

# Cuneiform Tablets and the Antiquities Market

## The Archives from Dūr-Abī-ešuḥ\*

*Zsombor Földi*

**Abstract:** In this paper, different issues of dealing with unprovenanced antiquities are discussed from the Assyriologist's point of view. How should one deal with unprovenanced artefacts? Should they be published at all? Is it satisfactory to publish only the artefacts? What is the importance of acquisition history, and to what extent should one trust the data provided by dealers and auction houses? Since the Old Babylonian (20<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) city of Dūr-Abī-ešuḥ was virtually unknown until the early 2000s, its unprovenanced archives offer an excellent opportunity to address these issues. One can observe the appearance of cuneiform tablets from these archives in the main European and American centres of antiquities trade, as well as the scarcity of data concerning their acquisition history. However, since the main bulk of tablets still await publication, these observations must be considered preliminary. In an Appendix a previously unknown tablet from Dūr-Abī-ešuḥ, housed in a German private collection, is published for the first time.

In the past two decades, thousands of clay tablets have been acquired by various museums and private collections. A considerable number of them come from sites previously neither officially excavated nor identified, such as Garšana (ĜARšana),<sup>1</sup> Iri-Saḡrig<sup>2</sup> and Dūr-Abī-ešuḥ. Since these texts were discovered through illicit excavations and their acquisition is, from a

legal point of view, an offence against international law protecting cultural heritage, the publication of such materials has been subject to debate. This paper aims to present a brief overview of the already known—published and unpublished—tablets from Dūr-Abī-ešuḥ, focusing primarily on the provenance of these tablets as well as on the importance of publishing the corresponding data. It will also attempt to establish the date of the Dūr-Abī-ešuḥ archives' discovery by illicit diggers.

Let us begin with the question of the antiquities trade and academic involvement. In an attempt to remain brief for the purposes of this paper, the ethical and moral aspects cannot be discussed in detail here. The debate, principally between archaeologists and philologists, so far has focused primarily on the publishing of recently acquired cuneiform tablets, which

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\* This is an updated version of a paper written in 2013–2014. Abbreviations are those of the CDLI database: [http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations\\_for\\_assyriology](http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations_for_assyriology); add MSCCT = Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection, Cuneiform Texts. Relative dates are according to the Middle Chronology.

<sup>1</sup> See Owen – Mayr 2007, supplemented by Owen 2011; 2012; and 2016b.

<sup>2</sup> See Owen 2013a, supplemented by Sigrist – Gabbay 2014, nos. 6–10; Owen 2016a; and Sigrist – Gabbay – Avila *in press*, nos. 1–2; but cf. already Pettinato *apud* Menegazzi 2005, a volume which was, unfortunately, unavailable for the present study. The first tablet identified as originating from Iri-Saḡrig appeared on Ebay on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2004 (BDTNS No. 167825; see Molina 2013, 72). On the archive itself see Owen 2013b.

often turn out to be illicitly excavated.<sup>3</sup> Philologists often claim that those who want to prevent the publishing of such tablets are, in fact, ‘censoring knowledge.’<sup>4</sup> In the opinion of many archaeologists, the very act of publishing might increase the market value of archaeological objects (such as cuneiform tablets) and the demand for similar objects as well. Such tablets, however, are usually already acquired, and seldom re-sold.<sup>5</sup> Those who identify such tablets for dealers and auction houses are the ones who cause the gradual increase in value, rather than the scholars who publish them. As long as their age, content and value are not determined by a specialist, cuneiform tablets look very similar to the untrained eye.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, auction houses in the European and North-American centres of the antiquities market are always able to find specialists, who are willing to support the antiquities trade with their expertise—for financial gain or in the hope of being able to obtain publication rights.<sup>7</sup>

Some ‘cuneiformists’ do find it obvious that one should not identify objects of doubtful origin for dealers or auction houses, and yet there are some that do not. The remaining responsibility is that of museum curators and private collectors, who may be offered

the opportunity to buy unprovenanced artefacts. Since they cannot be experts of all fields, it is the task of the cuneiformist to inform them about such objects’ possible source and place of origin, being aware of the different materials which have been ‘on the market’ in certain periods. This would necessitate, however, that the actual ownership history of the published artefacts is also provided.

In the view of the author, the question is not whether such tablets should be published or not. After a cuneiform object is discovered, it is the responsibility of cuneiformists to publish it as soon as possible. This is especially true of tablets in private collections, where the tablets are often kept without taking appropriate actions to care for them, leading to their deterioration. One can agree with R. K. Englund in that the contents of every single text should be documented and published,<sup>8</sup> but one should not forget that the provenance of these texts is likewise important. Since the early days of Assyriology, only the minority of cuneiform tablets came from archaeological excavations, whereas the lion’s share was acquired through the antiquities market. Consequently, the place where they were found and their archaeological context cannot be identified with certainty.

<sup>3</sup> For the arguments of those who support the acquisition and study of such tablets, see Owen 2009 and 2013a, 335–356 as well as Westenholz 2010a. For counter-arguments, see Brodie 2006; 2008; and 2011 (with further literature), as well as Müller-Karpe 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Owen 2009. In this relation, the importance of unprovenanced antiquities as historical evidence (e.g., the Etemenanki or *ziqurrat* stele of Nebuchadnezzar II, see CUSAS 17, 76) is often emphasized.

<sup>5</sup> As correctly pointed out by Owen 2009, 129.

<sup>6</sup> See Brodie 2011, 129–131.

<sup>7</sup> Compare, for instance, Westenholz 2010b, 455; Feliu 2006; 2010; 2012; 2013; 2014; Feliu – Millet [Albà] 2003; 2004; 2009; 2012; and Arnaud 2007; 2010 (see below).

