



Inscriptions from the new excavations at Tablet Hill, Tello/ Girsu: Autumn 2022–Autumn 2023

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the cuneiform inscriptions discovered at Tello (ancient Girsu) during the British Museum's excavation seasons of autumn 2022, and spring and autumn 2023. The excavations at Tell V, also called Tablet Hill, led to the discovery of a large group of cuneiform tablets dating from the Late Early Dynastic, Sargonic, Lagash II, and Ur III periods. Most of the inscribed objects are broken and originate from French spoil heaps as well as ancient construction fills. The new cuneiform tablets belong to the state archives stored in the administrative center of ancient Girsu. Alongside the cuneiform tablets, the team also found a group of seal impressions, envelopes, tags, and tablet basket labels (pisan-dub-ba).

Introduction Conclusion:

1. The British Museum's new excavations in Tablet Hill (Tell V):

The British Museum's autumn (2022) season marked an important transition in the on-site research focus at Tello/Girsu. After completing the excavations at the Eninnu temple mound (Tell A) in spring (2022), the team moved their main

fieldwork investigations to another major site, the so-called Tablet Hill (Tell V) (Fig.1). Our renewed excavations at Girsu, following a period of over (80years) of fieldwork interruption since André Parrot's last season in (1933), seek to provide opportunities to test innovative methods using new technologies, which exemplify best practice for archaeological projects in Iraq. By

re-excavating poorly recoded architectural features that are gradually weathering away, as well as using techniques developed in the field of rescue archaeology, the project creates a long-lasting record and re-contextualises museum objects originating from these damaged mounds.

Tablet Hill-also known as Tell V, the Mound of the Tablets (Tell des tablettes) from the disastrous excavations and looting in the late 19th and early (20th) centuries-was a key area to prioritise with this research approach. One of the largest mounds at the site, it was extensively excavated yet inadequately documented. Tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets in more than two hundred collections around the world originate from this area, which in all likelihood constituted the administrative centre of ancient Girsu, and home to the state's archives.

Today, the mound resembles a crater with a ring of eroded spoil heaps surrounding a flat barren area (Fig.2). Its interior appears to comprise infilled sedimentation deposits which we suspected are filling deep, older excavations into

the heart of Tablet Hill. Our initial strategy in excavating this area concentrated upon the relatively straightforward, albeit laborious, process of removing the 19th and early (20th) century spoil heaps within this area. We had become acquainted with the previous French excavation methods over the course of seven excavation seasons in the Temple mound (2016-21). Here, the French teams excavated a mixture of trenches and deep sondages within the interior of the mound and deposited the resulting spoil at its periphery. For this reason, we believed that archaeological horizons within the interior of Tablet Hill would have been compromised by these deep sondages, but intact remains would be buried beneath the surrounding spoil heaps. The present report describes the epigraphic finds from the first three seasons: autumn (2022), spring (2023), and autumn (2023). Excavations in the area continue. Campaigns from spring (2024) onward will be presented in a future article.

2. Brief history of the previous digging at Tell V (1894-1904):

The official excavations at the Mound of the Tablets started during



Ernest de Sarzec's eighth season in (1894). His work at Tell V can be divided into four main phases: 1) In (1894), he opened a series of trenches to the southeast of the mound, where he found so-called "galleries" dating to the Ur III period, from which came about 30,000 cuneiform tablets; 2) During the following season in (1895). Sarzec moved fieldwork operations to the central part of Tell V and started digging deeper, reaching archaeological horizons belonging to the Akkadian period. He uncovered the so-called "Square of Large Bricks" and beneath it and its southwest the "Pavement" with Akkadian tablets; 3) In the tenth season of excavations in (1898). Sarzec continued excavating northward and found tablets dating back to the Lagash II period and to the reign of Shulgi; 4) Finally, he opened new deep trenches in (1899) towards the northern part of Tell V and discovered well preserved remains of an Early Dynastic well.

Following Sarzec's death, Gaston Cros was appointed to continue the excavations at Girsu. In (1903), he reopened Sarzec's northern trench in Tell V, where he exposed fur-

ther remains belonging to the Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods. The following year. Cros moved his focus to the southwest area of the mound and discovered architectural remains dating back to the Ur III period, notably the gateway of a royal chapel dedicated to King Shu-Sin of Ur by the governor Arad-Nanna. After a long pause. Henri de Genouillac and André Parrot returned to Tablet Hill in (1929-30). Fieldwork mainly concentrated in the area outside the mound, where they opened a large excavation trench to its southwest. No official digging took place within the tell itself.

Finds from the excavations under Sarzec and Cros were divided between the archaeological museum in Istanbul (Arkeoloji Müzesi) and the Louvre. Finds from the looting were purchased by museums around the world. Finds from the excavations under Genouillac and Parrot were divided between the Iraq Museum, Baghdad, and the Louvre. The arrangement was that all tablets would be loaned to the Expedition for study for a period of (24 months). They should all be published, after which point the Director of Antiquities should select



(50%) for the Iraq Museum, The material was partially published by Genouillac (1934,1936), focusing almost exclusively on the objects in the Louvre. Tablets were returned to Baghdad, where they were assigned numbers in the IM (47000s); most remain unpublished. The signed Director's copy of the division list is preserved in the Iraq Museum. The finds from the new excavations are all in the Iraq Museum.

