

## A Neo-Sumerian Administrative Tablet in the University of Tartu Art Museum

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### §1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

§1.1 The previously unpublished Neo-Sumerian document **KMM A 45** is located at the University of Tartu Art Museum. It was transliterated, translated into Estonian and studied for the first time in the unpublished 2001 bachelor thesis of Jaana Strumpe (2001: 14–21). The text was also briefly mentioned in the Estonian popular-scientific journal “Horisont” (Sahk 2004), in the Estonian newspaper “Eesti Ekspress” (Erelt 2006), and in a catalogue dedicated to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University of Tartu Art Museum (Sahk 2006: 30–31). Photographs of the tablet were appended to J. Strumpe’s bachelor thesis and published in the University of Tartu Art Museum catalogue mentioned above (Sahk 2006: 30–31).

### §2. The Journey of the Tablet to the University of Tartu Art Museum

§2.1 The tablet was donated to the University Art Museum by Johan Laidoner (1884–1953), a general of the Estonian army, who served as chairman of the committee of the League of Nations in Mosul from October to December 1925, resolving border disputes between the Kingdom of Iraq (under British administration) and the Republic of Turkey. During his stay in Iraq, Laidoner bought several artefacts of ancient Mesopotamian

origin. While, in a letter sent from Mosul to his wife Maria Laidoner on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1925, he does mention three artefacts that he bought from an antiquities market in Mosul (a document in a clay envelope (NABU 2019/27),<sup>2</sup> a seal, and a figurine of a lion from Aššur), he does not mention the Ur III document discussed in this article in the same letter (Strumpe 2001, 11). Thus, it is unknown where exactly Laidoner bought this tablet. When Laidoner returned to Estonia he decided to donate some of the Mesopotamian artefacts he acquired in Iraq to the University of Tartu, including the tablet under discussion here (Erelt 2006).

### §3. Measurements, Date, and Origin of the Tablet

§3.1 The tablet is made of fired clay and measures 3.7×3.3×1.6 cm (Sahk 2006: 30). The text is written in the Neo-Sumerian variant of the Sumerian language and originates from the 48<sup>th</sup> year and 11<sup>th</sup> month of the reign of king Šulgi (2093–2046 BC), as testified by the month and year names mentioned in the text (reverse lines 6–7 and left edge). As the text was probably bought from the market and thus most likely came from an illegal dig, the exact circumstances of its excavation are unknown. The month name *udru*<sup>duru5</sup>, however, is known from the Nippur calendar (see Co-

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Jaanika Anderson, director of research at the University of Tartu Art Museum, for giving permission to collate the tablet and publish the photographs, Marcos Such-Gutiérrez and Vladimir V. Emelianov for reading the draft and giving many useful comments and suggestions, and Jacob L. Dahl for providing us with his edition of **CUSAS 39, 153**. Only the authors are responsible for any errors that may remain. This paper was supported by a personal research grant from the Estonian Research Council (grant number PUT1466).

<sup>2</sup> The enveloped document is a Middle Assyrian cuneiform text dealing with a slave buying his freedom. It was first published in Russian by Jankovskaya 1989; in Estonian by Espak, Sazonov 2010; in English by Espak, Sazonov 2019.

hen 2015: 156–157, Emelianov 1999: 266) and thus the text is certainly from the city of Nippur or its vicinity.

**§3.2** The fact that the temple of the god Šakkan (reverse line 4) and the official Lugalazida (reverse line 5) are mentioned in the text provides additional arguments for the text's origin being from Nippur. This official is known to have played an active role in the building of Šakkan's temple in Nippur during the period of the seventh to eleventh month of the same year, according to 11 other Ur III administrative documents.<sup>3</sup> While in ten of these documents Lugalazida is involved in inspecting (gurun<sub>2</sub>-ak<sup>4</sup>) the male workers (guruš) stationed in the Šakkan temple, in our text and in CUSAS 39, 153 the same official deals with reed-workers (ad-KID) and carpenters (nagar), in all probability with the purpose of providing building materials for the same temple.