<sup>8</sup> ‘[I]t seems to me the ethical imperative of specialists to fully document the texts’ content, and to communicate their findings to the scholarly community as well as to the general public. Those who are *not* prepared to utilize all sources in their research, including texts available to us through private collections, and certainly those who would presume to limit the access or use in scholarly communications of unprovenanced sources, as has begun to happen with submissions even to such politically neutral editorial boards as those that oversee the publication of papers on the *history of mathematics*, may want to reconsider the professional choices they have made in their lives’ (Englund 2009, 5–6 n. 11).

Unlike the legal documents from the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods, most texts from ancient Mesopotamia do not mention the place where they were drawn up. This makes it often impossible to determine a tablet's place of origin. Therefore, any proposed identification must be based not only on the cuneiform text's actual contents (such as geographical names, prosopography, date etc.) and its palaeographical features, but also the history of the object's acquisition. The date of purchase, the name of the seller and—in an ideal scenario—the nature of other tablets belonging to the same lot, are essential for the reconstruction of the original archives, which cannot be excavated anymore.<sup>9</sup> The availability of such data led to very spectacular results in the case of private archives at Old Babylonian Sippar, found by illicit diggers by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, it is not enough to publish the already acquired cuneiform tablets; it is also the editors' responsibility to clarify the circumstances of their acquisition. Unscholarly references to private collections whose owners 'wish to remain anonymous' and vague designations such as 'a private collection in GN' should be avoided. Those who retain this kind of information, which is usually known but left unpublished,<sup>11</sup> are

ironically 'censoring knowledge' in their own way, just like those whom they criticize for trying to prevent the tablets' publication.<sup>12</sup> As more than a handful of examples show, it is possible to publish not only the cuneiform objects' present whereabouts, but also their real ownership history.<sup>13</sup>

### **Dūr-Abī-ešuh tablets in public and private collections**

The town or fortress called Dūr-Abī-ešuh was virtually unknown before the discovery of its archives.<sup>14</sup> This circumstance makes the tablets from Dūr-Abī-ešuh a reasonable choice for an investigation of antiquities trade in the past two decades.

The question of these archives' origin can be approached from two directions. First, one can compile the information provided by museums and collections in which tablets from this site are located.

The greatest bulk of tablets from Dūr-Abī-ešuh is housed at Cornell University, Ithaca (NY). Besides the 92 texts published by K. Van Lerberghe and G. Voet,<sup>15</sup> the publication of approximately 400 other tablets of the same collection was

<sup>9</sup> On the early Old Babylonian tablets from the city of Kiš, before and after their dispersal through the antiquities market, see Johns 1910, 279; 1911a, 98; and 1911b, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Esp. Renger 1986; van Driel 1989; and Kalla 1999.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, compare Schøyen Collection's MS 1988, which is an agate eye-stone dedicated by king Kurigalzu. The publication (CUSAS 17, 62) contains a copy and a photo of the obverse, but tells nothing about its ownership history, as if M. Schøyen's 'Statement of Provenance' (see below) would free the editors of the scholarly duty of clarifying the provenance of each artefact. To the reverse

side—as shown by the corresponding CDLI image—a label of Christie's is still attached, relating that the object was sold on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1994 as lot 219 (Földi 2013a, 19; the description in the auction catalogue—possibly the work of W. G. Lambert—suggests Ilaba in l. 1 rather than the edition's Mār-bīti). For a positive example see now George 2016, 53 on CUSAS 32, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Owen 2009.

<sup>13</sup> See from the last years, e.g., Finkel 2006; Radner 2012; Földi 2013b; Siddall 2013; and Winitzer 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Note that there was only one textual attestation (CT 52, 118 = AbB 7, 118, a Sippar letter) known to Groneberg 1980, 57.

<sup>15</sup> CUSAS 8, 1–89; Van Lerberghe – Voet 2010, nos. 1–3 (no. 4 = CUSAS 8, 39).

promised.<sup>16</sup> No information concerning the exact date of acquisition or the seller is provided. By the time of CUSAS 8's publication, Van Lerberghe and Voet had been working for five years on the Dūr-Abī-ešuh tablets;<sup>17</sup> thus they may have very well begun in 2004.<sup>18</sup> By that time, a preliminary catalogue compiled by R. H. Mayr, was already available for their work.<sup>19</sup> Since the cleaning, baking and cataloguing of clay tablets are time-consuming tasks, the acquisition may have taken place around the early 2000's.

Another very remarkable group of texts from Dūr-Abī-ešuh is housed at the Schøyen Collection, Oslo and London. Besides the two literary texts edited in CUSAS 10,<sup>20</sup> A. R. George referred to twenty-four letters and archival documents,<sup>21</sup> as well as some texts of astrological content, which turned out to be lunar-eclipse omens.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the divinatory texts from this site were edited by the same author;<sup>23</sup> the archival texts are going to be published by F. van Koppen. As for their acquisition, all the

MSCCT volumes contain a 'Statement of Provenance' by M. Schøyen, claiming that 19 (in the earlier volumes only claiming 16) old private collections, by now dispersed, 'are the source of almost all the tablets, seals, and incantation bowls' in his possession.<sup>24</sup> In addition, 'other items were acquired through the auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's, where in some cases the names of their former owners were not revealed.'<sup>25</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Van Lerberghe – Voet 2010, 181; according to Van Lerberghe – Voet 2016, 562, the next volume will focus on texts dealing with the military.

<sup>17</sup> Van Lerberghe – Voet 2010, 181.

<sup>18</sup> This calculation finds support at the KU Leuven homepage (<http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/ono/meso/projects/cornell>, 13.10.2016), where it is explicitly stated that the tablets were digitized by Van Lerberghe and Voet from 2004 on.

