

90) A Neo-Babylonian Real Estate Sale from Nippur (20 N 3139)¹⁾ — This fragment of a baked tablet was found by Dr. Abbas Alizadeh, Director of the Nippur expedition, while surveying the northern slopes of Tablet Hill in 2019 during the first season of excavations at Nippur after a 29-year hiatus. The fragment measures 3x3 cm. The tablet can be dated to the Neo-Babylonian period²⁾ and its inscription concerns a real estate sale. The beginning of the text is not preserved, and only the first half (or less) of nine lines on the obverse are imperfectly preserved.

The first preserved lines (1'-5') provide part of the usual description of the location of the real estate; the complete description would have contained the total area, the type of property, its location, and a list and measurements of the neighboring properties along with the names of their owners. The preserved text begins with a description of the shorter sides of the property. Both short sides of the property are 32 cubits (or about 16 m), making the plot at least 256 m² (2755 sq ft).³⁾ The house is located adjacent to a “broad street” described as the “walkway of the gods and the king,” possibly referring to the not-yet-revealed procession street leading to the Ekur or another major street of the city.⁴⁾

The operative clause (6'ff.) appears after a dividing line. The buyer, Nabû-šumu-līšer, buys the real estate for 2½ minas⁵⁾ from a certain Enlil-ēriba. Because all names in this text lack preserved patronyms and ancestor names, it is difficult to establish archival connections or an approximate date for this text. Still, three-tier genealogies, as suggested by A-šū₂ ša₂ in this text (6'), do not appear in Nippur before 634 BCE.⁶⁾

At the beginning of the text, five or more lines are missing. The length of the original lines cannot be reconstructed with certainty. In line 6' and 7', the father's name and the family name are missing, so likely more than half of the width of the surviving lines is lost.

obv.

- 1' [...] [ⁱim r̄x] [...]
 2' [3]¹2¹ ina 1 KUŠ₃ r̄SAG¹. [KI AN.TA im...]
 3' [D]A E₂ m^dMAŠ-^{r̄}ša¹-^{r̄}bīr¹-^{r̄}ŠU¹ [...]
 4' 32 ina 1 KUŠ₃ SAG.KI r̄KI¹. [TA im...]
 5' DA SILA DAGAL *mu-taq* DING[IR.MEŠ u LUGAL...]
-
- 6' m^dAG-MU-SI.SA₂ A-šū₂ r̄ša₂¹ [...]
 7' *it-ti* m^den-lil₂-SU [^{ba}...]
 8' *ki-ma* 2½ MA.NA KU₃.BABBAR r̄x¹ [...*maḥīra*]
 9' r̄im¹-^{r̄}be₂¹-^{r̄}e¹-^{r̄}ma¹ r̄i²¹-^{r̄}ša²¹-[*am*² ...]
 10 [...]

(²⁻³) 32 by the cubit measure the [upper] short side [on the (east/west/north/south)], next to the house of Ninurta-šābit-^{r̄}qāi¹ [...], (⁴⁻⁵) 32 by the cubit measure the lo[wer] short side [on the east/west/north/south], next to the broad street, walkway of the go[d] [and the king...]

(⁶⁻⁹) (The buyer) Nabû-šumu-līšer, son of [...], [descendant of...], together with (the seller) Enlil-ēriba, [son of..., descendant of...], determined/declared [a price] and paid 2½ minas of silver.

Commentary

(3') The name is also attested in BE 8/1: 78 r. 16, but this is likely not the same person.

(4') The name Nabû-šumu-līšer is attested in BE 8/1: 10 (/Rāši-ili) and 109 (/Marduk-zēra-ibni //Kidin-...).

(6'-9') The operative clause is only partially preserved. The *maḥīra imbēma*-clause is introduced by *kīma* instead of the typical *kī*. The reconstruction of the following *išām* is uncertain.

Notes

1. I thank the Oriental Institute, Christopher Woods and Abbas Alizadeh for the permission to publish this tablet; Heather Baker and Martha Roth for reading and commenting on an advanced draft of this article, and Matthew Stolper and John Nielsen for checking the prosopography.

2. The form of this sale contract is typical for the Neo-Babylonian period (see M. Jursa, *Neo-Babylonian Legal and Administrative Documents: Typology, Contents and Archives*, GMTR 1, Münster, 2005, 27-29, and Heather D. Baker, “A Waste of Space? Unbuilt Land in the Babylonian Cities of the First Millennium BC,” *Iraq* 71 (2009): 90 fig. 1. The present communication uses the terminology introduced by Baker for the description of houses in fig. 1. The paleography is Neo-Babylonian. It is notable that the signs are elongated and the micro-tubes of the reed stylus well visible. The personal names and the use of the expression A-šū₂ ša₂ (obv. 6') to indicate filiation support a Neo-Babylonian dating.

3. The minimum area here is calculated as a square via the equation 16 x 16 m. As the long sides are usually longer than the front sides, we can be certain that the house actually exceeded 256 m². For the Neo-Babylonian surface measures, see Heather D. Baker “Babylonian Land Survey in Socio-Political Context,” in *The Empirical Dimension of Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, edited by Gebhard J. Selz: 293-323, Wiener Offene Orientalistik 6. Wien, Münster 2011, 309-311. The units are given in the “length-cubit convention,” see pp. 314-315.

4. On *mūtaq ilī u šarri*, see CAD M2: 298 s.v. *mūtaqu*, mng. c. The street name is so far attested for Uruk, Kiš, Babylon, and Borsippa. See also Andrew R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Text*, OLA 40, Leuven, 1992, 363. This street is not indicated on the Nippur topographical map. Heather D. Baker “From Street Altar to Palace: Reading the Built Environment of Urban Babylonia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, edited by Radner, Karen and Robson, Eleanor, 533-52, Oxford, 2011, 542-43 states that the urban elite preferred proximity to the centers of power and integration into the “network of public space.”

5. In tablets with the “length-cubit convention,” the unit price is usually not specified, see Baker, “Babylonian Land Survey,” 315.

6. John P. Nielsen, *Sons and Descendants: A Social History of Kin Groups and Family Names in the Early Neo-Babylonian Period, 747-626 BC*, CHANE 43, Leiden, 2010, 225.



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