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# The Scholar in His House: Scribal Material in Context in Late Uruk Private Houses

**Abstract:** The excavation of private houses in Uruk has led to the discovery of scholarly tablets in an archaeological context. The sector concerned, named Ue XVIII, shows three different levels of occupation (II, III and IV) with houses belonging to two successive families of exorcists: the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta (end of the fifth century, beginning of the fourth) and Ekur-zakir (fourth to third centuries). The texts and the objects linked to them enable us to understand that these houses were those of master exorcists who taught their knowledge to students, primarily their sons, in their houses. However, the oldest of the two families disappeared at the end of the Achaemenid period. It is possible that this event was contemporary with the destruction of the house on Level III by fire. Although this concomitance cannot be established with certainty, it is possible that this violent fire is to be placed in parallel with a possible revolt of the city of Uruk against the Achaemenid power, which would then have been put down by Darius III.

## 1 Introduction

Late Babylonia, i.e. the Achaemenid, Hellenistic and Parthian periods from the end of the fifth century<sup>1</sup> to the beginning of the common era, has provided numerous scholarly tablets, notably at Babylon and Uruk. Many of these objects were unearthed by clandestine diggers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were sold on the antiquities market, and arrived in large numbers in museums around the world. There are approximately 3,500 tablets dated or datable from Babylon and 1,500 from Uruk relating to the very end of the Achaemenid period and the Hellenistic and Parthian periods.<sup>2</sup>

However, few sites have been officially excavated for as long as Uruk. Indeed, German archaeologists began their first official excavations on 14 November 1912. They had to stop in 1913 and resumed only in 1928 for regular excavations until 1939. Excavations resumed again after World War II and have continued to this day under the direction of Margaret van Ess (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut). Tab-

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1 All dates are BCE.

2 Monerie 2018, 6–17.

lets were unearthed at the site of Warka, ancient Uruk, both in sanctuaries and in private houses. This distribution sheds light on the origin and use of private tablet collections.<sup>3</sup> Within the topic of the materiality of texts, I would like to introduce two private houses containing scholarly tablets that constituted some sort of ‘libraries’<sup>4</sup> or, at least, private collections of scholarly tablets.<sup>5</sup>

These two sets of tablets were found, stratigraphically, one above the other, the older one dating to the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century and the later one to the end of that century and the third century. These two successive buildings belonged to two families of exorcists, *āšipu* in Akkadian, and document the scribal practices in private houses of people who otherwise worked for the nearby sanctuaries.<sup>6</sup> One of the problems still unsolved is the length of time the house belonged to the oldest family, the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta, which disappeared during the fourth century, before the arrival of Alexander.<sup>7</sup> This issue has been addressed regularly by many authors. However, the lack of documentation does not allow us to answer this question. According to the data of literary and scholarly tablets, the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta were active one generation before Darius II (423–405) and at least one generation after his reign (see Fig. 1a).<sup>8</sup> The descendants of Ekur-zakir are attested without doubt from Philip III Arrhidaeus (323–316) and still in the third century (see Fig. 1b). The administrative and economic texts reinforce this chronological framework.

It is ultimately quite rare to have not one but two collections of scholarly tablets kept in the same place, one following the other. The aim of this article is to find out whether, by working on the tablets and their material context, it is possible to reconstruct the history of these families and, more generally, of Uruk in the fourth century.

After the presentation of the finds themselves, their state of preservation and the problems encountered in reconstructing the different tablet collections, I will address the purpose of these scholarly tablets kept in private houses. Fi-

3 Frahm 2002, 81–85.

4 For a presentation of what Assyriologists call a ‘library’, see Robson 2019b.

5 For the excavations in Ue XVIII (the sector of the houses), see Hunger 1972; Hunger 1976; Schmidt 1972a; Schmidt 1972b and Schmidt 1979; Hoh 1979; Sack 1979.

6 While the inhabitants of the second house, the descendants of Ekur-zakir, worked for the Rēš temple, the exact situation of those of the first house, the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta, remains unknown (Robson 2019a, 223 and 232). Indeed, there is a hiatus between the time when the new main temple of Uruk, the Rēš temple attested in the beginning of the third century, and the assured end of the use of the Eanna in the fifth century.

7 Clancier 2009, 52–53.

8 See Frahm 2002, 79, for this family clan.

nally, the transition from one house to another and from one family to another raises the question of the reasons for this development.

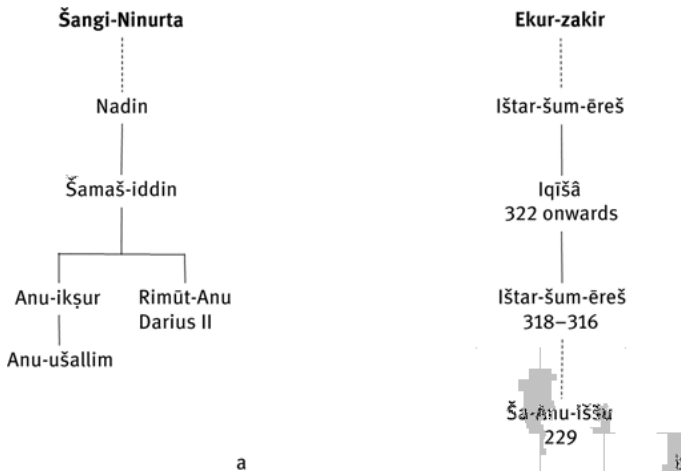


Fig. 1a–b: The descendants of Šangi-Ninurta tree (a). The descendants of Ekur-zakir tree (b).

## 1.1 The discovery

Random discoveries on the site of Warka has advanced our knowledge of private libraries compared to temple libraries. The archaeological sector of the temple was regularly looted, while the private houses were probably less easy to identify. Indeed, many of the tablets originally preserved in the libraries of the Rēš and Ešgal (also called Irigal) temples were unearthed by illicit excavators and then sold.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, we do not know their initial context of discovery. However, the German excavators brought to light a collection of tablets containing the library of the *kalûs*, the lamentation priest of the Rēš temple.<sup>10</sup> The two best preserved and documented finds were unearthed in another part of the

<sup>9</sup> Thus, tablets belonging to Iqīšā (Ue XVIII, Level II of the house) or to Anu-bēlšunu (Le XVI3, *kalûs*'s library of the Rēš temple) entered the collections of some museums, such as the Louvre, at the end of the nineteenth century after having been bought from tablet dealers in Baghdad (e.g. TCL 6, 17, 34 and 50). The reconstitution of the Uruk libraries has often been carried out by integrating these tablets with the collections discovered in regular archaeological excavations. These are theoretical reconstitutions and not tangible ones, as the colophon of a tablet does not always indicate its actual place of preservation (see *infra* 3.3 for examples).

