21</sup> The “farmers” and the donkey herder were

21. Schrakamp (2014) studied these persons comprehensively, including a careful and detailed discussion of the history of research. It is worth repeating his summary: “Es lässt sich wie folgt zusammenfassen: Die unter der *Statusbezeichnung* ru-lugal und der *Berufsbezeichnung* aga<sub>3</sub>-us<sub>2</sub> zusammengefassten Personengruppen bildeten die oberste Gruppe der Tempelbeschäftigten. Da zahlreiche Angehörige

of the same social rank. The evidence collected in Table 6 allows more conclusions to be made about the integration of the population into the festival calendar. The ten to twelve “overseers”, who represented something like the top 1% to 1.5% of the adults who depended more or less directly on the Female Quarter,<sup>22</sup> each provided a kid to their colonel for the festivals of Nanshe. Within the redistributive mode of economy, the temple-lord or colonel relied on the cooperation of the members of his organization, and this cooperation was reiterated and intensified with each donation. When various important individuals brought a kid twice a year, this produced more awareness of the festival calendar and its deities, as well as of social relations, than if some temple-lord had kept a herd of goats centrally as the organization’s fund for sacrifices.<sup>23</sup> The small contributions allowed for constant repetition and thus served as a constant reminder of one’s membership in the community of the city-state, which was also a community that existed in the name of the local gods, whose large festivals the people celebrated every year. Upon closer inspection, in the practice of the *mašdaria* provisions the ancient Lagashites had found a remarkable way to achieve the constant integration of as many persons as possible without causing the collapse of the system due to an excessively heavy economic burden or too many participants, inasmuch as the influential overseers of the Female Quarter only donated personally to Nanshe’s Festivals twice a year. Without doubt their donations were intended for this goddess specifically, because the Lady of Lagash, the head of the Female Quarter, had a special obligation to the cult of the most important female festivals in the city-state. This connection also worked at another level, since it also served to strengthen the close bond between the large cities Girsu, where the Female Quarter was situated, and Niĝen, the cult-place of Nanshe. Nanshe’s temple organization, for its part, contributed to Bau’s Festival at Girsu, the festival organized by the Female Quarter, as we discussed above at the beginning of this article.

In very few instances, *mašdaria* gifts were not bound to religious festivals, but rather were used for a feasting held by the ruler. Prentice (2010, 192-193) has collected these references: the birth of a princess, the presence of the ruler at a house-warming party or a gift of the ruler to his son. The restricted number of such *mašdaria* provisions underscores the exceptional importance of the divine festivals, but on the other hand the deliveries indicate that the palace always functioned as a place and an institution for feasting, a commensality that involved more people than a nuclear family.

dieser Gruppen in einigen Urkunden zu den RU-lugal, in anderen zu den *aga<sub>3</sub>-us<sub>2</sub>* gezählt werden und beide Gruppen ähnliche Funktion und Status besaßen, ist die strikte Abgrenzung schwierig. Rationenlisten und Landtexte nennen RU-lugal und *aga<sub>3</sub>-us<sub>2</sub>* als erste und zahlenstärkste Gruppe, verzeichnen für sie die umfangreichsten Zuwendungen und weisen sie somit als Elite der Tempelbeschäftigten aus. Diese Elite genoss relativen materiellen Wohlstand und konnte Häuser, Gärten, Sklaven und Equiden besitzen. Als Gegenleistung für ihr hohes Einkommen und ihren hohen Status leistete sie, in Gruppen unter Aufschern organisiert, Wehrdienst und bildete den Kern des lagašitischen Heeres. Zugleich trug sie die Hauptlast der öffentlichen Arbeiten. RU-lugal übten meist landwirtschaftliche Berufe aus oder fungierten als Aufscher über niedriggestellte Arbeitskräfte, während *aga<sub>3</sub>-us<sub>2</sub>* möglicherweise polizeiliche Aufgaben erfüllten” (Schrakamp 2014, 723-724).

