A New Ur III Letter-Order from the Semitic Museum at Harvard University

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§1. The tablet published here for the first time (SM 1899.2.135) is an Ur III letter-order housed in the Semitic Museum at Harvard University that records the assignment of a subsistence field to the official Ayakala. It was identified and photographed by Palmiro Notizia on June 2008. The tablet is well preserved, it measures 50×40×18 mm, and it is not ruled. The provenance from Girsu-Lagaš can be determined on the basis of onomastics.

§2. Text edition (Palmiro Notizia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>obv.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. ba-zi</td>
<td>To Bazi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. u₃-na-a-du₁₁</td>
<td>say:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ₄(iku) GAN₂ MUR₇ ti-ra-aš₂</td>
<td>4 iku of land, the rear part of (the domain unit in the field of) Tira’ai,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rev.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. im-ma ha-bi₂-ib₂-ge-ne₂</td>
<td>May be (= Bazi) confirm it on a tablet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seal
1. ur-[...]
2. dub-[sar] the scribe,
3. dumu ur-x-[...] son of Ur-...

§2.1. Commentary

obv. 1: Bazi is attested as the addressee of four letter-orders, but only two, TCS 1, 49 (= Michalowski 1993: no. 163), and BM 94502, have a content analogous to our text. In the case of TCS 1, 49, Bazi is requested to take away (kar) a 3 bur₃ field plot (=54 iku = 19.44 ha) from Lugaluruda and to give it (šum₂) to Ludingira, who was likely the rightful grantee. However, any reference to the nature of the field plot or to the term PAD is missing in the text. In BM 94502, he is ordered to “release” (šu–bar) two large allotment plots situated in two different fields.

obv. 3: In the Ur III period the average size of a land

Abbreviations follow CDLI’s convenient list <http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations_for_assyriology>. SM 1899.2.135 is published with the kind permission of Piotr Steinkeller, Curator of Cuneiform Collections, and Lawrence E. Stager, Director and Curator. A good quality photo of the tablet is available on the website of the CDLI project (CDLI no. P405912). The copy of the seal impression was prepared by Alessandro Di Ludovico. For recent treatments of Ur III letter-orders, see Urciuoli 2009 and Allred 2010. A comprehensive analysis of the Ur III letter-orders is in preparation by Daniele Umberto Lampasona (Università di Napoli “l’Orientale”), while an edition of all Ur III letter-orders appearing since Sollberger 1966 was announced by Lance Allred (Allred 2010: 9 note 2). An edition of four unpublished letter-orders in the British Museum (BM 93653, BM 94080, BM 94502, BM 94972) is in preparation by P. Notizia and L. Verderame.

We are grateful to Manuel Molina and Piotr Steinkeller who read a draft of this paper and offered helpful comments and suggestions. Needless to say, we alone are responsible for any and all errors.

3 TCS 1, 48, 49; Molina, AuOr 17-18 (1999-2000) 226 no. 32; BM 94502 (see note 1).

4 For others letter-orders from Girsu dealing with field assignments, see e.g. TCS 1, 50 (= Michalowski 1993: no. 95), 153 (= Michalowski 1993: no. 177; see also Maekawa 1992: 216 n. 11), 161, 225 (Michalowski 1993, no. 198), 230 (Michalowski 1993, no. 86), 365.
allotment distributed by the crown (PAD) was 6 iku (≈ 14,400 m²), however it varied depending on the dependent worker’s (erin) social position and profession. A lower-ranking state dependent would normally receive 4 iku (≈ 1.44 ha) of land, that is the same extension assigned to Ayakala. If we accept the standard yield ratio of 20 to 30 gur of barley for one bur3 (= 18 1/10) iku) of soil, then a 4 iku field plot could provide up to 6 gur (≈ 2,000 sila3) of barley per year. It is worth noting, however, that the same dependent could hold more than one PAD-plot within different fields and that the location of a single plot might change from one year to the other due to the unstable topographical conditions in the southern part of the Mesopotamian alluvium. For the reading of the sign MUR7 (LAK 193, KWU 354, ABZ 242), see Civil 2011: 232-233. I assume that in our text MUR7 does not have a simple prepositional use (“behind [the temple of] Tira’aš”), but rather it refers to a specific part of the domain unit of the field of Tira’aš (see below). In the land survey texts from Girsu, plots of each field are classified according to the differences in either the quality of the soil, or in the use of the land. The sign MUR7 indicates in those texts the “rear part” (Akk. arkattu) of a domain unit, with no direct relationship to the quality of the soil as proposed by Pettinato. However, I am uncertain about the reading of the sign MUR7 in these cases, whether mur7 or murgu2. Tira’aš was the name of one of the four secondary shrines of Ningirsu mentioned in Cylinder A of Gudea. The site of the homonymous settlement is unknown, but it is probably to be located in the environs of Girsu, close to its borders with the province of Umma. A palace/fortress (e2-gal) seems to have existed, both in Tira’aš and in Antasura, built by Eannatum and Urukagina to protect the northern boundary of Lagāš. For the Ur III period the following attestations of the toponym are documented: A. e2-ti-ra-aš2 (“temple of Tira’aš”)

