One of the more difficult tasks facing historians of ancient Mesopotamia is the identification and classification of names found in cuneiform sources of animals and plants. It has been often a matter of either personal preference or unavoidable circumstances which has determined the spotty nature of work done in this endeavor. On a broad level, the names of Benno Landsberger and the participants of the project Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon (MSL) of the University of Chicago first spring to mind as proponents of an encompassing treatment of ancient fauna and flora. Landsberger’s scheme in the case of animals was, isolation of Akkadian word candidates and if possible their Semitic cognates from cuneiform and modern written sources on the one hand, on the other the compilation of candidate creatures, culled from depictions in Babylonian art,¹ from osteo-archaeological reports and from zoological and technical studies of animals native to the heartland and regions peripheral to ancient Mesopotamia. The successful striking of obvious word/animal pairs from the two resulting lists leads in this process to an ever smaller number of unidentified words/objects which were then subject to speculative identifications. This considered method resulted in quite appealing publications which had an immediate and lasting impact on Assyriology, beginning with Landsberger’s famous Fauna;² the zoological identifications of wild animals in this

¹ Available in the early 30’s were the studies of M. Hilzheimer, Die Wildrinder im alten Mesopotamien, Leipzig 1926 (MAOG 2/II); id., Säugetierkunde und Archäologie, Zeitschrift für Säugetierkunde 1 [1926] 140–169; id., RIV 14, Berlin 1929, 190–200. See now E. van Buren, The Fauna of Ancient Mesopotamia as Represented in Art, Rome 1939 (AnOr. 18); M. Behm-Blancke, Das Tierbild in der altmesopotamischen Rundplastik, Mainz 1979 (Baghdader Forschungen 1).

² B. Landsberger, Die Fauna des alten Mesopotamien nach der 14. Tafel der Serie HAR-ra = ḫubullu, Leipzig 1934 (Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Klasse der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 42/6). This edition was in no small fashion a product of the Leipziger Schule and Landsberger’s apparent early decision to order the great mass of Babylonian lexical material, above all through the assistance of his students; cf. L. Matouš, Die lexikalischen Tafelserien der Babylonier und Assyrier in den Berliner Museen (LTBA) I: Gegenstandslisten (Serie HAR-ra = ḫubullu), Berlin 1933, and W von Soden, Die lexiki-
volume found in the Babylonian lexical list HAR.ra = ḫubullu 14 quickly spread to secondary literature and into the German and the American Akkadian dictionary projects. However, Landsberger moved through an immense amount of material in his academic career, so that his attention to philological detail in this and subsequent publications was not that found in the work of somewhat less productive scholars.

This snarl is of course known to those who have dealt with Landsberger’s lexicographical work and is thus not of great interest. In judging the reliability


4 E. Ebeling in the D.L.Z., 12. 4. 1936, col. 613 ff., first leveled harsh general criticism against the less than precise reconstructions of lexical lists offered by Landsberger in Fauna, following up in MAOG X/2, Leipzig 1937, 35–75 (sic!), with detailed corrections of the manuscript, which, as an aside, had been submitted by Landsberger early in August 1933 and which went to press the end of June 1934, so that the increasing pressure in late 1934 in the administration and faculty of the University of Leipzig to drive the Jewish scholar out, resulting in Landsberger’s expulsion in April of 1935, will not have played a role in his cursory treatment of the lexical scores. Moreover, as Ebeling demonstrated, the blame could only be borne in part my Matous, since Landsberger states himself that his transliterations of the VAT texts published in LTBA I were made based on photos and collations of the originals, the manuscript of Fauna having been composed before the appearance of the text copies. Some years ago, I had occasion to reconstruct the partitur version of the volume MSL 8/2, that is, the presumably revised version of Fauna utilizing both LTBA I, the collations and corrections published in the cited review by Ebeling, and collations of VAT texts performed by F. Köcher; this reconstruction resulted in corrections filling some 15 typed pages.
of the work of Landsberger and of the project MSL initiated and for many years led by him, it is, however, important to consider two factors complicating the identification of animals in cuneiform sources. First, the lexical lists were compiled by scribes who were officials of central authorities in urban centers. In describing and categorizing objects, these officials were entirely dependent on their own perceptions and on those of people surrounding them. It is not surprising that animals were consequently classified from the viewpoint of the scribe who was at once urban consumer and vain and occasionally fantastic pedant.\(^5\) The consumer knew shoulder butts or salted fish meal and included designations of these objects in his lists of pigs and fish. He did not know what a dugong was,\(^6\) nor did he have any rationale to doubt the mythical tradition in which he lived, with its world of dragons and monsters. Second, there is good reason to believe that referents of written and spoken object designations changed through time. On the semiotic level, this lexical development would seem to apply to the use of the proto-cuneiform script by Sumerians entering the alluvium at the inception of the Early Dynastic period, of particular relevance to faunal studies, the probable semantic shifts which seem to have occurred following the Ur III period will have had wide-reaching effects on compilations and translations of Sumerian vocabularies prepared in the Old Babylonian period and thereafter, from which Assyriology derives its translations of most Akkadian and Sumerian animal names. The often noted need for particular skepticism regarding our understanding of Sumerian phonology and lexicon based on an Akkadian itself revived through comparison with extant Semitic languages is made the more urgent by the awareness that elements of spoken languages change through time and that although these elements tend to freeze with the death of a particular language, a non-vigorous recording of a dead language – Sumerian in the first centuries of the 2nd millennium – leaves open to debate the validity of many of the lexical identifications redacted in this period.

\(^5\) The large number of fabulous creatures in ḫḫ 14 attests to the fact that literary and folkloristic imagination played no small role in its compilation. Indeed, the first section of the list comprises nearly 50 entries dealing with snakes and dragons, of which the majority were mythical beasts.

\(^6\) The fanciful postulation in Fauna, p. 71, and MSL 8/2, p. 91, fn. 31, that this animal was represented by the proto-cuneiform sign ATU 1, 92, is at the same time a warning that script-archaeology can lead to entirely unfounded identifications which flourish in secondary literature (among others, for example in the otherwise masterful essay “Seckühе (Sirenia)” by B. Breitjes, Zeitschrift für Säugetierkunde 32 [1967] 115-118). The sign combination ḫ ḫ u n š, “cow-fish” attested in the Early Dynastic fish list (cf. R. Englund and H. Nissen, ATU 3, 94, and G. Pettinato, MEE 3, 98, to line 18) may, however, point in the right direction, since a preserved cut from such an animal may have been described by the fishermen or traders as having been taken from a large swimming cow. Thus also the Arabic ḥa qar al-mā’ “water cow” in Arabian geographies, cited in E. Baer, BSOAS 31 [1968] 23.
As a faithful admirer of the scholar celebrated in this volume, whose acute and lucid work has gone far in establishing the identification of and the role played by above all large animals in ancient Mesopotamia, I wish to offer a note on a group of less assuming creatures, the rodents, cuneiform references to which first aroused my interest when, during the tiresome process of compiling my own score of the late Akkadian list ḫḫ 14, I was intrigued by the detailed knowledge of these animals scribes exhibited both in lexical and in literary compilations. As J. Boessneck, whose enthusiasm for small mammals was striking, and who constantly dispensed much more warmth and insight than could be repaid, once told me, "Man soll auf das kleine Getier hören, es erzählt uns von Halbgöttern, die sich viel anmaßen!"

