The Surû-Priest, the Instrument 墘Al-gar-sur, and the Forms and Uses of a Rare Sign*

By Nick C. Veldhuis (Groningen)

The sign SURû is one of the very rarely used graphemes of the cuneiform repertoire. The purpose of this paper is first, to trace the paleographic history of SURû, from its earliest attestations until the period of the late lexical texts from Uruk. The main reason for this article is to clear up the confusion in the present descriptions of the sign. We will also take the opportunity to say a few words about the meanings and phonological shape of the words surû and ʞAl-gar-sur. Finally we will discuss some general aspects of the function and transmission of rare signs.

In MSL 6, p. 122 Landsberger described the sign SURû as BALAG=UZû, or UZû=BALAG. This description was accepted by CAD (v. algarssur). The Old Babylonian form of the sign was studied by Al-Fouadi (1969, p. 131), who listed the following variants: UZû=BALAG; UZû=BALAG; BALAG=UZû; and BALAG=UZû. In Borge's ABZ the sign is described as MA*$KASKAL-SIGû und ähnliches" (SURû) or "MA*$SIGû und ähnliches" (SURû). Borge's description is derived from Sî (MSL 3, p. 147; see below § 6) and is presumably meant to apply to first millennium writing only. The present consensus seems to be that the first millennium form is MA*$KASKAL-SIGû (with variants), the older form BALAG=UZû.


I was able to inspect a considerable number of SURû signs in the original during visits to the British Museum and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Unless stated otherwise, all signs illustrated or discussed below have been collated.

1 Old Babylonian SURû

In the Old Babylonian period the sign SURû appears in Sumerian literary texts and in lexical lists, primarily in the word ʞAl-gar-sur, a musical instrument (see below).

(*) It is a pleasure to acknowledge the suggestions and corrections by David Brown, Hermann Vainstak, and Jeremy Black. Elaine Baboos collected a text in the Ashmolean for me, and received the relevant line. Jerry Cooper collected a text in the Walters Art Gallery and allowed me to see his copy of the sign in question. To both I should like to express my sincere thanks.

(*) For reasons which will become clear in § 6, I will not follow Borge's distinction between SURû and SURû. All signs are taken to be variants of a single sign SURû.


(*) I should like to thank Dr. C. B. F. Walker, Deputy Keeper of the Western Asiatic Antiquities in the British Museum, and the professors Ake Sjöberg, Ede Leachey, and Steve Timney, curators of the Babylonian Collection of the University Museum, Philadelphia, for their permission to use the resources under their care. My stay in London was made possible financially by a fellowship at the Warburg Institute of London University. It is a pleasant duty to acknowledge their support.

(*) References were collected by Krispijn in his discussion of the instruments ʞAl-gar and ʞAl-gar-sur (Krispijn 1990, PP. 9-10).


(*) Edition in Al-Fouadi 1969. For the interpretation of line 62 and its variants see below.


(*) UET 6 68; edited by Hall 1986. The duplicate CBA 11263 has dug-akir, (charm) instead of su. The line is quoted by Krispijn 1990 (p. 16), but with the wrong number (A 30202 = 3 53736, which is Ilmens Dagan V).

The word *al-gar-sur₄ further appears in SEM 90 ii 11. Unfortunately, the sign SUR₄ is not preserved in Proto-Ea or Proto-Aa. It was probably treated in the section U2, but this passage is almost completely lost in both compositions (see MSL 14, p. 62: 875E, and MSL 14, p. 103: 875E).

In Old Babylonian writing the sign SUR₄ has at least three variants: U₂₂⁺EURIN, U₂₂⁺UD, and U₂₂⁺LI₅. No example involving the sign BALAG has been identified. In Nippur only the first two variants are attested. Of the fourteen examples collected in table 1, six have the form U₂₂⁺EURIN (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 13), and five have U₂₂⁺UD (1, 8, 9, 11, and 12). The remaining three are damaged at the end of the sign (6: most probably U₂₂⁺UD, 10, and 12). An additional example is found in photograph in Ludvig 1990 Tafel 6 (3 N-7 925, 566 line 5, last sign; not collated), which most probably has the form U₂₂⁺EURIN.

Table 1: Texts from Nippur.  

Outside Nippur the most common form appears to be U₂₂⁺LI₅ (table 2). Illustrative examples are no. 1 and no. 2, both of unknown origin. Additional examples of the sign SUR₄, which seem to be in LI₅ is found in TCL 16 Plate CXIV obv. line 20 and Plate CLXII line 60 (both Enkis Journey to Nippur; not collated). The sign forms found in Ur (nos 4-7) are rather confusing. The two examples in UET 6, 26A (nos 5 and 6) both end in LI₅, but the signs differ in their first part. No. 4 may be U₂₂⁺LI₅, but the final part of the sign is not entirely clear. No. 7 is damaged as well, but clearly does not represent U₂₂⁺LI₅, nor any of the other variants discussed above. A possible reading is U₂₂⁺TAR (see § 4 below), but this must remain uncertain.

Table 2: Texts from Ur and Unknown Places.

Outside Nippur the most common form appears to be U₂₂⁺LI₅ (table 2). Illustrative examples are no. 1 and no. 2, both of unknown origin. Additional examples of the sign SUR₄, which seem to be in LI₅ is found in TCL 16 Plate CXIV obv. line 20 and Plate CLXII line 60 (both Enkis Journey to Nippur; not collated). The sign forms found in Ur (nos 4-7) are rather confusing. The two examples in UET 6, 26A (nos 5 and 6) both end in LI₅, but the signs differ in their first part. No. 4 may be U₂₂⁺LI₅, but the final part of the sign is not entirely clear. No. 7 is damaged as well, but clearly does not represent U₂₂⁺LI₅, nor any of the other variants discussed above. A possible reading is U₂₂⁺TAR (see § 4 below), but this must remain uncertain.

