

The Ur III Governor Ur-Mes and Urusagrig from an Iraqi Perspective

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Abstract

The Ur III period does not suffer from a shortage of tablets: if anything, we have more information than we can adequately handle now. Starting about twenty or thirty years ago, a new cache of tablets from Urusagrig appeared on the art market: they appear to number more than 2700. Some of these tablets have been published; some collections have been returned to the Iraq Museum. Study of the archive is really just beginning. In addition to providing transliterations of a few previously unpublished Urusagrig texts in Iraq, this article seeks to address four main questions: 1. What can Iraqi scholars contribute to the ongoing debate about the location of Urusagrig? 2. How can Urusagrig texts legitimately be studied? 3. What do we know about its governor Ur-mes? 4. What were Urusagrig's taxes like and did it hold a special place in the Ur III state.

Keywords: The Ur III Governor Ur-Mes, Urusagrig, Iraqi Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Various spellings of the name of this city can be found in current publications. Written *uru-sag-rig7ki* if read in Sumerian; presumably it could also be read in the Akkadian language as *Al-Šarrāki* (Justel 2020). The texts of the city of Ebla cited it in the form *Šar-ra-kumx*, or *Šar-ra-LUM*, which of course suggests that they used the Akkadian name (Kakoulides 2026). If the Sumerian name is used in transliteration, some scholars prefer *Urusagrig*, others *Irisagrig*. Populations at this time may well have been bilingual, and so many prefer to render the name in Akkadian, *Al-Šarrāki*. As the tablets studied here are written in Sumerian, the authors have chosen to render the name also in Sumerian. In any case, these are all just variant spellings of the same place. *Urusagrig* has never officially been excavated: in fact we are not even sure which tell it is. However, illegal digging at the site resulted in about 2700 tablets appearing on the art market after 2004 (Justel 2020). It is thought that *Urusagrig* was first looted during the American invasion of Iraq in May 2003 (Molina and Steinkeller 2023).. *Urusagrig* texts were studied illegally by some scholars without the approval of the archaeological authority in Iraq represented by Iraqi Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities or the General Authority for Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH).

Major publications of Urusagrig texts include Owen 2013 and Sigrist-Ozaki 2019.

The loters must have found records kept together by date, as “over 80% of all recovered texts being dated to either Amar-Sin 7 to Amar-Sin 9, or Šu-Sin 5 to Ibbi-Sin 3.” (Foster 2020) So far, the earliest dated Urusagrig tablet dates to Amar-Sin’s first regnal year; the latest, to the last month of Ibbi-Sin 4.

Urusagrig is known to have been occupied in historical periods from the Early Dynastic to the reign of Warad-Sin (Molina and Steinkeller 2023). It is of course possible that excavations will show earlier or later occupations there. Visitors from Urusagrig appear in a list of Fara date, and it is also mentioned in a few Early Dynastic year names (Molina and Steinkeller 2023).

Although Urusagrig was a province, the Ur III king did have a palace there. Messenger texts often refer to *ki lugal*, where the king is (Owen 2013: 99). In Sargonic times, at least one of the provincial governors was Naram-Sin’s own son (Steinkeller 2022), again showing a strong royal connection to this locale.

Where exactly was ancient Urusagrig?

While we have a general understanding of where Urusagrig was located on the basis of the texts – somewhere on the Tigris river not too far from the Nippur province (Sharlach 2022) and near a waterway called the Tabbi-Mama – the exact location of Urusagrig remains a matter of debate.

Some have suggested that ancient Urusagrig is modern Tell al-Wilayah. Regular excavations at Tell al-Wilayah took place in the 1950’s and were published in 1960 by Mazloum in Sumer. Tell al-Wilayah, located 30 km to the south of the center of Al-Hussainiya district in Wasit Governorate, was also hit by looters and it has been speculated that unprovenanced tablets associated with the merchants Turam-ili and SI.A-a also derived from Tell al-Wilayah.