One might imagine that the extent of ancient scholarly interest in rodents would be limited to the damage done by such animals to crops and stored foodstuffs. This is a categorization indeed obvious in the treatment of insects in a later section in ḫḫ 14, which, seen primarily as pests and parasites, are schematically qualified 'pest,' 'pest of the head,' 'pest of the field,' etc. However, the designation and characterizations of rodents in the section ll. 184–206 suggest a somewhat more observant categorization of this group of animals, with attention paid to the size of the animals, to their natural habitat and to the color of their pelts, even to their gait. For purposes of reference, this section is offered here with provisional translations of the Sumerian and Akkadian designations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sumerian</th>
<th>Akkadian</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kiši₉</td>
<td>pi-a-3u</td>
<td>“rodent”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peš kurra</td>
<td>MIN KUR-i</td>
<td>“mountain rodent”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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⁹ This sign appears to have developed from LAK 244 and 247 (cf. M. Krebernik, Die Beschworungen aus Fara und Ebla, Hildesheim 1984, 287–290; to p. 289, A1 cf. OIP 58, p. 291 7 to B3 s. TSŠ 629 iii 5 ⁹Nin.LAK 247 to B5 add Suppl. 12: [1 'Amara ⁹Nin.LAK 247], with the form LAK 245 in pre-Sargonic Lagash and Ur III. Two readings have generally been ascribed to the sign when used in connection with rodents, kiši₉ and peš. Whereas Proto-Ea offers only the reading pe-3e = PEŠ of the sign (line 583, s. MSL 14, 55), this reading is confirmed in Ea i 203 only for the Akkadian equivalent bn-nu-ni-ru/ha-ma-as-ši-ru; the Akkadian term pi-azu, on the other hand, is equated in the following entry with the same sign with a reading ki-ši(-ib) (cf. MSL 14, 187). Unfortunately, the gloss ki-ši of the sign PEŠ in line 187 below is of no help, since the corresponding Akkadian equivalent is
There's a Rat in my Soup!

186. ¹Nin kilin m(PÉŠ)[...]
187. kiši kiši...
188. p[és]
189. p[és] tur
190. p[és] giši
190a. p[és] giši a
191. p[és] MIN i g[u, e
192. p[és] še giš[ i gu, e
193. p[és] giši ur ra
194. p[és] aša ga
195. p[és] iši git gūn (nu)
196. p[és] nigaš gilim ma
197. p[és] sila gaz
197a. p[és] khašul
197b. p[és] khašal
198. [p]éš tum tum me
199. [t]úm tum me
199a. [túm tum] me
200. ¹Nin kilin/m

"?"
"?"
"h.-rodent"
"small rodent"/"mouse"
"reed thicket rodent"
"a.-rodent"
"reed thicket and water (?) rodent"/"b.-rodent"
"reed-eating rodent"
"i.-rodent"
"s.e.g iš.i-eating rodent"
"gnawer (?)"
"roof rodent"/"b.-rodent"
"field rodent"/"burrower"
"speckle-faced rodent"
"?.-rodent"/"a.-rodent"
"pot grinder"/"evil one"
"land destroyer"/"ditto"
"jumper"/"a.-rodent"
"packing rodent"
"a.-rodent"
"packer"/"ditto"
"packer"/"wallf rodent"
"Lady of the rats"
"mongoose"

lost. The readings p[és] = ḫumṣiru and kiš(i)š = pi aṣu are, moreover, confirmed, in the late Akkadian list Šullabary B, II. 166-167 (p-eš eš šiš = PÉŠ = ḫum-ṣi-ru ki-it = PÉŠ = pi-aṣu, s. MSL 3, 111). For a general reading p[és] of the sign in semantic combinations speaks a lexical text from Susa edited by M. Lambert in Journal Asiatique 263 [1975] 39f., no. 1, 2: PÉŠ sīla gāda = pā-aš-la-la-ak-da = ša-la-ak-da-um-m. As M. Civil stated in RA 70 [1976] 94, the Susan scribe will not have known the Akkadian equivalent hulû of the Sumerian sign combination PÉŠ sīla.gāz, inventing instead a (phonetically corrupted) loan (paš) šalak-dānum (-ānum often used in animal names). The element paš derived from the phonetic realization of the sign PÉŠ. The entry 394: p[és] la gāz of the Practical Vocabulary of Assur (see below, fn. 14) may also derive from /pš-(ši)la-gāz with an assimilation of the sibilant of the second element, assuming it is not to be read ši kā. It may be mentioned in passing that D. Frayne considers the word p[és] to have derived from proto-Indo-European *mūš (cf. CSMS Bulletin 25 [May 1993] 33).

10 For the reading of this name see the preceding footnote, the forerunner version of ḫḫḫ 11, l. 53, cited below, and cf. PVA 394 p[és] la.gāz = ḫu-lu-n (AFO 18, 332).
11 Five lines follow with further qualifications of this animal. Cf. M. Krebernik, Die Beschworungen aus Fara und Ebū, 287-297 with reasons pp. 260-262 against an equating of the designations ¹Ninkilin/m and ¹Ningirima.
The in some cases reconstructed entries of Ἡ يحدث 14 are secure due to the appearance of corresponding sign combinations in other late Akkadian lexical lists, in particular the list Ἡ يحدث 11 dealing with leather goods and animal hides and pelts but also in the series ἱἈ in ἣ ἣ, σαρτυ = ἅλκυ and ἩἈ, γουδ, and due to glossing of attestations in later Akkadian literary and royal inscriptions. For example, the animal designated πές ἰθία = ἵ-συμ-μω, "reed thicket rodent" in line 190 of the list is attested in Ἡحدث 11, l. 59 as ἱκυς πές ἰθία = ΜΙΝ (μασάκ) ἵ-συμ-μω, "pelt of the reed thicket rodent" 13. The so-called Practical Vocabulary of Assur 14 carries a parallel equation in line 393· πές ἰθία = ἵ-[σ]υμ-μω, and the final line of the 4th tablet of the series signifies ἁλαν = ἁβνύτη 15 contains the entry πές ἰθία = ἵ-συμ/συμ-μω/μα. One witness of this entry 16 derives from the Middle Assyrian period and so demonstrates a lexical tradition reaching at least into the end of the 2nd millennium.

