#### CHAPTER 17

# Sumerian Names Uri Gabbay

#### Introduction

Sumerian, which most scholars treat as an isolated language, is the first identifiable language written in cuneiform. By the end of the third millennium BCE it was no longer used as a vernacular language, but it continued to be used for the next two millennia, until the end of cuneiform culture, as a scholarly, literary, and religious language. This does not imply that the 'real', 'living' Sumerian tongue of the third millennium BCE perished and was replaced by an 'artificial', 'dead' language. Sumerian remained 'alive' and 'real' for another 2,000 years, perhaps not as a mother tongue but certainly as a language with a crucial and defining importance for the Mesopotamian scholarly and religious milieu. Many (perhaps even most) of the verbal religious performances in Mesopotamia in the second and first millennia BCE were conducted in Sumerian, whether they were based on the kalûtu corpus of Sumerian lamentations that constituted the regular temple cult or on the many Sumerian incantations included in the ašipūtu corpus which consisted of the purification and therapeutic rituals for temples and individuals. These corpora were not only performed but also studied. The scribal curriculum of the second and first millennia BCE began with lexical lists consisting of Sumerian or Sumero-Akkadian correspondences, and Sumerian remained an important part of scribal education and scholarly lore during advanced study.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, although the number of Sumerian personal and family names recorded in Babylonia in the first millennium BCE is tiny, their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Ran Zadok for discussing with me some of the materials in this chapter, and for reading and commenting on an earlier version.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For the second millennium BCE, see, recently, Crisostomo (2019) (Old Babylonian period) and Bartelmus (2016) (Middle Babylonian period). For the curriculum of the first millennium BCE, see Gesche (2001).

existence points to the cultural importance Sumerian held for the bearers of these names, especially if they were priests or scholars. Sumerian in the first millennium BCE was not only a language that scholars and priests knew from their training and liturgical repertoire, but also a source of identity for its users.

#### Sumerian Onomastic Material in Babylonian Sources

Although Akkadian names in Babylonia during the first millennium BCE extensively use logograms that originate in the Sumerian language, actual Sumerian names in this period are practically non-existent. In fact, only one Sumerian personal name is attested in first-millennium BCE Babylonia: the ceremonial name of the daughter of Nabonidus, whom he dedicated as a priestess in Ur.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise, there are a few Sumerian family names in first-millennium BCE Babylonia.

#### Personal Names

Priests in the first millennium BCE, although sometimes writing their names in an orthography reflecting a pseudo-Sumerian origin, were usually given Akkadian (Babylonian) names (unlike Old Babylonian priests, who often had Sumerian names such as Ur-Utu). There is one exception to this: according to several inscriptions of Nabonidus, he installed his daughter as *en*-priestess of the god Nanna in Ur and gave her the ceremonial name enníĝ-al-di-<sup>d</sup>nanna (En-nigaldi-Nanna), '*En*-priestess, the request of Nanna' (Schaudig 2001, 708). This case (which has no historical anchor besides the passages in the royal inscriptions) is exceptional, just as the whole cultic act described in the passage is exceptional, and thus this use of a Sumerian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Excluded are Sumerian personal names that are found in literary and scholarly texts composed or transmitted in the first millennium BCE but not otherwise attested as actual personal names or family names in Babylonia in the first millennium BCE. These include various names in VR 44 (Lambert 1957; some of these names, however, are known as family names in the first millennium BCE, see section on 'Family Names'), some of which also appear in other literary texts. For example, llàl-úr-alim-ma (interpreted in antiquity as Ṭāb-utul-Enlil 'Enlil's lap is sweet'), listed in VR 44 ii 17 (Lambert 1957, 12) appears in the dream of the protagonist of the composition Ludlul (III 25–6, see Oshima 2014, 279; note that llàl-úr-alim-ma is attested as a personal name in Kassite Nippur, see Hölscher 1996, 130). Other examples are the fanciful Sumerian names in the humoristic scribal composition 'Ninurta-pāqidat's Dog Bite' (George 1993). Also excluded from the discussion are the Sumerian names lka-áš-du<sub>11</sub>-ga (perhaps 'The decision is instructed'; see Jursa 2001–2, 83) and lugal-sùr-ra ('Lord of the song/lament'), known from a list from Sippar of divine or mythological cultic functionaries, which clearly do not relate to actual contemporary persons (Jursa 2001–2, 77–9, BM 54725+ i 10', iii 6', 19').

