The Term ab₂-RI-e in Ur III Sources
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§1 Introduction
§1.1. The CDLI has recently added to its files a small collection of previously unpublished tablets acquired by the Los Angeles Unified School District (Brumfield and Allred, forthcoming) that includes an Ur III receipt, AA 76, with an obscure term still not fully understood. This term, ab₂-RI-e, only appears in one other Ur III text, CST 320.

§2. Textual Attestations
§2.1. The LAUSD text dates to Amar-Suen 6 vi and derives from Drehem. The account concerns 40 animals in the possession of Abi-abih and Ur-nigar¹, but given by Intae’a, of the shepherd’s office, into the administrative control of Ur-kununa, an official also in the shepherd’s office. In this text, Ur-nigar is qualified by “ab₂-RI-e” that has thus far eluded translation.

AA 76

obverse
1) 1(u) u₄ sil₄ nu-a² 10 pregnant ewes,
2) 1(u) ud₅ ma₃₃ nu-a 10 pregnant nannies,
3) a-bi-a-bi-ih (of) Abi-abih;
4) 1(u) u₄ 10 ewes
5) 1(u) ud₅ 10 nannies
6) ur-nigarg5 ab₂-RI-e (of) Ur-nigar, the ab₂-RI-e,

reverse
1) ki in-ta-e₃-a-ta from Intae’a
2) ur-ku5-nun-na Ur-kununa
3) i₃-dab₅ took possession;
4) iti a₃-ki-ti month: “Akitu,”
5) mu ša-aš-ru₃₃ ba-lyul year: “Šarru was destroyed.”

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1. 4(u) 40 (animals).

¹ For discussion on the reading nigar see H. Waetzoldt (1975: 383).

§2.2. Contextually and syntactically, the term, ab₂-RI-e indicates a profession. The obvious suggestion for an office associated with ab₂-RI-e, already noted by de Maaier and Jagersma, is a phonetic writing of the logogram abrig (= NUN.ME.DU; Akkadian abriqqum), that is generally interpreted as a type of cultic functionary. Therefore, the preferred interpretation of ab₂-RI-e would be ab₂-rig₅-e, with -e as the ergative postposition, with distributive force (see Jagersma 2010: 158).

§2.3. SET 54 (§ 42 vi) offers a similar transaction, with Ur-kununa taking administrative control of various cattle from individuals, including Intae’a. The animals are intended for Tummal, Ur and Enkaldim, and are credited to the account of Ur-nigar. Additionally, TCL 2, 5506 (AS 7 vi 13), records transactions of shepherds
and cultic officials concerning dead animals. In the text, Ur-kununa assumes administrative control of the animals from the shepherds (sipa); the sections with Ur-nigar and Intae’a are partially broken, but each individual is recorded as sealing (kišib3) some receipt entered into gar and Intae’a are partially broken, but each individual mals from the shepherds (sipa); the sections with Ur-ni-
Ur-kununa assumes administrative control of the ani-
and cultic offi cials concerning dead animals. In the text, from the possession of Ur-nigar.

§2.4. Abi-abiḫ is a “cup-bearer” (sagi) at Drehem who was often involved in cult transactions, predominantly the issuing of small cattle for the core urban centers (e.g. AUCT 2, 88 [SS 2 ii 15]; PDT 1, 609 [SS 2 vii 1]; CST 329 [AS 5 viii 18]; AUCT 1, 206 [AS 6 xii 1]). Both Abi-abiḫ and Ur-nigar occur in parallel roles in AA 76, so the identification of Abi-abiḫ as a cultic official supports the interpretation of Ur-nigar also as a type of cultic official.

§2.5. Perhaps the best-known Ur-nigar in the Drehem corpus is the official in the office of dead animals, treat-
ed most recently by Tsouparopoulou (2008: 253-255). He was active from § 42 until AS 3 according to Tsou-
apopoulou’s analysis. Ur-nigar, as an official for the dead animals department, occasionally accepted hides and carcasses together with the cup bearer Beli-arik. The co-
ocurrence of Ur-nigar with the cup bearer Abi-abiḫ, after Beli-arik is known to have left this office, strongly suggests that the Ur-nigar presented in the texts above is the same as the Ur-nigar who is the head official of the office of dead animals in Drehem. However, according to Tsouparopoulou (2008: 255), Ur-nigar ceased to be active in the office of dead animals by Amar-Suen 3 iv 6, two years before the texts presented here. Therefore, the term ab2-RI-e is not necessarily related to his duties in the office of dead animals, but given his interactions with agents of the shepherd’s office and cup bearers, Ur-
nigar most likely acted in a cultic capacity, transferring animals between Drehem and the cult centers in the major urban centers.