Some identify Urusagrig with Adams’ survey site 1188, which is Umm Al-Hafriyat (Frayne 1992: 36). Other sites on Adams’ survey that might be possible are sites 1071, 1032 and 1056 (Bartash 2025). Starting already before any Urusagrig tablets were out of the ground, scholars used records of boat journeys from Umma to document that Urusagrig was about four days journey upstream from Umma. Molina used a group of Urusagrig texts from the year Shu-Sin 2 to show that towing a boat from Urusagrig to the inlet of the Tabbi-Mama canal took two days, which would mean a distance of about 30 km, causing him to locate the inlet of the Tabbi-Mama canal at or very near Tell Al-Wilayah (Molina 2013: 62 ff). In this view, Tell al-Wilayah and Urusagrig were very near one another but not the same. Viano on the other hand argued for a different location for Urusagrig in 2019. He suggested that the Tabbi-Mama waterway was just a variant name for the Tabbi-šarrat. Thus, Viano held that Urusagrig was precisely Tell al-Wilayah (Bartash 2022). A few years later, Steinkeller also scrutinized such waterways in boat texts, concluding that Urusagrig could not be identical to Tell al-Wilayah because it lay in the wrong direction. The texts from Shu-Sin 2 show that the inlet of the Tabbi-Mama lay to the north or north-east of Urusagrig, but this is not where Tell al-Wilayah is located (Steinkeller 2022: 4). Everyone agrees that Urusagrig must have been located not too far from Nippur and very close to Tell

al-Wilayah, but there is little consensus at present as to exactly which site on the survey map it was.

Yet another way to try to identify the location of Urusagrig is through month names, since most city-states in the Ur III heartland continued to use their own local calendars. The Urusagrig sequence of month names is largely known, though scholars disagree in a few cases as to the order. Of the twelve month names in the Urusagrig calendar, eight of them also appear in the calendar used in Tell al-Wilayah texts. This obviously suggests that Urusagrig and Tell al-Wilayah were very close to one another. However, it also suggests that they were not the same place, because if Urusagrig and Tell al-Wilayah were identical, they should have used the exact same calendar (Lafont 2023).

On the basis of just the texts we have now, it might not be fruitful to continue the same debate. Certainly Iraqi archaeologists can go to Tell al Wilayah and Umm al-Hafriyat and inspect the ruins to see if robber holes there correspond to what we would expect to see on the ground from looting activities after 2003. Since the looters seem to have only hit caches belonging to certain years, legal excavations at Urusagrig may yield many more tablets with clear archaeological contexts, in addition to solving the question of where exactly it was. In addition, potentially ruins of the Ur III palace at Urusagrig might be uncovered.

How Should Urusagrig Tablets Be Responsibly Published?

Looting and destruction of archaeological sites are obviously to be condemned. Once tablets have appeared on the art market, though, some scholars choose to publish them in order that information not be lost (Steinkeller 2022). Much debate exists on whether that is ethical or not (Loges 2022). Many scholars choose to avoid publishing or even referring to looted tablets. However, once tablets have been repatriated, they can and should be published and studied in Iraqi and international journals and monograph series. Ideally international publications can be made through collaborations between Iraqi scholars and the wider Assyriological community (Maekawa 2023).

METHOD

Ur-mes: A Governor (ensi2) of Urusagrig

Unlike other locations such as Umma and Nippur, where almost all of the governors (ensi2) and many of the key government officials stemmed from a single powerful local family, Urusagrig's known governors come from a hodgepodge of different families. Because so little is known about Urusagrig in the earlier half of the Ur III period for now, we can say little about earlier governors or provincial administrators in Urusagrig.

Although Ur-mes, governor of Urusagrig, is by far the best attested, five governors of Urusagrig are listed by Owen 2014-16: 499: Lu2-banda3, in Shulgi 38; the zabar-dab5 in Amar-Sin 1 ; Ur-mes, from AS3 or 4 to IS 3 or 4-- but not continuously. Ur-mes's tenure as governor was interrupted in AS7 and AS8; in AS7, perhaps starting in AS7 month 7, it was a man named Dadani son of Ili-kibri who was governor, attested also in that capacity well into AS8; but in AS 7 and 8, additionally

Ilalum held that title. Why Ur-mes left temporarily and why not one but two replacements are attested in AS7-8 remain unclear at present. Once Ur-mes returned in AS9, then he served as ensi² of Urusagrig, apparently without any more interruptions.

Ur-mes was a common name in Ur III times and so we must be careful when piecing together fragments from various archives that we are dealing with the same person. With that in mind, it might be helpful to note some of the other people attested in Ur III times with the same name, Ur-mes, who are obviously different from Urusagrig's governor. These include: at Umma, Ur-mes the father of Abba-kalla, at Girsu, Ur-mes the son of Ur-NIG², at Puzrish-Dagan, Ur-mes the son of La-na kurušda and Ur-mes, scribe, son of Ur-Sin. Even in Urusagrig, there may have been multiple people named Ur-mes.

