



Review: Sumerian Proverbs in Their Curricular Context

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REVIEW ARTICLES

SUMERIAN PROVERBS IN THEIR CURRICULAR CONTEXT

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Bendt Alster has published a two-volume edition of all known Old Babylonian Sumerian proverbs. This publication provides an opportunity to look at the proverbs as a corpus and to investigate their actual use. Proverbs are mostly found on school tablets. The curriculum of the school and the position of the proverbs therein is relatively well known. Part I of this article explores some of the implications of looking at the proverbs as didactic instruments for a particular phase of scribal education. Part II includes additional fragments, joins, corrections, and suggestions.

THE IDENTIFICATION AND PUBLICATION OF Sumerian proverb collections began in the 1950s and 1960s through the efforts of S. N. Kramer, E. I. Gordon, and J. J. A. van Dijk. Subsequent studies by R. S. Falkowitz and B. Alster made an ever-increasing number of proverbs available, furthering the scholarly discussion over the nature of these texts. Alster's new book is a corpus publication. It includes editions of all Old Babylonian proverb collections. Previously published collections are re-edited. More than half of the twenty-seven collections are presented here for the first time. Bendt Alster's *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* is thus a landmark publication.

The numbering of the proverb collections used by Alster essentially goes back to Gordon's famous article, "A New Look at the Wisdom of Sumer and Akkad," published in 1960.¹ This article, technically a review-article of van Dijk's *La Sagesse suméro-accadienne*,² lists the sources of all "wisdom" texts—published and unpublished—known to Gordon at that time, including the proverb collections. The concept "wisdom" was derived from biblical scholarship. The inclusion by van Dijk and Gordon of the proverbs under this label implicitly or

explicitly compared the Sumerian collections with the Old Testament *Meshalim*. The wisdom concept naturally generated questions about the contents and background of this wisdom. Gordon's edition of Collections 1 and 2 has the subtitle *Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*.³ This romantic interpretation of the proverbs and their wisdom is elaborated on by Alster in the introduction to the present book. He identifies the moral outlook of the proverbs with that of the ordinary people, the "folk." According to Alster the proverb collections represent actual proverbial expressions used by ordinary Sumerian speakers, collected by scholars as sayings by sages of old.

In this paper I will propose an alternative approach to the proverbs, a curricular one. Whatever the original context and use of the proverbs, the tablets as we have them originate in great majority in the school. We should try to establish how and why proverbs were employed in scribal education. This idea is not altogether new. Falkowitz in his 1980 dissertation⁴ strongly argued in favor of understanding the proverbs as part of the traditional curriculum of the Old Babylonian scribal school. Unfortunately, Falkowitz' dissertation was never published, so that his arguments did not get the attention they deserved. Today we are in a much better position to evaluate the curricular place and function of the proverbs than Falkowitz was twenty years ago. Alster's book has made all extant proverb collections easily accessible. Moreover, our

This is a review article of: *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World's Earliest Proverb Collections*. By BENDT ALSTER. Two volumes. Bethesda, Md.: CDL PRESS, 1997. Pp. xxxvi + 548, 133 plates. \$90.

I wish to thank Professors Miguel Civil (Oriental Institute, Chicago), Steve Tinney, and Erle Leichty (University of Pennsylvania Museum) for permission to publish tablets in their collections. Philip Jones corrected my English and added some helpful remarks.

¹ *BiOr* 17 (1960): 122–52.

² Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953.

³ E. I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1959).

⁴ R. S. Falkowitz, "The Sumerian Rhetoric Collections" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1980).

understanding of the Old Babylonian school, its curriculum, and its teaching methods has considerably improved.

This article consists of two parts. In the first part I will outline a few interpretative possibilities stemming from a curricular approach to the corpus. The second part includes the results of my work on the primary sources: additional fragments, joins, corrections, and suggestions.

PART I: PROVERBS IN THE CURRICULUM

The scribal curriculum of the Old Babylonian period can be reconstructed in some detail. Since educational practice was not entirely uniform, I will restrict myself to that of Nippur, where most of our sources originate.

The Nippur curriculum consisted of two phases. In the first, pupils mainly copied a variety of lexical texts. These texts aimed at imparting the writing system but also introduced Sumerian vocabulary. In the second phase of their curriculum pupils studied literary texts. Tablets with proverbs are found at the end of the first phase. Their contents prepared students for studying literary Sumerian in the second phase.

There are thousands of exercise texts from Nippur which allow us to get a rather precise idea of what was taught in what order and how. Exercise tablets come in five types: prisms, large multi-column tablets, square tablets, single-column tablets, and lentil-shaped tablets or buns.⁵ Prisms, multi-column tablets, and single-column tablets were used by pupils of all levels. Square tablets (usually called type II tablets) and lentils are characteristic of the first phase. Both lentils and type II tablets provide a model text by the teacher, to be copied by a pupil. In general, literary exercises are written on tablet types that do not include a teacher's model. Type II tablets combine extracts from two different texts: introduction of a new exercise and a repetition of an old one. The obverse contains a model text written by the teacher. This is the new exercise. To the right of the model there is room for the pupil to copy the example several times, until he became truly familiar with the exercise. The reverse was used by the pupil to repeat a longer extract from a school text that he already knew by heart. Type II tablets thus allow us to establish the order in which texts were studied.

The twenty-seven collections published by Alster are not all equally well represented. Most frequent is SP

⁵ For the typology of school tablets see Miguel Civil, *MSL* 12, 27f.; and Niek Veldhuis, "Elementary Education at Nippur: The Lists of Trees and Wooden Objects" (Ph.D. diss., Groningen, 1997), 28–39.

Coll. (Sumerian Proverb Collection) 2 + 6.⁶ For this collection we now have over one hundred twenty-five Nippur sources. More than half of these tablets are either buns or type II tablets.⁷ Other proverb collections that were frequently used in primary education are 1 and 3. Collections 1, 2, and 3 are relatively well standardized. There are, to be sure, many variants in orthography and in verbal forms. Occasionally the order of two proverbs is inverted, an extra proverb is added, or one is omitted (though it should be remarked that adding and omitting are terms that presume a fixed composition). The proverb collections are flexible compositions. They share this feature with other texts used in the first phase of education: the lexical corpus. Other collections besides SP Colls. 1, 2, and 3 are relatively rare. Collection 16, for instance, is represented in Alster's edition by three sources. Two more tablets may now be added (see below) to bring the total to five. Two out of five are type II texts. How can such numbers be interpreted? Evidently, Collection 16 was available for Nippur teachers to assign as an exercise, but they rarely did so.

This pattern compares well with the distribution of the lexical corpus. There are some lexical texts that are available in tens or even hundreds of copies. Examples are Syllable Alphabet B (a very elementary exercise), the tree list (the first section of Old Babylonian *ur₅-ra*), Proto-Ea, Proto-Lu, and Proto-Izi. In contrast, there are lists that rarely appear among the school tablets. There are six examples of Early Dynastic Lu A from Old Babylonian Nippur. One of these is written on the reverse of a type II tablet with Nigga on the other side (N 5566 + N 5583).⁸ There are five copies of an abbreviated form of Proto-Ea, two of them written on a type II tablet.⁹ Somewhat more frequent are Proto-Diri, ugu-mu, and the later portions of *ur₅-ra*. If one were to plot the ideal order of the exercises against the number of tablets found one would see peaks with passes and valleys.

⁶ Proverb Collection 6 is the final section of Collection 2. See below, part II.

⁷ Most of the other pieces are small fragments or flakes, for which the type may no longer be identified. In addition we have one prism, several multi-column tablets, and a few one-column tablets.

⁸ Unpublished. The obverse has *šu-[sig₃]-sig₃-ge; šu-uš-[]-i* representing lines 275 and 278 (*MSL* 13, 103). For ED Lu A, see most recently R. K. Englund and H. J. Nissen, *Die lexikalischen Listen der archaischen Texte aus Uruk*, ATU 3 (Gebr. Mann Verlag: Berlin, 1993), 17ff., with further literature.

⁹ All copies unpublished: CBS 2336, CBS 10468, CBS 15099 (type II), CBS 15418 (type II), Ni 137.

One of these peaks is Proverb Collection 2. In one of the valleys we find Proverb Collection 16. Presumably, primary education consisted of a number of required exercises which every pupil would study. Faster students, or those who could afford to spend more time, might do extra work before continuing to the next required exercise. Proverb Collection 16 and Early Dynastic Lu A belong to the texts that only a few pupils would study. Collection 2 belongs to the required program.

WHAT DID THE PROVERBS TEACH?

