



Cuneiform Text from Neo-Sargonic Period

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Abstract

This study presents a newly identified cuneiform tablet from the Sargonic period, currently preserved in the Iraq Museum under the registration number (IM.203815). The text is an economic document inscribed on both the obverse and reverse sides, consisting of ten lines. It records the delivery of quantities of barley measured according to the unit (gur.sag.gal₂.dul₃) as well as another type of processed barley, in addition to references to plots of land. The text is dated to the first month.

Keywords: Clay Tablet, Šarru-kīn, Iraqi Museum, Barley, Fields.

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نص معماري جديد من العصر السرجموني

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٢٠٢٥/٧/١٢: تاريخ المراجعة ٢٠٢٥/١/١١: تاريخ التقديم

٢٠٢٦/١/١: تاريخ النشر الإلكتروني ٢٠٢٥/٧/٢٤: تاريخ القبول

الملخص:

هذه دراسة لنص معماري جديد من العصر السرجموني وهو من النصوص المصادرية والمحفوظ حالياً في المتحف العراقي ويحمل الرقم (IM.203815)، وهو نص اقتصادي مدون عليه عشرة أسطر على وجه ورقاً الطيني، وهو يتعلق بتسليم كميات من الشعير وفق مقياس (gur.sag.gal2.dul3) وكذلك نوع آخر من الشعير المدروس، وأيضاً مساحات لحقول، وان النص مؤرخ بالشهر الأول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رقيم طيني، شروكين، المتحف العراقي، شعير، حقول.

Introduction

The Sargonic period (2334–2154 BCE) represents one of the most prosperous and unifying eras in Mesopotamian history. In archaeological and historical research, it is commonly referred to as the Akkadian period, which dates to the second half of the third millennium BCE. This era was characterized by a centralized authority under a single ruler who held absolute control over power, governance, and dominance.

Cuneiform texts from the Sargonic era constitute some of the most significant material remains, as they document essential details of daily life and highlight the economic, political, religious, and literary aspects of that time.

King Sargon of Akkad, who held supreme power and prestige during this era, established what is considered the first unified kingdom in ancient Iraq. His reign marked the dominance of royal authority and the gradual decline of temple influence, representing a critical transformation in

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Mesopotamian urban life whereby religious authority was replaced by secular power, as described by historians.

Despite the importance of this period, the number of cuneiform texts from the Sargonic era discovered so far remains relatively limited compared to later periods such as the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. The present study focuses on one such newly identified text from the Sargonic period, preserved under the museum number (IM.203815). The tablet measures (1.5 × 3.5 × 4 cm) and was confiscated for the Iraq Museum, meaning that its exact archaeological provenance is unknown, though its attribution to the city of Umma has been established.

Scholars often face difficulties in precisely dating texts from the Sargonic era due to several ambiguities in the dating system of that time, as well as the striking similarities between Sargonic documents and those from the preceding Early Dynastic (ED) period. This overlap has led European scholars to adopt the modern term “Sargonic period”.

The identification of such texts relies on specific indicators, most notably the dating formula (MU.ITU), which frequently appears in Sargonic texts but is absent from other historical periods. Additional criteria include the shape of the tablets, paleographic style, linguistic features, onomastics, references to geographic locations and cities, numerical systems, and the metrology applied in weights and measures.

Content of the Text

This newly identified document is classified as an economic text. The tablet is inscribed on both the obverse and the reverse and consists of ten lines of writing. Its content concerns the delivery of quantities of barley measured according to the unit (gur-sag-gal₂-dul₃) as well as processed barley.

The transaction is attributed to an individual named Ad-da-tur (AD-DA-TUR), who is mentioned as the official in charge of the grain storehouse (ka-guru₇). As previously noted, the text includes a dating formula.

Study of the Text

The following section presents the transliteration of the cuneiform text into Latin script, accompanied by its translation into Arabic. Afterward, we provide a detailed philological analysis of the principal terms and expressions contained within the text:

(IM.203815)

Obv.

1. 30(bur₃) 4(iku) gana₂ / [4] sar
100 la₂ 2 še-gur /- sag-gal₂- ḫdul₃ -
še-giš- ḫra - [a]
sag-[apin-na]

Rev.

5. sig₇ a-ša₃- ḫla₂-tur -
ad-da-tur / ka-guru₇-ke
šu ba-ti
ki-nig₂-kas₇-ka
[i3]-na-ga₂-ga₂

Upper Edge

10. [x-m]u 1 iti

Translation:

Obverse:

- 30 (bur) 4 (iku) field area / [4] sar
- 98 gur of barley / (according to the unit) gur-sag-gal-dul
- Processed barley
- Chief of the farmers

Reverse:

- Field of La-tur
- Ad-da-tur / the official in charge of the grain storehouse
- Received
- From the balanced account
- Deposited

Upper Edge:

- The year [X], first month

General Meaning:

The text records plots of agricultural land and quantities of processed barley measured according to the unit (gur-sag-gal-dul). The document is dated.

