



Benjamin R. Foster

# Sargonic and Pre-Sargonic Cuneiform Texts

in the Yale Babylonian Collection



Ψ LOCKWOOD PRESS

**SARGONIC AND PRE-SARGONIC  
CUNEIFORM TEXTS**

IN THE YALE BABYLONIAN COLLECTION

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BY

BENJAMIN R. FOSTER



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2020



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## ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

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ALS	Benjamin R. Foster, <i>Administration and Use of Institutional Land in Sargonic Sumer. Mesopotamia</i> 9. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1981
ArOr	<i>Archiv Orientalni</i>
ArOr 50	Benjamin R. Foster, "Education of a Bureaucrat in Sargonic Sumer," <i>ArOr</i> 50 (1982): 239–241
ASJ	<i>Acta Sumerologica</i>
ASJ 4	Benjamin R. Foster, "An Agricultural Archive from Sargonic Akkad," <i>ASJ</i> 4 (1982): 7–51
ASJ 12	Benjamin R. Foster, "Two Late Old Akkadian Documents," <i>ASJ</i> 12 (1990): 51–56
ASJ 13	Benjamin R. Foster, "Miscellaneous Inscriptions on Stone Objects," <i>ASJ</i> 13 (1991): 181–184
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
AWAS	Gebhard Selz, <i>Altsumerische Wirtschaftstexte aus Lagaš, Altsumerische Wirtschaftstexte aus Amerikanischen Sammlungen 2. Texte aus: Free Library Philadelphia, Yale University Library, Babylonian Collection. Freiburger Altorientalische Studien</i> 15,2. Freiburg: Steiner, 1993
BIN 8	George Hackman and Ferris J. Stephens, <i>Sumerian and Akkadian Administrative Texts from Earliest Times to the End of the Akkad Dynasty. Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies</i> 8. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958
CRRAI 33	Benjamin R. Foster, "Notes on Women in Sargonic Society," in Jean-Marie Durand, ed., <i>La Femme dans le Proche-Orient Antique, Compte Rendu de la XXXIII<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 7–10 Juillet 1986)</i> , 53–61. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987
CRRAI 38	Benjamin R. Foster, "A Sargonic Itinerary," in Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannès, ed., <i>La Circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien, Actes de la XXXVIII<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Paris, 8–10 juillet 1990)</i> , 73–76. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations: 1992
ELTS	I. J. Gelb, Peter Steinkeller, and Robert Whiting, <i>Earliest Land Tenure Systems in the Near East: Ancient Kudurrus. Oriental Institute Publications</i> 104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
HUCA 49	Marvin Powell, "Texts from the Time of Lugalzagesi: Problems and Perspectives in their Interpretation," <i>HUCA</i> 49 (1978): 1–58



- IUO 16 Simonetta Graziani, ed., *Studi sul Vicino Oriente Antico dedicati all memoria di Luigi Cagni*. Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, *Series Minor* 61 (2000)
- JANES *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
- JANES 12 Benjamin R. Foster, “Notes on Sargonic Royal Progress,” *JANES* 12 (1980): 29–42
- JCS *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
- JCS 28 Mark Cohen, “A New Naram-Sin Date Formula,” *JCS* 28 (1976): 227–232
- JCS 35 Benjamin R. Foster, “Selected Business Documents from Sargonic Mesopotamia,” *JCS* 35 (1983): 147–175
- LAK Anton Deimel, *Liste der archaischen Keilschriftzeichen. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 40. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922
- MCS *Manchester Cuneiform Studies*
- MLC Morgan Library Collection, Yale University
- MVN 3 David Owen, *The John Frederick Lewis Collection, Materiali per il Vocabulario Neosumerico* 3. Rome: Multigrafica Editrice
- NBC Nies Babylonian Collection, Yale University
- OP 11 Benjamin R. Foster, “An Agricultural Archive from Sargonic Akkad,” in Hermann Berens, Darlene Loding, and Martha Roth, ed., *DUMU-E,-DUB-BA-A, Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg. Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund* 11, 155–165. Philadelphia: University Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology, 1989
- OSP Aage Westenholz, *Literary and Lexical Texts and the Earliest Administrative Documents from Nippur: Old Sumerian and Old Akkadian Texts in Philadelphia Chiefly from Nippur. Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 2. Malibu: Undena Publications, 1975
- PIHANS 118 Benjamin R. Foster, “The Sargonic Period: Two Historiographical Problems,” in Gojko Barjamovic, Jacob Dahl, Ulla Koch, Walter Sommerfeld, and Joan Westenholz, ed., *Akkade Is King, a Collection of Papers by Friends and Colleagues Presented to Aage Westenholz on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday 15th of May 2009. Publications de l’Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul* 118, 127–137. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2011
- RBC Rosen Babylonian Collection, Yale University
- SPTL Eric L. Cripps, *Sargonic and Presargonic Texts in The World Museum Liverpool. BAR International Series* 2135. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010
- Textile Terminologies* C. Michel and Marie-Louise Nosch, ed., *Textile Terminologies in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean from the Third to the First Millennia BC. Ancient Textile Series* 8. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010
- USP Benjamin R. Foster, *Umma in the Sargonic Period. Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences* 2. Hamden, CT: Shoestring Press, 1982

