TWO NEW UR III LETTERS
IN THE LOUVRE MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT · This article provides the publication of two new Ur III letters kept at Louvre Museum. The content of these letters is concise as the majority of the Ur III administrative letters. The first one asks for the return of persons before an inspection and the second letter asks for the release of one barge carrying sesame.

KEYWORDS: Mesopotamia, Sumerian, Cuneiform, Ur III period, letter-order.

Since the work of E. Sollberger which contains 373 letters from the time of the third dynasty of Ur (Ur III),1 the number of Ur III letters has considerably increased. In a recent paper, published in 2015, W. Sallaberger counts 679 Ur III letters, 662 in Sumerian and 17 in Akkadian, 45% of which come from Girsu’s administrative archives.2 Although the number has almost doubled, we must nevertheless deplore the absence of an archaeological context for most of these tablets documenting provincial administrative business. Since then new letters have been published3 and others have yet to be published.

Among unpublished tablets kept at the Louvre Museum, there are two Ur III letters (AO 11407 and AO 11408) which have been recorded by CDLI (Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative) and BDTNS (Database of Neo-Sumerian Texts) without having been the subject of a traditional edition.4

1. AO 11408 (P493332 = BDTNS 195798)
Measurements: 3.4 × 3.9 × 1.5 cm
To Ur-Igalim, speak: let him send *Lubala’ari/*men on the other bank with Lugal-nizu! This is (the time of) an inspection. This is urgent. Let him not argue!

1.1: the recipient of this letter, named Ur-Igalim, suggests that this letter is from the administrative archive of Girsu province. The PN, Ur-Igalim, is very well attested in the Ur III administrative archives, especially in Giru. To a lesser extent this PN is also present in the archives of Puzriš-Dagan and Umma. Due to the number of mentions of this PN associated with various functions homonyms must be suggested. Then, letters whose recipient is a man named Ur-Igalim are from the administration of Girsu and most of them deal with issues related to barley. Moreover, administrative letters mentioning this PN in their bodies also are from Girsu.

1.3: the sequence lu₂-bala-a-ri is known at least once time in an administrative document from Umma archive dated of Šulgi 47: MVN 21, 199 (P120436 = BDTNS 046001).

coll ii, 1-7:

1. a-kal-la dumu lugal-ni₂-lagar-e
2. a-ga₁-us ensi₁-ka-še₁
3. a-kal-la dumu ur-du₄ kuruš-da ses-tab-ba lugal-₁₂₇₇-gigir-re-še₄
5. ki lu₂-dinjar-ra šabra
6. 1/2 a-kal-la dumu lu₂-bala-a-ri
7. dumu-gi₁-me iti 13-še₃

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° Ur-Igalim as recipient: Anadolu Arastırmaları 15, no 3 (Ist L.0901); Anadolu Arastırmaları 15, no 16 (Ist L.09026); TČS 1, 222 = ITT 3, 5607 (Ist L.09067); TČS 1, 223 = ITT 4, 8002 (Ist L.08002); TČS 1, 224 = MAH 16339; TČS 1, 225 = LEM 198 (AUAM 73,3138); TČS 1, 226 = ITT 3, 5407 (Ist L.05407); TČS 1, 339 = ITT 2, 926 (Ist L.00926); TČS 1, 340 = ITT 3, 5247 (Ist L.05247); TČS 1, 341 = ITT 5 6977 (Ist L.06977); AuOr 17-18, 219 no 28 (BM 01970); PPAC 5, 1209 (BM 088637).

° Ur-Igalim within text: Anadolu Arastırmaları 15, no 08 (Ist L.09018), field and barley seed: to be given to Ur-Igalim; TČS 1, 42 (BM 057208) carcasses of sheep to be given to Ur-Igalim; TČS 1, 66 = LEM 165 (BM 058822), judgment about a field against Ur-Igalim; TČS 1, 87 = ITT 5 6975 = LEM 234 (Ist L.06975) in this letter the man named Ur-Igalim is dub-sar šaš-dub-ba to whom tablet baskets from Nippur will be given; TČS 1, 263 (BM 02850) various items to be given to Ur-Igalim; TČS 1, 329 = ITT 5 6909 (Ist L.06909) flour, fruit tree(s) and […] to be given to Ur-Igalim; AuOr 17-18, 219 no 28 (BM 01978) letter ordering the delivery of flour and barley to Šeš-šēl and the delivery of flour to Ur-Igalim; AuOr 17-18, 220 no 08 (BM 020922) Ur-Igalim associated with other individuals, all qualified as mule driver of the king.

