UR-NAMMÂ(K)’S CONQUEST OF SUSA

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During my stay in the tablet room of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in 2007, I discovered two “forgotten” fragments of inscribed vessels from Woolley’s excavations at Ur, whose inscriptions mention the conquest of Susa by Ur-Nammâ(k), the founder of the so-called Third Dynasty of Ur. They are published here by the kind permission of Steve Tinney, co-curator of the Babylonian Section of the Penn Museum.1

To tell the truth, the inscriptions in question have long been known: they were first edited by Braun-Holzinger (1991, 167, G 243 and G 244); and, more recently, by Frayne (1997, 408–409, nos. 1021 and 1022). However, neither Braun-Holzinger nor Frayne understood their historical significance, not realizing that the dedicant of the inscriptions was, in both cases, king Ur-Nammâ(k) of Ur.

In previous scholarship, the capture of Susa was generally counted among the deeds of Sulgi(r) (= “ˇSulgi”), whom the majority of scholars considered to be the true builder of the Ur III empire.2 Beyond rendering unto Ur-Nammâ(k) that which is Ur-Nammâ(k)’s, the texts published here document a key episode in the history of the Ur III empire and of its eastwards expansion.3

1. CBS 14934 (= FIG. 1)

This fragment of a white calcite vase, which measures 6×5.5×2.4 cm,4 was found in the fill of the É.NUN-ma˘h.5 Its inscription reads as follows:

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1 Used to be read also as “Ur-Namma” or “Ur-Nammu.”

2 I would like to thank Steve Tinney for allowing me to publish these two objects (plus the related piece CBS 9592, from Nippur). The photos reproduced in this article were provided by Jeremiah Peterson and adapted for publication by Massimo Bozzoli. To both of them go my heartfelt thanks. I am also grateful to Glenn Magid, who checked and corrected my English. The abbreviations used in this article are those of the Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie, vol. 11. This study was made possible by a research grant from the Department of Archaeology of the University of Bologna.


4 Note, however, the contrary view of Michalowski (2004: 233): “Later Mesopotamian traditions celebrated Shulgi, the second king of the new dynasty, above all other members of his family […]. Modern scholars have followed suit, […] mesmerized by the opinions of others; it is time, however, to rehabilitate Ur-Namma, the man who actually created the Ur III kingdom and who set the foundations for generations to come. […] The borders of the core of the empire were established under his rule and were not to change until the collapse of his creation two generations later.”

5 In view of the significance of this event, it is likely that one of the lost year names of Ur-Nammâ(k) was “mu susin,” ba-˘hulu, “Year: Susa was smitten,” or “mu ur-˘namma lugal-e susin,” mu-˘hulu, “Year: Ur-Nammâ(k), the king, smote Susa” (cf. Frayne 1997: 9–20).


7 Woolley 1974: 90, ad *U.439.
Frayne (1997: 408) read the first line as “re[n][...]]” and commented: “The fact that the royal titulary ends with the epithet ‘[k]ing of Ur’ would suggest an attribution of the fragment to Sulgi, since Amar-Suen, Šú-Sin and Ibbi-Sin all used the title ‘king of the four quarters’ after ‘king of Ur’ in their inscriptions. If line 1’ is a royal name, then it cannot be Ur-Nammu; his name never appears with the prefixed DINGIR sign in contemporary royal inscriptions.”

However, the DINGIR sign is not at the beginning of the case, but in the middle. Moreover, Sulgi(r) always makes the epithet ninta kalag-qa, “strong male,” or diğir kalam-ma-na, “(patron) god of his country,” precede lugal uri, “king of Ur.” Therefore, [ur-]*[namma] is the only restoration possible in line 1’.

On the basis of the partial duplicates UET 1, 18, CBS 9592 (= Fig. 2)⁸ and CBS 14935 (see below, sub II), we may reconstruct the entire text as follows:

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1. [d ...]
   (one or two lines broken)
1’. [ur-]*[namma]
2’. [lugal uri,[lu]-m]-a-ke,
3’. [u]-s[usin],[MÜŠ.EREN]¹⁰
4’. [m]-u-bulu-a
5’. ‘nam-ra’-[aš]
6’. [mu-na-AK-a]
7’. [nam-ti-la-né-šè]
8’. [a mu-na-ru]
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“To DN, (…) his lord/lady, Ur-Namman(k), king of Ur, [wh]en he smote [S]usa and [turned it into] booty [for him/her, presented (this vase) for his own life].”

1.1. Philological Remarks

3': Lafont (1986: 76) argued for a reading /šušum/ of the sign complex MÜŠ.EREN¹⁰ in Ur III texts. However, the syllabic spellings su-sin[lu]-na (CIRPL 15, Éan. 1 rev. vii 3; locative) and su-sin-na¹⁰ (SAT 3, 1726 rev. 6; genitive) definitively prove that the Sumerian reading of the logogram for Susa was /susin/ in the third millennium B.C.⁹

As for “kaskal šu-šu-um⁵”, quoted by Lafont (1986: 75), cf. KASKAL ūšu-ši¹¹ (TCL 10, 98A:9 [envelope¹¹]) and ha-ra-an šu-ši-im (Leemans 1960: 59, AO 8480:13¹¹). Clearly, šu-šu-um¹¹ represents the undeclined (i.e., in the nominative) Akkadian name of Susa.¹² This is

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⁸ Cf. Frayne 1997: 407–408, nos. 1019 and 1020, respectively.
⁹ Cf. MÜŠ.EREN⁴-na (genitive) in Lambert 1970: 70–71, no. 4.2 and MVN 22, 143.4. For additional occurrences of the spelling su-sin[lu] in Sumerian texts, see RGTC 1, 154 s.v. “Šušin/Susin;” and RGTC 2, 175–176 s.v. “Susin.”

Sumerian /susin/ is obviously related to Elamite /g.sc/i.sc/a.sc/n.sc/n.sc/i.sc/m.sc/a.sc/r.sc/c.sc/h.sc/e.sc/s.sc/i.sc/. In other words, the syllable that occurs twice in the word for “Susa” was, in Sumerian, the same as the s of su, “flesh,” and different from the š of šu, “hand,” regardless of how they were actually pronounced.

¹⁰ The tablet (= 98B), line 10, has KASKAL MÜŠ.EREN⁴, instead.
¹¹ The envelope (ibid., p. 60), line 12, has h[a-ar]-ra-an MÜŠ.EREN⁴[ši], instead.