

28) Larak and the “Old Tigris”* – The town of Larak, which was immortalized by its inclusion in the antediluvian section of the Sumerian King List,¹ is documented in third millennium sources only once. The occurrence in question comes from an Ur III Puzriš-Dagan tablet, which records an expenditure of two sheep “for Nin-Isina of Isin when she went to Larak.”² The occasion of that trip undoubtedly was to call on Nin-Isina’s spouse, Pabilsag, who is well-documented as the divine master of Larak.³

Among the early data on Pabilsag, of special interest is his mention in the Pre-Sargonic riddles from Lagash (Al-Hibba), where he bears the title ur-sag ^dEn-líl-lá, “hero of Enlil”.⁴ Since that title otherwise belonged to Ninurta and Ningirsu, Pabilsag counted as a warrior god. Moreover, it appears certain that, already by that time, he had been syncretized with the former two deities. The same riddle also connects Pabilsag with the canal MAŠ.TI.HAR,⁵ which must have flowed in the vicinity of Larak (as the riddle is obviously about Larak itself).

Although the precise location of Larak is unknown,⁶ all the indications are that it was situated comparatively close to Isin. Note, especially, the following data:

* This note profited from exchanges with Robert McC. Adams and Ran Zadok, to whom I offer my cordial thanks.

1 Th. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, AS 11 (Chicago, 1939), 74-75.

2 2 udu [...] ^dNin-Isin_x(IN)-[^{si}-na] Isin_x(IN)^{si.ki} šè ud La-ra-ak^{ki}-šfè ìl-gin-na-a (SACT 1 169: 1-4). Collated by M. A. Powell, OA 20 (1981) 130. For this text, see most recently Th. Richter, *Untersuchungen zu den lokalen Panthea Süd- und Mittelbabyloniens in altbabylonischer Zeit*, AOAT 257 (Münster, 1999), 158. Unfortunately, this attestation was overlooked by *Rép. géogr. 2*, which left Larak without any entry in that compendium.

3 For Pabilsag and his connection with Larak, see Richter, op. cit., 96, 158-59, 172-73, with earlier literature.

4 R. D. Biggs, JNES 32 (1973), 30 x 1’-4’.

5 íd-bi MAŠ.TI.HAR, “its (i.e., of Larak) canal is the MAŠ.TI.HAR.” This toponym is identical with the name of a wagon part, which is documented in the Pre-Sargonic sources from Nippur and Lagaš: 3 ^{giš}MAŠ.TI.HAR (TUM 5 140 i 1); 1 umbin MAŠ.TI.HAR sunun (DP 482 iv 3). Cf. also ^{giš}TI.HAR in EV 349 (MEE 4, 238). The last attestation suggests a possible reading ^{maš}TI.HAR.

6 See D. O. Edzard, RLA 6/7-8 (1983) 494-495.

(1) A Middle Babylonian tablet from Isin mentions a *šangu* priest of Larak (LÚ.É.BAR ^{uru}La-ra-ki),⁷ indicating that these two localities remained in close physical contact.⁸

(2) Two Early Old Babylonian tablets from Isin mention a local city-gate named after Pabilsag (abulla ^dPa-bíl-sag [BIN 9 380: 9]; ^{giš}ig abulla ^dPa-bíl-sag [MCS 5, 121 no. 7: 4-5]), which very likely led in the direction of Larak.⁹

(3) The same city-gate is probably also meant in a Sargonic legal document from Isin (BIN 8 170: 15-16),¹⁰ which records legal proceedings that occurred “at the place of Pabilsag” (ki ^dPa-bíl-sag-ka di-bi si bí-sá). Alternatively, Larak itself could be meant here, which would make the Larak–Isin connection even stronger.

(4) As a general rule, divine couples usually reside in relative proximity to one another.¹¹

(5) And last but not least, there is the evidence of SACT 1 169 (see above), which demonstrates that ritual intercourse was conducted (apparently overland) between Isin and Larak on regular basis.

If Larak and Isin were in fact relative neighbors, the distance between them probably did not exceed 20-30 kms. This – and the fact that Isin lay to the west of the Euphrates, on the very edge of the alluvium – would mean that Larak is to be sought in the general eastward direction in relation to Isin and the Euphrates, within a section of the alluvium marked off to the east by the Tigris.¹²

⁷ C. B. F. Walker and C. Wilcke in *Isin – Išān Bahrīyāt II*, ed. by B. Hrouda (Munich, 1981), 101 IB 1052 rev. 5.

⁸ Cf. Kh Nashef’s observation regarding the same source: “Unser Beleg ... deutet ausserdem möglicherweise auf eine Lage in der Nähe von Isin” (*Rép. géogr.* 5, 176).

⁹ Richter, op. cit., 173, thinks that the structure in question was “die Türe des Heiligtums,” but abulla never describes temple-gates. Here note that the alleged examples of abulla meaning “gate (of a building)” in PSD A/2, 181, uniformly refer to city-gates. Cf. Steinkeller, RA 72 (1978) 75.

¹⁰ This tablet is to be added to the later group of Isin materials listed in Steinkeller and J. N. Postgate, *Third-Millennium Legal and Administrative Texts in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad*, MC 4 (Winona Lake, 1992), 7-8.

¹¹ Cf. Steinkeller in *Festschrift für Burkhart Kienast*, ed. by G. J. Seltz, AOAT 274 (Münster, 2003), 630.