The canonized tradition of the series ἩἈ, ῥα = ἱβουλλυ in fact derives from the Old Babylonian period, during which lexical sources from the 3rd millennium dealing with realia were entirely rewritten. Although the "fore-runner" witnesses of the list Ἡحدث 14 have never been edited, 17 it is possible to order the few available Old Babylonian sources into a score version using primarily the late Akkadian series Ἡحدث 14 and Ἡحدث 11 and the forerunner of Ἡحدث 11 edited in MSL 7, 209–228. The section covering rodents has the following form 18:

12 See MSL 8/2, pp. 44–75.
13 With text A = L.TBA 1, 33 i 34'
17 This forerunner text was presumably slated for publication together with a revised commentary to the full list in the volume MSL 8/3 announced by Landsberger in MSL 8/2, p. ix. The manuscript was apparently never written.
18 Including SLT 37 (+ ?SLT 46 + N 5491, s. MSL 8/1, 82 V 14, MSL 9, 41), 38 (s. V 15 of Ἡحدث 15, MSL 9, 41), 45, 51 (s. Ch.-F. Jean, Babylonica 13 [1933] 59f.; MSL 8/1, 82 V 29), 52 (s. MSL 8/1, 82 V 31), 56 (s. MSL 8/1, 82 V 39), 57 (s. MSL 8/1, 82 V 48), C. Frank, Straßburger Keilschrifttexte in sumerischer und babylonischer Sprache, Berlin – Leipzig 1928, 19 (= D. Charpin and J.-M. Durand, Documents cunéiformes de Strasbourg, Paris 1981, 151), TIM 10, 17 and 105, VAT 6491, CBS 4815, 6464, 13309; cf. Fauna, pp. 49f., 73.
OB Forerunner of rodent section of Ḥḫ 14
(A = SLT 51, B = SLT 38)

Corresponding section of Ḥḫ 11

A obv iv 1 [ p éš ]
B rev iv 1 [ p éš ]

A obv iv 2 [ péš gš gš]
B rev iv 2' [ péš gš]

A obv iv 3 [ péš gš gš gu a]
B rev iv 3' [ péš gš e gu a]

A obv iv 4 [ pèš gš t ur]
B rev iv 4 [ pèš a ša ga]

A obv iv 5 [ gùn a]
B rev iv 5' [ pèš i gš i gš]

B rev iv 6' [ pèš gš ]lim [ m a]

46. kuš pēš tur
47. kuš pēš gš gš e
48. kuš pēš gš gš e gu a/gi gi ga a
49. kuš pēš gš t ur ra
50. kuš pēš igi gùn nu a
51. kuš pēš nīg gš lim [ m a]
52. kuš pēš nīg gš lim [ m a]
53. kuš pēš ("duš" si la gš gaz za zi ga)
54. kuš d Nin kilin m

Precursors to this lexical tradition from the third millennium are found not in Babylonia but rather in Syrian Ebla. The reading *p i eš of the sign LAK 244 in the Ebla texts is shown in a lexical text published by A. Arachi.

19 See MSL 7 209-212, for the text witnesses of this forerunner list of Ḥḫ 11 (and add: K. Watanabe, in: AS] 9 [1987] 277-291; Ms 74247 + 731054 + Tokyo fragment and Ms 74148a = texts D+ [Sumerian] and G [bilingual] of D. Arnaud, Emar VI/4 [Paris 1987] pp. 89-104, no. 548 [the joins to D+ were noted in M. Civil, AuOr. 7 [1989] 16]), which comprises designations of leather objects; the abbreviated section on animal skins and pelts ends with our list of rodent pelts (p. 215), the use of which outside of cultic practice is unknown to me.

20 The texts Watanabe and Arnaud D+ (see preceding fn.) have kuš pēš gš gš Arnaud G has kuš min (= pēš) gš gš a, the latter possibly a haplographous reduction from gi gu a. The three texts also continue with the entry kuš pēš min gš t ur ra in line 49, followed by kuš pēš a ša ga.

21 The section of the text witnesses Watanabe and Arnaud D+ (s. fn. 19 above) dealing with the mongoose Nin kilin n (Akkadian šēkkû) adds four designations of this animal; see above, fn. 11.

22 The "Sign-list" from Ebla, Eblaitica 1 [1987] 97 1.86 (= TM.75.G.1385 rev iii 2 and TM.75.G.1907+12680 rev ii 19f.): pēš = b[i]-šum, line after anšē and before pi ri g.
In the section of the bilingual Vocabulario di Ebla listing wild animals are two entries dealing with the sign LAK 244 = pēš, of which the second nī pēš clearly corresponds with the Semitic equivalents a'ar-ra-bīt (um) to later arrabnu, the “roof” rodent pēš ḡār rā. Two other bilingual texts contain further attestations of pēš in combination with the sign nī equivalent to nīg) and apparent phonetic complements, including nīn pēš-hūlum = ha-ma-si-lum (hama/tumšīrnu, ar. ha(n)ṣīr, ‘pig’) and nīn pēš = ba-ra-tum (perūrūtum, ar faīr). A number of seemingly indigenous names of rodents is also found in an Ebla list, including ha-ma-si-rū₂₄um and ṣū-ṣu-mu-um.⁵

In nearly all of the entries of HAR. rā = ḫubullu cited above, the Akkadian designation of the animals can be found in an impressively large number of reference texts covering the whole spectrum of Babylonian literature. For instance, the creature called kur(n)issu in first millennium sources, a rodent which attacked fields and stores of the oil-producing plant še gīš i, first appeared in this role in published cuneiform sources in an astrological text from Kuyunjik, then in a nambrubī incantation from Assur; further, kursissu are qualified in the so-called expanded version of the tašrītu menology as vermin which will befall a field of še gīš i should it be irrigated on the 3rd or 5th day of that month. Finally, an Old Babylonian collection of extispicy omina warns that with the appearance of a pierced processus papillaris of an

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21 MEE 4, pp. 298, 872f.
22 TM.75.G.10018 and 11303 = texts 96 and 112, respectively, of MEE 4; cf. there p. 368, ll. 0297–0301 see also MEE 3, p. 67.91.
23 MEE 4, pp. 385f., no. 116 (photo pl. 32), ii 5f. For the Ebla connection to ḫī see the article by M. Civil cited above in fn. 3.
24 R. Campbell Thompson, RMA I, London 1900, pl. 7 no. 28 (BM 80–7–19,59), 3–5: DIS 30 ina IG11Á-ši ū, ZĀLAG e-dī-[šk] /kus-nis-su ŽI-ma ŠE.GIŠ.Ī GU-, “Entry: the moon is at its appearance covered with a shimmering light , k. will rise up and devour the še gīš i.” Campbell Thompson, RMA II, p. xxxvii, translated ḫī “perhaps a worm or insect.”
25 E. Ebeling, KAR 257 6’: [ ina ḫU. lī-ka]-ṣi-si ku-ru-sis-si ši-qip-pu ḫu-la-[me-šu], “against the evil of the i.- and the k.-rodents, the i.-worm, the ḫī.”
inspected liver state officials would plunder the palace and the kurissu would devour the še giš i of the land.29