Proverbs may have taught moral lessons. Collection 2, number 6 says: “My fate is her voice. My mother can change it,” reflecting the obedience of a good son to the command of his mother.¹⁰ Various proverbs praise scribes who know Sumerian and have good handwriting, or singers who have a good voice. SP Coll. 2.38 states: “A scribe who knows just one single entry, if only his hand is nice, he is a scribe indeed.” Since the pupils who copied this line had learned hundreds and hundreds of (lexical) entries it is hard to take this statement literally. The importance of a nice hand is no doubt exaggerated. The saying may be used to encourage good handwriting, but it may as well be invoked to ridicule a pupil who is more successful in refining his hand than in recalling entries. Even though the grammatical and lexical interpretation of this proverb does not seem to pose insurmountable problems—many proverbs, however, do—its interpretation as a moral lesson is very uncertain. Many proverbs do not seem to have any moral implication at all. They simply describe a situation or a mental state in a particularly vivid way. This is the case, for instance, for SP Coll. 16.F1, also attested as SP Coll. 9.G3 (see part II, below):

kur ku₃ ba-al-gin₇ lu₂ dim₂-ma nu-sa₆
Like a mountain mined for metals, this man is not in a
right state of mind.

If we look at the place that the proverbs occupy in the curriculum, it becomes clear that they must have had other functions as well. We may look forward in the curriculum to the literary texts, and backward to the lexical corpus.

The comparison with a mountain mined for metal ore is also found in the Curse of Agade, line 109, and is used there similarly to express the idea of disturbance and confusion. In another proverb in Collection 16, just a few lines further on, we find:

[^d]nirah-gin₇ dar-ra-me-en

You are like the snake-god Nirah splitting [the water].

This expression is found in a variety of literary texts. It is, indeed, one of the stock similes of Sumerian literature.¹¹ There are many such points of contact between the imagery of proverb collections and the language found in literary compositions. The pertinent passages have been discussed extensively in the literature (see, for instance, Alster’s discussion of SP Coll. 3.1 on p. 376). However, if we look at the proverbs from a curricular point of view, these relations acquire an additional, more strictly intertextual significance. The Curse of Agade is one of the most frequently attested literary compositions. Chances are that the pupil who was so clever that he was actually assigned Collection 16 would also make it to the Curse of Agade. And this background would enable him to understand more fully the imagery of that composition.

If we look backwards in the curriculum we may compare the proverbs with the corpus of lexical texts, and ask: “what’s new?” The answer is: grammar. Lexical lists contain little in the way of grammar. The most frequently attested list is ur₅-ra, which is a thematic list of nouns. It has been assumed that grammatical lists and verbal paradigms were used to teach grammar,¹² but the evidence does not favor this opinion. Grammatical lists and verbal paradigms from Nippur are, first of all, relatively rare.¹³ Moreover, they do not exhibit the characteristics of the exercises used in primary education. There are no paradigms or grammatical vocabularies on type II tablets or buns. Pupils did get some exposure to Sumerian grammar in the model contracts. Our picture of the curriculum is somewhat hampered here by the fact that the corpus of model contracts is still very poorly known. From what we do know, however, it is clear that collections of model contracts consisted of series of similar contracts. Relatively common among the model contracts are those concerning the sale of a house. A typical exercise runs as follows:¹⁴

¹¹ The references are collected and discussed by Jeremy Black, *Reading Sumerian Poetry* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998), 135f. See also W. Heimpel, *Tierbilder in der sumerischen Literatur* (Rome: Päpstliches Bibelinstitut, 1968), 507f.

¹² Jeremy Black, *Sumerian Grammar in Babylonian Theory* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), 5.

¹³ Note that OBGT VI-X, treated by Black as Nippur sources, are, in fact, unprovenanced (“Crozer tablets”).

¹⁴ CBS 6098+, with restorations from CBS 4617 (PBS 12/1 23, collated), CBS 6527, CBS 13934, N 4073, and N 5334. All parallels have variants in names and numbers. The name in line 5

¹⁰ See below, SP Coll. 2.6 for the reading of this proverb.

1	¹ / ₂ sar e ₂ du ₃ -a	A built-up house plot of ¹ / ₂ sar
2	giš-bal giškeš ₂ -da	with a second floor and a wooden roof; ¹⁵
3	gišig gišsag-kul gub-ba	the door and the bar are there;
4	ki e ₃ -bi ša ₃ sila dagal-la-še ₃	its exit is on Broad Street,
5	da e ₂ lu ₂ -gir-gi ₄ - lu	next to the house of Lugirgilu—
6	e ₂ amar-abzu dumu lugal-ezen	the house of Amarabzu son of Lugalezen
7	ki amar-abzu-ta	from Amarabzu
8	¹ dingir-da-nu-me- a-ke ₄	Dingirdanumea
9	in-ši-in-sa ₁₀	bought;
10	šam ₂ til-la-bi-še ₃	its full price,
11	² / ₃ ma-na kug-bab- bar in-na-an-la ₂	² / ₃ mina silver, he paid him.
12	ud kur ₂ -še ₃ amar- abzu	In the future Amarabzu
13	u ₃ ibila-a-ni a-na me-a-bi	and his heirs, as many as there will be,
14	e ₂ -bi-še ₃ gu ₃ nu- ga ₂ -ga ₂ -a	will not raise a claim to this house;
15	mu lugal-bi in- pad ₃	thus he swore in the name of the king.
16	¹ / ₂ sar e ₂ du ₃ -a	A built-up house plot of ¹ / ₂ sar
17	sila dagal abul- maḥ-a-kam	at the main street to the Abulmah
18	da e ₂ ur- ^d šu-bu-la	next to the house of Uršubula,
19	e ₂ i-la-ak-šu-qir	the house of Ilakšūqir
20	ki i-la-ak-šu-qir- ta	from Ilakšūqir
21	¹ nu-ur ₂ -i ₃ -li ₂ -šu- ke ₄	Nurilišu
22	in-ši-in-sa ₁₀	bought.
23	šam ₂ til-la-bi-še ₃	Its full price,
24	² / ₃ ma-na 5 gin ₂ kug-babbar	² / ₃ mina and 5 shekels silver,
25	in-na-an-la ₂	he paid him.
26	ud kur ₂ -še ₃ i-la- ak-šu-qir	In the future Ilakšūqir

is lugal-a-[] in CBS 6098+; other texts have Lugirgilu here. Scribal errors and omissions in CBS 6098+ have been corrected according to the parallels.

¹⁵ Proto-Kagal bilingual Section E 66: giškeš₂-da = tašlitum (MSL 13, 88).

27	u ₃ ibila-a-ni a-na me-a-bi	and his heirs, as many as there will be,
28	e ₂ -bi-še ₃ gu ₃ nu- ga ₂ -ga ₂ -a	will not raise a claim to this house;
29	mu lugal-bi in- pad ₃	thus he swore in the name of the king.
30	2sar e ₂ du ₃ -a	A built-up house plot of 2 sar. ¹⁶

(end of exercise)

The main features by which one contract varies from another are the description of the house—its size, location, and other features—the price paid, and the names of the persons involved. The verbal forms for selling, paying, not raising a claim, and taking an oath are the same, or vary only between singular and plural. Verbal forms include a *ḥamtu* and a *marû*, a dative, a negative form, and a nominalized sentence. The repetitive character of these texts is useful for explaining and drilling various aspects of the Sumerian verb and the Sumerian sentence. It is not unlike the brick inscriptions with which modern students of Sumerian are drilled.

We may now look at the beginning of Proverb Collection 2 with the eyes of a teacher. Proverb number 1 reads:

ki-gul-la-ba ki ḥe ₂ - en-gul	In a place that has been destroyed, he destroys the place.
ki nu-gul-la-ba gu ₂ - gir ₂ ḥe ₂ -en-gal ₂	In a place that has not been destroyed, he makes a breach.
ki-ni ki lu-ub ₂ ^{sar} kud-da ḥe ₂ -a	His place is like a place where turnips were har- vested.
garza-bi gir ₃ ba-da- kur ₂	The course of its ritual was changed.
di-ir-ga-a ki ba-e- gul	The order was destroyed.
me-bi ba-da-ḥa-lam garza-bi gir ₃ na-ab- ta-ab-kur ₂ -ru-de ₃ - en-ze ₂ -en	Its cult was annihilated. You should not change the course of its rituals!
di-ir-ga-a ki nam- ba-e-gul-lu-de ₃ - en-ze ₂ -en	You should not destroy the order!
me-bi na-ab-ta-ab- ḥa-lam-e-en-ze ₂ - en	You should not annihilate its cult!

