

INTRODUCTION

All of the five hundred and thirty-five texts published in this volume, save one, are a part of the James B. Nies Babylonian Collection at Yale University. The single exception comes from the Yale University Babylonian Collection. These documents originated in the early years of the First Dynasty of Isin, a period now dated near the beginning of the twentieth century B.C. and hereafter often referred to as Early Isin. Although important new material has come to light within recent years, the era surrounding the fall of the Third Dynasty of Ur and the rise of the First Dynasty of Isin is still one of the lesser known pages of Sumerian-Akkadian history. This publication presents the first sizable group of economic texts from this period.

This Early Isin material is limited to the reigns of the first two rulers of the dynasty, Ishbi-Erra and Shu-ilishu. Since the Sumerian king list says that the former was king for thirty-three years and the latter for ten, the maximum period during which most of these tablets (a few are not Early Isin) were written was forty-three years. Indeed, the texts herein dealt with break off abruptly after the third year of Shu-ilishu, reducing the length of time covered by almost all of these records to only thirty-six years.

Of the more than eight hundred Early Isin tablets in the Nies Babylonian Collection, over four hundred deal in some way with one subject, namely, the leather industry. Such unusual wealth of material focused upon one point is seldom found concentrated within such narrow geographic and chronological limits in cuneiform economic texts. This striking singularity of subject matter, together with the fact that the names of a few men recur again and again, suggests very strongly that these documents come from the archive of one particular temple. This archive, in turn, may have been composed of a series of smaller parts involving specific individuals.

Although this body of Early Isin texts most probably comes from a single site, no accurate information can be given as to their provenience. The reason is that all of the tablets were acquired from the hands of dealers in antiquities who did not know or did not tell whence they came. Most of them were purchased, however, in the years 1934-1942.

As it has already been said, most of the present texts are concerned with the leather business. It is inevitable, therefore, that these documents contain many words and phrases peculiar to the leather trade. In fact, the unpublished dissertation of the writer called "Terminology of the Leather Industry in Late Sumerian Times" dealt with numerous terms of this technical vocabulary. These terms divided them-

selves into four groups consisting of kinds of hides, skins, and leather, leather technology, leather products, and related words and phrases. While the Third Dynasty of Ur materials, plus some records both earlier than Ur III and later than the First Dynasty of Isin, were utilized in this study, the present volume contains far more texts related to the leather business than do all other published sources combined.

Since the First Dynasty of Isin follows the dispossessed Third Dynasty of Ur immediately in point of time, the Early Isin texts are closely related in form, content, and language to those of the preceding period. Linguistically, these texts show the beginning of a transition from Sumerian to Akkadian as the spoken and written language of private and commercial usage. Observation of this phenomenon, therefore, is quite rewarding in itself.

The first point to be noticed, although the extent of the evidence is not great, is the attachment of the phonetic complement *um* to Sumerian words and ideograms. This, it seems, must be explained as denoting the fact that the word written in Sumerian is to be pronounced in Akkadian. In text No. 384, for example, KUŠ.MÁŠ.NITÁ^{um} may equal *mašak-taššum^{um}* and in No. 312 KUŠ.MÁŠ.NITÁ.DÙG.GAN^{um} might be read *mašak-taššum tukkannum^{um}*. Other similar cases include GIŠ.GU.ZA.ŠU.NIGIN.NITÁ^{um} and GIŠ.GU.ZA.SAL^{um}, No. 440; GIŠ.NÁ^{um}, No. 438; and GIŠ.GU.ZA.MÁ.GAN^{um}, No. 436.

In the second place, there are a substantial number of phonetically written Akkadian words used throughout the Early Isin texts. These Semitic words appear in personal names, date formulae, and in the textual body of the tablets. For names the personal name list provides ample witness. Among the date formulae are such words as *I-ti-il-pá-šu-nu*, *li-bur*, *tá-ra-am*, and *ri-im* found respectively in Ishbi-Erra's years 6, 8 and 9, 11, and 13. In the body of the texts occur such words as *kà-ba-bu-um* 'shield,' Nos. 14, 106, 111, 329-332; *na-aḥ-ba-tum* 'container, quiver,' Nos. 38, 127, 183, 225, etc.; *ku-ša-nu-um* '(leather) cushion,' Nos. 342, 434, 437-440; *du-lu-lum* 'homage,' No. 331; *ták-ši-ru-um* 'repair,' Nos. 376, 377, 434, 437, etc.; *zi-ik-ru-um* 'priestess, devotee,' Nos. 328 and 348; and *nu-us-ḥu-um* 'container,' No. 361.

Third, to Akkadian nouns, which are employed without regard to case, state, or number, Sumerian suffixes are attached. The common suffixes are *-bi* 'its, their,' and *-šè* 'for,' the first being a possessive pronoun and the second a constructional element. These are some of the words with which suffixes appear: *kà-ba-bu-um-šè*, Nos. 14 and 331; *kà-ba-bu-um-bi* and *kà-ba-bu-bi*, No. 329; *na-aḥ-ba-tum-bi-šè*, Nos. 233 and 395; *ku-ša-nu-um-šè*, Nos. 342, 434, 439, and 440; *ku-ša-nu-um-bi*, No. 437; *ku-ša-nu-um-bi-šè*, Nos. 434 and 440; *ták-š[i-ru-um]-šè*, No. 446; *ták-ši-ru-um-bi-šè*, No. 454; *zi-ik-ru-um-šè*, Nos. 328, 341, and 412.

Finally, the basic structure of the texts remains Sumerian throughout. Sumerian verbs and the so-called postpositions of Sumerian are used consistently.

Two conclusions may be drawn from these statements about the language of

the Early Isin documents. First, the use of Akkadian nouns in these late Sumerian texts indicates that many of the people who took part in business transactions spoke Akkadian. Second, the fact that Akkadian verbs or prepositions are almost never used (*a-na-x qí-bi-ma* in No. 475, are the only exceptions) shows that the scribes were reluctant to part with the set patterns of commercial documents which had long been recognized as standard forms. Akkadian nouns could be introduced without interfering with the structure of the fixed Sumerian patterns.

Examination of the personal name list reveals varied ethnic groups. Sumerian and Akkadian names, quite naturally, are predominant. 'Amurrite' names are present in considerable numbers. Other groups may be represented to a very small degree.

A peculiarity of orthography should be mentioned. The sign BA, which is normally made with two slightly diverging wedges at the top and bottom, a horizontal wedge in between, with all three being concluded by a vertical wedge, quite often has an unmistakable vertical wedge at the beginning also. Fossey's *Manuel d'assyriologie, tome deuxième, évolution des cunéiformes*, it is true, gives three examples where there may be an upright wedge at the beginning of BA. These are his Nos. 91, 95, and 100. While the sign indicated in No. 91 is certainly BA in Reisner's copy, it may be seriously questioned whether the wedge which appears to be a vertical at the beginning of the sign is actually a vertical or horizontal. In No. 100, in all probability, the sign involved is really SU instead of BA. Ranke reads the sign as BA in the personal name list of the volume to which Fossey refers. Theo Bauer, however, in his work, *Die Ostkanaanäer*, p. 29, lists what appears to be the same name, although from another text, as *Ia-aq (g,k) -su-r[u-um]*. This leaves the single occurrence No. 95 in Fossey's list as what is probably the only one of the three which is an authentic case of BA with a vertical wedge at the beginning. Cases of BA with an initial vertical occur in BIN IX 76, 357, 359, 375, 380, 388, 396, 418, 419, 421, 424, 467, 500, and possibly in other texts in this volume as well.

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