

A LU E SCHOOL TABLET FROM THE SERVICE QUARTER OF THE ROYAL PALACE AP AT URKESH

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The tablet A1j1 (fig. 1) was found in July 1992¹ in the floor accumulation labeled A1f113, in what is now labeled room B2 (fig. 2) of the royal palace AP at Urkesh, modern Tell Mozan. It was broken in antiquity, and its three fragments were found a few centimeters apart from each other. The first and larger fragment received the label A1.69, and the other two, which were found still joined together, received the label A1.72. Even though found close to each other, the appearance of the fragments is quite different: A1.69, the right half, is blackened by being in contact with ash, while A1.72 (consisting of the two fragments that compose the left half) is not.

Joined together, the fragments yield a practically complete text, with 5 lines on the obverse and one on the reverse. The text is an excerpt from the Early Dynastic LU E professions list, of which the full text has reconstructed from sources found at Abu Salabikh,² Ebla,³ Gasur,⁴ and Kish.⁵

The fact that our school tablet was broken in antiquity, but its pieces were preserved in the

same immediate context, suggests the presence of apprentice scribes active within the storehouse. It seems likely that objects arriving in the storehouse, which were stored in sector B, were registered in the part of the building to the South (Sectors A and C, fig. 2). While sector A is badly eroded and little is left besides the outline of the walls, sector C is well preserved, and may give evidence of a scribal installation.⁶ Another complete small tablet, an inscribed docket, and more than forty fragments of tablets, have been found within the building, and also just outside it to the West.

One of the reasons why this find holds special interest is that the texts from Urkesh are the northernmost stratified cuneiform material in the

1. The text was presented in 1993 at the national meeting of the American Oriental Society in Chapel Hill. It was briefly described in G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Mozān, Tall," *RLA* 8 (1995) 391 and in G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Urkesh, the First Hurrian Capital," *Biblical Archaeologist* 60 (1997) 94, with a photograph (upside down). A large photograph of the left half portion of the tablet was published in the *New York Times* of November 21, 1995, p. C1. A manuscript with the edition of the text submitted for publication in June 1996 was not published.

2. *MSL* 12 1.5, pp. 16–21 (the portion corresponding to our text is found on p. 17, ll. 34–39); R. D. Biggs, *Inscriptions from Tell Abū Ṣalābikh*. OIP 99 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1974), nn. 54–60 (the portion corresponding to our text is found on pl. 31 ii 34–39; pl. 33 ii 34).

3. *MEE* 3, 27–46 (the portion corresponding to our text is found in three out of six exemplars, shown synoptically on pp. 36–37, lines 34–39).

4. *HSS* 10 222; see *MSL* 12 1.5 (pp. 16–21). The portion corresponding to our text is not preserved.

5. *MAD* 5 N. 35, p. 31, 133, and p1. XIII. For the attribution (by Wilcke) to the LU E list see Biggs, *Inscriptions*, 82. The portion corresponding to our text is not preserved.

6. See G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Royal Palace of Urkesh. Report on the 12th Season at Tell Mozan/Urkesh: Excavations in Area AA, June–October 1999," *MDOG* 132 (2000) 143–45.