§2.6. In this account, the cultic officials Ur-nigar and Abi-abiḫ are transferring animals to the shepherd’s of-
office, presumably because the animals are unfit for cultic slaughter. In this context, ‘pregnant’ is reasonable as a motivation for refusing to slaughter certain female ani-
imals for the rituals of Mesopotamian cults. In CST 320, a tablet of Drehem provenience dated one year earlier (AS 5 vi 20), an Ur-nigar is qualified, again, as ab2-RI-e. The contents of this tablet record a small quantity of herded animals delivered to an agent of the Ur III state from the possession of Ur-nigar.

**CST 320**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obverse</th>
<th>Reverse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) 2(diš) udu</td>
<td>1) mu-kuš(DU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 ewes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(surface damage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) ...</td>
<td>2) ab-ba-sa6-ga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abba-saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) ...</td>
<td>3) ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) 1(diš) maš2</td>
<td>4) iti a2-ki-ti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) ur-nigarab2-rig5-e3</td>
<td>5) ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) 1(diš) udu</td>
<td>6) ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as delivery</td>
<td>as delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 goat,</td>
<td>(surface damage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Ur-nigar, the abrig;</td>
<td>took possession;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the 20th day</td>
<td>month: &quot;Akitu,&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| left edge              | year: “Enunugal was in-
|                         | stalled as Inanna priest.” |
| 1) 3(diš)              | 3) ...              |
| 3 (animals).           | 3 (animals).        |

§2.7. There are two additional texts that support the reading ab2-rig5-e as a phonetic rendering of abrig in the Ur III period: Amorites 18 and MVN 15, 192. Both Drehem texts date to Amar-Suen 5 xii 29 and, in fact, Amorites 18 is a summary account that includes the receipt MVN 15, 192.4

**Amorites 18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reverse iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) 1(diš) sila4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na-ah-šum-bala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) ur-ad-gig4-gi4 gala-maḫ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iri-sa1,3-rig7,ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) 1(diš) sila4, ur-nigarab2-rig5-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ab2-rig5-e3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) 2(diš) udu niga gu4-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>us2-sa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) 1(diš) sila4 ur4-nin-sun2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| šabra                  | chief household admini-
|                       | strator;             |
| 18) 6(diš)              | 6 (animals).          |
| 1 lamb of Ur-Ninsun,    | 1 lamb of             |
| chief                  | Ur-Ninsun, chief      |
| household administrator;| household administrator;|
| 1 lamb of               | 1 lamb of             |
| Ur-Ninsun, chief        | Ur-Ninsun, chief      |
| household administrator;| household administrator;|
| 1 lamb of               | 1 lamb of             |
| Ur-Ninsun, chief        | Ur-Ninsun, chief      |
| household administrator;| household administrator;|
| 1 lamb of               | 1 lamb of             |
| Ur-Ninsun, chief        | Ur-Ninsun, chief      |
| household administrator;| household administrator;|

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3 Note that de Maaijer and Jagersma attempted to recon-
struct ab2-ri2-ig’ for ab2-RI-e in their transliteration of CST 320. This reconstruction is rejected here; how-
ever, a case of scribal mental haplography, where the resemblance of IG and E results in the mistaken omis-
sion of the IG sign, could be considered. In this case, ab2-RE-e could be reconstructed as ab2-ri2-ig’-e. This follows more closely the emendation of de Maaijer and Jagersma. Nonetheless, two identical instances of men-
tal haplography seem unlikely.