22. See above §2.2 on the number of ca. 1000 people forming the Emunus organization.

23. Which existed as well; see above §1.2.

## 5. Festival provisions in the kingdoms of Akkade (2324-2142 BCE) and Ur (2110-2003 BCE)

### 5.1. *A note on the kingdom of Akkade*

The concept of the *mašdaria* continued to be used under the Mesopotamian kingdoms of Akkade and of the Third Dynasty of Ur. For the kingdom of Akkade, it suffices to point to a series of 35 Late Sargonic documents from Umma (Jaleel – Edan 2015, nn. 2 to 36), listing one, rarely two sheep or goats stemming from various individuals, of which very few are characterized by their profession as merchant (e.g. n. 6), field-surveyor,<sup>24</sup> textile cleaner (n. 6<sup>b</sup>) or shepherd (e.g. n. 3). Mostly around 10, 15 animals per text are described as “festival provisions” for various cities in the province: the city of Umma itself (16×),<sup>25</sup> Zabalam, the important sanctuary of Inana (7×),<sup>26</sup> the sanctuary Girġesh (1×, n. 35),<sup>27</sup> and also places like Nagsu (1×, n. 34) and Mashkan-Shara (1×, n. 7). Two texts note similar festival provisions (*mašdaria*) for the kingdom’s capital Akkade (1×, n. 14) and for the religious centre of Babylonia, Nippur (1×, n.18).<sup>28</sup> Without overestimating the evidence supplied by this series of documents, it is clear that the local Umma festivals received much more attention than the royal festivals at Akkade and Nippur.

### 5.2. *Festival provisions (mašdaria) under the Third Dynasty of Ur: the case of the silver and gold deliveries*

A completely different picture emerges from the massive quantity of textual evidence for the kingdom of the Third Dynasty of Ur, when the festivals in the royal capitals gained a unique dominance over the others, and the *mašdaria* deliveries offer an important key with which to analyze the situation. First, it should be underlined that the Sumerian term *mašdaria* had kept its two Early Dynastic facets of meaning as a tax for herdsmen and as a contribution for central festivals. As a tax, the cowherds delivered milk products to the storehouse as *mašdaria* annually. Here we will concentrate on the second aspect of the *mašdaria*, and mention only in passing that a portion of the *mašdaria* foodstuffs was consumed at the royal table without being bound specifically to festivals, which is similar to the Early Dynastic situation (see above and §5.3). The most important *mašdaria* deliveries, however, are those that arrived from every province of the kingdom at the capital Ur for its three main festivals, whereas comparatively few deliveries were sent to other cultic centres in Sumer. One group of officials appears prominently in the festival provisions (*mašdaria*), namely the city-rulers and the temple-lords of the state’s core region in Mesopotamia. Thus apparently the old Early Dynastic system, where communal organizations supported the city-state’s centres, was transformed into a larger network in which the provinces,

24. *lu<sub>2</sub>-eše<sub>2</sub>-gi<sub>2</sub>* n. 27, *gu-sur* n. 6.

25. Nn. 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24, 27, 28, 29, 33, 36.

26. Nn. 2, 3, 9, 13, 16, 22, 25.

27. Written *gi<sub>13</sub>(šid)-ġe<sup>ki</sup>* (n. 35 rev.).

28. Unclear is [*x*]-*ġeš-za* (n. 32 rev.).

the successors of the former city-states, and the royal capitals represented by the temples had taken over this role.<sup>29</sup>

Although the *mašdaria* contributions included various foodstuffs in the Ur III kingdom as well, we will focus here on the most impressive form of *mašdaria* consisting of considerable amounts of silver and gold sent to Ur. The silver derived from various taxes which had been collected in the province, as attested by three large accounts from Umma dated to three successive years (Shu-Suen 8, 9 and Ibbi-Suen 1; D'Agostino – Pomponio 2005; 2014). Umma's Fiscal Office collected the silver, often in tiny amounts, from the population of the whole province. A substantial contribution stemmed from the so-called irrigation tax charged on agricultural land, and some silver derived from taxes on the purchase and sale of many products like bitumen, salt and *gazi* plant or bird's feathers; finally, the sum included silver paid by various individuals to settle their outstanding obligations in grain or in animals (Steinkeller 2004; Ouyang 2013). The manner in which the silver collected in the province was then used, according to these three extraordinary documents, tells us much of politics and economy in the Ur III state (Table 7).

