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Observations on Diplomatics, Tablet Layout and Cultural Evolution of the Early Third Millennium: The Archaic Texts from Ur

1 Introduction

The Early Dynastic (ED) I–II period (ca. 2950–2650 BC), although crucial to our understanding of Mesopotamian history, is poorly documented, since no more than five hundred cuneiform tablets have been discovered as of yet.¹ The main textual corpus consists of 403 tablets uncovered by L. Woolley in the Royal Cemetery of Ur;² around 25 tablets from Uruk, later than the archaic documents and contemporary with the texts from Ur;³ further tablets which may have originated in Umma, Nippur, Kiš or be of unknown provenance;⁴ and finally, some of the so-called archaic *kudurru*: these latter may indeed be later than the Late Uruk period, to which they were dated by the authors of ELTS.⁵ ED I–II texts are characterized by the first clear occurrences of the Sumerian language and by a use of writing similar to that of the Fara scripts.⁶ On the other hand, these texts still display archaic features, such as the numerical system, which confirm that “they are intermediate in character between the collections of Jemdet Nasr and Fara”.⁷ Thus, to better estimate the cultural significance of the ED I–II documents, it is helpful to examine not only philological data, but also the “material” features, which are the main topic of this paper.

Diplomatics does not merely form an extraneous framework to writing. It is also a part of its essence, notably because any written sentence is embedded in a “material”

I would like to express my gratitude to Kamran V. Zand, Heidelberg, for his suggestions; I would also like to thank Alexander J. Edmonds, Tübingen, for having corrected the English of the present paper. Abbreviations follow the list given in the Reallexikon der Assyriologie as well as publication references available on the CDLI project; in order to make references to cuneiform texts from the ED I–II period easier, UET II and ATFU are used for Burrows 1935 and Lecompte 2013 respectively.

1 On the ED I–II period texts, see Viscato 2000, 13–18; Lecompte 2013, 1–28.

2 331 tablets were first edited by E. Burrows in UET II, with copies and an index of names (UET II, 1–266, 271–310, 312, 338–373). Later some remaining unpublished texts, consisting of 65 fragments (three without inscription), were published in ATFU.

3 Mainly published in Green 1982, Texts 1–13; see a preliminary catalogue in Lecompte 2013, 23, n. 79.

4 See Lecompte 2013, 23–24, notes 80–83; recently V. Bartash has published one ED I–II text in *CUSAS* 23, Text 144; further tablets are, according to the CDLI website, unpublished.

5 On the dating of these documents, see Steinkeller 2011, 214; Lecompte 2013, 23, n. 76.

6 Burrows 1935, 22–23; Englund 1998, 215; Krebernik 2002, 6.

7 Burrows 1935, 1.

and in the shape through which it is revealed (paper, book, lines, font, etc.). On the other hand, “material” shape and format determine or match the nature of a written sentence, which only exists as it appears: for instance, it is well known that in Mesopotamia royal inscriptions are generally written on different supports than administrative records. Furthermore, semiological studies, especially those of R. Barthes on this topic, refer to the distinction made by de Saussure between two components of the sign, the concept and its phonic form, *signifiant* and *signifié*,⁸ but in relation to the analysis of images and objects.⁹ This is why semiological studies focus on form and meaning, writing and image.¹⁰ This distinction matters for the question of the diplomatics of ED I–II documents, because the shapes of the cuneiform tablets, as well as the material arrangement of signs, far from being neutral, determine the conceptual order of the content, even for administrative texts. Such outer physical aspects are part of the meaning of a tablet and therefore reflect the stream of cultural tradition. According to Barthes, the *signifié* is more precisely identified with what a word refers to throughout the language, whereas the *signifiant* is a material feature of the sign. Barthes further argues that the *signifiant*, or “signifier”, is a mediator and therefore needs “matter”: “la substance du signifiant est toujours matérielle”.¹¹ Accordingly, the *signifiant* can be expressed through different kinds of signs: verbal, graphic, gestural, etc. The use of graphical signs displays material aspects of writing which are closely related to language, meaning, and concept, and is therefore a semiological system *per se*.¹²

Against this backdrop, the present study will stress two aspects of the implications of “material” features throughout the ED I–II tablets which are highly relevant in underlining their cultural evolution during the early third millennium. Firstly, tablet format and shape from the Late Uruk period to the time of the Fara texts underwent important changes. Texts from Ur, which are not well standardized, show intermediate features, though the column disposition is organized rather similarly to the Fara conventions. On the other hand, since systematic palaeographical studies should be devoted to the texts from Ur, which would exceed the scope of the present article, only the relation between the set of (graphical) signs and the squares (or cases)/lines within which they are written will be highlighted here. This therefore concerns the order of signs in clusters. In the present article, the tablets will be turned 90° counter-clockwise from their original reading and writing direction, in order to conform to conventional standards within Assyriology.

⁸ Saussure 1995, 99–103.

⁹ See for instance Barthes 1964.

¹⁰ Barthes 1970, 214–223.

¹¹ Barthes 1964, 109.

¹² The significance of tablet shape as well as of sign order in the cuneiform texts matches the observation of Barthes 1970, 214, on the aims of semiological studies: “la sémiologie est une science des formes puisqu’elle étudie des significations indépendamment de leur contenu”.

2 Tablet Shape and Format from the Late Uruk to the Fara Period

2.1 ED I–II Texts

2.1.1 Shape of the Tablets

In spite of their fragmentary state, the archaic texts from Ur were described as follows by E. Burrows:

The great majority of the tablets (to abstract from labels and the like) are oblong, with length [i.e., top to bottom of copies] greater than breadth, straight or oblong, slightly rounded sides, and but slightly rounded corners¹³

Examples of the aforementioned typical oblong format are: ATFU 56 (Ill. A.5), with straight sides and slightly rounded corners, and UET II, 61 (Ill. A.3) and 70, which display slightly curved sides. Burrows also noticed many exceptions, such as circular tablets, tablets with equal length and breadth, etc. Though most of the tablets have an oblong format, some of them can be cushion-like in form, such as ATFU 2 or UET II, 55 (Ill. A.1). R. K. Englund also observed that ED I–II tablets were “clumsily” formed,¹⁴ since many texts from Ur present irregular sides, for instance UET II, 55 (Ill. A.1), whereas contemporary tablets from Uruk seem (at least according to the available copies) to be well executed. However, this aspect of the tablets from Ur is barely noticeable in Burrows’ copies, and could also be due to the fragmentary state of preservation of this material. Tablets which were wholly preserved, however, seem to be generally well formed, such as UET II, 177 (Ill. A.4) or ATFU 54.

As regards tablet surface, Burrows makes the following observation:

About 70 per cent. of the relatively complete tablets have obverse flat and reverse convex, or obverse slightly convex and reverse more convex; about 20 per cent. are nearly equally convex on both sides (occasionally nearly flat on both sides): about 10 per cent. are more convex on the obverse and less so, or flat, on reverse¹⁵

The surface of the majority of the tablets can easily be seen in ATFU 57 and UET II, 177 (Ill. A.6 and 4), the former having a flat obverse and convex reverse, the latter a slightly convex obverse and more convex reverse. UET II, 70 seems to illustrate the

¹³ Burrows 1935, 4.

¹⁴ Englund 1998, 215.

¹⁵ Burrows 1935, 4.

kind of tablets with both obverse and reverse convex, while ATFU 64 is an example of the last category (convex obverse and flat reverse). According to the photographs available, the situation seems to be the same for those of Uruk and for the tablets without provenance.

2.1.2 Columniation and Internal Organization

According to Burrows, the internal organization can be described as follows:

Columns are divided into cases in the usual way [...] The asymmetrical subdivisions that characterize the JN tablets do not occur. The affinity is here with Fara and later texts [...] The reverse is most often uninscribed. When it is inscribed the tablet is turned over on the bottom edge, as at Fara; never laterally, as sometimes at JN. The right column of the obverse may run over on the reverse [...]¹⁶

There are a few examples of tablets from Ur where the reverses are uninscribed but they have a separation line drawn beforehand by the scribe (see for instance ATFU 18). ED I–II tablets from Uruk have similarly uninscribed reverses. In other cases, such as UET II, 252 and ATFU 57 (Ill. A.2 and 6), the last column of the obverse continues on the reverse and is indeed its first column.

As regards disposition of columns, however, the situation is more problematic than Burrows' description would suggest. On the one hand, it is noticeable that the format typical of archaic tablets from Uruk and Jemdet Nasr, with their multiple entries and complex subdivision, is not anymore in use. On the other hand, one also has to observe that, unlike the Fara tablets, ED I–II texts, at least those from Ur, are not well standardized and show an irregular use of columniation, an indication that the scribes did not follow a strict protocol. Firstly, the lines dividing the cases into columns are regularly clumsily shaped and rarely as well-drawn as they are in many Fara or Abū Šalābīḥ tablets. Secondly, very few tablets from Ur are similar to the big texts from the ED IIIa period, with the exception of UET II, 112, which has 6 columns, each containing more than 20 lines. This disposition of columns and lines shows a more irregular pattern than during the ED IIIa period: in some tablets, such as UET II, 201, ATFU 55 (Ill. A.8), and ATFU 64, one side contains two columns, the other only one row of lines running over its whole surface, similar to the format of later periods, for instance Sargonic; likewise, some tablets only have one row of lines on one side (UET II, 82, 115 and 122). Columniation generally runs from left to right on the obverse and from right to left on the reverse. The way columns succeed one another is in some cases peculiar: for instance, on the obverse of UET II, 177 (Ill. A.4), there is a gap between the second and third columns, and the second column is inscribed on only

¹⁶ Burrows 1935, 4.

half of its height, while the third column begins with an entry which seems to introduce a different kind of ware ($LA_2 NINDA_2 \times \check{S}E$). In UET II, 104, the obverse consists of three columns stopping at half of its height, and the last line has the sign APIN, referring to land plots to plough (uru_4); such disposition is consistent with the format of Late Uruk as well as Fara texts. In UET II, 98, there is also a gap between the first and third columns of the obverse, and the second column is left blank and without any case/square, as on the reverse of the ED III tablets. In other tablets, columns already drawn are left uninscribed, such as UET II, 20 and 27, but in the latter, the columns of the reverse all are inscribed; only the obverse contains two columns without inscription. The riddle of why scribes drew on tablets which were obviously too big cannot be solved. However, it should be observed that in ATFU 33 (III. A.7), signs in the right column have been erased, as if the scribe intended to reuse it.

