

CRITICAL REVIEWS

Harriet Martin, Francesco Pomponio, Giuseppe Visicato and Aage Westenholz, *The Fara Tablets in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology*. Bethesda: CDL Press, 2001. Pp. xxvii + 162 + xvi plates.

Reviewed by Robert K. Englund, University of California, Los Angeles

In a most welcome monograph, a group of experts on the Early Dynastic IIIa texts from Shuruppak, modern Fara, have combined their considerable skills to provide, in a form accessible both to specialists and the general reader alike, a gentle introduction to the published record of tablets from the earliest period of truly recognizable Sumerian scribal tradition with a detailed study of a set of Fara period tablets from Philadelphia.

While ostensibly focused on the publication of the collection of Fara tablets excavated by E. Schmidt in 1931 and housed in the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, this volume offers much more. In a short but wide-ranging introduction, the authors lay out for their readers the publication record of ED IIIa texts excavated by the German Oriental Society (DOG) expedition to Fara of 1902-1903 (as well as of those provided through illicit digging, and subsequent antiquities market peddling that plagues such successful tablet exposures). H. Martin criticizes the methods employed in early southern Mesopotamian archaeology, and contrasts the Germans' limited results in recognizing Early Dynastic mud-brick architecture, due above all to their evident haste in moving large volumes of earth in a seven month campaign conducted from

Babylon, with the excavations conducted by Schmidt and his team thirty years later. She drives this point home in her essay on the archaeological context of the Schmidt excavation (pp. 3-16, representing a distillation of her treatment of the same material in *Fara: A Reconstruction of the Ancient City of Shuruppak* [Birmingham 1988], 10-63). Not only were the strata recorded here, but also, for instance, the vessels found in context with tablets, in particular conical bowls, which support an ED IIIa dating for tablets found in the same locus and therefore offer evidence for this chronology beyond the largely paleographical arguments made heretofore. For those who have not read the archaeological details of the excavation in the excavation reports or in Martin's *Fara*, a short introduction into the meaning of the find data would have been helpful. For instance, it will not be clear to everyone reading the current monograph that the find information locating the text no. 35 (F 380) within HI 48 refers to a square of 10×10 meters and therefore to a locus of some generality.

The main body of the manuscript consists of two chapters with editions of tablets excavated (nos. 1-95), and purchased (nos. 96-111) by the University Museum. Pomponio and Visicato have in their *Early Dynastic Administrative Tablets of Suruppak* (Naples 1994) achieved a real improvement in our understanding of the Fara period system of bookkeeping. This advance carries through the pages of the UM publication, including more, for the reviewer startling information about the time metrology of the ED IIIa period. Note in particular the new insights in this book

(*passim*, including Visicato's remarks p. 140) concerning the still enigmatic bala entries closing numerous Fara accounts, and the discussion of possibly the earliest attested month names in cuneiform texts, in pages 93–96, together with an edition of the highly intriguing text TSS 882. These pages should be noted to M. Cohen's *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda: CDL, 1993).

The authors have attempted to clarify many of the questions posed in the Philadelphia corpus with reference to the major DOG publications. Nonetheless, it is incumbent upon editors of cuneiform to follow convention and cite texts according to their original editions unless their collations have resulted in new readings of tablets. We as a rule want to consult the hand copies of texts and not transliterations if at all possible, so that the rule here of citing where possible for instance EDATŠ 117 instead of NTSS 496 forces us first to look up the corresponding original publication in EDATŠ, if at hand, to go to the original. Editors should at least offer the reader both references.

The system of numerical notations is not mature in the present volume. It is assumed for unclear reasons that all cereal capacity measures are based on the NI-ga/lid₂-ga system, but without obvious conventions on the part of the editors how these are to be interpreted (for the reading see M. Powell, *RIA* 7, 495). So in text no. 26 it seems to be assumed that the intention was n NI-ga x (bariga) y (ban₂), then in the following text according to third millennium standards n y(bariga) še NI-ga (where NI-ga corresponds to gur [+qualification]; the same inconsistencies occur for instance in texts 52ff. and 55ff.). In the same vein, it is difficult to understand the translations of such metrological notations in the volume. 2(aš) 2(bariga) 1(ban₂) še [lid₂-ga] in no. 28 obv. I 1 is given as “2(Niga) and 130 (sila) of barley” where no sila₃ is found in the text. Whether or not the gur-mah of 8 bariga (480 sila₃) was favored in grain accounts recording rations and seed as opposed to a lid₂-ga used in private transactions and irregular barley distributions, including the UM Fara texts published here (see p. 35 with reference to EDATŠ, p. 183) is an open question.