Annually, the Fiscal Office of the province handled between 20 and 22 minas, i.e., ca. 10 to 11 kg, of silver. Of these, the province invested 3 to 6 minas (1.5 to 3 kg) in the purchase of special goods by means of merchants, and the tiny amount of 5.5 shekels (ca. 46 grs.) was donated to the local temples as an asset for future times. However, the lion's share of 12 minas, i.e., 6 kg, of silver, more than half of the total silver at their disposal, was sent to the capital in the form of silver rings, both larger ones for oxen and smaller ones. Together with gold of the highest quality bought for another 1.25 minas of silver, this treasure was dedicated as royal *mašdaria* at the "three festivals", the main festivals of the Moon-god Nanna in the capital Ur: the two Akiti Festivals for the harvest in the spring and for seeding in the autumn and the Sublime Festival in the winter. Oxen played a role at these festivals, some were guided to the temple complex to be slaughtered for sacrifices, and others served as draught animals and pulled the chariot or the boat of god Nanna at his procession. Even more relevant is the fact that in the course of the ceremonies at Ur, a ritual took place that was called "the opening of the (divine) treasure".<sup>30</sup> The evidence thus shows us that the silver of Umma, stemming from local taxes and fines, was transformed into a festival gift to the Moon-god Nanna and his wife Ningal and was dedicated to them during one of the main festivals. This ritual act took place just before the closing ceremonies, after Nanna had returned from his procession on the tenth day. The ceremonial context guaranteed a public awareness of the province's donation, and the participating office-holders would actually have observed the delivery of their riches to the state's "national" sanctuary at Ur, in a ritual that took place every year on the same dates, under the patronage of the king. In this way, the king and his state solemnly filled the god's treasury, where the silver remained basically untouched as an asset for harder times. Such times were not far off, since just twelve years after the last documented delivery from Umma, the treasures from the temples of Ur were confiscated as "purchase price" to be paid to Isin in Northern Babylonia, evidently to buy grain for the starving population: divine protection thus helped literally in periods of stress.<sup>31</sup>

29. *mašdaria* deliveries in the Ur III documentation are discussed with many examples (which can easily be added to nowadays) by Sallaberger 1993, 160-170.

30. This is attested for the Akiti Festival in autumn and for the Sublime Festival (Sallaberger 1993, 185-186).

31. Sallaberger 1999, 174 on *UET* 3 702 (Ibbi-Suen 13), and further literature.



Year	Shu-Suen 8	Shu-Suen 9	Ibbi-Suen 1
Document	BM 110126 = <i>Nisaba</i> 26, 2	BdI E-1	BM 106050
Total income	1191.4	1348.6	1276.8
Total expenditure (including overdraft carried over from preceding year)	1326.6 (including overdraft: 149.7)	1502.8 (including overdraft: 173.1)	1444.8 (including overdraft: 154.2)
Royal <i>mašdaria</i> for the three festivals: silver rings for oxen and small rings + in gold	720 + 75	720 + 75	720 + 75
<i>mašdaria</i> for Shu-Suen* delivered with the harvest (in gold) + delivered with fish and vegetables (in gold and silver)	60 + 30 – within the turn of office ( <i>bala</i> )	60* + 60 – in Nippur + 60 – in Tummal	60
<i>mašdaria</i> for Ibbi-Suen		15 – for king Ibbi- Suen’s coronation	
extraordinary royal expenditures for representation	40 – statue of Shu- Suen for temple of Shara 60 – royal chief cupbearer	60 – cupbearer and “man of the crown” bringing statues of Shu- Suen to the temples of Shara and Gula 40 – royal messenger bringing news of Ibbi-Suen’s coronation	
sub-total royal sector	985	1090	855
cultic standards in Umma province	5.5	5.5	5.5
at disposal of merchants	181.8	173.1	394.2
extraordinary expenditures at Umma	–	–	32 provisions when the city-ruler had died (in Shu-Suen 7)

Table 7: Annual silver accounts of the province of Umma for three successive years, including festival provisions (*mašdaria*) to the capital Ur and for other royal agenda.

