

The Instructions of King Ur-Ninurta: a New Fragment¹

Miguel Civil — Chicago

1. In 1913, H. Zimmern published the copy of a large tablet (VAS 10 204, with photo of the reverse in pl. 1).² Its text was later identified as the "Contest between the Bird and the Fish" and another composition, or compositions, now called "The Instructions of Ur-Ninurta," or the like. Not until 1948 was an attempt made to translate this tablet: M. Witzel "Ein Stück sumerischer 'Weisheit'" (*Or* 17, pp. 1-16). While recognizing the text's gnomic character, Witzel was unable to tell the two compositions apart and his study naturally suffers from the imperfect knowledge of literary Sumerian pervasive at the time. J. van Dijk, *La sagesse suméro-akkadienne* pp. 102-12 offered in 1953 a tentative, but much better translation of the "wisdom" part. In *Sumer* 11 (1955) pl. 13ff., he published a duplicate from the Iraq Museum (IM 55403), then recently excavated in Tell Harmal;³ and he later provided a revised copy of the same tablet in *TIM* 9, 1 (1976). Further duplicates were listed by the author in *Or* 41 (1972) 88f. Finally, B. Alster edited and commented the first 71 lines, using all the available duplicates, in *Or* 60 (1991) 141-57.⁴ The remainder of the "wisdom" text has not yet been the object of an up-to-date edition, doubtlessly due to its difficult textual condition: even sources from the same time and place (such as VAS 10 204 and 205) exhibit extreme textual variations, and the language is ungrammatical at places. The latest addition to the dossier is CBS 11945, published recently by A. Cavigneaux (*Limet Festschrift* [1996] 18-21). The tablet, probably of Middle Babylonian date,⁵ is bilingual, but unfortunately not much of its Akkadian is preserved.

2. MM 487b is a fragment (ca. 100 x 80 mm) from close to the left side of the obverse (the reverse is destroyed) of a multi-column tablet, with two columns preserved. Its original size is uncertain: the tablet had, by comparison of the text of both columns, a minimum of 35 lines per column, to which at least the two lines 30a-b have to be added. A length of only 37 lines, corresponding to ca. 180 mm, however, is somewhat surprising for a tablet that, if it had two columns per side, must have been only ca. 160 mm wide. With a total

1. Es amb gran plaer i satisfacció que tinc l'honor d'oferir aquest petit treball sobre el primer fragment literari sumeri que va passar per les meves mans, ja fa uns cinquanta anys, al P. Guiu Camps a qui tant deuen els estudis bíblics i orientalistes catalans.

2. The texts VAS 205 and 206 are also partial duplicates of 204; see list of sources later in this article.

3. W.F. Geers had previously made a transliteration of this tablet, when studying the Tell Harmal tablets for the CAD project.

4. Additions in *NABU* 1992 no. 83.

5. Its editor prefers a Neo-Babylonian date. The continuing lamentable state of cuneiform paleographic studies and the ensuing need to rely on impressionistic criteria, make such disagreements inescapable.

of four columns the complete tablet must have had something like 148 (= 37 x 4) lines.⁶ There are several Akkadian glosses, and two marginal marks, a short vertical wedge, of unknown significance, on col. ii 2' and 6'. The script is Middle Babylonian (cf. for instance the form of the sign HAR in ii 8f., as well as the use of šá in the glosses in i 8f.). The place of origin is likely to be, like some other tablets in the Montserrat collection, Babylon itself. The edition below, due to space limitations, covers only the lines present in some way in MM 487b.

3. For reference, a list of sources is provided here:

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| A | IM 55403 (translit. by F.W. Geers, <i>Sumer</i> 11 pl. xiii-xv, <i>TIM</i> 9 1)
Tell Harmal. One-column tablet, complete. The text is syllabic, of low quality, and divided in three sections with partial totals at their end; last line: šu-nigín ⁷ 71 mu-bi. | = 1-71. |
| B | Ni 4035 (<i>SLTN</i> 137)
Nippur. Center fragment of a one-column tablet of the same length as A (lines 1-71). | = 17-32, 44-61. |
| C | VAT 6977 + 6978 (<i>VAS</i> 2 204)
Sippar. Six-column tablet, see reconstruction in <i>Or</i> 41 (1972) 88f. | = 29a?-62, 65-93,
147-86, 231-57. |
| D | UM 29-13-419A (photo p. 53)
Nippur. Fragment from the left side of a six-column tablet with 45-50 lines per column. The lower left part appears to have been squeezed when still wet (or erased?); the reverse surface is perfectly preserved. | = 23-37, 70-79, 274'-96'. |
| E | MM 487b* (photo p. 53)
Babylon(?). Four(?) -column tablet, see description above. | = 20-33, 56-68. |