These text references in fact tell us little about the animal kurissu beyond the fact that it represented a threat to the crop še giš i. Insofar as no rodent is recognized as singularly threatening to the seeds of this oil-producing plant, it is not possible to reduce the number of animals which might be considered, all field mice, to one or two candidates for a translation of the term. The situation is different in the case of line 190 of the list Hh 14. The animal entered there, pēš ḡiš gí = ū-šu-mu, “reed thicket rodent”,30 is sufficiently attested in various contexts in both Akkadian and Sumerian sources as to allow of an identification which, if not beyond doubt, certainly fulfills minimal expectations. The ušummu, also written šummu in later texts, is, first, found in lexical texts beginning in the Old Sumerian period in Ebla and reaching through the Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian into the neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian canonized forms. The Akkadian term is without exception equated with the Sumerian pēš ḡiš gí. Second, the animal is widely attested as a desirable repast of gods, of kings and of normal men, in Sumerian texts dating to the Ur III Dynasty at the end of the 3rd millennium, in Akkadian texts dating to the Old Babylonian and the neo-Babylonian period.31 The blood of the animal was used in cultic practice.32 Third, this animal is according to textual references a burrower, as we might expect, moreover may be found above all along the banks of canals, whence it probably derived its Sumerian name, and where its burrowing activities would have represented a threat to the dikes. Next to this philological evidence may be set with some reserve the osteo-archaeological evidence of remains of rodentia unearthed in Mesopotamian excavations, and, finally, eating practices in the Orient which are current or from recent periods may be cited, all of which taken together suggest that the ušummu was the bandicoot rat.

Cuneiform texts published toward the end of the 19th century already attested to the fact that ušummu belong on the dining table of the Chaldean

29 YOS 10, 35, YBC 8648, 29 = J. Nougayrol, RA 38 [1941] 88, AO 7033, rev 3f.: MÂŠ pa-ál-ša-at ŠÁ TAM(E,NE) É.GAL-lam i-ma-la-lu| ku-ru-ší-sú ŠE.GIŠ.i ma-tim i-ka-ál/lu
30 Following the Sumerian. The etymology of the Akkadian word is nor known (according to GAG, p. 63, §55q a parasus form of a verb primae infiniae). Cf. the overview of the literature to pēš ḡiš gí in M. Civil, AuOr. 5 [1987] 23f., and see W. Himpel, RIA 7 p. 607
31 Four other rodents were also served in Babylonia, the ‘field mouse’ harriru (pēš.a.aša ga), the ‘roof’ rodent arrabu (pēš ḡiš ṣur ra), the ‘jumper’ rodent akbaru (pēš ki bal) and the ‘spickle-faced’ rodent barmu (pēš.igi gûn); see W. Himpel, loc. cit., and below, fnn. 44 and 49.
32 R. Caplice, Or. 39 [1970] 118, BM 82–3-23,1 14: ÚŠ UZ.TURmûden ÚŠ PÉŠ.ḡi G1 1 ṣal-ja Sl.A-ma i-na UGU [Gl.DUg], MES GAR-an, “(Nine jars) you fill with (beer, wine, ...) blood of a duck, blood of a ‘reed thicket’ rodent and pressed oil, and you place them on the reed altars”
gods and kings. Nebuchadrezzar boasts in an oft copied inscription that he "daily heaped up on Nabû's offering table [fattened oxen, various small cattle, geese, ...], a string of fish, birds, 𒈹𒇹, eggs – produce of the marshlands –" 33 𒈹𒇹 assumes a similar place in a neo-Babylonian list of entrées for cultic meals to be served at set times of the day 34 The procurement office for 𒈹𒇹 recently shown to have existed in neo-Babylonian Sippar, and the


Civ 34–37 | 4 UZ.TUR¹musen 10 TU.KUR²musen 30 [ES]²musen | 4 NUNUZ UZ.TUR²musen
Cvii 6–9 | 2] UZ.TUR¹musen 20 [ES]²musen | NUNUZ UZ.TUR²musen
Dvii 19–20 | i-si-iḥ  mu-nu ap-si-i ḫi-[ṣ][ar] AN-e KUR.GI¹musen UZ.TUR²musen SES¹musen [T]U.KUR²musen

A i 8–10 | ]-um-mu ] a[p-pa-rī-im ] ]
B i 19–20 | nu-um-mi ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-pa-ra ḫi-[ṣ]-iḥ
B ii 29–31 | i-si-iḥ nu-um-mi ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-pa-ra ḫi-[ṣ]-iḥ
B iii 13–15 | ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-pa-ra ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-pa-ra ḫi-[ṣ]-iḥ
Civ 37–40 | 3 ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-ABZU i-[ṣ] i-mat a[p]-p[a-ri]
Cvii 9–11 | 2 ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-ABZU i-[ṣ] i-mat a[p]-p[a-ri]
Dvii 21 | ḫi-[ṣ]-u-um mu-NUNUZ a-si-ma[a]-a ḫi-[ṣ]-a-pa-ra

A similar list of offerings made by Nebuchadrezzar was published in CT 46, 45 (BM 45690; edited by W. Lambert, Iraq 27 [1965] 1–11, s. p. 7):

rev. v 5 | du-um-iḥ  GU₁MEŠ dan-ma-ti UDU¹NĪTA NIGA SIG₄M[ES] x x x KUR.GI¹musen U[Z]₁[TUR²musen SES¹musen TU.KUR²musen ī-um-mu i-[ṣ]-iḥ KU,GMEŠ GUR[IN] KIRI₄ ṭur-ru-[h li-ma-a] ḫi-[ṣ]-a-pa-tu

and cp. Lie, Sg. 78 (text A = Winckler Sg. no. 51, B = 76f. [so-called 'Prunkschrift']):

A 9 | GU₁MAH-hi bit-ru-ti ḫi-[ṣ]-e [ma]-ru-ti [KUR.GI]¹musen MEŠ
B 168 | GU₁MAH-hi bit-ru-ti ḫi-[ṣ]-e ma-ru-ū-ti KUR.GI¹musen MEŠ
A 9 | [UZ.TU]¹musen MEŠ PES₂GI MEŠ [ ] KU₄MEŠ
B 169 | [UZ.TU]¹musen MEŠ ḫi-ma-ma [i]-[ṣ]-e-[t] KU₄MEŠ

Note to the references given in HKI. I to this text that the incorrect copy P. Botta, Monument de Ninive IV Paris 1846 1850, 105, was worsened by Winckler into PES₂KUR.GI MEŠ, made still worse by Lie's PES₂i-[ṣ]-hi-ː-it'. Further attestations of the variant 𒈹𒇹 for 𒈹𒇹 cited below prove that the form found here is not to be explained as a sandhi orthography with preceding paspasū. 34 F. Thureau-Dangin, Rituels akkadiens, Paris 1921, pp. 62–65 and 74–86 to AO 6451; s. pp. 78f., ll. rev. 16' 28: (a) 𒈹𒇹 (written PES₂GI) together with UDU, UZ.TUR²musen KUR.GI¹musen SES¹musen TU.KUR²musen and NUNUZ.
draconian punishment threatened for the case that yearly delivery quotas were not met, offer further proof of the importance of the rodent delicacy in cultic practice and, necessarily, on the tables of the priesthood. The edition by E. Ebeling in 1942 of an Old Babylonian letter from Larsa, in which the sender communicates his great enthusiasm for the uṣummu from a neighboring town he had recently tasted, demonstrated that this animal was also highly prized in the Old Babylonian period. The apparent businessman Šamaš-nāṣir writes.