<sup>10</sup> This library will not be discussed here. See Clancier 2009, 73–80 and 99–101.

city, sector Ue XVIII to the east, south-east of Uruk.<sup>11</sup> Today, it is commonly referred to as the house or houses of the exorcists or *āšipu*. Official excavations were undertaken in this area between 1969 and 1972.<sup>12</sup> They revealed several levels of occupation of which three are relevant here (Fig. 2).

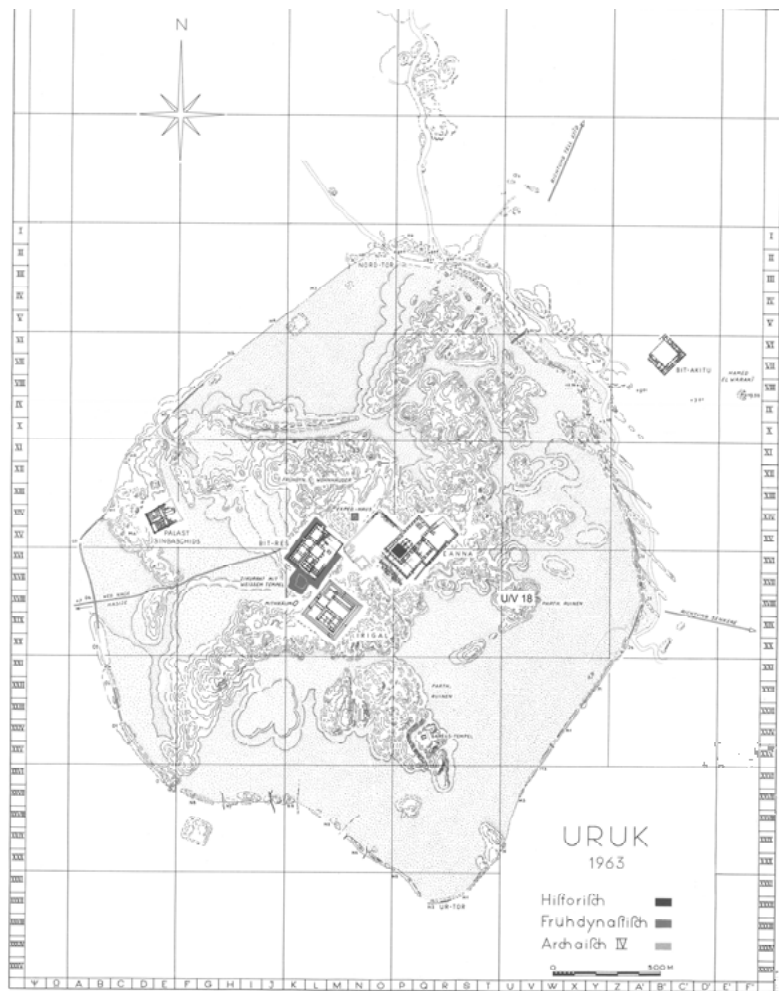


Fig. 2: Hellenistic Uruk, from Lenzen 1965, pl. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Sack 1979, 48–50; Oelsner 1986, 77–97; Pedersén 1998, 207.

<sup>12</sup> Schmidt 1972b, 56.

## 1.2 The three levels of the exorcists' houses

The houses of the exorcists were located in a sector that was occupied for centuries by scholarly families. We will look at the later levels, but earlier phases, less clear due to stratigraphic upheavals, are also attested up to the sixth century. We will, therefore, focus on the following three levels:

### Level IV

#### Descendants of Šangi-Ninurta

Darius II (423–405) and one generation earlier and one later at least

### Level III

#### Owner unknown

Destroyed by fire, the debris of which marked a clear dividing line with Level II

### Level II

#### Descendants of Ekur-zakir

Philip III Arrhidaeus (323–316) and two generations later and maybe one earlier<sup>13</sup>

### 1.2.1 The house of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta (Level IV)

Level IV, the house of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta,<sup>14</sup> yielded tablets scattered on the floor, and several jars contained tablets in room 4,<sup>15</sup> measuring 2 × 1.6 m. Thirty-two of them were intact – or nearly so – with scholarly content and at least twenty-three legal documents.<sup>16</sup> Other tablets were not kept in a container, but were all piled on top of each other directly on the floor.<sup>17</sup> Ovens have been uncovered in this house and it is possible that they were used to bake tablets, as proposed in the later levels.

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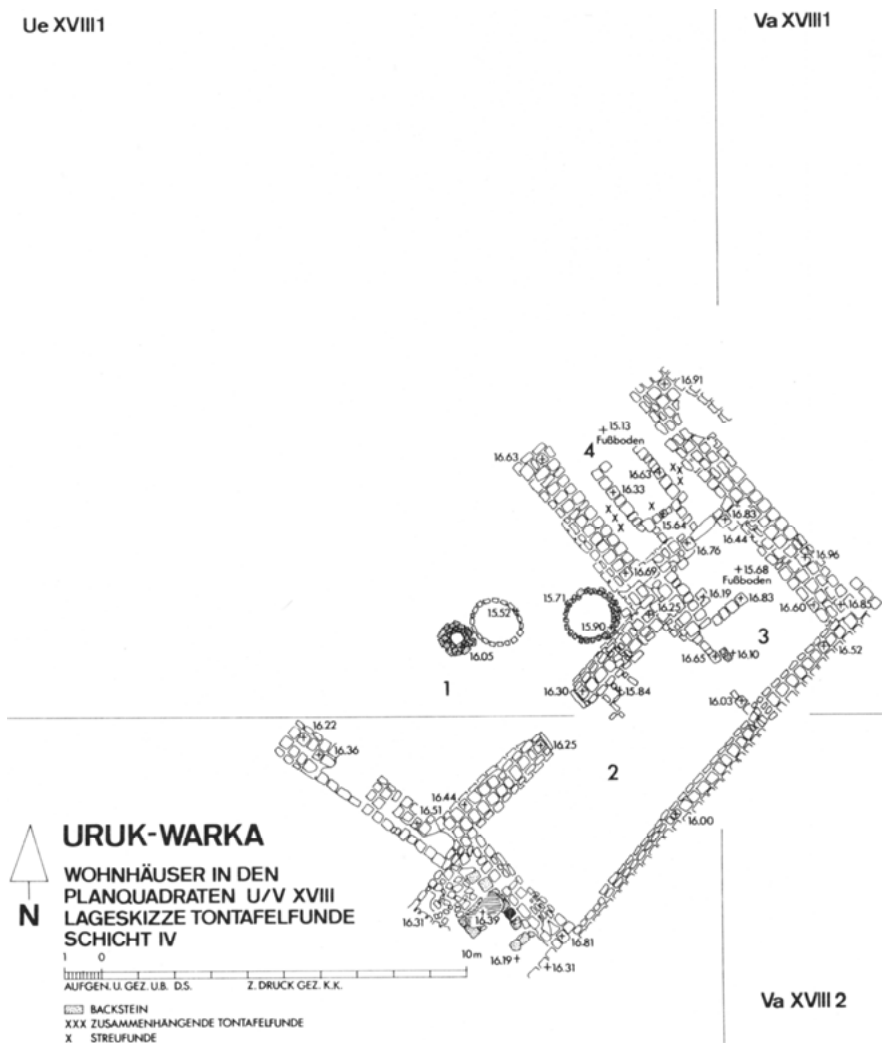
<sup>13</sup> Oelsner 2001, 485.