¹⁶ The exercise in CBS 6098+ ends with the first line of the next model contract.

gud-de₃ ki-gub-ba You should not remove
 na-ab-ta-ab-kur₂- the bull from its socle!
 ru-de₃-en-ze-en

There is much that is still unclear in this rather atypical beginning of Collection 2, and the translation is accordingly uncertain. The Sumerian, however, exhibits a number of interesting grammatical oppositions. The first three lines contain affirmatives with the h e_2 -prefix. The verbal forms in the next three lines are indicatives with b a -. In the final four lines we find prohibitives with prefix n a m - and the second person plural suffix. In the next two proverbs (SP Coll. 2.2–3) we find first person cohortatives with g a -. First and second person forms, cohortatives, affirmatives, and prohibitives are very uncommon in model contracts, or perhaps even completely absent. There is a lot of new grammar here that a teacher could begin to explain.

Proverb collections are not grammatical paradigms in disguise. We may understand the curriculum as a series of exercises with a gradual increase of unit length: syllable, word, sentence, text. The standard order of school exercises in the classical world is, indeed, very similar.¹⁷ In this curricular series the proverb loosely represents the sentence and therefore coincides with the introduction of grammar. These collections of sayings, fables, and literary quotations were found to be suitable for beginners' Sumerian. They served as a tool for explaining Sumerian grammar by example, rather than for representing this grammar in an abstract way. To understand this teaching method we may, again, look for a parallel in the lexical corpus. Lexical texts were copied first of all to get familiar with the writing system. The more systematic treatments of the writing system, the sign lists Proto-Ea and Proto-Diri, are not the first lists that were copied. Instead, the pupils were to copy long lists of Sumerian nouns (u r_5 -ra). In these long lists they would encounter virtually all the problems inherent in Sumerian writing. Proto-Ea gives all the values of all Sumerian signs. Pupils who copied Proto-Ea knew all these values; they had encountered them in u r_5 -ra. What they learned was the system behind it. Proto-Ea teaches the abstract concept of polyvalence. Similarly, the grammatical vocabularies and verbal paradigms were written by advanced pupils. Some of them appear to have been written by very accomplished scribes. Sumerian grammar was initially taught

through the practice of copying, first, model contracts, then proverbs, and finally literary texts. We must assume, therefore, that the teacher or his assistant played an active role in class. He was not just supervising, scolding and caning, as the eduba texts seem to suggest.¹⁸ The proverbs were translated into Akkadian. Very few traces of these translations are extant.¹⁹ Ordinarily only the Sumerian was copied, while the Akkadian was added orally. Again, for the lexical material a similar teaching process can be demonstrated.²⁰ The Akkadian translations may have led to grammatical explanations. Obviously, these oral explanations are lost and we have no way of knowing in what form grammatical information was transmitted.

PROVERBS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

The role of proverbs in education may be further elucidated by investigating the archaeological record. The bulk of the Nippur material is from the early excavations in the late nineteenth century, for which no useful information is available. The post-World War II campaigns are more promising in this respect. I have not conducted a full survey of the archaeological background of the 2N-T and 3N-T school texts. It is likely, however, that such a survey would provide even more information about the way education worked. This point will be illustrated by one example. Two rather unusual tablets both combine a single proverb from Collection 2 and an exercise in finding a reciprocal (igi-bi in Sumerian). Both tablets have the dimensions of a regular bun, but are square in format with rounded corners. Small square tablets were used for computations in the Nippur school.²¹ The combination with a proverb, however,

¹⁸ See Åke Sjöberg, "The Old Babylonian Edubba," in *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on his Seventieth Birthday, June 7, 1974*, ed. S. Lieberman, AS 20 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1975), 159–79.

¹⁹ Partial translations are found in N 1009 (+) N 5187 (SP Coll. 16) and UM 29-15-330 (SP Coll. 2). The practice of writing down translations was more regular in Ur.

²⁰ M. Civil, MSL 14, 85; Niek Veldhuis, "Elementary Education at Nippur," 46–47.

²¹ Three such square tablets were recently published by Eleanor Robson, *Mesopotamian Mathematics, 2100–1600 B.C.; Technical Constants in Bureaucracy and Education*, OECT 14 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 275–77. Previously published examples are listed in the same volume, pp. 11f. Additional exemplars are UM 29-16-401 (44 26 40 squared) and N 837 (a few traces of numbers; probably unfinished).

¹⁷ See most recently Raffaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*. American Studies in Papyrology, 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

TABLE

2N-T496 = IM 58966	TIM X/1 134	square	SP Coll. 2.52 and numerical igi-bi exercise
2N-T497 = IM 58028	TIM X/1 123	lentil	SP Coll. 2.49
2N-T498 = IM 58029	TIM X/1 124	lentil	SP Coll. 2.6
2N-T499 = A 29984		fragm	Proto-Ea
2N-T500 = A 29985	Gordon SP Pl. 70	square	SP Coll. 2.42 and numerical igi-bi exercise
2N-T501 = IM unacc.		lentil	lexical
2N-T502 = IM 58031	TIM X/1 159	lentil	Syllable Alphabet B 40-41
2N-T503 = IM unacc.	TIM X/1 160	lentil	unidentified school text

is very unusual. The closest parallel is a set of lentils from Ur, with a proverb on one side and a computation on the other.²² No such lentil is known from Nippur.

The two square pieces were found in the same corner of the courtyard of house B in the TB area, on floor 1 of level II, together with six other school texts. The eight tablets in this lot may be listed as indicated in the table above.

The two atypical pieces (2N-T496 and 2N-T500) indicate that this is not a random lot. It may be the production of a single session, where pupils on different levels were working together. Some were working on proverbs, while another was still familiarizing himself with the sign repertory in Syllable Alphabet B. Note that no literary texts were found in this particular group. The evidence is of course too meager and too isolated to be of much value. It may, however, give some grounds for the expectation that the archaeological distribution of school texts may indeed contain significant information.

ON TEXTS AND TABLETS

Our way of reading and understanding ancient texts has a history of its own. In many respects we may trace this history back to the humanist scholars of the Renaissance.²³ One of the main contributions of this scholarship was the contextualization of ancient texts. The texts that were the subject of their scrutiny were, first of

all, of course, the Bible, and, second, the writings of classical antiquity. In the preceding period of scholasticism, authoritative texts were used as sources of quotations. These decontextualized quotations were used to prove or illustrate a point of discussion. For humanist scholars, however, the authority of the ancient text was not located in isolated quotations, but in authorial intent. They were interested in the ancient text as a source of knowledge about a glorious past. They (re-)invented philological and hermeneutical methods to interpret the meaning of a text as the expression of the intention of an author. They were well aware that the earliest manuscripts they were dealing with were from the Carolingian period, and thus many centuries removed from the period they wanted to study. Among the important tasks, therefore, was the classification of manuscript variants and the identification of the best reading, in order to arrive at the text as it had originally been composed. In about the same period the conception of a unique text, produced once upon a time by an author and afterwards merely reproduced, received a further powerful stimulus from the invention and spread of printing.

This approach to ancient texts is still with us, and for good reason. As much as the techniques and goals of editing and interpretation have changed, the basic problem remains: we have no autographs of Plato or St. John. Sumerologists, however, have a data set that differs fundamentally from what the humanist scholars were faced with. Compared with the material with which classicists work, the corpus of traditional Sumerian texts may seem poor. We lack the broad variety of philosophical speculation, the self-reflection, and the spectrum of scholarly and scientific texts that make the ancient Greeks so fascinating. What we do have, however, are contemporary sources. We have direct evidence of how our sources were used, where they were used, and sometimes even by whom. The material side of our sources, their character as archaeological objects, calls for a much richer approach than what traditional text criticism has to offer. Not only the text, but also the object—the clay tablet—has a story to tell. We do not need to establish one fixed

²² Forty-six of these reverses were published in Eleanor Robson, *Mesopotamian Mathematics*, 245–72. An unprovenanced example is YBC 7345 (Alster, plate 130). Only one lentil with a mathematical exercise from Nippur is known to me (Ni. 2265, unpublished).

²³ See Anthony Grafton, "The Origins and Impact of the Renaissance Sense of History: Notes on the Humanist as an Intellectual Type," in *Cultures of Scholarship*, ed. S. C. Humphreys (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997), 253–76. See also Jeremy Black, *Reading Sumerian Poetry*, 28–38, with further literature.

version of Proverb Collection 2, because the sources tell us that Proverb Collection 2 was a flexible text. We do not need to identify the best manuscript, because every single manuscript, even the most aberrant, tells a story about how it was used, understood or misunderstood, discarded, re-used, or carefully kept.

