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**Priests of Ur in the Old Babylonian Period:
a Reappraisal in Light of the 2017 Discoveries
at Ur/Tell Muqayyar***

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Abstract

Thirty-two years after the publication of *Le Clergé d'Ur au siècle d'Hammurabi* (1986), a reappraisal of the situation is made possible by collations of already known texts, and by new tablets provided by the resumption of excavations on the site of Tell Muqayyar. The question of the estate properties within the city of Ur will first be examined: generally, the members of the clergy owned the houses they inhabited, which were not the property of the temple of the Moon-god Nanna. Then the evidence about the specific situation of the purification priests devoted to the god Enki-of-Eridu will be studied: the older data are supplemented by new ones discovered in 2017 in a house occupied by a Babylonian general. Finally, the level of literacy of the clergy and the role he played in education will be examined; here again, the 2017 season provides new evidence thanks to the discovery of a house inhabited by an intendant of the temple of the goddess Ningal.

Key words

Mesopotamia; Ur; priesthood; real estate property; purification; cuneiform literacy.

Introduction

My first visit to Tell Muqayyar, ancient Ur, took place in 1974, when I was taking part for the first time in the French archaeological mission at Tell Senkereh (Larsa). My own work on the texts of Ur began in 1978. I was then working on my PhD, which was devoted to the Old Babylonian tablets excavated at Tell Sifr, ancient Kutalla, by Loftus in 1854, and then copied by Strassmaier in 1882 and again by Jean in 1931. I noticed that nearly one third of the tablets had nothing to do with the rest. Research on their formulary and prosopography enabled me to demonstrate they were written at Ur. But the question was: how could they have been mixed with the tablets from Tell Sifr? Then I discovered that at the same time Loftus excavated at Tell Sifr, another Englishman, Taylor, was working at Tell Muqayyar.¹ He discovered thirty tablets in what he called the “Tomb mound”. The tablets were sent to the British Museum and mixed with those Loftus discovered at the same time at Tell Sifr.²

The second phase of my commitment with Ur was my *Thèse d'État*, devoted to the clergy of Ur during the XVIIIth century BCE.³ This work had been written in the same spirit as this colloquium, putting stress on the clergy as a social unit, analyzing its economic situation and its role in the cultural life of the time, especially as concerns education and the transmission of tradition to the next generation.

* This paper has been prepared in the frame of the “EcritUr” project, granted by the French ANR (“Agence nationale de la recherche”). I wish to thank the organisers of this conference for their invitation to contribute. I give here the text of my communication more or less unchanged, including the necessary footnotes, the main addition being § 2.4. As long as a consensus has not been reached, I follow the so-called middle chronology (Hammu-rabi of Babylon 1792-1750 BCE).

¹ J. E. Taylor, “Notes on the Ruins of Muqeyar,” *JRAS* 15, 1854, p. 260-276; see E. Sollberger, “Mr. Taylor in Chaldaea,” *AnSt* 22, 1972, p. 129-139.

² For more details see D. Charpin, *Archives familiales et propriété privée en Babylonie ancienne: étude des documents de «Tell Sifr»*, HEO 12, Geneva-Paris, 1980 (hereafter HEO 12).

³ D. Charpin, *Le Clergé d'Ur au siècle d'Hammurabi (XIX^e-XVIII^e siècles av. J.-C.)*, HEO 22, Geneva-Paris, 1986 (hereafter HEO 22).

Finally, in 2015, I was invited by Elizabeth Stone as epigrapher of her new archaeological mission at Ur. The site, 15 km south-west from Nassiriya, has not been looted in the last decades, because a military camp is right next to it; it is completely enclosed and guarded night and day by the police. A rather comfortable house had been built within the site itself, ideal conditions for working and much better than those I experienced at Larsa in 1974, and still in 1987 and 1989, when I came back as an epigrapher.

A first season took place in the autumn 2015, which gave a few Old Babylonian tablets, a few Ur III tablets, but above all a batch of Old Akkadian documents, about which I already reported during the *Rencontre Assyriologique* at Philadelphia in July 2016.⁴ When in november 2016 I received the invitation to participate to the present colloquium, I thought it could be interesting to update our knowledge about the clergy of Ur. But the next season at Tell Muqayyer, which took place in the spring of 2017, led to discoveries about the theme I had already chosen in a way I could not even hope for.⁵

We will first examine the question of the temple estate properties within the city of Ur. I will then review the evidence about the purification priests, the older data being supplemented by new ones in 2017. Finally, we will reexamine the role the clergy played in education, and here again the 2017 season provided new evidence.

1 Real estate properties of the temple and of the priests

The temple of Nanna/Sin at Ur was a big landowner: UET 5 666 is “a cadaster of lands owned by the Nanna temple and by the palace (...) The Nanna temple owned at least 988.2 hectares near the city of Iktutum; the total surface in its possession recorded in this text may amount to 1312.2 hectares.”⁶ Other texts show that the temple also possessed orchards,⁷ some plots being eventually sold to private people.⁸ But what was the situation concerning houses or unbuilt plots of land within the city itself?