<sup>14</sup> This family clan is only attested in the texts of the first house (Level IV) and nowhere else in Uruk.

<sup>15</sup> Hoh 1979.

<sup>16</sup> von Weiher 1979, 95.

<sup>17</sup> Sack 1979, 49.



**Fig. 3:** Ue XVIII, Level IV. House of the Šangi-Ninurta family, from Hoh 1979, pl. 70.

The complete reconstitution of the group of tablets belonging to this level remains complicated due to the intrusions of Parthian tombs, which disturbed the different stratigraphic layers. We can still propose that, at least, 131 tablets belonged to Level IV. The period of use of this house is very difficult to ascertain

because very few scholarly tablets are dated and the attribution of the legal texts to the family is debated.<sup>18</sup> Its use, according to the textual and archaeological data, extends from c. 445 until before the Hellenistic period beginning in 331 at Uruk. Anu-ikšur, son of Šamaš-iddin, is the main owner of this collection, but his father, Šamaš-iddin, brother, Rimūt-Anu and son, Anu-ušallim,<sup>19</sup> are also attested. The generation of Anu-ikšur dates to the reign of Darius II (423–405).<sup>20</sup>

### 1.2.2 The house of the descendants of Ekur-zakir (Level II)

Level II contained the best-preserved and most recent stage of the exorcists' houses, but due to erosion, we can only make a very partial picture of this house.<sup>21</sup>

A niche in the north-west wall of room 1 was filled with baked scholarly tablets of various sizes. They were placed edge to edge. To the best of my knowledge, there was no record of the arrangement of the tablets in relation to each other. It seems impossible even today to know which tablets were kept in this niche.<sup>22</sup>

Another group of tablets was found in the filling to the south-west of the room. In addition, fragments of baked tablets were scattered on the floors of other rooms.<sup>23</sup> In its early state, room 3 had an oven with a baked brick base, near which other baked tablets were found.<sup>24</sup> Four roughly shaped tablets and three more carefully shaped ones were also found against its north-west wall. The most likely function of the oven, according to the excavators, was the baking of the tablets.<sup>25</sup> It seems, therefore, that the scribes of the house were involved in all stages of the production, from the shaping of the tablets, their

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**18** On the question of archival texts, their dating and attribution in late Babylonian Uruk (and elsewhere), see Joannès 2001; Hackl and Oelsner 2017; Hackl and Oelsner 2018 and *infra* 2.2.3.

**19** Anu-ušallim (l. r.56') wrote the first tablet of the series *Šumma izbu* (SpTU 3, 90) for his father Anu-ikšur.

**20** The tablet SpTU 5, 232 shows that Rimūt-Anu, brother of Anu-ikšur, was active under Darius II.

**21** Hoh 1979, 29.

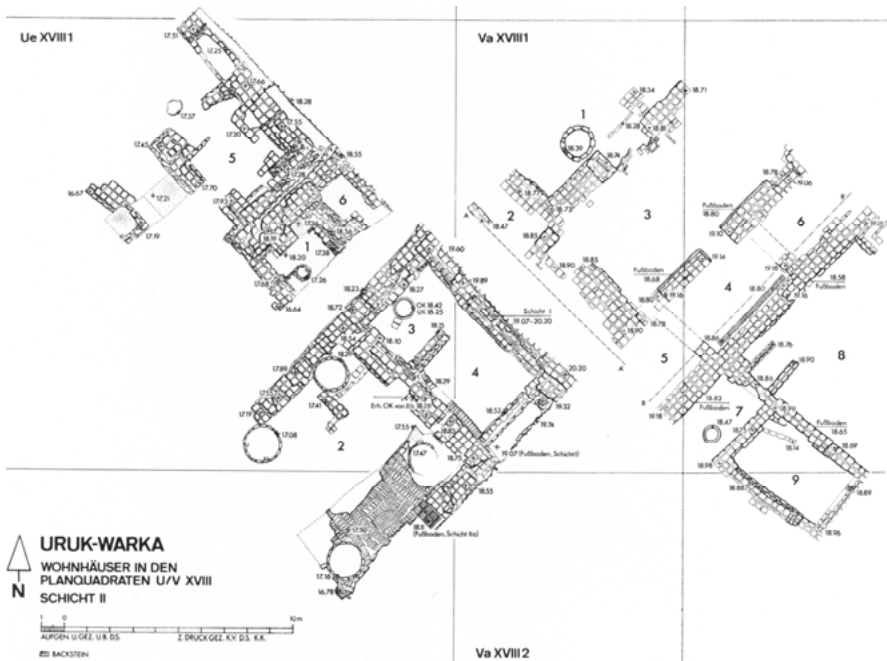
**22** Hermann Hunger does not give this data either in the excavation publication (1972) or in the tablets' edition (Hunger 1976, 9–13).

**23** Hoh 1979, 30.

**24** Hoh 1979, 29.

**25** Hoh 1979, 30.

writing and their baking for preservation. There was a 10 cm layer of ashes, perhaps resulting from the cleaning of the oven, in the adjoining room 4.



**Fig. 4:** Ue XVIII, Level II. House of the Ekur-zakir family, from Hoh 1979, pl. 68.

It is possible to assign 157 tablets to Level II.<sup>26</sup> The period of use of this house extends, at most, from the beginning of the Hellenistic period to the end of the third century (229).<sup>27</sup> The main protagonist, Iqīšā, son of Ištār-šum-ēreš, descendant of Ekur-zakir, is to be dated from the reign of Philip III Arrhidaeus (323–316) to the beginning of Seleucus I (305–281)<sup>28</sup> and the family is attested there until the end of the third century. This family clan was also devoted to exorcism (*āšipūtu*).