The following sources of the "Instructions" do not preserve the section 1-71:

- | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| F | UM 29-15-979 (<i>OrSuec</i> 23-24 [1976] 166f., photo 180)
Nippur. Most of a one-column tablet. | = 84-100, 102-18. |
| G | Ni 4193 (<i>ISCT</i> 1 78)
Nippur. Right edge fragment of a one-column tablet. | = 143-52, 209-19. |
| H | VAT 6448 (+) 6479 + 6503 (<i>VAS</i> 10 205)
Sippar. Two large fragments of a four-column tablet of ca. 50 lines per column. | = 154-78, 212-247, ?,
280'-99'. |
| I | VAT 6464 + 6604* (<i>VAS</i> 10 206)
Sippar. Small center fragment of a four-column tablet. | = 117-30, ii unplaced. |
| J | CBS 11945 (A. Cavigneaux, <i>Limet Festschrift</i> 18)
Nippur. One-column tablet, bilingual. | = 156-65, ca. 210-24. |

6. The end would thus fall around the place where a hypothetical section D₂ starts in the reconstruction in *Or* 41 (1972) 88.

7. Thus and not ŠID, as in *Or* 60 (1991) 149. The total of the first section is barely visible on the *TIM* 9 1 copy.

4. Transliteration.

Note. The upper lines give a *free* restoration, showing how the original text may have looked. Only the lines present in MM 478 are treated here.

- 20 ní-te-a-ni dingir mu-un-da-[ab-sá-e]
 A ní-[t]a-a-ni dingir [m]u-un-da-[x-r]a? im-mi?-e [(x)]
 B ní []
 E [] ^{im-hu-_rv₁} mu-un-da-[x-x-(x)]
- 21 . . . sizkur-ra im-ma-an-gá-gá-a
 A [(x)-t]a? KA.AN.NE sizkur-re im-ma-gá-gá-[(x)]
 B [] sizkur-ra im-m[a-]
 E [x x x] ^{šá} s[iz]kur-ra ^{i-na-aq-_{qí}-ú} im-ma-an-g[á-gá-a]
- 22 mu dingir-ra-na mu-un-na-kal-la
 A mu dingir-ra mu-un-na-[ka]l-la
 B [] mu-un-n[a-]
 E [-r]a-na ^{šú-_{qí}-ru-šú} mu-un-na-kal-[la]
- 23 nam-erím ku₅-ru-da im-ma-da-ab-te-gá-a
 A nam-erím x-a-ni ib-bi-da-^rx¹-e
 B *om.*
 D [-d]è im-ma-[]
 E [] .RU-da ku₅-ru-da ^{dup-ru} im-ma-da-ab-te-gá-a
- 24 ki dingir-ra-ni-ta si-sá-bi ì-dib-bé
 A ki dingir-ra-ta si-sá-bi ì-da-bé
 B [] si-sá-bi ì-[]
 C ^rki? []
 D [] si-sá-bi []
 E [-r]a-ni-ta si-sá-bi ì-dib-bé
- 25 ní-g-ú-gu-dé-a-ni in-na-ab-su-su
 A ní-g-u-gù-a-ni ní-g ab-si-^rsi?³
 B [] in-na-a[b-]
 C ní-g ^rú¹-[]
 D [] in-na-a[b!-]
 E [ní-g-ú-g]u-dé-a-ni in-na-ab-su-su
- 26 u₄-da-ni-šè u₄ mu-un-da-an-dah-e
 A ^ru₄¹-da-a-ni u₄ mu-un-dah
 B [] mu-da-an-[]
 C *om.*
 D [] u₄ mu-da-^ran-dah¹-[(x)]
 E [-n]i-šè ^{ana u₄-mi-šú} u₄ mu-un-da-an-dah-e

27 mu tuku-a-ni mu bí-íb-diri-diri-ge
 A mu tuku-a-ni mu im-ma-^{ʿsiʿ?}
 B [m]u mu íb-[]
 C *om.*
 D [-n]i mu mu-a íb-diri-diri-[(x)]
 E [-r]a-na ^{šá-na-a-tim} mu bí-íb-diri-diri-ge