In practice this means that we may try to look at lexical and literary texts as a synchronic corpus. The educational texts from Nippur—be they literary, lexical, or proverbial—belong together in a single educational system. They share a functional, physical, historical, and presumably cognitive background. Ideally, understanding of a single composition involves understanding of the whole corpus and the structure of that corpus. Questions of text production, tablet use, the discarding of tablets, and the archaeological background of textual finds provide a kind of contextualization of which most scholars working on ancient cultures can only dream. An approach like this implies a reversal of orientation. The question of the origin and date of composition becomes less important, and more emphasis will be put on the question of use and reception. Not because reception is more in vogue now, but because our material provides immediate evidence for such investigations. This way of looking at texts is hardly new in Assyriology. It finds a parallel in the so-called archival approach to administrative texts.

One of the responsibilities of Sumerology and Assyriology will be to continue to develop a methodology that is tailor-made for the strengths and weaknesses of our material. The non-applicability of much of the traditional understanding of what a text is and how it should be read gives our field a relevance for neighboring disciplines that goes far beyond the isolated survivals of Mesopotamian cultural phenomena.

PART II: CORRECTIONS, JOINS, COLLATIONS, AND ADDITIONS

One of the great advantages of a corpus publication such as the one under discussion here is that it greatly enhances the chances of identifying new duplicates. Several such pieces were found during my work on Nippur lexical texts. Since my approach to school texts, as outlined above, is in an important way dependent on the material appearance of tablets, I have worked through the catalogues in Alster's book and checked the descriptions. Some of the information included below (in particular, museum numbers) is derived from a catalogue of 2N-T and 3N-T texts, kept in the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

SP COLL. 1

Catalogue:

V (UM 29-15-330): copy and edition in BWL (Plate 68; edition pp. 273f.).

W (N 5687) is a lentil-shaped tablet; it contains SP Coll. 1.43 (repeated), not SP Coll. 1.41–42:

teacher: ninda-ni [uzu . . .]/zi-[]

pupil: ninda u[zu-]/zi-[] (NI-sign omitted).

HHH is UET 6/2, 320 (not 230, which is SP Coll. 5 source CC).

N 1757: rev. i = 144–46; rev. ii = 167, 169 (the obverse is not preserved).

N 5138: preserved part of the tablet is the reverse. The obverse is uninscribed (type II tablet).

UET 6/2 239 is listed in the catalogue (p. 6) with the remark: “ii 2–3 = SP Coll. 1.9.” This description applies to UET 6/2 339 + UET 6/3 235* (see Alster pp. 321f.). UET 6/2 239 is a lentil which contains SP Coll. 1.9, and is referred to in Alster's edition as source UUU.

UET 6/2 320: this source is already listed as HHH (see above).

Additional sources:

N 5469: reverse of a type II tablet; obverse anepigraphic. Col. i = SP Coll. 1.55; ii = SP Coll. 1.70, 72–73.

N 7672: flake, perhaps from the obverse of a type II tablet. SP Coll. 1.101–2 (very fragmentary).

SP COLL. 2+6

Collections 2 and 6 belong together as a single composition. The final section of SP Coll. 2 in Alster's edition runs parallel to the first section in SP Coll. 6. See Alster, p. 145 and Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs*, 518 and 543.

Catalogue:

Q (3N-T905,191 + 3N-T916,329): invert obverse and reverse.

R (N 5504): invert obverse and reverse.

II (CBS 11080 (+) CBS 19816 + CBS 19825 + CBS 19832): reverse is metrological ([š]u-si).

RR (CBS 8058): invert obverse and reverse.

LLLL (3N-T906,246): certainly not the same tablet as Q (very different in curvature). Read SLTN 69 (for SLTF).

CBS 4805a: reverse is a multiplication table.
 CBS 6827: reverse is Proto-Izi I.
 N 4919: reverse is metrological (caption on Plate 7 is incorrect).
 Ni 5077: reverse is Proto-Ea (MSL 14 23 Fi).
 3N-T915b = A 33459 (not A 38459).

Sources listed under SP Coll. 6:

CBS 6964 joins CBS 7907 and N 4081. One-column tablet.
 CBS 19789: reverse has Old Babylonian Nippur ur_5-ra 11.
 N 5156: reverse very probably has Proto-Ea (signs only).
 Ni 5098: reverse has model contracts.
 3N-T570: reverse has Proto-Lu (MSL 12 30 Y).
 3N-T914ff = A 33455: this is probably an error for 3N-T914gg = A 33455. The piece is listed by Alster under "Lenticular Sources," but neither 3N-T914ff nor 3N-T914gg is lenticular. 3N-T914ff = A 33454 is edited by Alster as a duplicate of SP Coll. 11, but may be better attributed to SP Coll. 6. For both pieces, see below.

Remarks on Individual Proverbs:

SP Coll. 2.6. Alster's reading $na\ m-a\ ma-mu$ ("motherhood(?)") is difficult because several exemplars have a line break between NAM and AMA. Read:

$na\ m-tar-mu\ gu_3-nam$ My fate is her voice:
 $ama-mu\ mu-da-an-kur_2$ my mother can
 change it.

Note that source HHHH (unprovenanced) has a line division between $na\ m-tar$ and $-mu$, which seems to speak against my interpretation.

SP Coll. 2.149'-151'. The fragment 3N-T914ff = A 33454 is used by Alster as a duplicate to SP Coll. 11.69-70. SP Coll. 11 is basically represented by one tablet only; the additional sources listed by Alster are all partial duplicates. The last (very fragmentary) line of 3N-T914ff does not fit the text of SP Coll. 11. Since SP Coll. 11.69 equals SP Coll. 2.149' we may as well attribute this fragment to SP Coll. 2, and thus recover some of the text of SP Coll. 2.150'-151':

150' (// SP Coll. 11.70) $a-da-be_2\ nig_2\ IM$
 [...] / $kur\ ša_3-g_e$
 $k[ur- \dots]$
 151' $id_2-[\]$

SP Coll. 2.152-53. The fragment UM 29-15-343 (fig. 11), not included by Alster, is a type II tablet. The ob-

verse has proverbs; the reverse lists wooden objects.²⁴ The obverse reads:

152	1'	traces
	2'	$^{\dagger}lu_2^{\dagger} id_2-d[a^?]$

153	3'	$e_2-gal\ gud-de_3\ k[un-bi\ dab_5]$
	4'	$^{\dagger}utu\ lugal-la\ igi-z[u]$
	5'	$he_2-im-ši-gal_2$

Lines 3'-5' restore the text of SP Coll. 6.1, so far preserved only in CBS 13890 line 1'. This line was read by Alster $e_2-gal\ gud-de_3\ ku[n-bi\ he_2-dab_5]$. Collation shows that more than half of the line is broken away, so that there is room for considerably more text. In our new fragment there is room for no more than two signs after $k[un]$ in line 3'. The two pieces may have contained an identical version of this proverb, only slightly deviating from the version in SP Coll. 14.21. Our new piece does not belong to SP Coll. 14, since the signs in line 2' do not correspond to anything in this collection. SP Coll. 6.1 presumably equals SP Coll. 2.153. Lines 1'-2' may thus represent SP Coll. 2.152. SP Coll. 2.149' speaks about "those who live near the water." The $lu_2\ id_2-da$ in line 2' may continue this theme. SP Coll. 2.151', as reconstructed above, apparently also has the river as its subject matter.

SP Coll. 6.20-33. The fragment 3N-T914gg (Chicago cast; fig. 1) is probably a type II tablet. One side is blank. The blank side is indicated as "reverse" on the cast, but may well be obverse. The inscribed side preserves a single column. It parallels and restores SP Coll. 6.25-33 (omitting 29-30). Moreover, the piece provides just enough overlap with CBS 6832 (Alster, p. 287) to demonstrate that the latter fragment represents SP Coll. 6.20-25. CBS 6832 is paralleled by UM 29-15-436 (fig. 12); UM 55-21-437 = 3N-T363 (fig. 13); UM 55-21-400 = 3N-T911g (unpublished); and A 30155 = 3N-T130 (Alster, p. 304). With the new evidence the reconstruction of SP Coll. 6.20-27 now reads as follows:

SP Coll. 6.20	$^{\dagger}u_4^{\dagger}-ma-da\ an-sum-^{\dagger}ma^{\dagger}\ en-$
	$ki\ pa-rim_4-bi-im$
21	$mušen\ an-na\ um^{mušen-e}\ (var.$
	$-gin_7)\ dug_3-ga$
22	$ku_6\ engur-ra\ eštub^{ku_6}\ gi\ dug_3-$
	ga
23	$nig_2-ur_2-limmu_2\ peš_2-giš-gi$
	dug_3-ga

²⁴ See Niek Veldhuis, "Elementary Education at Nippur," 319 (Ni II-277).