**26** Clancier 2009, 84–85 and 400–406. Robson 2019a, 229, proposes 230 tablets for the descendants of Ekur-zakir of the Level II, adding administrative and legal texts. It is quite difficult to assign a tablet without dating or colophon and not discovered in connection with a floor to a specific house due to the disturbance of the later Parthian graves. This situation explains the differences between evaluations from one author to another.

**27** SpTU 4, 157.

**28** Legal texts SpTU 5, 308, 309–311.



### 1.2.3 The house of the descendants of Ekur-zakir (Level III)

The older house (Level IV), the one of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta, was voluntarily levelled and totally rebuilt (Level III). No hiatus has been identified between the two Levels IV and III: the complete reconstruction was probably necessitated by the decayed state of the building.

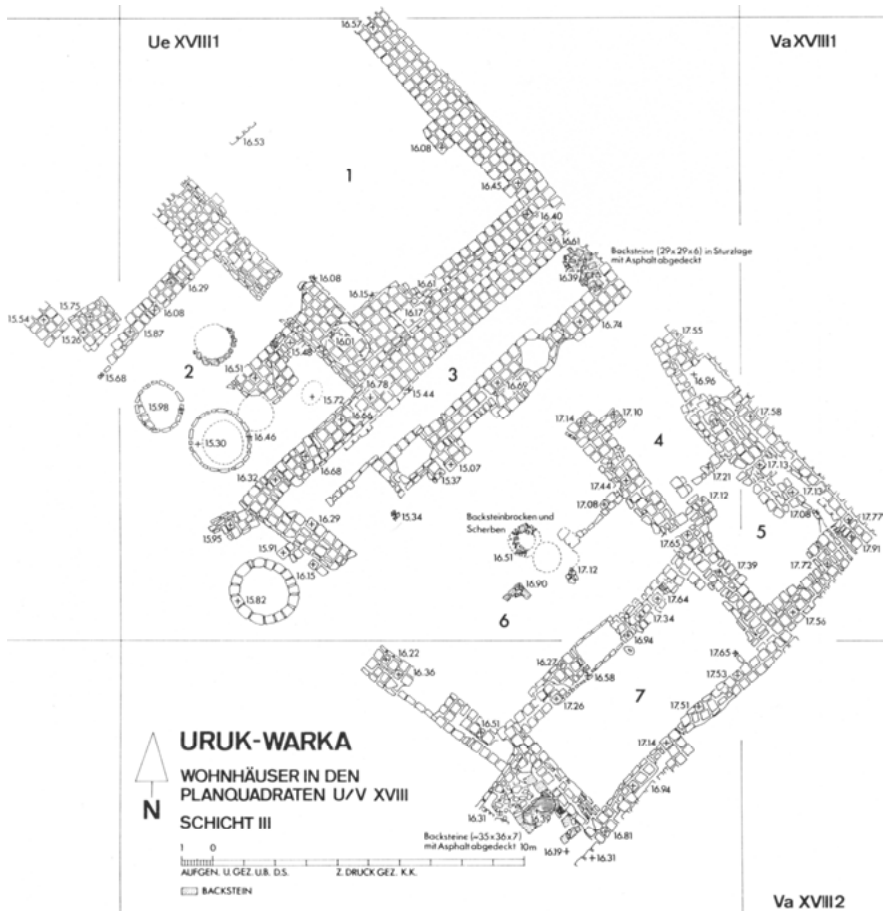


Fig. 5: Ue XVIII, Level III, from Hoh 1979, pl. 69.

Level III separated Levels II and IV. It was very disturbed.<sup>29</sup> An asphalted working surface, built with bricks, was to the south-west of room 7, near a Parthian grave. The excavators uncovered small preformed proto-tablets of fine, dark clay on and around this surface. They also found stylets and flat bone ‘needles’ as well as unbaked uninscribed tablets with lines already drawn in room 3, without recording their precise location.<sup>30</sup> Level III was generally, and despite the details mentioned above, heavily disturbed by Parthian burials to such an extent that the tablets were scattered there without any order or real context.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the mixes of tablets between the collections of Levels II, III and IV are numerous. This leads to 119 tablets that cannot be attributed to one house or another. Some of them could have come from Level III. Moreover, the house was destroyed by fire, whose debris marked a rupture with Level II.<sup>32</sup> The difficulty of attributing tablets to Level III may be due to the fact that the house was perhaps deliberately set on fire and possibly emptied of valuables and useful items, such as the tablets, it might have contained.

So, the problem is to understand which family occupied Level III. Was it the last generations of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta (Anu-ušallim and his potential descendants?) or those of Ekur-zakir (maybe the father of Iqīšâ?)? A few dated tablets were found there but apparently without connection to a floor, which would make it possible to be certain that they belonged to this level. Nevertheless, two dated legal tablets have been attributed to Level III: SpTU 5, 307 and SpTU 5, 295. They are from Artaxerxes IV (338–336), year 0,<sup>33</sup> and Darius III (336–330), year 4, respectively. Although this last text could also be dated to Darius II (423–405), the dating by Darius III is proposed by Joachim Oelsner<sup>34</sup> because he considers that the same scribe, Anu-erība, son of Ištar-šum-ēreš, wrote the two texts, which, thus, should be dated within a limited span of time. However, Egbert von Weiher, the editor of the tablets, does not read Anu-erība

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**29** Sack 1979, 48–49; Kose 1998, 385–386. Dorothee Sack points out that it was not possible to properly record the architectural remains of Level III due to a lack of time at the end of the thirtieth excavation campaign. Arno Kose has taken up the issue again, but the archaeological data remains difficult to interpret. He reports the existence of fire-reddened Level III walls in room 8 and Sack, before him, spoke of a fire layer, the debris of which marked a dividing line with the later Level II.

**30** Hoh 1979, 28.

**31** Oelsner 1986, 141–144.

**32** Sack 1979, 48–49.

**33** The tablet SpTU 5, 307 is dated to the last year of Artaxerxes III's reign (338), year 21, and by the inaugural year (*rēš šarrūti*) of Artaxerxes IV, i.e. his year 0.

**34** Oelsner 2001, 485, followed by Hackl and Oelsner 2017, 75.

in SpTU 5, 295, but Bel-erība. The copy unambiguously shows a ‘<sup>d</sup>en’ for ‘Bel’ and not a ‘<sup>d</sup>60’ for ‘Anu’.<sup>35</sup> In order to decide between the two readings, it will be necessary to go and check the tablet in Baghdad. For the time being, it seems reasonable to give some credit to von Weiher’s copy and, thus, consider that we have two different scribes.