Note: Amounts in shekels of ca. 8.4 grs; 60 shekels = 1 mina.

Texts published by D’Agostino – Pomponio 2005 and 2014.

The Umma silver accounts (Table 7) listed further, albeit more modest royal festival provisions, especially “Shu-Suen’s *mašdaria*”, which included donations to Nippur and Tummal, the cultic centre of Sumer and Akkad. The province also had to pay high amounts for royal representation,

for the fashioning of statues of the living king in the temples of the province, or for the coronation of Ib-bi-Suen and the reception of the royal messenger (see Table 7). Evidently, these occasions for royal representation presuppose the participation and feasting of larger groups of persons.

### 5.3. *Festival provisions in the kingdom of Ur*

When the kings of Ur redirected provisions to the state festivals of the moon god in their capital, they stepped into a long tradition and reorganized it according to the current needs of the state. However, the kings of Ur did not only acknowledge the tradition of the cultic centre in the political capital, they also emphasized the role of the divine king Enlil, whose temple at Nippur had long served as the ideological and religious centre of Sumer and Akkad. When the land of Babylonia had still consisted of many city-states in the Early Dynastic period, the supremacy of Enlil and his city was never disputed, and rulers from all states dedicated their votive gifts to Nippur. The kings of Ur as rulers of this land inherited the duty of maintaining Enlil's sanctuary, and thus during this period Nippur was not only a centre of a culturally defined region, i.e., the land of "Sumer and Akkad", but also became a centre of the state of the kings of Ur in a political sense. The king supported the cult of Enlil with constant supplies from the royal herds, and many different contributions arrived at Nippur directly from the state's provinces. The deliveries of foodstuffs and other objects were sent for the "first fruit" (*nisaĝ*) at the turn of the year and as donations for the "Holy Hill" (*du<sub>6</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>*), a festival in the seventh month at the mythical place of Enlil's ancestors (Sallaberger 1993, 155-156). Some more modest *mašdaria* contributions from Umma were also directed to Nippur and its cult-place Tummal (e.g., Table 7). More often, however, another form of donation called *kašdea*, "banquet" was sent for Enlil's main holiday, the Tummal festival (Sallaberger 1993, 143-145; Ouyang 2013, 100-101). The designation of the provisions as "(royal) banquet" (*kašdea*) already points to the same context as the *mašdaria*: the contributions, which included sheep and cattle, flour and bread, oil, or silver as well, arrived at the festival as a share of its expenses.

Under the rule of the Third Dynasty of Ur, four first-rank state festivals were celebrated in Babylonia every year, three in Ur – the two Akiti festivals in (months I and VII) and the Sublime Festival (month X) – and one in Tummal near Nippur (month VIII after year Šulgi 44). These festivals served as the main occasions for personal encounters in the large state, since both the king and his court, important office-holders like generals or city-rulers, and envoys from abroad came together at this time (Sharlach 2005a). All their entourages and the local population surely added up to a very large number of participants. This context ensured the contributions from the provinces a high degree of publicity and attention both from the king and his court and from representatives from all over the state.

At this point, reference has to be made to the institution of the *bala*, the "term of duty", which is the contribution made by the provinces to the state that has become best known in Near Eastern studies. In this system, a province had to run some state organizations for a fixed period, usually of one month; some provinces shared a month, and Girsu managed three months a year (Sharlach 2005b). In her in-depth analysis of the *bala* system, Sharlach (2004) carefully set out the two components that were handed over in the system, "goods" and "labor". The provinces sent

agricultural products, barley and other grains, wood and reeds as fuel, and manufactured products to the crown, or they used these products to support events of royal representation within the province (e.g., voyages of the king, royal messengers). To a large extent, the provinces contributed labor to state organizations. This one-directional flow of goods amounted to 48% of the profit of the province's institutional economy. The *bala* system worked differently in the case of livestock, since it included not only animals sent to the royal cities Ur, Nippur or Uruk, or those used in the province for the royal agenda, but rather live animals were also sent from the crown to the province for internal use (Sharlach 2004, 152-153, Sets C and D and Set B, respectively). There is another set of animals which is of interest here: "[A]nimals sacrificed in the state-supported central shrines of Nippur and Tummal. [...] [T]hese animals clearly derived from crown herds but were accounted for as the *bala* of whichever province was on duty in that month ... The animals were fed and maintained by that province prior to being sacrificed." (Sharlach 2004, 152 on her 'Set A').