In 1925-26, Woolley decided to extend his digging to the periphery of the sanctuary of Nanna, the Ekišnugal, to which his main efforts had been devoted during his first four seasons, and explored the sector called “Tomb mound” by Taylor, to which he gave the name “EH”. During the next season, he extended his excavations to the west, a sector he called “EM”, where he found 16 houses. The tablets he found there allowed him to date the houses in the Old Babylonian period. In his final report, Wolley described the situation thus:

When we dug the EM area we were surprised to find domestic buildings set up against and almost impinging on the sacred Temenos. The buildings differ not at all from those in the AH quarter, but the tablets from them include a large proportion of religious texts, hymns etc., and *it may be that the clergy attached to the main temples were lodged in houses set round the Temenos and forming a sort of Cathedral close.*⁹

I wrote in my book on *Le Clergé d'Ur* that such a description was somewhat deceptive.¹⁰ It is true that a good proportion of the inhabitants of this quarter were priests of the neighboring temple, but they did not occupy what we would call “company housing”: the buildings they lived in were their personal property, which they either bought or inherited, and transmitted to their heirs.

⁴ D. Charpin, “Epigraphy of Ur: Past, Present and Future,” in: G. Frame (ed.), *Ur in the Twenty-First Century CE, 62nd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, University of Pennsylvania, July 11-15 2016*, Winona Lake, in press.

⁵ For a general overview, see D. Charpin, “Nouvelles découvertes épigraphiques à Ur (2015 et 2017),” *CRAIBL*, 2017, p. 1063-1081.

⁶ M. Van de Mieroop, review of D. Charpin, *Le clergé d'Ur au siècle d'Hammurabi*, Geneva-Paris 1986, *JCS* 41, 1989, p. 237-252 (p. 239).

⁷ See YOS 12 161, where Nanna temple is neighbour of a plot of land sold by Sin-uselli (Samsu-iluna 5); see also YOS 12 228: 2 (both texts edited in www.archibab.fr). The context of both sales is that of orchards.

⁸ This is the case of YOS 5 122, where Sin-nur-matim and Balmunamhe buy 24 sar of bare ground from Nanna temple in the context of orchards (see HEO 22, p. 49-50).

⁹ L. Woolley & M. Mallon, *The Old Babylonian Period*, UE 7, London, 1976, p. 12 (italics mine).

¹⁰ HEO 22, p. 140-141.

But a text published in 1991 has shown that the temple of Nanna did own plots of land in this neighborhood, which were eventually sold to private people. Was I wrong in 1986? The text is kept in the British Museum.¹¹ It dates from the second year of Rim-Sin I (1821 BCE). The sale contract has some peculiarities, but the beginning is normal : the sold object is an unbuilt plot of 1 sar, i.e. 36 square meters; the neighbors are Imgur-Sin, a priest with the title of ŠITA.ÈŠ,¹² and Puzur-Šamaš; the seller is the temple of Nanna; the buyer is Puzur-Šamaš, obviously the same man already mentioned as neighbor. It is clear that Puzur-Šamaš bought from the temple an unbuilt plot next to his house.

Where did this take place? Since the tablet comes from an acquisition by the British Museum (96-4-2,60), it is not evident. But there is here a great luck. The neighbor Imgur-Sin ŠITA.ÈŠ is also known in a tablet found by Taylor in the Tomb Mound, and also dating from the second year of Rim-Sin.¹³ The conclusion is rather clear: the tablet BM 13960, recorded in the British Museum in 1896, derives from illicit excavations made in the same part of the tell, after the sounding of Taylor which took place in 1854.

It is then sure that the temple of Nanna sold a house in a site next to the sanctuary. The problem is to know how the temple became owner of this plot and why it was sold – let me remind the surface: only 36 square meters. The simplest solution is to admit that the previous owner died without heir. In this case, the temple (and not the municipality) became owner of the land.¹⁴

So finally my analysis of 1986 is still valid : the area next to the temple of Nanna was made of houses belonging to private people and it is only in special cases that the temple could own a house in that part of the city close to the sanctuary; it was sold as soon as possible, the silver resulting from the sale being deposited in the treasury of the temple, named Ganunmah, whose officials sealed the sale contract.

2 News about *abriqqum*-purification priests

2.1 1986, publication of Le Clergé d’Ur

In the EM site excavated by Woolley in 1926-27, the house no. 7 Quiet Street is especially interesting. A family of *abriqqum* purification priests lived there: Ku-Ningal and his five sons. After the death of Ku-Ningal, in Rim-Sin 34 (1788 BCE), two of his sons succeeded him and lived in the house for half a century, till it was destroyed after Samsu-iluna 11 (1739 BCE).¹⁵ The main interest of the discovery was the mixture of archival texts, published in UET 5, and texts which had been described as “religious and literary” in UET 6 and “school texts” in UET 7: my book has been largely devoted to an edition and commentary of all these texts, reunited according to their findspot.

One of the most interesting texts in the archive is UET 5 191. A slave who had belonged to Ku-Ningal, twenty years after the death of his former master, redeems himself by giving another slave to the brother and the five sons of Ku-Ningal, among which are two *abriqqum* priests, E-šuluh-uru and E-namti-sud. The seal of the latter has been impressed on the tablet: “E-namti-sud, *abriqqum* purification priest of the god Enki-of-Eridu, son of Ku-Ningal”.¹⁶

¹¹ BM 13960, published in M. Anbar & M. Stol, “Textes de l’époque babylonienne ancienne III,” *RA* 85, 1991, p. 13-48 (edition p. 32-34, copy p. 47). New edition with commentary by D. Charpin, “Ventes de terres par le temple de Nanna d’Ur”, in: D. Charpin (ed.), *Archibab 4. Nouvelles recherches sur la ville d’Ur à l’époque paléo-babylonienne*, Mémoires de NABU 22, Paris, 2019.

¹² The title was misread as GUDU₄-AB-<ZU> by the editors, but the copy is clear.

¹³ HEO 12 93 : 16 (Rim-Sin 2); translation and commentary in HEO 12, p. 28; transliteration p. 269.