Joachim Oelsner<sup>36</sup> and Johannes Hackl,<sup>37</sup> following him, have proposed that both tablets were written by a member of the family of the descendants of Ekur-zakir. Indeed, Anu-erība and Bel-erība (whose name has been discarded by the authors) call themselves ‘son of Ištar-šum-ēreš’. This name is well-known for the descendants of Ekur-zakir since it is the one of both the father and the son of Iqīšâ, the main protagonist of the Level II house. Therefore, Oelsner proposed potentially identifying Anu-erība as a brother of Iqīšâ.<sup>38</sup> It is quite possible, but Ištar-šum-ēreš is a very common name in Uruk and without the ancestor’s name, which is absent, and in the very disturbed archaeological context of Level III, it is risky to attribute these two texts to the last resident family. Indeed, the descendants of Ekur-zakir are only known to have been active in the house (Level II) from Philip III Arrhidaeus (323–316) onwards. In that case, the Ekur-zakir clan would have occupied the sector at least fifteen years earlier (which is not impossible) and they would have lived in the house that belonged to a previous level (Level III) which was destroyed by fire.

The attribution of this Level III house to the descendants of Ekur-zakir is all the more difficult to establish because at least one text, SpTU 2, 56,<sup>39</sup> found with the two tablets is ascribable to the Level IV corpus.<sup>40</sup> SpTU 2, 56 is a contract written in Babylon by Libluṭ, son of Marduk-naṣir, descendant of Gimil-Nanaya, and dated to the beginning of the reign of the Babylonian king Amēl-Marduk (562). This document must be related to the other tablets from descendants of Gimil-Nanaya that were found in Level IV in the group bearing the excavation number W 23293.<sup>41</sup> Scholarly tablets of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta were

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<sup>35</sup> von Weiher 1998, 191.

<sup>36</sup> Oelsner 2001, 485.

<sup>37</sup> Hackl and Oelsner 2017, 75; Hackl and Oelsner 2018, 700, n. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Oelsner 2001, 485.

<sup>39</sup> von Weiher 1979, 96–97.

<sup>40</sup> This group of tablets registered during the excavation as W 22585 included other scholarly tablets that are not datable (SpTU 4, 194, 202 and SpTU 5, 259).

<sup>41</sup> Jursa 2005, 147–148. The tablets of the descendants of Gimil-Nanaya discovered in Level IV and recorded as W 23293 are the following: SpTU 5, 286 (W 23293/06), 287 (W 23293/20), 291 (W 23293/03), 299 (W 23293/09), 300 (W 23293/07) and 312 (W 23293/22).

also found in this group,<sup>42</sup> and the attribution to Level IV is not doubtful due to the direct contact of these objects with the floor. It is not known how the tablets of the descendants of Gimil-Nanaya arrived in the house of the exorcists, but the discovery of texts belonging to this family in the group W 22585 of Level III reveals that the tablets were mixed together. Thus, the SpTU 5, 307 and SpTU 5, 295 contracts may also come from the other levels and, based on these dated tablets, it remains impossible to assign Level III to either of the two families.<sup>43</sup>

## 2 Origin, use and destination of the tablets of the exorcists' houses

### 2.1 Private and temple scholarly tablet collections in Uruk

The collections of tablets unearthed in the houses of the exorcists of Uruk were not intended as a reference collection. Indeed, roughly speaking, sanctuaries in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods can be considered to have kept tablets that could serve as a local reference collection. It is not clear what form such libraries took, or even whether they existed as a coherent unit, or if they consisted of a series of storage rooms that, over the whole of a temple, constituted the library (*gerginakku*) of the god or goddess.<sup>44</sup> Regarding the Rēš temple, the tablets were said to integrate the 'Properties of the god Anu and the goddess Antu' (*makkūr Anu u Antu*).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Clancier 2009, 58–59. These are the tablets SpTU 4, 161 (W 23293/14), SpTU 5, 231 (W 23293/4, this text is a copy of the *Exorcist's Handbook* written by Rimūt-Anu, brother of Anu-ikšur, descendant of Šangi-Ninurta, and dated to Darius II), 243 (W 23293/34), 257 (W 23293/19), 261 (W 23293/5) and 268 (W 23293/13).

<sup>43</sup> Robson 2019a, 229, proposes that the house was reinhabited by the descendants of Ekur-zakir family c. 400. However, as we saw, following Oelsner (2001, 485), the oldest possible tablet of this family in that house dates to the first year of Artaxerxes IV (338–336) (SpTU 5, 307).

<sup>44</sup> For a presentation of the temple collections, see Robson 2019a, 210–216. She wisely says that 'We are used to thinking of temples' scholarly tablet collections as reference "libraries" of some sort. Recent work, however, has begun to challenge that assumption'. Actually, temples seem to have kept the wider collections of scholarly tablets, but the very rare archaeological attestations of such 'libraries' in Babylonia (in Sippar, Uruk or Babylon for our period) show that we should not expect central libraries in the sanctuaries but storage rooms spread all around the buildings.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, SpTU 1, 2.

The private collections documented at Uruk do not tend to completeness, as a reference collection does. Here, on the contrary, they are oriented towards the activities of their owners, i.e. exorcism, medicine and all the other knowledge that they needed, particularly divination.<sup>46</sup> The goal was to be able to move from the observation of the patient to their ailment, whether it was a treatment of the damage to the body or the supernatural origin of this damage, the two being inextricable. One might think that with these private collections, we have writings used by exorcists for their daily tasks. This is not the case, because when we go deeper into the composition of the collections, we realise that even in the disciplines at the heart of their professions, the tablets/series do not cover the basic and more advanced knowledge necessary for a good daily professional routine.<sup>47</sup> Actually, it seems that these sets of tablets were scholarly archives reflecting teaching activities and the learning of the students for which the owners were responsible. These were primarily their sons, but also the sons of other important families.<sup>48</sup>

In the house of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta, out of seventeen (or eighteen)<sup>49</sup> tablets of the *Sakikkû*, the great reference series for the determination of diagnoses according to the observation of patients, we find that thirteen of them are commentaries<sup>50</sup> and not the text itself.<sup>51</sup> The apprenticeship of the job was indeed done in the house of a master, even if this activity, in the long run, aimed at integrating the professions of the local sanctuaries.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Frahm 2002, 80–85.

<sup>47</sup> See Clancier 2014 for the collection of exorcism (*āšipūtu*) tablets in the house of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta.

<sup>48</sup> Clancier 2009, 90–99, Robson 2019a, 229; Frahm 2020.