name similar to those given to priestesses in the third millennium BCE should be understood in the context of the antiquarian values promoted by Nabonidus himself.

## Family Names

A few Sumerian family names are attested in the first millennium BCE, usually associated with scholars and priests.<sup>4</sup> These include:

# (1) Ur-(Divine name)

Two family names are formed on the pattern Ur-(Divine name), meaning 'The one of (Divine name)', which is attested already in personal names of the third and second millennia BCE: Ur-Nanna 'The one of Nanna' and Ur-Nintinuga 'The one of Nintinuga'. The name Ur-Nintinuga was interpreted in antiquity as 'The one (= man) of Gula' (Amīl-Gula) (VR 44 ii 9; Lambert 1957, 12). The family name Ur-Nanna is already attested in archival texts from Babylon dating to the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE. Since there is no evidence of Akkadian renderings of these names, it is assumed that these names were indeed Sumerian. 6

## (2) (Diving name)-ma-an-sum

A few family names, mostly from Babylon and Borsippa, are formed on the pattern (Divine name, or: temple name)-ma-an-SUM, meaning '(Divine name, or: temple name) gave me (this son)', which is attested already in personal names of the third and second millennia BCE: urudu(dùru-dù)-mansum, Esagil-mansum, and Asarluḥi-mansum. The first name was interpreted in antiquity as 'Nusku gave me' (Nusku-iddin) (VR 44 ii 16; Lambert 1957, 12). Since syllabic spellings of the first two names are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Not included in the list are the following family names which may seem Sumerian but are probably not: <sup>I</sup>sag-di-di/ti (cf. Zadok 2003, 482, n. 8), <sup>I</sup>ARAD-<sup>d</sup>(é-)gir<sub>4</sub>-kù (probably a writing for Arad-Nergal, cf. Lambert 1957, 6, n. 23a), <sup>I</sup>ga-húl-<sup>d</sup>tu-tu (probably the same name as Gaḥal, and not likely to be of Sumerian origin, contra Wunsch 2014, 297, 305, n. 48), and <sup>I</sup>aš-gan-du<sub>7</sub> (probably of non-Sumerian origin, contra Sandowicz 2018, 58, n. 77). Also excluded are family names ending with -akku (e.g., Iššakku, Kassidakku) which are based on Sumerian loanwords in Akkadian.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Nielsen 2011, 175; Wunsch 2014, 290–1; Jiménez 2017, 213.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Sandowicz 2018, 57–8; Wunsch 2014, 296. Note the syllabic spelling of the divine name Nanna in Ur-Nanna in one text, indicating that it was rendered in Sumerian and not as Akkadian Sîn, see Wunsch (2014, 310, n. 77).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The sign SUM is usually rendered 'sum' or 'šúm', but there are syllabic writings that may indicate 'ŝi'; see Wunsch (2014, 297 with nos. 29, 31).

attested, the names indeed seem to have been originally Sumerian and rendered in Sumerian form (although they may have been reinterpreted as near-homonymic Akkadian names; Wunsch 2014, 297).

