36) Babylonian Miscellanea 6. The Sun-God Tablet and its(?) clay impressions — The Sun God Tablet and two clay tablets with impressions found together in a box have been the subject of many studies, with the last important discussion by Irving Finkel and Alexandra Fletcher.[1)] The central idea of the authors is that the squeezes on the clay tablets were not imprinted from the relief from the Sun-God Tablet but from the cylinder seal of Shamash. The second conclusion concerns the time when the Sun God Tablet and clay tablets were made, which the authors date to the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina. The following comments are basically limited to these two points, although others are certainly worth discussing.

Let us first address the first point. While dating the time of production of the Sun-God tablet to a time commemorating the fortunate find that made it possible to restore the original statue of Šamaš destroyed by the Suteans is not in doubt,[2)] the idea that clay tablets were made at the same time, but from the seal of Šamaš, is, in my opinion, not convincing. It is worth paying attention to an issue omitted in the authors' considerations, namely that the set of robes listed on the Sun-God Tablet for six *lubuštu* ceremonies yearly for Shamash, Aya and Bunene (col. V 38-VI 8) differs significantly from the content on the clay tablet BM 91002, copied from *asumittu*-stone, where the sets of robes are much richer.[3)] If the unpreserved, or not yet found *asumittu*-stone comes from the time of Nabû-apla-iddina - an idea that I share with the authors - it means that, after some time, when the Sun-God tablet was composed, the temple was able to obtain much larger sets of robes from Nabû-apla-iddina,[4)] at least for Šamaš, and the original set listed in the Sun-God tablet has expired. This is clearly indicated by the lack of two main robes, *šeri'tu* and *karbītu* from the Sun-God Tablet in other texts outside this tablet.[5)] Although, like the authors,[6)] I assume that *asumittu* means the original, probably stone tablet, made in the time of Nabû-apla-iddina, the fact that clay tablets with impressions were found together, does not mean that they all were deposited in the times of Nabû-apla-iddina. Making a copy in a situation where the original of the asumittu existed, does not seem justified in the absence of a threat. However, the main argument against the idea that the clay tablets were produced and placed in the box already in the time of Nabû-apla-iddina is the low quality of squeeze on BM 91001, presumably preceded by the first, unsuccessful attempt, the low quality of clay on BM 91002 and several mistakes in the inscription on its reverse.[7)] All this speaks for the idea that both clay tablets were made in circumstances of real danger, and as such - as I argue - this occurred in 625 BC.[8)] The authors are entirely right that the box was found later during the reconstruction of the Ebabbar temple at the beginning of Nabonidus's reign and placed in a new place (maybe close to the place where it was kept earlier) and it remained there until its discovery at the end of the 19th century.

The second idea of the authors is that the similarity of impressions on the clay tablets and on the Sun-God tablet result from the use of the same theme and composition seen, or to put it better, that they are modelled on the Sun-God Tablet. According to them, the impressions on the clay tablets are smaller, they lack crenelation of the edges, and the waves on the bottom, as seen on Sun-God Tablet (Finkel and Fletcher 2016, 234-237). However, when comparing the Sun-God Tablet with two clay tablets from London made by the authors,[9)] one important issue escaped their attention, i.e. the perfect overlap of the cuneiform labels on the clay tablets with those on the relief of the Sun God Tablet. This fact contradicts the authors' thesis, because even nowadays, with the use of modern sophisticated technology unavailable in ancient times, such a placement of the inscriptions on a cylindrical seal so that it perfectly covers the inscriptions on the Sun- God Tablet would be a serious achievement. Contrary to the authors' opinion, the observed differences between the relief on the Sun-God Tablet and impression on the clay tablets may have arisen when the squeeze was removed from the Sun-God Tablet. The lack of a border, visible on the Sun-God Tablet but missing on the clay tablets, is also not a good argument. The person imprinting the reliefs on the clay tablets was interested not in the artistic and theological message of which the frame was part, but in preparing a squeeze of good quality with its central part, i.e. the statue of the god Šamaš, for future generations. The traces of waves visible on BM 91002 (and less clearly on BM 91001, and best preserved on Istanbul 459 (see photo on p. 233, Fig. 17)) have probably been smoothed and cut off, maybe because of their poor quality, or are missing because of damage. All this speaks in favour of the impressions being made not from the postulated cylinder seal of Šamaš, but from a relief on the Sun God Tablet.

A certain technological problem concerns the way of producing squeezes on clay tablets, especially on BM 91001. According to the authors, after making the squeeze, the producer turned the tablet over and then strengthened its reverse, applying clay (different from the clay from which the tablet has been made) pressing it with the thumb (p. 232 under "The Broken Impression"). This assumption seems highly questionable for two reasons. The authors assume that the impression was created by pressing the cylindrical seal of Shamash on the clay. It is difficult to imagine a technique other than pressing on the formed clay lying on a hard, even

surface. In such a situation the pressure could not result in unevenness of the opposite side (reverse). The clay, where pressed becomes more compact and it may move slightly outwards. Unevenness on the reverse might arise only if the imprint were made “in the air”, i.e., holding a clay tablet in one hand and rolling the seal with the other - a rather strange technique. Adding clay on the reverse makes sense only if we assume that the first attempt at making the relief was unsuccessful, possibly because the clay was too soft (and it does not matter whether the cylindrical seal of Shamash was imprinted - as the authors assume - or if clay was pressed onto the relief of the Sun-God Tablet). What appears to be the reverse today, in my opinion, was originally the obverse. The addition of clay and pressing it with the thumb after the impression was already made could lead to its damage. For this reason, it seems to me that the clay was added before or during the second attempt of making the squeeze, to thicken the clay in places where it was thin after the first unsuccessful attempt at making the relief imprint. The flat surface of the reverse of BM 91002 suggests that, while making an imprint of the relief, a board or a stone slab was probably used to take the pressure from above to obtain a surface for writing the text from the original *asumittu*.

Notes

1. Finkel and Fletcher 2016.
2. In, or shortly before the 31st year of Nabû-apla-iddina, as such date appears in the Sun-God Tablet.
3. Discussed by Woods 2004, 37-38.
4. The Stone-Tablet was written in his 31st year (859 BC), while Nabû-apla-iddin ruled for 33 years (877-855 BC), i.e. his new decision must be dated to the penultimate (856 BC) or ultimate (855 BC) year of his rule.
5. In Woods’ opinion (Woods 2004, 38) the copy on BM 91002 “serve(s) as an NB amendment to SGT’s *lubuštu* offerings.”
6. Zawadzki 2006, 141 and n. 441.
7. Zawadzki 2006, 145 and 152 with correction concerning reading of *iz-ḫi* in Zawadzki 2013, no. 175, pp. 162-163.
8. Zawadzki 2006, pp. 147-150.
9. Finkel and Fletcher 2016, 238, Fig. 19; differences are seen only when you use the digital, not paper version.

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