Administrative witnesses to such a practice in the Fara period are very sparing, and it seems contradicted by the author's own references to seed allocations in TSS 160, 209, 210 and 684 (his EDATŠ nos. 52–55).

One would have to call the autographs published in this volume a mixed blessing. Certainly the interpretive eye of the specialist behind the copies is to be welcomed; however, the evident distortions in most of the copies in chapter 1 relative to the physical reality represented by corresponding photos (chapter 2 texts much better) is disturbing, as is the apparent use of poorly transmitted copies of old publications in several cases, including nos. 95–96, and the general impression that all cuneiform images were scanned for publication at low resolution with consequently disturbing pixelation (note for instance the strong grayscale pixelation in nos. 18–19, line art pixelation in no. 20). The same is true of the archaeological figures pp. 3–14. Moreover, the reviewer has stated elsewhere his conviction that text editions should include, at a minimum, full information about the obverse and reverse surfaces of cuneiform tablets. How this is done should be left to the individual editors, but it should be obvious that a copyist need invest little of his time in completing autographs (electronically, or in form of hand drawings) of presumably uninscribed or destroyed surfaces. Must the reader assume in all cases in which no information whatsoever is offered about the reverse surfaces of copied tablets, for example no. 80 on p. 61, that that surface is uninscribed? And if really uninscribed, how much effort will it cost the editor to *make that drawing*? I state this here because where we are given the opportunity through photo collation, for instance of text no. 78 on p. 59, to confirm the statement that this tablet's obverse is destroyed, the photo on pl. IX gives the strong impression of containing traces of both numerical and ideographic signs.

The volume closes with a number of fine essays and indices, including Pomponio's reference list of all divine names found in DOG and UM administrative texts (with cross references to their respective cult centers and Fara god list entries;

pp. 103–14), Visicato’s short description of the administrative organization of Shuruppak (pp. 115–24), his detailed prosopography of Fara sale contracts (pp. 139–62), and an index of proper nouns (but not Sumerian lexemes; pp. 131–35). The CDLI (<http://cdli.ucla.edu/>) is committed through its partnership with the University Museum to present an online image dataset of all third millennium tablets in their collection that will better document the tablets published here than was possible with the black-and-white photos in the plates I–XVI.

The Fara Tablets represents, despite its technical flaws, a major new tool for specialists involved in the continuing analysis of the ED IIIa corpus of texts. We are grateful to the volume’s authors for this work, and to M. Cohen and CDL Press for their support of cuneiform studies.

Cross references in the manuscript evidently got mixed up in the final editorial process with the addition somewhere of four new pages. Although the reader will easily—and will have to—reorient himself and find the correct pages, I have noted the incorrect references below. Some of the transliteration corrections here will appear petty, but are made to insure that our archival files are corrected. A final editorial check would have eliminated a large number of inconsistencies in the transliterations, for instance the sequence of numerical notation—counted object—metrological qualification (n še lid₂-ga, or n siki ma-na) that is from text to text different, or the method of identifying in transliteration numerical iterations (here “90,” there “60 + 10×3”).

- pp. x–xvii: It is not obvious why the editors have not included headers in the continuing table.
- p. xxiff.: *HANE* following Akkad, *IUN* following *EDATŠ*, *WVDOG* following *LAK*, and so on, are missing in the *list of abbreviations*.
- p. xxv: correct in n. 1 to “see below, p. xxvi.”
- p. xxvii: grain and “products made of grain” (not byproducts).
- p. 4: To underscore the rushed nature of the DOG excavations of 1902–1903, H. Martin makes the point that one cubic meter of soil was moved per man-day, and that only five months into the excavations were finds recorded from houses. Few excavation numbers or other original location information are currently available from that campaign, both because such information would have been lost in Istanbul firings, and, as Martin states, because the original editors Deimel and Jestin were “philologists” with little or no interest in original archives. It might be noted to the physical labor of the Iraqi crews involved in the early Fara work that the *norm* for upper level canal excavators in the Ur III period ca. 2100–2000 B.C., was 1/6 volume-sar, or ca. 3 cubic meters per day, of course without the necessity of sifting.
- p. 18: What is a bilateral tablet?
- pp. 25ff.: It is not clear why in all cases (nos. 1, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15) where the initial numerical sign of entries in this series of parallel documents is missing, it is defaulted to “1.” Further, the personal name understood to mean “her bosom [is good]” is transliterated ur-NI about half the time, and there is an irregular use of brackets to indicate restored text (cp. for instance nos. 10 and 12).
- p. 29: Note to text 11: “o. I 3” and “infra, p. 114” are meant.
- p. 30: Note to text 14: “infra, pp. 110–111” is meant.
- p. 31: There is no reason not to translate *udu* here as in all other text corpora of the third millennium with “ovi-caprids.” In the note to no. 16, 45 should be 44; change 61 to 63, 92=?
- p. 32: Texts nos. 17–19 seem to make much better sense when šu-gi₄-a is interpreted as “received by,” an-na-sum as the active finite form.
- p. 33: The copy, and apparently photo of 21 obv. i 3 has “2.” In the note change 108 to 112.
- p. 34: The hand copy of both 23 and 24 (photos illegible) contains gir and not ku₆.
- p. 35: 25 obv. ii 2, hand copy shows 1(ban₂).
- p. 37: 30 obv. ii 1, hand copy shows 1(aš / NI-ga).
- pp. 37–38: The metrological system implied in the transliteration and the translation of text no. 31 is contradicted in the comments on pp. 38 and 127 to the same text, which themselves again contradict the editions of the texts 66–67 and 105 (see the remarks below to pp. 53 and 91).