## (3) (Divine name)-ù-tu

A few family names, mostly from Babylon and Sippar, are formed on the pattern (Divine name)-ù-tu, in which the element ù-tu may be interpreted as the Sumerian verb meaning 'to give birth, create': Baba-utu 'Baba created', Zababa-utu 'Zababa created', and Nanna-utu (Nannûtu) 'Sîn created' (Wunsch 2014, 301). The name <sup>Id</sup>nanna-ù-tu was interpreted in antiquity as Akkadian Sîn-ibni 'Sîn created' in VR 44 ii 13 (Lambert 1957, 12). It is not clear, however, whether 'ù-tu' is indeed the Sumerian verb ù-tu 'create', or whether this is a reinterpretation of the suffix *-ūtu* (or *-iaūtu*) that is found with other names (e.g., Zērūtu; see Wunsch 2014, 301), especially since there are also syllabic renderings of the name Nanna-utu (Tallqvist 1902, 159; Baker 2004, 356).

## (4) Lú-dumu-nun-na

The Lú-dumu-nun-na (Lu-dumununna) family, whose name literally means 'The one (= man) of the princely son', is attested in colophons from Achaemenid Nippur and in Late Babylonian archival texts from Ur. The family name Lú-dumu-nun-na is already attested in a late Old Babylonian text dealing with a legal case in the area of Nippur and Dūr-Abiešuh, known from three unprovenanced tablets (George 2010 no. 17). Although the 'Princely Son' probably refers to Sîn, there is no indication that Lú-dumu-nun-na was a writing for an Akkadian name such as Amīl-Sîn (so Wunsch 2014, 290), and it is likely that the name was pronounced in Sumerian (Lu-dumununna; Charpin 2019).

# (5) $(E_{(4)})$ - $gi_{(3/7)}$ -ba-ti-la (E-gi-bi)

The name of the  ${}^{\rm I}(e_{(4)})$ -gi ${}_{(3/7)}$ -ba-ti-la (E-gi-bi) family from Babylon was interpreted in antiquity as 'Sîn, you granted, may he live' (Sîn-taqīša-liblut) in VR 44 iii 53 (Lambert 1957, 13). It should be noted that  $e_4$ -gi $_7$  (A-KU) is not a regular name or epithet in Sumerian, and the interpretation of the element ba as taqīša, 'you granted', although lexically anchored, looks like a fanciful rendering. Such an interpretation of the name Egibatila would seem to be in line with learned pseudo-Sumerian writings of Akkadian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> George 2010, 135; Wunsch 2014, 290, n. 8; Gabbay 2014, 258.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Compare An-Anu III 15: <sup>d</sup>dumu-nun-na = MIN (= <sup>d</sup>Sîn) (Litke 1998, 118).

names, especially since the Akkadian interpretation of the name agrees with Akkadian name patterns (Wunsch 2014, 297). Nevertheless, the name Egibatila may be a genuine Sumerian name, albeit of late, scholarly origin, that is based on an Akkadian pattern. It is also possible that, despite the Akkadian interpretation, the sign ba is to be understood as part of the verbal chain (ba-ti-la), perhaps with the meaning 'Sîn gave life' (cf. Tallqvist 1902, 57). In any case, the shortened form Egibi indicates that the name was indeed pronounced in Sumerian. Still, one cannot exclude the possibility of a name Egibi, of uncertain origin, <sup>10</sup> that was reinterpreted as a short form of a supposedly Sumerian Egibatila.

### (6) Ab-sum-mu

The interpretation of the name Ab-sum-mu (Absummu), a family name attested in Nippur, is uncertain, although the writing sum-mu seems to indicate a Sumerian name containing the verb 'to give'. The element 'ab' could mean 'father' in some Sumerian contexts, or it may be a Sumerian verbal prefix; alternatively, the sign AB could be read as 'èš', with the meaning 'shrine'. None of these interpretations of the name are certain. In any case, there is no indication that this is a Sumerian orthography that masks an Akkadian name.