5. ʾiš-tu ṭaTu-ur- dU-gul-lā[k]1
7 ʿu-šu-um-mi Tu-tu-ma-gir
rū-šē-bi-la-am-ma
6 a-na dUTU-la-ma-sā-šu za-mar-da-bi-im
uš-ta-bi-il

10. ʾiš-te-en a-na a-ka-li-ia
ak-la-ma-a
ma-di-iš DU₁₀-ab
ki-ma DU₁₀-bu lu-ū i-de-e
mi-im-ma-an a-na dUTU-la-ma-sā-šu

15. ū-ul ū-šē-bi-il
a-nu-um-ma ūp-pi uš-ta-bi-la-ku
i-nu-ma a-na Tu-ur- dU-gul-lā[k]
lu-ra-du a-na NU-ʾaš KIRI₆ ša a-ša-ri-iš
wa-aš-bi qa-bi-ma

20. 15 ū-šu-um-mi i-na qa-qa-rī
li-šē-lu-nim-maš ṣu-bi-lam

Tutu-māgīr sent me
7 n.
from Tur-Ugalla

6 I sent on
to Šamaš-lamasāšu, the
‘zabardab’ official).

Just one I kept
to eat myself,
and it tasted excellent!
Had I known how good
they were,
I’d not have sent a single one
to Šamaš-lamasāšu!

Now, as to why I’m writing:
When you go down to
Tur-Ugalla, tell the orchardist
who lives there
he should dig up 15 n.
for me and send them here.

35 A. Bongenaar – M. Jursa, Ein babylonischer Mäusefänger, WZKM 83 [1993] 31–38. The text contains the record of an apprenticeship of an apparently young man contracted to the office of the royal uṣummu hunter (ʰa-ʾi-ri šu-um-me-e ša LUGAL). This man was to deliver 50 n.-rodents yearly to (the temple E-babbar of the sun god) Šamaš as the work quota of his young charge, with a penalty clause requiring payment of 1000 n. should he not meet this quota.

36 See his edition of the text TCL 17 Paris 1933, 13 (AO 6323), in MAOG 15/II, 15.

37 M. Stol has argued in BiOr. 31 [1974] 222–223 that the use of the Š-stem of the verb elū, “to cause to rise” “to bring up” should be understood metaphorically for “to find” “to provide quickly” and is thus not proof that the uṣummu were burrowers; Stol admits, however, that the situation in TCL 17 13, is ambiguous. The letter cited in the following note, the Sumerian proverb 6.43 = 11.26 (see below, fn.51), and the evidence supporting an identification of the animal with the bandicoot rat, appear to lend more credence here to the traditional translation “dig up”
A damaged text from Old Babylonian Ur seems to attest to similar instructions, and a recently published letter from the Mari archives demonstrates that the 'reed thicket' rodents were also in circulation in Syria at this time.

\[\text{[ù-šu-um-m]i ša₂ \text{i ši-ip-ri-ku-nu}}\]
\[\text{[la-a] uš-ta-bi-la-k[u]m} \]
\[\text{[i-na ša] at-tim an-ni-tim u-šu-um-mu} \]
\[\text{[ma-di-iš wa-aq-ru]} \]

[The u.(??)] which I couldn’t send you with your messengers. this year the u. are very expensive.\(^{39}\)

The Babylonian tradition of consuming \textit{ušummu} is also rather well attested in the neo-Sumerian period of the end of the 3rd millennium. Nine accounts demonstrate that the rodent formed part of regular offerings made to ranking gods of the Sumerian pantheon as well as part of festive meals of the Ur III kings. In the first,\(^{40}\) a measure of honey and numbers of animals are listed followed by their respective silver equivalent values and together qualified as \textit{nēśag}: En 1 i1 lā, “n.-offering of Enlil” in Nippur. The lines rev 1 f. read.

9 pēš gi₈
kù bi i gi 6 gál 4 še

9 ‘reed thicket’ rodents, the silver equivalent: \(\frac{1}{6}\) (shekel), 4 grains.\(^{41}\)

\(^{38}\) UET 5 (1953) 69, ll. 8’-13’: \textit{um-ma šu-un-û-ru} \textit{u-šu-um-ma} \textit{u-li-a[m]} \textit{x-ni le-qê an-ni-a-am ni-le-qê šum-ma i-na ki-tîm a-hu-ni at-ta. ..}, “they said: ‘bring up the \textit{ušummu} and take ..! We’ll take them. If you are really our brother. ’” The correspondence between Sumu-Dagan and his father in the Old Babylonian text CT 29 (1910) 20, BM 97031 (= A. Ungnad, VAB 6, Leipzig 1914, no. 137; AbB 2, Leyden 1966, 151), shows that the field rodent \textit{harirnu} was equally prized at the time: \textit{a-šar PÊ.SA.SÁ.GA i-ba-at-šu-û 1 šu-û PÊ.SA.SÁ.GA a-bi ši-ma-am mar-šû-as-šû li-id-di-in-û ma 1 šu-û PÊ.SA.SÁ.GA a-bi li-sà-bi-lam-ma} (ll. 10-15), “Wherever you find the field rodents, pay any price and send me 60 of them!” (Sumu-Dagan, disappointed by his father’s inaction, reminded him of his request in a letter written the following year; cf. CT 33, 24, BM 97115 (= VAB 6. no. 138; AbB 2, 179)).

\(^{39}\) J.-M. Durand, Archives épistolaires de Mari I/1, Paris 1988 (ARM 26), pp. 215f., no. 75. The author states p. 216, n. e), that “il s’agit manifestement d’un commerce de peaux.” This may be a judgment derived not from this text but rather from other Mari letters mentioning the \textit{nišummu}, of which there are said to be several. Babylonian evidence points, however, to the consumption of the animal’s meat. The text cited in the following fn. demonstrates that the animals themselves, and not merely their pelts, were probably exchanged in Ur III Nippur.

\(^{40}\) H. Sauren, MVN 2, Rome 1974, 24, dated to Shulgi 39 and sealed by the scribe Lugal.ezen.

