


General consensus seems to support dividing the Early Dynastic IIIa period into an earlier Fara phase in the south and a later phase characterized by the texts from the more northerly Abu Salabikh, Kish, and Nippur. Excavators in both regions uncovered cuneiform text artifacts exemplifying non-utilitarian text genres (lexical and literary compositions, and school texts) and texts from the utilitarian administrative and legal spheres. Almost as if in a routine removal of stratigraphic levels of a Mesopotamian ruin mound, first organized campaigns, later supplemented by irregular excavations, returned, for European and North American Assyriological inspection, with text artifacts from Persian, neo-Babylonian, and neo-Assyrian settlements of the first millennium BC, then those of the second, third, and finally fourth millennium.

Looking backwards, presargonic inscriptions from ancient Girsu, however, formed a final chronological stage in the ability of specialists to digest and communicate text content among themselves and to the larger public. Dating to ca. 2500–2350 BC according to the conventional Middle Chronology, these were texts in a largely standardized logo-syllabic writing system employing relatively clear lexical and syntactical conventions. A preponderance of administrative accounts from that phase of writing closely resembled the Sumerian texts of the Ur III period (ca. 2100–2000 BC), and royal inscriptions and dedicatory texts opened new avenues to understanding the earliest high literature of court officials in an otherworldly language.

Excavations at Shuruppak, ancient Fara, conducted in 1902–1903 as a side-operation by the Babylon expedition of the German Oriental Society, recovered some hundreds of tablets dated, mostly on paleographical considerations, to a century before those of the Girsu archives, and, following chronological designations applied by those early archaeologists, were assigned to the ED IIIa period, preceding the ED IIIb texts of Girsu. I say hundreds because, now 115 years after the initial removals from Fara and nearly a century after the WDOG publications of those texts commenced with Anton Deimel’s Liste der archaischen Keilschriftzeichen (1920), Schultexte aus Fara (1923), and Wirtschaftstexte aus Fara (1924), we must still take the word of those few specialists who have been granted access to excavation records and the texts themselves in Berlin and Istanbul, that the grand total from ED IIIa levels of Fara amounts to “well over 1000 administrative clay tablets” (p. 1; elsewhere “just over 1000” and “about 1000”); CDLI currently records a total of 735 such texts, including the 81 published here in WFT II for the first time.

Beyond these administrative accounts lie those texts that aroused the greatest interest in the ED IIIa discoveries, namely, those copies of non-utilitarian lexical lists, of a limited palette of literary compositions, and a fuzzy category of literature in the so-called UD.GAL.NUN cryptographic orthography. The volume under review represents the first in a series of planned publications dedicated to
the administrative records of Fara unearthed in the DOG expedition. It is a dutiful text edition. Horst Steible and Fatma Yildiz offer (pp. 1–6) a general introduction to their purpose: scholarly renditions of all extant administrative texts from the DOG Fara excavations, commencing with what I understand to be volume II of a several volume series entitled Wirtschaftstexte aus Fara.

Pp. 7–124 contain catalogue and transliterations (not a single text translation attempted!) of 170 records, followed (pp. 125–88) by exacting concordances, word indices, and finally (pp. 190–272) with plates of photographs and line art renderings of most of the texts. This series proposes to supersede and incorporate, next to the R. Jestin volumes TSŠ (1937) and NTSS (1957), the 1924 WF entries by Deimel (150 exemplars), adding unpublished (or individually published) texts along the way.

The series excludes consideration of the 111 Fara texts kept in the Penn Museum (96 from the 1931 regular excavations by E. Schmidt; see conveniently my review of H. Martin et al.’s edition of these texts in JCS 54 [2002]: 125–30), and WFT II is dedicated to what seem to be the least difficult of the administrative texts, those recording livestock management by some as yet unidentified central organization. Yet least difficult in ED IIIa texts is to be understood on a scale of incomprehensible to very difficult, and in the end one must conclude that the discipline of Fara studies has so few adherents for good cause: specialists tend to cluster around those archives that best reward efforts to understand their individual witnesses and the administrative or intellectual framework that created them in the first place, and there is precious little reward in texts that lead to translations like “people (who) do not <work> (at the) dyke” (pp. 5 and 49 to no. 29 rev. ii 7).

Taken together, WFT II is a solid piece of scholarship, delivering difficult text transliterations created by an expert with many years of experience, able to reconstruct broken text based on his careful study of parallels. It contains a wealth of evidence on ED IIIa period bookkeeping on equids conceived as teams of four animals and thus assigned to ploughing tasks, as known for both equids and oxen in later periods.