<sup>49</sup> SpTU 1, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42; SpTU 3, 100 and perhaps SpTU 5, 254.

<sup>50</sup> SpTU 1, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42; SpTU 3, 100.

<sup>51</sup> One of the reasons behind this specific distribution of texts might be that some apprentice scribes did not belong to the exorcist's household and those pupils kept their tablets and, thus, removed them from the house (I would like to thank Szilvia Sövegjártó for this suggestion). On the other hand, this distribution suggests that the owners of the house did not seek to build up a reference library.

<sup>52</sup> For the liberal activity (outside the temple) of exorcism of Iqīšâ of the descendants of Ekur-zakir, see Frahm 2002, 83–84.

## 2.2 Teaching and learning activities in the exorcists' houses

The commentary texts have been studied by Eckart Frahm<sup>53</sup> and it is not the place here to describe them in detail, but they probably testify for the teaching activities of exorcists in the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods. Thus, Anu-ikšur, descendant of Šangi-Ninurta, left behind several such commentaries. It is possible to divide them schematically into two broad categories: lexical commentaries, dealing with vocabulary, and scholarly and esoteric commentaries, whose purpose is to explain the logic of the texts and the secret knowledge they contain.<sup>54</sup>

The exact mirror image of this teaching activity is that of students learning. Their essential work consists of copying the canonical series, the reference works used in almost all disciplines. And this activity was already well mastered by the students. The two private collections of the Uruk exorcists, Levels IV and II, offer two examples of students' exercises on a same text revealing different levels of apprenticeship. Tablet 16 of the *Sakikkû*, showed that the medical series was used to establish the diagnoses. At the beginning of the text, it is a matter, through observation, of understanding the health of a patient:

(If) he is ill for one day and his head hurts him: heat stroke; hand of the god of his father.

This sunstroke is serious and, according to this series, the patient should die. Moreover, the first thirteen entries of the text list hopeless cases. This is what the well-copied reference text preserved in the house of Anu-ikšur (SpTU 1, 37, Level IV, Achaemenid period) says: 'he will die'. On the other hand, as can be seen in SpTU 2, 44 (Level II, Hellenistic period), the patient's fate is less clear since the scribe hesitates between death and survival: 'he will recover (or) he will die'. Moreover, in the reverse of this text, some words are repeated. In short, the copy is not of high quality. The colophon shows that the tablet was written by a certain Anu-ab-ušur, son of Anu-mukin-apli, descendant of Kurî:

Tablet of Iqīšā, son of Ištār-šum-ēreš, descendant of Ekur-zakir, the exorcist. Hand of (i.e. written by) Anu-ab-ušur, son of Anu-mukin-apli, descendant of Kurî.

<sup>53</sup> See Frahm 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Frahm 2011, 28–58. For explanations of words, see Frahm 2011, 59–85. For commentaries on example from this house, see Clancier 2014, 56–61.

The descendants of Kurī are neither part of the families of exorcists nor of a scholarly family. Perhaps Anu-ab-ušur had not been taught as thoroughly and completely as a member of a family of exorcists.

It can be seen from these examples that the collections of tablets discovered in the exorcists' houses were largely oriented toward teaching, as evidenced by the commentaries or the high-level exercises of students signing their works. Moreover, the presence of an oven shows that some tablets were intended for baking to ensure the best possible preservation as the large unbaked clay tablets were very fragile. It is quite probable that this delicate exercise was also taught in the house, which would explain why tablets with very faulty text were baked.

## 2.3 Storage of the tablets

Some of the best tablets were probably sent to the Rēš temple. Indeed, not all of Iqīšā's tablets (Level II, Hellenistic period) were discovered in his house, but some were found in the storerooms of the Rēš temple, even though they should have been kept in their owner's house:<sup>55</sup>

Long tablet of Iqīšā, son of Ištar-šum-ēreš, descendant of Ekur-zakir, the exorcist. Hand of Ištar-šum-ēreš, his son.

The one who fears Anu, Enlil, and Ea will not take it away, he will not deliberately let it be lost. On the same evening he should return it to the house of its owner. Whoever takes it away, may Adad and Šala take him away.

Month of *nisannu*, day 23, year 8 of Philip, king of the lands (18 April 316).

On the contrary, there are mentions of the Rēš temple in the house of the descendants of Ekur-zakir (Level II). The colophon of tablet SpTU 1, 2, a kind of 'chronicle' of the reign of Šulgi, a king of the late third millennium, says:

Copied, collated and correctly established [according] to its original on wooden board from the Properties of [Anu and Antu.]

[Tablet of] Anu-ah-ušabši, son of Kidin-Anu, descendant of [Ekur-zakir], ex[orcist of Anu and Antu], [*ahu*] *rabū* of the Rēš temple, the Urukian. Hand of [Anu]-balassu-[iqbi, his son].

He [wrote] (this tablet) [for] his understanding, lengthening of his days, his physical and moral well-being and the [stability of his position].

He placed (the tablet) [in] Uruk, inside the Rēš temple, temple of his (Anu) sovereignty.

[Uruk], month of *abu*, day 21, year 61 (15 August 251), Antiochus (II), king of the lands.

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55 Hunger 1968, 42, no. 97.

We have here the opposite case of the first text, which was found in the Rēš temple, whereas it was intended to be kept in the house of the descendants of Ekur-zakir headed by Iqīšâ. Now, on the contrary, SpTU 1, 2 should have been deposited in the Rēš temple but was discovered in the house of the descendants of Ekur-zakir, then owned by the grandson of Iqīšâ. No tablets of the Šangi-Ninurta family clan were discovered in the Rēš temple. Let us now have a look at the history of the shift from one family to another in the exorcists' houses through textual and archaeological data.

### 3 The 'libraries' of the exorcists' houses in the recent history of Uruk

As we saw, while the attribution of Levels IV and II is easy, knowing who lived in the Level III house is problematic. The question is, therefore, whether the end of the occupation of Level IV is contemporary with the disappearance of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta, or is it possible they occupied Level III as well?

This case is really interesting because according to the dating data available, Level III is too recent by at least one generation for the Šangi-Ninurta family and too old by one for the Ekur-zakir family. In this latter case, however, the time difference is less significant. As the level is very disturbed, it is not known whether it was occupied for a long time. The end of Level III is, in any case, to be dated to the very end of the Achaemenid period and one may wonder to what extent to insert this event into a larger story: that of the possible revolts against Persian rule in the south during the years 340–330 could help us to understand it.

