

Cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals, stamp seals and scaraboids in the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

Zoltán Niederreiter

The purpose of this paper is to present a diverse group of previously unpublished objects from the ancient Near East, several of which bear texts. Among the three cuneiform tablets, the first is a Middle Babylonian administrative text from the reign of Nazi-maruttash, the second provides a receipt belonging to the archive of Iddin-Marduk (reign of Nabonidus or Cyrus II) and the third contains a list counting smiths from the Neo- or Late Babylonian period. In addition, there are two cylinder seals: one depicts a presentation scene (Ur III period) and the other two ostrich-like birds (Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian period). Three stamp seals and two scaraboids, formerly held in the famous collection of Baron Plato von Ustinow, are also recorded and discussed. Finally, in a separate but related contribution, an Old Babylonian letter is presented by Zsombor Földi and the current author.

The present paper deals with a heterogeneous group: four cuneiform tablets,¹ two cylinder seals, three stamp seals and two scaraboids. This previously unpublished material is held at the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo.²

¹ For the other cuneiform tablets held in the collection, see Alster 1989 (one Old Akkadian and 27 Ur III tablets); Larsen and Møller 1991, 227-228, 232-233, 241-244 and 246 (one Old Assyrian tablet with its envelope).

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Cuneiform text 1

Oslo, MCH, inv. C47740 (Fig. 1)

Transliteration

OBVERSE

3 ½(diš) sīla ninda

2. ak'-lu₄

iti zíz.a

4. u₄ 2(u) 4(diš)+[1(diš)]-kám

REVERSE

mu 2(u) 5(diš)-k[ám]

*Translation*¹3 ½ liters of bread, ²expenditure ³⁻⁴on the 25th day of the month Šabātu, ⁵the 25th year.

After the quantity of bread stated in sīla, the term *aklu(m)*³ (line 2) refers to its expenditure or distribution without the mention of any personal name, occupation or place name. The dating formula (lines 3-5) of this administrative text refers to the month, the day and the year without the year name or the king's name.⁴ Based on the script, the term *aklu(m)* and the dating formula, I assume that the tablet can be connected to a group of administrative texts⁵ that originate from Nippur and is dated to the Kassite period.⁶ However, it is interesting to note that the bread (ninda) is not mentioned in these texts from Nippur (I thank Leonhard Sassmannshausen for this information).

The impression of the triangles can be found in double rows on the lower edge.⁷ This ornamental pattern was made with the upper or lower gold cap of a cylinder seal.⁸

material studied, the objects starting with C47 (i.e. Cuneiform texts 1-3 and Cylinder seal 1) are not accessible in the Musit-database or in the archives at the museum.

² As for the previous owners of the material, see Stol 1985 on Felix Freiherr von Oefele (1861-1954) and Laszlo Berczelly (forthcoming): 'Baron Plato von Ustinow and the Destiny of his Collection of Antiquities'; this manuscript on Baron Plato von Ustinow (1840-1918) is currently in progress.

³ For the meaning of *aklu(m)*, see Deheselle 1996.

⁴ On similar incomplete dates attested in administrative texts from Nippur, see Clay 1906b (for example, see nos. 145 and 146).

⁵ In particular, see Deheselle 1996, 215-216 and Sassmannshausen 2001, 280.

⁶ Taking into account the number of years, the present text can be dated to the reign of Nazi-maruttash (c. 1307-1282 BC), who ruled for 26 years.

⁷ For similar seal impressions, see Clay 1906a, pl. XIV, 40-42; Stolper 1984, 15-18.

⁸ Collon 2005, 109 no. 480.