Wilcke, <i>Law</i>	Claus Wilcke, <i>Early Ancient Near Eastern Law: A History of Its Beginnings, The Early Dynastic and Sargonic Periods</i> , revised edition. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007
Wilcke, <i>Rechsturkunden</i>	Claus Wilcke, “Neue Rechsturkunden aus der Altsumerischen Zeit,” <i>ZA</i> 86 (1996): 1–67
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WO 13	Benjamin R. Foster, “Notes on Sargonic Legal and Juridical Procedures,” <i>WO</i> 13 (1982): 15–24
YBC	Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale University
YOS 13	Jacob J. Finkelstein, <i>Late Old Babylonian Documents and Letters, Yale Oriental Series</i> 13. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete</i>
ZA 72	Benjamin R. Foster, “Archives and Record-keeping in Sargonic Mesopotamia,” <i>ZA</i> 72 (1982): 1–27
General Abbreviations	
b.	brother of
d.	daughter of
ED	Early Dynastic
GN	geographical name
h.	husband of
NP	name of profession or status
obv.	obverse
PN	personal name
rev.	reverse
s.	son of
sis.	sister of
w.	wife of
*	signs formerly visible, now lost
:	separates signs rearranged in transliteration
< >	presumed omission by scribe
<< >>	presumed superfluous sign
Copying Conventions	
Dashed edge	estimated original edge
Dotted line	erasure by scribe
Heavy dark outline	preserved original edge
Light outline	broken edge
Wavy outline	no further writing on preserved surface



## INTRODUCTION

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This volume publishes hand copies of 292 cuneiform texts in the Yale Babylonian Collections (MLC, NBC, YBC, and RBC) dating to the Sargonic and Pre-Sargonic periods. It is intended to continue publication of the Pre-Ur III texts in the first three collections named, begun by George Hackman and Ferris Stephens in BIN 8, though additional items will likely emerge as the Yale Babylonian Collection database is further edited and refined.<sup>1</sup> An additional 384 Sargonic texts in the RBC collection, mostly belonging to the Mesag archive, await definitive publication elsewhere. Many of the tablets published here were left aside by Hackman and Stephens as broken, illegible, or of less interest than the items chosen for that epoch-making volume, but I have included them here, even those for which my decipherment may be incomplete or tentative.

Through the generosity of the then curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, William W. Hallo, I was granted free access to its treasures, beginning in the early 1970s, so went through all its holdings, tablet by tablet, and prepared a private catalogue and transliterations of most of the Sargonic and Pre-Sargonic tablets in this volume for eventual publication. Building on this list, Susan J. Bridges made unpublished tablets in the Mesag archive available in careful transliterations in her 1981 Yale doctoral dissertation, *The Mesag Archive: A Study of Sargonic Society and Economy*. These texts are presented here in copy. In the intervening decades, some signs then visible are now lost; these have been indicated in the catalogue and indices with an asterisk \*.

Begun in 1988 under the direction of Ulla Kasten, the electronic database of the Yale Babylonian Collection was the first of its kind for cuneiform tablets. For the Sargonic and Pre-Sargonic periods, for which I was initially responsible, I planned a consistent, easily searchable terminology. “Account” meant a document of primarily quantitative content, such as a distribution of rations, typically beginning with a numeral. “Record” meant a document of an action, such as a purchase, sale, or lawsuit. Searchable key words were included where present in the original, such as “received” (for šu ba-ti, *imhur*), “disbursed” (for zi-ga, *ib-ta-zi*), “distributed” (for ba), and “sale” (*sa<sub>10</sub>*). This scheme has been retained here.

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1 Of the texts not included here, the writer has a visual memory of two archaic tablets, possibly forgeries, and of an Early Dynastic fragment with a year name, for which he made manual catalogue slips in the 1990s but which subsequently could not be located using the electronic database. One Pre-Sargonic text, perhaps belonging to the group of Early Dynastic tablets from Mari published by Dominique Charpin, “Tablettes présargoniques de Mari,” *MARI, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires* 5. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987, 65–127, has been omitted by choice.