#### 3.1 The Rēš temple and the exorcists of the exorcists' houses

The exorcists of Uruk, whether they were descendants of Šangi-Ninurta or of Ekur-zakir, were among the leading urban notables. They were not only scholars whose writings have survived; they were also prompt to intervene in the political destiny of their city through the power of local sanctuaries.

The religious history of Uruk in the fifth and fourth centuries is quite complex and linked to the political history of the city<sup>56</sup> and the region. There is no

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<sup>56</sup> Joannès 2001; Joannès 2006; Kessler 2003; Kessler 2004; Kessler 2018; Beaulieu 2018; Krul 2018; Monerie and Clancier 2023.



explicit reference to the Rēš temple before the third century.<sup>57</sup> Until the beginning of the fifth century, Ištar was the main goddess of Uruk and the main temple, her temple, was the Eanna.<sup>58</sup> At a certain point after the suppression of the revolt at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes (486–465),<sup>59</sup> she was replaced by Anu, god of heavens.<sup>60</sup> The Rēš temple, the new main temple of Uruk, devoted to Anu and his consort Antu, was (re)built at the end of the life of Iqīšâ, descendant of Ekur-zakir (house Level II), during the reigns of Seleucus I (305–281) and Antiochus I (280–261).<sup>61</sup> This explains why some of his tablets were unearthed in the temple, whereas no tablets of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta were. The works on the Rēš temple were led by one of his relatives, Kidin-Anu, also a descendant of Ekur-zakir, under royal patronage, as attested by the tablet YOS 20, 87.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the tablet SpTU 1, 2, unearthed in Level II, was written by the son of this Kidin-Anu.<sup>63</sup> There is no clear archaeological evidence or textual reference to a Rēš temple before the two first Seleucid kings. Any previous buildings could, therefore, have disappeared due to these works, which seem to have been particularly massive. However, this does not mean that there was no Rēš temple previously, as there are some meagre textual indications that it may have been built between the seventh and fifth centuries.<sup>64</sup>

If this was the case, we do not know the exact connection the inhabitants of the first house, the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta (house Level IV), might have had with it. But it is worth noting that some of their texts were placed under the protection of Anu and Antu, the tutelary deities of the Rēš temple.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, it is rather

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<sup>57</sup> Beaulieu 2018, 192, wrote about the question of the cultic landscape before the Seleucids: ‘The shift to Anu in personal names reflects not only a change in religious sensibility or preference for a god, but also a restructuring of the civic religion of Uruk and its institutions. This revisionary process led eventually to the creation of new temples, the Rēš and the Irigal (or Ešgal), well documented in sources from the Seleucid era. To which degree these institutional developments had already taken place in the fifth century cannot easily be determined.’

<sup>58</sup> For the Eanna during the late Babylonian period, see Kleber 2008.

<sup>59</sup> For these revolts, see Waerzeggers 2003–2004; Waerzeggers and Seire 2018.

<sup>60</sup> For the fate of the Babylonian sanctuaries, see Robson 2019a, 222.

<sup>61</sup> The early Seleucids were also very active in northern Babylonia (Stevens 2014).

<sup>62</sup> Text edited and commented in Monerie and Clancier 2023. For the evolution of the support of the Hellenistic monarchs to Babylonian sanctuaries, see Clancier and Monerie 2014.

<sup>63</sup> See *supra* 3.3 for its colophon.

<sup>64</sup> Kose 1998, 134–135, 187; Kose 2013, 334; Beaulieu 2018, 196; Monerie and Clancier 2023.

<sup>65</sup> This is the case of the SpTU 1, 33, l. r.9’–r.12’ tablet, the colophon of which states: ‘Reading out of Anu-ikšur, son of Šamaš-iddin, descendant of Šangi-Ninurta, junior exorcist, Urukean (lu<sub>2</sub>qaq-qar—<sup>d</sup>a-nu<sup>ki</sup>-u). The one who reveres Anu and Antu shall not take (this tablet) away’. The

likely that the exorcists of the Šangi-Ninurta family worked for the Rēš temple, whatever form and name it might have had then, as did the descendants of Ekur-zakir thereafter. This remains to be definitively demonstrated, however, as the state of the Urukean sanctuaries after Xerxes and before Seleucus I is largely a matter of debate today.<sup>66</sup> No identified tablets from the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta ever entered the Rēš temple built in the Hellenistic period, but as the family disappeared at the end of the Achaemenid period, it seems logical.

### 3.2 Temple and revolt in Uruk in the fourth century

The late Achaemenid period seems to have been politically turbulent in southern Babylonia.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the much-damaged *Urukean Kings List* mentions a non-Achaemenid king of Uruk immediately prior to Darius III (336–330), ‘whose second name is Nidin-Bel’. This character has been much discussed,<sup>68</sup> and his historicity sometimes questioned.<sup>69</sup> However, he is present in this list and seems to have been a local usurper either during or at the end of the reign of Artaxerxes IV (338–336).<sup>70</sup>

This reference in the *Urukean Kings List* is not the only evidence for political unrest in the Uruk region in the late 340s and early 330s. Indeed, we can add the existence, still very difficult to understand, of a six-year reign of a certain Ar’a/i/usiūqqa at Larsa.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, a mention in the text YOS 20, 87, exists of the return to Uruk of the cult statues of the Rēš temple that might have been deported at some time before the Hellenistic period. Indeed, the tablet YOS 20, 87, l. 17

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tablet SpTU 1, 126 is placed under the protection of Dari and Duri (r.ii.57: mud <sup>d</sup>du-ri<sub>2</sub> u <sup>d</sup>da-[ri<sub>2</sub> la<sub>3</sub> i<sub>ir</sub>-ta]-<sup>r</sup>ab<sub>2</sub>-<sup>r</sup>bal), mother and father of Anu (Frayne and Stuckey 2021, 71).

<sup>66</sup> Beaulieu 2018; Robson 2019a, 187–192.

<sup>67</sup> See the short presentation of Safaee 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Hackl and Oelsner 2018, 702–703. The authors analyse the possibility of a second name for an Achaemenid ruler but ultimately reject the idea.

<sup>69</sup> The *Urukean Kings List* is badly preserved but there is no doubt that Nidin-Bel is present. However, Amélie Kuhrt rejects the existence of this ruler just before Darius III as a scribal error (Kuhrt 2007, 425–426).

<sup>70</sup> The last dated tablet discovered at Uruk before the reign of Darius III is from the first full year of Artaxerxes IV. It is VAT 16476 published by Hackl and Oelsner 2017, 67–69 and 92.