3. The Girsu Project's new excavation areas (2022-23):

Area L1:

Excavations within Area L1 (c. 40 by 20 metres) on the northern edge of Tell V were carried out during three archaeological seasons in autumn (2022), spring (2023), and autumn (2023) (Fig.3), Our work encountered three broad phases within the central and southern parts of this area, represented by both structures and deposits. Preliminary dating suggests that this sequence runs from the Early Dynastic IIIb and Early Akkadian to the Late Akkadian period, which overlaps with the Lagash II period, These layers were truncated by large-scale excavations in the late (19th) and early (20th) centuries

that affected the western part of the area most severely.

The Late Akkadian/Lagash II phase comprised remains of mud-brick walls built on top of a thick levelling and ground-raising deposit that acted as a solid elevated platform on which the later buildings of this administrative complex were built. This deposit was only present to the east, having been entirely removed by earlier excavations within the western part, The foundation platform included a feature constructed partially of fired brick and identified as a small part of an extensive sub-mural drainage system.

The whole substructural layer was formed by the demolition and levelling of an Early Akkadian administrative building which was represented by a wall running northeast to southwest with a western corner beyond the limit of excavation.

These Early Akkadian remains had been almost totally demolished and levelled within antiquity—truncated by a series of pits to the southwest—and were also further damaged by excavations in the early (1900s).

Underneath the two Akkadian/



Lagash II architectural phases (and partially serving as their foundation) there was an extensive earlier architectural phase built using thinner plano-convex bricks (Fig.4).

Two rooms have been identified arranged northeast-southwest. The northeastern room had been entirely buried by the Late Akkadian/Lagash II construction and was only visible to us through the archaeological truncation mentioned above. It continued to the northwest beneath the Early Akkadian structure. The southwestern room had been more heavily truncated by deeper early (20th) century archaeological soundings and its extent is consequently less clear. The dating of this construction phase is at present unclear, although we suggest that it belongs to the end of the Early Dynastic IIIb period.

In the northern part of Area L1, our work encountered parts of a much later mudbrick building dating to the Old Babylonian period (c. 1750 BC). This suggests that the area within the immediate vicinity of this trench contains intact archaeological layers and buildings with a sequence that dates back to at least the Early Dynastic IIIb through to

the Late Akkadian/Lagash II period, as well as much later periods extending into Old Babylonian times towards the exterior of the mound. It seems, however, that most if not all of the sequence dating back to the Ur III period has been excavated away in the late 19th and early (20th) centuries.

Our work within Area L1 has also been carried out alongside a reinvestigation of previous work by Sarzec and Cros. This entailed a painstaking and systematic recording of the series of thick layers of discarded and dumped materials forming large spoil heaps around and on Tell V. Although the current topography of Tablet Hill gives the appearance of a fragmented archaeological landscape caused by excavation soundings from the late (19th) and early (20th) centuries, the potential of this area is enormous. In some respects, we now encounter a situation similar to where we found ourselves at the end of the first season in (2016) at the Temple mound (Tell A). Before our work there, it was assumed that massive truncation by earlier excavators had irrecoverably damaged the archaeological resource. We



finished the season having demonstrated the presence of one of the most important sanctuaries of Mesopotamia. Here, in Tablet Hill, we are at the brink of demonstrating the presence of something as important: a remarkable archaeological sequence in the administrative heart of ancient Girsu (Fig.5).

Area L2:

A (10x15m) trench was initially opened in spring (2023) to the southeast of Tell V, approximately fifty metres southeast of L1, upon the detection of a potentially large linear sub-surface feature (Fig.6).

This feature is oriented northeast to southwest, and situated between the deflated remains of (19th) century French excavation spoil heaps, An initial shovel-scrape exercise over the area immediately informed us that we indeed had a linear feature, the mudbricks of which were barely below the existing surface level. Two edges of a three-metre-wide mudbrick wall were identified and thus the trench was extended along the length of the wall to a maximum of thirty metres (east to west) by fifteen metres (north to south) to identify the extent of its preservation. The wall appeared to survive

to a length of (21m) (southwest to northeast), a maximum width of (3,18m) with a maximum height of seven (horizontal) courses. The individual rectangular shaped mudbricks measured (180x270x75mm).

The positioning and size of the wall suggest a large significant building of which we have the southeast border, Whether this wall was integral to the main structure or existed as a separate surrounding boundary is as yet unclear.

Several later features were seen in plan to be cutting the wall on the north side and one also cutting through the middle to the southwest.