All of these documents, save those excavated by the University of Chicago expedition to Nippur, were purchased on the antiquities market, the majority of the NBC and YBC tablets by Ferris Stephens in the 1930s and 1940s, mostly from the Iraqi families David, Messayeh, and Géjou, who dominated the trade at that time. To judge from the distribution of illegally excavated tablets of the Pre-World War II era, dealers would break large lots into several small ones and offer the smaller lots to different museums as more profitable than offering them as one large lot to one museum.

Exceptions to this pattern are the archive of Ur-Šara and Ama-é of Umma,<sup>2</sup> which was acquired by the Louvre in one lot, so the documents were no doubt found together in a different location than other Umma tablets, perhaps their house, and the Mesag archive, most of which is now at Yale. The Mesag archive was probably found intact in the remains of an Akkadian manor in some rural spot, perhaps in Lagash province. The archives of the governor of Umma, on the other hand, were no doubt found on the mound of Umma itself and subsequently scattered among many collections. A complicating factor has been that the governor of Umma during the reign of Sharkalisharri was also named Mesag; there is as yet no proof that he was the same man as the manager of the estate studied by Bridges.

Dealers would sometimes extract the largest tablet from each group and sell it separately at a premium. For example, BIN 8 144 (Mugdan), JCS 28 (1976): 228 (Eshnunna), YBC 12319 (this volume, no. 163), perhaps acquired separately from the other Mesag tablets, and the “grand document juridique de Nippur,” the showpiece of the Isin tablets divided between Yale and the Free Library of Philadelphia, were likely marketed as superior individual specimens.<sup>3</sup>

At the time these purchases were made, there was little interest in the possibilities of reassembling related groups of administrative, business, and juridical tablets, so curators generally did not keep purchased lots of tablets together. Therefore the museum numbers of these tablets are seldom of any use for tracing their modern history. In the early years of the Yale Babylonian Collection, the fund used for the purchase determined the collection a tablet was assigned to, but this practice was discontinued in the 1960s, so tablets belonging together may be found in different collections, though bought at the same time. Tablets were accessioned first of all, for purely practical reasons, by size (small, medium, and large, with gaps left in the numerical sequence for further additions), so two tablets that clearly belong together and were purchased at the same time may be hundreds of museum numbers apart. Because Yale

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2 Foster, USP, 52–78.

3 Maurice Lambert, “Grand document juridique de Nippur,” *Revue d’Assyriologie* 78 (1979): 1–22, re-edited in Wilcke, *Rechtsurkunden*: 47–67. Presumably owing to the price asked by the dealer, the Louvre did not purchase this item. Its present location, if it still exists, is unknown.

curators were also full-time faculty, delays in accessioning were inevitable; broken tablets and small fragments were often set aside till long after the better preserved ones had been accessioned. Ferris Stephens, Curator 1936–1962, sometimes inserted small unnumbered fragments for safekeeping in the empty spaces of boxes of unrelated tablets, accounting for the various double numbers here, such as NBC 6939a, 7019a, 7024a, but this practice was discontinued by subsequent curators.

The MLC tablets were mostly purchased by A. T. Clay as agent for J. Pierpont Morgan before the Yale collection was founded, so include a group of Sargonic tablets from Girsu that belong with those in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, the British Museum, and the Louvre; these probably passed through the hands of Vincent Scheil, who often copied or excerpted tablets submitted to him by dealers, then returned them as unwanted.<sup>4</sup> When Clay began to buy for Yale, he preferred to buy directly from dealers in Iraq, as the best of what went to Paris was acquired for the Louvre.<sup>5</sup> When Hackman and Stephens were working, the MLC tablets were not yet formally part of the Yale collections.

The assignment of provenance in this volume is therefore mostly guesswork based on internal evidence that, in the cases Lagash, Mesag, and Umma/Zabala, need not be discussed here. The tablets here attributed to Isin have sometimes been considered Nippur tablets, but the early levels of Nippur were mostly buried by later overburden far beyond the capabilities of pre-World War II looters, whereas Isin was heavily plundered and yielded such varied material as the Isin Craft archive, evidently found intact,<sup>6</sup> a collection of Sargonic juridical documents, apparently retained in a central repository, as at Girsu, Nippur, and Pre-Sargonic Shuruppak, and a group of accounts of date cultivation, various of which are published here. The Sargonic tablets from Isin, except for records of oaths dating to the reigns of Naram-Sin and Sharkalisharri, were mostly written in a “Sumerian” rather than “Akkadian” style. Of the documents that belong to the group recording management of dates, some, such as Nos. 105, 106, 110–113, or MVN 3 56, were reckoning tablets, in which the scribe set up a blank form by ruling off large horizontal spaces for noting units of gur, bariga, and bán, then filled in the individual units as he counted them. These tabulations were presumably the basis for a compilation of the accountable portion of the harvest. The Isin tablets were manufactured of a distinctive, friable

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4 Jacob J. Finkelstein, YOS 13, xi.