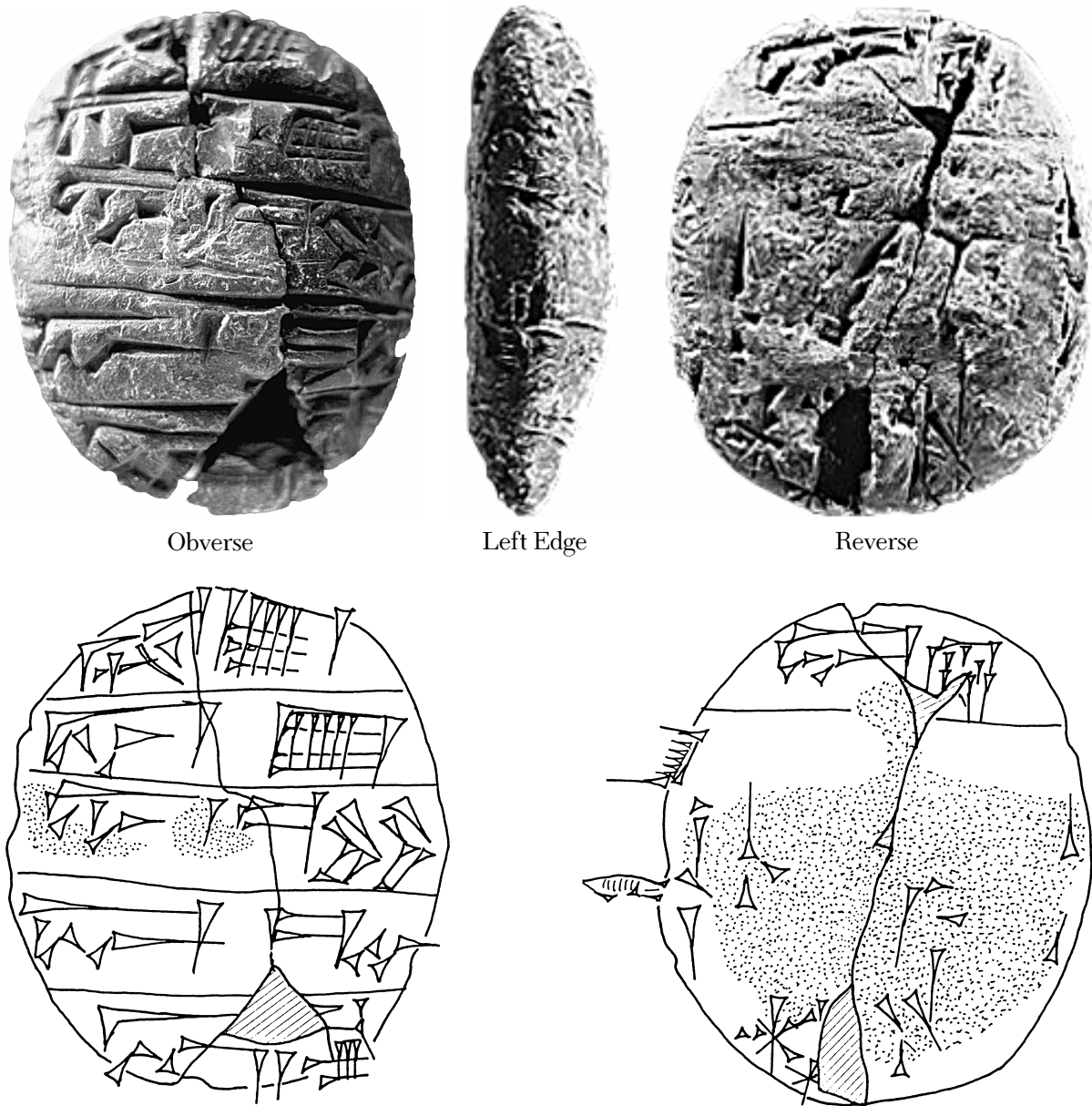


Fig. 1

third millennium, and thus the discovery of this school tablet utilizing a canonical lexical list speaks to the geographical spread of southern Mesopotamian culture. It is not so much the precise location in terms of latitude that matters (Urkesh is only some sixty kilometers north of Nagar, modern Tell Brak), but rather the fact that, in my view, Urkesh belongs to a different cultural horizon, more closely linked to the north than the rest of

the Khabur plains, and is ethnically identifiable as Hurrian.⁷

7. A case in support of a specifically Hurrian identity for Urkesh, in contrast with Nagar, has been made in my article "Urkesh and the Question of Early Hurrian Urbanism," in *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Hudson and B. A. Levine, Peabody Museum Bulletin 7 (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography/Harvard University, 1999), 229–50. Recent discoveries in