I would defer to the detailed discussion of the volume by F. Pomponio (AuOr 34 [2016]: 379–83, with multiple references to his and G. Visicato’s well received EDATS and its treatment of accounting frameworks in the ED IIIa corpus), and offer here some general remarks about WFT II’s place in Assyriological research. First, a simple technical question: is this a volume II of a new series WF(T) IIff., or is it rather an after-the-fact assignment of “II” to a series that began with the 1924 WF volume by Deimel? It seems to be the former, but p. 1 of the introduction speaks of “WFT I” that naturally corresponds to volume 4 of the WVDOG subseries “Inschriften von Fara” (I = WVDOG 40 = LAK [1922]; II = WVDOG 43 = SF [1923]; III = WVDOG 45 = WF [1923]; IV = WVDOG 143 = WFT II [?; 2015]; V = WFT I [?; unpublished], etc.). Pomponio announced a “big brother” WFT I dedicated to grain and field management, but I am unable to find this reference in our WFT II.

Then second and more importantly, what is the justification of what appears to be an expensive hardbound publication of these 170 cuneiform documents? It is not difficult to estimate the very high costs, not just in terms of editorial work at Harrassowitz, text and image layout, printing press, distribution, but also of flights and rail travel, accommodations and meals of the volume’s main author Steible (despite all the unwashed exigencies of access, it is difficult to have much sympathy with the inclusion of tangentially involved museum staff in author lists; here, Steible even goes so far as to offer [pp. ix–x] a “Preface of the Editors,” but writes and signs it alone), all presumably publicly funded. We see in current budget proposals for the imaging, image processing, and online posting of existing tablet collections costs that might range from $5–$10 per tablet; in the case of WFT, one could well imagine a cumulative piece expenditure of $1000 or more, and we are left to guess how the costly publication process continues according to a plan in a dark recess of some German correspondence.

But at these production costs and given the inclusion of Ms. Yildiz as co-author, was it really impossible to add $500 to the exorbitant expenditures to have serviceable photographs done up of the Istanbul texts? They present a crude likeness when seen next to the striking photos of the Berlin texts. Then even if we were to be satisfied with seeking a limited view of the economic structure of twenty-sixth-century Fara, when the authors pronounce (p. 2) that the volume was created “so that the texts can be examined in their full extent,” one will wonder what photographic memory they are addressing. Readers must gather in and compare and contrast formulations or syntactical formats on p. 26 with those on p. 112?
And then, we might want to see comparable texts that entered the published record from irregular Fara excavations, or, let us say, from Abu Salabikh (for instance, *OIP* 99, 491, 494). But in the end, we see here a familiar Assyriological publication of 170 of 1,000+ texts, such that a full examination of only the Fara exemplars excavated by the DOG mission will require another five volumes, a very bulky spread on the desk of anyone seeking to fully examine the Fara texts.

Have DOG and Harrassowitz, in publishing the first volume, committed to this endeavor, and does anyone, did DOG Secretary F. Blocher really believe this will happen when he wrote his celebratory preface to *WFT* II? Did those at the German Research Association (DFG) who agreed to underwrite the print costs? Or rather, thinking of alternatives, why now in this age are researchers not made privy to the full collection in some electronic form, so that they can test their own models to better understand this difficult transition period between Late Uruk and ED IIIb? DFG research and publication funding application reviewers may yet catch up to current standards and insist on at least a hybrid paper and PDF dissemination of project deliverables, with open access to raw data on the horizon. I admit freely that without the recent standardization of existing files, and the addition to CDLI of transliterations of 300+ heretofore unentered ED IIIa texts (incl. the 81 published for the first time here) by a tireless Dan Foxvog, I would have been very hard pressed to follow the *WTF* II commentaries by Steible and Yıldız.

But those who purchase this book should not be dependent on CDLI to do the same.

Some few technical notes can conclude this review:

Why do we still encounter transliterations in the form of n[in]-<AN>-˹da-*ša 2˺ (no. 6 v 14) in Assyriological publications? Are an i and an n really broken off in the initial sign or rather the sign nin damaged? I suppose the asterisk means, “collated by the authors,” but should the uninitiated have to guess? ˹nin˺-<AN>-˹da-ša 2˺ would give the same information, and we can assume the authors have accepted responsibility for the accuracy of their transliterations.

N₅ has shown up here to indicate a curvilinear “1” rotated 90º clockwise, evidently borrowed from the Late Uruk sign list. One might rather imagine using something like ašₙ₉₀ that refers back to its actual meaning (and there might have been a short discussion of writing orientation altogether, if only in a footnote, namely that there is no compelling reason to assume that the ED IIIa period texts were not written and read in an orientation rotated 90º counterclockwise relative to our publication conventions).

The authors speak (p. 2) of Krebernik’s “downright sensational” discovery of a VAM inventory book with findspots of the DOG Fara texts kept in Istanbul. But as is evident in the volume’s commentaries, these rough findspots played, and play, no more than a passing role in determining the historical or linguistic/paleographic value of the Fara texts, as is true in discussions of cuneiform artifacts generally. If the Assyriologist is unable, based on their content, to credibly reconstruct the time, city, area, building, and even basket or shelf her tablets were kept in in antiquity, she is missing something. This relativization of findspot importance touches on both the matter of poor excavation bookkeeping or inventory discovery, and of irregular excavations with no find logs whatsoever. The absurdity of extremes reached by opponents of contact with so-called unprovenienced tablets was highlighted in an—as I hope ironic—statement offered by the University of Glasgow lecturer Donna Yates in a recent *Washington Post* piece on the repatriation of the Oklahoma Green collection (<http://tinyurl.com/ycpm8pbo>): without their archaeological context, “[a]ll we have are the little tattered remains of what’s written on the tablets.”