Two sondages were excavated in order to determine the stratigraphy of the precinct wall, which appears to have been originally constructed in the Ur III period and comprehensively rebuilt in the Isin–Larsa period. A probable collapse deposit was identified beneath a large later cut, most probably made by (19th) century French excavators, Abutting the lowest courses of the wall below this lay a homogeneous crushed mudbrick layer, which we can surmise to have been a sub-surface packing layer belonging to the



Isin–Larsa period. It contained the fragmented remains of up to eleven Ur III discarded clay tablets. Within the western sondage, the later looting pit which damaged both the north edge and central part of the wall contained a substantial amount of burnt material including fired bricks and unbaked clay. Remains of an earlier mudbrick wall, presumably dating back to the Akkadian/Lagash II period, were exposed to the southeast side of the precinct wall.

Area L3:

Excavations within Area L3 (7x8m) on the eastern edge of Tell V were carried out in autumn (2023). Beneath a thick accumulation deposit filling a large wadi to the east of the trench, the remains of early (20th) century French spoil heaps were found to extend two metres below the current surface level. Beneath these deflated heap deposits and partially truncated collapse layers below, a large mudbrick wall with a width of (5,5m) was excavated (Fig.7). Pottery from the associated layers gave an Akkadian date. The wall survived to a maximum height of (0,8m), (9 courses of mudbricks) above a thick layer of

heavily compacted mudbrick foundations extending (0,45m) below. Parallel to this wall and (1,3m) to the southwest, a contemporary wall with a protruding edge to the southeast creating an ‘L’ shape was excavated in the southwest corner of the trench. These walls were found to have been built directly above an earlier phase of building dating back to the Early Dynastic IIIb period.

4. Inscriptions from previous excavations at Tello: an overview:

4.1 General remarks on inscribed objects from before the Ur III period:

The following paragraphs aim to provide a brief introduction to the known inscriptions from Girsu, in order to contextualize the newly discovered texts (§5) within a broader historical framework, with particular emphasis on administration and royal ideology. The discussion is therefore limited to the periods between Early Dynastic IIIb and Ur III. The reader should be aware that cuneiform texts from both earlier and later periods exist. In particular, Girsu is the only centre from Mesopotamia for which epigraphic evidence covers the entire peri-



od from Early Dynastic I down to Old Babylonian. Almost nothing is known on the stratigraphic context of the texts, except that most of the tablets were found in the “Tell de tablettes”, possibly in secondary context⁽⁵⁾. Their dating merely relies on palaeographic and prosopographic criteria, According to CDLI data, 7391 pre-Ur III texts (excluding seal inscriptions) from Girsu are presently scattered over (134) collections, out of which (33) are private. Two thirds of all inscribed objects are however held in three collections only, namely Musée du Louvre (Paris, 2305 texts). Arkeoloji Müzeleri (Istanbul, 1972 texts). Eski Şark Eserleri Müzesi (Istanbul, 874 texts), Other major collections include Vorderasiatisches Museum (Berlin). State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg), National Museum of Iraq (Baghdad), and British Museum (London).

4.2 Early Dynastic IIIb period:

As opposed to previous periods, which remain poorly represented, substantial epigraphic data becomes available from the ED IIIb period onward, A few decades before the rise of Sargon, Girsu hosted an active administrative bureau, as de-

tailed in roughly (1,700) cuneiform texts of administrative nature— it is possible, however, that part of them may actually stem from the Girsu region. The documents cover a period of roughly (23 years), during the reigns of Enentarzi, Lugalanda, and Urukagina, with overlap with Early Sargonic period. The vast majority of the evidence is related to the (E₂-munus) or (E₂-mi₂), lit, “female quarters”, also known as “House of Ba’u” – a large institutional organization, under direct control of the wife of the local governor (Bartash 2014; Schrakamp 2013; Prentice 2010; Beld 2002: 1-44), Non-administrative texts providing key insight for royal ideology are also abundant. Records from before the (2022) archaeological campaign have (508) commemorative inscriptions dated to the first dynasty of Lagash, including (88) inscribed bricks, (75) cones, as well as (103) inscriptions on stone or metal objects (vessels, plaques, architectural elements, statues, weapons, etc.), Finally, a remarkable (yet very difficult) fragmentary clay tablet featuring an otherwise unknown cosmogonic myth offers a glimpse into local scribal education and culture (Rubio 2013, CRAAI 56).



4.3 Sargonic period:

As for the Sargonic period, roughly 2,073 clay tablets were previously known, covering the reigns of Sargon (some of which of uncertain dating, with possible overlap with the end of ED IIIb period) down to Sharkalisharri. To these, roughly 150 other inscribed objects may be added (including bullae, cylinder seals, cones, display inscriptions on stone, etc.). Most of the evidence details the administrative life of a large institutional household, managing land, primary production, derived products, and workforce. Close contacts with the Akkadian capital existed, as demonstrates by local pisan-dub-ba dossiers (Foster 1982: 12-18), as well as by the fragmentary Sargonic stele from Tello (Foster 1985; Westenholz 1999, 42 wn 132), As Foster (2011:131 with previous references) puts it: “Girsu was an administrative centre of an extended Sumerian province under the Sargonic kings and that this could help account for the power and prosperity of Lagash under Gudea and his dynasty”. Interestingly, several school texts are attested in Sargonic Girsu (Krauss 2020: 191-193): (25) lists of per-

sonal names, (16) writing exercises, (10) exercises of type (b) through (e), 6 sign practice texts, 6 lexical lists (1 in the form of a prism), 6 cadastral plans (exercises?), 5 architectural plans (all except one with cuneiform annotations), (4) measurements texts, 1 sign list, 1 metro-mathematical exercise, 1 royal inscription (in Sumerian), 1 list of divine names, and 1 tablet with the drawing of an ox.

