

PIPOAC 3

DE L'ARGILE AU NUMÉRIQUE

MÉLANGES ASSYRIOLOGIQUES
EN L'HONNEUR
DE DOMINIQUE CHARPIN

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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Avant-propos.	v
Bibliographie de Dominique Charpin.	vii
ABDALLAH, F., Dynasties du Yamhad (Halab = Alep)	1
ALEXANDROV, B., Posing a Question in Akkadian: <i>Wh-</i> and Other Interrogatives in Old Babylonian Letters.	13
ARKHIPOV, I., <i>Ittum</i> « signe » et <i>ittum</i> « moment » en paléobabylonien	47
ATTINGER, P., Našše A.	79
BÉRANGER, M., Du signe à l'enveloppe. L'enseignement du genre épistolaire à l'époque amorrite d'après un nouveau modèle de lettre scolaire avec enveloppe	125
BEYER, D., Une empreinte de sceau-cylindre du palais de Mari .	169
CANKIK-KIRSCHBAUM, E., ^D GU ₄ -DUMU- ^D UTU in Assur in mittelassyrischer Zeit	175
CAUBET, A. & YON, M., Importation asiatique en Grèce mycénienne. La « <i>Combat Agate</i> » de Pylos	189
CHALENDAR, V., Un serment dur à avaler, les manifestations pathologiques du serment.	203
CHAMBON, G. & GUICHARD, M., Le monde en tableaux (I) : une étude des tablettes-registres de la grande fête d'Eštar à Mari.	225
COHEN, Y., Forging an Empire: The Land of Aštata According to the Šattiwaza Treaty (CTH 51) and Additional Sources. . .	279
COUSIN, L., Entre Ur et Eridu : réflexions autour d'une brique d'Amar-Sin	299
DE BOER, R., Pīhatni-īpiq, an official in the service of king Sumu-El of Larsa	307
DELNERO, P., Sound and Meaning in Sumerian Cultic Laments .	315
DÉMARE-LAFONT, S., Équité et légalité à Emar	357
DURAND, J.-M., Un joint dans les textes de Mari.	373

FIETTE, B., Des bateaux pour Babylone	383
FLEMING, D., Only the <i>maš'artu</i> -Priestess Speaks: The Emar Installation Rites in Scribal Context	401
FOSTER, B., Language Study and the Beginnings of the Collège de France	425
HEESSEL, N., Traum was Schönes!	441
HUOT, J.-L., Le mystère des remparts de Larsa	455
JACQUET, A. & RECULEAU, H., Tablettes paléo-babyloniennes de la collection R. F. Harper conservées à l'Oriental Institute de l'Université de Chicago	469
JOANNÈS, F., « Mettez-vous en quête de ce sceau ! »	491
JURSA, M., A 'Prisoner Text' from Birmingham	507
LACAMBRE, D., Samsī-Addu et la constitution de son empire : nouvelles données	513
LANGLOIS, A.-I., Quelques ânes en plus...	545
LAUINGER, J., Contribution to a Diplomatics of the Amarna Letters from the Levant: « la mise en page ».	563
LION, B., Mariages et archives dans le Royaume d'Arraphe . . .	583
LYONNET, B., La « céramique du Khabur » et ses relations orientales : les routes de l'étain	613
MARTI, L., Les archives de Tell Munbâqa : le cas de la maison B	639
MAUL, S., Eidesleistung und Selbstverfluchung. Überlegungen zu KAR 373 (VAT 8719)	655
MICHALOWSKI, P., Memories of Rim-Sin II	669
MOLINA, M., Sumerian Judicial Procedures against Tomb Robbers	693
NEBIOLO, F., <i>Iprum</i> , <i>iptirum</i> ed altre richieste: una lettera inedita dalla collezione dell'Iraq Museum di Baghdad	713
NEUMANN, H., Bemerkungen zur Identität und Rolle des <i>qajjāp(ān)um</i> in § 5/6 des Edikts Ammi-šaduqa	731
NICOLLE, C., La formation d'une culture régionale en Djézireh, le témoignage d'une tombe de guerrier de la période amorrite	739
OTTO, A., Official Seal Motifs at Larsa and Ur in the 19 th Century BC	763
OWEN, D., 'Death for Default' Redux. Akkadian Field Cultivation and Other Akkadian Contracts from Iri-Sağrig	777