While the authors struggle, as do we all, with readings of signs representing donkeys, I do not find reference in the volume to the most significant publication on the paleography of the difficult animal head series LAK 240ff.: C. Mittermayer, *Die Entwicklung der Tierkopfzeichen = AOAT 319*, Münster 2005.

ED IIIa sign sequence remains unclear here as elsewhere; as in editions of Late Uruk texts, commentators appear too often to fall back on the difficulty of establishing common standards of pre-ED IIIb orthography as a license to assume there was no systematization whatsoever. Even a casual review of, for instance, numerical-metrological notations of these relative to object designators demonstrates that we should be wary about published ED IIIa transliterations that seem to be consistent with accepted Sumerian lexicon or syntax, particularly in onomastics. One example is the very common sequence gu₂-an-še₃, “total.” Most specialists have probably asked themselves what the assumed Sumerian etymology of this word might be, that clearly associates functionally with ŠU+NIGIN, “grand total,” of later texts, where
subtotals are designated šu-nigin₂ in earlier, the ligature šu+nigin₂ (now “grand total” šuinig₂ and “(sub-) total” šuinig, respectively, in CDLI) in later accounts (cp. for instance the ED IIIb text VS 14, 101 = P020116; apparently reversed in the Umma OAkk account CUSAS 33, 74 = P326962, but there also mixing numerical signs in curvilinear [for gu₂-an-še₃] and cuneiform [for šu+nigin₂] forms).

The sequence for ED IIIa was surely established by modern editors based on the consistent use of gu₂-an-še₃ in the ED IIIb Girsu texts. But aside from the entirely regular sequence an-še₃-gu₂ in Ebla accounts (there are two possible exceptions from contemporaneous Beydar), we find no single instance of gu₂-an-še₃ in the ED IIIa corpus. Rather, the great majority are likewise an-še₃-gu₂ (in ten cases an-gu₂-še₃), suggesting first that an-še₃-gu₂ swept up through Abu Salabikh and Kish into Ebla, without influence from Lagash province, but second that we cannot really know what stood behind the original, after all quite significant accounting term in our ED IIIa administrative documents. This of course does not exclude a reading /gu’ anše/, as regular gada-na would not exclude a reading na-gada, as unusual as such a loan from Akkadian into early syllabic Sumerian might appear, but neither does it much support the later reading in earlier accounts.

A closer review of all sign sequences in the ED IIIa corpus, in consideration of J. C. Johnson and A. Johnson’s groundbreaking work on UD.GAL.NUN sign cluster strategies (in J. Englehardt, ed., Agency and Writing [2012], 165–82), including all personal names, cannot but reward the obsessive cuneiformist.

ROBERT K. ENGLUND
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES


This volume, the proceedings of a May 2011 conference at the Scholion Interdisciplinary Center for Humanities and Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, brings together essays by scholars at the vanguard of an emerging interest in the intellectual interactions between Babylonians, Iranians, and descendants of the Judean population exiled to Babylonia in the early sixth century BCE.

The opening essay, Yaakov Elman’s “Contrasting Intellectual Trajectories: Iran and Israel in Mesopotamia,” is, at roughly ninety pages, the volume’s longest. Elman invokes Axial Age theory as a heuristic to tease out the cognitive styles and modes of explanation from the textual output of scholars and scribes of Mesopotamia, rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud, and Zoroastrian priests as a means to assess contacts, commonalities, and differences between them. The correspondence of the chronological endpoint of the Axial Age with diminished production of cuneiform documents in the Hellenistic period contributes to Elman’s setting-aside of a consideration of the production of knowledge in cuneiform, unfortunate in view of its (limited) continuity until the first century CE. To be sure, Elman may not have engaged with evidence for astronomical knowledge, as it stands apart from the genres with which his main argument is concerned. The broad scope of this essay, which serves as an introduction to the entire volume, might have invited a more sustained engagement with the Mesopotamian material. Fortunately, his suggestion that minimal influence of each cultural community on the others is detected does not inhibit his co-contributors from their explorations of that influence and contact.

Two of the three authors of studies in the section “Society and Its Institutions” consider cuneiform evidence for the location of Judeans in the social and economic landscape of Mesopotamia in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods as a means to apprehend their contacts with the producers and products of intellectual activity. In “Locating Contact in the Babylonian Exile: Some Reflections on Tracing Judean-Babylonian Encounters in Cuneiform Texts,” Caroline Waerzeggers begins by considering the creation of Hutu mythico-history in the wake of their dislocation subsequent to their 1972 genocide. Identification of features of the Judean exile that echo Hutu narratives lends the essay a superficial tone of comparative anthropology. Waerzeggers retracts focus on the encounters suggested in the volume title, building on her earlier work on the Babylonian Chronicles (2012) and Liverani’s