(7) A-ba-<sup>(d)</sup>ninnu-da-ri

a-ba-<sup>(d)</sup>ninnu-da-ri, perhaps to be rendered Aba-Enlil-da-ri, is interpreted as 'Who (else) is a protector like Enlil?' (Mannu-kīma-Enlil-ḥātin) in VR 44 iii 42 (Lambert 1957, 13), where da-ri stands for *ḥatānu* 'to protect' (an attested but rare lexical equation), and *kīma* 'like' is not reflected in the Sumerian name. However, contrary to the interpretation given in VR 44, the original meaning of the name may have been 'Who leads (ri) with (-da) Enlil?' (i.e., 'Who leads but Enlil?'; cf. Oshima 2017, 149, n. 44). In addition, while Ninnu surely refers to Enlil, it is not clear whether it was pronounced as Ninnu or as Enlil. The name is known from a colophon from Nineveh, referring to the 'house' of this family, as well as from archival texts from Late Babylonian Nippur (Oshima 2017, 152). There is no indication, nor reason to assume, that the writing stands for an Akkadian name, especially since one text writes the last element as -r[a] rather than -ri (colophon of K 2757:7'; collated).

Although, as seen earlier, there are some problems with the interpretation of some of the Sumerian family names, it is important to realise that

It is in any case not West Semitic; see Tallqvist (1902, 57) with previous literature; Wunsch 2000, 1–2, n. 3; Abraham 2004, 9, n. 13.

almost all of these names belonged to families of a high social status whose members usually included priests or scholars. Besides the high social prestige that a Sumerian name conveys, it is important to remember that the religious and scholarly training and repertoire of many of the bearers of these names included much Sumerian, and a name in that language thus attests to their identity as the transmitters of the millennia-long Sumerian religious, literary, scholarly, and cultural tradition.

Indeed, according to the ancient Mesopotamian tradition, some of these family names can be traced back to individuals who were considered great priests and scholars (or ancestors of great scholars), adding to the prestige and cultural identity of their bearers. II Ur-Nanna, referred to as an exorcist and as a scholar of Babylon, was regarded as the composer of the 'Series of the Poplar'. 12 A son or descendant of Lú-dumu-nun-na, referred to as a scholar of Nippur, was regarded as the composer of the 'Series of the Fox' (Lambert 1962, 66, K 9717+ vi 12; Jiménez 2017, 46, 112). A son or descendant of [...-m]ansum (perhaps Asarluhi-mansum or Esagilmansum), referred to as a haruspex and scholar of Babylon, was regarded as the composer of one or more Sumerian texts (Lambert 1962, 66, K 9717+ vii 6-7). Asarluhi-mansum was regarded as the master scholar at the time of Hammurapi, and an ancestor of the well-known scholar Esagil-kīn-apli, who in turn was regarded as the master scholar of the Babylonian king Adad-aplu-iddin in the eleventh century BCE. 13 According to a text from Seleucid Uruk, Aba-Ninnu-da-ri (or: Aba-Enlil-da-ri) was considered the master scholar of Esarhaddon, and was identified with <sup>7</sup>Ahīgar, the composer of an Aramaic proverb collection (Oshima 2017). 14 Finally, Ur-Nintinuga, an āšipu from Babylon, is featured in the Babylonian composition Ludlul (Tablet III 40-6), where he appears in the dream of the protagonist, holding a writing board that identifies him as a scholar (Oshima 2014, 285-6; Sandowicz 2018, 57).

The association of a family with a given scholarly ancestor may be correlated with the family's geographical location. The Ur-Nanna family is known from the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE from Babylon,

This is also true, of course, for the bearers of some Akkadian family names, such as Sîn-leqe-unninnī, who was regarded as the composer of the Epic of Gilgamesh (Lambert 1962, K 9717+ 66, vi 10).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Lambert 1962, K 9717+ 66, vi 14; Jiménez 2017, 112, 212–13. Note that a colophon of a Late Babylonian tablet states that the text on it is based on a copy of Ur-Nanna, 'scholar of Babylon', indicating the great authority of the text and the scholar (Jiménez 2017, 212–13 with n. 571).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Finkel 1988; Heeßel 2010; Frahm 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Note that a colophon of a tablet from Nineveh probably states that the text on it is based on a copy from the 'house of Aba-Ninnu-da-ra', indicating the great authority of the text and the scholar (K 2757; see Oshima 2017, 152; for the 'houses' of families, see Nielsen 2011, 1).