4 This emendation follows the CDLI reading eš3 (AB; ‘shrine’) instead of kuruṣda (KU 7; ‘fattener’) in MVN 15, 192 iii, 5. This emendation is consistent with Amorites 18 obv. iii 15.
MVN 15, 192

obverse

1) 1(diš) sila₄
1 lamb
2) na-ab-šum-bala
1 lamb
3) 1(diš) sila₄
4) ur-ad-dī gir₂, gala-mah
Ur-ad-gigi, grand-gala of Irisarig
5) 1(diš) sila₄ ur-nigargar
1 lamb of Ur-nigar,
ab₂-ri₂-ig eš₃
6) 2(diš) udu niga
2 barley-fed sheep of an ox drover
7) 1(diš) sila₄

reverse

1) ur₂-dnin-sun₂ šabra
of Ur-Ninsun, chief household administrator
2) u₄ 3(u) la₂ 1(diš)-kam
on the 29th day
3) mu-kux(DU)
as delivery
4) ab-ba-sa₆-ga
Abba-saga
5) i₃-dab₅
took possession
6) iti še-sag₁₁-ku₅
month: "Akitu,"
7) mu en-unu₆-gal
year: "Enunugal was installed as Inanna priest."

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1) 6(diš) 6 (animals)

§3. Discussion

§3.1. Beginning in the proto-cuneiform period at Uruk, abrig is attested in the so-called Tribute List (Englund and Nissen 1993: 25-29, 112-120). It is odd that the term does not survive in the Lú lists; however, there is one unidentified fragment containing abrig (ATU 3, pl. 86, W 15895, am), so its presence in a professions list cannot be entirely excluded. The logogram abrig continues to appear in the Tribute List of the Early Dynastic period (MEE 3, 47; SF 12-13; CUSAS 12, 6.4.1 X1), and in Word List F/Geography B (OIP 99, 39). Yet the term is not attested in the textual record until the Old Babylonian period, remaining notably absent in the Ur III period.⁵

§3.2. In ED and OB periods, the logogram abrig is used as well as abrig₂. The logogram abrig₂ adopts the phonetic determinative ab₂; this phonetic role of ab₂ is posited here also as a phonetically realized sign in ab₂-

RI-e. In the abrig sign, the use of DU as a phonetic complement is also likely: NUN.ME₄; compare this with other homophones of /rig/: rig₇ = PA.HUB₄; rig₉ = HUB₂₄, rig₁₂ = ḫUB₂, rig₂₆ = PA.TUK₄.

§3.3. Charpin’s treatment (1986) of the family of Ku-ningal, an abrig in the Old Babylonian period, finds:

"[the prosopographic studies that we were able to conduct indicate that engiz, kišib-gal₂, enkum and abrig were part of the same circle of purification priests of the Ekšingal, thereby confirming the connection that the lexical lists and literary texts suggest existed between those holding these positions (393; author’s translation)."

An important note Charpin adds to his concluding thoughts is that the Old Babylonian administrative attestations of active abrigs are without exception from the city of Ur, and demonstrate an exclusive use of abrig₂ in the texts. This phenomenon is not unexpected, given the nature of the collapse of the Ur III polity, resulting in its power being reduced to only the small region around Ur. Therefore, the continued use of an abrig office and the preferred orthography with the ab₂ phonetic complement can be seen as a remnant of an Ur III practice, restricted to the city of Ur, that did not survive long into the Old Babylonian period.

§3.4. An alternative possibility is to render ab₂-RI-e as ab₂-re-e(g) with unexpressed auslaut; however, the orthography of this formulation is unparalleled in the Sumerian sources. The use of Ce-e to express a CiC logogram is rather exceptional. Furthermore, the employment of /reg/ for /rig/ is problematic in the Ur III period. Finally, the free variation between ri and ri₂, which would be necessary given the orthographies of AA 76 and CST 320 compared to Amorites 18 and MVN 15, 192, does not appear in Sumerian texts until the OB period. The examples are meager: da-ri ~ da-ri₂ ‘eternity’; and the Sumerian verbal modal prefix iri written as i-ri ~ i-ri₂ ~ iri.