28 egir-ra-ni šu-gi₄-a bí-íb-gíd-gíd
 A egir-a-ni šu un-di-ib-gi₄-gi₄
 B []-gi₄-a ^{ʿbíʿ?}-[]
 C *om.*
 D [-n]i šu-gi₄ bí-íb-sud-sud
 E [egir-r]a-na ^{ú-šá-al!-la-am} šu mu-ub-gi₄-gi₄

29 ibila-a-ni a mu-un-na-dé-e
 A ibila-a-ni a mu-un-na-de-^{ʿeʿ}
 B [] ^{ʿaʿ} mu-un-na-d[é-e]
 C ibila-[]
 D [-n]i a mu-na-^{ʿdéʿ!}-e
 E []-^{ʿaʿ}-ni a mu-na-an-dé-e

29a-c *om. by E, attested in BC²D.*

30 lú níg dingir-ra-na ní-te-ge₂₆-e nu-mu-un-zu-a
 A lú-^{ʿlúʿ?} níg dingir-ka ní-it-te-èn-bi nu-mu-un-[zu]-^{ʿaʿ}
 D []-^{ʿxʿ}-ni ní-te-ge₂₆ nu-mu-un-zu-a
 E [] ^{ʿnig dingir-raʿ}-na ní-te-ge₂₆-e nu-mu-un-zu-a

30a [(nì-te-a-ni dingir] nu-mu-un-da-ab-sá-e-a

30b [. . . sizkur-r]a? nu-um-ma-an-gá-gá-a

31 šu-pe-el-lá-bi nu-mu-un-na-kal-la
 A šu-up-la-bi nu-mu-na-kal-la
 B [] nu-mu-un-na-[]
 C šu-pe-e[l]
 D []-bi nu-mu-na-kal-le
 E [] nu-mu-un-na-kal-la

32 nam-erím ku₅-ru-da nu-mu-na-gig-ga
 A nam-erím ^{ʿun-ni-ib-béʿ} nu-mu-un-na-te-gi₆-e
 B [] nu-mu-u[n-]
 C nam-er[ím]
 D [.R]U ku₅-ru-da nu-mu-na-gig-ga
 E [] nu-m]u-un-na-gig-ga

32a *only in D, see note.*

33 u₄ ti-la-ni si nu-sá-e
 A u₄ ti-la-a-ni ʿsiʿ in-nu-sa-na-ʿeʿ?
 C u₄ til-la-[]
 D [-l]a-ni si nu-sá-e
 E []-ʿeʿ

(break in E)

56
 A diri-šè á-šè mu-ri-gar-gar
 B [] hu-mu-ra-an-gá-[gá]
 C diri-šè ugu lú [
 E [S]I.A-š[è]

57
 A ʿgúʿ-e-da hé-ri-ʿdu₈ a-sì-gaʿ-àm a-šà-ge ʿsi-si-eʿ-te
 B []-da sì-ke-bi a a-šà-zu sá-sá-dè
 C gud-gin₇ da? hé-[]
 E gud-da []