MVN 6, 301 rev ii 1; ITT 5, 6970 obv. 5 (e2-ti-ra-aš2); TLB 3, 167 obv. i 18; HLC 2 rev. i 4; SAT 1, 418 obv. i 18-20 (lu2 e2-ti-ra-aš2). B. a-ša3 ti-ra-aš2 (“field of Tira’aš”)

BPOA 1, 39 obv. 3; MVN 22, 177 rev. 4 (0.0.1 še Pl.IR a-ša3 ti-ra-aš2); Maekawa, ASJ 19 (1997) 290 no. 14 obv. 12 (3.0.0 GAN2 a-ša3 ti-ra-aš2); Maekawa, ASJ 2 (1980) 12 no. 30 rev. 1 (še a-ša3 ti-ra-aš2). C. #wir1 ti-ra-aš2 (“orchard of Tira’aš”)

MVN 17, 18 obv. 3; HLC 102 obv. 10; HLC 267 obv. 7’; Amherst 54 obv. 13; MVN 7, 299 rev. 1; HSS 4, 10 rev. i 31; ITT 5, 6994 obv. 3; MVN 17, 55 rev. ii 5’ (wir1 ti-ra-aš2 ); MVN 6, 139 rev. 6 (wir1 ti-ra-aš2). D. kun-zi-da ti-ra-aš2 (“weir of Tira’aš”)

TCTI 1, 766 obv. 4; TCTI 1, 851 obv. 7, 11 (kun-zi-da ti-ra-aš2 dagudī = MLAŠ.AŠ sur-ra). Besides, several texts record offers to the sanctuary of Tira’aš or religious events connected with Tira’aš: E. MVN 9, 87 rev. vi 33; CT 7, pl. 16, BM 17765, rev. i 5 (nig2-sizkur2-ra dti-ra-aš2); ITT 2, 833 obv. 7; HSS 4, 54 rev. 6; MVN 11, 131 obv. 4 (sizkur2 ti-ra-aš2-še3); BPOA 6, 37 obv. 14 (1 ma2 40.0.0 gur ti-ra-aš2-še3)

5 Dahl 2002: 334. According to Maekawa (1991: 213) in the Ur III period the area of each allotment parcel was a multiple of 3 iku.

6 Steinkeller 2004: 93.

7 A letter-order, from Umma, mentioning a 4 iku subsistence field is TCS 1, 148 (= Michalowski 1993: no. 76; Koslova 2003: 243 no. 3).

8 Dahl 2002: 334 with previous bibliography.


12 See Frayne 1997: 112 (RIME 1.9.1.26 [Ur-Nansē]), 152 (RIME 1.9.3.7a [Eannatum]), 266 (RIME 1.9.9.2 [URUKagina]). See also George 1993: 150 no. 1097; Edzard, RIA 10 s.v. Palast. A, III, p. 208 § 7. A location at modern Šatrah was proposed by Frayne (1997: 112), but his announced article on the geography of Lagaš province has never been published. For other attestations of Tira’aš in pre-Ur III period, see Selz 1995: 383-416 “Index B” s.v. e2-ti-ra-aš2, e2-gal-ti-ra-aš2 GAN2-nigin2-ti-ra-aš2-du,s2, i2-du,s2-ti-ra-aš2.

13 Our list updates the entry “Tiraš” by Edzard & Farber 1974: 197-198.


15 For this integration, see Civil 1994: 126.
Both TLB 3, 167 (A) and BPOA 6, 37 (E) confirm that Tira’aš was in the Girsu district. More precisely, according to HLC 102 (C) and HLC 267 (C), it was located in the area of Kisura, literally “the border.”