Fig. 1 Cuneiform text 1. Donated by Dr Felix Freiherr von Oefele (New York). Dimensions: height 2.9 cm, width 3.1 cm, thickness 1.8 cm, weight 22.4 g. Oslo, MCH, inv. C47740. Photo and drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

The small details of the triangles reveal that the gold cap was decorated with small grains of metal made by granulation.⁹

Cuneiform text 2

Oslo, MCH, inv. C47735 (*Fig. 2*)

⁹ Regarding this technology, see Moorey 1994, 230-231: 5; also, on the use of caps on cylinder seal from Nippur, see Matthews 1992, 65-66.

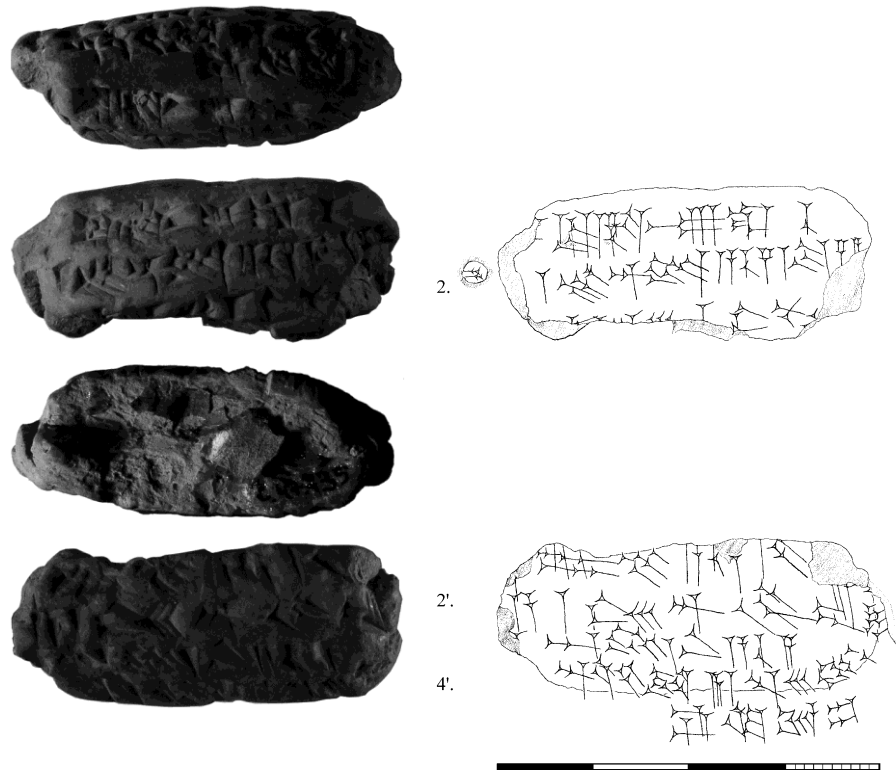


Fig. 2 Cuneiform text 2. Donated by Pastor G. Olsen in North Shields, England. Dimensions: height 1.8 cm, width 4.1 cm, thickness 1.5 cm, weight 9.9 g. Format: *u'iltu* (receipt). Oslo, © MCH, inv. C47735. Photo and drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

Transliteration

OBVERSE

- ^rx' gín kù.babbar ina ú-ra-šú
 2. [šá] ^mmu—^damar.utu a-šú šá ^mba-šá-a
 [a] ^mzálag—^d30' ^mdù—numu[n a-šú šá]
 4— [...]

REVERSE (beginning broken off)

^{md}nà'—mu a-šú šá ^mtin-[šú]

- 2'. a ^mdù-*eš*-dingir u ^{lú}umbisag
^{md}amar.utu-pap^l a-*šú šá*
 4'. [^m]utu-din-*it* a ^{md}30-siskur-*še.g*[a]

UPPER EDGE

e^{ki} itī ab

LEFT EDGE

1'-2'. [u₄ x.kám mu y.kám] 'x' [...]

Translation

¹(Concerning) x shekel of silver from the *urāšu*-service ²of Iddin-Marduk, son of Iqīšāya, ³[descendant of] Nūr-Sîn, Bāni-zēri [son of ⁴Dayyān-Marduk, descendant of Sîn-šadūnu ... has received ...].