4.4 Lagash II period:

As is well known, aligning this period in its chronological position remains a difficult task, in both absolute and relative terms⁽⁶⁾. A partial overlap with the so-called late Akkad period, as well as with the subsequent Ur III period is expected, but the extent of it cannot be established with certainty. An in-depth study of palaeography and prosopography of Lagash II epigraphic evidence is still a desideratum in the field. Roughly (600) administrative texts from the Lagash II dynasty have been published so far. Despite the political changes, they show a remarkable degree of continuity with the administrative practices from the preceding Sargonic period (Maiocchi–Visica-



to 2015; Lehmann 2016). Notable dossiers concern administrative activities of local officials (Dada, Šešda, Šara-iša, Šuna. Ur-Bagara, etc.), most of them active under the reigns of Gudea and his son Ur-Ningirsu II. Other texts include commemorative/royal inscriptions, including (2227) cone inscriptions (many are duplicates), roughly (27) statues of Gudea, (92) bricks (mostly Gudea, but also Pirig-me, Ur-ba'u, and Ur-Ningirsu II), and roughly (300) inscriptions on other media (vessels, architectural elements, weapons, etc.). Lagash II scribal education is as yet poorly represented, and/or not adequately understood, also as a consequence of the chronological uncertainties mentioned above. A few architectural plans (famously on Gudea statue B) and annotated cadaſter maps on clay tablets (such as RTC 258 = AO 3390) suggest however continuity with practices from the previous period.

4.5 Ur III period:

Manuel Molina's description of the history of the archives of Girsu in the Ur III period as "unfortunate" is an apt one⁽⁷⁾. It also applies more generally to all the major ar-

chives of this period. Since the late (19th) century, large-scale excavations at Sumerian sites in southern Iraq have coincided with persistent looting. The provincial archives of the governor of Girsu, unearthed by French archaeologists between the late (19th) and early (20th) centuries at Tello, suffered frequent excavation as well as extensive destruction by looters, who subsequently sold a substantial portion of the archives to museums and collectors worldwide. The dispersal of these many thousands of cuneiform tablets by looters and dealers has complicated efforts to trace their provenance and reconstruct the archival relationships that once represented.

According to the Database of Neo-Sumerian Texts (BDTNS)⁽⁸⁾, at present (29,134) texts from Ur III Girsu⁽⁹⁾ are known. These tablets are distributed among (740) collections across (40) different countries, including Australia (10collections), Austria (4collections), Belgium (16collections), Bulgaria (1collection), Canada (17collections), Chile (1collection), Croatia (1collection), Cuba (1collection), Czech Republic (3collections), Denmark (5collec-



tions), Estonia (1 collection), France (25 collections), Finland (2 collections), Georgia (1 collection), Germany (47 collections), Hungary (1 collection), Iraq (2 collections), Ireland (4 collections), Israel (36 collections), Italy (28 collections)⁽¹⁰⁾, Japan (33 collections), Lebanon (3 collections), Lithuania (2 collections), Luxembourg (1 collection), Mexico (1 collection), Norway (2 collections), Poland (3 collections), Russia (2 collections), South Korea (1 collection), Spain (18 collections), Sweden (3 collections), Switzerland (9 collections), Syria (4 collections), Netherlands (6 collections), Turkey (3 collections), Ukraine (1 collection), United Kingdom (52 collections), USA (388 collections), Vatican City (1 collection), and Venezuela (1 collection), Additionally, (86 collections), have been dispersed over time.

The documents are primarily administrative in nature (with a few exceptions, as noted below). As Garfinkle (2015:146) observed: “Essentially, administrative texts are the records of the operation of the institutional households of the kingdom, including temples, royal estates, and the offices of provin-

cial governors who managed the formerly independent city-states. Most of these texts took the form of receipts and disbursements of property owned or controlled by provincial and royal officials who were ultimately responsible to the kings of Ur, We must also include the more rare but very significant accounts, summaries, and balanced accounts that brought together and organized hundreds if not thousands of smaller administrative texts”.

In addition, we can include approximately (300) legal texts, more than (3000) messenger texts, around (370) loan documents, (16) sale documents, (5) school texts, and (11) field plans (some of which may be exercises). Finally, we must add (3) inscriptions of two apparently independent rulers of Girsu from the late Ur III period (Frayne 1997:427-430) and a fragment of a clay bowl rim, which contains the opening lines of a dedicatory inscription to the goddess Nisaba (Frayne 1997:430, with further bibliography).