2 The Word SUR₄

In first-millennium IN₄ = IN IV 1600 (MSL 12, p. 133; see below § 6) we find the equations sur₄ = ū₄ and sur₄ = kalib. Both Akkadian words are loaves from Sumerian. According to CAD zarur = sur₄ is not attended outside the lexical corpus. The related word sarman = is attested once in an inscription of Sargon II. The king claims to have installed various learned priests, including a sarmanu (see Fuchs 1994, p. 236, line 1577). The equation sur₄ = kalib in IN₄, = is an explanatory entry indicating that the sur₄-priest had a function comparable to the kalib or lamentation priest.¹²

¹² The sur₄-priest is not a late invention. He appears in some versions of Enki's Journey to Nippur. In his edition of this composition Al-Fouad (1969) reconstructed line 52 as *sit-ta-ni-gar-ba-ri-sarmanu, as which he translated as "zanni-lyres, algarzaru-musical instruments" (in an enumeration of musical instruments which continues in the next line). Ignoring the final -ax Al-Fouad took *al-gar-ba-ri-sarmanu as a single word, a variant spelling for *al-gar-sarmanu. This is impossible, since this spelling is unknown elsewhere. The line in question has three main variants: 1 *sit-ta-n, *al-gar-balag sur₄-da 2 *sit-ta-n, *al-gar-balag *al-gar-sur₄-da 3a *sit-ta-n, *al-gar-zu balag *al-gar-sur₄-da (SUP 2; 23; allograph SUR for SUR₄) 3b *sit-ta-n, *al-gar-zu balag *sur₄-am (UET 6, 119) Variant 1 is represented by one Nippur manuscript (EF: variant 1a) and by all but two of the non-Nippur texts. Variant 2 is the majority rendering in Nippur, found in three manuscripts (C, P, and NN). The remaining two manuscripts agree in having *al-gar-zu, but differ in their representation of the final word. Variant 1 is to be translated: "the lyre, the algar, and the balag of your sur₄-priest". The person addressed is the temple of Enki; as in earlier sections of this composition. Variant 2, the majority variant in Nippur, is simply an enumeration of musical instruments which continues in the next line. In variant 3 the second-person pronoun is attached to the word *al-gar. We may translate the line in BIN 2, 3 (variant 3a) as: "your lyre and algar, the balag with the algarrun." This is almost equivalent to version 2. The final -alu (not collated; see the photograph in BIN 2, plate LXIII) may simply be an allograph for -da. The text from Ur (variant 3b) has: "your lyre and algar, the balag and (even) the sur₄." In this case sur₄ cannot be the priest, since it is preceded by the * determinative. It may be an abbreviated or erroneous writing for *al-gar-sur₄, or we have here the word sur₄ = sarpun. The existence of this latter word, however, is open to doubt. It was suggested by Krippin 1990, p. 24 note 62. The suggestion is attractive, in particular because of the association in mar-gud between *sur₄ and sarpun, a word for stalk (see below § 6). The evidence in mar-gud, however, is rather confused. First, *sur₄ is equated with sammumar (another musical instrument) and only *sur₄-gal is explained as sarpun. Second, the lexical

¹¹ See also Hayashi 1994, pp. 102-103.

¹² The line in text 1 is transcribed twice in Al-Fouad 1969. The transcription on p. 95 is correct, the one on p. 131 is incorrect.
tradition knows *galu* also as a kind of flute. The interpretation of the variant from Ur remains uncertain.

The unexpected number of variants in a single line is probably due to the presence of an unusual word. The existence of a sur-priest was completely or almost completely forgotten, and the line was reinterpreted to include the somewhat better known word *al-gar-sur*.

a) comitative -da: balag *al-gar-sur-*da
   "Balag with algarusur" (Enki’s Journey 62 variant 2)

b) genitive -da: balag *sur-*da
   "The balag of the sur-priest" (biddim, variant 1a)

c) ablative or locative -da: *al-gar-sur-*da e im-im-d-e
   "In the house of G it is the algarusur" (Hymn of the Hoe 70)

d) copula -ra- 
   *gelia-an-na-ka* al-gar-sur-*ra- 
   "They play (music) with the algarusur" (Curse of Agade 35)

e) absolutive -or or -ra: 
   *al-gar-sur-*ra su-ha,ni, mi-ha-ba
   *al-gar-sur-*ra um-na-ta-lang-ge
   "They make the algarusur sound subash" (Keš Hymn)
   "They strike the algarusur for him" (Hymn to the Moon UET 6, 68)

The evidence may best be explained by a historical change of *da* -> *ra*. The comitative example (a) is inconclusive, since we expect -da under all circumstances. The genitive -da in example (b) indicates a reading *tanu*, as does the locative -da in example (c). The verb e-e as -de, -de/du is attested with several postpositions (see Attinger 1993, pp. 472-474). The -da in this example may be interpreted as locative or ablative. The allomorph -or for the ablative does exist but is rare, and the -or is found in all extant sources of this line. A simpler explanation, therefore, is to understand sur-d-e as the locative *rud-ud*. The Curse of Agade is known from Ur III sources, so the presence of earlier orthographies is understandable. The Hymn to the Hoe (example d) represents the later form with -or or *or*. The Keš Hymn is a composition of great antiquity. Unfortunately, the ED copies of the Keš hymn do not include the line in question. We expect -or rather than -ra, and this variant does indeed appear in BM 115798 (Geller 1996).