[Witnesses: ...] ¹Nabû-iddina, son of Balāssu², ²descendant of Eppeš-ilī, and the scribe: ³Marduk-nāšir, son of ⁴Šamaš-uballit, descendant of Sîn-karābī-išme.

⁵Babylon, [x day] of the month Ṭebētu, ^{1.e. 1'-2'}[y year of KN, *king of Babylon*].

The fragment of this cuneiform tablet written in Babylon belongs to the archive of Iddin-Marduk.¹⁰ Similar and contemporary receipts (in relation to the *urāšu*-service)¹¹ from the same archive allow us to identify the structure of the text.¹² After the name of Babylon and the month, the common closing form was written onto the left edge, which contains the day, the year and the name of the king (KN) with his title only. Among them, a fragmentary cuneiform sign of the formula is identifiable on the edge. The archive of Iddin-Marduk is dated to the reigns of Nabonidus (555 -539 BC) and of Cyrus II (538 -530 BC).

Cuneiform text 3

Oslo, inv. C47753 (*Fig. 3*)

Transliteration

OBVERSE

^{md}na-na-a-sum-na

¹⁰ For the scribe's name, see Strassmaier 1890, 159 no. 275: Cyr. 7. 10. 7 (S.t. 644. 76-11-17).

¹¹ On the term *urāšu*, see van Driel 2002, 264-268.

¹² Wunsch 1993, 53-55 nos. 211-212 (among the cited sources nos. 266 and 282 provide the closest parallels).

2. ^{md}nà-šeš-mu
 ^mnumun-ú-tu
4. ^mšad-di-nu
 ^mra-šil-dingir
6. ^{md}amar.utu-eri-b[a]
 ^{md}nà-ú-še-ziḅ

LOWER EDGE

8. ^mir-é[?].babbar[?].ra x[?] [...]
 ^{md}en-dù-uš a-šú [šá ...]

REVERSE

10. ^{md}en-mu-gin
 ^{md}ta-^rqiš-^dgu-[la]
12. ^{md}iškur-ú-šal-[l]
 ^mba-laṭ-su
14. ^{md}na-^rna[?]-a-apin-eš[?]
 ^mmu-^damar.utu
-
16. ^{md}nà-numun-mu
-

UPPER EDGE

pap 1(u) 7(diš) ^{lú}simug

Translation

¹Nanāya-iddina, ²Nabû-aḥ-iddina, ³Zērūtu, ⁴Šaddinu, ⁵Rāši-ilī, ⁶Marduk-erība, ⁷Nabû-ušēzib, ⁸Arad-Ebabbar[?], ..., ⁹Bēl-ēpuš, son of ..., ¹⁰Bēl-šum-ukīn, ¹¹Taqiš-Gula, ¹²Adad-ušalli, ¹³Balāssu, ¹⁴Nanāya-ēreš, ¹⁵Iddin-Marduk, ¹⁶Nabû-zēr-iddina.

¹⁷Total: 17^l smiths.

This Neo- or Late Babylonian list contains the personal names of the smiths and the summary (line 17) at the end of the text.¹³ A faint catch-line can be seen between lines 15-16 and a strongly visible one after line 16 at the end of the reverse side, which ends the name-list. Although the summary line on the upper edge indicates seventeen smiths, only one name per line can be identified in the previous sixteen lines, so in total there are sixteen

¹³ For this occupation see Kümmel 1979, 32-34.