PARPOLA, S., The Sumerian 2 nd Person Pronoun, and Latin and French Morphophonemics	799
POZZER, K., Les divinités au féminin – une étude des sceaux-cylindres mésopotamiens	813
RADNER, K., Mistakes were Made ... on the Throne base of Shalmaneser III of Assyria	833
RAMEZ, M., « Tu représenteras parfaitement la force de mon héroïsme ! » La diorite comme vecteur de l'idéologie royale au pays de Sumer et d'Akkad (III ^e -II ^e millénaires av. J.-C.)	841
ROTH, M., Seductress or Victim? Another Look at Laws of Ur-Namma §§6-8	879
SALLABERGER, W., Who Is Elite? Two Exemplary Cases from Early Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamia	893
SASSON, J., Vile Threat: The Rhetoric of a Marital Spat	923
SHIBATA, D., The Gods of Ṭabetu during the Middle Assyrian Period and their Genealogy	943
STEINKELLER, P., Texts, Art and Archaeology: An Archaic Plaque from Mari and the Sumerian Birth-Goddess Ninhursag	977
STOL, M., Old Babylonian <i>kišdātum</i> , “what one may get”	1013
TANRET, M., Gimil-Marduk. Une carrière de juge ou un juge de carrière ?	1031
THOMAS, A., L'adorant de Larsa au Louvre	1059
VAN KOPPEN, F., Itur-Asdu of River Silakku. A Contribution to the Kingship of Hammurabi of Babylon	1081
VAN LERBERGHE, K., Abiešuh's Year Four	1103
VELDHUIS, N., Word Studies: Ur III and ePSD2	1113
WASSERMAN, N., Mesopotamian Underwear and Undergarments	1125
WESZELI, M., Two Dossiers of Boat Owners and Hirers of Small Watercraft from the Area of Yahrurum šaplûm	1145
WILHELM, G., Mari hurr. Nr. 8	1181
YAMADA, S., Sim'alites at Ṭabatam and the Origin of the Kingdom of the “Land of Hana”	1189
ZGOLL, A., Mythos als rituell aufgeführtes Drama. Inthronisation, Tempelschöpfung und Stadtgründung im altbabylonischen Lied auf Bazi	1209
ZIEGLER, N., La <i>qadištum</i> dépouillée	1243

MISTAKES WERE MADE ... ON THE THRONE BASE OF SHALMANESER III OF ASSYRIA

Karen RADNER*

I have often met Dominique Charpin by chance. The most unexpected encounter was certainly in winter 2003 in the children's clothes section of H&M in a shopping mall in Graz (Austria), the most welcome was in front of the Hotel Raghdan in autumn 1997 in Deir ez-Zor (Syria) where I had just started work on the Neo-Assyrian texts from Tell Sheikh Hamad. And in spring 2001, we bumped into each other in the Assyrian gallery of the Iraq Museum, having sneaked away from the conference that celebrated the 5000th anniversary of the invention of writing in Baghdad in order to take in the marvellous treasures on display.

I have recently had the chance to visit the Iraq Museum again and offer this short note to Dominique as a small token of my gratitude for his generous support in many different ways over the past decades. It is based on the autopsy of a cuneiform document, which will hopefully please Dominique, one of the outstanding cuneiform epigraphers of our time. The subject of this paper – mistakes made by cuneiform scribes and how we deal with them – was of course chosen in reference to Dominique's contribution “,Lies natürlich...‘ À propos des erreurs de scribes dans les lettres de Mari” to the 1995 Festschrift for Wolfram von Soden¹.

1. TWO GHOST CITIES IN ŠUBRIA

In the early first millennium BC, the tiny kingdom of Šubria was situated in the mountainous regions to the north of the Țur Abdin mountains (Assyrian Kašiyari), stretching from the banks of the Tigris in the south and its headwaters in the west to the substantial mountain ranges of the Taurus in the north and in the east. In the south, Šubria bordered onto the Assyrian Empire and in the north onto Urartu – a precarious position between two powerful and always antagonistic neighbours. In 673 BC,

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¹ Charpin 1995.