Our interpretation of the phonemic shape of the word sur concurs with the arguments put forward by Black (1990) against the protoliterate of a phoneme /or/ or /ur/.

The text is a reworking of Eshnunna, and according to Black the data may better be explained by a gradual change of intervocalic *da* to *ra*.


3 Sur = sudu

Attinger (BA 78, p. 109) has argued that suru ends with the /du/ (or rather /nu/?) phoneme, because the spellings *al-gar-sur-*da and *al-gar-sur-*da alternate. However, in any particular context we find either -or or -du, and the only alternation that is attested is between -or and -nu. The suffixes that appear with *al-gar-sur* or suru can be summarized as follows:

a) comitative -da: balag *al-gar-sur-*da
b) genitive -da: balag *sur-*da
   "The balag of the sur-priest" (biddim, variant 1a)
c) ablative or locative -da: *al-gar-sur-*da e im-im-d-e
   "In the house of G it is the algarusur" (Hymn of the Hoe 70)
d) copula -ra-
   *gelia-an-na-ka* al-gar-sur-*ra-
   "They play (music) with the algarusur" (Curse of Agade 35)
e) absolutive -or or -ra: 
   *al-gar-sur-*ra su-ha,ni, mi-ha-ba
   *al-gar-sur-*ra um-na-ta-lang-ge
   "They make the algarusur sound subash" (Keš Hymn)
   "They strike the algarusur for him" (Hymn to the Moon UET 6, 68)

In our case, explaining the data above by positing a final /or/ for suru implies metathesis in the examples b and c (or *durj > /u*rutj). Metathesis of this type has been proposed by Boissen (1989) to explain the writing ura- 
   (ur-a-tu / ura-ta) If, however, we follow Steinkeller in interpreting UZ as *nuzi* (Steinkeller 1992, p. 47) Boissian’s hypothesis, which explains only this single phenomenon, becomes superfluous. The absence of metathesis in example d, moreover, remains unexplained in this alternative interpretation.

4 The Early History of the Sur-Priest

Several centuries earlier than the literary texts discussed above the sur-priest appears in the pre-Sargonic Lagash text VS 14, 75 (not collated). Col. 1-6 read:10

1) 2 su-du-ra, kis si-ir
2) zn-an-bi 0.0.4
3) le-er 0.1.3 2 ala
4) kas-bi
5) U2=TAR-NE
6) e-nig


The text is the account of the brewer Enlilaga over one month. In the same text an amount of beer is accounted for as 180 *sur* or suru, which may mean: "its beer was drunk by (those in charge of) the balag erected in the city centre" (Gil 4-5; see Selz 1995, p. 104). This provides a plausible context for reading suru-*da* in line 5: the beer was drunk by the sur-priest. The spelling suru-*da* is consistent with our interpretation of the older phonemic form of the word suru, as just explained in Section 3.

The sur-priest does not appear in third millennium lists of officials. We do find, however, the entries GAL-SUD, fišu, and amu-SUD. In the archaic version of ED Lu A we find the following sequence (ATU 3, PTT 105-107):

GAL-NAR 
GAL-BALAG 
GAL-SUD 

The same passage is found in the third millennium versions of ED Lu A (MSL 12, p. 11: 77-79; Arcari 1982, p. 243). The sequence "chief of the singers/ musicians," "chief of the balag-players," "chief of the fišu," suggests that the fišu had a function in music.

The contextual proximity of balag and fišu, parallels the connection between balag and suru in the Lagash text quoted above, and in variant 1 of Enki’s Journey to Nippur, 62. In the list "Early Dynastic Lu E" we find the professions fišu and amu-SUD (MSL 12, p. 18, line 110f. and MEE 3, p. 40, line 110). If fišu and suru are logically related to the initial ablatives of the two words in are in need of explanation. Sumerian sibilants are notoriously difficult. Their varying representations in glosses and in loanwords in Akkadian show that the Sumerian *sur-* was semantically related to the Akkadian one, and that both were subject to change over time. It is well known that Old Sumerian *shu* (or *hu*) under circumstances changed to /h/ in later Sumerian. Therefore, the word suru, originally had a /shu/ or /hu/ initial. Our primary evidence for the reading /suru/ derives from glosses in first millennium lexical texts (discussed in § 6 of the present paper). The variant *sur-ur- (in *al-gar-sur-ur*) in the Old Babylonian literary texts is indecisive, since it may as well be read *sur*. The only unequivocal evidence for *ur- in Old Babylonian is the entry 3.1-gar-tur-urra - mu-su-k[i ] (MSL 12, p. 165: 248; Old Babylonian bilingual Lu, reconstruction A). The only syllable spelling of Akkadian loan algarusur is found in a Middle Babylonian lexical text from Enlil: *unu-lugur-an - al-gar-tur-ur-ru-ur*. Unfortunately, as long as we have no alternate spellings in comparable contexts the relation between suru and fišu must remain speculative.