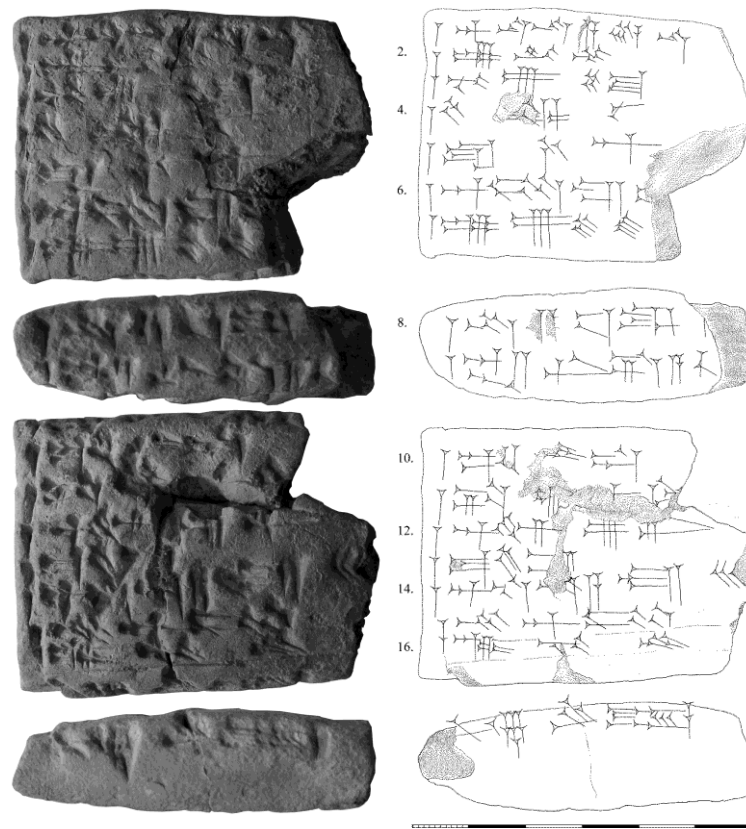


Fig. 3 Cuneiform text 3. Donated by Dr. Felix Freiherr von Oefele (New York). Dimensions: height 4.7 cm, width 6.1 cm, thickness 2.0 cm, weight 72.0 g. MCH, inv. C47753. Photo and drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

named. Because the whole right side of the cuneiform tablet is broken, it is uncertain whether the scribe was incorrect or if the final name was written in the second half of one of the broken lines. On the lower edge, line 8 contains a hard to discern part of a sign at the end of the name¹⁴ while the father's name was written in the second half of line 9.

Cylinder seal 1

Oslo, MCH, inv. C47721 (*Fig. 4*)

The iconography of this cylinder seal, dated to the Ur III period, belongs to the presentation scenes. An interceding minor goddess leads a worshipper by the hand toward a female deity who is sitting on a throne shaped like a stool placed on a low platform. A star-

¹⁴ Because the surface is damaged, it may only be assumed that the name in line 8 contains the temple name of Ebabbar.



Fig. 4 Cylinder seal 1. Dimensions: 3.05 x 1.6 cm, weight: 13.55 g.
Material: black serpentine. Oslo, MCH, inv. C47721. Photo and drawing:
Zoltán Niederreiter.

disc above the crescent moon is placed in the sky between the two deities, and a scorpion appears between them near their knees. The enthroned deity wears a horned crown and a flounced robe. Regarding the two standing figures, each of whom is wearing a fringed cloak, the minor goddess wears a horned crown while the worshipper has a rounded cap and is clean-shaven.¹⁵

Behind the enthroned goddess, there is a very faint two-line inscription in a frame that is separated by a line. The first line contains the owner's name (PN₁) and the second the father's name (PN₂) and his occupation. After line 2, there is a blank space.

Transliteration

1. 'x-x-x'-'a'
2. du[mu] 'x-x' 'nu'-bànda
blank space

Translation

¹PN₁, ²son of PN₂, the overseer.

¹⁵ For similar iconography see Collon 1982, 149 no. 384 and pl. XLV, 152 no. 400 and pl. XLVI.