- 24 mušen ba-dal-dal ama dili-bi
ba-(an)-TUŠ
- 25 mušen ba-dal-dal (var. ba-al-
dal; error)^dnin-a-[zu] ḥa-la-zu
e-še
- 26 mušen-du₃ giš-pap-ḥal-la-ka
ni₂ al-gu₇-e
- 27 mušen ku₆ gu₇-e u₃ nu-um-ši-
ku-[ku]
- 20 . . .
- 21 A bird in the sky is as good as an u m-
bird.
- 22 A fish in the deep is as good as a carp in
the reeds.
- 23 Four-footed creatures are as good as
canebrake rats.
- 24 All the birds flew away, their mother
alone stayed.
- 25 Ninazu, a bird flying around is your
share, they say.
- 26 The fowler, in the trap⁷ is what he eats.
- 27 The one who eats birds and fish cannot
sleep.

Lines 21–23 seem to compare animals that are equally-inedible, out of reach, or otherwise useless. The word *giš-pap-ḥal-la* (26; written *giš-pap-DINGIR-la* in 3N-T314gg) is apparently constructed as a genitive. It appears in the Old Babylonian Nippur version of *ur₅-ra 5–7* just before the siege engines (*giš^sgud-si-dili*).²⁵

SP Coll. 6.39. The reconstruction [*a-ra₂-b*]*u^{mušen}* may well be correct, but is mistaken in spelling. This particular writing of the bird name appears in Ugarit *ur₅-ra 18* (MSL 8/2, p. 148) but is otherwise unknown. The most common spelling of the word is *UD-ra₂-bu^{mušen}*, which is read *a₁₂-ra₂-bu^{mušen}*, or *ara₂-bu^{mušen}*. For other spellings see most recently Jagersma/De Maaijer, *AfO* 44–45 (1998): 286.

Additional Sources:

A number of further duplicates do not add to the textual reconstruction of SP Coll. 2+6. Some include minor variants. Lentils: CBS 8031 (SP Coll. 2.1 lines 5 and 6); Ni 324 (SP Coll. 2.69), known from an unpublished copy by Hilprecht kept in the University Museum. Type II tablets: N 7162 (flake from the obverse; SP Coll. 2.67);

3N-T910x (obverse SP Coll. 6.44–45; reverse MSL 13 15 L2); 3N-T920c (obverse SP Coll. 6.48; reverse lost). Multi-column tablet(?): N 3727 (SP Coll. 2.41; 54).

SP COLL. 3

Catalogue:

- D (Ni 10138): inscribed side is reverse (type II tablet).
I (CBS 8863 + N 4762): inscribed side is reverse (type II tablet).
K (Ni 4319): ISET 1, 172/114 (not ISET 2). May well join L (UM 29-13-458+).
Q (N 5078): this is a type II tablet with SP Coll. 3 on both sides. Obverse and reverse should be inverted.

Comments on Individual Proverbs:

SP Coll. 3.124 *UMBIN-ku₅-ru* is probably a sheep shearer rather than a manicurist. The comment that he is “dressed in dirty rags” becomes more poignant since he is involved in the production of fine clothing. References for *UMBIN-TAR* (= *gullubu*), *UMBIN-kin* and other expressions with *UMBIN* in the sense of shearing were collected by J. Klein.²⁶ It is possible that *UMBIN* in these contexts has the value *sig_x*, a value which in first millennium orthography is generally represented by *AKKIL* (= *sig₈*). The signs *AKKIL(GAD.KID₂.GIŠ)* and *UMBIN(GAD.KID₂.UR₂)* are closely related. The value *UMBIN* = *sig_x* is attested in the Diri equation *nisiki* = *GIŠ.NIG₂.UMBIN* = *mumarritu* (quoted in CAD, s.v. *mumarritu*), and is confirmed by variation between *sig/sig₂* and *UMBIN* in Old Babylonian and later lexical sources.²⁷ *Mumarritu* means “comb” and is thus loosely related to the semantic field of “shearing.” It is derived from the verb (*w*)*urrû* or *murrû*, “to cut (branches)” (see CAD, s.v. *arû* C). This verb is equated with *AKKIL* = *sig₈* in the first-millennium lexical tradition (see the CAD article for references). The reading *UMBIN* = *sig_x* is beyond doubt; its use in *UMBIN-TAR* (*gullubu*) and related expressions, however, is no more than a likely possibility.

SP Coll. 3.182. In Old Babylonian writing there is a clear differentiation between *buru₅^{mušen}* (a bird) and *bir₅(NAM)^(mušen)* (“locust”). Old Babylonian and Middle Babylonian versions of *ur₅-ra 14* (wild animals)²⁸

²⁶ *Three Šulgi Hymns: Sumerian Royal Hymns Glorifying King Šulgi of Ur* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ. Press, 1981), 154.

²⁷ See Niek Veldhuis, “Elementary Education at Nippur,” 190.

²⁸ An edition of the Old Babylonian versions is in preparation by the present author.

²⁵ Niek Veldhuis, “Elementary Education at Nippur,” 165, line 633.

list varieties of $\text{bir}_5 = \text{locust}$. $\text{Bir}_5^{(\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en})}$ is orthographically differentiated from $\text{sim}(\text{NAM})^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}}$ either by the absence of the $\text{MU}\check{\text{S}}\text{EN}$ determinative, or by an -rV complement (e.g., $\text{bir}_5^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en-ra}}$). Only in first millennium orthography is the Sumerian word for “locust” written $\text{buru}_5^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}}$. The article $\text{buru}_5^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}}$ in PSD has conflated the two words.²⁹ The ferocious animals in the present proverb are birds.

SP COLL. 5

Catalogue:

B (UM 29-15-574) is a one-column tablet.

SP COLL. 6

See at SP Coll. 2.

SP COLL. 8

Additional Sources:

N 3852 (fig. 6) indirectly joins CBS 3882 + CBS 19758. The multiplication table on the reverse is written in the regular direction (correct Alster’s description). The last preserved section on the reverse of the main fragment is the table of six, breaking off at ${}^119^1 (\times 6) = [1.54]$. The new section begins at $1 (\times 5) = [5]$. In the standard multiplication table $19 \times n$ is followed by 20, 30, 40, and 50. Four lines are completely missing. This corresponds to approximately 7 mm Laid out at a distance of 7 mm on the reverse, there seems to be one line entirely missing on the obverse. The text is to be inserted before section C of SP Coll. 8.

1’ ${}^1\text{lu}_2^1 \check{\text{s}}\text{e tuku-tuku } {}^1\text{x}^1\text{u}_3 \text{ mu-}{}^1\text{un}^1\text{-[ku-ku}^?]$
 2’ x mu gud NE-ba-an

 3’ ${}^1\text{dar}^?{}^1\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en-re im-du}_3\text{-a gu}_3 \text{ u}_3\text{-b[}i_2\text{-in-de}_2]$
 4’ $[\text{gan}]\text{-bad}^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}} 2 \check{\text{s}}\text{u-si nu-la}_2\text{-e [..]}$

²⁹ See M. Civil, *The Farmer’s Instructions: A Sumerian Agricultural Manual* (Sabadell: Editorial AUSA, 1994), 84f. Note that Jeremy Black’s scheme for the bird names buru_5 , buru_4 , sim , etc. is much too complex (“The Imagery of Birds in Sumerian Poetry,” in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, ed. M. E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout [Groningen: STYX Publications, 1996], 23–46, esp. p. 25).

5’ $[\text{bi}_2\text{-z}]a\text{-za}^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}}\text{-gu}_3\text{-balag-ga}_2\text{-k[ar}^? \text{-gir}_5\text{-za-na]}$
 6’ $[]\text{ad u}_3\text{-mu-ni-i[n-ga}_2\text{-ga}_2]$
 7’ $[]{}^1\text{x}^1\text{UNeme en-nu-[]}$

 8’ traces

Unfortunately, much remains unclear in this fragment. For line 1’ compare SP Coll. 3.23 and related expressions. At the end of line 2’ nothing seems to be missing (blank space). Most interesting is line 5’: $[\text{bi}_2\text{-z}]a\text{-za}^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}}\text{-gu}_3\text{-balag-ga}_2\text{-k[ar-...]}$. This is a form of the enigmatic bird name $\text{bi}_2\text{-za-za-gu}_3\text{-balag-dikar-gir}_5\text{-za-na}^{\text{mu}\check{\text{s}}\text{en}}$. This bird had previously been attested only in lexical lists (see references in PSD B, s.v. $\text{bi}_2\text{-za-za}$, lexical 3 and 4). Civil has demonstrated that it is translated *kur tibni* (“straw-basket bird”) in Akkadian (Sumerian Lexical Archive, Akkadian section).³⁰

SP COLL. 9

Catalogue:

N 4304 almost certainly belongs to source B (UM 29-15-512 + Ni 9797). Ni 9867 (ISET 2, 113) may well belong to the same tablet.