5 The Meaning of the Word *al-gar-sur*

In older studies algarusur has been translated "drumstick" or "spectrum" (CAD s.v. algarusur; Grant 1969, p. 175: 116). In more recent contributions it is assumed that both algar and algarusur refer to a kind of harp. The identification of *al-gar* as a horizontal (Elamite) harp was proposed by Duchenne-Guillémin (1969) on the basis of a combination of pictorial and textual evidence. An important argument in her discussion was the item ur-ru, 61: *MIN-adur-NIN-ma* - MIN e-urru-ru (MSL 6, p. 129). Because of the special place of Elam in the history of the harp, this line contributed to her conclusion that the algar must be a kind of harp. However, the interpretation of this line is open to doubt. In MSL 6 the passage runs as follows:

57) *al-gar-
58) [SU] 
59) *al-gar-sur-
60) [SU]-u
61) *MIN-DIN-ma
62) MIN e-urru-ru

Unfortunately, line 59 does not exist. It is reconstructed from an entry in the commentary on ur-ru (muru-gud line 165; MSL 6, p. 142). The line in question probably concerned with ur-ru, 67b, which happens to be spelled *al-gar-sur-ur* (with SUR rather than SURU) in the only source extant. Line 57 is inferred from line 59 (see footnote in MSL 6, p. 121). Since line 60 is all but lost and line 58 completely so, the interpretation of MIN in line 61 as al-gar is solely based on the doubtful reconstruction of line 59 from mur-gud. The word *al-gar*, in fact, is treated a few lines farther on (line 63). A more probable interpretation of line 61 is MIN = tigida (SÁ-NINTAR), because of the entry *tigida-NIN-ma* in the Old
Babylonian version of this same list from Nippur (line 610). The word "tigida" is a stringed instrument and may therefore qualify as the instrument discussed by Duchesne-Guillarmod. A reappraisal of the word algarzur should involve a consideration of all Semitic terms for musical instruments, which go beyond the confines of the present paper. The following is not more than a suggestion. In assessing the meaning of algarzur, the word balag plays an important role, because of the frequent cooccurrence of the two words. In the past, two translations of balag have been advocated with some regularity. The translation "harp", "lyre", or similar, is proposed, for instance, by PS 3 (v. balag) and by Kreisipa 1990, p. 6-7 ("Oberbegriff der Stimm instru mente"). Cohen (1974, p. 31) and Black (1991, p. 29 n. 39) argues for the identification of balag with a kind of drum. The first interpretation is supported by the Elba Vocabulary line 572 (MEE p. 264) balag = gn-sa-ra-an-um (with orthographic variants). The Akkadian represents the common Semitic word kumnur as zilh (see Krebernik 1983, p. 21). In later texts, however, the translation zilh or harp presents difficulties. Gelb (1976, p. 57) has pointed out that among the specialized terms for musicians in Ur III we find nar-ss-me and nar-balag-me. Since the nar-ss-me are engaged in playing stringed instruments the nar-balag-me must be something else, presumably "musicians playing a percussion instrument". The awe-inspiring names of Gudea-period balags, ubumgal-kalamas (Dragon of the Land) and igal-si-lam-um, (Fierce-looking King) are hardly suitable for instruments producing soft, melodious sounds, but may well be imagined for the giant drums that are known from pictorial evidence. In literary texts from the Old Babylonian period, now conveniently brought together in PDB B, p. 76c, the balag is repeatedly found in parallel with the siltu-drum or with the mezu-drum. We may further cite a passage in the Old Babylonian list of trees and wooden objects. The ad-na-lam (a wooden drum) is preceded by a short section <balag and followed by <mezu-balag. These items are followed in turn by stringed instruments (<mezu-balag, <itimtum, etc.). If balag were a stringed instrument, this would be an odd arrangement. The passage may be understood as treating (wooden) drums and related words, including <balag, <ab-ta-lam, and <al-garzur, followed by stringed instruments. A similar passage is found in the list of musical instruments in Amenhotep III's Psalms 7, pp. 214f.

If we accept the interpretation of balag as a drum, variant 2 of Enkidu's journey to Nippur line 62 becomes most suggestive: the drum with the drumsticks (balag <al-garzur-das). The translation "drumstick(s)" is not contradicted by any of the occurrences discussed above. The mud-god entry <al-garzur-<nam-<sa-<u - <al-ta<sa-la> bast UURUR (MSL 6, p. 142, 165) remains elusive because of the unidentified UURUR, SULFE (stake), however, is more likely to be a drumstick than a harp.

The translation "drumstick" is further supported by the use of the verb suh-sah-za to describe the sound of the algarzur (Keb Hymns 116, see above §1 and §3). Verbs of the class C2b-C1-<C1 were described by Civil 1960, who concluded that all these forms mean "to make noise", in particular a repeated, monotonous kind of noise. In addition to the sound of the algarzur the verb suh-sah-za is also used to describe the sound of little stones set in motion by the feet of Enmerkar's messenger rashing over the mountains (Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 351). Moreover, the word suh-sah-za is rendered rasqaqida (<dancer>) in Akkad (Lag 237; MSL 12, p. 136). The occurrences suggest a meaning "rattling" or "beating" (the beating of the feet of the dancer on the ground) and support Gragg's translation of the Keal Hymn line 116: "the drumsticks (= al-garzur) kept beating to

6 First Millennium

In first millennium texts the use of the sign SURA is almost exclusively restricted to lexical texts. The only exception known to me is in a late Babylonian copy of a bilingual Balag-text: sa-<silu-gi-<tu> min-<a-gal-<la>-<du> di<ga<-ba<-la<-da-bu ma-da<-ku<mu<mu> la<e>-<te>-<ra>-<za>. He should return my advisor, my chief lamentation priest.