From a simple economic perspective, the value of the animals, even those that were physically sent to the provinces, barely constituted a fraction of the expenses of the taxes and services, and concerning the slaughtered animals, the economic benefit was even smaller, since one has to assume that they were divided up as a common meal. However, a look at the social context allows an appreciation of this institution. Representatives of each province were actively present during their term of duty in Nippur, which was the prestigious religious centre of the large Mesopotamian kingdom. Besides work duties as a deliveryman or in the upkeep of the royal facilities, this also meant attending the large state festivals. Participation included physical presence at and experience of the space and the monuments on display in the enormous temple complex of Enlil. Therefore, both the delivery of commodities and work for the state always implied the physical presence of the active personnel at the kingdom's cultural centre during the festival month. Depending on the modern viewer's disposition and his or her ability to imagine the experiences of the ancients, he may view this as an exceptional and highly stimulating experience for the participant, or as a prime occasion for the king to indoctrinate his subjects. Leaving such attempts at ancient psychology and subjective assumptions concerning motivation apart, the fact remains that representatives of the provinces gained a unique proximity to the state's primary cultural and religious centre during exactly those days, when the province spent most of its efforts for the state. In this way, focusing on festivals and their participants affords us a much better understanding of how knowledge about the royal centres' culture spread throughout the state.

The present section has briefly reviewed various payments of the provinces to the state in the Ur III period. Firstly, there existed various festival contributions to the cultic centre Nippur, which were called *kašdea* "banquet", *nisaĝ* "first fruit", and *duku* "Holy Hill". Secondly, the relationship between feasting and the dues paid to the Ur III state also made sense within the *bala* institution, the "term of duty". After this excursus, we return to the institution that we could trace throughout the centuries, the festival provisions called *mašdaria*.

## 6. Contributors as actors: festival provisions and the concept of pooling

The term *mašdaria*, to be translated as “festival provisions”, points to a specific delivery that entailed the notion of a fee. It was often bound to festivals, and usually directed towards the ruler. The specific type of *mašdaria* depended on the economic and social context: the primary producers of food like the shepherds or the fishermen delivered the *mašdaria* directly to their lord, in the case of the Early Dynastic documentation the ruler or his family. One place to consume the foodstuffs was the palace, and the palatial meals always included a number of people who were served food, and the meals can thus be defined as feasting, although here the number of participants was always fairly restricted. In contrast, then, the annual festivals devoted to the gods, such as Bau’s Festival in Early Dynastic Girsu, or the Akiti festivals and the Sublime Festival (*izim-mab*) in the capital Ur under the Third Dynasty, represented the large public festivals at which hundreds of people arrived, including guests from various other cities. By participating at a festival, a person acknowledged and demonstrated his or her membership in a community, and this fact can be stated without any speculation about personal motivation. Beyond that, the participant experienced the maximum degree of proximity to the cultural midpoint of the respective community, a centre that was marked by the deities and their temples with all their accoutrements. Moreover, this contact with the cultural centre happened precisely during its period of maximum activity, regarding the public presentation of the deities, the presence of the ruler, performances, and the participation of many other members of the community. By contributing a share of the food and drink consumed during the feasting, everyone became an active member and assumed a host-like role, thus it became his or her celebration as well.

In addition to factors such as the close regional contact between a city and its direct environment or neighboring cities, the political situation of a community also defined the circle of participants involved in the feasting. In periods of political instability, for example, only the city itself together with its immediate hinterland could execute the annual temple festivals. In contrast, in the Early Dynastic city-state of Lagash, representatives of second-rank cities like Lagash, Niġen, Guaba or Pasira arrived at Bau’s Festival in the capital Girsu. Meanwhile, in the kingdom of the Third Dynasty of Ur, the temple-lords and city-rulers from all of the Mesopotamian cities of the state’s core area contributed to the large festivals in the capital Ur (Sallaberger 1993, 162).