¹⁴ For municipalities selling pieces of land without heir, see D. Charpin, “Économie et société à Sippar et en Babylonie du nord à l’époque paléo-babylonienne,” *RA* 99, 2005, p. 133-176 (p. 144). We must recall that the traces of the municipality at Ur in the Old Babylonian period are very limited.

¹⁵ For the circumstances of the destruction of Ur, see D. Charpin, “Le pillage d’Ur et la protection du temple de Ningal en l’an 12 de Samsu-iluna,” in: D. Charpin (ed.), *Archibab 4. Nouvelles recherches sur la ville d’Ur à l’époque paléo-babylonienne*, Mémoires de NABU 22, Paris, 2019.

¹⁶ É.NAM.TI.SU₁₃.UD / ABRIG₂ / ⁴EN.KI NUN^{ki}.GA / DUMU [KÛ.(d)]NIN.GAL.

In 2007, G. Spada published the fragment U.31352.¹⁷ She thought it was a contract similar to UET 5 191. But thanks to the project Ur-online, we can now access to a more comprehensive photo than the one she published and we can see it is a fragment of an envelope.¹⁸ Then, it is clear that this is the envelope of UET 5 191, with a variant in the writing of the name of the slave.¹⁹

Archival texts and literary texts found at No. 7 Quiet Street had been published separately, but studying them together revealed fruitful. One can see how this family had special traditions linked to the god Enki-of-Eridu, but was included into the clergy of the Moon-god Nanna/Sin in the main temple of Ur. There were also quite a number of school exercises, which proved that cuneiform knowledge was transmitted in the house: we will come back later to this issue.

2.2 Another abriqqum family

Ku-Ningal's family was not isolated: there was at the same time at Ur at least another family of *abriqqum* purification priests. Its house has not been excavated by Woolley, but informations can be gathered from different sources.

Collations at Yale

I discovered this family by chance at Yale, continuing my collations of the tablets published in YOS 12.²⁰ On two tablets, I deciphered impressions of one and the same seal, belonging to an *abriqqum* named E-igidubi-isilim : "E-igidubi-isilim, *abriqqum* purification priest of the god Enki-of-Eridu, son of Nanna-addani."²¹ This man was a witness in the contract UET 5 191, with the title of *abriqqum*. What is interesting in the legend of his seal is that, like the son of Ku-Ningal, his complete title makes him an *abriqqum* of the god Enki-of-Eridu.

Here again, we have a family tradition : thanks to the seal legend of E-igidubi-isilim, we learn that his father was Nanna-addani. This man was witness in TCL 10 52, also with the title of *abriqqum*.

The Sumerian name of E-igidubi-isilim belongs to a special onomastic tradition: members of the clergy bore a name which was a sort of short hymn to the glory of the temple they were attached to. Such names could be shortened.²² An exercise discovered in house No. 7 Quiet Street consisted in writing such names and providing them with an Akkadian translation.²³ The first name is E-igidubi-isilim, and it is not by chance: we can see that the third name is that of his colleague E-šuluhbi-uru, one of the sons of Ku-Ningal.

I must add that in UET 5 191, the fifth witness, just after E-igidubi-isilim, is a man named E-me-šudu, who also bore the title of *abriqqum*. Was he related to E-igidubi-isilim? We cannot say for the time being.

It is clear that there were at least two families who worked in parallel as *abriqqum* and had close ties for at least half a century, from Rim-Sin I to the end of Samsu-iluna 11, when the city was plundered and destroyed.

¹⁷ G. Spada, *Testi economici da Ur di periodo paleo-babilonese*, Nisaba 12, Messina, 2007, p. 166 (Nisaba 12 VI.2).

¹⁸ <http://www.ur-online.org/subject/53494/>. On the envelope, the impression of E-namti-sud's seal can be seen, a fact overlooked by G. Spada.

¹⁹ For more details, see D. Charpin, "En marge d'ÉcritUr, 2: retour au n°7 Quiet Street," *NABU* 2018/12.

²⁰ S. I. Feigin, *Legal and Administrative Texts of the Reign of Samsu-iluna*, YOS 12, New Haven/London, 1979; see D. Charpin, "La Babylonie de Samsu-iluna à la lumière de nouveaux documents," *BiOr* 38, 1981, p. 517-547.

²¹ YOS 12 349 and 543: É.IGI.DU₈.BI.Ì.[SILIM] / ÁB.NUN.ME.[DU] / ^dEN.KI NUN^{ki}.[GA] / DUMU ^dNANNA.AD.DA.[NI]; cf. D. Charpin, "Notices prosopographiques, 1: une nouvelle famille d'abrig d'Enki-d'Eridu," *NABU* 1987/35.

²² For instance, É.IGI.DU₈.BI.Ì.SILIM is fully written in OECT 15 15 in lines 6, 8, 9 and then abbreviated as É.IGI.DU₈.BI in lines 11' and 24'.

²³ UET 6/1 117, republished in D. Charpin, *Le Clergé d'Ur...*, HEO 22, p. 398-399.