SURA is probably written UZ<SI>SIG, but the sign is damaged and of little value for our present purposes.

The following lexical entries are known to me:

1) SII (MSL 3, p. 147) 284-287: 284 uz UZ<SI>SIG 285 su<nu>

17) It should be noticed, however, that all mud-god entries in this passage are reconstructed. It is not certain that column 3 matches the columns 1 and 2 as presented in MSL 6 (see the note to 161-170 in MSL 6, p. 142).

18) Klinner tried to harmonize the two opinions, by assuming that balag is a stringed instrument with a resonator that can be used for percussion (Klinner 1995, p. 463).

25) The line was reconstructed sur<tu>-<da ma<alak<is 2] by Civil. However, MA<ma> LIS is used as variant for gzu in a MI Akkadian lexical tablet (MSL 7, pp. 119-120, v. 9-12). An alternative reconstruction, therefore, would be <gzu>-<ph or similar.

26) For column 3 see above, note 25.

The first of these two signs is SURa, the second is a related sign, glossed gzu-nna in SII (line 287). In MSL 3 the first sign was described as UZ<SI>SIG, the second as UZ<SI>SIG. In MSL 3 the first sign was described as UZ<SI>SIG, the second as UZ<SI>SIG. In MSL 3 the first sign was described as UZ<SI>SIG, the second as UZ<SI>SIG. The ancient sign names as given in column 3 of the present tablet are UZ<SI>SIG-guzu-guzuLIN and UZ<SI>SIG-<mas-hakkuhkuh respectively. The latter sign has a comparable form in BM 34720 (CT 51, 82 rev. columns iv, v; S source ZLI; copied here including the initial vertical):

In an early Neo Babylonian copy of SII from Nippur (Code 1996 no. 114; signs only) the relevant lines appear as follows (copy by Steve Cole, not collated. SII 284-287):

The scribe of this tablet (or his source) probably adapted the unusual signs SURA and GUPANA to something familiar.

More Babylonian examples are found in BM 34129 (mar-gud), which contains two slightly variant forms:

The texts display a wide variety of forms for SURA.

We may begin our discussion of these signs with the Babylonian examples. Most informative is BM 35586 + BM 93030 (S2 source SI), which includes an additional column with ancient sign names. The forms of the sign under discussion are:

The first column is identical in:

BM 35586 + BM 93030.

These forms are close to the ones in BM 35586+ (fig. 2) which the Babylonian scribe indicated as UZ<SI>SIG.

BM 70871 + BM 82921 + BM 101566 is an unpublished duplicate of L<lu> - <lu>. Here we find x x x x:

The second column is:

BM 35419.

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For column 3 see above, note 25.

41) The line is a glossed reconstruct g<a><g>ur in SII line 287. In MSL 3 the first sign was described as UZ<SI>SIG, the second as UZ<SI>SIG. The ancient sign names as given in column 3 of the present tablet are UZ<SI>SIG-guzu-guzuLIN and UZ<SI>SIG-<mas-hakkuhkuh respectively. The latter sign has a comparable form in BM 34720 (CT 51, 82 rev. columns iv, v; S source ZLI; copied here including the initial vertical:"

Fig. 3: BM 34720.

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BM 34192.

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BM 35586 + BM 93030.

These forms are close to the ones in BM 35586+ (fig. 2) which the Babylonian scribe indicated as UZ<SI>SIG.

BM 70871 + BM 82921 + BM 101566 is an unpublished duplicate of L<lu> - <lu>. Here we find x x x x:

The second column is:

BM 35419.
The sign SBR is not taken as an arbitrary conventional symbol, but rather as an icon in which form and meaning, or form and sound value, have some non-arbitrary relation. The Old Sumerian form UZ+ŠAR may indicate an original function of the sur-priest. One of his responsibilities may have been related to the killing of a sacrificial goat. This interpretation, however, may be no more than a modern rationalisation of the sign combination. The Old Babylonian form UZ+ŠAR does not seem to include any indication of its reading or meaning. ERIN, in the Nippur spelling UZ+ŠAR, may be understood as a phonemic indicator. Steinke (1990) has demonstrated that ERIN has a value šar in third-millennium texts. UZ+ŠAR may therefore be understood as UZ+ŠAR, using a learned, archaic sign value. The variants of SBR in the first millennium occasionally show the use of secondary sign interpretations. The variants may be grouped around two central forms: a Babylonian and an Assyrian one.

### Babylonic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Babylonian</th>
<th>Assyrian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UZ+ŠAR</td>
<td>UZ+ŠAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>UZ+ŠAR+GA</td>
<td>UZ+ŠAR+GA</td>
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<td>UZ+ŠAR+GE</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Most variants may be understood as simplifications of the central forms UZ+šar and UZ+ŠAR. The Assyrian form MAŠIG, for instance, can be derived from the central form, because Assyrian UZ = MAŠAKAL. The writing UZ+DA in the Neo-Babylonian copy of SUV II from Nippur is no doubt erroneous, replacing the true sign with something familiar. The Assyrian form UZ+BAALAG represents a secondary interpretation. The Assyrian sign SARGI approximates a reduplicated SARGI. The writing is probably inspired by the common association of balag and -šar-sur. The variant SARGI+GE, an Assyrian form found in a Babylonian text, demonstrates that in sibilant speech the sign was actually analysed and named -šarGIR or something similar; otherwise the ending -GE after a sign pronounced šar/šar is difficult to explain. The form UZ+ŠAR may be related to the Old Babylonian form, but that is far from certain.