\(^{41}\) The uneven equivalence of \(\frac{3}{7}\) grains of silver per animal, or about \(47\frac{1}{2}\) animals per shekel, suggests, first, the ‘price’ was determined in an \textit{ad hoc} fashion, and second that the animals were not excessively expensive, although, by means of comparison, some 10 kg of the high protein smoked fish \(k_u₅, še₅\) dealt with in some detail in delivery accounts and trade agent ledgers from the provinces of Umma and Girsu could be had for the same silver equivalent as that set for one pēš gi rodent; cf. R. Englund, BBVO 10, Berlin 1990, pp. 182–192.
Similarly, a second text from Umma dated to the 5th year of Amar-Suen registers various amounts of different types of dried fruits, dairy products, fish, and

\[\frac{1}{3} \text{sáh}^g_i \text{gi} \quad \frac{1}{3} \text{boar} \text{('reed thicket' pig),} \]
\[\frac{3}{4} \text{péš}^g_i \text{gi} \quad \frac{3}{4} \text{‘reed thicket’ rodents,} \]
\[\frac{5}{6} \text{úga}^\text{mušen} \quad \frac{5}{6} \text{raven,} \]

\text{níd̆ba} \text{‘En lîl lâ} \quad \text{níd̆ba-} \text{offering of Enlil.}^{42}

A third account from Umma registers

\[\frac{2}{3} \text{péš}^g_i \text{gi} \quad \frac{2}{3} \text{‘reed thicket’ rodents,} \]
\[30 \text{sumâš} \text{kù}_6 \text{KWU 858i} \quad 30 \text{KWU 858 containers of sumâš fish,} \]
\[115 \text{kù}_6 \text{sag kēš} \quad 75 \text{fish bundles,} \]

\text{níd̆ba} \text{‘Suën} \quad \text{níd̆ba-} \text{offering of Suen.}^{43}

Two parallel texts from Ur qualify a ‘reed thicket’ rodent bound for the table of the king (Ibbi-Sin) as “grain-fed”, “fattened” (sign ŠE = nígä) and thus imply that these rodents were not only caught and eaten, but were also domesticated or at least held, probably in pens in some way made impervious to gnawing, and fattened.\(^{44}\) This implicit statement is proven by two texts from Girsu. The first account\(^{45}\) records the daily feeding schedules of a number of farm animals known to have been kept in the stockyards of temple households to be fattened for offerings. Following standard Sumerian accounting practice of beginning with the largest amounts, the text lists measures of \(1\frac{1}{2}\) and \(1\text{ sīla}\) of grain fed each day to sheep and goats, then listing large

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42 Y. Nakahara, The Sumerian Tablets in the Imperial University of Kyoto, Kyoto 1928, no. 19, ll. rev 3–7. The point of recording fractions of these animals, particularly of rodents and birds, is not obvious (\(2\frac{1}{2}\) rodents are also booked in AnOr 1, 190, 13\(\frac{1}{3}\) in MVN 16, 739; see the following fn.); certainly the seemingly exaggerated exactness of many of the Ur III accounts, for example, the inclusion of fractions of grains \((\frac{1}{180}\)th shekel) of silver in trade agent accounts or of \((\frac{1}{180}\)th and even \((\frac{1}{360}\)th)th workday in labor accounts (cf. R. Englund, JESHO 31 [1988] 173–176) make a possibly artificial division of sacrificial offerings imaginable.

43 AnOr 1, Rome 1931, 190, obv ii 21–28; compare similarly MVN 16, Rome 1994, 739 rev 18. UET 3, London 1937 102 obv 5 and 141 obv 6. The nínimm is followed in both accounts by an entry recording one péš ìgigûn nígä, a fattened, speckle-faced barma rodent also known from texts of this period; cf. fn. 49 below. A third text, AnOr 1, 242, l. 12, registers similar foodstuffs provided for the temple of Amar-Suen in Umma; these are doubtless sacrificial offerings for the cult of the dead king.

45 ITT 3, 6415; since the account lacks a colophon, it may have been either incomplete or a school exercise.
birds with between $\frac{2}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ sila each, smaller birds with less, and ending with an entry of 17 pēš, each being fed $\frac{1}{15}$ sila 4 shekels, approximately 40 grams\footnote{Assuming the neo-Sumerian sila held about 1 liter and based on the specific weight of 0.6 of barley. The source of W. Heimpel’s ‘10 grains’ (RA 7 607) is not obvious.} of grain per day. These can only have been the same rodents qualified pēš gis gī in the second text, which registers 129 of these animals being fattened at the time of the account.\footnote{C. Virolleaud and M. Lambert, Tablettes économiques de Lagash, Paris 1968, no. 95 (= C. Virolleaud, Comptabilité chaldéenne, Poitiers 1903, 34; cf. M. Lambert, RA 57 [1963] 215, Vir 351), dated to the first month of Ibbi-Sin 2.} 40 grams of barley is an amount which an animal would have ingested daily with a live weight of three or four hundred grams or more, i.e., on the order of a guinea pig or a large rat.\footnote{As with other fattening animals, it is difficult to judge in what fashion grain was consumed about 50 grams a day.} No such information is available concerning the size of other rodents which were eaten in Mesopotamia.\footnote{The rodent called pēš i gi  gūn, Akk. barmu (‘speckle-faced’) is mentioned in the context of meat exploitation in two Ur III period texts. The first (TCL 2, Paris 1911, 5528), an apparently incomplete account from Drehem of animals for offerings in a form parallel to those cited above, records rev. ii 4: 25 pēš i gī gūn. The second (B. Böck – R. Boehmer, Zwei neusumerische Tontafeln aus Uruk, BagM 23 [1992] 82–84, W 25046), a receipt from Uruk dated to Ibbi-Sin 3, confirms the delivery of 10 (?) such rodents. Two Old Babylonian letters mention numbers of the field mice pēš a šā gā = ū r r i r u (‘burrower’) requested by the son of the addressee (s. fn. 38 above). A cultic proscription of the eating of the ‘roof’ rodent pēš gis u r a = arrabu on the 1st or 7th of the month tāṣitu (R. Labat, Hémérologies et ménologies d’Assur, pp. 168–172, to KAR 177 rev. ii 14 and rev. iii 18 = KAR 147 obv. 8 and rev 8 = ND 5545 [P. Hulin, Iraq 21, 45–53] obv 8 and rev. 7; in all three witnesses, the animal is written ār-riba/ra-ab UR in the first line, PES.UR(RA) in the second) demonstrates that they too were eaten. Finally, Assyrian texts document festive and cultic meals including the jerboa (?) akbaru (pēš k i bāl), according to one of which (D. Wiseman, Iraq 14 [1952] 24–44, cf. p. 35, l. 114) Assurnasirpal had 10,000 such mice served up as one of many dishes to celebrate the completion of his palace at Nimrud.} 

Three Sumerian literary passages offer some additional information about the appearance and habitat of the ‘reed thicket’ rodent. In the first, the moon god Suen includes among a long inventory of gifts he has brought to present to Enlil in Nippur

\[
\text{pēš gis gī nī g kūn su₄ kūn su₄ dā 'reed thicket' rodents with long tails,}
\]
\[
d\text{Ašīm babbar (} \text{[}d\text{Na]nnna will I, Ashimbabbar/Nanna-Suen,}
\]
\[
d\text{Suen me en ū ū māni ib ib gul gul feed (him).} \text{\footnote{Cf. A. Sjöberg, Der Mondgott Nanna-Suen in der sumerischen Überlieferung 1, Uppsala 1960, 150: 24f., and A. Ferrara, Nanna-Suen’s Journey to Nippur, Rome 1973 (StPohl SM 2) 68: 275f. The translation assumes that ū ū gūl is a verbal correspondence to the substantive ū ū gāl, “food” “feed”}}
\]
There’s a Rat in my Soup!