The governor of Kutha, Gudea, had a son named Ur-mes, attested in Amar-Sin year 3 (MVN 2.284 iii). Although Owen suggested Ur-mes, governor of Urusagrig was the son of the Kutha governor (Owen 2013: 98), to the authors this seems unlikely or even impossible because Ur-mes of Kutha had Gudea as his father, while Ur-mes of Urusagrig lists his father's name as Ur-sa⁶-ga (Mariani and Valeri 2026).

Ur-mes's tenure as governor of Urusagrig is first clearly attested in Amar-Sin 4 month 8, according to P113018, a Puzrish-Dagan tablet about cattle and sheep mentioning Ur-mes ensi² Urusagrig. Possibly Ur-mes occurred a year earlier in a bala text (AOAT 240.81.7), but note that the relevant line is almost entirely reconstructed. Ur-mes's tenure as Urusagrig's ensi² continued until the fourth year of the king's reign Ibbi-Sin according to the text Nisaba 15/2.984.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Family of Ur-mes

We know nothing about Ur-mes's place of birth or his mother. His father was Ur-sa⁶-ga, well attested on seal impressions, two on seals dedicated to Shu-Sin and one on a seal dedicated to Ibbi-Sin. He may have had a brother named DINGIR-ba-ni -- a brother Ilum-bani šeš ensi² is attested in Nisaba 15/1.194 and CUSAS 40/2.562 (IS3). However, since the governor in question is not named, we cannot rule out the possibility that this Ilum-bani was related to one of the other attested governors of Urusagrig. No sisters are currently attested (Sallaberger 2020).

Although frequently wives of governors, generals and other notables occur in administrative records, dam Ur-mes never occurs in the BDTNS database of Urusagrig tablets. (There are some attestations, especially from Girsu, but these are very likely to be the Girsu Ur-mes, who was an entirely different person). Ur-mes clearly was married, as three adult children are attested in the archives. Dam Ur-mes is not attested, but e²-gi⁴-a Ur-mes is attested. The complication comes in the translation: is e²-gi⁴-a, which can be translated as "bride," or "daughter in law," to be understood as Ur-mes's wife and the mother of his three children? Or was the woman married to one of his adult sons? This woman, identified as Ba-qar-tum or Wa-qar-tum, was in fact a princess, the sister of Shu-Sin. Many have seen her as Ur-mes' wife (e.g. Owen 2014-2016). While this is not impossible, why would she still be called "bride" four decades later? In this scenario, she must have married in the reign of Shulgi (which

we can deduce since the children are adults in SS6-7), but she is called “bride” in IS9 according to the Ur text UET 3.1382. To the authors, it seems much more likely that e2-gi4-a is here to be understood as daughter in law. Thus, in this scenario, Ur-mes’s wife and mother of his two sons and daughter was an unknown woman, possibly deceased at the time of his governorship. As a reward or mark of his high favor with the kings, a royal marriage between Shu-Sin’s sister, Waqartum or Baqartum and one of Ur-mes’s sons may have been arranged. This fits well with how we know other royal marriages in the later Ur III period were arranged.

W/Baqartum is attested in several Urusagrig tablets as a very wealthy woman with enormous grain resources as well as livestock holdings. For example, in SS9 Waqartum provided the merchant Á-la-la 900 gur of grain, as well as 1-5/6 ma-na 7-1/2 shekels of silver. She transferred 36000 gur of grain in an Iraq Museum tablet in SS6. The livestock holdings were more modest than the grain resources, but still sizable; for example, 1385 various sheep and goats under the control of three different na-gada herdsmen according to the undated tablet CUSAS 40/2.634. As late as IS9, wa-qar-tum is classified as e2-gi4-a ur-mes ensi2.