Unlike some Late Uruk tablets, such as MSVO 1, 2–3, no ED I–II text shows a format consisting of lines running from right to left if turned 90° clockwise and divided into cases/squares in which signs were written “vertically”. There does not seem to be any evidence for the direction of writing or reading tablets and signs in the archaic tablets from Ur,¹⁷ although one may assume that this direction was indeed the same as during the third millennium and earlier periods.¹⁸

2.1.3 Clauses, Subscripts, Totals and Marks

As Burrows noted,¹⁹ totals are expressed only by the term gu_2 -an- $\check{S}e_3$, never $\check{S}u$ -ni $\check{g}en_2$, and are only found in a few tablets, which mostly deal with field surfaces. Totals are also not explicitly written, but merely consist of an amount, such as in ATFU 62, which summarizes the number of men, designated as lu_2 -RU, sent to a shrine called e_2 -nun gal.

¹⁷ H. J. Nissen in Damerow/Englund/Nissen 1993, 120, notices that *Winkelhaken* signs occur later than the Fara period and indicate a change in the writing orientation; the same may be said for the ED I–II documents.

¹⁸ Krebernik 1998, 274, writes about the tablets from the Fara period: “Bekanntlich sind die Keilschriftzeichen in ihrer uns vertrauten Form gegenüber der ursprünglichen, an den Bildinhalten erkennbaren Stellung um 90° Grad nach links gekippt, und aus ursprünglich waagrecht nach links verlaufenden Fächern sind Zeilen senkrechter Kolonnen geworden”. The designs on the tablets from Fara show, according to the same scholar, that the reading of these tablets was determined according to the vertical orientation of the signs. See also Edzard 1976–1980, 596. An explanation for the change in writing orientation was also given by Falkenstein 1936, 9–11, who assumed that tablets were first held in the palm of the left hand at an angle of approximately 45° in relation to the scribe. Compare with Deimel’s interpretation, 1922, 12–3. Zand 2008, 10.

¹⁹ Burrows 1935, 5.

Table 1: Expression gu_2 -an- $\check{s}e_3$ in the archaic texts from Ur.

Fields	Other
UET II, 97 – UET II, 113D – UET II, 122 – UET II, 127 – UET II, 163 – UET II, 164 – UET II, 184 – UET II, 356 – UET II, 359 – UET II, 365 – UET II, 371 (?)	UET II, 21. Flax (gu)? – UET II, 85. Barley, Vessel – UET II, 166. bread? – UET II, 297. ?

Another interesting feature is the presence of some sets of signs, which are set apart from the rest of the text and seem to correspond to clauses supposedly intended to summarize the content of the tablet or to refer to the administrator responsible for it. Such names and terms are generally isolated within a column and are not written inside a case, but seemingly arranged at random within the tablet. These can be described as subscripts.²⁰

Clauses summarizing content are related either to food rations concerning beer, bread and barley, or to fields, although the expression gid_2 -a, “measured”,²¹ is generally written in the “standard” cases and lines, apart from UET II, 184.²² Moreover, since several personal and professional names are attested, such clauses do not point to the existence of an administrative office, but rather refer to the responsibility of a few administrators. In this respect, the attestation in UET II, 162 of a possible lugal may not be evidence for the existence of a kingship in the city of Ur, since there is no further example of an office controlled by a king.²³ In UET II, 281, the separated clause, which refers to a number of cakes given to the $engiz/Me-en-gi$,²⁴ is merely a supplementary item in this administrative record which should have been written in the center of the tablet.²⁵

²⁰ See Sallaberger 2010, 33–34.

²¹ Jagersma 2010, 19. According to Burrows 1935, 22, this expression should be interpreted as: a- gid_2 but, with respect to the scarcity of attestations of the prefix -a, it may indeed consist of the verb gid_2 and the nominalizing suffix -a., for the latter writing gid_2 -da.

²² See UET II, 104. R0106 (note, however, that the expression is somewhat isolated and separated); UET II, 111. 00102; UET II, 122. 00102; UET II, 187. 00101.

²³ Compare with Sallaberger 2010, 33: “Text 162 also contains a clause of $\check{s}e$ lugal sanga, grain of king and administrator”. On the existence of kingship in the archaic texts from Ur, see also Andersson 2012, 245–247 and Lecompte 2013, 21–22.

²⁴ Those foodstuffs might be related to the profession of $engiz$, “cook”.

²⁵ Note also that the reverse of the lexical text UET II, 264, contains a colophon to be read Aya_2 - $engur-si$, as well as the sign $MU\check{S}_3$ and another unidentified sign, all set freely on the tablet (i.e., not enclosed in cases). This is consistent with the Late Uruk lexical texts.

Table 2: Isolated clauses in the archaic texts from Ur^a.

Content	Administrator/Responsible
UET II, 55. Obv. II. ninda gi ₄	UET II, 34. Rs. PA-EREN ₂ .X(KIŠ).KI
UET II, 61. Rs. kaš gi ₄	UET II, 37. Rs. S. 379(EGIR/IB ₂ A) AN x
UET II, 86. Obv. II. še+ninda	UET II, 108. Rs. II. kišgal a-ša ₃ GAN ₂
UET II, 95. Obv. II. še gu ₇ eš ₃	UET II, 162. Rs. I. lugal SAĜĜA(šid?) še
UET II, 127. Rs. I. GAN ₂ Nanna _x	UET II, 170. Obv. III. Lugal-PA-SU ₁₃ +SIKIL
UET II, 177. Rs. II. GIR! DU ₃	UET II, 176. Rs. GAL ([lug]al?)
UET II, 184. Obv. III. gid ₂ -a	UET II, 184. Obv. II. GAN ₂ EN
Rs. 2. [...] APIN	UET II, 226. Rs. I. NU ŠU ^c
UET II, 209. Rs. X(ĜIRI ₃ ?)	UET II, 262. Rs. namešda
UET II, 226. Obv. II GAN ₂	UET II, 281. Rs. 2N ₁ gug ₂ engiz
Rs. I. NU ŠU (PN)	UET II, 339. Obv. I. ba[h̄ar ₄ ?]
UET II, 252. Rs. igi-nim ŠA ₃	UET II, 343. Obv. II. 3'. gal-sukkal A ZA ₃
UET II, 364. Rs. NU S. 277 ^b	UET II, 353. Obv. II. PAP NAM ₂ ŠA ₃ (?)
ATFU 37. Rs. I?	ATFU 17. Obv. II. DU[MU]? ^d
ATFU 61. Rs. IV. kas ₄	

Notes: **a** Sallaberger 2010, 34, considers the reference to a nunnuzi priestess in UET II, 348 to be a subscript, although from our point of view it is merely integrated into the standard columniation.

b This sign probably refers to a kind of fish and is similar to DIM₃. **c** NU ŠU can surely be identified as a personal name because of its attestation in UET II, 226. Obv. IV. 1. **d** In my edition of this text, this possible script was merely considered to be an erasure.

Lastly, a few ED I–II tablets contain marks such as those recently analysed by J. Dahl for the Proto-Elamite corpus.²⁶ In contrast with those tablets, ED I–II non-writing marks are scantily attested and never occur in more than one tablet.²⁷ We can distinguish the following kinds of marks and present here an exhaustive list of those marks:²⁸

- non-writing marks on inscribed tablets: UET II, 51, star-like mark; UET II, 53, mark similar to the sign ŠU; UET II, 55 (III. A.1), complex drawing; UET II, 99 geometric shape; UET II, 105, drawing consisting of a circle and a triangle; UET II, 253, complex geometric shape; UET II, 264, drawing on the reverse (?);²⁹ UET II, 299,

²⁶ Dahl 2012.

²⁷ Non-writing marks in Ur are therefore unlikely to refer to any archival signs drawn to distinguish offices or administrators. Compare with the practice in Proto-Elamite tablets, Dahl 2012, 8–9. They are, on the other hand, not elaborated enough to be compared with the drawings in the texts from Fara and Abū Šalābiḥ, though Dahl 2012, 8, suggests that both kinds of marks closely resemble one another. On the designs in the ED IIIa tablets, see Biggs 1974, 31; Mander 1995, 18, clearly separates the marks observable in the Fara tablets, which he suggests are tied with the colophons, from the earlier engravings.

²⁸ For a preliminary list, see Dahl 2012, 8.

²⁹ Though mentioned by Dahl 2012, 8, this tablet may not contain a mark, but just be damaged.