5. New inscriptions from Tello:

5.1 A new approach:

The previous excavations at Tab-



Tablet Hill devolved into an unedifying race between the archaeologists and the looters to find as many tablets as possible. Little in the way of archaeology was recognised, recorded and published. It is clear from the new excavations that the large trenches dug by the French missions often cut through mudbrick walls. The methodology of the current excavations is the opposite. Processing tablets from the point of discovery through to being in a suitable condition for museum curation is a time-consuming process. With this in mind, efforts were made to limit the number of tablets found (Fig. 8). Obviously, it is difficult to predict how many tablets will be found in any trench dug, and digging in Tablet Hill is likely to yield a relatively high number of tablets and fragments. But in practical terms, it soon became clear which types of deposit typically yielded many tablets, and which few or none. It was therefore possible to nuance the strategy to manage the flow of tablets. The largest quantity of tablets—in most cases actually, fragments—came from French spoil. Significant numbers also came from ancient construction fills. The primary aims

of the new excavations were rather to find and understand what remains of the buildings in which the tablets were once stored.

This includes both locating and analysing the areas explored in the old excavations, as well as excavating areas untouched by those missions.

The spoil heaps from the French missions and the looters are, in their own way, part of the history of the site. They are distinct archaeological layers with their own story to tell. Analysis of the assemblages recovered from the various layers should reveal the nature of each deposit, helping to differentiate the two groups of spoil, and thereby locating the areas of activity. This involves treating tablets in particular ways, beyond simply reading their text and using their date to assign dates to levels. One is to identify relationships to previously excavated material. Tom Jones (1975, 44) noted how there were patterns in the distribution of material found by the official and unofficial digging. The other is to use the ceramics found in the same layers to help assign a date to the fragments, many of which cannot be attributed with



confidence to a period. The contexts in which the tablets were found will be analysed in detail elsewhere.

Given the lamentable situation with regard to tablets found at Tello in the past, the archaeological context offered is particularly important. The aim of the present article is to offer a summary and catalogue of the material, prior to their publication in monograph form. For convenience, the summary is arranged in chronological order. A total of (518) inscribed objects were recorded during the three seasons under study.

5.2 Late Early Dynastic IIIb period:

A complete ovoid-shaped bulla (so-called “olive”) from the time of Iri-inim-gina is to be added to the group of (23) other such objects already known (Frayne 2008, 286–87) (Fig.9).

5.3 Sargonic period:

Most of the (138) inscribed objects from the Sargonic period are administrative texts. There are some interesting exceptions, including: (7) sealings of Lugal-ušumgal (TG 5967 et passim) (Fig.10), who was the local governor at the time of

Naram-Sin and Šar-kali-šarri⁽¹¹⁾; a very fragmentary brick stamp probably bearing the name of Naram-Sin (TG 5425); and two fragments featuring an architectural plan (TG 5873+5874) (Fig.11).

The administrative texts belong in the local administration. On palaeographical grounds, most records are to be dated to the so-called Classical Sargonic period (mid-Naram-Sin down to the end of Šar-kali-šarri), but a few may be slightly earlier than that⁽¹²⁾. Most of the documents seem to belong in a local office (or offices) concerned with the administration of primary and secondary resources: allotments of alimentary items (barley, beer, bread, flour, fish), husbandry (sheep and goats), field management, textiles, workforce, etc. In terms of magnitude of production, there is little in their content that speaks for an imperial administration. however defined, Contacts with the Agade bureaus did exist, however, as demonstrated by several clues such as: the use of the gur of Akkad as metrological unit (besides other standards); the above-mentioned seal and sealings; the rare mentions of known individuals and/or high-ranking officials,



such as the dub-sar lugal.

A few inscribed objects are apparently school texts: (TG 5876) is a very fragmentary tablet, perhaps a metrological exercise featuring large numbers; (TG 5457) bears two personal names (reverse uninscribed); (TG 5857) is a fragmentary administrative exercise concerning copper and textiles (?) allotted to various individuals: the text is crossed over with a large “X” on both obverse and reverse; Fragment (TG 6078) also bears a seal impression on the one side, but it features an isolated sign and traces (?) of other signs almost randomly placed in an otherwise uninscribed space; (TG 5916) is a test impression of a cylinder seal: the obverse is uninscribed, while the reverse bears a seal impression running vertically. Finally, (TG 5916) is an uninscribed tablet likely resulting from school practices.

5.4 Lagash II period:

35 inscribed objects are datable to the Lagash II period:

Highlights from this period include (15) cones of Gudea which are duplicate of known inscriptions (TG 4820 et passim), commemo-

rating construction of the E-ninnu and temple for Ningirsu, as well as other temples to several gods: Enki, Gatumdug, Igalim, Ningishzida, Meslamtaea, Nindara.

The (26) administrative texts found provide new evidence that sits in the broader historical frame of the local administration, as detailed in Maiocchi and Visicato (2020). They align in content and magnitude of production with the Sargonic period, showing a remarkable degree of continuity in administrative practices.

5.5 Ur III period⁽¹³⁾:

A total of (275) inscribed objects dating to the Ur III period were unearthed across the three seasons: (127) during the autumn (2022) season, (37) during spring (2023), and 93 during autumn (2023). There are a further (19) objects which could potentially be dated to the Ur III period, pending further examination. Other objects are not dated at all. In the overview of the material in the following paragraphs, these tablets of uncertain date are left aside for further studies.