- p. 38: Note 11: “pp. 125–127” is meant. Both the hand copy and photo of no. 32 obv. ii 2 show 2(ban₂).
- p. 39: Note o. 2’ to text 34a: “p. 109” is meant.
- p. 40: The meaning of *LAK* 20 is unclear. Note that the use of the sign AŠ-tenû in the text *WF* 126 to qualify *LAK* 20 suggests that the sign represents young animals, thus probably “kids,” and we may wonder whether, indeed, text 35 counts just these animals rather than amounts of grain.
- p. 41: Note 14, *AOAT* vol. 240 (*Fs. Von Soden*) is meant.
- p. 42: Text no. 39 obv. i 1, [NI-ga] is neither necessary, nor likely.
- p. 43: Text no. 40 obv. I 2: the copy offers an apparently incorrect MUNU₄ for BU = su₁₃ (and note that the editors list another attestation of the personal name in text 55 of this volume). Delete “3. (blank)” in 41 obv. ii.
- p. 45: The sign AN was not included in the copy of 48 obv. ii 2.
- p. 48: The notation 1(aš) 3(diš) of 56 obv. ii 1 seems a highly unusual method of recording the “13th (day),” where the position of the numerical signs relative to the sign U₄ should have grapho-semantic significance.
- p. 51: The copy (and apparently photo, pl. VI) of 61 obv. i 1 has BI instead of GA. Is the “ziz₂” of line 3 actually gug₂?
- p. 53: The liquid metrology of nos. 66–67 recording as little as a thirtieth of a sila₃ appears, employing a system mirroring the standard system of dry grain capacity, suspicious (1/30 sila₃ would, following the absolute measures adopted by the editors, correspond to 33 ml, or about two sips of your morning coffee). See the remarks below to p. 91, text 105. In the note to no. 66 obv. i 1, “pp. 125–27” is meant; to obv. ii 1, if traces of the sign ŠAR were recognized, these should be visible in the copy.
- p. 57: Text 74 obv. i 1: BI/kaš and DUG are not interchangeable in the Fara period.
- p. 59: Is the interpretation of TAR = “1/2” credible? And what does “1/2 of a barley beverage” mean?
- p. 61: Copy of no. 81 obv. ii 1 omits number sign.
- p. 62: I cannot follow the discussion of the form of the signs GI₍₄₎ and DU in the texts 81 and 83. Neither the peculiar positioning of the oblique wedges of the GI stalks, nor the curved impression of DU, would be compatible with archaic forms, but *would* be good indications of poorly accomplished signs.
- p. 63: Obv. ii 5: unu₃(d)/utul should be AB₂KU (photo illegible).
- p. 64: The hand copy of the numerical notations in text no. 83 bears only a passing resemblance to the impressions of the photo on pl. X. Since we cannot know what really is being counted, it would be advisable to reconsider whether the impressions of obv. i 3–4 were not after all, following the copy, bariga-like signs of an unclear numero-metrological system. The photo seems to confirm 2(diš) of obv. ii 5. The translation “talent” of gu₂ seems contradicted by both transliteration gu₂-u₂, and by the commentary to that entry.
- p. 66: The copy of 1(u) in the second column of 85 is presumably to be lowered to the second case.
- p. 67: The transliteration should be made to correspond to the correct copy of the lower case, which spans both columns, as noted in the commentary. The translation in text 88 of “net” for si-NU×U (not šuš) that goes back to M. Civil, *AuOr* 5 (1987) 313, has no serious foundation (nor is it apparently accepted here p. 120). It is, however, interesting that this text is now the earliest attestation of this product, delivered by ED IIIb sea fishermen together with turtles. The sign sag represents a metrological qualification, as shown by the texts J. Marzahn, *VS* 25, 62, and *ITT* 5, 9231 (see the reviewer’s *Ur III-Fischerei* [=BBVO 10; Berlin 1990] p. 98 n. 314).
- p. 71: Text 93 obv. 2: the form of the first sign would be that of ba. Without recourse to a photo, it is not possible to determine whether the transliterations of fifth units of gur (why the change here to this system of notation?) is correct; the copy shows units of ban₂.