Explanation of Terms

Line 1:

- bur₃: The largest unit of land measurement in Mesopotamia, corresponding in Akkadian to būru. It is equivalent to approximately 64,800 m² in modern terms⁽¹⁾.
- iku: A unit of land measurement attested in cuneiform texts in the forms (iku) or (gana₂). Its Akkadian equivalent is ikū (“field”), corresponding to about 3,600 m²⁽²⁾.
- gana₂: A Sumerian unit meaning “field area, land,” equivalent in Akkadian to eqlu. Its pronunciation is close to the Arabic term⁽³⁾.

- sar: A unit used for measuring large areas, equivalent today to 3,888,000 m², roughly about 1,555 donums⁽⁴⁾.

Line 2:

- la₂: A Sumerian term meaning “minus” or “remainder,” equivalent in Akkadian to matū⁽⁵⁾.
- še: A Sumerian word for “barley,” Akkadian še'u⁽⁶⁾.
- gur: A Sumerian unit of capacity, equivalent in Akkadian to kūrru. In modern terms, it equals about 6,252 liters⁽⁷⁾.
- gur-sag-gal₂-dul₃: A unit of dry measure used especially for grain. It is prominently attested in the texts from the city of Umma⁽⁸⁾.

Line 3:

- giš-ra-a: A Sumerian term meaning “processed (grain),” equivalent in Akkadian to mahṣu⁽⁹⁾.

Line 4:

- sag: A Sumerian word meaning “chief” or “head,” Akkadian rešu⁽¹⁰⁾.
- apin: A Sumerian term meaning “farmer” or “plow,” Akkadian epennu. In the compound expression SAG-APIN-NA, it denotes the “chief of farmers,” literally “the one responsible for the plow,” a common term in Sargonic texts⁽¹¹⁾.

Line 5:

- sig₇: A Sumerian term meaning “yellowish-green (grass)” or “pale yellow,” Akkadian araqu⁽¹²⁾.
- a-ša₃: A Sumerian word for “field,” Akkadian eqlum⁽¹³⁾.
- tur-la₂: “Field of the god Šara,” attested in the texts from Umma⁽¹⁴⁾.

Line 6:

- ad-da-tur: A personal name⁽¹⁵⁾.
- guru₇: A unit of capacity for dry goods, equivalent to 3,600 gur, or about 909,360 liters in modern terms. Its sign form differs from the standard GURU₇, but this variation is often encountered in the texts from Umma⁽¹⁶⁾.

Line 7:

- šu-ba-ti: A compound Sumerian verbal form meaning “he received,” Akkadian ilqī, from the verb lequ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Line 8:

- ki: A Sumerian word for “place,” Akkadian ersetum⁽¹⁸⁾.
- nig₂-kas₇: A Sumerian expression meaning “balanced account,” Akkadian nikkassu⁽¹⁹⁾.
- ka: Preposition “from.”

Line 9:

- na-ga₂-ga₂-i₃: A complex Sumerian verbal form:
 - i₃: Sentence marker or verbal prefix.
 - na: Case filler.
 - n: Subject marker.

- ga₂-ga₂: Root verb meaning “to deposit,” Akkadian šaknū⁽²⁰⁾.

Line 10:

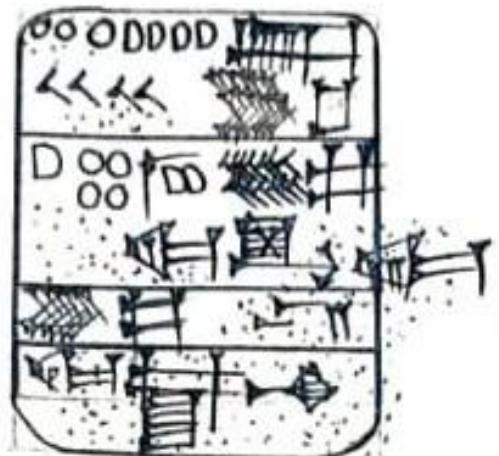
- mu: A Sumerian word for “year,” Akkadian šattu⁽²¹⁾.
- iti: A Sumerian word for “month,” Akkadian ar̥u⁽²²⁾.

Conclusion:

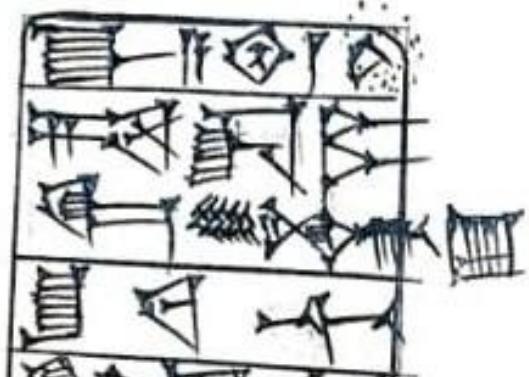
- 1- The text under study represents a new addition to the corpus of cuneiform documents from the Akkadian period, which remain relatively scarce compared to later eras.
- 2- Although the text does not contain a fully explicit dating formula, it was possible to attribute it to the city of Umma.
- 3- The document provides a clear picture of the foodstuffs commonly traded in ancient Iraq, with barley occupying a central role due to its significant nutritional and economic importance.

(IM.203815)

Obv



Rev



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