<sup>19</sup> Van Lerberghe – Voet 2009, v–vi.

<sup>20</sup> CUSAS 10, 16 (MS 3208) and 17 (MS 3209/1–3).

<sup>21</sup> Under the accession number MS 3218 (see George 2009, 136). According to the CDLI database (accessed 13.10.2016), there are 27 tablets under this number; note that MS 3218/06, an extispicy report has already been published as CUSAS 18, 4.

<sup>22</sup> MS 3117 and 3118 (see George 2009, 148–149), now published as CUSAS 18, 14 and 13, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> See especially CUSAS 18, 3–4 and 13–14, with George 2013, 70–71.

<sup>24</sup> Földi (2013a, 19, 21–22 with nn. 54–56) noted that 'from the material of these earlier collections at least one piece could be identified among the tablets, seals, and incantation bowls of the Schøyen Collection'. A quick survey of the CDLI database, which is necessarily incomplete, gives the following result for 20 of the ca. 4300 cuneiform objects from the Schøyen Collection included in the CDLI database:

- 6 Claremont (CUSAS 34, 69–74 = Fisher 1971);
- several Erlenmeyer (e.g., CUSAS 17, 100 = Friberg 2007, 233 MS 1686 = Sollberger 1954, text A; CUSAS 18, 36 = Leichty – Kienast 2003, 281ff.; CUSAS 32, 64 with George 2016, 53);
- 1 Amherst (MVN 5, 202);
- 1 Dring (Walker 1973, pl. 16 Dring 2 = AbB 10, 145);
- 1 Schaeffer (CUSAS 34, 27 = Garelli 1964, 66 Sch. 11);
- 1 (Seidl-)Geuthner (Friberg 2007, 137 MS 1984 = MVN 10, 214 = Allotte de la Fuÿe 1915, 49);
- 1 Frida Hahn (CUSAS 34, 26 = Lewy 1930, no. 35); according to Ulshöfer 1995, 383 auctioned at Charles Ede Ltd. in 1972; on the collection see now Michel *apud* George – Hertel – Llop-Raduà – Radner – van Soldt 2017, 48.
- 2 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (SET 66; CUSAS 17, 70 ?=? RIMA 2.0.101.35, ex. 9 = Jones 1941, 326);
- 2 Pinches (MVN 5, 28 and 73); in fact, Pinches' wife's collection; according to Sollberger 1978, 16 n. 8 was auctioned at Sotheby's in 1958;
- 1 unclear (Allotte de la Fuÿe 1919, 19f.; from his own collection? Compare note 47 below);
- 1 Charles Ede Ltd., London (Lee 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Compare Schøyen *apud* Friberg 2007, xi; Alster 2007, xii; Dalley 2009, v–vi; George 2009, vii–viii; Civil 2010, v–vi; George 2011, viii–ix; 2013, vii–viii; 2016, vii; and George –

D. Arnaud has reported a considerable number of tablets from the same site in an article.<sup>26</sup> His statements regarding the difference between ‘origin’ and ‘provenance’ as well as about the ‘journey of objects, either inscribed or not’<sup>27</sup> makes one wonder if these texts were seen by him ‘in passing,’<sup>28</sup> or even in a private collection. This matter will be discussed below in detail.

Other tablets, the number of which it is impossible to estimate, may be scattered around the world. One of them is housed at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. It is the only one, part of whose ownership history has been published: it was purchased on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2003, supposedly in the United Kingdom.<sup>29</sup> More tablets have been reported to K. Van Lerberghe from Paris,<sup>30</sup> one from Israel<sup>31</sup> and one possibly from London.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the author recently identified two letters from the same site in the private collection of P. Kress in Bochum; one of them is edited in the Appendix.

### **Dūr-Abī-ešuh tablets on the antiquities market**

A different approach is offered by the study of the material, which appeared on the

antiquities market in the past two decades. From 1998 until recently, a number of cuneiform tablets, originating from Dūr-Abī-ešuh, have been offered for sale by various auction houses and sites.<sup>33</sup> The earliest appearance of such a tablet, to the knowledge of the author, dates back to 1998 (see Appendix);<sup>34</sup> the second to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2001, at a Christie’s London auction in South Kensington.<sup>35</sup> The tablet was not sold at the time, but six months later it was offered for sale again. On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2002, the tablet was sold by the same auctioneer for £705.<sup>36</sup> But who was the purchaser?

By comparing the available photographs, it becomes obvious that the tablet under discussion is identical to MS 3218/04 of the Schøyen Collection.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, at least three more lots of the same auction can be identified in that collection: nos. 559–561 are identical to MS 3218/02, 05 and 03,

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Hertel – Llop-Raduà – Radner – van Soldt 2017, VI–VII. The later versions omit the reference to incantation bowls, but do not undertake any change in the list of collections, although some of them were known for incantation bowls rather than clay tablets (e.g., Rihani; see Lundén 2005, 7 and Balter 2007, 555).

<sup>26</sup> See Arnaud 2007, 41–44.

<sup>27</sup> Arnaud 2007, 5 with n. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Van Lerberghe – Voet 2009, v.

<sup>29</sup> Földi 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Some of these may be amongst those seen by Arnaud (see note 26).

<sup>31</sup> Sigrist – Gabbay – Avila *in press*, no. 5.

<sup>32</sup> K. Van Lerberghe, pers. comm. (08.10.2016).

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<sup>33</sup> This section is based on the author’s own collection of data, with no claim of completeness.