Data from OECT 15

The names of two purification priests from Ur appear on three tablets of OECT 15, published in 2005;²⁴ they were bought by the Ashmolean museum in 1922 and derive very probably from Larsa. These names were not properly identified by S. Dalley, who established the indexes of the volume and put them among the “place names”, because they begin with the sign É “house” or “temple”: the first is our E-igidubi-isilim, and the second is E-me-šudu, an *abriqqum* who was the also witness in UET 5 191, as we have seen.²⁵

The three texts where the names of these two *abriqqum* appear belong to the administrative archives of Šamaš-hazir, who had been made responsible of the royal domain in the region of Larsa by Hammu-rabi.²⁶

2.3 The 2017 campaign: the house of a Babylonian general

I will now arrive in 2017. One of the greatest achievements of Woolley at Ur has been the exposure of the largest urban sector ever excavated, namely the AH quarter, south-east of the great temple. One of the goals of Elizabeth Stone was to dig at the periphery of this neighborhood, in order to get more informations with the techniques nowadays available and thus supplement the studies made on the houses already discovered.²⁷ The excavation of “Area 3”, north-west of the AH quarter, began in the autumn 2015 and was carried on in the spring of 2017. A huge house was cleared. Some thirty tablets were discovered around the burial vault, which were related to a Babylonian general named Abisum. He arrived at Ur at least during year 36 of Hammu-rabi and is mostly attested during the reign of Samsu-iluna, till year 11. I reminded the excavators that it happened twice that Woolley also discovered tablets within tombs.²⁸ And that is what happened: of course, the tomb was opened at the end of the excavation season, and I decided to postpone my flight back. And I was right : on Sunday December 13th, 5 tablets were discovered. And on Monday, when I should have been in the plane to Paris, 7 more.

Among them, tablet No. 3229 is particularly interesting. This document records the fact that a loan of 4 sheqels silver made to Waqar-abušū has been repaid by Abisum. What is of interest for us here is the name of the creditor. When I cleaned the tablet, I noticed that the name began with É: so, it was once more a member of the clergy with these special names glorifying the temple. With more cleaning, I could read the complete name: É.IGI.DU₈.BI.Ì.SILIM. I already knew this name! But the tablet UET 5 191 where it was found dated from Rim-Sin 54, and this repayment was made in the reign of Samsu-iluna, between 20 and 30 years later. Then with a better cleaning of the reverse of the tablet, I could decipher the impression of the seal legend: it was the same as on the YOS 12 tablets. Thus, it was sure I had to deal with the same man I had met thirty years ago. This information was very important on many levels. It is the proof that these priests, who had close contacts with king Rim-Sin and his family, were still in a good economical position, even after the Babylonian conquest of 1763 BCE. We also see that a priest of Ur had no problem to make transactions with Babylonian people installed in their city after Hammu-rabi's annexation, even with a high-ranking military officer.

The image I had of these purification priests is thus modified. They were not only a closed group mainly obsessed by the transmission of their peculiar traditions linked to the cult of the god Enki-of-Eridu, but they played as well a role in the socio-economical life of their city during the Babylonian domination.

²⁴ S. Dalley, *Old Babylonian Texts in the Ashmolean Museum mainly from Larsa, Sippar, Kish, and Lagaba (with copies contributed by Eleanor Robson and Tina Breckwoldt)*, OECT 15, Oxford, 2005 ; see D. Charpin, “Chroniques bibliographiques. 10. Économie, société et institutions paléo-babyloniennes: nouvelles sources, nouvelles approches,” RA 101, 2007, p. 147-182.

²⁵ See RA 101, 2007, p. 155.

²⁶ See now B. Fiette, *Archibab 3. Le palais, la terre et les hommes. La gestion du domaine royal de Larsa d'après les archives de Šamaš-hazir*, Mémoires de NABU 20, Paris, 2018, esp. p. 200.

²⁷ E. C. Stone & P. Zimansky, “Archaeology Returns to Ur. A New Dialog with Old Houses,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 79/4, 2016, p. 246-259.

²⁸ See D. Charpin, “Les tablettes retrouvées dans les tombes de maisons à Ur à l'époque paléo-babylonienne,” in: D. Charpin (ed.), *Archibab 4. Nouvelles recherches sur la ville d'Ur à l'époque paléo-babylonienne*, Mémoires de NABU 22, Paris, 2019.

2.4 The temple of Enki-of-Eridu at Ur

The god Enki-of-Eridu was not just worshiped at Ur within Nanna's temple by *abriqqum* purification priests devoted to him. We possess two contracts in which prebends attached to his own temple were sold.²⁹

The first one is kept at Yale;³⁰ only the reverse has been copied as YOS 5 149, which gave a list of witnesses and the date (-/ix/Rim-Sin 23). But a collation of the obverse revealed it was not a "contract for hire of a slave"³¹: it is the sale of a "prebend of cook of the temple of Enki-of-Eridu"³². The first witness is an *išippum* purification priest of Enki, named Lugal-nigina.

The second contract is TCL 10 52, more than 2 years older than YOS 5 149 (1/i/Rim-Sin 21). Thanks to YOS 5 149, the copy of Jean can now be better interpreted: the prebends which are sold are that of "2 brewers and 1 cook of the temple of Enki-of-Eridu".³³ The seller is Sin-ereš, an ENKUM purification priest, and the buyer the well known Nanna-imah.³⁴

Given the similarity between the two lists of witnesses, it is probable that seller and buyer are the same in YOS 5 149 as in TCL 10 52. The new fact is that till now we had in documents from Ur only mentions of the god Enki-of-Eridu, above all in titles of priests devoted to him;³⁵ now, the temple of this god is referred to. It is probably identical with the building excavated by Woolley in the south-east border of Tell Muqayyer,³⁶ built by Amar-Sin and renovated by Rim-Sin according to the name of his 8th year³⁷ and to an inscribed statuette found in a foundation deposit box.³⁸

3 Clergy and education

For a long time, the role of the Mesopotamian clergy in matter of education has been matter of debates. Let us recall what Landsberger wrote in his provocative manner :

One must castigate as false romanticism the conception of the so-called *Priesterweisheit* [priestly wisdom], still to be found in secondary handbooks. The scribes, although a great number of them were deeply religious, were completely a lay group. The priests as well as the kings (not counting some exceptions among the latter), and the governors, and the judges were illiterate.³⁹

This great scholar was seriously mistaken on this point: many discoveries show that a great number of priests not only mastered cuneiform writing, but that they were also able to write new compositions and transmit this knowledge of writing to apprentices.