The ensi2 Ur-mes had at least one daughter, Nin-sa6-ga and two sons, Ur-Tummal (attested in SS6 according to PDT 2.803) and Awilumma (attested in SS7 in a barley loan according to Owen 2014-2016). Nin-sa6-ga is currently better attested than her brothers in the Urusagrig documents found to date. She appears to have been in charge of 48 enslaved persons in IS2, and occurs also in IS3 month 9 with even more enslaved people: in a tablet that lists more than 20 gur of barley as še-ba geme2 arad2 nin-sa6-ga (Nisaba 15/2.953), she seems to be in control of 225 enslaved persons in her very large estate: 74 guruš, 48 enslaved females, 47 enslaved boys and 56 enslaved girls (discussed already by Lafont 2016: 152). Nin-saga, the governor’s daughter, was the responsible party sealing for grain allocations and rations for people as well as goods to buy bitumen and so on according to Nisaba 15/2.1023. What exactly all these people were doing on the estate and whether we should expect that all of the governor’s children held similar sized estates remains unclear. Her estate seems more like what we might expect from a princess than a governor’s daughter, but this may have been due to her standing as a distant member of the royal family (Owen 2020).

Ur-mes, the governor, in tablets from Urusagrig

Currently, the BDTNS database contains one hundred and five texts from Urusagrig mentioning Ur-mes, dating from the ninth year of the reign of Amar-Sin (Nisaba 15/2. 165) to the fourth year of the reign of Ibbi-Sin (Nisaba 15/2. 984). Provincial governors of the Ur III period were responsible for administrative, religious, legal, and economic management of their domains and most of these tablets seem to show Ur-mes’s work conforming to the expected job portfolio.

Amongst these were two legal texts representing court records or lawsuits. The first was dated to IS 3 (Nisaba 15/2. 965) and the second dated to the fourth year of Ibbi-Sin’s rule (Nisaba 15/2. 984). One may also note a few letter orders about grain allocations, including Nisaba 15/2. 1094, dated to the second month of the second year of the reign of King Ibbi-Sin (Borrelli 2020).

Also well attested were various sorts of receipts and deliveries on the part of Ur-mes. Sometimes he also occurred as a conveying (giri3) official. As for the materials

that were received, delivered and spent, they were barley (še), beer (kaš) and wool/textiles (siki). Ur-mes supervised workers of various sorts and gave out New Year rations. Ur-mes also was involved in livestock transactions, most frequently with sheep (udu) and goats (maš2). None of this is at all out of the ordinary or unexpected for an Ur III governor (Greco 2022).

However, there are some more unusual features in the Urusagrig archives. For example, in SS9, Ur-Mes helped Dada gala, a very famous court musician giving out rations for Dada's staff according to Nisaba 15/2. 539. Other Urusagrig texts collected by Owen also attest to a number of musicians supported by the province with generous rations of meat and sesame oil (Owen 2013:96). Was Ur-mes a patron of the arts? Or were all these musicians rather part of the entertainments deemed appropriate for the royal and diplomatic visitors seen in the ration texts?

In Amar-Sin 9, very shortly after his return to the position of ensi2 of Urusagrig, Ur-mes delivered a very large amount of barley, 1200 gur, to Pudu in order that Pudu might buy copper according to P521782 (SM 1234), dated to AS9 month 7. Pudu was a well-known long distance Gulf trader, also married into the royal family (Molina and Steinkeller 2023). In other Ur III provinces like Umma or Lagash, the extant archives seem to show a fairly strict three-way division of responsibilities and resources: the provincial governors there were responsible for the local administration and costs, which were accounted for quite separately from the royal domains and military sectors. However, at Urusagrig, the governor seems to have been quite involved with feeding all these royal, diplomatic and military travelers. We also can find texts such as CUSAS 40/2.338 (IS 3), in which Ur-mes the ensi2 provided 12 months of grain rations for the enslaved workers of a prince Puzur-Sin, which one might have expected to be a royal expenditure. Perhaps because of Urusagrig's tight connections with the royal family, the divisions of fiscal responsibility between provincial and royal expenses appears more blurred than at Umma or Lagash (Sharlach 2022).

One may notice from this chart that the years AS7-8 are essentially lacking. This is not surprising, because these were the years when the interim governors, Dadani and Ilalum were holding Urusagrig's governorship (Mariani and Valeri 2026). Ur-mes does not appear to have been resident in Urusagrig during these years. Perhaps he was sent elsewhere by the king, either as a punishment, or, more likely, to undertake important tasks elsewhere (Revkin and Ahram 2020).