<sup>34</sup> Acquired by P. Kress (Bochum) from Galerie Jürgen Haering (Freiburg) for 450 DM. It was said to come from a collection in southwest Germany (information kindly provided by P. Kress, 24.10.2016). In light of this information, the tablet appears to have been imported into Germany after 1970 and if this were to be the case, the purchaser may have unintentionally contravened the UNESCO 1970 Convention, whatever documents the seller on the tablet’s provenance did provide. In such cases, the decision of Jonathan Rosen and Cornell University, i.e., to give back these tablets to Iraq (see Owen 2013a, I, 352–353), after they have been fully recorded and published, might be followed.

<sup>35</sup> Sale 9244, Lot 246.

<sup>36</sup> Sale 9382, Lot 557. The estimated price was £600–900.

<sup>37</sup> Note that a fragment appears to have been lost from the upper left corner of the reverse side. On the Christie’s photos it is still attached to the tablet, but it is missing from the CDLI image.

respectively.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, a group of ten cuneiform tablets were sold for £2938 at the same time.<sup>39</sup> It contained one Early Dynastic tablet (253j) and two Ur III records (253d–e); the remaining seven date back to the Old Babylonian period. Four of them are likely to have originated from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ:<sup>40</sup>

- 253b is ‘an economic text concerning sheep for a festival for Ninlil and Ninurta,’ dated to the reign of Samsu-ditāna (1625–1595 BCE);
- 253g is ‘a legal document which confirms that Iluninum has entrusted 23 animals to the shepherd called Belmanu, son of Tari-bum, who is henceforth responsible for them, with good seal impressions of the parties involved,’ dated to the reign of Ammī-ṣadūqa (1646–1626 BCE);
- 253h is a ‘contract concerning livestock for the festivals of Ninlil and Ninurta, with seal impressions,’ dated to the reign of Ammī-ṣadūqa;
- 253i is a ‘contract concerning livestock delivered for offerings, fine seal impressions,’ dated to the reign of Samsu-ditāna.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> This apparently confirms M. Schøyen’s statement regarding the acquisition of cuneiform objects through Christie’s (for references see note 25).

<sup>39</sup> Sale 9382, Lot 253; the estimated price was £2500–3000. For the sake of convenience, they will be referred to here as 253a–j, respectively.

<sup>40</sup> For the descriptions see Christie’s 2002, 97 no. 253.

<sup>41</sup> For the sake of completeness, here follows the description of the remaining three Old Babylonian tablets, whose connection to the already known material cannot yet be determined: 253a is ‘a private contract concerning 58 sheep, with multiple clear impressions of the cylinder seal of Geme[n]-Asalluhi, the priestess of Marduk and Zarpanitum,’ dated to the reign of Samsu-ditāna; 253f is ‘a legal document with 6

Parallels for 253b, 253h and 253i are known from the material published by Van Lerberghe and Voet, namely CUSAS 8, 23–38 and 40. As for 253g, ‘Iluninum’ is obviously a misreading for *i-lu-ni nu-èš* ‘Ilūni, the *nêšakkum*-priest.’ Likewise, ‘Belmanu’ must be, in fact, Bēlšunu. Compare the three herding contracts from the same archive: in CUSAS 8, 41, sheep and goats were entrusted to the same Bēlšunu, the son of Tarībum by the *nêšakkum*-priest Enlil-manšum. In CUSAS 8, 42 and 43, the livestock is entrusted by Ilūni, the *nêšakkum*-priest to Warad-Gula and another to Nabi-Gula, respectively. These four tablets, however, do not belong to the MS 3218 group in the Schøyen Collection. Consequently, they were most likely acquired by someone else.

The tablets sold in London were presumably identified and described by the late W. G. Lambert, one of the few scholars who was widely known—but seldom criticized—to support the marketing of Near Eastern antiquities by equipping them with detailed descriptions.<sup>42</sup> The same is true for the Vienna tablet.<sup>43</sup>

The situation is somewhat more complicated in the case of Paris auction houses. To the knowledge of the author, tablets from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ were offered for sale by Piasa, Pierre Bergé et Associés, Millon et Associés, and Tajan, all belonging to the Drouot group.

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witnesses, itemizing a quantity of barley, silver and troops, fattened oxen and sheep in an estate on the banks of the Euphrates, signed with cylinder seal impressions, dated to the year the wall of Uruk was built,’ possibly dated to the reign of Sîn-kāšid (see Falkenstein 1963, 9 no. 7), and 253i is ‘a receipt for 5 gur of barley.’

<sup>42</sup> On Lambert’s work and the academic involvement in this matter, see Brodie 2011 (esp. 129–131) in detail.

<sup>43</sup> See above and Földi 2014 in detail.

The first appearance of such objects corresponds with the first sale at Christie's: in the catalogue of Tajan's auction on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 2002, one finds four cuneiform texts from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ (nos. 73–76),<sup>44</sup> although their place of origin is indicated to be the region of Sippar. All of them are dated to the reign of Abī-ešuḫ (1711–1684 BCE). They all are designated as accounts of payment for the personnel of a fortress, which must be, judging by the parallel texts, Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ on the Ḫammurāpi-nuḫuš-nišī canal.<sup>45</sup> In some cases these individuals are explicitly stated to be Kassites (no. 75),<sup>46</sup> or farmers, troops, brewers, and shipwrights (no. 76). What is remarkable is that the purchaser was promised full translations, as used to be the case with tablets authenticated by Lambert.

Five months later, according to the catalogue of the Tajan auction on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2002, another two tablets (nos. 169, 171) from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ appeared.<sup>47</sup> Like the ones discussed above, they are dated to the reign of Abī-ešuḫ, and both of them deal with the provisioning of troops. They are said to come from the region of Sippar; in one of the descriptions, Elamites are also mentioned in an unclear context.