Esarhaddon of Assyria (680-669 BC) annexed Šubria and divided the land into two Assyrian provinces, known after their capital cities as Uppummu and Kullimeri².

The first mention of these cities dates to the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858-824 BC). Uppummu is attested as “URU.ú-pu-m[e] of Anḫitte, the ruler of Šubria,” in a label identifying a fortified city in the mountains, besieged by the Assyrian army, on a bronze band of the monumental Balawat temple gates³. Both Uppummu and Kullimeri are mentioned together on Shalmaneser’s throne base from the Review Palace (“Fort Shalmaneser”) at Kalḫu (Nimrud). The relevant passage refers to the campaign of 854 BC and concludes the long inscription carved onto the throne base. In the translation of A. Kirk Grayson, who had been unable to check the original when preparing his edition⁴, it reads as follows: “I marched to the land Šubrû. Anḫitti, the Šubraean, abandoned Ḫasmetu (URU.ḫas-me-tu), his royal city, in order to save his life (and) entered the city Ibumu (URU.i-bu-mu). I confined him to his city. <I received> his sons (and) daughters with his tribute”⁵.

When I first dealt with this inscription in 2012 in the context of a study of the buffer states between Assyria and Urartu, I recognized that URU.i-bu-mu must stand for Uppummu rather than otherwise unattested *Ibumu. It was just as obvious that URU.ḫas-me-tu did not stand for an equally unknown city *Ḫasmetu but for Kullimeri. The sequence of events required that Anḫitte fled from the advancing Assyrian army from his royal residence Kullimeri to Uppummu where he was then put under siege, as also the Balawat Gate depiction and label have it.

At that time, I was entirely prepared to exonerate the mason and assume at least some mistakes made by the modern copyist. Peter Hulin, the original editor of the inscription on the throne base, had published only a hand copy⁶, and none of the photographs available elsewhere covered the passage in question. To distort the sign *kul* = NUMUN so that it looks like *ḫas* = TAR is quite easy, and the sign TU bears sufficient resemblance to RU so that one might mix up the two characters. I therefore suggested the reading URU.kul-me-ru⁷.

² Radner 2008: 63-64 no. 64 (Kullimeri) and no. 66 (Uppumu).

³ Grayson 1996: 144 no. A.0.102.73.

⁴ Grayson 1996: 102: “It was not necessary to collate the inscriptions although it was possible to collate lines 48-50 (A.0.102.60-62) from the published photos.”

⁵ Grayson 1996: 104 A.0.102.28 l. 44.

⁶ Hulin 1963: pl. X (foldout plate between p. 68 and p. 69).

⁷ Radner 2012: 260.

2. ḤASMETU / KULLIMERI AND IBUMU / UPPUMMU

When I was finally able to check the throne base in the Iraq Museum on 21 November 2018⁸, the autopsy confirmed the accuracy of Hulin's copy: the text has indeed URU.*ḥas-me-tu* (Fig. 1). Given the frequent pairing of Kullimeri and Uppummu in other Assyrian inscriptions and the tiny size of Šubria, it is entirely inconceivable that there is another royal residence called Ḥasmetu, only attested in the inscription of the throne base. The only explanation is therefore that the stone mason mis-copied the cuneiform characters when he carved them onto the throne base.

That mistakes were made is already clear from the fact that one is required to add a verb at the end of our passage, the concluding part of the inscription. This verb is missing but necessary to complete the sentence; Grayson therefore amended <*am-ḥur*> "I received", and I agree with him. The mason had miscalculated the available space and ran out: already *ma-da-ti-šú* "his tribute" is squeezed in a rather inelegant fashion onto the front of the inner elevated area of the throne base (Fig. 2) that is otherwise left empty. There was no room for *am-ḥur* and he simply left out the word.