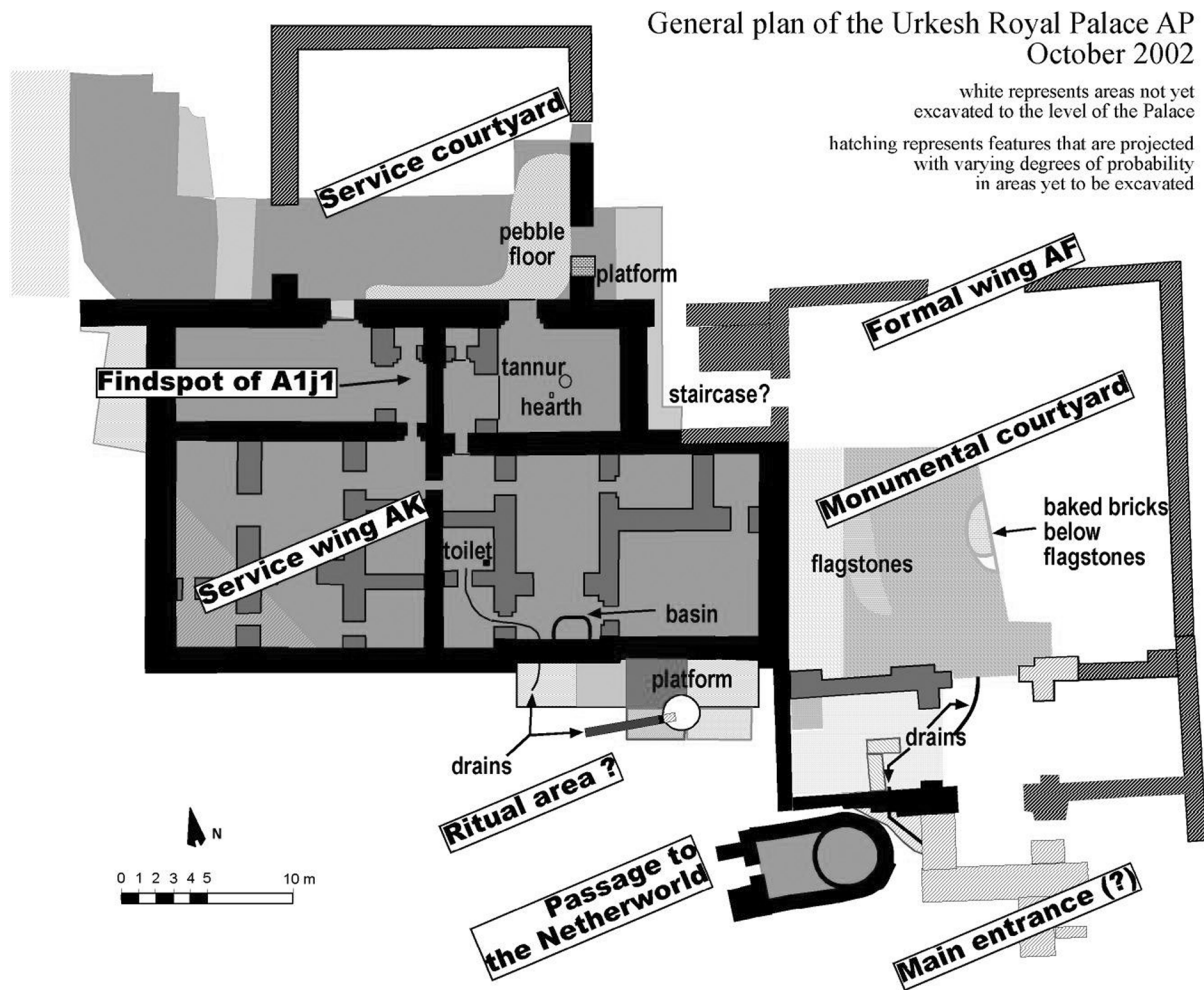


Fig. 2

Following the discovery of impressions of the seal of Tar'am-Agade,⁸ a daughter of Naram-Sin,

the area immediately to the south of the royal palace AP have brought out even more dramatically the nature of Urkesh Hurrian culture, see M. Kelly-Buccellati, "A Hurrian Passage to the Netherworld," *MDOG* 134 (2002) 131–48.