On the 17–18<sup>th</sup> March 2003, Piasa offered at least two Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ tablets for sale, both from the reign of Abī-ešuḫ. (The

identification of four more tablets as Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ ones is uncertain.) No. 415 of that sale is said to be an account of payments for troops by the royal administration, whereas no. 416 is labelled as an account of payments for troops at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ and is said to have come from Sippar. As in the other cases, full translations of the texts were promised for the purchaser. Ten days later (on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2003), another account of payments, also dated to the reign of Abī-ešuḫ, was offered for sale at a Tajan auction (no. 239).

The trade of such cuneiform objects continued after 2003, although the most important auction houses, such as Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonhams decided not to auction illicitly excavated Iraqi antiquities.<sup>48</sup>

Three tablets, possibly—but not certainly—from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ, were sold at a Piasa auction on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2005. All of them are dated to the reign of Abī-ešuḫ. No. 63 is a long account of sheep (possibly a herding contract, see above), whereas nos. 416 and 440 are a house rental contract and a lentil-shaped account of barley, respectively.

The tablet offered for sale at Millon & Associés on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007 (as no. 228), judging by its measurements and contents given in the auction catalogue must be identical to the aforementioned no. 73 of Tajan's auction on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 2002. In this time, its estimated price went down from €1500-1800 to €900-1200.

Unusually, a full translation of a text (no. 231) was published in the catalogue of a Pierre Bergé & Associés auction on the 17<sup>th</sup>

<sup>44</sup> A fifth text (no. 79), which is a long list of payments to officials, might belong to the same dossier, but note that it is dated to Sd 17, i.e., four years later than the latest known text from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ (see Van Lerberghe – Voet 2009, 2).

<sup>45</sup> On the existence of two fortresses called Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ see now Van Lerberghe – Voet 2016.

<sup>46</sup> On the soldiers of foreign origin at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ see Földi 2014, 45–46.

<sup>47</sup> Several of the cuneiform objects—primarily Ur III tablets—offered for sale on that occasion, once belonged to the private collection of F.-M. Allotte de la Fuÿe.

<sup>48</sup> See Brodie 2011, 120–122. On the situation up to now, see Westenholz 2010a, 259–260 and Brodie 2011, 122–129.

January 2009.<sup>49</sup> It is another account of payments for troops at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ, dated to the reign of Abī-ešuḫ. The translation reads as follows:<sup>50</sup>

Ce grain qui est mesuré à la mesure du dieu Mardouk de la réception, selon la mesure du petit vase-mesheqoum.

Il s'agit de farine moulue, pour la nourriture des troupes cassites, quand les troupes se trouvèrent avec Etel-pi-Mardouk, l'intendant, Samsou-ilouna-kashid, Sin-moushallim et Awil-Nabium à Fort-Abi-eshouh, sur la rive du canal 'Hammourapi-est-la-propriété-du-peuple', quand les troupes furent sous la responsabilité de Samsou-ilouna-kashid et Inbi-Sin.

Cela a été livré à ceux qui sont stationnés à Fort-Abi-eshouh, sur la rive du canal 'Hammourapi-est-la-propriété-du-peuple'. Nourriture du mois de Kislim.

Sortie de grain de l'impôt et du grain d'autre origine, pour le capital de la nourriture des troupes du Fort-Abi-eshouh, sur la rive du canal 'Hammourapi-est-la-propriété-du-peuple', sous la responsabilité d'Awil-Shamash et Sin-ouselli, administrateurs.

Besides well-known individuals, such as Awīl-Šamaš and Sīn-uselli, the two

<sup>49</sup> Note that another tablet, belonging to lot 230, refers to Dūr-Sīn-muballiḫ, which was another fortress at the other outflow of the Ḥammurāpi-nuḫuš-nišī canal (see George 2009, 139). Therefore, it appears not impossible that it came from the same findspot.

<sup>50</sup> See Pierre Bergé & Associés 2009, 106 no. 231.

accountants (*šatammū*),<sup>51</sup> lesser known individuals also occur. The most curious among them is Samsu-ilūna-kāšid, whose name was previously unattested,<sup>52</sup> except for a reference to this name by Arnaud, in his discussion of his enigmatic Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ texts.<sup>53</sup>

The aforementioned data suggests that the tablets discussed by Arnaud must be identical to those offered for sale at various auction houses at Paris. A number of further documents published by him can also be identified in the same material.<sup>54</sup> This might lead one to conclude that he had provided the descriptions of these tablets, that made an estimation of their market value possible. In addition to the cuneiform tablets from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ, the following artefacts can be identified in the auction catalogues:

- Arnaud 2007, no. 3, a prism containing the inscription of a certain Šarrī-Ēl, the king of Kumidi; it was sold at a Piasa auction on the 17–18<sup>th</sup> March 2003, as no. 406.<sup>55</sup> Note that its forthcoming publication by Arnaud was referred to in the auction catalogue.
- Arnaud 2007, no. 10 was published as a stamped brick of a certain 'Ḥammurāpi-

<sup>51</sup> On them see Van Lerberghe – Voet 2010, nos. 1–4 with Földi 2014, 42–44.

<sup>52</sup> Compare Pientka-Hinz 2008, 646. The personal names, in which the kings of the First Dynasty of Babylon occur as theophoric element, were first discussed by Klengel 1976; on such names in general, see Radner 2005, 31 (with further literature). Note also Samsu-ilūna-muštāl in another Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ text (CUSAS 8, 39).

<sup>53</sup> Arnaud 2007, 42 n. 115.

<sup>54</sup> Note that in the supplement of his article, Arnaud (2010) refers to some auction catalogues as containing images of the objects he just edited (see below).