Fig. 5 Cylinder seal 2. Dimensions: 2.35 x 1.0 cm, weight: 2.95 g. Material: sintered quartz (faience or composition) with traces of green glaze. Oslo, MCH, inv. C42361. Photo and drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

Cylinder seal 2

Oslo, MCH, inv. C42361 (*Fig. 5*).¹⁶

Between the top and bottom line borders, there are two birds facing right with heads turned back, walking in single file; a six-pointed star and a cross or four-pointed star are depicted above the birds. They are ostrich-like birds¹⁷ because of the crested head, the form of the outstretched wing, the tail and the legs.¹⁸ The lines in front of the breast indicate the second wing.

Stamp seal 1

Oslo, MCH, inv. C42359 (*Fig. 6*).

Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian period. This type of seal, made of one piece of stone,

¹⁶ For the material see Sax 2001, 28-29 no. I.6.2.16.

¹⁷ On the ostriches and their representations, see Collon 1998.

¹⁸ On similar iconography see Teissier 1984, 156-157 no. 181.



Fig. 6 Stamp seal 1. Formerly in the Collection of Baron Plato von Ustinow. Dimensions: base 2.15 x 1.2 cm, height 1.95 cm, weight 8.5 g. Material: light yellow translucent chalcedony. Oslo, MCH, inv. C42359. Photo: © MCH, drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

constitutes the stone copy of a metal mount (the rib and frame) together with its stamp seal.¹⁹ Its ribbed handle is longitudinally pierced. On the ovoid base, there is a long-robed deity facing left, on double base lines, surrounded by rays. Some details were made using a drill.²⁰

Stamp seal 2

Oslo, MCH, inv. C41082 (*Fig. 7*).

Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid Period. Modelled-style stamp seal, with rounded top and oval base. The object is not pierced but has two uneven holes. On the base, there is a bearded, winged scorpion-man facing left with a round cap with a vertical projection at the back, the paws of a lion and a simplified scorpion body and tail curving up behind the wing.²¹

¹⁹ For a stamp seal with metal mount from Zinjirli (ancient Sam'al), see von Luschan 1943, 73, 159 and pl. 38: e.

²⁰ For similar stamp seal forms and images, see Delaporte 1920, 73 no. D.79 and pl. 54 nos. 11^a-11^b; Jakob-Rost 1975, 74-75 no. 400 and pl. 16; Buchanan and Moorey 1988, 62 nos. 403-404.

²¹ For similar depictions of the scorpion-man, see Mervillees 2005, 59 no. 32, 77 no. 83 and 123 no. V.5.2.1. On ancient sealings with similar figures, see Mitchell and Searight 2008, 144-145 no. 416e (date: 507 BC), 199 no. 650c (date: 294 BC), 240 no. 780b.



Fig. 7 Stamp seal 2. Formerly in the Collection of Baron Plato von Ustinow. Dimensions: base 1.7 x 1.2 cm, height: 1.9 cm, weight: 6.7 g. Material: lapis lazuli. Oslo, MCH, inv. C41082. Photo: © MCH, drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

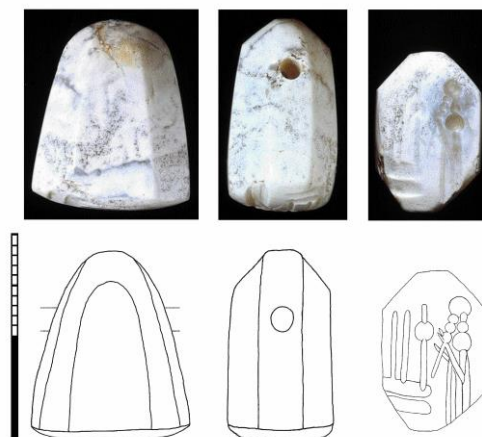


Fig. 8 Stamp seal 3. Formerly in the Collection of Baron Plato von Ustinow. Dimensions: base 1.85 x 1.15 cm, height 2.2 cm, weight 7.7 g. Material: milky chalcedony. Oslo, MCH, inv. C41092. Photo: © MCH, drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

Stamp seal 3

Oslo, MCH, inv. C41092 (*Fig. 8*).

Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid period. Faceted dome-backed longitudinally-pierced stamp seal with an octagonal base. On the base, there is a stylised worshipper with raised

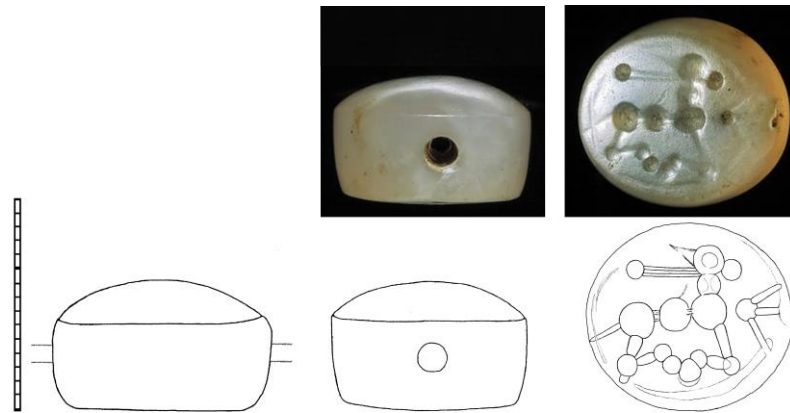


Fig. 9 Scaraboid 1. Formerly in the Collection of Baron Plato von Ustinow. Dimensions: base 1.45 x 1.6 cm, height 0.95 cm, weight 3.6 g. Material: pale greyish-brown chalcedony. Oslo, MCH, inv. C41216. Photo: © MCH, drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

hands facing left, towards symbols (mace and stylus) that have been placed on a stand. Some details were made with a drill technique.

Scaraboid 1

Oslo, MCH, inv. C41216 (*Fig. 9*).

North-Syrian or Levantine (early first millennium BC). On the base of this longitudinally-pierced scaraboid, there is a crouching horned quadruped facing right, with a stylised floral motif (perhaps a simplified branch) in front of him.²² The depiction, partially surrounded by a line border, is characterised by the drilled elements.²³

Scaraboid 2

Oslo, MCH, inv. C41178 (*Fig. 10*).

Graeco-Phoenician (c. sixth century BC). On the base of this longitudinally-pierced glass scaraboid, there is a winged, human-headed sphinx seated to the right. The sphinx wears an apron that hangs down over his chest. The depicted figure is partially surrounded by a line border.²⁴

²² For a more elaborate example of a similar scene depicted on a stamp seal known from Tell el-Far'a-Nord, see Keel 2010, 2-3 no. 3.

²³ On similar scaraboids and iconography, see Vollenweider 1967, 70-71 no. 78 and pl. 36; Keel 2010, 196-197 no. 391 (from Tell el-Far'a Süd).

²⁴ For a similar depiction on a glass scaraboid, see Bianchi 2002, 171 no. NE-22.



Fig. 10 Scaraboid 2. Formerly in the Collection of Baron Plato von Ustinow.

Dimensions: base 1.2 x 1.7 cm, height 0.85 cm, weight 2.75 g. Material: blue glass. Oslo, © MCH, inv. C41178. Photo: MCH.

Zoltán Niederreiter
Department of Assyriology and Hebrew Studies
Eötvös Loránd University Budapest
H-1088 Budapest, Múzeum krt. 4/F
zniederreiter@gmail.com



Fig. 1 Faceted octagonal object.
Formerly in the Collection of Baron
Plato von Ustinow. Dimensions: 1.45
x 0.9 cm (octagonal form), weight
2.94 g. Material: hematite. Oslo, ©
MCH, inv. C41084. Photo: Zoltán
Niederreiter.