58
 A a-ia-aš-túb a-gàr [di]-di-te
 B [] x x x-e-dè
 C a-eštub a-gàr-e []
 E a-eštub []

59
 A šu-ni-in-ta a-šà-zu a ha-ra-ab-si?
 B [] a ha-ra-ab-si
 C šu-nim-ta a-š[à-]
 E šu-nim-ta []

60
 A ki e-da-ka pa-zu ha-ʿxʿ-ni-zu bí-ib-si
 B [] pa₅-zu ha-ra-ʿxʿ-[x-(x)]
 C ki a-dé-k[a]
 E ki a-dug₄-ga []

61
 A ʿxʿ su-zu KU-na-àm ʿšeʿ-zu [d]ah-ba-ab
 B [] x še-zu []
 C ʿsu₇ʿ-[]
 E su₇-za x KU *ku-ur-ʿxʿ-I(...)* []

- 62
 A šu na-ab-ta-ta [g]án še-zu ʿxʰ [tu]rʔ-tur-e
 C na[mʔ-]
 E šu na-ab-tag-tag []
- 63 mur ì-me-àm kin-gá-àm hé-en-zu
 A mu-ri-me-àm kin-ga-àm hé-[m]eʔ-en-zu
 E mur ì-me-àm []
- 63a mur ì-me-àm []
 E mur ì-me-àm []
 A *om.*
- 64
 A a-ʿxʰ áʔ engar [-x-(x)]
 E á-ág-gá []
- A 27 mu-bi
 E *dividing line only.*
- 65 lú ní-te-a-ni ki mu-un-za-za
 A [l]ú ní-ta-a-ni ki mu-un-za-ʿzaʰ
 C ʿxʰ []
 E lú ní-te-a-ni []
- 66 lugal ere^{ki}-na-ka ní-te-gá-bi mu-un-zu
 A lú ere^{ki}-na-ka mi-it-te-èn-bi mu-un-z[u]
 C lugal erín []
 E lugal ere-na-ka []
- 67 šu-kin-dab₅-ba hé-en-zu ki-su-ub-ba hé-en-zu
 A šu-ku-un-di-ip-pa hé-en-zu ki-su-pa hé-en-ʿzuʰ
 C šu KUʔ []
 E šu-kin-dab₅-ba hé-[]
- 68 sun₅-sun₅-na hé-en-zu gub-bu hé-en-zu tuš-ù nu-zu-a
 A su-un-sú-na hé-en-zu gu-bu hé-en-zu tuš-šè nu-zu-ʿaʰ
 C sun₅-sun₅-[na]
 E ʿsun₅-sun₅-naʰ []

E ii breaks off here, A, B, and C continue for three more lines, followed in A by the subscript:

7 mu-bi
 šu-nigín 71 mu-bi

5. Translation

- (The one who knows how to respect the matters of his god:)
- 20 he voluntarily [has pleased(?)] god,
 the rites he performs [. . .],
 the name of his god is sacred to him,
 he keeps away from swearing,
 goes regularly to his god's place,
 25 what he lost will be returned to him,
 days will be added to his days,
 years will be added to the years he has,
 his descendants will be safe,
 his heir will pour a libation for him.
- 30 But the one who does not know how to respect the matters of his god:
 30a does not [(willingly)] please(?) god,
 30b he does not perform [the rites . . .],
 he, despicably, considers nothing sacred,
 swearing does not bother him,
 the days of his life are not right,
 (break)

56-64, *see comments.*

- (break)
- 65 A man will prostrate himself,
 he should know how to respect the ruler of his town,
 he should know how to bow down, he should know how to kiss the ground,
 68 he should know how to be most humble, he should know how to serve, he will not rest.
 (break)

6. Comments

The first 71 lines are divided into three sections of 37, 27, and 7 lines, respectively. The last line of each section gives its "title": "precepts" (á-ág-gá) of god (lines 1-37), "precepts" of the farmer (lines 38-64); and the very last line, preserved only in A in a syllabic form, gives something like "the one who gives orders, at the gate(?) (or inside?), of the palace, should know how 'to wake up' (people)" as a subscript for lines 65-71. The first section starts with an imitation of the opening lines of an epic tale, and then introduces a speaker (not identifiable because of the poor state of the text) who in order to establish a just order in the kingdom of Ur-

Ninurta describes, in Nippur, "the ancient city,"⁸ the difference between the man who fears god and the one who does not. The tone and style of the precepts can be seen in the portions translated (lines 20-33), introduced by line 19 reading "the one who knows how to respect the matters of his god," the positive counterpart of line 30. The recurring motif is the respect or fear (ní-te-gá) of the deity; it is what separates the pious man from the evil one. The second section gives advice, in very general, non-technical terms, on agriculture, mostly the preparation of the fields and their irrigation. The text of this section is provided almost exclusively by A, and is thus practically untranslatable without more orthodox parallels. No continuous translation is provided here. Suggestions for translation are given in the comments. In the third section, one is requested to be extremely humble and submissive to authority. Beyond this third section, the text speaks of a king building a palace, and of his administration of justice, in terms reminiscent of the hymn to Nungal (she is actually mentioned in line 95), the divine Lady-Warden of the Mesopotamian jails.⁹ Somewhere in the gap in lines 130-34, or perhaps even before, the tone changes, and someone gives ethical advice, in an address in the second person singular. The contents of this extremely long section is quite similar to the traditional "counsels of wisdom" (see B. Alster's remarks in *Or* 60 [1991] 142ff.).

20. The verb is restored from the presumed parallel in line 30a). The translation is based on the assumption that the gloss reads *im-hu-u[r]* (the traces of the last sign are uncertain on the tablet). Other nuances of *mahāru* are possible in the context. Among the thirty or so Sumerian translations of this verb, the equation *sá* = *mahāru* is attested only in A.i. II i 25, 30, with a meaning usable to the present passage.

21. The beginning of the line cannot be restored; perhaps it had an adverbial of time. Line 30b is an antithetic parallel to 21.