- pp. 72–74: The edition of the Ur III text no. 94 is inadequate and must be re-edited elsewhere. Certainly the summation rev. 17 is to be read ŠU+NIGIN₂ 1(geš₂) 2(u) 7 guruš zi-ga and all entries to be considered records of the assignments of the workmen, in the initial cases to plowing/harrowing teams. Both this and the preceding text seem ill-suited for inclusion in this volume dedicated to the ED IIIa period.
- pp. 77–78: Copy obv. i 6: NI is missing, ii 3: sign is tuš/dur₂; the transliteration obv. ii 2 reads 2 siki ma-na here, but 2 ma-na siki in the following text; translation obv. i 3: “1 2/3 šar its house.”
- pp. 79–81: The copy and photo show obv. iv 4 giri₃-ne₂-ba-tuš¹; iii 3: the commentary has he₂-abzu; translation of rev. i 9 simply “scribe of the field,” then “80 (/90) sila₃ . . .”
- p. 82: Obv. v 2 “2/3 (gin₂) mana silver” unclear.
- pp. 84ff.: Why do the editors believe that entries recording sexagesimal counts of i₃-nun in their texts 100ff. presume references to sila₃? If that is because of no. 103 obv. i 1 and ii 2 they should say so; however, the product recorded in ii 2 is restored, rev. iii 1’ is only partially preserved.
- p. 85: Obv. ii 1: copy shows 2(bariga); ii 2: read “10 la₂ 1.”
- p. 87: “(destroyed)” should mean destroyed. Obv. iii 3 hand copy shows traces of 1(bariga), rev. iii has traces of several signs that would at least indicate whether the corresponding lines contained milk products or only personal designations. Rev. ii 3 read “10 la₂ 1.”
- p. 89: The source of obv. ii 2’]-nun is not clear; rev. ii’ 3 hand copy shows traces of nun.
- p. 91: The hand copy of no. 105 shows obv. iii 4 traces of “3/5.” It should be noted that this very unusual metrology, if correct, would mirror the division of N₁ into 5 N₃₉ in the proto-cuneiform grain capacity system. However, there is, despite the remarks of the editors p. 126, no way to know whether the unit involved represents 1/6, 1/10 or another subunit of aš, just as 2(bariga) represents 1/2 lid₂-ga. Since, moreover, there appears to be no attestation of “4/5,” but three of “3/5” (67 obv. i 1, 105 obv. i 4, iii 3) and numerous instances of “2/5” and “1/5,” the sign likely represents 1/4 of aš and we might consider whether the entire discussion is superfluous, with in these instances normal Fara grain capacity notations qualified ideographically by the unit of measure, “sila₃,” with a possible archaic meaning of “(liquid) ration.” This would give a certain value symmetry to such entry sequences as 2(lid₂-ga) ba še / 2(lid₂-ga) kaš sila₃ in text no. 107 rev. ii 3–4 (p. 93). Obv. iii 5 shows traces of a further ideogram not noted in the transliteration, and the copy of the reverse contains traces of two signs in two lines of the left column.
- p. 92: The hand copy shows traces of a final sign in obv. i 1’.
- p. 93: The line before obv. v 1’ apparently contains a damaged še; an aš is copied after 4(ban₂) in v 1’; rev. i 2: correct gig₂ to gig; to rev. ii 3–4 see note above to p. 91; 2(ban₂) is copied in the case after rev. iii 3.
- p. 95: “3(Niga) and 180(sila) of barley” is not an adequate translation of 4(lid₂-ga) la₂ 1(bariga) in obv. iv 1’ of this text, unless the volume under review is to be restricted to use by specialists.
- p. 97: Obv. i 4: see notes to pp. 57 and 91 above.
- pp. 98–99: In such cases where entire columns (here obv. i–ii) have been lost since first photographs were made, the original photo should be used in the copying process (pl. XVI; correct there 110 N 541 “rev.” to obv., and to the lower right “obv.” to rev.); the sign AŠ×U is eše₃; the ideographic sign(s) that must have accompanied the field notation in obv. ii 6 is/are missing; the copy of rev. i 3 is a difficult to interpret representation of the signs ZA₇ KUR ZA₇ (ZA₇ is inscribed with two “diš” signs one over the other with strokes drawn through their long axes; see the god list correspondence SF 5 obv. v. 9 cited here p. 114, and the image in the CDLI pages).
- p. 117: Note 13: “provided *for*.”
- p. 118: Note 15: TŠŠ¹ x cited here and in the following indices is located on plates XXXIII–XXXIV of that volume. Note 20: the reference to the de Marcellis tablet cannot be clear