The Ur III inscribed objects found thus far provide a represen-



tative cross-section of the various types of written artifacts one might expect to encounter when considering the entirety of written documentation from Ur III Girsu. We can categorise the inscribed objects into five different categories: cones; sealings; envelopes; tags and tablet basket labels (*pisan-dub-ba*); and tablets. One cone was unearthed, commemorating Ur-Namma's canal work for Namma (TG 4979)⁽¹⁴⁾.

Nine sealings date to the Ur III period: (TG 5559) bears the inscription of Dudu, the scribe, servant of Lu-kirizal, the governor of Lagaš⁽¹⁵⁾, which was previously known only by another sealing kept in the Louvre (AO 4201), first published by Cros, Heuzey, and Thureau-Dangin⁽¹⁶⁾; (TG 5408) bears the inscription of Ur-Nin-girsu, the governor of Lagaš; (TG 5654) and (TG 5656) bear an inscription of a servant of the governor of Lagaš; (TG 5516) bears the inscription of Ur-Ninmarki, servant of Ur-Ningirsu, governor of Lagaš—a sealing which is not attested in Ur III documentation⁽¹⁷⁾. A further four are barely legible, Four envelope fragments were found: (TG 5044) was sealed by Íb-ta-è;

(TG 5174) records animals; (TG 5663) bears only the year name of Šulgi 44; (TG 5686) shows only traces. A tag (TG 6074) bears the name of Gudea, the overseer, The label of a tablet basket is of particular interest because it is dated to Šulgi year (7), which is seldom attested in the documentation (TG 5120)⁽¹⁸⁾.

The remaining objects consist of cuneiform tablets, as expected. These tablets fall into two distinct types: administrative, which constitute the majority; and school texts, a rare form of documentation in Ur III contexts⁽¹⁹⁾. This latter category comprises nine texts, identified either by their particular shape or by the presence of impressions of isolated signs; including an apparently incomplete type II tablet with a sign exercise, a type IV tablet featuring a practice administrative exercise, and a fragment of an exercise. The quantity of school texts discovered is particularly noteworthy, Only around (20) tablets have been discovered at Girsu to date. The discovery of an additional nine school texts is promising for the future of research on Ur III educational practices, A more detailed study of these



tablets will be published in Taylor and Rey (2025). The majority of the documentation consists of administrative records detailing various aspects of state management, including labour, flour, bread, textiles, animals, cereals, beer, bitumen, reeds, agricultural fields, and messenger texts, plus one letter-order addressed to Ur-Igalim. Several texts are barely readable, with only a few recognisable signs, but are presumed to be administrative on account of the ductus and the tablet shape. The great majority of the tablets are undated (or the part where the date would have been is missing). There are some exceptions: (TG 4964) is dated to Amar-Suen (9); and (TG 5023) is dated to Šulgi (10). Interestingly, (TG 5048) is dated to Šulgi (2), which is attested just five times in Ur III documentation⁽²⁰⁾. Another exception is represented by the messenger texts; seven out of thirteen texts, as is common in this type of document, are dated with the month⁽²¹⁾.

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end notes:

1- The British Museum. Rey & Husain (§1, §2); Rey, Faiers & Pooley (§3); Taylor & Jawad (§5.1).

2- Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague (§4.5, §5.5).

3- Ca' Foscari University of Venice (§4.1-4, §5.2-4).

4- The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

5- See most recently Huh 2008, 160-165, 288, 292-316, and cf. the remarks of Thureau-Dangin 1910, 1.

6- Lehmann 2016; Pomponio 2011, id. 2016; Sallaberger, Schrakamp 2015, 113-130; Steinkeller 2013; id. 2015.

7- Molina 2023: 39.

8- The dating of 601 of these is uncertain.

9- The dating of 478 of these is uncertain.

10- For a more precise study on the collection of cuneiform material in Italy, albeit updated to 2011, see Ermidoro 2011.

11- Cf. RIME2.1.4.2004 = Frayne 1993, 165-66. On the career of this individual see Pomponio 2011, 237; Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 108.

12- On the palaeography of the Old Akkadian period see Maiocchi 2015.

13- The abbreviations used in this paragraph are listed on the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI) website available at https://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations_for_assyriology (accessed 22/03/2024). In the transliterations of texts '/' points out the end of line, and '/' an indented line.

14- Other cones commemorating the building of canals by Ur-Namma for different gods are, for example, RIME 3/2, p.62, no. 26 (to Enlil), RIME 3/2, p.63, no. 27 (to Inana), and RIME 3/2, pp.63-64, no. 28 (to Nanna).

15- Lu₂-kiri₃-zal/ ensi₂/ Lagaš^{ki}/ Dudu/ dub-sar/ dumu La-ni/ GA₂-dub-ba / arad₂-zu.

16- Cros, Heuzey, and Thureau-Dangin 1910:248.