²⁹ See D. Charpin, "Prébendes du temple d'Enki-d'Eridu à Ur," in: D. Charpin (ed.), *Archibab 4. Nouvelles recherches sur la ville d'Ur à l'époque paléo-babylonienne*, Mémoires de NABU 22, Paris, 2019.

³⁰ I wish to thank A. Lassen, assistant curator of the Babylonian Collection, for her welcome and help during my stay at Yale in April 2018.

³¹ E. M. Grice, *Records from Ur and Larsa Dated in the Larsa Dynasty*, YOS 5, New Haven, 1919, p. 53: "Witnesses, etc., from contract for hire of a slave."

³² NAM.GIR₄ É^dEN.KI NUN^{ki}.GA; for the reading NAM.GIR₄, see D. Charpin, "Retractatio. À propos de la prébende de cuisinier à Ur à l'époque paléo-babylonienne," *NABU* 2014/14.

³³ TCL 10 52 : (1) 2 LÚ.LUNGA.MEŠ (2) 1 NAM.GIR₄ NÌ É^dEN.KI NUN^{ki}.[GA]. My edition in HEO 22 p. 178 (É^dEN.ZU.NA^{ki}) has to be corrected accordingly.

³⁴ About this man and his two sons, see HEO 22, p. 176-185.

³⁵ For a complete list, see the article quoted above note 29.

³⁶ L. Woolley & M. Mallowan, *The Old Babylonian Period*, UE 7, London, 1976, p. 64-67.

³⁷ The abbreviated version mentions : "Year : king Rim-Sin built the temple of Enki within Ur" (MU^dri-im-^d-EN.ZU LUGAL.E É^dEN.KI ŠÀ ŠEŠ.UNU^{ki}.MA MU.UN.DÙ.A). See attestations on www.archibab.fr.

³⁸ D. R. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)*, RIME 4, Toronto, 1990, p. 278-279 n° 6.

³⁹ B. Landsberger, "Scribal Concepts of Education," in: C. H. Kraeling and R. Mc. Adams (eds.), *City Invincible*, Chicago, 1960, p. 94-123 [p. 98]. For a general criticism of this view, see D. Charpin, *Writing, Law, and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia*, Chicago/London, 2010, chap. 1.

It is true that until the middle of the Old Babylonian period, the texts relevant to liturgy, divination, and exorcism are very rare, as P. Michalowski recently underlined.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the house of Ur-Utu in Sippar-Amnanum only preserved traces of the initial learning of cuneiform and not of more advanced texts related to the training of a future chief-lamentator (*kalamahhum*).⁴¹ For Uruk, the publication of A. Falkenstein and A. Cavigneaux has shown that a pit designated as *Scherbenloch* contained, alongside archival documents dated from the reign of Rim-Sin, numerous fragments of school texts, which belong mostly to the stage of initiation, but contain also a good sample of Sumerian literature.⁴²

The case of the priesthood at Ur allows us to see again the important role writing played in the training of apprentices by members of the clergy and in the transmission of their traditions.

3.1 EM Quarter, No. 7 Quiet Street

Father Burrows, who was the epigrapher at Ur in 1926-27 when Woolley excavated the EM quarter, wrote hesitantly about No. 7 Quiet Street: “perhaps a scribal school”.⁴³ I will begin to recall shortly the conclusions I reached thirty-two years ago in my study of the house No. 7 Quiet Street.⁴⁴

There is no trace of the most elementary phase of learning, such as tu-ta-ti or other syllabaries, but copies of lexical series and grammatical texts which were used to teach the Sumerian language. A number of lentils have been discovered, which were limited to a few lines, like an extract of hymn B to the king Lipit-Ištar (U.7716 = UET 6/2 351).

A more difficult exercise consisted in copying Sumerian letters, either royal letters or letters belonging to the corpus recently called by A. Kleinerman *Sumerian Epistolary Miscellanea*. On the tablet U.7741, published as UET 6/1 173, 6 letters have been copied, two of them being unattested elsewhere.⁴⁵

Six mathematical tablets have also been discovered, as well as an exercise for calculating the surface of a field (U.7803 = UET 7 116).

The copy of historical inscriptions belonged to the typical exercises an apprentice had to do: 3 inscriptions of the Akkad period, and 3 of Ur III kings were found, as well as a copy of Ur-Nammu’s laws; 2 inscriptions of an Isin king and 3 of Larsa kings. Father Burrows has been harsh with the students: “the copyist was guilty of gross errors” (UET 1, p. 77 ad n° 275); “the scribe has made numerous errors, and in some cases the signs cannot be certainly recognized” (p. 83 ad n° 276); “the copy was made by an inexperienced hand” (p. 85 ad n° 285).

A good number of what is generally labelled as “literary texts” has been discovered : “Creation of the hoe,” “Farmer’s almanach,” “Exaltation of Inanna,” hymn to Nippur (Išme-Dagan W)... But what is the more interesting in this house is the presence of texts which have no parallels elsewhere. First of all, five hymns ending with the doxology “Rim-Sin lugal-mu” (UET 6/1 102-106): I proposed that some of them were composed *ad hoc* on the occasion of the visit of king Rim-Sin shortly after his victory over Uruk.⁴⁶ Recently, N. Brisch proposed it was a visit of Rim-Sin II,⁴⁷ but I explained later why I find it

⁴⁰ P. Michalowski, “Literacy, Schooling and the Transmission of Knowledge in Early Mesopotamian Culture,” in: W. S. van Egmond & W.H. van Soldt (eds.), *Theory and Practice of Knowledge Transfer. Studies in School Education in the Ancient Near East and Beyond. Papers read at a Symposium in Leiden, 17-19 December 2008*, PIHANS 121, Leiden, 2012, p. 39-57.