Appendix

Oslo, MCH, inv. C41084 (*Fig. 1*)

This faceted octagonal object which depicts seven nearly identical figures in a procession in front of three boldly executed cuneiform signs belongs to a group with similar features. These were made of hematite, their faceted form is hexagonal, heptagonal or octagonal and they represent the same type of simplified figures in a procession that terminates in front of the boldly executed cuneiform signs. The pieces of this group are modern items (i.e. forgeries). For similar objects, see Clercq and Ménant 1888, 170 no. 298 (heptagonal form), pl. XXVIII and 171 no. 300 (hexagonal form), pl. XXVIII; Legrain 1911, 43 no. 69 (hexagonal form) and pl. VI = Speleers 1943, 173 no. 1639; and Legrain 1925, 282 no. 497 (hexagonal form) and pl. XXVII.

Zoltán Niederreiter

Addendum

A previously unpublished Old-Babylonian letter at the MCH:

Oslo, MCH C47720 (*Fig. 1*)

Transliteration

OBVERSE

- ‘a-na’ ša-lu-ur-‘tum’
 2. ‘qī’-bí-ma
 um-ma a-wi-il-dingir-ma
 4. mi-nu-um ki-ma na-aḥ-ri-im te-pu-š[ī]
 ki-ma šú-ḥa-ar-‘tim’ ša la wa-tar
 6. wa-al-da-at-ma e-li qá-aq-qá-r[i(-im)]
 ú-ba-an la ar-ka-at te-pu-ši
 8. aš-pu-ra-[ak]-ki-im u[m]-ma ‘a-na’-ku-ma
 6(aš) š[e.gur a-n]a ma-ḥa-ri-im ša gu.za.l[á]
 10. i[d-ni a-n]a-mi-nim še-a-am
 [a] ta-ad-‘dī’-ni
 12. [x x] ‘x’ [x] ub-lam-ma
 [x x] ‘x iš’-si-ma
 14. [x x (x)] ‘x’ [...]
 [...]

REVERS

The cuneiform signs on the reverse of the tablet cannot be identified because of the fragmentary state of the text.

Translation

¹⁻³Speak to Šallūrtum! Thus says Awīl-ilī: ⁴Why is it that you acted like a (small) boy? ⁵⁻⁷You acted like a female servant who does not give birth (any)more and she is not high from (lit. “taller than”) the ground (therefore) by a (single) finger.