17- Ur-^dNin// -gir₂-su / ensi₂ / Lagaš^{ki} / Ur-^dNin-//MAR.KI / [arad₂-zu?]

18- mu ma₂ ^dNin-lil₂ ba-du₈. Just 8 texts are dated to this year, and all of them are from Girsu (ITT 5 6703, ITT 5 6711, ITT 5 6725, RA 65, p.20 no. 8, ITT 5 6819, ITT 5 6713, RA 65, p.20 no. 7, MVN 7 388).



Moreover, this year name also appears in a list of Ur III year names from Nippur (OrNS 54, p.300) dated to the Old-Babylonian period, for which see Wilcke 1985.

19- For an updated overview of school texts in Ur III period see Taylor and Rey (forthcoming in 2025).

20- mu us₂ e₂ ^dnin-gubalag ki ba-a-gar attested in ITT 4 7662, ITT 5 6737, MVN 7 28, MVN 7 64, RTC

271. All these texts are from Girsu. Moreover, this year name is attested in a list of year names from Nippur published by Hilprecht (1896: 125).

21- Notizia 2009: 21-22 notes that the dating formula of the messenger texts is most often constituted by the indication of the month and is accompanied in some cases by that of the day. The name of the year is only sporadically attested.

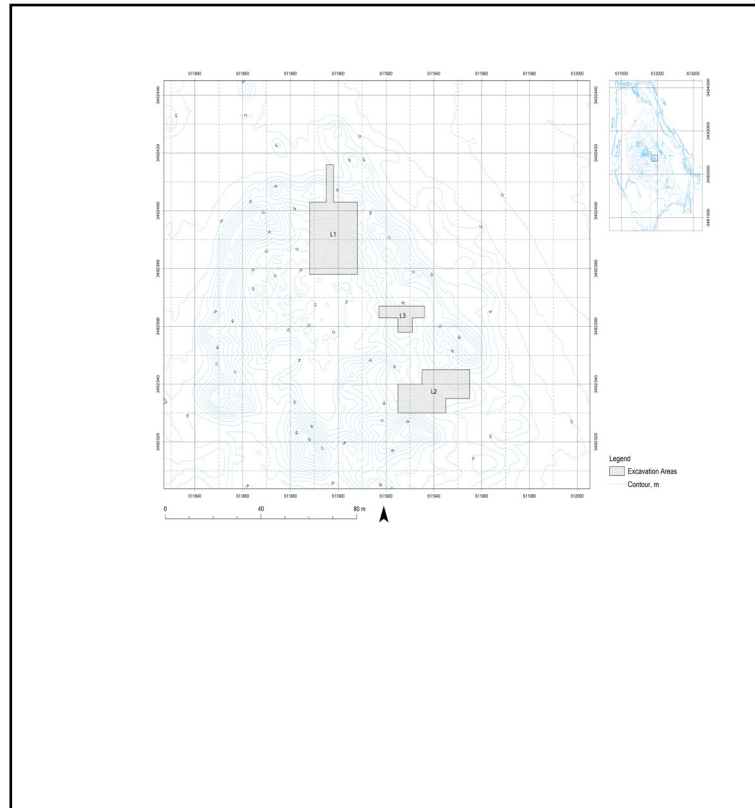


Fig. 1
Plan of Tablet Hill (Tell V) showing the location of the British
Museum’s new excavation areas, 2023 (Plan drawn by Melek Er ©
The Girsu Project).



Fig. 2

General view of Tablet Hill and Area L1 with the Eastern Tells in the background, 2022 (Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).