### Rarely Used Signs

Widely used compounds, such as paššu (IG1+RU) or dīnī (Š1+ŠA) may over the centuries change considerably in their appearance, but the elements of the compound usually remain constant. Their palaeographic development can be explained for the larger part by the development of their constituent signs. We have seen that this is not the case for the rare sign SBR. Even in Neo Assyrian, one of the most standardized phases of cuneiform, the sign has three recognized variants: MAŠIŠ, UZ+ŠAR, and UZ+BAALAG. Over the centuries the first element, UZ, remained constant, but even that is occasionally replaced by MAŠIŠ. A compound that is less frequently used may have been subject to rationalisations of various sorts. It is not taken as an arbitrary conventional symbol, but rather as an icon in which form and meaning, or form and sound value, have some non-arbitrary relation.

### Orthography

The orthography was discussed by Civil (1987). In the Old Babylonian list of trees and wooden objects from Nippur the transcription TIGDILU appears among the musical instruments, not far from the line -šar-sur-sūr (see Veldhuis 1997, p. 249: 613-616). Of the four sources extant for this passage of the list, two use the spelling DILTAR, one ŠAŠAR, and one is broken at the beginning of each line. The spelling DILTAR is found only here and in a literary text, also from Nippur (Roth 1983, p. 276: 34; see Civil 1987). Spellings with ŠAŠAR are found in the Isin craft archive (see below), and in later lexical texts. Middle Babylonian lexical texts from Emar and Ugarit write ŠAŠAR, ARAR (Emar 64/4, p. 76: 450*), with glosses ša-šar-lā-šaš, PULI 3, Planché X K 13.63; see Veldhuis 1996). First millennium lexical texts write ŠAŠAR, MIN DI, with variants ŠAŠAR, MIN TARA and ŠAŠAR, MIN KASLAK (see Civil 1987). From this evidence we may once again continue a discussion of spellings:

In the Nippur spelling DI may be understood as a phonematic complement: -TAR = tiddilu. This is most probably a secondary development, furthered by the fact that ŠAŠAR are similar in shape in Old Babylonian writing. The writing with ŠAŠAR is more wide-spread and is found in the Isin craft archive which is older than the Nippur lexical texts. The first millennium variant with KASLAK is probably produced by confusion with the word šīgallu-kaslu-la in the list of trees and wooden objects (see Veldhuis 1997, p. 249 line 614 and Arar Emar 64/4, p. 76: 406, where it is rendered hā-sā-šaš-šaš). A similar confusion may account for the inclusion of MIN in these late spellings. Post-Old Babylonian versions of lexical lists occasionally use MIN to repeat a gloss. By this way MIN may have entered the orthography of the main word. Since the word was not used outside the lexical corpus this kind of confusion is understandable. The late writing ŠAŠAR, MIN DI again includes a phonematic indicator.

### Footnotes

1) See also § 5.

2) In Hiintie the logogram is spelled ŠAŠAR, TART (de Martino 1997, p. 485), which may provide an alternative explanation for the writing with MIN (A > MIN). However, the development MIN > A is more likely, because ŠAŠAR is more like Sumerian than ŠAŠAR, MIN (secio difficilior).
The paleographic history of rare compounds such as TIGIDLU and SUR₃ may thus be explained partly by the need for erratic transcription, and partly by simplification. Still, the more fundamental question remains: why did the scribes introduce signs of such limited application? There is no obstacle what-
soever to the writing of sign *guana*, with SUR₃ rather than SURᵢ, and so to avoid the rare sign (e.g. BIN 2, 2); see above §2). In the Old Babylonian period SURᵢ appears exclusively in lexical and literary texts. These texts were used in the education of scribes. Once

graduated, a scribe would never use the sign again. For what reason were they forced to spend their time on such seemingly useless rarities of the cuneiform system?

To answer this question we must realize, first, that our documentation is incomplete. The word *nigidi* (SA₃, TAR) does appear in administrative texts. It is found in early Old Babylonian administrative texts from the so-called Išim craft archive in the particular archive, in a small group of texts concerning the production of musical instruments, the rare word *tigidi* appears three times. If we had not recovered this group of texts we would have concluded that TIGIDLU was invented exclusively for literary and lexical texts used in the classroom. In fact, the com-

pound TIGIDLU demonstrates that a rare sign or compoud may be at home in a specialized sector of the bureaucracy. Perhaps we may describe SA₃,TAR as a lexical writing used within a small circle of specialist craftsmen. The absence of the sign SURᵢ in administrative texts (apart from the one Old Sumerian example) may be due to chance.

In the second millennium BC the Old Babylonian schools tended to include everything. The instruction in writing in the Old Babylonian period was much more than the transmission of a technique. Writing itself was considered to be something worthy of study. This appears, first, from the structure of the curriculum in Old Babylonian Nippur. As I have argued elsewhere, it can be demonstrated that in Nippur the sign lists Proto-Ea and Proto-Di were introduced to the stu-

dents after the thematic lists of words (the forerunners to ur₃-ra). Proto-Ea deals with polysyllabic signs. Each sign is provided with glosses to explain the different values it may have in Sumerian. Proto-Di is similar in form, but deals with compound signs and adds Akkadian translations. In studying ur₃-ra the pupils had already encountered many polysyllabic and com-

pound signs. They had, for instance, used the values

ur₃, nīgī, lugal₃, and lajang long before they started to study the signs values of LAGAB in Proto-Ea. Similarly, that SIA was only encountered in other scholastic texts. The learned level of the writing system had a degree of circularity, of self-reference, in which writing explained writing, and derived its rele-

vant only from writing. The typical first-millennium style of exegesis and eisegetics, as found in such texts as TIN₃,TIR, in commentary texts, and in some Sumerian-Akkadian bilinguals, depended upon an in-

tricate knowledge of the flexibility of the cuneiform system.