⁴¹ M. Tanret, *Per aspera ad astra. L'apprentissage du cunéiforme à Sippar-Amnanum pendant la période paléobabylonienne tardive*, MHET 1/2, Ghent, 2002.

⁴² A. Cavigneaux, *URUK. Altbabylonische Texte aus dem Planquadrat Pe XVI-4/5 nach Kopien von Adam Falkenstein*, AUWE 23, Mainz, 1996.

⁴³ In C. J. Gadd & L. Legrain, *Royal Inscriptions*, UET 1, London, 1928, p. 85 below.

⁴⁴ D. Charpin, *Le Clergé d'Ur*, HEO 22, p. 35-42 (catalog) and p. 424 sq. (study).

⁴⁵ A. Kleinerman, *Education in Early 2nd Millennium BC Babylonia: The Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany*, CM 42, Leiden/Boston, 2011, p. 63.

⁴⁶ D. Charpin, *Le Clergé d'Ur...*, HEO 22, p. 275-301.

⁴⁷ N. M. Brisch, *Tradition and the Poetics of Innovation: Sumerian Court Literature of the Larsa Dynasty (c. 2003-1763 BCE)*, AOAT 339, Münster, 2007, p. 120.

dubious.⁴⁸ We also have hymns to the gods Haya (UET 6 101, in 2 copies) and Nanna (UET 6 67). The later had been summarised by Kramer in this way : “an hitherto unknown hymn to Nanna (...), according to which Enki plays a major role in the building of the Ekišnugal and its purification, as well as in its diverse rites particularly those concerned with lustration and purgation”.⁴⁹ In my edition of the text, I explained this very curious situation:⁵⁰ it was a way for the *abriqqum* purification priests, devotee of Enki-of-Eridu, to legitimize their presence in the sanctuary of Nanna. They reproduced the words and deeds of their divine master.

In the same way, an Akkadian compositions called by its first editor “At the cleaner’s” (UET 6 414) is not “a sketch from the life at Ur”, but an exercise in Akkadian, in which the god Enki is evoked as the patron of cleaners. The text includes this oath: “By Enki, the lord of the washing vat (*Aššum Enki bēl namsîm*)!”⁵¹

3.2 *New excavations of spring 2017: the house of Sin-nada, scribe and intendant of Ningal’s temple*

Here again, the results of the last season of excavations at Ur are very interesting. A new area has been excavated in 2017 by a German team of Munich University directed by Adelheid Otto, several hundred meters south from the AH quarter. The ruins of an Old Babylonian house appeared immediately under the surface; the plan is still far from complete but the residence is obviously large and well built.

The texts have been discovered *under* the last level of occupation. The older ones belong to the reign of Sin-iribam (1842-1841 BCE), the latest ones to the reign of Šilli-Adad, in 1835: the texts have obviously been discarded when new occupants moved into this house after 1835 BCE, one century before the city of Ur was abandoned under Samsu-iluna. The tablets, very often fragmentary, as well as sealed tags, have been found mixed with sherds, bones and other waste, currently being analyzed.

Who was the inhabitant of that beautiful house? The leading figure is that of a man named Sin-nada. The legend of his seal, after his name, bears 4 lines, beginning with the indication that he is “son of Igi-anakezu, scribe, intendant of the temple of the goddess Ningal”.⁵²

This seal has been impressed on clay tags which were used to close baskets of goods or of tablets, but also on letter envelopes, some fragments of which having been found. Normally, a letter is found in the house of the addressee: logically, Sin-nada could not be considered as an inhabitant of the house. But one of the letters was sent to a woman named Nuṭuptum. Sin-nada begins his letter by a list of objects sent to her and adds that he will be back after ten days. Nuṭuptum is then very probably Sin-nada’s wife, and the fact that Sin-nada was the sender of this letter does not keep him from being considered as the house master.

As I was looking closely to the impressions, all incomplete, of Sin-nada’s seal, I realised that the fifth line was not always the same. In some of them, Sin-nada was described as “servant of Sin-iribam”, king of Larsa between 1842 and 1841.⁵³ In others, he appeared as “servant of Šilli-Adad”, who was king of Larsa for 9 months only, in 1835.⁵⁴ Sin-nada felt the need to change his seal when Šilli-Adad became king.⁵⁵ What is very interesting, is the fact that Šilli-Adad started work in the Ningal temple.⁵⁶ This building

⁴⁸ D. Charpin, “Se faire un nom: la louange du roi, la divinisation royale et la quête de l’immortalité en Mésopotamie,” *RA* 102, 2008, p. 149-180 (p. 151).

⁴⁹ C. J. Gadd & S. N. Kramer, *Literary and Religious Texts. First Part*, UET 6/1, London, 1963, p. 8a.

⁵⁰ D. Charpin, *Le Clergé d’Ur...*, HEO 22, p. 366-379.

