

Foreword

Workshops devoted to the Ur III period have been a feature of the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* roughly every other year beginning in London in 2003. In 2009 we asked the community of Neo-Sumerian scholars to convene the following year in Madrid before the *Rencontre* in Barcelona so that we could have a longer and more specialized meeting. The results exceeded our expectations. The meeting had more than 50 participants and included eight topical sessions and 27 papers. The program of the conference can be found at the end of this volume.

This volume collects the proceedings of this three-day conference held in Madrid in July 2010, and it highlights the vitality of the study of late third millennium BC Mesopotamia. The 21 contributions included here cover a broad range of topics offering new texts, new interpretations, and new understandings of the language, culture, and history of the Ur III period (2112 – 2004 BC). The present and future of Neo-Sumerian studies are important not only to the field of Assyriology but also to wider inquiries into the ancient world. The extant archives offer insight into some of the earliest cities and one of the earliest kingdoms in the historical record. The era of the Third Dynasty of Ur is also probably the best-attested century in antiquity. This imposes a responsibility on our small community to make this material accessible to a broad and interdisciplinary audience in the humanities and related fields. We believe this volume is a solid step in this direction.

The Ur III textual corpus has been the subject of intensive analysis for about a century. In this volume, once settled questions are reopened and new questions are framed concerning topics as broad as authority, geography, and labor. Many of the contributors not only sum up the results of their current research, but they also chart a course for future work for themselves and their colleagues. Though most of the contributions are offered in English, the authors represent an international gathering of specialists on the Neo-Sumerian period.

As editors we encouraged presenters to bring their papers to press and to take into account the lively discussion that took place in Madrid. We gave authors a great deal of latitude in terms of the length of their published contributions. We sought to establish consistency in many areas while honoring the conventions adopted by each author. We respected author preferences in transliterations and onomastics. At the same time, we tried to establish some uniformity in the presentation of commonly known place names, such as Šuruppak (*vs.* Šurubag), as well as divine and royal names, such as Ur-Namma (*vs.* Ur-Nammu), but we have deferred to individual authors if they maintained a clear preference for a less common usage.

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