Comments on the Individual Proverbs:

SP Coll. 9.G3 reads $[\text{kur ku}_3] \text{ba-al-gin}_7^1 \text{lu}_2 \text{dim}_2\text{-ma nu-sa}_6$ (collated): “As a mountain mined for metal ore, this man is not in a right state of mind.” See the comments on SP Coll. 16 F1 below.

SP COLL. 12

Catalogue:

A (CBS 14004 (+) CBS 14125 + N 5913) is probably a type II tablet. The inscribed side is the reverse. The end of column i (right column; column ii in Alster) and the beginning of column ii (column i in Alster) are preserved, so “section A” should follow immediately after “section B.” This reconstruction is supported by source B (Ni 9630+ = TAD 8/2, lev. 1–2). Obverse i 11 (transliterated by Alster, p. 202) contains traces of

³⁰ <http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/SUM/SLA/Akkadian.html>.

SP Coll. 12 sec. B 13 immediately followed by sec. A 1.

CBS 7130: reverse has an extract from Proto-Lu.

Additional Source:

N 5418: large left-edge piece of a type II tablet. The obverse has SP Coll. 12 section B 3–9; the reverse has a metrological table. In the new tablet B 4 probably reads [lugal]-e mu-un-^rzu¹ / agrig-e nu-mu-un-[zu].

SP COLL. 13

Catalogue:

B (N 5919 + N 6162): reverse is Lisin's song (information from Civil's unpublished catalogue of literary texts, no. 4.10.1).

SP COLL. 14

Catalogue:

“3N-T930h + 3N-T922h”: The correct number is 3N-T921h + 3N-T922b (= A 33525 + A 33554). This is a type II tablet with Proto-Lu on the reverse (MSL 12 31 V'). The obverse contains SP Coll. 14.41–43. The tablet generally confirms the text as edited and reconstructed by Alster. Note, however, ma-ni-ib₂-r[i-] in SP Coll. 14.41 (not ħe₂-).

Ni 10162: Judging from the copy (ISET 2, 108) this is not a lenticular tablet.

SP COLL. 15

Catalogue:

B (ISET 1 67/125): Sec. A 5 is not found on this tablet. It is not clear where Alster's transliteration comes from.

SP COLL. 16

Additional Sources:

UM 29-15-667 is a type II tablet with SP Coll. 16 on the obverse and SP Coll. 21 on the reverse. The obverse is treated by Alster as SP Coll. 21 section C.

N 1009 (+) N 5187 (fig. 4).

The two new sources allow for a more complete reconstruction of sections E and F. The four proverbs of UM 29-15-667 obv. may now be numbered SP Coll. 16

E 4–7. The new source N 1009 (+) N 5187 parallels section F:

- | | | |
|-------|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | kur ku ₃ ba-al-[gin ₇ lu ₂] dim ₂ -ma nu-sa ₆ | SP Coll. 16 E 7 = F 1 |
| ----- | | |
| 2 | šu-i-gin ₇ nam- ^r x ¹ - [] suħur im-ši-la ₂ - ^r e ¹ | SP Coll. 16 F 2 |
| ----- | | |
| 3 | ^r x ¹ zi TUG ₂ ^r x ¹ [... ^d]nirah-gin ₇ dar-ra- ^r me-en ¹ | |
| ----- | | |
| 4 | []ka-am ₃ i ₃ -bar-re | |
| ----- | | |
| 5 | []diri | SP Coll. 16 F 5 |
| 6 | [b]a-ni-ib- ^r tum ₂ [?] | |

Rev.

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1' | []x-e-še |
| 2' | []aš[E [?] -]-i-gid ₂ -i x-ga ₂ -ga ₂ ^{??} |
| 3' | iš-ħi-[-i]k [?] x el ra-ma-ni-šu iz-nu-ur |

Left side: [] ta-wi-i-tum

Right side: i-[]

Collation of UM 29-15-667 demonstrates that line 4 (SP Coll. 16 E 7; old SP Coll. 21 C 4) may be read: 'kur' ku₃ ba-al-[]/lu₂ dim₂-^rma []. Thus SP Coll. 16 E 7 = SP Coll. 16 F 1. This proverb is duplicated in SP Coll. 9 G 3 (see above). A parallel expression is found in Curse of Agade 109. Line 2 of N 1009 (+) N 5187 duplicates SP Coll. 16 F 2. Line 5/6 represents a version of SP Coll. 16 F 5. Lines 3 and 4 deviate from the published version. The reverse of N 1009 (+) N 5187 has two more unidentified proverbs, plus a line in Akkadian.

SP COLL. 19

Comment on Individual Proverb:

19 Sec E 2: Ni 679 (ISET 2, 109; not ISET 1) has the typical “landscape” format of Middle Babylonian exercise texts.³¹

³¹ See Miguel Civil, in CANE IV 2308: “Type V,” and Niek Veldhuis, “Elementary Education at Nippur,” 71–73.

SP COLL. 21

Catalogue:

B (UM 29-15-667): this is a type II tablet with an excerpt from SP Coll. 16 on the obverse (see above at SP Coll. 16). Only the reverse (treated as obverse by Alster) belongs to SP Coll. 21.

E: 3N-T348 = UM 55-21-311 (not -315). This is a one-column tablet.

F (CBS 8850): obverse and reverse should be inverted (the reverse is clearly convex).

“Section C” (the obverse of source B) does not belong here but is part of SP Coll. 16. Since obverse and reverse must be inverted in B and F the order of the remaining sections changes:

- 1 major gap
- 2 section B
- 3 section A
- 4 section D

Since sections A and D both appear on the same single-column tablet (source E) the gap between them cannot be too long.

Additional source:

A 30175 (3N-T168); type II tablet: Obverse SP Coll. 21 A 5 (Fowler and his Wife), reverse Proto-Diri with a numerical exercise.

MINOR SUMERIAN PROVERB COLLECTIONS

CBS 6832: see above at SP Coll. 2+6.

N 3395 is a bilingual with Sumerian left and Akkadian right. This format is typical for the Kassite period. See most recently J. J. A. van Dijk, “Inanna raubt den ‘großen Himmel’: Ein Mythos,” in *Festschrift für Rykle Borger*, ed. S. M. Maul, Cuneiform Monographs 10 (Groningen: STYX Publications, 1998), 12 note 16, with examples and earlier literature. A Kassite date may also explain the lack of parallels and the rather unusual Sumerian of this text.

N 6119: lines 3’–4’ are duplicated by N 4047 (fig. 8). This is a left edge fragment of a type II tablet. The reverse has wild animals (Old Babylonian Nippur *ur₅-ra* 14). Collation shows that the sign read PIRIG by Alster may better be read IB₂, as in the new duplicate (“my hip”?). The phrase šu TU-TU-ba (N 6119) is paralleled by šu⁷ A₂-^rba¹, which is, unfortunately,

not much clearer to me. For the verb šu TU-TU see Sjöberg, ZA 65, 242; Jacobsen apud Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs*, 450–51.

UM 29-16-394: the correct number is UM 29-16-39 (as in Plate 103). The lines on the reverse seem to be intended for a game board or something similar, not for writing.

LENTICULAR SCHOOL TABLETS FROM NIPPUR

CBS 6855: not a lentil, but rather a fragment of the upper left corner of a tablet.

2N-T496: not a lenticular, but a quadrangular tablet. It is identical in format to 2N-T500 (SP Coll. 2 source XXX). Both include an exercise in reciprocals. See the discussion above.

SUMERIAN PROVERBS FROM UR

Almost all tablets with proverbs from Ur are lentils, with the exception of UET 6/2 339 + UET 6/3 235* (the inclusion of UET 6/2 337 in the corpus is questionable). Some of these have been included by Alster in the editions of the main proverb collections, in particular, Collections 1, 2, 5, and 8. Lentils do not often contain more than one proverb, and are therefore relatively worthless for the reconstruction of a collection. Those texts which do have more than one proverb very often differ in arrangement from the better-known collections from Nippur (see in particular UET 6/2 339+). The existence in Ur of collections that run more or less parallel to those from Nippur is questionable. Even though many individual proverbs are attested in Ur, the arrangement of the collections (if standardized collections existed at all) almost certainly differed considerably. The situation appears to be comparable to that of the lexical texts in the Old Babylonian period: There were parallel developments, but every scribal center had its own versions. Some of the unprovenanced texts do duplicate longer sections of a Nippur collection (SP Coll. 5: YBC 4604; SP Coll. 9: NBC 9763). This question deserves a more thorough investigation.