23. The equation *te-gá* = *duppuru* is attested elsewhere (Aa VIII/1:191; Izi E 96); it seems to belong to the lexical entries with antithetic meanings (see *AS* 20 133). In the basic Nippur corpus,¹⁰ *te* appears with the comitative infix a few times with *ní* (GH:168; ŠA:070; InB:087; LSU:178), and a couple of times with *izi* (LSU:168; GH:102); in the first case it is a true comitative, often found with verbs of emotion or states of mind (Gragg, *Infixes* 62f.); in the second, it is a case of *-da- < -ta-* (cf. "to put *out* the fire"). Whether this *-ta-/-da-* is the element that gives to *te-gá* the meaning "not to approach" cannot be ascertained due to lack of parallel references.

24. The *-ta* is here an Akkadianism (late texts often take *-ta* as Akk. *ina*). In older texts *-ta* is sometimes used as a locative of remote deixis.

27. Translation "years" for *mu* according to the gloss in E and the context of the preceding line. Otherwise, a translation "his reputation will be vastly superior to (any other) reputation" would be perfectly defensible. Note that E must have had something other than *mu-tuku-a-ni* at the beginning.

28. There is a depression on the tablet, after the *-na*, that looks a little bit like a U-sign, – it is just a surface pit. The verb *šu--gí₍₄₎* = *šullumu*: Nigga bil. B 139; *inim ab-ba-šè geštú^{í-te-di-a-am} ak-dè, ní šu-a gí₄-gí₄-*

8. Reading [nibru^h] *uru 'ul-la mu-un'-[. . .]* in source B, line 1'.

9. See M. Civil, "On Mesopotamian Jails and their Lady Warden", in: *Hallo Festschrift* (1993) 72-78.

10. I.e., in the compositions listed in the Nippur literary catalogue. Abbreviations: GH = Gilgamesh and Huwawa, InB = Ninmešarra, LSU = Lament of Sumer and Ur.

dē *ra-ma-an-šū šū-lu-ma-am* "inform yourself of the sayings of the elders, improve yourself" UET 6 371:1-3 (= Enlil Hymn 33); also Cohen, *Eršemma* 140:20ff.; Lambert, *BWL* 252 ii 3. Source D may represent a quite distinct reading: "his descendants will last long time in their old age."

29. On careful examination, the verbal stem in D seems to be a damaged dé (cf. line i 18', *ibid.*).

29a-c. These lines are found in the Nippur sources (B and D) and perhaps in the outside C source. Alster corrected in *NABU* 1992 no. 83 some of the imprecisions, relating to these lines, in his *Or* 60 (1991) article. Present state of these lines:

29a B [-n]i igi-ba-an-[]

D [(x) x-r]a?-ni igi mu-un-ši-bar-re

C 'x' (like ŠE?) []

29b B [geš]tú hé-im-m[a-]

D [(x) x] geštú hé-bí-íb-gub-b[é] ki-bi DI-e-dē

C níg šu? []

29c B [] igi ba-an-[]

D [x x x]-ni igi ba-ni-in-suh-a

C ibila []

Note that while the Nippur sources, despite the differences in the verbal forms, go together, there is no guarantee that C fits these lines as indicated. There is a double dividing line in D between 29b and 29c.

30. The second lú may be erased.

30a-b. Restored from 20-21.

31. There is no clear antecedent for the -bi, and thus the nominal phrase is better taken as an adverb. The negative counterpart of line 22 is 32a, not the present line.

32. The form -te-ge₆ in A should not be considered an attempt to render gig in a syllabic form, but rather it represents -te-gá, by parallelism with the antithetic line 23. This syllabic writing is one argument more in favor of the reading /ŋe/ of GÁ, proposed by Edzard. Note also: gi₆-in-mèn "I am a (female) servant" (Emesal), with a gloss GÁ-en to -mèn (*UET* 6 386). D has a line 32a: [...]-ra-ni nu-mu-na-kal-e (possibly the negative counterpart of line 22).

56. Perhaps: "Let him put an effort harder than anyone else." The optative + 2nd person dative is reminiscent of the verbal patterns of the "Farmer's Instructions" (*AuOr Suppl.* 5 p. 24). Despite the copy in *TIM* 9, the line ends in two GAR, not one. This late passage should not be construed as invalidating the distinction, often forgotten in the Sumerological literature, between the two verbs: (a) ŋar / ŋá-ŋá "to put," versus (b) gar / gar-gar "to pile up," as shown by passages like: gán-né-gán zi-dē še ŋá-ŋá níŋ-nam gar-gar "to put barley in all the good fields, to pile up (stores of) everything" Summer and Winter 24. (b) alternates with (gú)--gur and is a synonym of it, but not (a). The difference between (a) and (b) explains the puzzling insistence of Ur III scribes of adding reading complements (ŋá and/or ar) to such a common verb as ŋar.