- scratching on the reverse (?);³⁰ UET II, 312 geometric mark similar to a building plan (?)³¹
- in some uninscribed tablets, we find only drawn markings: UET II, 157, mark similar to the sign UB; UET II, 249, 250 and ATFU 36,³² same complex mark; UET II, 263, scratchings;³³ UET II, 292–293, scratchings, similar to a “coin” or a sign;³⁴ UET II, 311, 313–315 (sealings), plain drawings partly similar to signs.³⁵

2.2 Uruk Texts

In comparison with the ED I–II tablets, those from the Late Uruk period, especially from level III of the Eanna sector, as well as those from Jemdet Nasr, display some common features. Archaic tablets are also frequently oblong, with greater length than breadth. Smaller tablets resemble pillows in a manner similar to the archaic texts from Ur.³⁶ However, in contrast to these, Jemdet Nasr texts generally have a convex obverse and a flat reverse, even though there is no systematic rule regarding the repartition of their surface.³⁷ As Falkenstein noticed, on tablets from the Uruk IV level both sides are slightly rounded;³⁸ Uruk III tablets also possess equally convex obverse and reverse sides.³⁹ On the other hand, the organization of columns undergoes an important change during the Late Uruk period: while Uruk IV texts regularly consist of plain cushion-like tablets without any columniation, those of the Uruk III period display the use of more complex formats, especially characterized by the subdivision of columns and squares.⁴⁰ Since the writing was oriented “vertically” and turned 90°

30 Though included by Dahl 2012, 8 in the tablets containing a mark, it may again be merely a damaged trace.

31 It is questionable whether in UET II, 290, the mark similar to a modern comma must be identified with BAR.

32 See the commentary to this “tablet” with the similar forms attested during the Uruk period.

33 Burrows 1935, 53.

34 Burrows 1935, 54: “Irregular piece with sign (?) repeated. Sealing?”.

35 Burrows 1935, 55 considers those drawings to be “scratched markings”, “scratched signs”. The signs DU, MUNU₄ and SAL can be identified in UET II, 311, 314 and 315. The sign in UET II, 313 is uncertain. See also UE III, Drawings 50–119, Plates 3–6 and the commentaries by Legrain.

36 For an overview on tablet format during the Uruk period, see Falkenstein 1936, 7–8, 11–12.

37 Langdon 1928, III; Falkenstein 1936, 8.

38 Falkenstein 1936, 7: “Beide Seiten dieser sehr oft nur einseitig beschriebenen Stücke sind in gleicher Weise leicht gewölbt”. Falkenstein also notes two exceptions to this format.

39 Falkenstein 1936, 8: “Gewöhnlich sind beide Seiten gleichmäßig gewölbt”.

40 Falkenstein 1936, 7 and 11: “Die kleinen rechteckigen und ovalen Tontafeln der Schicht IV weisen in der Regel keine Unterteilung auf. [...] Die umfangreicheren Texte der Schicht IV und der späteren Zeiten zerlegen die Schreibfläche durch senkrechte Striche, die die einzelnen Fächer zu Kolonnen vereinigen”. Englund 1998, 57, on the Uruk IV tablets: “Only the obverse of these texts is inscribed,

clockwise in comparison with the presentation of modern copies and photographs, scribes drew the signs from right to left and filled each case from top to bottom in what is “horizontal” to us. Accordingly, some tablets from Jemdet Nasr, such as MSVO 1, 2–3, display “horizontal” rows of lines divided into squares when turned 90° counter-clockwise from their original orientation instead of columns running from top to bottom down the tablet. This feature may explain why, in some tablets from Ur, an arbitrary arrangement of lines and columns, with an alternation between columns and lines, can be found.

Other features of the Late Uruk texts seem to match the organization of tablets found in Ur:

1. The reverse is often left uninscribed, especially in lexical lists.
2. Sets of signs in the last clauses may be isolated or may not stand in a column, similarly to the subscripts and separated clauses in ED I–II texts, such as the reverse of MSVO 1, 13 and of ATU 5, W5233b. In other tablets, sets of signs are written in a column but are not divided into the usual lines and seem more freely arranged, like in ATU 5, W9168h+, and MSVO 1, 84. All of these examples show the use of a so-called “subscript” which survived during the ED I–II period.

2.3 ED IIIa Period

The oblong format with rounded sides typical of the archaic documents from Ur is generally no longer in use, having been replaced by small cushion-like tablets and larger rectangular texts, though there are examples of oblong texts with straight or rounded sides.⁴¹ As observed by Falkenstein, tablet dimensions increase during the ED IIIa period.⁴² Tablets are generally inscribed on both sides, unlike the archaic documents from Ur. On the other hand, surfaces during the Fara period display more affinity with the aforementioned texts: while in bigger tablets obverse and reverse are often slightly convex, some smaller documents present a flat obverse and a convex

and only with one entry (an entry will usually consist of either a numerical notation, or one or a combination of ideographic signs, or most frequently, both)”. For a description on the Uruk III period texts, see Englund 1998, 61, and the use of “multiple entries”.

41 Deimel 1924, 2–4, on the administrative tablets: “Der äusseren Form nach sind die meisten dieser Wirtschaftstexte quadratisch mit abgerundeten Ecken, also genau wie die der Urukagina Zeit. Bei diesen Fara-Tafeln sind aber Vs und Rs schwach gewölbt; sie sind daher in der Mitte viel dünner, als die Urukagina-Tafeln; die Ränder laufen alle spitzig zu, sind also im Gegensatz zu den letzteren unbeschreibbar”. Deimel 1923, 13; Krebernik 1998, 273. Zand 2009, 8–9 describes UD-GAL-NUN texts as having in Fara “ein rechteckiges Format mit annähernd gleicher Höhe und Breite”; the same is true for Abū Ṣalābīḥ manuscripts. See Biggs 1974, 22 and 30. The ED IIIa oblong tablets are more ovoid than those from the ED I–II period.

42 Falkenstein 1936, 8.

reverse, a format which is also broadly adopted later in Presargonic Lagaš/Ĝirsu documents.⁴³ Columniation is more strictly organized and reliably consists of columns divided into squares: as far as we know, there is no more alternation between lines and columns. Gaps between columns are not arbitrarily arranged, as may be noted in the documents from Ur. A total is designated as šu-niĝen_2 and $\text{gu}_2\text{-an-še}_3$, the latter corresponding to the final sum, an inheritance of the administrative expressions of the previous period. The previously typical subscripts and freely arranged sets of signs referring to the administrator or to the general content of the texts are now seemingly absent. Only the colophons of the literary and lexical texts can be inscribed in a separate space, apart from the rest of the standard columniation.⁴⁴

2.4 The Position of the Archaic Texts from Ur

As Burrows has already noted,⁴⁵ archaic texts from Ur are intermediate in nature.⁴⁶ Features common with Late Uruk/Jemdet Nasr tablets include:

- an oblong shape, half rounded sides, larger tablets having a rectangular format.
- a reverse generally left uninscribed.
- the presence of clauses and subscripts freely disposed apart from or into the columns.
- tablets from Ur displaying rows of lines inconsistent with the usual columns; this clearly comes from the horizontal lines subdivided into columns observable in a few of the Jemdet Nasr texts.

On the other hand, the ED I–II texts are forerunners to the ED III tablets in regard to the following aspects:

- surface, with a rather flat obverse and convex reverse.
- a lack of subdivision of cases similar to the Late Uruk period.
- total expressed as $\text{gu}_2\text{-an-še}_3$.

Other features are very specific to the ED I–II period, such as the clumsy form of many tablets and the random disposition of columns.

⁴³ Deimel 1924, 3; Deimel 1922, 3.

⁴⁴ Deimel 1923, 2; Biggs 1974, 33–34.

⁴⁵ Burrows 1935, 6: “There is thus evidence of many kinds that the present collection of documents is intermediate between those of JN [Jemdet Nasr] and F[ara]”.

⁴⁶ Burrows 1935, 4–5.

3 Material Features of Writing: Sign Clusters

Burrows already made important palaeographical observations on ED I–II tablets: namely, “a large proportion of signs are more primitive than those of Fara” and about one-fifth of the signs have “partially rounded forms where F[ara] already has the angular”.⁴⁷ However, we can also observe a slight tendency toward more angular forms and broader signs than during the Late Uruk period, which might be connected to the stylus used at that time.⁴⁸ Although many tablets are so damaged that the original signs may have been deformed, there are examples of very thin signs similar to those of Late Uruk texts, such as in ATFU 3. An important aspect which will be stressed here is the order of signs, which was given scant attention by Burrows.

3.1 Sign Clusters in the Archaic Texts from Ur⁴⁹

Although those texts are the first to use mainly phonetic values of signs to write (Sumerian) personal names,⁵⁰ the order of sign clusters does not correspond to the pronunciation of such names but seems to be largely arranged at random.⁵¹ It is, however, possible to notice some rules which are related to the use of space within the case or to the presence of numerical signs. As a matter of fact, numerals are consistently clustered in the left edge of the case, where they may follow each other, either horizontally or vertically. The writing of personal names (PNs) is the most important evidence for sign disposition, because very few sentences are written in those tablets, which refer mainly to persons and professions. However, a major difficulty for such a study comes from the fact that many PNs are attested in only one text each.

1. Utu-ur-saĝ is attested in three texts; in UET II, 128 and ATFU 55, it is to be found as follows: numerals Utu-ur/-saĝ. In UET II, 340, this PN is written on a line following the mention of the object: O0101. 2N₁ NINDA₂ × ŠIM 0102. Utu-saĝ:ur. The placement of the signs here depends upon the presence of numerals: in the first

⁴⁷ Burrows 1935, 3: “[wedges] seem to be generally less broad than those of Fara [...] and not unlike those of JN script”. Compare with the observations of H. J. Nissen in Damerow/Englund/Nissen 1993, 119, who contends that the “transition from curvilinear to real cuneiform [...] is completed by the time of the archaic texts from Ur”. See also Edzard 1976–1980, 546.