In her analysis of the forms of economic exchange in the Early Dynastic city-state of Lagash, Prentice (2010, 155-156 and 187-203) described *mašdaria* as a “return gift”, which included the participants in a “generalized reciprocity” as “members of a ‘fictional’ family who receive gifts or foodstuffs at festivals” (*ibid.* 202), following the description of Sahlins (1972). Prentice concentrated on the representatives who brought the *mašdaria* and interpreted the donation of “holy milk and holy malt” to women, mostly the wives of the representatives from various temples, as a counter-gift. After closer inspection of the *mašdaria* institution, however, the textual data indicates unambiguously that large portions of the population participated at every stage from production to consumption. Therefore, the exchange cannot be framed as an elite feast involving only a few invited participants in a family-like environment, but rather the feasting was a community social event that included – directly or indirectly – as many people as possible. Therefore, following the terminology of Sahlins, the *mašdaria* institution with the collection of specific goods for common

feasting, corresponds to his “pooling” or “redistribution” transaction type. It is worth citing a passage in full, since it describes the role of *mašdaria* perfectly as relates to Third Millennium BCE Babylonia:

On a very general view, the array of economic transactions in the ethnographic record may be resolved into two types. First, those ‘vice-versa’ movements between two parties known familiarly as ‘reciprocity’ (A ↔ B). The second, centralized movements: collection from members of a group, often under one hand, and redivision within this group: This is ‘pooling’ or ‘redistribution.’ On an even more general view, the two types merge. For pooling is an organisation of reciprocities, a system of reciprocities— a fact of central bearing upon the genesis of large-scale redistribution under chiefly aegis. [...]

Pooling is socially a within relation, the collective action of a group. Reciprocity is a between relation, the action and reaction of two parties. Thus pooling is the complement of social unity and, in Polanyi’s term, ‘centricity’; whereas, reciprocity is social duality and ‘symmetry.’ Pooling stipulates a social centre where goods meet and thence flow outwards, and a social boundary too, within which persons (or subgroups) are cooperatively related. But reciprocity stipulates two sides, two distinct social-economic interests. Reciprocity can establish solidary relations, insofar as the material flow suggests assistance or mutual benefit, yet the social fact of sides is inescapable. [...]

The practical, logistic function—redistribution—sustains the community, or community effort, in a material sense. At the same time, or alternatively, it has an instrumental function: as a ritual of communion and of subordination to central authority, redistribution sustains the corporate structure itself, that is in a social sense. The practical benefits may be critical, but, whatever the practical benefits, chiefly pooling generates the spirit of unity and centricity, codifies the structure, stipulates the centralized organisation of social order and social action.

(Sahlins 1972, 188-190, with omissions as indicated).

This description can easily be matched with the various aspects discussed in the foregoing analysis of the *mašdaria* institution. In this passage, Sahlins also points to an aspect that is not directly represented in the sources, namely that “the spirit of unity and centricity” comprises the definition of a “social boundary”. Indeed, envoys at the state festivals of Ur may have been invited guests, but they did not contribute as the core participants did, and so the contribution to the pooling was more decisive in terms of being included in the community than simple participation in the consumption of goods.

Pooling as a social activity demands a social centre. Besides the data drawn from the administrative texts and discussed above, one may also refer to Sumerian literature. Hymns and narrative texts describe the regular flow of goods to the temples of the gods, and this was always regarded a most compelling indicator of prosperity. The city-ruler or the king contributed to the temple as a representative of his land, which additionally defines the temple as the social centre. It

is perhaps appropriate to cite in this discussion one passage from the Nanshe Hymn, a text that apparently stemmed from the late third millennium, although the preserved manuscripts date mainly to the 18th century BCE (Heimpel 1981). Nanshe, the goddess of Niĝen, is portrayed as the goddess who grants proper order to the land, and this includes the assignment of tasks to its inhabitants and the appropriate conduct of people. As part of the concept of a just and stable order, the regular delivery of goods to the temple features prominently, and the lines that introduce this theme of the Nanshe hymn are cited in full:

After its (the temple's) first-fruit contributions were installed, one will follow them,  
and so that they should not stop,  
let there be an oil carrier who will deliver oil to the temple,  
let there be a milk carrier who will deliver milk to the temple,  
and for bringing the fish in a hurry, let there be a person of daily assignment!  
After the firewood carrier of the steppe  
has brought his delivery into his lady's temple,  
it will be deposited in its corners, it will be deposited at its sides.  
(Nanshe A 76-82; translation based on the editions of Heimpel 1981, Black *et al.*  
1998/2006, 04.14.01, and Attinger 2013/2015).