The Sumerian proverbs 6.43 = 11.26 and 6.45 seem to refer to the same animal infesting reed thickets, with the admonition that filling the canals at the wrong time will attract rodents

6.43 a DU gib gi a nam mu nú dē en pēš gi-ga ke₄ [íg u₇ gu₇ dē en]
Don’t lie down in the reed thicket, the ‘reed thicket’ rodents will eat you up!\(^{51}\)

6.45 i₇ da a na an dé e en pēš bi âm e₁₁ dē
Don’t pour water into the canal, its rodents will come out!\(^{52}\)

These texts offer the following information about this rodent:
1) Its natural habitat is presumably the reed thickets found along the courses of the Babylonian canal network and the southern swamps, also probably burrowing and living in underground nests.
2) Its primary interest to the Babylonians seems to have been its meat, particularly prized for festive meals, skin/pelt may have been of economic interest.
3) It was apparently domesticated and kept in herds in the Ur III period and fed or fattened with 40 g of barley per day; live weight thus perhaps ca. one pound.
4) It could have a long tail.

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\(^{51}\) Only two of the witnesses to this and the following proverb are published: 6.43 = SLTN 147 obv 5, and SLT 189, obv 1-4, 6.45 = SLTN 147 obv 7 and SLT 189, obv 7f. The numbers cited follow the new edition of the proverbs by B. Alster, The Proverbs of Sumer (Leyden, forthcoming), to whom I am indebted for this information; the old reference number was 6.21 = 11.18’ s. E. Gordon; Festschrift Struve, Moscow 1962, 229. The first word, read by M. Civil, AuOr. 5, 23 a. rā and understood as “path,” has the variant ʼa⁷ šē in SLTN 147 and so is read by Alster a ša₄ (no translation offered). The element ke₄ of the second line is found in only one witness of 11.26, so that a referent burmāmu of the Sumerian name cannot be excluded.

\(^{52}\) The number, following B. Alster, Proverbs (see the preceding fn.), was previously 6.23’ for which cf. E. Gordon, op. cit. Compare M. Civil, JCS 32 [1980] 169 to 3N T 232 + 244: pa₅ gib kir₅ ke₄ a na.an tum/nig ki i gāl “The ditch of the orchard should not carry water, there will be vermin!” and A. Cavigneaux and Farouk al-Rawi, Iraq 55 [1993] 100, Haddad 77 obv 6f: “pā sa⁷ kae na a.b.tu un/nig KU a₁ [gā a₁] pa-at A.SÅ ne-e i-šul i-ma-ta-ar x [ ] i-ha-š-I (the syllabically written Sumerian would correspond to pa₅ aš₄ ga a na a.b tūm nīg ki a₁.gāl). I do not understand the riddle edited by Civil, AuOr. 5, 23: [b]āra.gani nu šub ba mu-ni nu pā da/i’ digir’ nam lú lu- gin, šu ba an ka-re [k]jī bū-bi pēš gi, translated by Civil “Its throne (platform; Civil: underground nest, in a place where it cannot be toppled?) does not fall down; its name is not invoked, it steals from god as well as from man. Answer: the canebrake mouse.”
Most commentators have followed B. Landsberger’s identification in Fauna 107 of the *uṣummu* with a form of the common dormouse.⁵³ These members of the family Myoxidae are small, arboreal animals who prefer to feed on fruit and nuts. None of these characteristics seem to fit with what we know about the *uṣummu*. This rodent should be found in the reed thickets, most likely living underground in the dikes of canals and other dredged waterways, it should be larger than a black rat of normal size (100–200 grams), and, of course, it should be native to Mesopotamia, at least at the time of written records from the middle of the 3rd millennium.

Since there is no record of the existence of the black or the brown rat (*Rattus rattus* and *norvegicus*, respectively) in Mesopotamia, and the jerboa would scarcely be kept and fed in captivity,⁵⁴ the most likely candidate which would fill at least most of these conditions is the bandicoot⁵⁵ or mole rat (*Bandicota indica*) of the family Muridae, native to India and Sri Lanka. These burrowing rodents range from 1 to 3 pounds, with tails from 6 to 12 inches long. A related

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⁵³ German ‘Schläferart’ (‘Haselmaus’ ‘Siebenschläfer’ ‘Gartenschläfer’; English name presum-ably related to French dormir); cf., for example, K. Butz, BiOr. 34 [1977] 284, fn. 27; W von Soden, GAG § 55q s. *parus*, AHw 1443; this zoological identification was questioned by M. Civil, *A&O*, 5, 24 (who, however, notes the weakness of the Romans for fattened dormice kept in special gliaria; see also E. Alfoldi-Rosenbaum, *Das Kochbuch der Römer*, Zürich 1970, p. 92).

⁵⁴ There is some confusion about the rodents called by the Arabs *gerbā‘* or *gerbil* and *iarbū‘*. The desert jerboas (*iarbū‘*) Jaculus jaculus are the nocturnal rodents often mentioned in travel reports to be hopping in the Rover’s lights during night travel through the desert (bounding up to two feet vertically; cf., for example, D. Harrison, *The Mammals of Arabia III*, 415ff.; R. Hatt, *The Mammals of Iraq*, 82; J. Kirmiz, *Adaptation to Desert Environment. A Study on the jerboa, Rat and Man*, London 1962). In the Gezira, the desert jerboa, which can reach a body length of 5 or 6 inches, are hunted – dug up – by boys in the months June through October and are eaten communally (L. Stein, *Die Sammar-Gerba: Beduinen im Übergang vom Nomadismus zur Seßhaftigkeit, Berlin 1967* 83, 97). Their size, habitat and the apparent difficulty keeping them make these rodents unlikely candidates for our ‘reed thicket’ rodent, leaving aside consideration of the very meager osteo-archaeological evidence for their use by Babylonians. Since Fauna, 109, the jerboa has been equated with the *akbam = pēs kī bāl*. The gerbils *Gerbillus* sp. and *Tatera* sp. should be excluded for other reasons. Gerbillus cheesesmani or dasyurus are smaller still than the desert jerboa and so unlikely to have been fed the amounts known from the Ur III documents; I am also aware of no report of their being eaten in modern times (cf. D. Harrison, *Gerbils from Iraq*, with a Description of a New Gerbil, *Journal of Mammalogy* 37 [1956] 417–442). Neither *Tatera* bailwardi, according to F. Bodenheimer, *Animal and Man in Bible Lands*, Leyden 1960, 110, the most common field mouse of central Iraq, nor *Tatera indica*, known as the antelope rat or Indian gerbil (skeletal remains of this latter rat have been found in Uruk and Jarmo, and in Persian Deh Luran, Farukhabad and Shahr-i Sokhta; the large nocturnal gerbil can reach 8 inches body length, but cannot be domesticated) are eaten.