PROVERBS IN THE YALE COLLECTION

YBC 7297: KU-GA₂-NUN-^rtir¹-ra^{mu}šen is apparently a spelling for bir₅-ga₂-nu-tir-ra, a word that is found in the Old Babylonian list of wild animals from Nippur. The word appears in the first millennium version of *ur₅-ra* 14 as buru₅-gan₂-tir-ra = zi-za-nu qiš-tum (a kind of locust). The Emar text has bir₅-

gan₂-nu-um-tir-[ra] (Emar 6/4, 116, 119').³² The sign KU has a reading bi₇. This solution has the disadvantage that bi₇ has a /d/ Auslaut (bid₃). The other possibility is to understand KU as a poorly written PU₂. The development bir₅ (OB) > buru₅ (1st millennium) makes an unorthographic spelling pu₂ for bir₅ not altogether unlikely.

ADDITIONAL UNIDENTIFIED AND QUESTIONABLE
FRAGMENTS³³

Several more fragments may be identified as proverbs with greater or lesser certainty.

CBS 6565 (fig. 2): fragment of a type II tablet. The reverse has Nigga (MSL 13, 94 L1).

1' traces
2' a-na-gin₇-n[am] "How
3' nig₂ i₃-gu₇-a-mu can the thing that I just ate
4' gub-ba-e-še be standing here," he said.

5' muš-laḥ₅-e A snake charmer
6' muš an-da-ḡal₂¹ had a snake,
7' zu₂ mu-ra-ze₂-ḡx¹ he(?) pulled out the
tooth . . .

CBS 12666 (fig. 3): bottom fragment of a type II tablet. Obverse probably proverbs (unidentified), reverse Old Babylonian Nippur ur₅-ra 3 (trees).³⁴

N 2182 (fig. 5): lower left corner of a type II tablet. Obverse proverb? Reverse Proto-Izi (MSL 13 13 source B).

³² Arnaud transcribes buru₅ rather than bir₅. The signs as copied (Msk 731086 = Emar VI/2, 166), however, lack the one diagnostic characteristic of BURU₅: the final broken or single vertical. Without collation the reading must remain provisional.

³³ Several very fragmentary or illegible pieces may be identified as proverbs by their typical layout or by the suffix -e-še, almost exclusively confined to proverbs. For the sake of completeness their numbers are listed here: CBS 7894, CBS 7895, N 4664 (lentil fragment), N 5667 + N 5694. The tablet UM 29-13-512 was not available to me. It is described in the catalogue as obverse Proto-Diri; reverse proverbs. Several more pieces were included by Alster in the photographs (plates 112–16), but not treated in the main text, or referred to in the indexes. Of these, 3N-T914n contains model contracts, not proverbs.

³⁴ See Niek Veldhuis, "Elementary Education at Nippur," 293 (Ni II-019).

N 3884 (fig. 7): fragment of the bottom of a type II tablet. The tablet had been cut in antiquity to preserve the teacher's model. Reverse metrological.

1' []-KAR₂

2' [-g]a-ga
=====

3' []-li₂-la₂
4' []-NA₂-a-me-en

Line 4' may well be read [s]a₄-a-me-en. Unidentified proverb, or, perhaps, extract from a hymn?

N 4909 (fig. 9): lower left corner of a type II tablet. The reverse has Proto-Lu (a few lines of the sipa-section are preserved; see MSL 12 49). The obverse has an unidentified proverb:

1' traces

2' [l]u₂ nig₂-gur-ra-k[a]
3' KA-na am₃-[]

4' erased

N 5569: lower left corner of a type II tablet. The reverse has an extract from Old Babylonian Nippur ur₅-ra 13 (udu). The tablet has been distorted by pressure and is therefore difficult to read in places.

1'–2' undeciphered

3' si-ga-ar nam-ba- Be not hostile to the
an[?]-na-kur₂-[] weakling,
4' kala-ga-ar nam- do not cry for the strong
ba-an-ḡše₈¹- one,
š[e₈]
5' gašam-še₃ a₂-ni to the craftsman his
ḡx¹ arm . . .

This is reminiscent of SP Coll. 13, but it does not duplicate any of the known proverbs.

N 7577 + N 7578 (fig. 10): flake. The lay-out of the text suggests proverbs. Unidentified.

CONCORDANCE OF NEW FRAGMENTS

3N-T910x: SP Coll. 2 + 6 A 30175 (3N-T168): SP
3N-T914gg: SPColl. 2 + 6; Coll. 21
fig. 1 CBS 6565: unidentified; fig. 2
3N-T920c: SP Coll. 2 + 6 CBS 7894: unidentified

CBS 7895: unidentified	N 5569: unidentified
CBS 8031: SP Coll. 2 + 6	N 5667 + N 5694: unidentified
CBS 12666: unidentified; fig. 3	N 7162: SP Coll. 2 + 6
N 1009 (+) N 5187: SP Coll. 16; fig. 4	N 7577 + N 7578: unidentified; fig. 10
N 2182: unidentified; fig. 5	N 7672: SP Coll. 1
N 3727: SP Coll. 2 + 6	Ni 324: SP Coll. 2 + 6
N 3852: SP Coll. 8; fig. 6	UM 29-15-343: SP Coll. 2 + 6; fig. 11
N 3884: unidentified; fig. 7	UM 29-15-436: SP Coll. 2 + 6; fig. 12
N 4047: Minor Collections // N 6119; fig. 8	UM 55-21-437 (3N-T363): SP Coll. 2 + 6; fig. 13
N 4664: unidentified	UM 55-21-400 (3N-T911g): SP Coll. 2 + 6
N 4909: unidentified; fig. 9	
N 5418: SP Coll. 12	
N 5469: SP Coll. 1	

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Alster's *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* contains several hundred tablets and fragments, many of which are published here for the first time. The difficulties in reading and understanding this corpus are of an extraordinary nature. The tablets—school exercises—were often badly written and roughly treated by the pupils who wrote them. The proverbs themselves are terse and replete with uncommon words. Alster is to be congratulated for having the courage to tackle this unruly but very rewarding corpus.

Having all the proverb collections together in one publication opens new vistas of research. The cross-references in Alster's editions show the intricate web of relations between the collections. The inclusion of many illustrations (116 plates with photographs, plus 17 plates with hand-copies) allows the reader to get a good idea of what the tablets look like. Thanks to Alster's monumental work, a new era in the study of Sumerian proverbs may now begin.

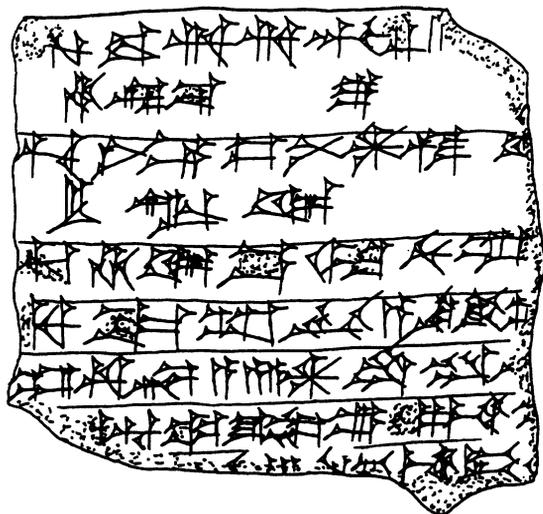


FIG. 1. 3N-T 914 gg obv., SP 6; rev. unscribed

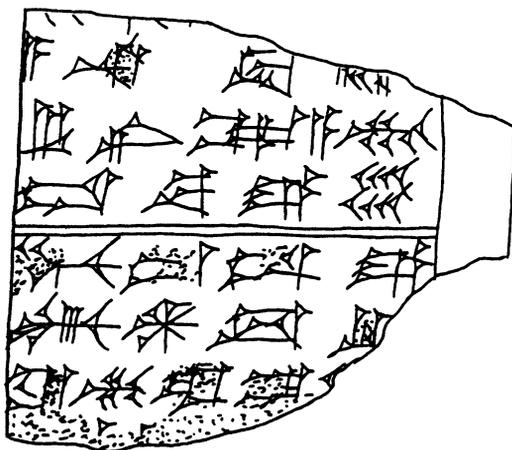


FIG. 2. CBS 6565 SP; rev. Nigga, not copied

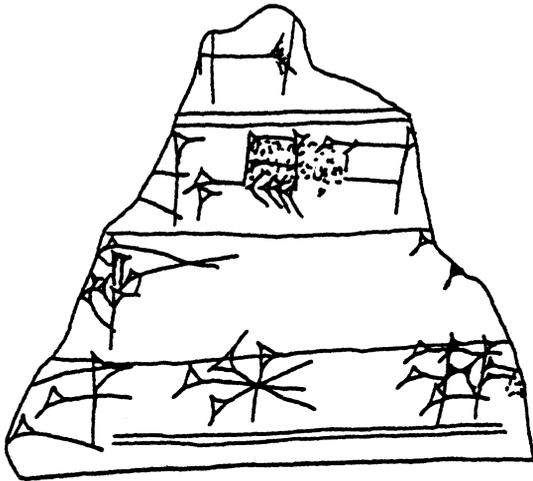


FIG. 3. CBS 12666 obv.