⁵¹ This aspect is to be added to my recent book on Mesopotamian temples (D. Charpin, *La vie méconnue des temples mésopotamiens*, Docet omnia, Paris, 2017, p. 173-177). The text has been published by C. J. Gadd, “Two Sketches from the Life at Ur,” *Iraq* 25, 1963, p. 177-188 and studied by myself in *Le Clergé d’Ur*, HEO 22, p. 431-432 and recently by N. Wasserman, “Treating Garments in the Old Babylonian Period: ‘At the Cleaners’ in a Comparative View,” *Iraq* 75, 2013, p. 255-277.

⁵² $\text{d}^{\text{EN}}.\text{ZU-na-da} / \text{DUMU IGI.AN.NA.KE}_4.\text{ZU} / \text{DUB.SAR x.KE}_4 / \text{UGULA É É }^{\text{d}}\text{NIN.GAL}.$

⁵³ L.5: $[\text{I}]^{\text{R}} \text{d}^{\text{EN.Z}}[\text{U-}^{\text{r}}\text{e}^{\text{l}}[\text{ri}]-\text{ba-a}[\text{m}].$

⁵⁴ L.5: $\text{IR } \text{ši-lî-d}^{\text{I}}\text{ŠKU}[\text{R}].$

⁵⁵ His seal is by the way the only one presently known of someone describing himself as a servant of Šilli-Adad.

⁵⁶ UET 8 78 = RIME 4, p. 220 n° 2.

was situated south of the ziggurat. Apparently, Sin-nada managed to convince Šilli-Adad that repairing the building of which he was responsible was an urgent task.

One of the most interesting aspects of Sin-nada's house consists in the number of school tablets discovered. Several lentils have been found. Thus, Sin-nada was not only intendant of Ningal's temple: he provided training to future scribes. This training was not limited to the elementary phase, since a new manuscript of the *Lament over Sumer and Ur* has been discovered in this house, identified by Anne Löhnert. 47 manuscripts were known till now, none of which bearing the complete text.⁵⁷ Woolley found 13 of them at Ur, but none bore lines 251 to 267, very well preserved on the obverse, which will allow A. Löhnert to fill some gaps in the present edition.

A fraction only of Sin-nada's house has been excavated in 2017: the surface clearing has shown it covered a much bigger surface, which could give interesting new informations during next season.

Conclusion

Ur has given a rare opportunity to study the clergy in its topographical and sociological context: the combination of an archaeological and a philological approach aiming at an historical reconstruction as complete as possible was already rewarding in 1986, but it is now possible to learn more and I am happy of this opportunity to share rapidly the latest discovery made on the field in 2017.

But what is of course striking is the fact that the new texts are better understood when brought together with the ones previously discovered. This is the reason why a new project was launched in October 2017, named *EcritUr*, which is devoted to the Old Babylonian texts from Ur, deriving from all kinds of excavations, ancient and new.⁵⁸ What I have presented here are the first fruits of this new undertaking.

⁵⁷ P. Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, MC 1, Winona Lake, 1989.

⁵⁸ See <http://digitorient.com/blog/2017/11/04/debut-du-projet-anr-ecritur/>.