5 Benjamin R. Foster, “Albert T. Clay and His Babylonian Collection,” in Billie Jean Collins and Piotr Michalowski, ed., *Beyond Hatti: A Tribute to Gary Beckman*. Atlanta: Lockwood, 2013, 121–135.

6 Marc Van de Mieroop, *Crafts in the Early Isin Period: A Study of the Isin Craft Archive from the Reigns of Išbi-Erra and Šu-ilišu*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 25, Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1987. For the Sargonic tablets from Isin, Ingo Schrakamp, in Walther Sallaberger and Ingo Schrakamp, ed., *Associated Regional Chronologies for the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean 3: History & Philology*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015, 235 note 416.

clay quite unlike the clay of the tablets of Umma or Lagash and tend today to be in poor condition. On the other hand, the Mesag tablets in the NBC collection were better manufactured and were for the most part baked in 1978 by Susan Bridges, so remain in good condition today. The tablets from the Chicago expedition to Nippur were baked and numbered to the highest professional standards. Their findspots were recorded, but since none was found in its original context, this information will appear in the relevant Nippur Expedition publications.

The Sargonic tablets from Girsu have here been distinguished from those of Lagash generally, but in the case of the Umma region, tablets from Zabala and Umma itself have here been classed together.

Most of the tablets classified as of unknown provenance can with some confidence be assigned to one of the major groups separated here, rather than attributed to otherwise unknown sites, but this task awaits future researchers. A note left by Ferris Stephens in the NBC 10200 drawer reads “Fara, Tell Asma[r], Abu Hatab.” This was presumably a statement by the dealer, E. S. David, as to where certain tablets in a lot of over hundred in that numerical series were said to have originated. Only three Yale tablets have been identified as having come from Tell Asmar (Eshnunna), none from this numerical series, Nos. 205 (YBC 12310), 272<sup>7</sup> (NBC 8961), and JCS 28: 228 (NBC 10920), though others no doubt remain to be added to this group. No tablet at Yale has so far been securely identified as having come from Abu Hatab (Sippar), though No. 212 (NBC 10207), which may have been part of the “Quradum Archive,” seems a strong possibility.<sup>7</sup> If one takes the risk of believing the dealer’s statement and judges from the small number of Sargonic business documents known from this site, then one may suppose that some of the other texts in this volume of unknown provenience may someday be shown to have come from there.

With respect to dating, it can be difficult to distinguish early Sargonic from late ED and late Sargonic from early Ur III, so one may hesitate over the dating of some of the tablets included here. I have preferred to err on the side of including tablets that might fall somewhat outside the chronological scope of this volume, e.g., No. 179.

The catalogue includes my reading of certain challenging tablets or passages for the reader’s consideration; cross references to a few problematic readings have been included in the indices.

Cuneiform tablets were erased by scribes in three ways: by smoothing over the passage, by laying a small piece of wet clay over the passage, so there is a slight bulge on the surface, or

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<sup>7</sup> For the Quradum archive, Edmond Sollberger, in Ira Spar, ed., *Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art I*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988, 6–9.

by gouging it out, leaving a hole.<sup>8</sup> These techniques have been indicated in the catalogue and shown on the copies with dotted lines.

I am grateful to the late William W. Hallo, whose confidence in me already as a student ultimately made this project possible. For opinions on various individual signs, I thank Klaus Wagensonner. I am particularly grateful to Giuseppe Visicato and Claus Wilcke for suggestions and corrections to my preliminary copies of selected Early Dynastic texts (nos. 2–39). Vitali Bartash made improvements to my copy of no. 208. Ulla Kasten, Elizabeth Payne, and Marcel Sigrist drew my attention to various tablets that turned up in the electronic cataloging process and Emmanuelle Salgues advised me about the Mesag texts. Karen Polinger Foster has assisted with all aspects of this undertaking from outset to completion.

I ask the reader's indulgence for certain inconsistencies in the copies, made, when circumstances permitted, over some forty years.

For errors of any kind that remain, I alone am responsible.

Benjamin R. Foster

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<sup>8</sup> Gebhard Selz, "Medium and Message beyond the Written Text," *Scienze dell'Antichità* 17 (2011): 283–296 (286).