<sup>55</sup> See Földi 2013b, §3.4. An inscription of a certain Baragsagnudi, sold at the same auction as lot 388 and edited since by Marchesi (2006, 216), was also referred to by Arnaud (2007, 9 n. 5).



andullī (or: -šulūlī),’ a supposed Babylonian governor at Ešnunna. Judging by the available copy and the image, it must be identical to a brick that was housed at the Ifergan Collection, Málaga. According to their homepage, that artefact was acquired at a Pierre Bergé & Associés auction on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2006 (Lot 413).<sup>56</sup> In fact, the brick turned out to be a duplicate of an already known inscription of Ipiq-Adad II of Ešnunna.<sup>57</sup>

- Arnaud 2007, no. 13 is the so-called Sutean funerary inscription, consisting of four inscribed bricks. At least two of these were apparently sold at a Piasa auction on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2005 as nos. 426–427 (Arnaud’s no. 13/3 and 13/4, respectively).

- Arnaud 2010, no. 2 contains three new fragments of Sîn-iddinam’s inscription on the dredging the Tigris river, commonly referred to as ‘Sîn-iddinam 2.’<sup>58</sup> These are apparently identical to the ones offered for sale at the Piasa auction on the 17–18<sup>th</sup> March 2003 (lot 49). The duplicate sold at a Pierre Bergé auction (on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007, lot 293), that Arnaud himself refers to, is a further one.<sup>59</sup> This inscription was known to D. R. Frayne’s edition in only four manuscripts. In view of the fact that additional ones started to emerge in greater number by the middle of the 1990s,<sup>60</sup> they are commonly thought to be originating

from some monumental building, uncovered in the course of recent illicit excavations.<sup>61</sup>

- Arnaud 2010, 3 is a diorite vase with a three-line inscription of Warad-Sîn; possibly a fake. The catalogue of the same Pierre Bergé auction contains an image of the same object.<sup>62</sup> It was acquired by the Musée Champollion at Figeac.<sup>63</sup>

- Arnaud 2010, 6 (=MVN 10, 57) is a duck-weight with an inscription of Tukultī-Ninurta II; as Arnaud notes, a fine image of the same object was to be found in the catalogue of a Drouot auction, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2000 (no. 136).<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusions

In conclusion: nothing was heard about Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ until 1998. Then, and especially after the year 2000, tablets from this site started to appear in the European and American centres of the antiquities trade. This may indicate—as pointed out by N. J. Brodie regarding the aforementioned Sîn-iddinam barrels as well as the so-called Nebuchadnezzar Larsa bricks<sup>65</sup>—that they had been excavated illicitly, not long before their appearance on the antiquities market. They were most probably discovered in 1998 or slightly before. Therefore, smuggling them out from Iraq obviously started well before the 2003 invasion of Iraq,<sup>66</sup> which is not necessarily the case with the archives from Garšana and Iri-saḡriḡ (see above). If A. R. George is right in

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.trocadero.com/IFERGANGALLERY/items/901258/item90> (11.28.2012; no longer available).

<sup>57</sup> See Földi 2013b, §6.8.

<sup>58</sup> Frayne 1990, 158–160 (RIME 4.2.9.2).

<sup>59</sup> Arnaud 2010, 7 n. 11. The object under discussion is no. 293.

<sup>60</sup> Frayne 1990, 158; for the new duplicates see Beckman 1997; Westenholz – Westenholz 2006, 93–94; Brodie 2008, 50; and Földi 2013a, 21 n. 43; add CUSAS 17, 46–49 and Glassner 2013.

<sup>61</sup> See Brodie 2008, 43–44; 2011, 120–121.

<sup>62</sup> Arnaud 2010, 10 n. 24; the object is no. 292.

<sup>63</sup> With Pottier 2010, 47; see Földi 2013b, §6.5.

<sup>64</sup> Arnaud 2010, 13 n. 36.

<sup>65</sup> See Brodie 2011, 125–126.

<sup>66</sup> Consequently, the appearance of Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ tablets in collections may serve as an indicator for the purchase of unprovenanced antiquities in the early 2000s or thereafter.

identifying the mound where the Dūr-Abī-ešūḫ archives may have originally been situated,<sup>67</sup> it is also not impossible to find the original findspot. This would obviously result in further discoveries.

Another important conclusion is that besides great bulks of tablets, such as those acquired by Cornell University, a significant number of them were dispersed through the antiquities market. That these appear to be far fewer than the hundreds of tablets at Cornell, however, must be the result of our present ignorance.<sup>68</sup> The proportion of the Garšana as well as the Dūr-Abī-ešūḫ material between Cornell University and the Schøyen Collection<sup>69</sup> makes one think that the dispersal of these happened—at least partially—through the same channels. Information concerning the acquisition history of Dūr-Abī-ešūḫ tablets would nevertheless help in identifying more tablets from that site.

In order to stimulate further research, a list of tablets sold at auction houses and

presumably originating from Dūr-Abī-ešūḫ, is presented here.<sup>70</sup> One may expect the appearance of each of these tablets in private as well as public collections, and should thus be aware of its background and historical context as an artefact.

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<sup>67</sup> See George 2009, 139–141; compare now Van Lerberghe – Voet 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Next to nothing is known, e.g., of the Museum of the Bible (a.k.a. Green Collection; Oklahoma City), referred to by Civil *apud* George 2012 and recently Owen 2016b. According to the online resources (Brinkman 2011; Witherington 2012), the collection houses about 11,000 cuneiform tablets which have been assembled from 2009 on.