In light of this, it is easy to argue that URU.*ḥas-me-tu* is a faulty writing, incised by the mason instead of URU.*kul-me-ri* or URU.*kul-me-ra*. As none of the extant spellings of Kullimeri ever end with the sign *-ru* I do not assume that an otherwise unattested writing *URU.*kul-me-ru* was originally intended. There is one exact match for the spelling URU.*kul-me-ra*⁹ although writings ending in *-ri* are otherwise much more common.¹⁰

⁸ I wish to cordially thank Dr Qais Hussein Rasheed, Director of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq and Deputy Minister of Culture of Iraq, for permission to work in the Iraq Museum and to Professor Dr Anmar Abdullillah Fadhil and Professor Dr Laith M. Hussein of the College of Arts, Baghdad University, for arranging my stay in Baghdad. As ever, I am grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation whose generous funding made this work possible.

⁹ URU.*kul-me-ra*; Fales & Postgate 1992: no. 3: i 9'. Also [URU.*ku*]-*'im¹-me-er-ra*: Mattila 2002: no. 272: 5'.

¹⁰ URU.*ku-li-im-me-ri*: Leicht 2011: no. 34: 4'; Novotny & Jeffers 2018: no. 3 iv 7, 9; no. 4 iv 4 (broken); no. 6 v 15 (broken), 17 (broken); no. 7 iv 67' (broken), 69'; Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990: no. 25: 8 (broken); Fales & Postgate 1995: no. 19 r. 5' (broken). KUR.*ku-li-im-me-ri*: Novotny & Jeffers 2018: no. 3 iv 7. URU.*ku-im-me-ri*: Leicht 2011: no. 33, r. iv 6'.



Fig. 1. URU.*ḥas-me-tu* on the throne base. Author's photograph.

In the mason's defence, we must stress that these mistakes concern the unfamiliar name of a distant city, far away from Kalḫu in the mountains of Anatolia: Kullimeri makes its very first appearance in the Assyrian records in this text. While the signs *kul* = NUMUN and *ḥas* = TAR have a fairly close resemblance, the character TU does not match RA or RI very well, and so it is difficult to see this as a casual confusion. Also phonetically, there is no easy way to explain the mistake. However, further along in the passage there is another combination of the signs ME and TU (there read as KU₄) in *ana URU.i-pu-me KU₄-ub* "he entered the city Uppummu". I would therefore argue that the mason by mistake



Fig. 2. The last word of the inscription squeezed onto the front part of the base (marked by the arrow). Author's photograph.

skipped ahead in his master copy of the inscription and copied the character after ME correctly, but from the wrong part of the text¹¹.

We should also see the otherwise unattested spelling URU.*i-pu-me* for Uppummu as an errant writing as all other attestations of the toponym begin with the vowel *u*. Like Kullimeri, the name is first used in Assyrian texts at that time and would therefore have been unfamiliar to the mason. If the master copy had URU.*ú-pu-me* (as the name of the city is written also on the label of the Balawat Gate) or URU.*up-pu-me*¹² the confusion between *ú-* or *up-* and *i-* can easily be explained as an oversight, as these signs at least begin with the same combination of wedges.

3. CARVING MISTAKES

A recent study by Nathan Morello¹³ has drawn attention to the fact that on occasion, individual characters or sequences of characters of

¹¹ A similar mistake happened in Ashurnasirpal II's stele from the Ninurta temple in Kalhu (Grayson 1991: 210 no. 101.1) where the number 700 from line ii 109 was copied also in the next line (instead of 5) after the exact same sequence of signs; see the discussion in Radner 2015: 106.

¹² URU.*up-pu-me*: Leichty 2011: no. 33: i 36, ii 2, 6, 13. Also URU.*up-pu-um¹-[me]*: Novotny & Jeffers 2018: no. 4: iv 2 (broken); KUR.*up-pu-um-me*: Novotny & Jeffers 2018: no. 3: iv 7; no. 6: v 14 (broken); no. 7: iv 67'' (broken); Kataja & Whiting 1995: no. 2' (broken).