⁴⁸ Lecompte 2013, 26.

⁴⁹ See Ill. B, for the writing of personal names.

⁵⁰ Englund 1998, 215: “this period is characterized by the earliest apparently multivalent use of proto-cuneiform to write Sumerian words in personal names”. See the observations of Burrows 1935, 22–23; Krebernik 2002, 4, 6–7; Zand 2008, 15.

⁵¹ This feature of sign clusters was considered in studies which do not specifically deal with the archaic texts from Ur. See Edzard 1976–1980, 566; Zand 2008, 10–11.

- two attestations, the scribe uses the available space to the right of the numerals and leaves saĝ below; UTU stands in the first position.
2. Nanna_x-ur-saĝ is attested several times, but the signs are written at random; in most of the tablets, however, we find the following sign cluster: numerals Nanna_x/-saĝ:ur or ur-saĝ, with Nanna_x just below numerals or on their right.⁵² This is far from being the rule: UET II, 42 and 53 and ATFU 60. ur:/Nanna_x:saĝ; ATFU 64. [sa]ĝ:ur-Nanna_x.⁵³
 3. Ur-saĝ, which may be a shortened form of one of the two previous PNs, is also written as Ur-saĝ or saĝ:ur, generally depending on the presence of numerals.⁵⁴
 4. Names with the verb -si: Some personal names are written in the same manner, with no change in sign order: En-abzu-si is three times attested as: abzu-si:en, Aya₂-abzu-si four times as: si:abzu-aya₂.⁵⁵ Ama-e₂-si shows an irregular sign order: si:ama-e₂, e₂:ama:si, ama-e₂-si; the sign order depends upon neither the square nor the presence of numerals, and seems to be randomly arranged.⁵⁶ Ama-e₂-nun-si, which could be the same as Ama-e₂-si, is attested five times in a similar sign order, as follows: numeral si:ama- or Ama:si-e₂-nun, with the verb -si either below the numerals or to the right of them, close to the term ama; e₂ and nun are seemingly not separated, nun being drawn below e₂.⁵⁷
 5. Example of long names: Ša₃-ta-nu-e₃ is written with several sign orders which seem to be randomly disposed.⁵⁸

52 UET II, 55, 66, 87, 181 and 231, see also UET II, 186 and 253, where Nanna_x-ur-saĝ is quoted without numeral before.

53 The two first occurrences are not preceded by any numeral.

54 The first writing occurs generally in cases with numerals, e.g. UET II, 39, 168, 367 and ATFU 65; the latter is especially to be found in cases without numerals, such as UET II, 170 (?), 304, ATFU 60 and 61 (with the exception of UET II, 94).

55 The former is attested in: UET II, 168. O0109'. 1N₁₄ abzu-/si:en. UET II, 259. O0107. abzu-si:en. ATFU 55. O0203. 1N₁₄ 2N₁ abzu-si:en. The latter in: UET II, 127. O0206. si:abzu:aya₂. UET II, 193C. O0103'. [...] si:abzu:aya₂. UET II, 226. O0107. 2N₁ (=2 iku) si:abzu:aya₂. ATFU 50. R0101. si:abzu:aya₂. Transliterations are presented according to the sign order and to their placement within the cases.

56 This personal name is attested in the following texts (correct the index of Burrows 1935, 28). UET II, 62. O0207. 1N₁ e₂:ama/-si. UET II, 226. O0302. 1N₁₄ 3N₁ ama-/si:e₂. UET II, 255. O0205'. 1N₁ si:e₂:ama. UET II, 259. O0202. si:ama-/e₂. UET II, 354. O0202. 3N₁ si: 'ama^l-/e₂. ATFU 57. R0103. 2N₁ si:ama-/e₂. ATFU 18. O0202'. 1N₁ maš₂ Ama-/e₂-/si.

57 See UET II, 61. O0103. 4N₁₄ si:/ama-/e₂-nun!; though this occurrence was considered by E. Burrows to be Ama-e₂-si (PN 98), the sign NUN seems to be drawn below E₂, but without its usual vertical strokes and similar to BAR. UET II, 161. O0102. 1N₂₂ (= 1 eše₃) Ama:/si-e₂-nun, in which SI stands below the numeral. UET II, 199. O0203. 1N₁ si:ama-e₂-nun. UET II, 208. O0103. 2N₁₄ 3N₁ (= 2 bur₃ 3 iku) Ama:/si-e₂-nun, with the same disposition as in UET II, 161. ATFU 60. O0303. 2N₁ si:ama-/e₂-nun.

58 UET II, 19. O0102'. nu-e₃:ša₃-ta. UET II, 104. O0202. 2N₂₂ 1N₁ (= 2 eše₃ 1 iku) ša₃-/ta-/UD-nu-DU, with the sign ŠA₃ to the right of the numerals, TA below them and both signs UD and DU of the logogram E₃ being separated, as is usual in archaic texts from Ur. UET II, 128. O0407. 1N₁₄ (= 1 bur₃) nu-e₃:ša₃-/ta. O0409 (edge). ta:ša₃-nu-e₃. UET II, 143. O0302. [xN_x] [t]a:ša₃-[UD].DU:nu. UET II, 147. O0301. 1N₁

6. Example of long names, names with the element mes-: Mes-lu₂-nu-ḥuḡ is also randomly written: UET II, 62. 00103. 1N₁ lu₂:mes:ḥuḡ:nu. ATFU 57. 00302'. ḥuḡ¹:mes:lu₂:nu. Mes-ki-nu-zu is found as Mes-ki-nu-zu in two texts⁵⁹ and as zu:mes-ki-nu in one other tablet;⁶⁰ the sign set of this name therefore seems rather to be arranged according to its reading.
7. Example of long names, Lugal-nam-tar-PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL: sign order is also random, but NAM and TAR are never separated.⁶¹ When a personal name consists of more than three signs, the order of these is random.
8. Names with a reduplicated sign. In names such as Igi-gi-gi,⁶² Na-zi-zi,⁶³ ĜA₂-za-za,⁶⁴ and Ziz₂-sul-sul (transliteration uncertain),⁶⁵ the last two signs follow each other, either horizontally or vertically, and are not separated.
9. Element ul₄-gal. At least 12 personal names consist of the element ul₄-gal, either “great, noble, great fear” or “big acacia”.⁶⁶ They are generally to be found as: X-gal:ul₄,⁶⁷ with X being a personal element like aya₂, “father”, ama, “mother”, lugal...⁶⁸ Ama-ul₄-gal, though written at random, is in almost all occurrences characterized by the sign set gal:ama, followed or preceded by UL₄.⁶⁹ Aya₂-ul₄-gal: the sign order is more random, but it is noticeable that its writing generally consists of the association ul₄:aya₂, with gal below, to the left or separated, which occurs in six of eight attestations.⁷⁰

nu:ša₃:/e₃:ta. UET II, 162. 00311. e₃:nu:ša₃:/:ta. UET II, 182A. 00202'. 3(?)N₁₉, e₃:ša₃:/:nu:ta.

59 UET II, 128. 00303'. 1N₂₂ 3N₁ (= 1 eše₃ 3 iku) Mes-ki-/nu-zu. ATFU 64. 00204'. 1N₁₄ 5N₁ Mes-/ki-nu-zu.

60 UET II, 252. 00112. 2N₁ zu:mes-ki-/nu. This disposition cannot be explained by the format of the square, nor by the presence of numerals.

61 UET II, 101. 00102. Lugal-nam:/PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL:tar, with NAM being above TAR. UET II, 101. 00106. 2N₁ Lugal:/PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL:/tar:nam. UET II, 224. 00104. Lugal-/tar:nam-/PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL. UET II, 224. R0103'. Lugal:/PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL:/tar:nam. ATFU 46. 00101'. Lugal:/PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL:/tar:nam. In the last two cases, NAM and TAR follow each other horizontally.

62 ATFU 2. R0103. ATFU 60. 00402.

63 PN 543 in UET II; see references given by Burrows 1935.

64 PN 308, not written with the sign ZA but with NUNUZ. See the references given by Burrows 1935.

65 The sign AŠ₂ can be placed before or after sul-sul with no change in meaning, see UET II, 240, 247 and ATFU 61.

66 For literature on the reading of UL₄, which can be read ad₂, see Lecompte 2013, 66.

67 See for instance the writing of the personal names Bil_x(NE.PAPS.377)-ul₄-gal, PN 325 and Lugal-ul₄-gal, PN 471, which feature the sign combination gal:ul₄.

68 E. Burrows considers whether UET II, 152. 00102'. 2N₁₄ 1N₂₂ Aya₂-ul₄-gal GEN₇, refers to Aya₂-ul₄-gal-gen₇, “the father is like a big acacia”, PN 15, but one wonders whether GEN₇ may not mention the profession šidim.

69 The only exception to this writing is UET II, 85. 00202. gal:ul₄¹:ama. The association gal:ama is attested in all of the other occurrences of this PN, see Burrows 1935, 29 and ATFU 166 for the 9 other references.