The Nanshe Hymn, then, explores how the provisioning of the temple implies cooperation and justice, including for example the use of standard measures to allow fair distribution of services and benefits. Reading the hymn in the context of festival provisions, the link between provisions for the cult and a stable society and prosperous economy can be appreciated much better. The literary language and religious metaphors hide the basic fact that the social, economic, political and cultural structure of a city-state, along with efficient cooperation of the people, rendered the supply of the temples, the social centres, possible. To deliver goods to the temple was a social act of highly symbolic meaning, both demanding and stimulating cooperation and communication (see especially section 3). This act focused on the temples as the sacred places of the community, which epitomized a primordial order of the world, with annual repetition over long periods of time meaning that this role of the temple was deeply rooted in the memory of each participant. If seen in its social setting, the supplying of the temples by humans was of multifaceted cultural relevance, so that it is not necessary to reduce this to a theological discourse between gods and humans in the sense that the humans supported the temple in order to influence the mighty deity to support the humans and to guarantee their ongoing support, the principle of *do ut des*. This theological notion was also present in the Mesopotamian discourse on the relationship between gods and humans,<sup>32</sup> and the deeper and much more general social relevance was most probably not apparent to the actors themselves. However, a contemporary analysis of Mesopotamian festivals has to explore the cultural system beyond its religious façade in order to reintegrate the religious world with its social context.

32. Braun-Holzinger – Sallaberger (2016) and Mayer – Sallaberger (2003) for many examples.

The institution of the *mašdaria* festival provisions has become a key element in the understanding of how the population was involved in large festivals. Goods from *mašdaria* deliveries were used in feasts of the state, both in the large temple festivals and in the palace. No one would doubt that these donations were obligatory; nevertheless *mašdaria* should not be translated as a “tax”, since the term “tax” conveys the notion of a non-personal payment to the state, whereas here exactly the opposite is true. Contrary to taxes, which are collected in a common state budget to meet public expenditure, the *mašdaria* was determined in accordance with the most important public events. In this regard the fact that so many individuals of the city-state or the state were involved regularly became more meaningful. This social aspect of the *mašdaria* appears even in its latest forms in the kingdom of the Third Dynasty of Ur, and even in the contributions in silver: they were still handed over to the temple in a public event at the state’s most important festivals. In any case, the change from foodstuffs to storable silver indicates that the *mašdaria* festival provisions had changed substantially over the centuries from the time of Lugalanda and Urukagina of Lagash (ca. 2330-2315 BCE) to that of king Shu-Suen of Ur (2035-2027 BCE). The *mašdaria* institution characterized the strong relationship between a state’s population and the temples as its centres in the third millennium, but apparently there existed no similar institution in the subsequent Old Babylonian period or Middle Bronze Age, thus after the fundamental political and social changes of around 2000 BCE.<sup>33</sup>

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33. A concept similar to the third millennium *mašdaria* does not occur in the paragraph on “Steuer” by Stol (2004, 747-776), although donations to temples are attested especially in Ur as the “tithe” to Ningal (Stol 2004, 776 with literature), and the *igisá* “tax” is also partly linked to the cult (*ibid.* 772-775); in both cases, however, we lack the broad inclusion of the population. Some parallels to the *mašdaria* institution can be detected in the regular deliveries of foodstuffs from the state’s officials and the provinces to the temple of Assur in the Middle-Assyrian period. Sallaberger (2012) studied how various institutions, the king, the city and the temple communities, cooperated in the preparation of food for sacrifices, meals and festivals in Late Bronze Age Emar.

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