<sup>69</sup> As shown by the CDLI database (15.10.2016): 1571 Garšana tablets in total; 1421 (90%) at Cornell University, 16 (1%) in the Schøyen Collection. The Dūr-Abī-ešūḫ tablets are less well-represented at CDLI; one finds 247 in total with 246 at Cornell University and the remaining one from Vienna (the corresponding Schøyen Collection tablets are not marked with this label yet). The number of Dūr-Abī-ešūḫ tablets discussed on pp. 3–4 totals the number of known tablets to about 550, with approximately 500 (ca. 91%) at Cornell University and nearly 30 (ca. 5%) at the Schøyen Collection.

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<sup>70</sup> Note that nos. 1 and 6 are identical; presumably nos. 10 and 26 too.

No.	Date (YY/MM/DD), auction house, lot no.	Housed today at	Description	Measurements (mm)
1	2001/11/07 Christie's no. 246	Schøyen Coll., MS 3218/04	account of barley rations for troops at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ on the Ḥammurāpi-nuḫuš-nišī canal	184×82
2	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 253b		receipt of sheep for a festival for Ninlil and Ninurta	73×48
3	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 253g		herding contract (Ilūni, the <i>nēšakkum</i> -priest entrusted 23 animals to the shepherd called Bēlšunu, son of Tarībum)	81×46×23
4	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 253h		receipt of sheep for a festival for Ninlil and Ninurta	77×50×24
5	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 253i		receipt of livestock for offerings	72×44×24
6	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 557	Schøyen Coll., MS 3218/04	account of barley rations for troops at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ on the Ḥammurāpi-nuḫuš-nišī canal	184×82
7	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 559	Schøyen Coll., MS 3218/02	account of barley rations for Kassite troops	?×?
8	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 560	Schøyen Coll., MS 3218/05	account of flour and beer rations for charioteers (Bimaḫī Kassites)	?×?
9	2002/05/15 Christie's no. 561	Schøyen Coll., MS 3218/03	account of barley rations for Kassite troops	?×?
10	2002/06/05 Tajan no. 73		account of payments for the personnel of a fortress	205×105
11	2002/06/05 Tajan no. 74		account of barley payments for the personnel of a fortress	150×75
12	2002/06/05 Tajan no. 75		account of payments for Kassite troops of a fortress	105×55
13	2002/06/05 Tajan no. 76		account of payments for farmers, troops, brewers and shipwrights	65×45
14	2002/10/30 Tajan no. 169		account of payments for troops sent for an expedition	133×67
15	2002/10/30 Tajan no. 171		account of payments for troops sent for an expedition to a fortress	132×65
16	2003/03/17–18 Piasa no. 32		account of ...	91×54

17	2003/03/17–18 Piasa no. 46		account of silver, for the maintenance of the god Sîn (Enlil?)	94×52
18	2003/03/17–18 Piasa no. 415		account of payments for troops by the royal administration	155×76
19	2003/03/17–18 Piasa no. 416		account of payments for troops at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ	185×90
20	2003/03/17–18 Piasa no. 420b		account of livestock(?)	60×45
21	2003/03/17–18 Piasa no. 421b		purchase of ...	44×41
22	2003/03/28 Tajan no. 239		account of payments	88×50
23	2005/04/13 Piasa no. 63		account of sheep (herding contract?)	160×75
24	2005/04/13 Piasa no. 416		rent of a house	73×40
25	2005/04/13 Piasa no. 440		lentil-shaped account of barley	65×?
26	2007/11/14 Millon & Associés no. 228		account of payments for the personnel of a fortress	205×105
27	2009/01/17 Pierre Bergé no. 230a		account referring to troops under Asalluḫi-iddinam, leaving Dūr-Sîn-muballiṭ	36×35
28	2009/01/17 Pierre Bergé no. 231		account of payments for troops at Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ	83×52

**Appendix: A letter from Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ**

The tablet Kress 5 (CDLI P272792) is published here for the first time. It measures 54×40×22 mm and it is housed in the private collection of P. Kress (Bochum).<sup>71</sup> The corresponding CDLI entry dates back to 2005; the tablet itself was acquired by its present owner as early as 1998.<sup>72</sup>

The text is a letter, sent by Lugal-gubbani to Sîn-māgir; the same correspondents are also known from the unpublished letter MS 3218/19. Impressions of a five-line seal inscription can be found on the reverse as well as on the left and upper edges.

**obv.**

- 1.) *a-na*<sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-*ma-gir*
- 2.) *qí-bí-ma*
- 3.) *um-ma lugal-gub-ba-ni-ma*
- 4.) <sup>d</sup>EN.LÍL *li-ba-al-li-í-ka*
- 5.) <sup>1</sup>*sà-ap-ḫu-li-ip-ḫur*<sup>1</sup>
- 6.) <sup>1</sup>*ša*<sup>2</sup> *ip*<sup>2</sup>-<*pa*<sup>2</sup>>-*ar-ku*
- 7.) 1.0.0; '4' SÍLA<sup>2</sup> IGI<sup>2</sup> 'x ŠE<sup>2</sup>.GUR<sup>2</sup>'
- 8.) x x x x x

lo.e.

(-)

**rev.**

9.) {...}

10.) {...}

(-)

up.e.

(-)

**seal**

- 1.) <sup>1</sup>*la*<sup>2</sup>-*qí*<sup>2</sup>-[*pu*<sup>2</sup>-*u*]*m*<sup>2</sup>  
 GUDU<sub>4</sub> <sup>d</sup>EN.LÍL.LÁ  
 LÚ<sup>1</sup> KA.KEŠDA<sup>2</sup> LUGAL  
 DUMU <sup>d</sup>NIN.URTA-*ni-šu*  
 ARAD *a-bi-e-šu-uh*.KE<sub>4</sub>

To Sîn-māgir say: thus (speaks) Lugal-gubbani. May Enlil keep you in good health! Saphu(m)-lipḫur, who stopped working(?), ... (unclear traces).