70 UET II, 24. 00201; UET II, 27. 00110 and 00204; UET II, 84. 00201'; UET II, 152. 00102, in which

10. Other names consisting of two signs. As can be predicted, sign order is also random in many cases: Amar-ib (shortened form of Amar-^dIb) is generally written ib:amar. However, there are also examples of Amar-ib. Ama-alan is generally written as follows: ama with alan just below it in five texts,⁷¹ or in an horizontal direction alan:ama⁷² in three occurrences; only in UET II, 363. 00104. 3N₁ alan:/am[a], is the order otherwise. The disposition of the signs can be partially predicted: the first order consistently occurs when numerals are present, leaving a narrow space right on the edge of the case, which is just enough for the sign AMA; the sign ALAN must therefore be placed below it. The second order occurs only when the case is large enough to contain numerals as well as the signs ALAN and AMA: the scribe thus always chooses to put ALAN to the right of the numerals. The third order can be explained through the broad space to the right of the numerals, in which the sign ALAN can fit, in contrast to the first disposition. Ib-mud is randomly written either ib-mud or mud:ib, seemingly without any predictable reason.

Table 3: Sign order in personal names in the archaic texts from Ur.

Names	“Correct order”	Other fixed or preferred order	Random
Utu-ur-saĝ	Utu-ur-saĝ		Utu-saĝ:ur
Nanna _x -ur-saĝ	Nanna _x -ur-saĝ	Nanna _x -saĝ:ur	ur-Nanna _x :saĝ saĝ:ur:Nanna _x
Ur-saĝ	Ur-saĝ	saĝ:ur	
En-abszu-si		abzu-si:en	
Aya ₂ -abzu-si		si:abzu-aya ₂	
Ama-e ₂ -si	Ama-e ₂ -si		si:ama-e ₂ e ₂ :ama:si
Ama-e ₂ -nun-si		si:ama-e ₂ -nun Ama:si-e ₂ -nun	
Ša ₃ -ta-nu-e ₃			nu:ša ₃ -ta:e ₃ ta:ša ₃ -nu-e ₃ nu-e ₃ :ša ₃ -ta
Mes-lu ₂ -nu-ĥuĝ			lu ₂ :mes:ĥuĝ:nu ĥuĝ:mes:lu ₂ :nu

Aya₂-ul₄-gal is a šidim (considered as Aya₂-ul₄-gal-gen₇ by Burrows, PN 15); UET II, 356. 00102; UET II, 367. 00105'. By contrast, we find following writing: UET II, 87.00203. 4N₁₄ (= 4bur₃) gal:aya₂/ul₄; UET II, 181. R0102. 1N₂₂ 3N₁ (= 1 eše₃ 3 iku) Aya₂/-gal:ul₄. This may show that some scribes wrote sign clusters in a similar disposition, although it is impossible to determine, by means of palaeographical features, whether such tablets were written by the same individual or not.

⁷¹ UET II, 26. 00102. UET II, 93. R0105. UET II, 99. 00105. UET II, 177. 00201. UET II, 350. R0101.

⁷² UET II, 142. 00204. UET II, 194. 00202. UET II, 201. 00102.

Mes-ki-nu-zu	Mes-ki-nu-zu		zu:mes-ki-nu
Lugal-nam-tar-PA. SU ₁₃ +SIKIL		NAM and TAR never separated	
Igi-gi-gi Na-zi-zi ĜA ₂ -za ₇ -za ₇ Ziz ₂ -sul-sul		Reduplicated signs never separated Examples: Igi-gi-gi Ziz ₂ -sul-sul, Ziz ₂ -/sul-/sul, sul-sul:ziz ₂	
Ama-ul ₄ -gal		ul ₄ :gal:ama, gal:ama:ul ₄	
Aya ₂ -ul ₄ -gal		gal:ul ₄ :aya ₂ , ul ₄ :aya ₂ -gal	
Ama-alan		alan:ama	

As can be seen, although sign clusters are often unpredictable due to their random arrangement, some rules or habits can be deduced from the writing of personal names. Physical features of the cases/squares partly determine the way personal names are written. Sign order may also depend on numerals, their presence and the space available to their right; in some instances signs are consistently placed under numerals, such as Nanna_x in the PN Nanna_x-ur-saĝ. The size of squares (breadth and length) is another feature explaining sign arrangement, since scribes had to fill the available space with all of the signs they needed to write. Apart from such criteria, sign order may also reveal the conception of writing from the ED I–II period and the existence of habits tied to some specific names. Some signs are therefore never separated, and are consistently associated with one another, such as reduplicated signs (e.g. Igi-gi-gi, Na-zi-zi, etc.), and some expressions (gal:ul₄ in the names Lugal-ul₄-gal and Bil_x-ul₄-gal or the logogram abzu, which is almost always written zu+ab). It is also striking that some names seem to be written according to their reading, or at least display a regular sign cluster, such as En-abzu-si.

It is worth investigating whether there are further criteria, such as aesthetic or religious factors, which might explain the disposition of sign clusters corresponding to personal names. This might be the reason why some signs are always associated with one another and why a term such as abzu shows a regular sign order. There is, however, hardly any evidence for such criteria, even though we notice a strict regularity in the writing of divine names that consist of a logogram. For instance, the names of Nanna_x and ^{an}Anzu_x are always written in the same way (respectively ŠEŠ+NA, ^{an}IM+ĜE₆).⁷³ Although evidence is lacking, it seems that the practice of maintaining the same sign order is valid to a lesser extent for some professional names: thus kíĝgal is always to be found as GAL+UNKEN,⁷⁴ saĝi is generally written as DU₈.

⁷³ On Anzu see Zand 2010; on the writing of Nanna, see Green and Nissen 1987, 252 (= ZATU 388), Steinkeller 1995, 705, 709–710.

⁷⁴ See the attestations in Burrows 1935, 18 (Occupation 74) and ATFU 64.

ŠU/TAK₄+SILA₃,⁷⁵ and nu-banda₃ is written in the “correct” order.⁷⁶ The term abgal, only mentioned in two tablets, is by contrast written both NUN.ME and ME.NUN;⁷⁷ similarly, maškim is written both PA.DU.KASKAL and KASKAL.PA.DU.⁷⁸ The shape, size and appearance of the signs may have also determined their arrangement within squares and lines, since tablet layout is significant for the arrangement of information. Aesthetic criteria⁷⁹ may therefore be identified in some tablets: for instance, in UET II, 61. 00103, the personal name Ama-e₂-nun-si occurs with the sign AMA above E₂, which may be related to their similar forms, since both are rectangular in appearance and are of the same size. Another example would be the previously mentioned reduplicated signs which are always associated with one another. Since Ama-ul₄-gal and Aya₂-ul₄-gal are represented with different sign orders, though both names share the element ul₄-gal, it may be that scribes applied some norms to the words to be represented. Such norms might also be shaped by aesthetic criteria. Thus, a random ordering of signs does not contradict the existence of some norms influencing their physical arrangement within the cases. Unfortunately, phrases and more developed expressions are too scanty in the archaic texts from Ur to permit any real comparison with personal names. Let it also be here observed that gu₂-an-še₃ generally occurs as an:še₃:gu₂, though there are also examples of še₃:an:gu₂.

3.2 Comparison with the Fara Period

It is well known that Fara tablets do not have a fixed sign order: “Die Anordnung der Zeichen innerhalb eines Faches ist frei, d. h. unabhängig von der Lesefolge”.⁸⁰ This can, of course, be observed in the several phrases which are attested in administrative records as well as in literary works,⁸¹ although some rules related to sign order can be found, depending for instance upon the number of signs within a square.⁸² For

⁷⁵ This profession is mainly attested in ATFU 32, 33 and 52; see ATFU 33 where it is written with TAK₄ instead of ŠU; an exception might be UET II, 112. 00303'. [... si:]iri:aya₂ / [ŠU/TAK₄?] ŠITA DU₈, but if so, then sagi would therefore consist of ŠITA instead of SILA₃, by contrast with the texts published in ATFU. Compare with the writing in Uruk: W 20501. 00302'. [DU₈?],ŠU+SILA₃.

⁷⁶ See references in Burrows 1935, 16; the only exception is UET II, 85. 00203. 2N₁ banda₃:nu.

⁷⁷ The first order is attested in ATFU 57. 00207, the second in UET II, 109. 00306.

⁷⁸ The former in UET II, 70. 00207, the latter in ATFU 52. 00102.

⁷⁹ Cancik-Kirschbaum 2012, 114–117, also refers to the “aesthetic profile” of cuneiform texts, which depends both on the “Textträger” and on the type of tablets in which information is written; this concept is also closely related to the significance of tablet layout for the scribes.

⁸⁰ Krebernik 1998, 274. Deimel 1922, 4: “Die Reihenfolge der Zeichen ist völlig der Willkür des Schreibers überlassen”. The same author also attributes sign order to “Schreibbequemlichkeit”. See also Englund 2009, 10, n. 24 for new investigations on this topic.

⁸¹ Zand 2008, 10–11. See also Johnson/Johnson 2012.

⁸² Johnson/Johnson 2012, 171–172 have shown that the signs of the name of Enki, UD.GAL^{KI}/UNUG,

the convenience of the present study, we will mainly focus here upon the writing of personal names, in order to compare the features of Fara period texts to those of the previous period.⁸³ Due to the scarcity of attestations of most of the personal names in the archaic texts from Ur, however, their writing can hardly be compared with that of the names from the Fara period. This is why other personal names will also be briefly addressed.