Table 1. Tablets concerning the Governor Ur-mes in the city of Urusaĝrig by date

<u>Ensi2</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Provenance</u>	<u>Select References</u>	<u>Texts No.</u>
Ur-mes	AS 9	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 0165;164; 146	3
Ur-mes	SS 1	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 0150;151; CUSAS 40-2,1492	3
Ur-mes	SS 3	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 0240;236;234	4
Ur-mes	SS 4	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 0291; CUSAS 40-2 1018	9
Ur-mes	SS 5	Urusaĝrig	CUSAS 40-2 1393;472;488	5
Ur-mes	SS 6	Urusaĝrig	CUSAS 40-202; 503;839;	11
Ur-mes	SS 7	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 416; CUSAS 40-411; 503;839.	9
Ur-mes	SS 8	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 444; CUSAS 40-114.	4
Ur-mes	SS 9	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 524;532;979;	10
Ur-mes	IS 1	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 634; CUSAS 40-541;1719	7
Ur-mes	IS02	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 711; CUSAS 40-644;	7
Ur-mes	IS03	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 1079; CUSAS 40-338;	9
Ur-mes	IS04	Urusaĝrig	Nisaba 15/2 982;984	2

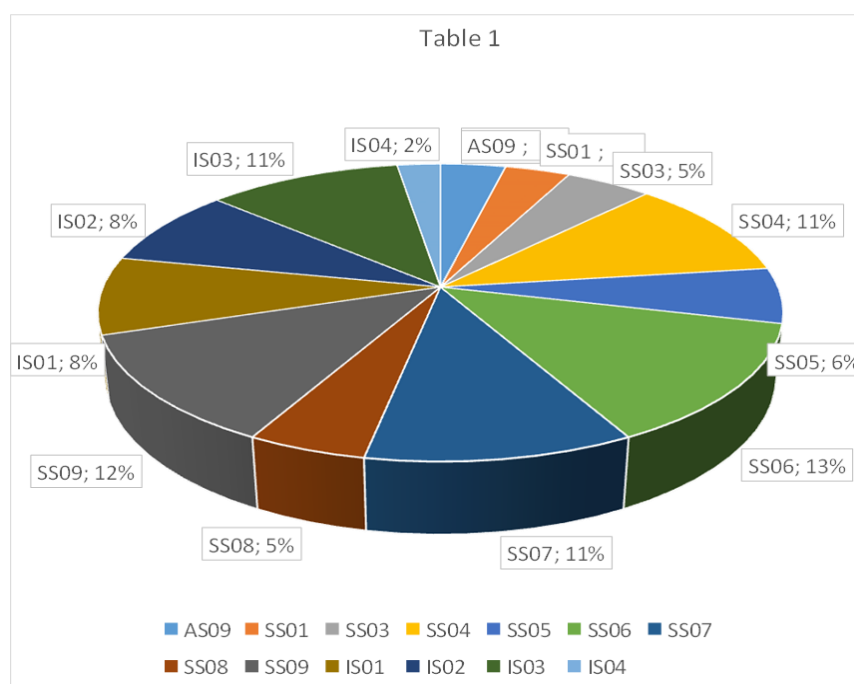


Figure 1. Concerning the Governor Ur-mes in the city of Urusaĝrig by date

Did Urusagrig Have a Special Status with regard to Provincial Taxation (bala)?

Urusagrig was an important location well before the Third Dynasty of Ur: for example, two Sargonic seals show us that in Sargonic times, Naram-Sin appointed one of his own sons as governor there (Steinkeller 2022:2). Was it unusual in Sargonic administration for a prince to be appointed ensi2 ? Thirty years ago, this did seem to

be the case, but evidence that has since come to light suggests five other cities in the north of the Land or the Diyala area were in fact administered by princes serving as governors in the late Sargonic period (Foster 1993: 28, Schrakamp 2020: 634). The close connection between Urusagrig's governance and the royal family in the late Sargonic period was not then unique, but still is worth stressing, as when we arrive in the Ur III period, we see an especially close connection between that city and the royal family. From late in Shulgi's reign on, kings frequently visited Urusagrig. Urusagrig's royal palace in late Ur III times had certain trappings of royalty, such as lions (at least from SS5 onwards) (Such-Gutiérrez 2019: 433). Quite possibly these lions were in Urusagrig only when the king was too (Such-Gutiérrez 2019:436). The royal visits seem to most frequently have been in month three, though visits in months nine or ten are also well attested (Mariani and Valeri 2026).