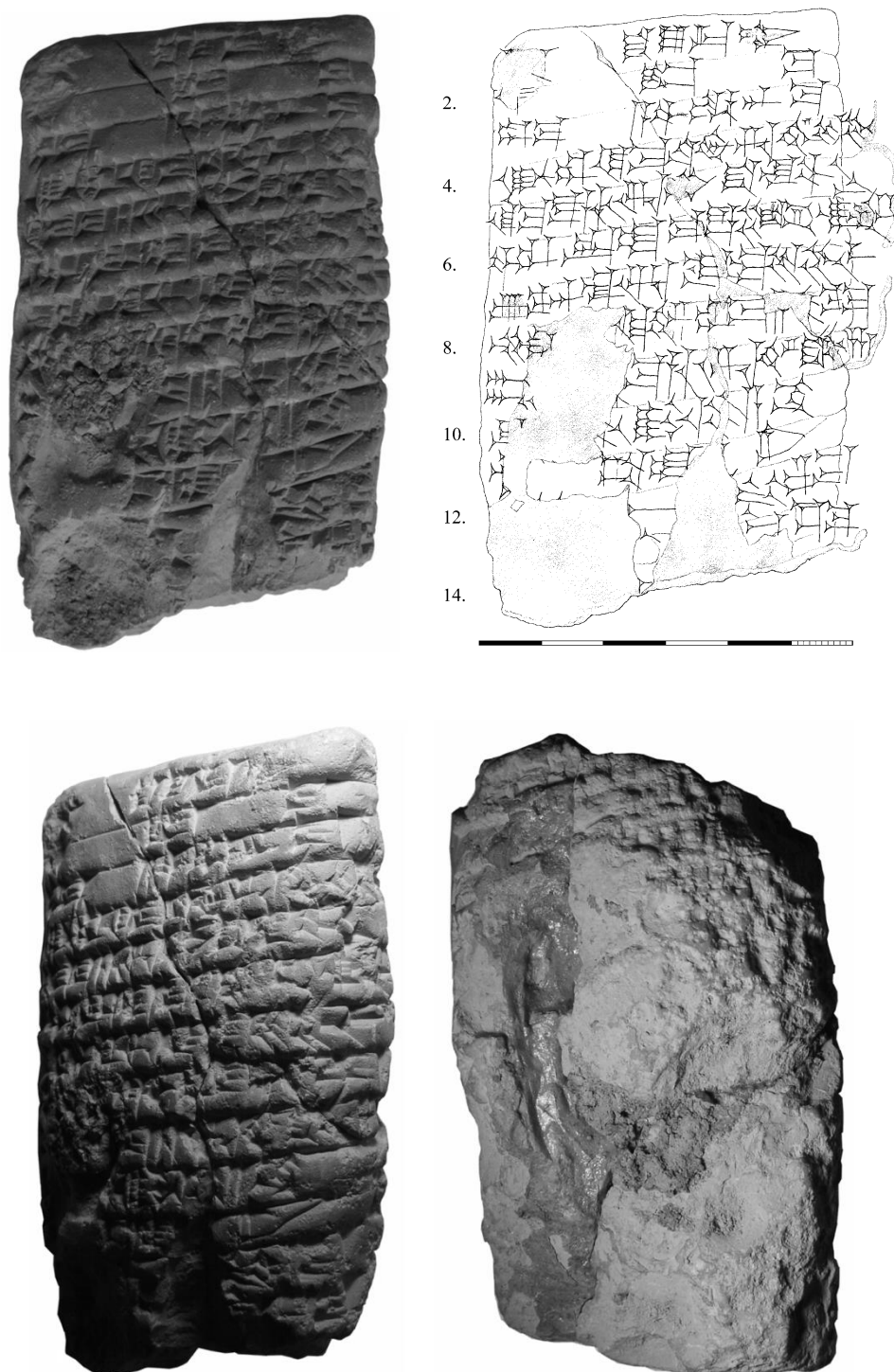


Fig. 1 Cuneiform text 1. Donated by Dr Felix Freiherr von Oefele (New York). Dimensions: height 8.7 cm, width 5.2 cm, thickness 2.8 cm, weight 134.4 g. Oslo, MCH, inv. C47720. Photo and drawing: Zoltán Niederreiter.

⁸Thus I wrote to you: ^{9–11}“Give (out) 6 *kurru* (c.1800 litres) of barley for the chair-bearer to receive (it). Why did you not give (out) the barley (yet)?” ^{12–14}... he/she brought to me and ... *he/she called* and ...

This Old Babylonian letter was sent to Šallūrtum by Awīl-ilī. Although these names are recurring in the corpus, no particularities can be deduced from them without the mention of their occupation or date and place of their activity. However, it is evident that the sender of the letter sent orders to Šallūrtum (who might have been his daughter, wife or his relative). This letter does not contain a greeting formula after the introduction (lines 1–3). It is the continuation of earlier correspondence between the two persons because Awīl-ilī refers to a barley delivery, the transport of which Šallūrtum had not yet accomplished.²⁵

Zsombor Földi
Institut für Assyriologie und Hethitologie
Ludwig Maximilians-Universität München
zsombor.foldi@gmail.com

and

Zoltán Niederreiter

²⁵ For the meaning of *naḥrum* (line 4), see Kogan 2012 while for *guzalûm* (line 9), see Westenholz and Westenholz 2006, 123–127.

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