1. Personal names attested both during the ED I–II and IIIa periods
 - En-abzu-si is only attested in WF 71. Rs. III. 6, in the “correct” order.
 - Aya₂-abzu-si is attested in RTC 4. Obv. I. 5 and UET II, 2. Rs. III. 6,⁸⁴ also in the “correct” order.
 - Ša₃-ta-nu-e₃, in comparison with Ni₃-ša₃-ta-nu-e₃, is written either in the “correct” order or as Ša₃:nu:ta-e₃, with NU below ŠA₃.⁸⁵ For Ni₃-ša₃-ta-nu-e₃ there is paradoxically more irregularity; for instance, in WF 107, it is written Ni₃-ta:ša₃-nu-e₃ and Ni₃-ta-ša₃-/UD-nu-DU.⁸⁶
 - Mes-lu₂-nu-ḥuḡ is written with less regularity than in the ED I-II texts.⁸⁷
 - Saḡ-tar seems to be consistently written tar:saḡ.
 - Ga-gu₇-gu₇, which is only rarely attested in the archaic texts from Ur but always with the same sign cluster,⁸⁸ is to be found only in WF 128. Obv. III. 7’ in what may be the “correct” order.
 - Utu-ur-saḡ: similarly to the archaic texts from Ur, Utu stands first, and is followed by ur-saḡ or saḡ:ur, or is separated from both signs.
 - Names with the element -ul₄-gal: Aya₂-ul₄-gal is randomly written,⁸⁹ Ama-ul₄-gal is attested in two texts, as Ama-/gal:ul₄ (WF 70, Rs. II. 7) and gal:ama:/ul₄ (TSS Rs. II, 2); by comparison, Nin-ul₄-gal is written nin-gal:ul₄, though

were placed differently according to the number of other signs which are present. This tendency is consistent with the influence of numerals on the placement of sign clustering in the archaic texts from Ur. Furthermore, according to the same scholars, sign clusters in the UD.GAL.NUN texts can show the following order: left > upper right > lower right. By contrast, archaic texts from Ur are apparently not organized according to such fixed sequences.

83 On the attestations of the personal names here chosen as samples, see also Pomponio 1987 and Visicato 1997.

84 This tablet from Ur must be dated to a later period than the usual archaic texts.

85 The former is to be found in TSS 1. Rs. I. 9, WF 119. Rs. III. 1; the latter in WF 22. Obv. VII. 4. WF 78. Rs. III. 9.

86 Respectively Obv. IV. 8 and V. 14.

87 For instance: CT 50, 15. Obv. II. 6. mes:nu:ḥuḡ:/lu₂, TSS 411. Obv. I. 3. Mes-lu₂-/nu-ḥuḡ. TSS 522. Obv. I. 3. 1(aš) Mes-lu₂-/ḥuḡ :nu.

88 PN 405 in UET II. ATFU 37. O0203. This name is written with GA on the left, and the reduplicated GU₇ on the right in a vertical disposition.

89 WF 6. Obv. IV. 8. Aya₂-ul₄-/gal. WF 65. Rs. I. 9. O.2.4 Aya₂:gal:/ul₄. Compare with IAS 495 from Abū Šalābiḥ, Obv. IV. 4. Aya₂-ul₄-gal.

it is attested twice in the “correct” order of reading (TSŠ 568, Obv. I. 2; NTSS 569, Rs. IV. 9).

- Names of gods: if Nanna is almost always written ŠEŠ+KI, the name of Anzu, which can be represented in five different writings,⁹⁰ is less standardized than during the ED I–II period, since the disposition of signs in AN.MI.MUŠEN, its most common writing, is not strictly maintained.

2. Other names

- Names with ^ddumu-zi: this divinity is generally represented as dumu+zi, though dumu:zi:ur and Lugal-dumu+zi can also be found for this god.
- Names with the goddess Sud₃: UR₅-tu-^dSud₃ is often written as follows: numerals ^dSud₃:/tu:UR₅ or UR₅-tu, though the sign orders are random and their disposition in the cases can vary;⁹¹ Ur-^dSud₃ is also written randomly;⁹² Inim-^dSud₃-da-zi is by contrast generally written Inim-^dSud₃-da-zi, with KA upon the other signs, though there are some exceptions.⁹³
- Names with abzu: the logogram ABZU is seemingly always written zu:ab,⁹⁴ and in contrast with other logograms, its components cannot be separated. The personal name Abzu-mud is written at random; the same is true for En-abzu-(ta)-mud, which, however, always has EN in the first position and whose sign order seems to depend on the size of the square and on the presence of numerals. In most of its occurrences Abzu-ki-du₁₀ is written in the “correct” sign order, though it also displays a random arrangement, without any visible reason.

Table 4: Sign order of a sample of Fara personal names.

Name	“Correct order”	Other fixed or preferred order	Random
En-abzu-si	En-abzu-si		
Aya ₂ -abzu-si	Aya ₂ -abzu-si		
Ša ₃ -ta-nu-e ₃	Ša ₃ -ta-nu-e ₃	Ša ₃ :nu:ta-e ₃	

⁹⁰ On this topic see Zand 2010.

⁹¹ For instance, the tablet edited by G. Visicato and A. Westenholz, Fs Cagni A 33676. Obv. VI. 8, according to the photograph available on the CDLI website (P010060).

⁹² See the tablets edited by Lambert 1971, 29–30. Obv. II. 1, VI. 7; 29–34. Rs. II. 1: those tablets show the same sign order, which could indicate that both were written by the same scribe; see also MVN 10, 86, in which Ur-^dSud₃ is mentioned three times with the same sign disposition, in the “correct” order.

⁹³ On the tablets kept in Berlin and Istanbul, sign disposition is as follows: Inim-^dSud₃-da-/zi or similar, WF 32. Rs. I. 3, WF 34. Rs. I. 7 and II. 4, WF 35. Obv. I. 3, WF 37. Obv. IV. 3; ^dSud₃:/inim/:da-zi, TSŠ x (pl. XXXIII–XXXIV) Obv. IV. 2. We also considered 11 other contemporary attestations to be found according to the CDLI, in which the order generally conforms to Inim-^dSud₃-da-zi (cf BIN 8, 15 Obv. II. 5, Fs Cagni A 33676. Obv. III. 5).

⁹⁴ Contrary to Deimel’s assertion, see Deimel 1922, 5.

Mes-lu ₂ -nu-ḫuḡ			Mes:nu:ḫuḡ/:lu ₂ Mes-lu ₂ /:ḫuḡ:nu
Saḡ-tar		tar:saḡ	
Utu-ur-saḡ	Utu-ur-saḡ	Utu-saḡ:ur	
Aya ₂ -ul ₄ -gal	Aya ₂ -ul ₄ -gal		Aya ₂ -gal:ul ₄
Ama-ul ₄ -gal			Ama-gal:ul ₄ gal:ama:ul ₄
Nin-ul ₄ -gal	Nin-ul ₄ -gal		Nin-gal:ul ₄
UR ₅ -tu- ^d Sud ₃			^d Sud ₃ :UR ₅ :tu ^d Sud ₃ :tu:UR ₅
Ur-Dumu-zi		dumu+zi:ur	
Inim- ^d Sud ₃ -da-zi	Inim- ^d Sud ₃ -da-zi		Inim- ^d Sud ₃ -zi:da
Ur- ^d Sud ₃	Ur- ^d Sud ₃	^d Sud ₃ :ur	
Abzu-mud	Abzu-mud	mud:abzu	
En-abzu-ta-mud	En-abzu-ta-mud	En:mud:abzu-/ta	En-abzu:mud-ta
Abzu-ki-du ₁₀	Abzu-ki-du ₁₀		Abzu-du ₁₀ :ki ki-du ₁₀ :/abzu

The practice of writing is very consistent in the texts from Ur and Fara, and is characterised by a mixture of random dispositions and predefined orders, some names or terms appearing in a unique arrangement. Texts from the ED IIIa period display some differences, although this topic was not systematically studied in this paper, especially the role of the size of the cases and of the presence of numerals. There is indeed a slight tendency toward a sign order conforming to the reading or at least toward more standardized dispositions into the squares of personal names.⁹⁵ On the other hand, the sign sets which are standardized are not the same as during the ED I–II period, which conforms to the graphical evolution, as exemplified by the divine name of Dumu-zi. Furthermore, according to K. V. Zand, aesthetic criteria might have influenced sign order, especially to avoid leaving empty space: “Die Ästhetik des gleichmäßig ausgefüllten Faches war daher wohl die vorherrschende Intention hinter der freien Zeichenordnung”.⁹⁶ This scholar notices, for instance, that the verbal form nu-šar₂-šar₂ always occurs as šar₂ nu šar₂. This observation is also valid for the administrative texts in which personal names and numerals are generally arranged in order to fill most of the available space in a square. On the other hand, the archaic texts from Ur do not seem to have been produced with any systematic attention to empty spaces, which often occur.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ This matches the observations of Johnson/Johnson 2012, 171–174, on the UD.GAL.NUN texts.

⁹⁶ Zand 2008, 11.

⁹⁷ See for instance UET II, 185. O0103, with empty space on the left. UET II, 162. R0101. UET II, 70. O0107. By contrast some well-preserved tablets seem to have an “aesthetic” sign disposition similar to that of the Fara texts, see for instance cases in UET II, 109, 112, ATFU 57 and 60.