#### §4. Contents of the Tablet

**§4.1** As the amounts of listed building materials made of reed and wood are vast and it is unthinkable that either a single reed-worker or a car-

penter could produce such quantities in a single day, the collective (without the plural marker enē) should be preferred as the grammatical form for ad-KID and nagar.<sup>5</sup> For the activity of the reed-worker the verb written is definitely sur, as the collation of the tablet in the University Art Museum made clear. The verb sur is commonly used in Ur III administrative documents to denote the activity of twisting and braiding reeds and other substances together.<sup>6</sup> According to H. Waetzoldt, one worker would, for example, manage to braid only four gazi reed-posts/rope (g<sup>gi</sup>gilim gazi) a day.<sup>7</sup> It would thus take more than seven years for a single worker to braid the 10,800 gilim gazi listed in this text. To manufacture 10,800 gilim gazi in one day would require about 2700 workers, each preparing 4 units. The construction of a temple is undoubtedly a demanding project and some Ur III administrative texts list even larger numbers of workers.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the option preferred here is to interpret ad-KID and nagar as collective terms (grammatically singular), with the exact number of various reed-workers and carpenters not being mentioned.<sup>9</sup>

#### §5. Transliteration and Translation

##### *Obverse*

1.	1(u) 3(diš) sar g <sup>gi</sup> KID-mah	468 m <sup>2</sup> <sup>10</sup> of great reed mats
2.	5(geš <sub>2</sub> ) g <sup>gi</sup> gilim dagal	300 wide reed-posts/rope <sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> MVN 15 147; MVN 15 152; Akkadica 140, p. 85, no. 8; KM 89496; KM 89497; KM 89529; CUSAS 39, 153; MCS 7 13 AO 11739; MCS 7 13 AO 11740; MCS 7 14 AO 11741; Fs. Neumann, p. 209, I.D.1 NUL 13. See, however, Heimpel 2009, 178, who interprets e<sub>2</sub> dŠakkan<sub>2</sub> as “[...] probably a facility for equids. It would have had stables with stalls like the bull house and the house of fattened rams.” The amount of materials made of reed and wood listed in our text, however, leave the impression that we are dealing with a more capacious building than stalls.

<sup>4</sup> For this term, see Steinkeller 1982.

<sup>5</sup> For cases when a plurality of humans is interpreted as a collective, see Jagersma 2010, 111.

<sup>6</sup> Waetzoldt 1992, 132: “Das Verb sur steht für das Zusammendrehen von Pflanzenfasern bzw. stark geklopftem Rohr, und auch für das Herstellen von Seilen aus anderen Materialien (z. B. Wolle oder Ziegenhaar) wird sur benutzt.”

<sup>7</sup> Waetzoldt 1992, 133. According to A. Goetze (1948, 182) a reed-mat measuring 6m by 6m (= 1 sar) would take six days to weave, cf. Englund 1988, 170, note 43.

<sup>8</sup> The text Nisaba 15/2 0547 lists numbers as high as 1440 ad-KID and 1533 nagar among some other craftsmen, with the added note “(one) workday” (u<sub>4</sub> 1(diš)-še<sub>3</sub>). The number of ad-KID and nagar, however, is usually much lower in Ur III documentation.

<sup>9</sup> Another option is that ad-KID and nagar in our text only stand for the foremen or overseers of the manufacture of the objects, and the number of workers needed for this is not mentioned. Perhaps, however, the term “(one) workday” (u<sub>4</sub> 1(diš)-še<sub>3</sub>) is misleading and the work was in fact meant to be done over a longer period of time. The exact period and the number of workers needed were possibly recorded in another document.

<sup>10</sup> 1 sar = 36 m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> For g<sup>gi</sup>gilim, see Waetzoldt 1992, 132–134; Heimpel 2009, 215–216.

3.	3(šar <sub>2</sub> ) <sup>gi</sup> gilim gazi	10,800 gazi reed-posts/rope <sup>12</sup>
4.	a <sub>2</sub> ad-KID-ḫug-ga <sub>2</sub> -ke <sub>4</sub>	labor of hired reed-workers: <sup>13</sup>
5.	ib <sub>2</sub> -sur u <sub>4</sub> 1(diš <sub>2</sub> )-še <sub>3</sub>	braiding for one workday
<i>Reverse</i>		
1.	2(geš'u) 2(geš <sub>2</sub> ) 3(u) 4(diš) <sup>ges</sup> ur <sub>3</sub> -ḫi-a	1354 various roof-beams <sup>14</sup>
2.	a <sub>2</sub> nagar-ḫug-ga <sub>2</sub> -ke <sub>4</sub>	labor of hired carpenters:
3.	ib <sub>2</sub> -ur <sub>5</sub> u <sub>4</sub> 1(diš)-še <sub>3</sub>	collecting for one workday <sup>15</sup>
4.	e <sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup> šakkan <sub>2</sub>	(for the) temple of Šakkan <sup>16</sup>
5.	ki lugal-a <sub>2</sub> -zi-da-ta	from Lugalazida <sup>17</sup>
6.	iti udru <sup>duru5</sup>	(in the) month of udru <sup>duru5</sup> (=xi)
7.	mu us <sub>2</sub> -sa ki-maš <sup>ki</sup> <ba-ḫul>	one year after Kimaš (was destroyed)
<i>Left Edge</i>		
1.	mu us <sub>2</sub> -sa-bi	one year after that (=Šulgi 48)