As to the personal name Uludi, at Girsu-Lagaš the most important officials bearing that name were an estate manager (nu-banda3-gu4) and a foreman of the female millers (ugula kikken2).18

The expression im-a ge.n “to confirm on a tablet” suggests the redaction of a new document by Bazi – or on behalf of Bazi – as a response to the request of the central administration to assign a PAD-plot to Ayakala.19 However, it is virtually impossible to identify

18 For ulu3-di nu-banda3-gu4, see CT 5, pl. 27, BM 18933, obv. i 11; HSS 4, 32 obv. 9. For ulu3-di ugula kikken2, see CT 3, pl. 35, BM 21335, obv. iv 16.
19 The expression im-a ge.n appears also in the letter-orders TCS 1, 335 (=MVN 7, 406; see also Wilcke 1998: 32-34) rev. 4 (en-na im še-ba-a i1-ib,-ge-ne3); BiOr 26 (1969), p. 174 BM 18568 (= Michalowski 1993: no. 134) obv. 5-6 (im še-ba siki-ba ga-bi2-ge); TCS 1, 276 obv. 6-7 (im še-ba-ka he,-bi-ib-ge-ne3). The same expression is attested in several administrative texts: MVN 13, 172 rev. 2 (im-ma i1-ib,-ge-en3); SANTAG 6, 115 rev. 6 (im tug2-ba e2-gal-ka nu-ub-ge-en3); NSGU 209 rev. ii 17 (im-ma bi2-in-ge); BM 25455 (courtesy M. Molina) left edge (im lu3 didli-ka ge-ne2-dam). For im ma ge-na “confirmed on a tablet”, see OTR 251 rev. i 14; BPOA 1, 14 obv. ii 8 (im-ma’[=UR] ge-na). For im ge-na “confirmed tablet”, see Nisaba 11, 26 rev. ii 3-4 (im ge-na e2*-dun-ur,-ra), translated by al-Rawi and Verderame: “tavoletta di conferma”; Ontario 2, 424 (pisan dub-ba im ge-na še geš-e1-ša gir1 bu3-bu3 mu en “nanna maš-e i1-ša, 1-ša-gal, translated by Sigrist: “tablet basket <containing> the verified tablets [accounting for] the threshed barley, responsible: Bubu § 43”). For other examples of “confirmation” of tablets, see BIN 3, 317 rev. 3 (im gu-la ge-ne,-dam); SANTAG 7, 129 (see also Sallaberger 2006: 270) rev. 3 (im tug2*-ba-i1-bi’/ge-ne2-de,/-dam); HSS 4, 127 obv. 4 (im es4 didli-ke,-ge-ne2-dam); MVN 22, 178 rev. ix 3’ (im e2*-gal ib3-ge-na); SNAT 506 rev. 4 (im-bi nu-ha-la nu-ge-en3). On the use of the verb ge-n in a peculiar typology of labels from Umma, see Laurito, Mezzasalma & Verderame 2006; Laurito, Mezzasalma & Verderame 2008.
sions the latter is the best recognizable of the three characters that were originally represented on the seal’s surface. In fact, the receiving goddess is almost completely preserved on the reverse and partially distinguishable in one impression on the obverse. She sits on a niched throne and wears a flounced robe and a headgear of the multi-tiered horned crown kind, with a disk-like element on its top. The scene was certainly completed by the typical couple of a goddess and a man standing hand in hand. What remains visible of them in the impressions is only part of the body of the male figure (wearing his typical fringed mantle), who raises his right hand before his face. Before the sitting goddess no traces of astral symbols are visible in the top part of the field, but, in its middle region, a barely legible integrating motif clearly appears. In presentation scenes of Ur III period such a position can be occupied by an animal or monster, like a goose, an Anzu-like eagle, a lion or a bull. Seal impressions of SM 1899.2.135 do not show enough of this motif to allow a sound interpretation of its nature. According to what can still be observed in one of the impressions on the reverse, one can suppose that this element could correspond to a lion placed on a standard and facing towards the right. Such iconography recurs in this region of the scene in some well-known published specimens of presentation scenes of the same period. The presence here of an Anzu-like eagle or a lion standing on his hind-legs or cowering down is much less likely.

20 For example in the impressions on YOS 4, 201 (Buchanan 1981: no. 620; here the lion is left-oriented), BPOA 6, 1476, and SAT 2, 400, all from Umma and kept in the Yale Babylonian Collection.

21 Some examples of these iconographies can be located in: Collon 1982: no. 386; Buchanan 1966: no. 422; Collon 1982: no. 433; von der Osten 1934: no. 136; Legrain 1925: no. 263; Buchanan 1981: no. 572 (SAT 3, 1492 = YBC 1704); MLC 166 (Yale Babylonian Collection).
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