Seal: Lā-qīpum(?), the *pašišum*-priest of Enlil, member of the royal army(?), the son of Ninurta-nīšu, the servant of Abī-ešuḫ.

**Notes**

3.) The same name appears also in CUSAS 8, 2 l. 23, where the son of a Lugal-gubbani acts as witness. That name is read as \*LUGAL-AB.BA.A.NI, claiming that it might be a reference to the king of the Sealand.<sup>73</sup>

7–8.) It is difficult to determine whether ll. 7–8 still belong to the letter. They are, in fact, incomprehensible and seem to be written by a different hand. The beginning of the reverse shows obvious erasures. Is it an unfinished letter that was never sent? One might even consider whether the end of the obverse was 'written' in modern times, but this is, to the knowledge of the author, not paralleled by any further Dūr-Abī-ešuḫ tablets.

Seal: Impressions of the same seal appear on MS 3218/19 as well. The exact nature of the relation between the sender of the letter and the seal owner is yet unclear. On the title KA.KEŠDA<sup>2</sup> LUGAL compare now Goddeeris 2016, I, 274.

<sup>71</sup> See Molina 2008, 25 on the Ur III tablets; the published Iri-saḡrig ones are Owen 2013a, nos. 122, 202, 337, 391, 452, 457, 470, 474, 662, 682, 908, 957, 973, 1010, 1063, 1116, and 1118. The only Old Babylonian text published from this collection is a literary one (Zólyomi 2015).

<sup>72</sup> See note 34 above.

<sup>73</sup> Van Lerberghe – Voet 2009, 13.

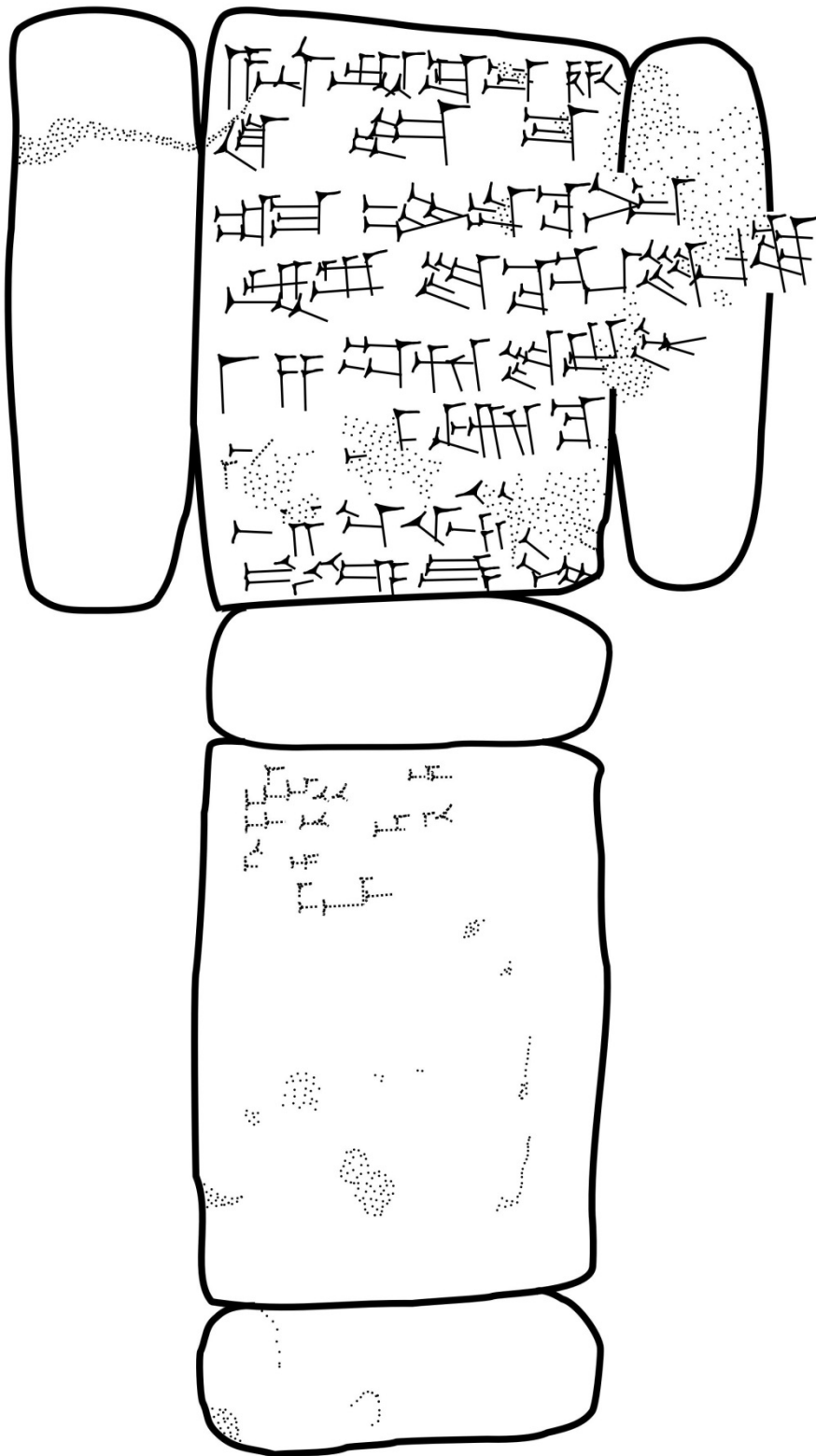


Fig. 1 Autograph of Kress 5 (drawing by author)



**Fig. 2** Photo of seal impression on Kress 5 rev. (photo by author)

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