3.3 Comparison with the Uruk Period

The sign disposition in the Uruk/Jemdet Nasr tablets cannot be well understood due to three main difficulties:

- Only a few personal names can be positively identified in the proto-cuneiform texts; most of them are scarcely attested, generally in no more than two texts.⁹⁸
- Personal names are often written by means of ideographic signs,⁹⁹ so that they cannot be compared with syllabic values widely used in the archaic texts from Ur, though it must be noted that archaic texts also show the use of phonetic signs, as others have observed.¹⁰⁰
- Personal names from the Uruk period are hardly similar to those from later periods, according to the hypothesis that proto-cuneiform writing might not have been used by Sumerian scribes.¹⁰¹

We can therefore take as examples a sample of (personal) names attested during the Uruk period:

1. EN_a AN RU is attested in the list Officials, 21¹⁰² and several times in administrative documents as EN_a AN RU;¹⁰³ only in one (unpublished) text is a different order, AN EN_a RU,¹⁰⁴ found, while in other occurrences the sign AN seems to be omitted.¹⁰⁵
2. ŠUBUR E_{2a} × 1N₅₇ is attested in three texts, each time with a different sign arrangement.¹⁰⁶
3. EN_a ĤI UNUG_a (En-Unug-du₁₀) is attested in only two texts from the Uruk period: BagM 22, W 24007, 4. 00201. [...] EN_a UNUG_a / ĤI. BagM 22, W 24013, 22. 00102. 1N₁ EN_a UNUG_a / ĤI; both have the same sign disposition, which is different from that of an archaic text from Ur: ATFU 50. R0106. du₁₀:en-Unug.

98 On this topic see Englund 2009.

99 Falkenstein 1936, 29–36; Englund 1998, 79, who suggests that archaic “bookkeeping is not language oriented”; Glassner 2000, 113–138.

100 See the observations of Steinkeller 1995 and Glassner 2000.

101 According to the author’s research, only five personal names common to the Uruk and ED I–II periods can yet be identified, such as Zur-zur and En-Unug-du₁₀. On the “linguistic” landscape of Mesopotamia, see Rubio 1999.

102 ATU 3, 88; in W 19771,h and 24015,1, it is written in the “standard” way, in W 15895,w without AN.

103 For instance ATU 6, W 14111,r. R0201; ATU 6, W 15775,d. 00304; BagM 22, W 24033,3. 00101; MSVO 3, 15. 00101; also unpublished texts, such as IM 073409, 2. 00206.

104 MS 4494. 00203, photograph available on the CDLI website (P006297).

105 ATU 6, W14329,a+. 00201, MSVO 3, 17. 00201’ though both cases are damaged. See also MS 2442. 00104. 1N₁ EN_a RU BU_a.

106 MSVO 3, 14. 00104. ŠUBUR E_{2a} × 1N₅₇. MSVO 3, 17. 00102. E_{2a} × 1N₅₇ + ŠUBUR. MSVO 3, 18. 00205. E_{2a} × 1N₅₇ ŠUBUR.

4. $EN_a \text{ 𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$, mainly attested in unpublished documents, is generally written EN_a / $\text{𒄩} + \text{𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$, with 𒄩 close to $\text{𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$ and below EN_a .
5. $GUL \text{ 𒇺} \text{ 𒇺} + \text{DU}_{6a}$ ¹⁰⁷ consists of a possible geographical/divine name, followed by the element GUL , which is also found in another personal name, $GUL \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$; $GUL \text{ 𒇺} \text{ 𒇺} + \text{DU}_{6a}$ is attested in six texts and its sign order within these is random.¹⁰⁸

Names consisting of $PIRIG_a$ or $3N_{57} + PIRIG_a$: as a colophon to one of the manuscripts of the archaic City List we find $E_{2a} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} + PIRIG_a$,¹⁰⁹ which is also attested in two administrative documents with a different sign order.¹¹⁰ This name may be identical to $3N_{57} + PIRIG_a \text{ 𒇺} \text{ 𒇺}$ ¹¹¹ or to $3N_{57} + PIRIG_a \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$ $^1 E_{2a} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$ $^1 A[B?]$,¹¹² both of which are attested in only one text, respectively. Sign order is not strictly determined.

Table 5: Examples of sign order of names in the archaic texts.

Name	“Correct order”?	Other fixed or preferred order	Random
$EN_a \text{ 𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$	$EN_a \text{ 𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$		$\text{𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒄩}$
$\text{𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$	$\text{𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$		$E_{2a} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$
$EN_a \text{ 𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$ (En-Unug-du ₁₀)	$EN_a \text{ 𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$		
$EN_a \text{ 𒄩} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$		$EN_a / \text{𒄩} + \text{𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿} \text{ 𒊿}$	
$GUL \text{ 𒇺} \text{ 𒇺} + \text{DU}_{6a}$			$GUL \text{ 𒇺} \text{ 𒇺} + \text{DU}_{6a}$ $\text{𒇺} \text{ 𒇺} + \text{DU}_{6a} \text{ 𒇺}$

Although it is a matter of speculation, the sign order of the personal names in the archaic texts does not seem to be firmly defined but is, as in later periods, rather random in nature, even if some sign sets are standardized and suggest the use of some norms. Logograms of professional names are also not standardized, as is proven by the title $ENGIZ$, $EN.ME.GI$, whose sign set can be written in different orders.

3.4 Material Sign Disposition during the Early Third Millennium

From the Late Uruk to the ED IIIa period and onward, signs are to a varying extent freely arranged into cases and lines which do not form a binding framework for

¹⁰⁷ Englund 2009, 21.

¹⁰⁸ The disposition of the signs can, however, partially be explained: the sign $\text{𒇺} \text{ 𒇺} + \text{DU}_{6a}$, which is longer, generally occurs first when there is no numeral, for instance in MSVO 4, 58. O0201b2; in other tablets, such as MSVO 4, 36. O0203, GUL stands on the right of the numerals.

¹⁰⁹ ATU 3, colophon of W 20266,74. R0101, manuscript of the archaic City List.

¹¹⁰ MSVO 3, 12. O0203. MSVO 4, 44. O0102.

¹¹¹ ATU 5, W 15772,z. O0302b. See also Englund 2009, 21.

¹¹² ATU 6, 15774,b. O0201.

writing. Beyond such random disposition, however, some norms and rules can be seen which partly determine the relationships of signs to each other within the frame of clusters. Such norms seem to change according to the evolution of the writing system and may be tied to the underlying values of cuneiform scripts. In the mainly ideographic use of writing during the Late Uruk period, signs are generally randomly arranged but some more stable combinations can also be found. The ED I–II texts are the first documents known to mainly use the phonetic value of signs to write personal names and Sumerian sentences, even if protocuneiform writing had already proved to be partially syllabic, but to a much lesser extent. Personal names were at that time represented in several pieces corresponding to the semantic and grammatical elements of which they consisted.¹¹³ These parts reproduce the meaning of the name, such as Nanna_x-ur-saĝ, “Nanna is a hero”, Ama-e₂-nun-si, “The mother fills the E₂-nun shrine”, etc. Names analysed according to their phonetic features can also be identified: Na-zi-zi, Ga-gu₇-gu₇, and further names with reduplicated signs. Random sign disposition of personal names during the ED I–II period may therefore be a consequence of the introduction of new phonetic values. Once signs were assigned a value, scribes did not need to write them in the “correct” order according to our modern reading, because the personal names recorded were naturally well-known to them.¹¹⁴ The Fara tablets share the same features as the texts from Ur, although there is a slight tendency toward more regularity: these texts also represent Sumerian personal names by breaking them down into several component elements, and inherit the method broadly used in the archaic texts from Ur.

Further comprehensive studies on sign order during the Uruk and Fara periods are still expected, but one should be aware that the word “random” must be used carefully when referring to the disposition of cuneiform signs. Sign order in the ED I–II texts happens to be determined by other possible criteria, such as the available space, the presence of numerals, the way logograms are written and the gathering of similar signs. This study focused only on the rules observable in the texts in question, but in the Uruk and Fara periods sign order may have also acquired a meaning which is related to the conception of writing. During the time of the invention of writing, sign order is mainly conceived in relation to the numerous logograms, whereas phonetic values, having emerged only recently, do not necessarily form a binding frame-

113 On the structure of Sumerian personal names, see for instance Krebernik 2002, 8–10, Andersson 2012, 57–70.

114 Moreover, the practice of conforming the arrangement of signs to their reading is a later tendency, which dates from the time of the reign of Ur-Nanše. Since administrative texts from early periods were, according to Selz 2007, 74, necessarily unambiguous (*Bedürfnis nach Eindeutigkeit*), the apparent difficulty of sign order should only be considered to be the result of “unsere Unkenntnis der Kontexte, der Codes”, and was therefore not an ambiguous feature from the point of view of the scribes. Determining which meaning is at the basis of sign order is the task of modern hermeneutics.

work for the arrangement of signs within the squares.¹¹⁵ Writing did not reproduce the words of a language, and therefore did not conform to the order of phonetic values.¹¹⁶ Later, during the third millennium, different norms regarding the sign order of personal names were in use, which are tied with the evolution of writing, especially phonetic values and religious or aesthetic conception.

4 Conclusion

ED I–II texts exhibit some material features which may be considered as evidence for this poorly documented span of time and its position between the Late Uruk and Fara traditions. The shape and format of those texts appear to be intermediate and share features with the Uruk as well as the Fara tablets. Such features as the oblong format, uninscribed reverse, and rows of lines are shared with the Uruk period; on the contrary, other material features are forerunners of later tablets, especially the flat obverse and convex reverse, which are similar to the shape used for ED IIIb texts. Furthermore, tablet layout includes non-writing marks: the archaic texts from Ur, in contrast with proto-cuneiform or Fara tablets, do not display standardized kinds of designs. The presence of clauses is another feature typical of the ED I–II tablets: whereas the use of the term gu_2 -an- $\check{s}e_3$, which is not attested in the proto-cuneiform documentation, to refer to the total is definitely a “modern” aspect, the isolated sign sets, referring either to an administrator or to the content of a text, seem closer to the habits of the Uruk period. The tablets’ layout and diplomatics are therefore significant for their cultural evolution and offer evidence of the peculiarities of the ED I–II tradition.