This extract mentions three persons with the same name, Ayakala, followed by their filiation to avoid ambiguity. In this case, lu₂-bala-a-ri seems to be a PN.

The interaction between the nominal and verbal chain suggests that the sequence lu₂-bala-a-ri could be a PN in this letter. The verbal chain ḫa-mu-da-an-gi₄-gi₄ is marû translative of the verb gi₄ "to return" within which the -n- before the verb marks a human absolute, and the -da- is a comitative, referring respectively to the two elements of the nominal chain. Although the suffix of the comitative (-da) is absent in the nominal chain, the place of the comitative follows generally the element with which it is associated. In this case lu₂-bala-a-ri would be the animate absolute (corresponding to -n- before the verbal root) and lugal-n₂-zu would be the comitative (here unmarked).

The sequence lu₂-bala-a-ri could also be understood as an indication of origin and lu₂-bala-a-ri would mean "men on the other side (of the canal)". In this case we propose to understand lu₂ as a collective. This proposal doesn’t fit with the -n- before the verbal root gi₄-gi₄ if the order in the nominal chain is absolute case followed by the comitative. An inversion in the nominal chain could be possible. According to this interpretation, the missive would require Ur-Igalim to send Lugal-nizu accompanied by "men on the other side (of the canal)" because of an inspection.

1.4: the last sign of this line is broken. We propose to read the lugal-n₂-zu₁. Almost all mentions of this PN are from Umma’s administrative archives. Archives of Girsu also quote this PN a few times.

1.6: the context suggests that the sign igit₂-erin₂ is here the graphical variant of gurum₂ (igit₂+gar) and not the sign sag₁₀ "to be good". We thus understand the expression igit₂+erin₂-am₁, "this is (the time of) the inspection". In archives of Girsu the sign igit₂+erin₂ used instead of igit₂+gar is not usual.

As a conclusion, we can consider that this letter was sent to the Girsu province in order to ask the return of persons from the Umma province before an inspection whatever the interpretation of lu₂-bala-a-ri: PN or "men on the other bank"

2. AO 11407 (P493311 = BDTNS 195797)
Measurements: 3.6 × 3 × 1.8 cm

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* HLC 80 (Šulgi-46, a large annual tablet-summary of draft cattle- lugal-n₂-zu is described as engar); PPAC 5, 285 (Šulgi-48); PPAC 5, 529 (AS-06); TUT 162 (AS01-00).
To Adalal, speak: let him release 1 barge of sesame!

1.1: the name of the recipient, Adalal, is very well attested among administrative records from the Ur III period but many homonyms must be considered.

1.3: the barge tonnage is not expressed. The first sign is partially broken and it could be 1(diš) counting the barge (with no relation to the vessel’s size). Usually, the tonnage follows the word mₐ₂ “boat/barge” (n mₐ₂ n gur) as in the example below:

AuOr 17-18, p. 228 n° 38 (P₄₄₅₆₁₉ = BDTNS 0₄₇₆₄₉)

1. na₃ni-ra³ To Nani,
2. u₃ₐ₃ₐ₃[a₃]ₐ₃[du₃]₁ To Nani, speak:
3. 20 mₐ₂ 60 gur (about) 20 barges of 60 gur,
4. mₐ₂ girtiₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐₐ¢
Museum sigla

AO = Antiquités orientales, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.
Ist = Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul, Turkey.
MAH = Musée d’Art d’Histoire, Genève, Switzerland.
AUAM = Siegfried H. Horn Museum, Institute of Archaeology, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

Abbreviations

LEM = P. Michalowski, Letters from Early Mesopotamia, Atlanta 1993 («SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series», 3).
MVN 21 = N. V. Koslova, Neusumerische Verwaltungstexte aus der Sammlung der Ermitage zu St. Petersburg, Rome 2000 («Materiali per il vocabolario neosumerico», xxI).
RT = Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l’archéologie égyptienne et assyrienne, Paris.
TCS 1 = E. Sollberger, The business and administrative correspondence under the kings of Ur, Texts from Cuneiform Sources 1, New York 1966.
TUT = G. Reisner, Tempelurkunden aus Telloh, Berlin 1901.

BDTNS = Database of Neo-Sumerian Texts (http://bdtns.filol.csic.es/)
CDLI = Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (https://cdli.ucla.edu/)

Bibliography


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Text 1, AO 11408 (P_{493332} = BDTNS 195798).
Text 2, AO 11407 (P493331 = BDTNS 195797).