Urusagrig contained sanctuaries dedicated to the worship of Shulgi, Amar-Sin and Shu-Sin (Molina, forthcoming) (Kaplan 2020). Urusagrig must have been a bustling center full of travellers headed to and coming from places like Der, Shimashki, Kimash and so on. The numerous "ration" texts are not of course records of rations handed to travelers to take with them on their journey, as Owen already noted, but rather luxurious, meat-centered soups and foods that must have been consumed in Urusagrig itself (Owen 2013: 93).

Urusagrig imported a good deal of barley. All those boat trips from Umma that have been so extensively analyzed with regard to the question of Urusagrig's location can also be considered from another angle – the boats seem to mainly have been laden with barley grown in Umma and then transported up to Urusagrig. Presumably then Urusagrig compensated Umma with goods in return (Kaplan 2020).

Despite having so many tablets from the Third Dynasty of Ur, our records are far from complete. We know a great deal about the system of provincial taxation (*bala*) over a period of about forty years (Sharlach 2004). Every month of a given year was divided up amongst the provinces for *bala* duty, that is, being financially responsible for the animal sacrifices in the main shrines in the capitals. Most provinces had one month per year; Girsu, being a city state with three cities within it, often bore three months of *bala* duty. Small or poorer provinces might split a single month (Sharlach 2004). Reconstructing the roster or calendar of which province was assigned which month in any given year in the Ur III period is a work in progress: we know a good deal, but blanks still remain in our knowledge (Steinkeller 2022).

While our knowledge of the roster remains incomplete, it is nevertheless perhaps significant that the province of Urusagrig never appears on this list until quite late in the Ur III state, in the year SS4. For example, in a tablet from Princeton covering equids and sheep and goats received by the Puzrish-Dagan official Abba-šagga in Amar-Sin years 7 and 8 from *ensi2s* and *šabras*, Ilalum the *ensi2* of Urusagrig contributed a total of 484 sheep and goats as *šu-gid2*, showing they did contribute animals to the government, but we may contrast that to the payments from Umma's *ensi2* in the same tablet, which were specially called *bala*. Some have followed a reconstructed transliteration of an exceedingly broken line in a tablet from Amar-Sin 3 to indicate Ur-mes was governor of Urusagrig already in that year and paid *bala*. However, the signs really are not there. *Bala* is clear on the line drawing (Abed,

Abdulmuhsin, and Alkhwalidi 2022). The line seems to read bala u[r]?-[x] en[si2] [x]-PA.ALki. A reconstruction of Ur-mes ensi2 Urusagrig is not impossible but perhaps one should be cautious in the absence of other evidence that Ur-mes was governor that early or that Urusagrig paid bala prior to the middle of Shu-Sin's reign. Urusagrig's bala is first securely attested in SS4 and SS5 as month 1, SS9 as month 11, and Ibbi-Sin 2 as month ten (Niblock 2021). Thus, it seems that Urusagrig's most frequent month to be holding bala duty was either month one or month ten. Interestingly, prior to SS4, it was the province of Girsu that most frequently was assigned bala in both months one and ten (Zwaid and Cripps 2020).

The southern provinces of Umma and Girsu were hard hit by salinization rising in arable fields, which first reduced crop yields in the later Ur III period, especially in the reign of Shu-Sin, eventually rendering the fields completely unusable for the staple crop, barley (Jameel et al. 2020). One wonders whether reduced agricultural capacity in Umma and Lagash led to their being omitted from the bala roster in crisis years as a form of tax relief, while other northern provinces like Urusagrig were used to fill in the gap. This remains speculative.

Another unique role that Urusagrig played in network of provincial taxation was as a helper province. When a province in the Ur III state could not make its own payments, they seem to have turned to Urusagrig for help (Jadah et al. 2020). For example, in Amar-Sin year 7, month 12: this was probably a bala month for Girsu, as Girsu very frequently was assigned months 11 and 12. But here we see Ilalum the ensi2 of Urusagrig instead paying nig2 gu3-de2 bala-še3 mu ensi2 gir2-suki-še3. A very badly broken and now undated account from Girsu also shows us Urusagrig helping Girsu with its bala, with large quantities of grain over many years: 10 guru7 [gur] uru-sag-ri[g7][ki]-ta šu ur-dlamma -ka mu-7-1/2-am3; 10 guru7 gur uru-sag-rig7ki-ta bala iti 3-am3 ba-du8 šu a-la-LUL mu 2-1/2-am3 (Ali 2021).