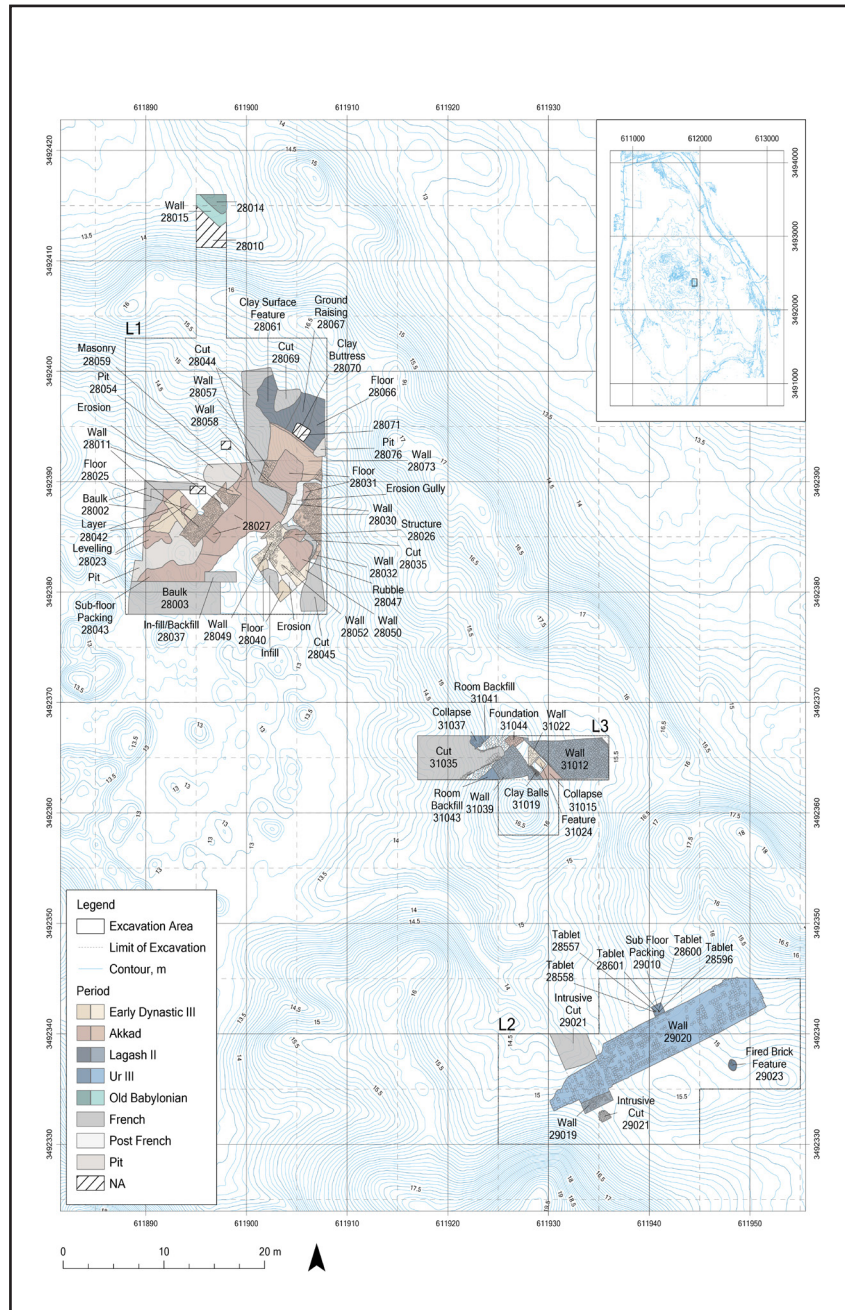


Fig. 3
Plan of the British Museum team's excavation trenches on Tell V,
2023 (Plan drawn by Melek Er, Charlotte Faiers and Sébastien Rey
© The Girsu Project).

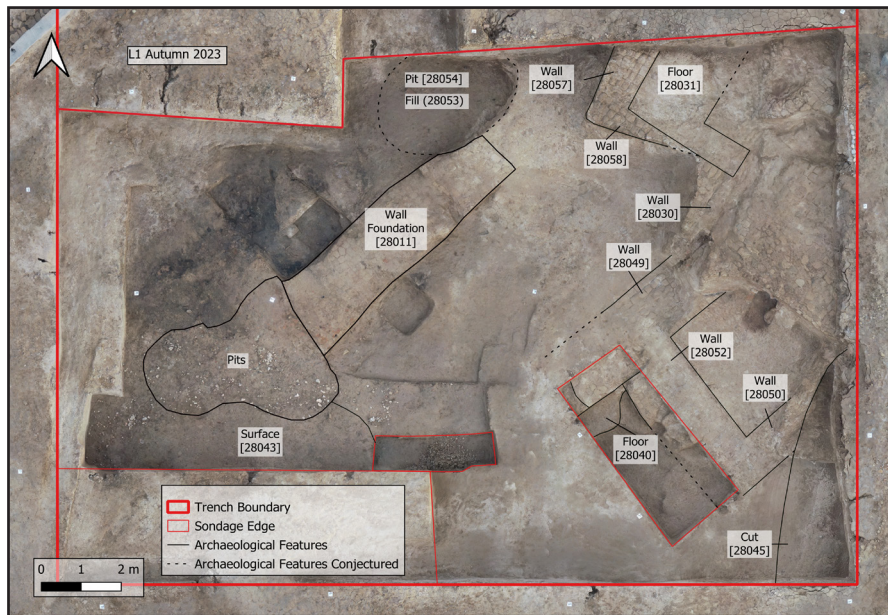


Fig. 4
Aerial view of Area L1 showing the archaeological features excavated between 2022 and 2023 (Image by Charlotte Faiers © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 5
Detail view of Area L1 showing Late Akkad/Lagash II and Early Akkad archaeological remains truncated by the French team's early excavations in Tell V, 2023 (Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 6

General view of Area L2 showing the Ur III/Isin-Larsa sub-surface archaeological features and the excavated remains, 2023 (Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 7

Detail view of Area L3 showing the Late Akkad/Lagash II wall excavated in 2023 (Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 8

Early Akkadian and Ur III cuneiform tablets retrieved from Tablet Hill (Tell V) and delivered to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, 2023 (Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 9

Early Dynastic IIIb ovoid-shaped tag belonging to the reign of Irinim-gina, TG 5815 (Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 10
Early Akkad clay sealing of Lugal-ušumgal, TG 5654 (Photo by
Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).



Fig. 11
Early Akkad clay tablet featuring an architectural plan, TG 58735874+
(Photo by Eleonor Atkins © The Girsu Project).