⁵⁵ Said to grunt like a pig, the rat’s name derives from the Dravidian Telugu pandi-koku (‘pig-rat’).
short-tailed bandicoot, Nesokia indica, is found throughout southwestern Asia and may have entered the Mesopotamian alluvium very early, having crossed or been brought over from its Indian origins during the 4th or 3rd millennium. The animal reported in some literature under the name Nesokia (indica) buxtoni, is a typical reed-eater widespread in the riverine plains of Iraq and Palestine today, its burrows “a frequent sight along banks of irrigation channels and amongst camel thorn shrubs near the water.” It is regarded as a particular delicacy by Iraqi Bedouin.

Unfortunately, rodent populations migrate very rapidly both overland and as the result of trade contacts, so the current presence of particular animals could indicate a native population as well as a recent arrival. Moreover, while the discoveries of skeletal remains of animals or other concrete indications from archaeological excavations have, in particular in more recent undertakings, resulted in the identification of a broad spectrum of ancient fauna in Mesopotamia, remains of burrowing rodents which can dig through strata representing hundreds and thousands of years are extremely difficult to date. A firm dating of such remains seems possible when, for example, the charred bones of rodents are found in or next to a hearth where they had been prepared for a meal or are found in a burn level of a building. Another means of dating rodent bones is available with finds of such remains in owl pellets or dung balls of other animals, or even in the stomach of a predator. While these ideal conditions have not been met with bandicoot remains, the multiple finds of such rats in Near Eastern excavations, and some indications that not all will

56 D. Harrison, The Mammals of Arabia III, 497. R. Hatt, The Mammals of Iraq, 86f., states that the “earths of these rodents were common in cultivated areas near Baghdad and Basra.”
58 Such skeletal remains were also rarely gathered, since the necessary sieving or filtration which would catch small bones from excavations is usually considered too labor and, of course, water intensive. This failing skews the results of faunal analyses of excavation finds in favor of large mammals and birds. See, for example, S. Payne, Partial Recovery and Sample Bias: The Results of Some Sieving Experiments, in: E. Higgs (ed.), Papers in Economic Prehistory, Cambridge 1972, 49–64, and Payne’s remarks in A. Clason (ed.), Archazoological Studies, Amsterdam-Oxford 1975, 13. For an overview of the uses to which carefully excavated rodent finds can be put, see R. Redding, Rodents and the Archaeological Paleoenvironment: Considerations, Problems, and the Future, in: R. Meadow – M. Zeder (eds.), Approaches to Faunal Analysis in the Middle East, Cambridge 1978 (Peabody Museum Bulletin 2) 63–67.
59 J. Boessneck – A. von den Driesch, Ein Katzen Skelett der Römerzeit aus Quseir (Koscr) am Roten Meer, Spixiana 6 [1983] 211–218 (in English in JAS 10 [1983] 205–211), report having identified the skeleton of a large male domestic Roman cat which, shortly before its death, “had eaten at least 6 rats (Rattus rattus), remains of which were found in the stomach and in dung balls.”
have been late intrusions, make at least plausible the existence of these animals in ancient times.

I was first made aware of this problem with the reported find of a lower jaw of one bandicoot among the tablets and other faunal remains excavated in the mound of Abū Salābikh by the University of Chicago team working at Nippur; the age of this bone could not be determined. A similar report of bandicoot remains was made from the English excavations of Ur and from recent excavations of Uruk and Isin. While all of these finds may have been later intrusions – the bandicoot can burrow up to 6 meters – the aridity of the deserted tells, and finds of the very early occurrence of bandicoot rats elsewhere in the Near East support their early appearance in Mesopotamia.

Cultural assessments may make the consumption of rodents seem no more appealing than that of insects or worms, westerners generally associate them

60 The finds were first analyzed at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, cf. R. Biggs, JCS 20 [1966] 74, fn.11, and id., The Inscriptions from Tell Abū Salābikh, Chicago 1974 (OIP 99) 19, fn.2. Subsequent study of the bones by A. von den Driesch in preparation of her publication of the fish bones in the collection confirmed the find of bandicoot, but could not determine whether the bones had been deposited already in antiquity (personal communication).


63 F. Hole – K. Flannery – J. Neely, Prehistory and Human Ecology of the Deh Luran Plain, Ann Arbor 1969 (Memoirs of the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Michigan 1), 319–321, mention two bandicoot mandibles from Ali Kosh which were found within the depth range of these animals, but which were both stained the same mahogany brown as the other faunal remains of the same levels and so seemed to be "redeposited specimens disturbed in ancient times, not modern intrusions" (recent intruders were recognized by "their pale white color, their articulated condition, and often by their accompanying seed catches"). See also D. Kock – I. Nader, Pygmy Shrew and Rodents from the Near East, Senkenbergiana Biologica 64 [1983] 18 (remains of sub-adult Nesokia indica myosura found in owl pellets from Qa’llar-Rahba); L. Caloi – B. Compagnoni, I Mammiferi, in: G. Tucci (ed.), La città’ bruciata del deserto salato, Venice 1977 188–190 (report on rodent finds from Shahr-i Sokhta, Iran, ca. 3200–1800 B.C.; English translation p. 206); H. Wright (ed.), An Early Town on the Deh Luran Plain. Excavations of Tepe Farukhabad, Ann Arbor 1981 (Memoirs of the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Michigan 13), 255; P. Robinson, Fossil Occurrence of a Murine Rodent (Nesokia indica) in the Sudan, Science 154 [1966] 264; O. Thomas, A New Species of Nesokia from Mesopotamia, Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 26 [1919] 422f.
with canalization, with refuse and the transmission of disease. In another environment, without our history of rat-carried plagues, these animals are not only prized, but are often an easily accessible and highly efficient source of protein. Indeed, the New Scientist recently reported that rat soup with a score of 70 eggs = 100) would equal mutton broth as a source of high-quality protein, beating chicken, whale and soybean!

Yet we know that the Romans prized the meat of rodents (see fn. 53 above), and that under certain conditions rats were eaten in modern Europe (cf. Anonymous, The Siege Cookbook, or the Art of Living in Times of Siege by a Homemaker, Paris 1871; cited by R. Freedman, Human Food Uses, London 1981, 14, with recipes for dog, horse and rat).