¹³ Morello 2016.

cuneiform inscriptions carved onto monuments commissioned by the kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, such as palace wall reliefs or steles, may be positioned very deliberately on the object so that there is a complex semantic interplay with the imagery; the best examples come from the carvings of the throne room of Shalmaneser's father Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC). Our stone mason's work concerned an object that as the support for the throne of the king was no less important than Ashurnasirpal's wall decoration and yet, it was executed in a far less subtle way. However, the mason was faced with the challenging task of arranging the lengthy inscription around a complexly shaped, three-dimensional monument that was to be in full view of the Empire.

On the whole, the stone mason mastered his task well. But once he had reached the final passage of the inscription he started to make mistakes (Fig. 3). At that point, he had come to the unhappy realisation that he would not have enough room to complete the text in the space that was still available to him. But unfortunately, this last part of the inscription had to be carved into a highly visible spot: into the top of the throne base, along the edge of its front on the right hand side. Starting to cramp the signs together in order to save space was surely not an option. The king, sitting on the throne, would have had the resulting clumsy sequence of signs in full view, and so would have had anyone who approached the monarch.

So the mason simply carried on, but he clearly had lost his nerve and made a series of mistakes. As we have demonstrated, he missed his place in the master copy once, perhaps succumbing to wishful thinking and skipping ahead 14 characters (likely corresponding to a place in the next line in the master text on a clay or wooden tablet), and copied the wrong sign. He also misread two signs and carved similar characters instead. In this way, he mangled the names of two distant places that he had surely never heard or read before.

The stone mason must have noticed that he misspelled the name of Kullimeri because he resumed the text in the correct place after the mention of the city. However, there was no subtle way to eradicate the mistake in its highly visible spot on the monument and so he chose to ignore it, presumably hoping that no one else would realise the slip either. The oversight could only have been noticed if one compared the text sign by sign to the master copy. If one did not know Uppummu and Kullimeri, one would never notice the error – unless one was well acquainted with Šubria's geography. Then one would have certainly balked at encountering places called Ḥasmetu and Ipumu in the course of Shalmaneser's 854 campaign to the small mountain kingdom.

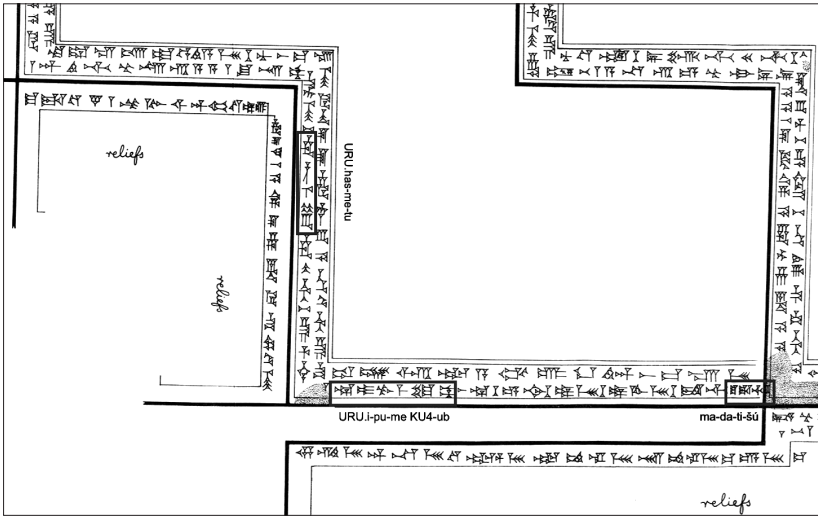


Fig. 3. The two misspelled place names and the squeezed last word *ma-da-ti-šú* (after which *am-hur* should have followed), indicated in a detail of Peter Hulin's hand copy.

In addition to confirming Peter Hulin's hand copy of the inscription on Shalmaneser's throne base from Kalhu this short note aims to draw attention to the fact that carving mistakes like the ones our stone mason made show that such craftsmen were without any doubt literate and able to understand the text they were copying. Rather than introducing mistakes that could easily be avoided if only one could have read the text, our mason's mistakes are limited to unfamiliar names and crop up in a writing situation where he was working under considerable stress.

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