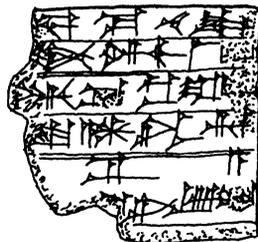
left edge



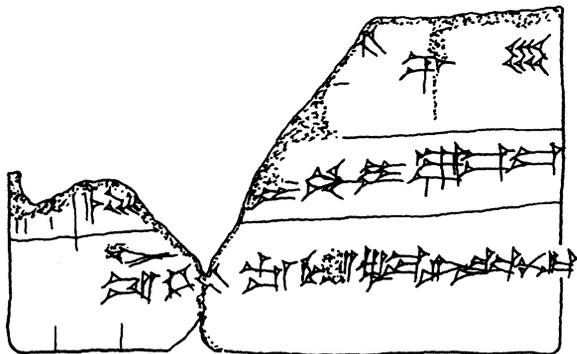
N 1009



N 5187



obv.



rev.

right edge

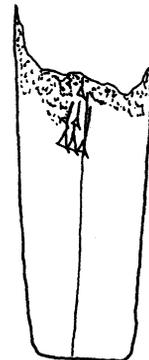


FIG. 4. SP 16

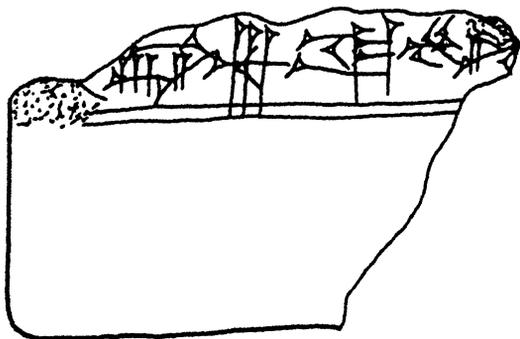


FIG. 5. N 2182 obv.

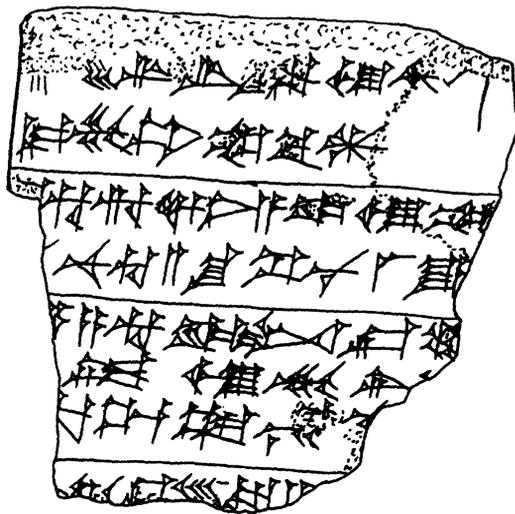
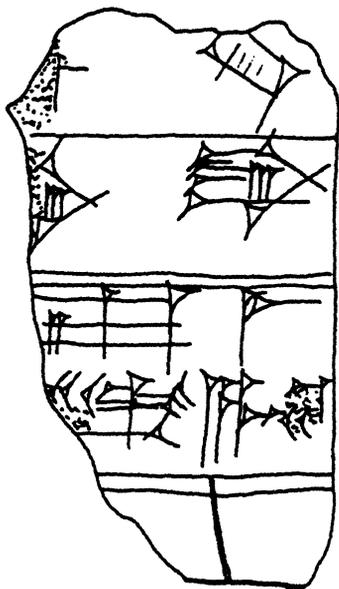
FIG. 6. N 3852 obv. (+) CBS 3882 + CBS 19758, SP 8;
rev. standard multiplication table, not copied

FIG. 7. N 3884 obv.

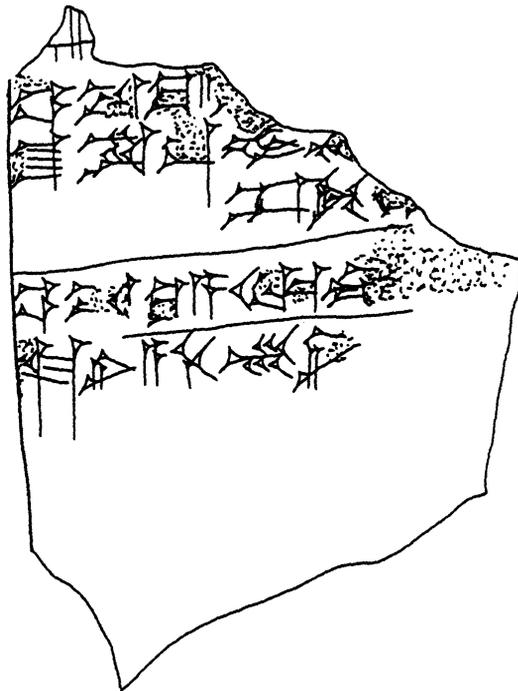


FIG. 8. N 4047 obv.



FIG. 9. N 4909 obv.



FIG. 10. N 7577 + N 7578, SP

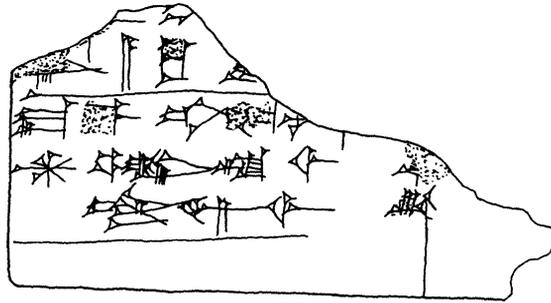


FIG. 11. UM 29-15-343, SP 2+6

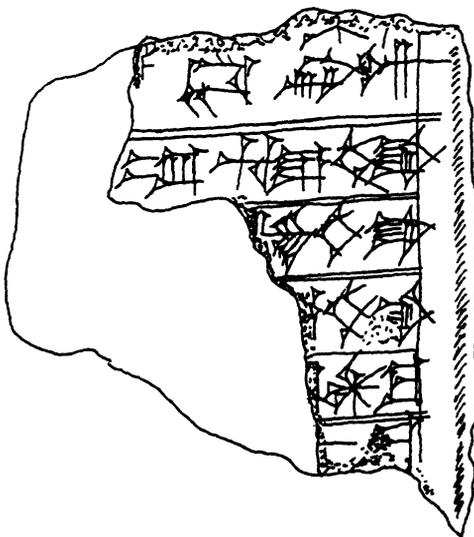


FIG. 12. UM 29-15-436, SP 2+6

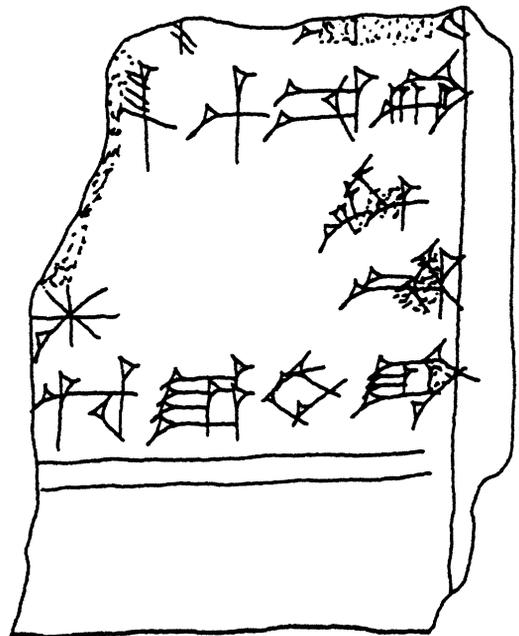


FIG. 13. UM 55-21-437 obv. (3N-T363), SP 2+6