<sup>71</sup> Tablet BRM 2, 51. See Joannès 2001, 257. Oelsner 2003 proposed understanding the name Ar’a/i/usiūqqa as a form of Arrhidaeus but cannot explain most of the name (‘-siūqqa’). Moreover, the appellation of a Hellenistic king (Philip III) by his sole personal name would be a hapax, which means that, according to the data available, it seems difficult to reject the existence of a king unknown to us. Francis Joannès dates it to the end of the Achaemenid period. It is difficult to confirm this hypothesis that contributes to the reflection on the political troubles of the end of the Achaemenid period in southern Babylonia.

refers to the transfer (*abāku*) of divine statues to Uruk as well as the return (*tāru*) of something related to the gods towards the city (l. 20). The use of these verbs, which contrasts with the mere ‘entry’ (*erēbu*) of the divinity into the renovated temple after a temporary sojourn in a nearby temple usually recorded in the cuneiform sources strongly suggests that the cult statues installed in the *cella* of the Rēš after the temple’s second building phase were not in Uruk in the first half of the 280s BC.<sup>72</sup>

Another document, TCL 6, 38, refers to tablets related to the cult of Anu and the Urukean goddesses and gods that Kidin-Anu, descendant of Ekur-zakir,<sup>73</sup> brought back from Elam, as said by the copyist Šamaš-eṭir in the colophon:<sup>74</sup>

Hand of Šamaš-eṭir, son of Ina-qibit-Anu, son of Šibqat-Anu.<sup>75</sup> Writing board of the cultic ordinances of Anu (*paraš anūtu*), of the holy purification rites (and) the ritual regulations of kingship, together with the purification rites of the gods of the Rēš temple, the Irigal (Ešgal), the Eanna and the (other) temples of Uruk, the ritual activities of the exorcists, the lamentation-priests, the singers and all the experts, (so) that, later on, everything which the apprentice holds will be available to an expert. (Written) in accordance with the tablets that Nabû-apla-ušur (Nabopolassar), king of the Sealand, carried off from Uruk and then, Kidin-Anu, Urukean, exorcist of Anu and Antu, descendant of Ekur-zakir, elder brother (*ahu rabû*) of the Rēš temple, saw those tablets in Elam, copied them in the reign of kings Seleucus (I) and Antiochus (I) and brought them to Uruk.

Nabopolassar (626–605) is credited with the transfer of these tablets, but it is problematic since the colophon mentions the rites of purification of the gods of the Rēš temple and the Irigal (Ešgal). Indeed, if these temples already existed, they must not have been very important since the Eanna was the main temple of the city at that time. This potential misattribution may be explained by another text, the chronicle ABC 2 (l. 15–17). It mentions that Nabopolassar, at the beginning of his reign, transferred to Susa the Elamite divine statues that the Assyrians had deported and installed in Uruk. There is no clear reason why this Babylonian king should have deported Urukean cult objects to Elam. Confusion may have occurred in the Hellenistic period between different events that the scribe of TCL 6, 38 attributes to the most famous hated king. Indeed, Nabopolassar was not appreciated in Uruk.<sup>76</sup>

Julien Monerie and I wonder if the return of the cultic statues in Uruk (YOS 20, 87) at the time of Kidin-Anu, the relative of Iqīšâ (Level II), could be

<sup>72</sup> Monerie and Clancier 2023, 77.

<sup>73</sup> For Kidin-Anu see *supra* 4.3.

<sup>74</sup> Translation slightly adapted from Ossendrijver 2020, 327–328. See Monerie and Clancier 2023.

<sup>75</sup> This scribe was active at the beginning of the second century.

<sup>76</sup> See Jursa 2007 for the fate of his father at the hands of the Urukeans.

linked with the transfer of the tablets from Elam by the same Kidin-Anu and referred to in TCL 6, 38.<sup>77</sup> It was indeed customary to maintain the worship of deported statues once they had arrived at their destination. The tablets that were moved with them could have served this purpose. These two distinct references to the displacement of goods from the sanctuaries of Uruk could be the consequence of the repression of a revolt whose date is to be determined but which would be under the Achaemenids, given the place of ‘deportation’.

With all these clues, it would be possible to propose the following reconstruction of the events:

1. A revolt in Uruk occurred during the reign of Artaxerxes IV (338–336) putting on the throne a personage of whom only the second name is known: Nidin-Bel.
2. At the same period, an independent king might also have ruled in the neighbouring city of Larsa.
3. Darius III then retook Uruk at the beginning of his reign. The Achaemenid king could have deported the gods of Uruk and some of the cultic material to Elam to punish the city and its notables working for the sanctuaries.
4. The house of Level III could have been destroyed during the recapture of the city by Darius III if we assume that its inhabitants, working for the punished sanctuaries, took part in the revolt. Perhaps this could explain the extinction of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta from Uruk.
5. Later, under the first Seleucid kings, Kidin-Anu, a descendant of Ekur-zakir, then in charge of the Rēš temple, would have been involved in the return of the statues and tablets from Elam and the renovation of the temple under royal patronage.

## Conclusion

The dossier under study allows the placing of the tablet, an archaeological object, in its physical, social, religious and political context. It was possible to study the uses of tablets from their shaping to their baking in three houses (Levels IV, III and II). Their inhabitants, exorcists, students and teachers, worked for themselves and for the great local temple. These scholars were not only exorcists but also politicians. The best example is Kidin-Anu, descendant of Ekur-zakir, who, at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third century, acted

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<sup>77</sup> Monerie and Clancier 2023.

directly for the (re)construction of the Rēš temple whose dimensions were seldom reached in Mesopotamian sanctuaries whatever the period. It is quite probable that he enjoyed some direct contacts with the early Seleucid kings.

On the other hand, relations between the local notables serving the sanctuaries and the Achaemenid monarchy seem to have been much more difficult. This is true from the end of the sixth century and reaches a climax with the suppression of the revolts of the beginning of the reign of Xerxes. It is not impossible that the end of the Persian empire was also a violent period for the notables in Uruk. The dossier which has just been presented could be an echo of this through the disappearance of the descendants of Šangi-Ninurta or, at least, the destruction of the house on Level III. It is very unusual to see the extinction of a clan of scholars. It is, to the best of my knowledge, the only example for Uruk. This unusual disappearance invites a search for exceptional causes.

## Abbreviations

ABC = Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles  
 BRM = Pierpont Morgan Archive  
 SpTU = Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk  
 SpTU 1 = Hunger 1976  
 SpTU 2 = von Weiher 1983  
 SpTU 3 = von Weiher 1988  
 SpTU 4 = von Weiher 1993  
 SpTU 5 = von Weiher 1998  
 TCL = Tablettes Cunéiformes du Louvre  
 UVB = Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka  
 VAT = Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin  
 YOS = Yale Oriental Series

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