and Ur-Nanna, as noted earlier, was considered a scholar of Babylon. The Asarluḥi-mansum family is attested especially in Babylon, and as noted, Asarluḥi-mansum himself was considered the scholar of Ḥammurapi, king of Babylon. The Lú-dumu-nun-na family is known especially from colophons from Nippur, and Lú-dumu-nun-na, as seen earlier, was considered a scholar of this city. Two other families are also located in Nippur: Absum-mu and Aba-Ninnu(or: Enlil)-da-ri, although they are not associated with a venerable ancestor. It is probably not a coincidence that three out of the limited number of families bearing Sumerian names are closely associated with Nippur. Scholars from this city, especially those belonging to the Lú-dumu-nun-na and Ab-sum-mu families, occasionally designated themselves as 'Sumerians' (*šumerû*), alluding to the long Sumerian tradition associated with Nippur.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, some temporal questions may be raised, although they are difficult to answer. Are any of the family names typical of certain periods, and could this information aid in reconstructing the historical origin of those families? For example, family name patterns such as Ur-(Divine name), Lú-(Divine name or epithet) (as in Lú-(d) dumu-nunna), and (Divine name)-ma-an-sum can be found already in the third and early second millennia BCE. However, this does not mean that first-millennium BCE families, whose names share these patterns, should be viewed as members of lineages going back to the third or early second millennium BCE, as such names could have been given later as well. 16 Indeed, the Ur-(Divine name) pattern is known also from the Middle Babylonian period (Hölscher 1996, 229-30). On the other hand, a name such as E<sub>4</sub>-gi<sub>7</sub>-ba-ti-la, which seems like a late scholarly invention, may reflect the relatively late emergence of this family as nouveaux riches in Babylonia (Abraham 2004, 9), though not much can be said more specifically about the date when the name was given to or chosen by the family. In the cases of Lú-dumu-nun-na and Ur-Nanna, however, attestations from the mid- and late second millennium BCE suggest relatively early dates for the emergence of these families (Wunsch 2014, 291-2). Lastly, Aba-Ninnu(or: Enlil)-da-ri was considered a contemporary of Esarhaddon, as seen earlier, which would imply

<sup>15</sup> Oelsner 1982; George 1991, 162; Gabbay and Jiménez 2019, 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> In this context, note the deliberate archaism found in Nippur colophons, where the title (not the personal name) 'the one of Gula' is written UR <sup>(d)</sup>ME.ME, alluding to such a personal name (and perhaps even alluding to an ancient ancestor); see Gabbay and Jiménez (2019, 71, n. 73).

a very late date for the emergence of this family. However, this tradition is late and ideological in nature (Lenzi 2008), and thus it cannot serve as a basis for speculations regarding the history of this family.

### **Further Reading**

For general surveys and histories of Sumerian and Sumerian literature, see Piotr Michalowski (2004) and Gonzalo Rubio (2009). On late Sumerian of the first millennium BCE, see Thorkild Jacobsen (1991) and Mark Geller (2010). Short discussions on Sumerian family names in the first millennium BCE appear as part of the general discussion of family names in Cornelia Wunsch (2014) and Małgorzata Sandowicz (2018, 57–8, appendix). For a discussion on Sumerian and pseudo-Sumerian family names that are attributed to a supposed scholarly ancestor, see Wilfred G. Lambert (1957). For discussions on fanciful writings of pseudo-Sumerian names, see Andrew R. George (1993) and Uri Gabbay and Enrique Jiménez (2019).

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