Proto-Ea and Proto-Di demonstrate that education in writing at the Old Babylonian schools was not simply aimed at the mastering of a skill, but rather at the understanding of the mechanics of the cuneiform system. This 'scholarly' interest in writing was directed primarily at the contemporaneous Old Babylonian pos-

sibilities of the system, but included as well the history of cuneiform. Paleographic concern is well known from the first millennium. In particular the sign list *S₆₃ was repeatedly copied in a paleographic fashion imi-

tating archaic sign forms. Robert Schofield (Finkel 1997, 152) iden-
tified a historical inscription written this way (Finkel 1997). Attempts to imitate earlier phases of writing are known as well from the Old Babylonian period (38). The interest in historical orthography is demonstrable in many entries in Old Babylonian lexical lists. The Nippur forerunner to ur₃-ra 3-7 line 515 has *līd₃-ga* (a measure). The use of the value *līd₃ (Nī) is re-

stricted to this one word which had been out of use since the Sargonid period (see Civil 1975, p. 132). This interest in ancient signs values is also apparent from one of the Nippur spellings of *lur₃ discussed above. The rendering SUR₃ = *līd₃* is now still known. An eloquent witness to the study of ancient cuneiform in the Old Babylonian period is the small but impor-

tant corpus of Old Babylonian copies of Early Dya-

nostic lexical and literary texts. Some of these copies include glosses. In Appendix 1 a new example of this text type, a copy of the Early Dynastic Fish list with glosses, has been published and edited. This glossed exam-

ple demonstrates the awareness of the Old Babylonian scribes that third millennium Sumerian and third mil-

leennium orthography differed from their own practice. The urge to be complete, to include the likely, the unlikely, and even the impossible developed over time into a characteristic element of first-millennium li-

brary texts and first-millennium scribal education. S

Appendix: An Old Babylonian copy of ED Fish (BM 82905)

BM 82905 (33-1-21, 68) is an example of an Old Babylonian copy of an Early Dynastic lexical text with glosses, probably from Sippar. It duplicates some lines of ED Fish. No Old Babylonian copy of this particular text was known so far.

Old Babylonian copies of Early Dynastic lexical and literary texts:

a) without glosses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CBS</th>
<th>Nippur</th>
<th>Sumerian Words</th>
<th>C.</th>
<th>S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CBS 8237 | Nippur | ED LA | A | C. | S. | SLT 42 (MEE 3, p. 158ff)
| CBS 6142 | Nippur | ED LA | A | C. | S. | SLT 12 (ML 12, p. 9)
| CBS 7845 | Nippur | ED LA | A | C. | S. | SLT 13 (ML 12, p. 9)
| YBC 2125 | Nippur | ED LA | A | C. | S. | YOS 1, 12 (ML 12, p. 9)
| Ni 1600 | Nippur | ED LA | A | C. | S. | ML 12, p. 9
| KIssura | Nippur | ED LA | A | C. | S. | FAOS 2/Plate 92, F20
| BM 30041 + BM 90906 | Unknown | ED LA | A | C. | S. | unpublished

b) with glosses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CBS</th>
<th>Nippur</th>
<th>ED list of plants</th>
<th>C.</th>
<th>S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CBS 7094 | Nippur | ED list of plants | C. | S. | Civil and Biggs 1966, pp 8-11
| CBS 14130 | Nippur | ED list of vessels | C. | S. | SLT 11 (Civil and Biggs 1966; p 8 n2)
| UM 29-15-174 | Nippur | ED proper names | C. | S. | Civil and Biggs 1966, pp 5-7
| CBS 13493 | Nippur (Ur III) | ED LA | A | C. | S. | SLT 24 (Green 1983, p 265)
| Ur | Nippur (Ur III) | ED LA | A | C. | S. | UET 7, 86 (Civil 1983, p 1 n2)
| BM 59680 | Nippur | ED Fish | C. | S. | Civil 1983, p 1 nl
| BM 82905 | Nippur | ED Fish | C. | S. | unpublished below

CBS 6142 (SLT 112; see above) is a list of names, followed by ED LA A.

After the publication of ML 12 the following additional fragments of this tablet have been identi-

fied: UM 29-16-211; UM 29-16-224; and UM 29-16-

232. None of the fragments can be joined physically. N 5651 (+) N 5652 are two small fragments of another copy of ED LA A from Nippur (without glosses).

Traditional copies of Early Dynastic Fish are not surprising. From the earliest period in archaic uruk this had been the most frequently copied composition. Most of the pieces without glosses are gnomes, with the exception of SLT 112. BM 3041 + BM 90906 is a cylinder in a rather bad state of preservation.

N 5867 is an OB copy of the ED Fish list from Nippur without glosses (courtesy M. Civil).

The prominent position of ED LA A in this corpus is not surprising. From the earliest period in archaic uruk this had been the most frequently copied composition. Most of the pieces without glosses are gnomes, with the exception of SLT 112. BM 3041 + BM 90906 is a cylinder in a rather bad state of preservation.

