
In recent decades, war, with its attendant social and political upheaval, has allowed the unauthorized excavation of many sites in Iraq and the entry of numerous groups of cuneiform tablets onto the antiquities market. However much I deplore the loss of archaeological context and the insult to the cultural heritage of Iraq, as an historian I nonetheless welcome the publication of material that has come to light in this unfortunate manner, for it is irresponsible for a scholar to ignore any available information relevant to a topic of inquiry. Although it is not stated in the volume under review, there can be little doubt that the archive published here was indeed looted.

The selection of 89 texts (dating from Aš 5 through Sd 4, around 20 years) presented here in hand-copy, transliteration, translation, and in a dozen cases in photographs, is revealed by internal evidence to come from Dūr-Abišušu, a fortress settlement established by the Late Babylonian monarch whose name it bears. Previously known only from the year name Abi-ešuš “m,” the town also features in an archive briefly described by ARNAUD (2007: 41-44), most likely recovered from the same illicit excavations.

The location of Dūr-Abišušu remains to be determined, but the authors (pp. 4-6) make a good case for its situation on the ancient Tigris at the junction with the Ḫammurapi-nuṣūs-niṣši canal. The scribal practices (p. 6) and seal iconography similar to that of Šippar (p. 160) suggest a northern setting.

Five types of document dominate this collection: purchases of slaves (nos. 1-11); loans for commercial expeditions (nos. 12-22); receipt of sheep for temple offerings (nos. 23-40); silver loans (nos. 46-53); and various texts dealing with the delivery and distribution of barley (nos. 54, 60-79, 82, 84, 86-89), sesame (nos. 58-59), and bran (nos. 56-57). Note also three herding contracts (nos. 41-43). All texts included in the volume seem to be administrative records generated by the temple bureaucracy.

A real surprise arising from study of this material is the identity of this temple: Enlil’s Ekur, which seems to have been relocated in Dūr-Abišušu from Nippur, or rather to have set up a branch office there. Note no. 25:5-7: ana šuku "en.lil ni.nin.ur.ta u šu nu _busy šu nibīšu", “for the provisions of Enlil, Ninlil, Ninurta, and Nusku, and for the eššum-rites of Nippur.” This shift would be part of the general displacement of persons and institutions northward within Babylonia under the successors of Samsuiluna (p. 1), but a single text here (no. 80) mentioning boat traffic with the quay of Nippur (kar nibīšu) shows that the traditional religious capital had not been completely abandoned. Indeed, a letter to be fully published in a later volume of the Cornell series but translated here (CUNES 51, p. 7) describes the defense of the Ekur in Nippur from mounted attackers in AD 11.

The chief personality in this body of texts is Enlil-mansum, son of Ur-Sadaruma (Ursatum), son of Ninurta-nīšu, who bears the infrequently attested title nu.ēš = nešaššum (PIENKTA 1998: 304) and appears to be in charge of the operation of the Ekur in Dūr-Abišušu. Also present is the ubiquitous abī šābim Utul-Istar (nos. 13, 14, 54; cf. pp. 34, 36), who lends out silver, presumably from the palace treasury. To his dossier add now also RICHARDSON 2010, nos. 28, 29, 82, 83, and 83b.

The authors have presented the material in an excellent fashion, with particular attention devoted to the seal impressions, which have been studied in detail and reproduced in both photo and copy. In addition, a chart helpfully indicates the position of each seal impression on the tablets (pp. 272-76). Unfortunately, some of the copies (e.g., pp. 165, 264) have been printed so darkly that they are all but useless. On a few occasions a seal deemed to be illegible can be at least partially read, for example, no. 47, seal B: [ ... ] / [mu].ēš [ ... ] / ... / [du:šu] *x [ ... ] / arad Am[-mi-ša-du-qd].

The copies of the cuneiform text on the tablets do not always match the transliterations, particularly when indicating the extent of broken signs and lost text. See here no. 11:13, no. 24:11, and no. 51:2.

Closer editing by a native English speaker would have avoided such infelicities as “consequently” for “consistently” (p. 58), “fainted” for “faded” (p. 210), and “singular” for “single” (p. 219). Do the authors have a new interpretation for the iconographic element they term “wedge and ring” (p. 224)? What is meant by
the “unmasked” use of a cutting wheel (pp. 202, 227)? The spelling “wesir” (pp. 87, 216) is a Germanism (Dutchism?).

The book includes the usual indices of personal, divine, and geographic names and of professions. Particularly interesting is the description of the “Leuven Camera Dome System” (pp. 161-62, photo p. 299), which has been employed to produce the magnificent “digital line drawings” of a number of the pieces. No indication is given as to the cost of such a set-up, but if it can be produced economically enough to be within reach of the major tablet collections, it promises to revolutionize our work.

I conclude with a number of minor comments on particular items:

No. 5: Translate lines 7-8 with “her,” not “his.”

No. 9: Restore line 16: a-na ba[-aq-ri]-ša.

No. 19: The translation of lines 12-13, ki lī silīm.ma.ta u lī gi.ta.ta as “jointly responsible” is at best a paraphrase.

No. 33:4 and 38:4: Render “Šumum-libši, the barber.”

No. 55: On the copy, line 8 reads igi (not “) Huzalum. Is this a scribal error, or does the fault lie in the construct form mu-ṣa-ad-di-in in 1. 7? CAD M/II, 252-53 does not list any “collectors” governing proper names. The patronymic dumu Ešerum has also been omitted from the translation.

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