On the other hand, the ED I–II period corresponds to the first attempt at inventing and using phonetic values to represent Sumerian personal names, in contrast to the ideographic Late Uruk mode of writing.¹¹⁷ Signs were at that time not arranged according to their reading, but rather in a random fashion or according to other criteria. The size of the cases, the available space, and the presence of numerals partly determined sign arrangement in the archaic texts from Ur, which therefore had a material aspect. Since writing did not aim to follow the reading nor the pronunciation of the signs, scribes mainly took care to fill the cases and lines. It is, on the other hand, noticeable

115 It is, however, noticeable that one of the few personal names to be found in the archaic texts which is also attested in the ED I–II tablets from Ur, En-Unug-du₁₀, “the lord is good to Uruk” or “the good lord of Uruk”, is written in the “correct” order.

116 Krebernik 2007, 40.

117 On the relationships between writing and language in Mesopotamia, see Krebernik 2007. It is worth investigating whether the aforementioned evolution is consistent with a new conception of the use of writing and reading, especially in respect to the language represented.

that some sign sets are more standardized and may reveal the existence of aesthetic or religious criteria: for instance, reduplicated signs in personal names like Na-zi-zi generally follow each other; similarly, divine names represented by a logogram display a relatively fixed order. The scribes during the Fara period also used free and random sign order, but introduced some slight changes in respect to the ED I–II tradition. From now on, materiality may also be approached through palaeographical studies, which could improve our interpretations of the archaic texts from Ur: further studies on sign evolution between the Late Uruk and Fara periods, as well as an updated version of the sign table edited by E. Burrows in UET II, are still expected. Another interesting future problem is the interpretation of sign disposition in Uruk and Fara texts which might show that such criteria as “randomness” or “aesthetics” do not suffice to explain the way in which graphical components are arranged within cases. Since Mesopotamian texts, as suggested by Selz, are the result of a collective codification,¹¹⁸ sign order surely had a meaning in the framework of the linear and non-linear structures of the third millennium tablets.

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¹¹⁸ Selz 2007, 67; id., 74 refers to the “lineare Anordnung” of the archaic texts, which aimed to represent unambiguous information; however, since the writing of the words and terms did not conform to the reading of the signs, this linearity did not contradict the existence of other meaning networks (see Selz 2007, 86, 6).

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A. Sample of Archaic Texts from Ur

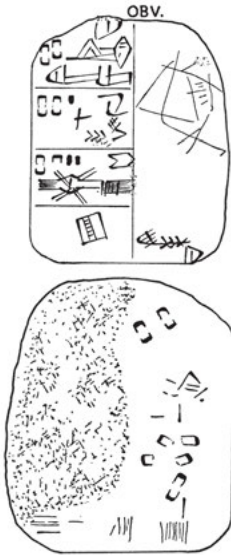


Fig. 1: UET II, 55.



Fig. 2: UM 37-07-070 = UET II, 252 © Published courtesy of the Penn Museum.



Fig. 3: BM 128913 = UET II, 61 © The Trustees of the British Museum.

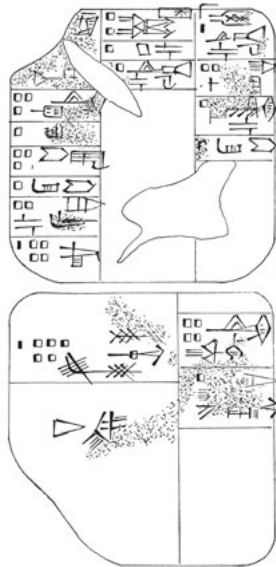


Fig. 4: UET II, 177 (taken from Burrows 1935, pl. XXII).



Fig. 5: ATFU 56 © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 6: ATFU 57 © The Trustees of the British Museum.



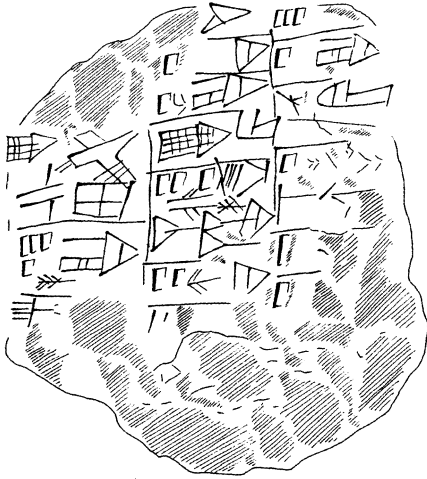


Fig. 7: ATFU 33 (Copy by Camille Lecompte).¹¹⁹

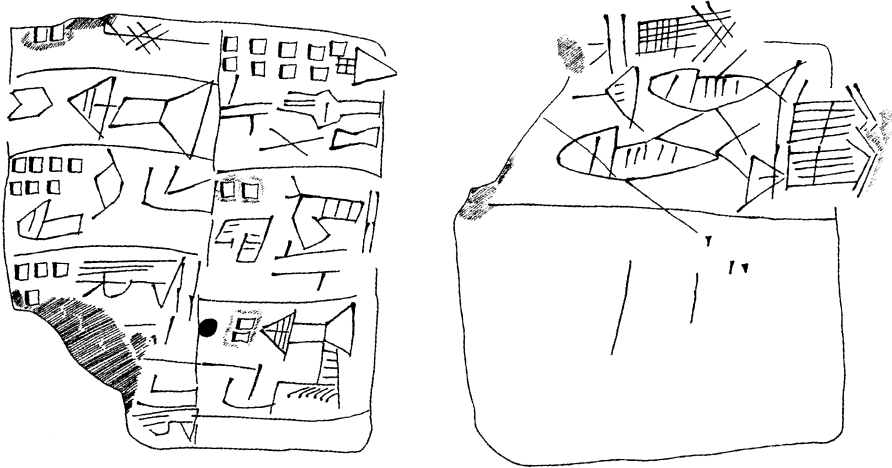


Fig. 8: ATFU 55 (Copy of the reverse by Camille Lecompte).¹²⁰

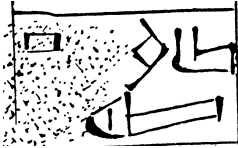
¹¹⁹ Including following corrections to the original edition: O0103', lu[gal]. O0201. ġeštin/din?.

¹²⁰ Including following correction: R0101. x A KA₂ GIR DIM₃ DIM₃ A KA₂ SAL KA₂.

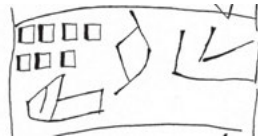
B. Writing of Personal Names in the Archaic Texts from Ur (3.1)

1. Utu-ur-saĝ

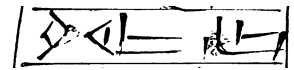
UET II, 128. 00305'.



ATFU 55. 00103.

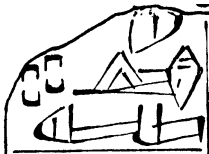


UET II, 340. 00120.

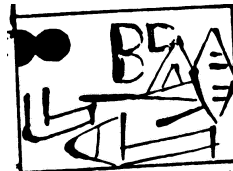


2. Nanna_x-ur-saĝ

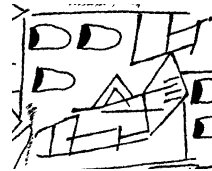
UET II, 55. 00101.



UET II, 87. 00306.



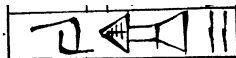
ATFU 60. 00305.



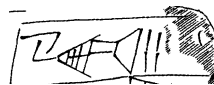
4. Names consisting of the verb -si

4. a. Aya₂-abzu-si

UET II, 127. 00206.



ATFU 50. R0101.



4. b. Ama-e₂-si

UET II, 00207.



UET II, 255. 00205.

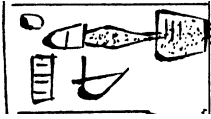


UET II, 259 00202.

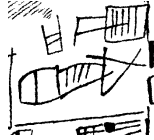


6. Mes-lu₂-nu-ḫuḡ

UET II, 62. 00103.

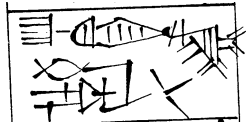


ATFU 57. 00302.



7. Lugal-nam-tar-PA.SU₁₃+SIKIL

UET II, 101. 00102.



UET II, 101. 00106.



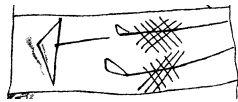
UET II, 224. 00104.



8. Names consisting of a reduplicated sign

8. a. Igi-gi-gi

ATFU 2. R0103.

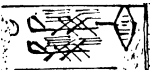


ATFU 60. 00402.

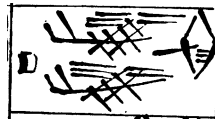


8. b. Na-zi-zi

UET II, 112. 00203.



UET II, 274. 00205'.

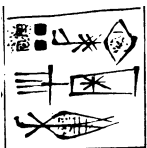


UET II, 71. 00104.

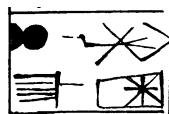


9. a. Ama-ul₄-gal

UET II, 48. 00202.



UET II, 87. 00303.



UET II, 241. 00303.



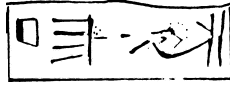
ATFU 23. 00202.



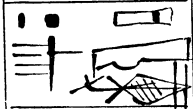
9. b. Aya₂-ul₄-gal
UET II, 24. 00201.



UET II, 84. 00201'.



UET II, 152. 00102.



UET II, 181. R0102.