8. See G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, *MDOG* 132, 139–40 and "Überlegungen zur funktionellen und historischen Bestimmung des Königspalastes in Urkeš. Bericht über die 13. Kampagne in Tall Mozan/Urkeš: Ausgraben im Gebiet AA, Juni–August 2000," *MDOG* 133 (2001) 71–76, as well as "Tar'am-Agade, Daughter of Naram-Sin, at Urkesh," in *Of Pots and Plans: Papers on the Archaeology and History of Mesopotamia and Syria presented to David Oates in Honour of his 75th Birthday*, eds. L. Al-Gailani Werr, J. Curtis, H. Martin,

our dating of king Tupkish to the Akkadian period, and specifically to early Naram-Sin or possibly even slightly earlier, has been confirmed. The accumulation A1f113, in which our tablet A1j1 was found, is the earliest one within the palace built by Tupkish, and the nature of its emplacement makes it clear that its period of use was fully contemporary with the reign of Tupkish. The majority of the seal impressions of Tupkish himself, his wife Uqnitum and their courtiers, come from the same or equivalent accumulations throughout the service wing of the Palace. The

A. McMahon, J. Oates and J. Reade (London: Nabu Publications, 2002), 11–31.

Abu Salabikh	Ebla	Urkesh	
6 ad-kid	34 ad-kid	1 ad-kid	“worker in reeds”
7 díṃ-kid ^l	35 díṃ-kid	2 díṃ-kid	“maker of reed mat(s)”
8 díṃ-ŠUB ⁹	36 díṃ-ŠUB-ŠUB	3 díṃ- ^{gis} ŠUB-ŠUB	“maker of throwstick(s)”
9 díṃ-ban	37 díṃ- ^{gis} ban	4 díṃ- ^{gis} ban	“maker of bow(s)”
10 díṃ-garig(ZUM) ¹⁰	38 díṃ- ^{gis} garig	5 díṃ- ^{gis} garig ¹²	“maker of comb(s)”
11 díṃ-I	39 díṃ-I-I	6 díṃ- ^{gis} I-I ¹²	“maker of ?”

Abu Salabikh	Ebla	Urkesh
6	34	1
7	35	2
8	36	3
9	37	4
10	38	5
11	39	6

text from Abu Salabikh dates to ED III, those from Ebla to late ED III¹¹ and from Gasur to Old Akkadian, while for the Kish text there is an outside possibility that it may date to Ur III.¹²

A transliteration of the text,¹³ arranged synoptically with the pertinent portions of the Abu

Salabikh and Ebla texts, shows interesting minor variations between the redactions (highlighted graphically in the second table below—the gray representing identity and the hatching similarity). The first two lines are identical in all three texts, and lines 4–5 are identical in Ebla and Urkesh. A further correlation between the Ebla and the Urkesh text is in the doubling of the last sign in line 3. The Urkesh text extends the use of the determinative to two more lines than the Ebla text (lines 3 and 6). This seems to suggest that the Urkesh text is closer to Ebla than to Abu Salabikh.

13. On the reverse, there are a number of wedges, and two signs, which go in different directions, mostly opposite to that of the text. They must reflect an exercise in using the stylus.

9. See B. Alster, *RA* 85 (1991) 6–8.

10. I owe the reading garig, “comb” (i.e., later ga-rig or ^{gis}garig) to P. Steinkeller (personal communication, for which I am most grateful).

11. See recently M. C. Astour, “A Reconstruction of the History of Ebla (Part 2),” *Eblaïtica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaite Language*, 4, (2002), 73–77.

12. Gelb, *MAD* 5, p. 31: “Perhaps Ur III?”; p. xvi: “(this and another tablet) give the appearance of tablets of the Ur III period.” But note that every other tablet published in this volume is Sargonic or Pre-Sargonic.