Similarly, in AS8, when Urusagrig was not known to be assigned to any given month of bala, the governor of Urusagrig helped Babylon pay its bala by providing 9 fattened sheep according to OIP 121.108 (AS8 month 11 day 9). In SS1, Ur-mes the ensi2 provided 2 gur of še-lu2, coriander, mu-bala-a-še3 to a representative of Gudea, the ensi2 of Kutha. Coriander is a potent spice so 2 gur is a surprisingly large quantity. In SS2, a similar situation arose. We don't know that Urusagrig had a month of bala that year, but two tablets show Urusagrig paid bala on behalf of Marad and Eshnunna. These are MVN 20.100, in which 50 gur of grain was paid on behalf of the ensi2 of Marad by Ur-mes of Urusagrig, and MVN 15. 134, dated to SS2 month 8 day 30 shows 97 lambs via a herdsman from Ur-mes ensi2 uru-sag-rig7ki-ta, on account of the Bala of Eshnunna, mu bala ensi2 eš3-nun-naki-še3 (Tashtoush et al. 2024).

Table I below (IM 226569) shows a similar situation: Ur-mes of Urusagrig helped Ibni-Adad, governor of Urum, with his bala payment in the form of barley. Even more examples of Urusagrig helping other provinces pay their bala can be listed. In Ibbi-Sin 1, Ur-mes paid Sippar's bala, as shown by AUCT 3.67 (IS1 month 1). Urusagrig again helped Sippar pay its bala with 80 animals according to JCS 14.111.15, unfortunately undated. Urusagrig also helped the ensi2 of Umma in that same year, as shown by Nisaba 15/2.677, according to which Ur-mes provided more

than 760 gur of grain to Dadaga the provincial governor of Umma as the purchase-price for 1904 sheep mu-bala-a-še³ (Cohen 2020).

There are other attestations of one provinces other than Urusagrig stepping in to help one another: e.g. YOS 4.74 (The year formula could represent S46 or AS2) – Puš and Kuara stepped in to help cover the bala of the ensi² of Babylon. But these are very rare. So perhaps as a working hypothesis one could suggest that Urusagrig's governor's domain bore many royal expenses in the course of its regular administration of the royal residences, royal entertainments, royal shrines and diplomatic travellers, and so perhaps often did not also have to pay a month of bala as other provinces did (Zarei 2020). However, it may have been expected to pitch in when other provinces fell short (Dhaher 2020). As barley harvests in the southern provinces like Girsu experienced serious salinity problems, Urusagrig may have been more regularly added to the bala roster in order to give relief.

CONCLUSION

Urusagrig is a fascinating location that has the potential to add new facets to our understanding of the Ur III state. Studying tablets repatriated to Iraq with the proper permissions from Iraqi authorities allows the field to move forward with new evidence, without potentially contributing to art market activities. One may hope that Iraqi teams may visit Tell al-Wilayah and Umm al-Hafriyat in order to gather more information that may help us break the logjam in the debate over which tell the Urusagrig tablets derived from. Ur-mes was a provincial governor with a long (though interrupted) tenure at Urusagrig. In addition to the usual activities that provincial governors from other Ur III archives engaged in, Ur-mes also supervised the rations for many musicians and almost innumerable emissaries. He may also have been involved in long-distance Gulf trade with his in-law, Pudu. Urusagrig held a special place in the Ur III state as a connection node to Der and locations to the north-east such as Shimaski and Kimash.

Many royal messengers travelled through Urusagrig. The king also had a subsidiary palace there, along with sanctuaries dedicated to the kings and even some of the trappings of the royal court (such as the lions). A few royal family members also may have had estates there, including Waqartum, sister of the king Shu-Sin who was married into the family of Ur-mes. Ur-mes' own daughter also had a huge estate of her own. Although our knowledge of the month by month tax roster remains incomplete and new material could alter our reconstructions, on the basis of the material available now, it seems that Urusagrig's tax burden was a little different than many heartland provinces, especially in the earlier phases of the Ur III period. It did not apparently often have its own month of bala service, but instead regularly helped other provinces. However, as the period started coming to an end, later in the reign of Shu-Sin, it did often have its own month of bala service, perhaps even shouldering some of the triple burden that the now troubled Girsu province had previously borne.

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