57. Although one can make sense of isolated words, no satisfactory interpretation of the line seems possible at present.

58. "To have the carp-flood reach(?) the fields." The "carp-flood" designates that time in early Spring

when, after the water temperature has reached at least 16° C, the large carps spawn, with spectacular splashing, in the shallowest edges of ponds, marshes, and rivers; see B. Landsberger, *JNES* 8 (1949) 281f., and his lengthy discussion in *MSL* 8/2:97ff.¹¹ In A, the fourth sign is -túb, not -tum, according to collation.

59. See Alster's comments, *Or* 60 (1991) 155.

60. "In the flooded places let your ditches be full of water," presumably referring to drainage. The reading /dak/, alongside /duk/, of KA is of unknown significance, but well attested, e.g.: da-ag Ea III 70, Prov. 5.55; da-g RA 11 144:5, VAS 2 51:8ff., UET 6 392:20; tag CT 16 38 ii 4 (compared with BIN 2 22:198).¹²

61. "Do ... in your threshing floor, add more of your grain," meaning? A verb KU is found in a similar context in Farmer's Instructions 98; here the gloss is unclear. The sign x in E, is like a NA with an indented horizontal on top, something like KU₇ in Neo-Assyrian.

62f. "And so it is! he should know about working." Cf. OBG 1:879. The reading mur (inferred from mu-r(i) in A) agrees with the somewhat problematic entry Aa V/2:255, and is at variance with other evidence, e.g., S^a Voc. A 9'.

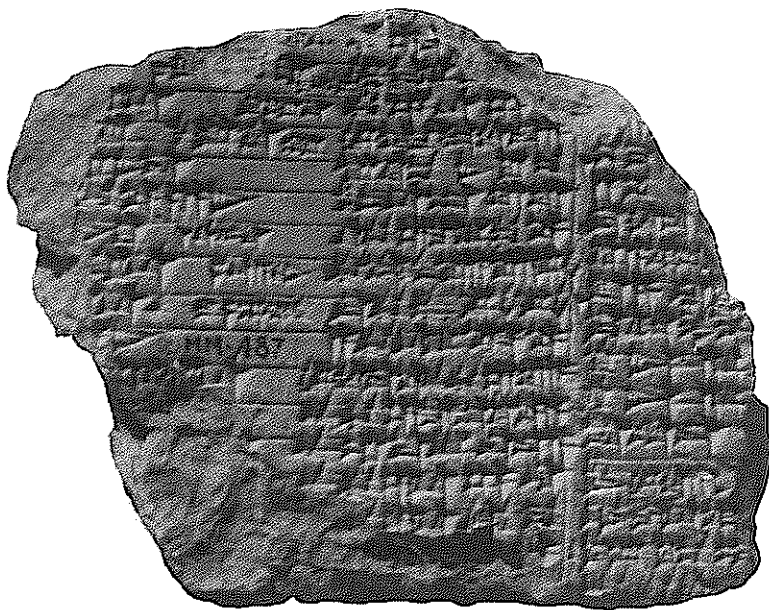
62. "Do not . . . , the field will be short of grain."

65. This line and line 67 accumulate synonyms for physical expressions of submission: ki-za-za and ki-su-ub are both = *šukênu* (Izi C ii 18ff.), and šu-kin-dab₅ (discussed in *JCS* 28 [1976] 184-87), translated mostly by *kamāsu* "to bow down," is in fact etymologically related to the Semitic form *šukênu*. The first sign of the line in E is lú, and not lugal as erroneously suggested by me in *Or* 41 (1972) 88.

11. The vexing problem of the apparent coexistence of the readings gud and eštab for the same fish, can be solved in two ways: one can simply assume scribal ignorance (the logogram was given its most common reading by scribes unacquainted with the fish names of Lower Mesopotamia), or hypothesize that the more common name of the giant carp was "bull-fish" (gud), and only in Spring was the same fish called eštab, so that the latter should properly be translated "Spring carp." Note that the same word eštab (which does not need to mean exactly "Spring," but only something associated with it) is used as a qualification of barley ("Spring barley").

12. P. Attinger, *Éléments de Linguistique* pp. 321 and 403, mentions these a-forms, with no elaboration beyond classifying them as "non-standard."

MM 487b



UM 29-13-419A