§3.5. Another possible, but fairly improbable, solution to the unorthodox orthography of these texts is that agrig (= IGI.DUB; Akkadian: abarakkum), a household steward, is the intended meaning. There is evidence to support the idea of the office of the agrig in the Ur III administration. First, the term agrig is associated with lugal (king) and eš₃ (shrine; [MSL 12, 28 A, rev. i 10-11]) alleviating any semantic obstacles to interpreting agrig eš₃ in Amorites 18 and MVN 15, 192. Second, agrig is attested in an Ur III lexical list of offices and titles (Prima del’ alfabeto 7), while abrig is absent, dem-

⁵ For the resumption of the abrig office in the OB textual record as a libation/purification priest see Charpin (1986: 51ff).
proving at least that the agrig was an active administrative office during the Ur III period. Third, the use of agrig in Ur III documents indicates that it is an active office in the economic sphere (e.g. BBVO 11, 278, 6NT364 [date broken]; MVN 21, 410 [AS 3 xiii]; AS/20, 104 5 [date broken]) and royal inscriptions (FAOS 9/2, Šulgi 2; RIME 3/2.1.4.33).

§3.6. While the role and duties of the abrig and agrig officials are distinct, the orthography of these two terms becomes muddled by the Old Babylonian period, and it is possible that the orthography discussed above reflects a similar confusion between agrig and abrig in the cuneiform.  

The OB Nippur Diri recension (MSL 15, pp. 8-38) clearly shows a mismatch from the expected IGL.DUB = abarakkum. The initial sign could be reconstructed as ab₂, however this would create an unexpected equation between abrig and IGL.DUB. On the other hand, if the expected AG sign was reconstructed, this still concedes inconsistencies between IGL.DUB and agriqquum, which is never an attested Akkadian gloss for the compound sign; however, abriqqum is the expected Akkadian for NUN.ME.DU.  

§3.7. Civil's proposed /bg/ phoneme might also be at work here (1973: 59-60). While Sumerian chooses an intervocalic /g/ to express agrig, it is clear that in Akkadian this phoneme is acknowledged as intervocalic /b/ in abarakkum. This oscillation is also attested at Ebla in the bilingual lexical lists (MEE 4).

VE 706 agrig 'a₂-ga-ra-ku₂-um
'a₂-ga-ra-gu₂
'a₂-ba-ru₂-gu₂

VE 707 agrig-sal 'a₂-ga-ra-ka₂-tum

§3.8. The phenomenon of phonetically rendering a Sumerian logogram has been documented in literary texts, but not in administrative texts yet. Flückiger-Hawker notes syllabic Sumerian throughout the Ur-Namma literature (1999: 23-27). In her list of non-standard orthography, Flückiger-Hawker cites administrative terminology embedded in the literary texts such as maš-gi-i for maškim, an administrator, ([Urnamma E 30' || 32']) and ku₃-si₂ for ku₃-sig₁, the term for gold ([Urnamma D 29', source B]). Bergmann, in his study of syllabically written Sumerian, cites additional examples of these terms: maš-gi-in = maškim (TCL 15, 3, 17) and ku₃-z for guškin (UMBS 10/2, no. 13 [CBS 112] obv. 5). It is possible, therefore, that the non-standard orthography of ab₂-rig₅-e is only part of a larger phenomenon occurring in the Sumerian writing system in the late third and early second millennium. To what extent this practice is linked with the death of spoken Sumerian is speculative.

§3.9. That the abrig was a cultic office seems certain given the contexts of the accounts presented above. Beyond this general understanding that is consistent with the abrig office from the OB period, little can be stated with certainty at present. Ur-nigar possessed the title abrig for the span of at least one year, from AS 5 vi 20 until AS 6 vi, after he is known to have left the his post in the office of the dead animals at Drehem. However, it is unclear at present whether Ur-nigar held any additional titles or offices concurrent with his post as abrig, or whether another individual also performed abrig duties during the Ur III period. With such limited evidence in the Ur III corpus, it is, in the end, unclear whether any further facts can be ascertained about this office and its role in the wider Ur III administration.

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6 This term also shows up in the Ur III personal names, lugal-agrig-zi and nin-agrig-zi.
7 By the Neo-Assyrian period the confusion becomes incontrovertible in the lexical lists: NUN.ME.DU = ag-ri-qu (CT 19, pl. 23 Rm 344, rev. ii 8').
8 The contested etymology of Biblical Hebrew 'abrek ("attention!") is avoided from this discussion because there is not yet consensus among scholars; for a concise and current discussion of the state of research on this term, see Mankowski (2000: 16-20).
9 OIP 121, 94 (AS 5 vii 17) and MVN 4, 116 (AS 5 viii 25) are potential matches for the Ur-nigar here with the title nu-banda₂ within this one-year time span.
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