Figure 1: Photo of obverse

<sup>12</sup> P. Steinkeller interprets <sup>gi</sup>gilim gazi as “ropes or cables (gilim) made of the plaited gazi fibers (apparently the licorice plant = *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, whose rootlets [sic!] are known to be a source of fibers, used in modern times as an insulation and as an ingredient of wallboards) [...]” (Steinkeller 2015, 220).

<sup>13</sup> For ad-KID (*atkuppu*), see Sallaberger 1989, 320 with endnote 89; Steinkeller 1989, 171, note for text 3, line 7; Neumann 1993, 36, note 94.

<sup>14</sup> For <sup>ges</sup>ur<sub>3</sub> as roof-beams, see Steinkeller 1987, 92; Van De Mieroop 1992, 158; Heimpel 2009, 173.

<sup>15</sup> Another option would be to interpret the verb (written  $\text{HII} \times \text{A}\check{\text{S}}_2$ ) in this line as ḫur, “to scratch” (as in Strumpe 2001, 14). This would refer to the manual activity of carpenters in preparing the roof-beams, removing the bark from the beams or similar.

<sup>16</sup> For Šakkan/Sumuqan, the cattle deity, see Wiggermann 2011–2013, 308–309.

<sup>17</sup> As the recipient (kišib<sub>3</sub> PN or PN šu ba-ti) is missing in the text of the duplicate CUSAS 39, 153, Dahl surmises that “it may originally have been encased in an envelope” (Dahl 2020, 218). While this is also a possibility for KMM A 45, there is, however, no sign of an envelope for this text in the University of Tartu Art Museum.



Figure 2: Photo of reverse

§6. Duplicate **KMM A 45 = CUSAS 39, 153**

§6.1 The text **CUSAS 39, 153**, mentioned above, is a duplicate of our text. This text is held in the Schøyen collection in Oslo and was published in CUSAS 39 as No. 153 by Jacob L. Dahl.<sup>18</sup> Looking at the photograph on the CDLI, the differences

between the two texts are minor. For example, in **CUSAS 39, 153** there are fewer lines in total, as lines obverse 4–5 and reverse 2–3 of **KMM A 45** are both squeezed into one line in CUSAS 39, 153. Our new text makes it possible to reconstruct the text **CUSAS 39, 153** fully, and we therefore present a new and improved edition of that text here.

*Obverse*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. 1(u) 3(diš) sar <sup>gi</sup> KID-maḥ   | 468 m <sup>2</sup> of great reed mats                 |
| 2. 5(geš <sub>2</sub> ) <sup>gi</sup> gilim dagal  | 300 wide reed-posts/rope                              |
| 3. 3(šar <sub>2</sub> ) <sup>gi</sup> gilim ʾgaziʾ   | 10,800 gazi reed-posts/rope                           |
| 4. a <sub>2</sub> ad-KID-ḥug-ga <sub>2</sub> -ke <sub>4</sub> ib <sub>2</sub> -sur   | labor of hired reed-workers: braiding                 |
| 5. 2(gešʾu) 2(geš <sub>2</sub> ) 3(u) 4(diš) <sup>geš</sup> ur <sub>3</sub> -ḥi-a-kam  | 1354 various roof-beams                               |
| 6. a <sub>2</sub> nagar-ḥug-ga <sub>2</sub> -ke <sub>4</sub> ib <sub>2</sub> -ur <sub>5</sub> u <sub>4</sub> ʾ1(diš)-še <sub>3</sub> ʾ | labor of hired carpenters: collecting for one workday |

*Reverse*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. e <sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup> šakkan <sub>2</sub>    | (for the) temple of Šakkan                    |
| 2. ki lugal-a <sub>2</sub> -zi-da-ta                  | from Lugalazida                               |
| 3. iti udru <sup>duru5</sup>                          | (in the) month of udru <sup>duru5</sup> (=xi) |
| 4. mu us <sub>2</sub> -sa ki-maš <sup>ki</sup> ba-ḥul | one year after Kimaš was destroyed            |
| 5. mu us <sub>2</sub> -sa-bi                          | one year after that (=Šulgi 48)               |

<sup>18</sup> Dahl 2020, 218.



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