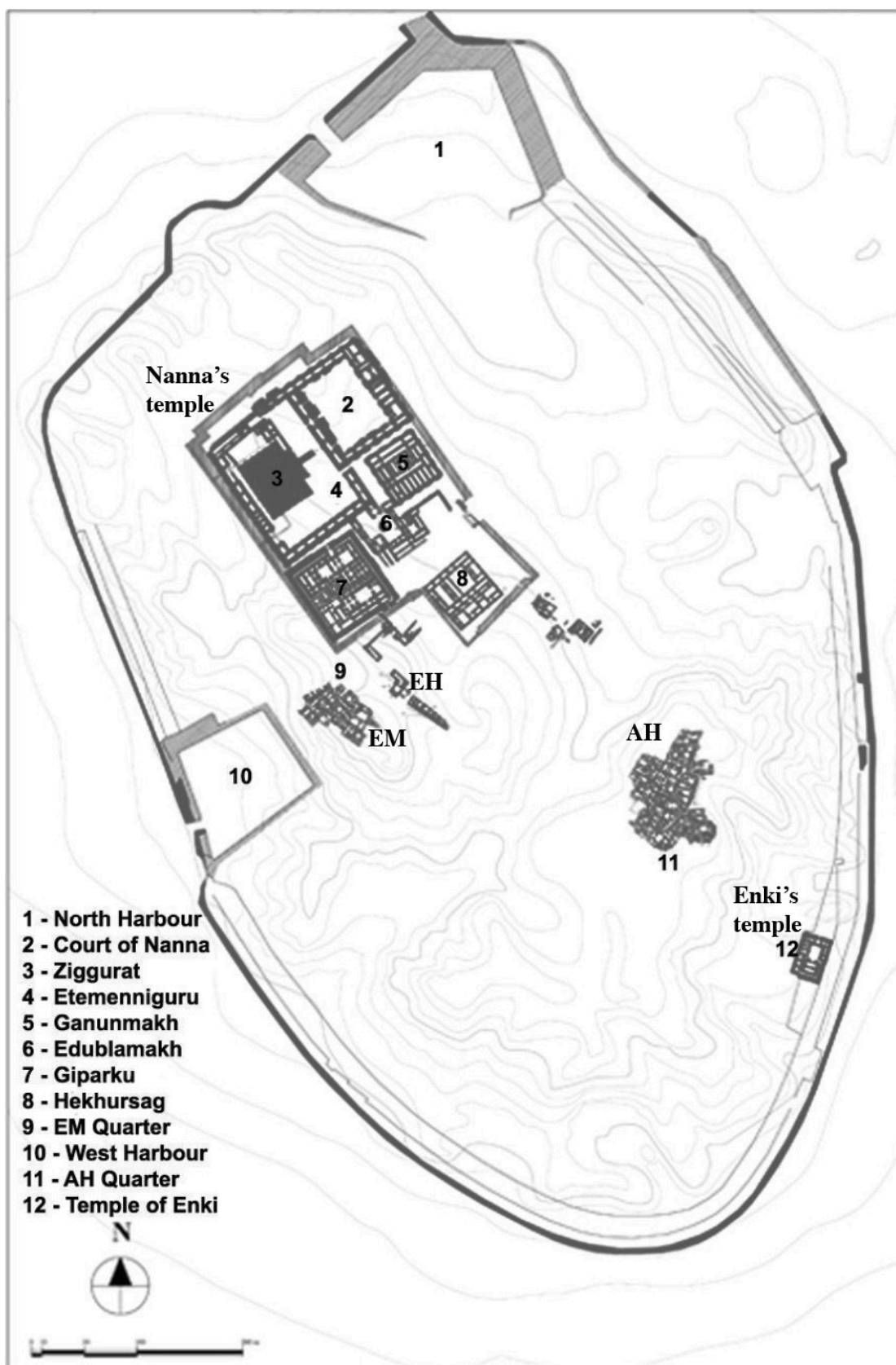


Figure 1. General plan of Ur in the Old Babylonian period (after F. Ghio, in: G. Di Giacomo & G. Scardozzi, "Multitemporal High-Resolution Satellite Images for the Study and Monitoring of an Ancient Mesopotamian City and its Surrounding Landscape: The Case of Ur," *International Journal of Geophysics*, 2012, fig. 8b).

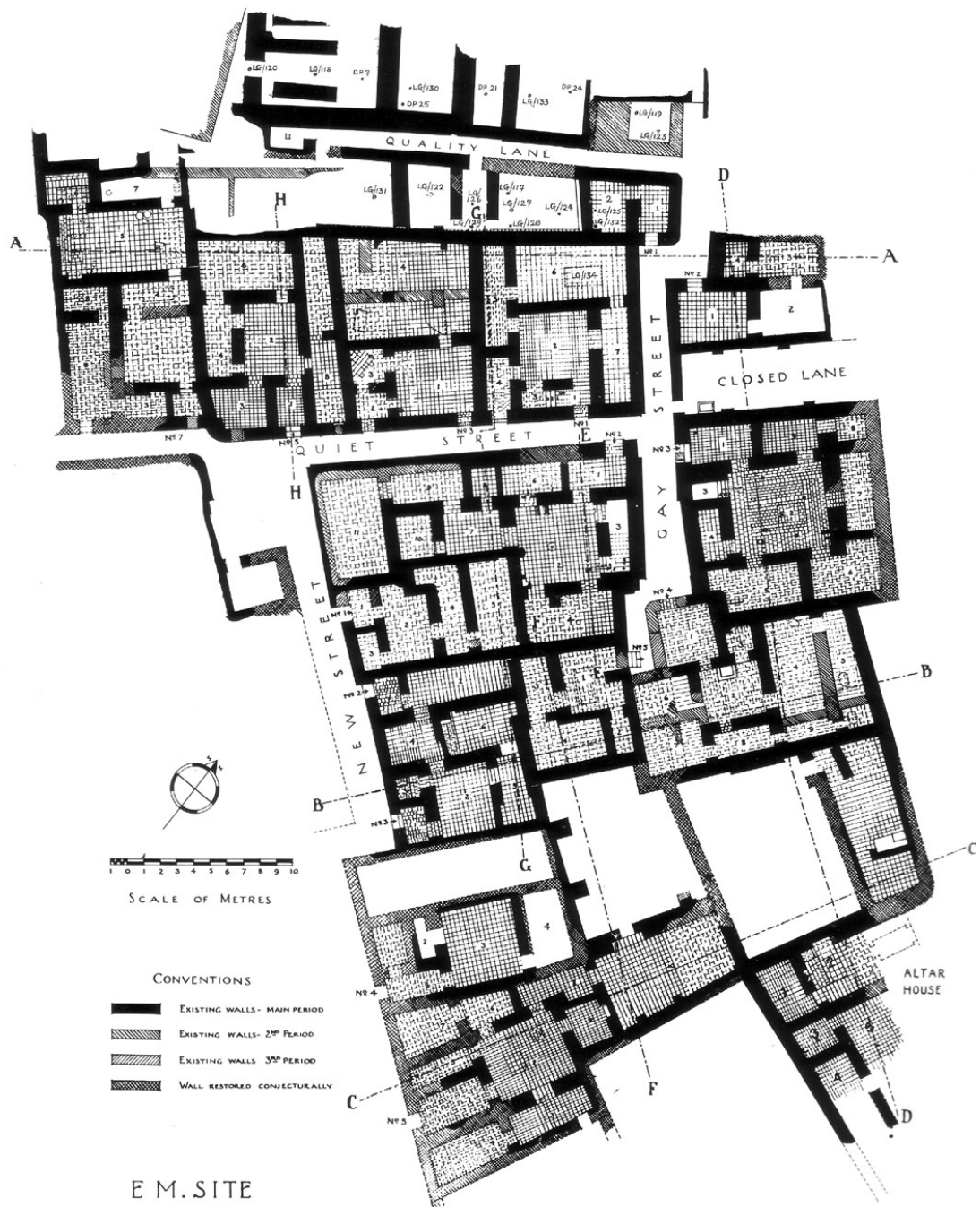


Figure 2. Plan of the EM quarter: house No. 7 Quiet Street is top left (after UE 7, pl. 122).



Figure 3. General view of General Abisum's house, in Area 3 (photo E. Stone & P. Zimanski).