THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES IN THE UMMA SILVER ACCOUNT SYSTEM*

BY

DANIEL C. SNELL
(The University of Oklahoma)

The silver balanced accounts preserved in Sumerian language on clay tablets from the Southern Mesopotamian city of Umma from the Ur III period, conventionally dated 2112-2004 B.C.E., allow us to study how resources were distributed. These texts, which constitute the biennial records of a kind of government acquisitions agency, a General Services Administration, using persons called dam-gar3, 'merchant,' allow us to quantify the allocation of resources in the extant texts of one economic system1). And the quantification need not be in some measure of the goods themselves since this system rather modernly converts everything into silver money. Using these money notations as a standard of value, we should be able to say what proportion of the acquisitions went to certain groups.

It is possible to divide the persons occurring in the merchants' accounts into at least two groups, those connected to the city governor and those connected to temple establishments2). And we also have a large mass of people, 54 persons, or 48% of all persons mentioned in the texts except the subscribers, who are not clearly connected to either the city governor or the temple3).
I assigned in *Ledgers and Prices* many persons who appear in the texts to various bureaus in the state apparatus. These assignments are sometimes explicitly made in the texts, and sometimes they can be deduced from regularities in the types of material received or from associations of personal names. The assignments are sometimes hypothetical, and we do not know whether an individual who once works for a bureau is always working for that bureau when he appears in the accounts.

I further assigned the bureaus on the basis of prosopographic associations to the spheres of authority of the city governor and of Šara’s house, the principal temple at Umma. Here we shall call allocations that go to someone associated with the city governor “royal” allocations, and those that go to Šara’s house “cultic” allocations. It appears likely that Šara’s house is administered by the city governor, but it may be useful to distinguish these “secular” and “religious” spheres, though the ancients probably did not.4)

A third type of allocation I have classified as “unidentified”, and this type includes both persons and institutions that occur rarely or that are never associated with a bureau. Really the categories “royal” and “cultic” might be combined and thought of as “familiar”; that is, I may not have the right understanding of what these people are each doing to get their names inscribed in texts from the Umma bureaucracy, but I am sure that they have some ongoing role to play for that bureaucracy. The scribes (or scribe5) do not have to worry about identifying most of them because everybody knows what they are doing. Regardless of the nuancing of the definition of

4) It seems that Limet’s assertion that the two types of authority were confused in the Ur III period says more about our own dichotomy between the religious and secular than it does about the native view of things; see H. Limet, “Le Rôle du palais dans l’économie néo-sumérienne,” *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East*, F. Lipyński, ed., (Leuven: Departement Orientalistiek, 1979), Volume I, pp. 235-248, esp. p. 236. This is especially clear when we learn that the palace in some cities had within it a chapel wherein religious ceremonies were performed, as Limet notes, p. 240.