Read in Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Vol. VI, p. xxviii. When I examined the piece in spring 1997 it was unkicked and uncleaned and could be read only partially.


Within the used of the learned possibilities of the writing system in its extreme form is a post-Old Babylonian phenomenon. In itself, however, this ap-

proach to the writing system was not new. Knowledge of the sign repertoire, its system and its possibilities, extending far beyond what may be used in the practice of day-to-day writing, belonged to the goals of the Old Babylonian Eduka. This knowledge, rather than the technique of writing as such, is how a true scribe distinguished himself.

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39) A well-known example is the stela on which is inscribed the Code of Hammurapi, where the vertical reading direction is in probably intended to enhance the impression of the one line of the text. See also YOS 1, 12, with the colophon in a common O. B. hand.

40) Veldhuis 1997, p. 244.
BM 82905 is the lower left corner of a tablet measuring 2.9 by 3.9 cms. The curvature of the fragment is consistent with a two-column format. It is written in a formal Old Babylonian hand. Because of the nature of the text palaeography is of no help in determining its date more precisely. We may reconstruct its contents as follows:

Col. 1: [1]-32
Col. 2: [33-862]
Col. 3: [863-93]
Col. 4: 94-[end]

In Pettinato’s reconstruction (MEE 3, p. 95f.) ED Fish has 101 lines. It is possible that our text had a few lines more. Anyway, so often in lexical compositions, the last section is the least standardised. The BM fragment skips line 97 and has 99 before 98. A new edition of ED Fish, including the present fragment and a number of unpublished duplicates from Ur-III Nippur is being prepared by M. Civil. For that reason the BM text is edited here on its own, and the commentary is restricted to the aspect that is of most interest in the present context: the glosses.

Many of the glosses contain the element /ku/ indicating that /ku/ was part of the word. The gloss /ku-Ass/ in obv. 5 may be interpreted as an inverted reading of the line /kum-ku/. The next line, /mekku/ is paralleled in earlier sources by me-du-ku. Apparently the correct reading order is me-ku-du. In reverse 1 the Old Babylonian source reads GLA-pisan-ge-Ass-ku. The element /ku/ of the gloss probably represents the initial GLA thus confirming Klein’s suggestion of a reading GL = ku (Klein 1981, p. 117f.). In obv. 1 the /ku/ is of course ku, as demonstrated by the ED entry pisan-ku, (with variant PISAN-X-ku), corresponding to GLA-kU, in the Archaic text. The gloss bi-se-g4A for PISAN, which returns in the next entry, is interesting. Civil (1975, p. 149) discussed the two main variants of this word, pisan and mezam, and the various alternative representations in glosses. Initial b and final g are both well attested, but middle \( \mathbb{G} \) is not. The word was reconstructed by Civil as bi\( \mathbb{G} \) or \( \mathbb{G} \)s\( \mathbb{G} \), where the \( \mathbb{G} \) stands for the alternation of x and z in the glosses. That this sibilant was sometimes understood as \( \mathbb{G} \) (as in the gloss in our line) is demonstrated by the two forms of the Akkadian keyword: pisannu and pisannu. The gloss in obverse 4 is at first sight rather uninformative: \( \mathbb{G} \)Ir-Ass-ku. In contrast with the glosses discussed above it does not include an element /ku/. It may thus indicate that here \( \mathbb{G} \)U, is a true determinative. I do not fully understand the gloss e\( \mathbb{G} \) (if read correctly) in reverse 4: LUKUR-Ass Ass-\( \mathbb{G} \)ku. The ED text (preserved in only one copy) was read PLASAR-kU, in MEE 3.

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P. Altinger
J. Boeck

41) Whether the Old Babylonian scribe intended to identify sum-ku with kūtu-ku, is difficult to say. Originally kūtu-ku, and kūtu-ku, were distinguished; both appear in Archaic and ED Fish lists (MEE 3, p. 99, 47a paralleled by ATU 3, p. 97, 51). Its omission in the Ebla version may indicate that by this time the two words were considered equivalent. Further discussion has to await Civil’s new edition of the composition.

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Näpfe: ein Ur III-Text aus einer Wiener Privatsammlung

Von Michael Jursa und Michaela Wesszeli (Wien)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vs.</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>4 dug 1 bân 5 sîla ha-la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4 dug 1 bân 5 sîla lugal-zag-ge³&lt;si&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>4 dug 1 bân 5 sîla nîngir-di-me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>4 dug 1 bân 5 sîla 4-ki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>4 dug 1 bân 5 sîla ur³&lt;šarrā³&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>4 dug 1 bân 5 sîla ir³&lt;mu&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>2 dug 3 bân 5 dug-gal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Addendum:

Line 256 in OB Proto-Lu³, provisionally read G2²BU-ud in MSL 12 42, is to be read sur³. According to the commentary (MSL 12 70) the reading of the line was "very uncertain". In the meantime CBS 14108 (source C) has been baked and cleaned and now shows a very clear sur³ (UZ, UD). Source D (N³T351+) has X-BU. The X in D "could be tu³" according to MSL 12 70. The line, however, is undamaged. The traces may be interpreted as an erasure, plus the tail of the SîTA in the preceding line. In other words, source D simply has BU, probably to be read sur³. Finally, source V³³ (N 6013) joins indirectly with N 5129÷N 5382, as reported in MSL 13 13 (J) and 14 (K). This source was kindly brought to my attention by M. Civil. In the new piece line 256 reads UZ³, apparently deficient for sur³.