without inclusion here of the publication *Memorial Cagni*, II, no. 1, cited pl. 139.

- p. 125: It is unacceptable to transliterate a sign without a clear referent. The reading gahar_x must therefore include information referring to the sign identification LAK 490 (aside from the unlikelihood that /gahar/ is indeed the pronunciation of this sign; see the reviewer, *OrNS* 64 [1995] 381–82 n. 10 and 385 n. 20). WF 141 (see the image of this text in the CDLI pages) obv. ii 2 has 1(geš₂) 5(u) 1(aš) ni₃-NI LAK 490; obv. ii 4: 2(bariga) 3'(ban₂); rev. i 1: AB₂.KU, “dairyman,” is unu₃(d); rev. ii 1: 1(geš'u) 6(geš₂) 5(u) [la₂ 1(aš)]; rev. ii 3: I see only 2(u) 1(bariga) LAK 490 šu-tag, which makes perfect sense given obv. i 3: 2(u) la₂ (1(bariga) 3(ban₂)) and obv. ii 4 (above). Note that the apparently forced interpretation of Pomponio/Visicato of obv. i 3, based on positive instead of negative 3(ban₂), would make no sense, since that would simply be 2(u) la₂ 3(ban₂).
- p. 126: Last paragraph, correct 106 to 105.
- p. 131: An index of the discussed words would have been helpful here (i.e., AB/eš₃ pp. 25–26, šu-gi₄ p. 26).

Jesper Eidem and Jørgen Læssøe, *The Shemshara Archives Vol. 1: The Letters*, Historisk-filosofiske Skrifter 23, Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2001. Pp. 185 + 88 pls.

Reviewed by Marc Van De Mieroop, Columbia University

The final publication of a group of cuneiform tablets is always a pleasure to the student of ancient Mesopotamia, as primary editions are at the basis of all else we do. The pleasure is even greater when the tablets have been excavated a long time ago and were since then only known through partial publication and references in sundry studies. This volume, by Jesper Eidem and Jørgen Læssøe, contains seventy-five letters, twenty letter fragments, three extremely small

fragments of administrative texts, and 6 sealings. Together with Eidem's 1992 volume of 146 administrative texts, it completes the publication of the Shemshara tablets excavated by Danish and Iraqi archaeologists in 1957 and 1958 respectively. The letters published here have been often quoted, but were never fully known to the scholarly community. It is a pity that we have had to wait this long to see them in their entirety, and unfortunately this is not exceptional in the discipline. That partial knowledge of documentation can lead to misunderstandings is made clear by an example in this volume. On the basis of letter 68, it has been repeatedly stated that Shemshara was a post on the trade route for tin from northwest Iran to Anatolia after the disappearance of the Old Assyrian trade system centered at Kanesh. Other letters first published here (nos. 56 and 57) indicate, however, that tin mentioned there came from the area just west of Shemshara and that no major trade route was involved (cf. pp. 29 and 60).

The publication is very accomplished with a full transliteration and translation of the tablets, short notes, handcopies, and some photographs. The copies were almost all made by Læssøe, but Eidem carefully collated them, on the basis of photographs when he did not have access to tablets housed in Baghdad. By indicating outlines with a thick line, the copies suggest that they represent the tablet shape, but they are not to scale, nor do they provide accurate renderings of the physical appearance (p. 68 n. 61). From the photographs it is clear that the copies are longer and narrower than the actual tablets. The copies of the signs seem mostly accurate, however, and the number of collations is relatively few. Also the philological work is sound, showing great familiarity with the Old Babylonian dialect of northern Mesopotamia in the early second millennium.

This work is preceded by a detailed analysis by Eidem of the geographical and historical context of the letters, a nice piece of work also drawing on his extensive knowledge of the Mari and Leilan material. These letters vividly illuminate a small part of the vast puzzle that the early history of Upper Mesopotamia presents. Although they are undated, they can be placed in a short