¹² These facts exclude Tell al-Wilayah as a possible candidate for Larak, as considered by J. N. Postgate, *Sumer* 32 (1976) 82, since Tell al-Wilayah is situated considerably to the east of the Tigris. For the course of the Tigris during the third and second millennia, see Steinkeller, “New Light on the Hydrology and Topography of Southern Babylonia in the Third Millennium,” *ZA* 91 (2001) 22-84.

No references to Larak are extant in second millennium sources, except for the Middle Babylonian attestation of a “priest of Larak” just cited (which proves that it continued to operate as a cult-center), and its mentions in the antediluvian section of the Sumerian King List, the “Lamentation over Ur,”¹³ and a number of other literary compositions.¹⁴ However, Larak’s name reappears in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid sources.¹⁵ It is one of those attestations (PBS 2/1 181: 7) that, in fact, provides exceedingly important information on Larak’s location. That text, which lists some of the landed properties managed by the Murašu firm of Nippur, and dates to the first regnal year of Darius II (423–405 BCE), names a field situated “in Larak on bank of the Old Tigris” (*ina URU.UD.UD.KI GÚ ÍD.IDIGNA la-bi-ri*).

When we confront this datum with our earlier observations about Larak’s position in relation to Isin based on the third- and second-millennia sources, it becomes clear that the waterway in question must have been identical with the Tigris’s main course as it flowed during the third and second millennia over the lower section of the alluvium, past Maškan-šapir, Urusagrig, Adab, Karkar, Zabalam, Apišal, and Girsu.¹⁶ One can conclude, accordingly, that Larak was situated either directly on or very close to the Tigris,¹⁷ somewhere along its stretch between Urusagrig and Adab.¹⁸

The “Old Tigris” is mentioned in three other Murašu texts (BE 10 36: 8 [1/v/2], 41: 9 [1/vi/5], and 98: 9 [4/?/?]), which likewise date to the reign of Darius II. In each of those cases, agricultural land is said to be located “on the bank of the Old Tigris” ((šá) GÚ ÍD.IDIGNA *la-bi-ri*). In addition, the same waterway is referred to in an unpublished Neo-Babylonian text from Sippar, which names a settlement ^{uru}Bu(or *Gíd*)-*da-na* situated on the

¹³ Ga-ša-an-x-x [...] é-ba La-ra-ak^{ki}-a (W. H. Ph. Römer, *Die Klage über die Zerstörung von Ur*, AOAT 309 [Münster, 2004], 14 line 19).

¹⁴ See J. A. Black in *Velles paraules: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Miguel Civil*, ed. by P. Michalowski et al., *Aula Or* 9 (1991), 30 n. 56.

¹⁵ For the attestations, see *Rép. géogr.* 8, 210.

¹⁶ See Steinkeller, *ZA* 91, 39–41 with Map 1.

¹⁷ The Murašu texts also mention a “Larak canal” (ÍD.UD.UD.KI – *Rép. géogr.* 8, 375; Stolper *Entrepreneurs* no. 13: 7’, 13’, 15’), which may have been identical with the MAŠ.TI.HAR of the Pre-Sargonic riddle. Possibly, but not necessarily, that canal connected Larak with the Tigris.

¹⁸ A good candidate for Larak in that general area would be the site of Tell al-Laham, which is situated ca. 22 miles to the northeast of Isin as the crow flies, and which shows Ur III through Achaemenid occupation. See R. McC. Adams, *Heartland of Cities: Surveys of Ancient Settlement and Land Use on the Central Floodplain of the Euphrates* (Chicago, 1981), 277 nos. 1230 and 1231.

ÍD.IDIGNA *la-bi-ri*, clearly in the vicinity of Sippar.¹⁹ The last example demonstrates that the designation “Old Tigris” applied equally to the course of the Tigris north of Maškan-šapir, all the way to Sippar.

The existence of a waterway called “Old Tigris” during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods is of obvious significance for the history of the Tigris, but, as far as I know, this point has so far escaped the attention of scholarship. Clearly, if there was an “Old Tigris” in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid times, there must, by that time, have existed a “New Tigris” as well, which ran to the east of the old branch, and, almost certainly, constituted the river’s main branch. Thus, the sources in question provide a secure *ante-quem* date for a major eastward shift of the Tigris. A *post-quem* date of this event is established by a Kassite letter from Nippur,²⁰ dating roughly to the reigns of Kurigalzu II and Kadašmanturgu (1354-1280 BCE), according to which, at that time, Nippur still obtained irrigation water from the Tigris. As for the Achaemenid “Old Tigris,” chances are that it continued to be part of the Tigris system, rather than to have become one of the Euphrates branches. Against the latter possibility speaks not only its name, but also the fact that the Euphrates tended historically to shift westward, which was due to the continuous rise of the alluvium (resulting from the accumulation of silts and the prevailing upward tectonic movement of the Euphrates–Tigris floodplain).

Piotr STEINKELLER (22-02-2005), 6 Divinity Avenue, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138 (USA)

¹⁹ Fitzwilliam O.9: 3 (15.II.547/6 BCE), cited by Zadok in NABU 2000/3 p. 4 + NABU 2003/35 p. 36 (collation). I am deeply grateful to Ran Zadok for bringing this datum to my attention.

²⁰ See Biggs, “A Letter from Kassite Nippur,” JCS 19 (1965) 95-102; Steinkeller, ZA 91, 41.