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# Glimpses of the Old Babylonian Syllabary. Followed by Some Considerations on Regional Variations and Training in Letter-Writing

Marine Béranger

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BERLINER BEITRÄGE ZUM VORDEREN ORIENT  
BAND 28

# Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient

Herausgegeben von

Dominik Bonatz  
Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum  
und  
Jörg Klinger

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Zur Methodik ihrer Erstellung

herausgegeben von  
Jörg Klinger und Sebastian Fischer



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# Glimpses of the Old Babylonian Syllabary. Followed by Some Considerations on Regional Variations and Training in Letter-Writing

MARINE BÉRANGER<sup>1</sup>

COLLÈGE DE FRANCE

During the four centuries that the Old Babylonian period lasted (between 2002 BC and 1595 BC), Mesopotamian scribes used the same writing system and Akkadian dialect to write their letters. However, as A. Westenholz (WESTENHOLZ, A. 2006: 254) has reminded us, Old Babylonian Akkadian was a lively developing language at that time, and had no fixed written norm. The idea that the different regions/kingdoms had their own inventory of signs and corresponding values is furthermore well established, as is the practice of analysing the syllabary of a text in order to locate its place of writing. Nevertheless, since the pioneering studies by A. Goetze (GOETZE 1945: 146–151, GOETZE 1947, GOETZE 1958: 137–149) and the comparison of various corpora of letters by J. G. Westenholz (WESTENHOLZ, J. G. 1974: 410–412 and WESTENHOLZ, J. G. 1983: 224–226), research has mainly focused on a single archaeological site or corpus, and no extensive and systematic comparison of local Old Babylonian spelling conventions has been undertaken so far.<sup>2</sup> And yet, the increasing number of Old Babylonian

<sup>1</sup> I thank D. Charpin and A. Jacquet for their proof-reading of this paper and valuable comments. Any remaining errors are my own responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see WHITING 1987: 3–22 on the letters excavated at Tell Asmar (Ešnunna). Note that M. Streck (STRECK 2006: 215–251), in order to study the phonetic realisation of sibilants,

analysed the way they are written in Old Babylonian letters and inscriptions from Qaṭṭunan and Babylon, and that O. Popova has recently compared the Alalah VII syllabary with those of Old Akkadian, Old Assyrian and Mari texts (POPOVA 2016: 62–90).

tablets excavated and published since the 1980's encourages the resumption of such a research. The study of W. Sommerfeld is a stimulating example of what can be done (SOMMERFELD 2006).

The purpose of my talk during the workshop organised in April 2016 by J. Klinger and S. Fischer was to start a review of the Old Babylonian syllabary, first by outlining the repertoires of signs used in letters written in the kingdoms of Babylon and Mari at the time of Kings Hammu-rabi and Zimri-Lim (18<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>3</sup> Letters are indeed a valuable source, for they are easy enough to date and locate (STRECK 2006: 215 n. 2)<sup>4</sup>. On this occasion, I also presented the method which I have developed to work on the Mesopotamian writing system (XML-TEI annotated corpora reengineered in a software called “TXM”<sup>5</sup>). This technical part of my work will not be the subject of the present paper, nor will I engage in phonological considerations. After giving an insight into the syllabaries of Babylon and Mari, I will rather, through the study of onomastics, trace back some regional variations and consider the way people were taught to write letters.

## 1. Glimpses of the syllabary of Mari and Babylon

The corpus from the kingdom of Mari analysed for this research consists of letters written in the four central districts (Mari, Terqa, Saggaratum and Qaṭṭunan)<sup>6</sup> at the time of King Zimri-Lim. It is composed of 780 letters sent by some sixty people. This corpus is made of 138,054 occurrences of unbroken signs. The corpus from the kingdom of Babylon consists of 295 letters written by King Hammu-rabi and his state officials: Ṭab-eli-matim (*wakil gallābī*), Lu-Ninurta (possible chief accountant, *šandabakkum*), Sin-iddinam (at first secretary of Hammu-rabi, then governor of Larsa)<sup>7</sup>, Enlil-kurgalani, Iddiyatum, Marduk-mušallim, Namtilani-idug and Taribatum. This corpus is made of 38,663 occurrences of unbroken signs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a precedent review on the syllabary used in texts from Mari, see: BOTTÉRO 1954: 34–66, WESTENHOLZ, A. 1978: 160–169 and DURAND 1984: 174–178.

<sup>4</sup> Archival letters are often found with economic/legal documents which provide information on the people mentioned in the letters. The place of writing is more difficult to determine, but this can be done by cross-checking prosographical information. I have gathered all the information that I have found on the senders and addressees of the Old Babylonian letters in a prosopographical database.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on “TXM”, see <http://textometrie.ens-lyon.fr/?lang=en>; for a technical

description of my project, see BÉRANGER forthcoming and the website [https://groupes.renater.fr/wiki/txm-users/public/umr\\_proclac\\_corpus\\_akkadien?s\[\]=txm&s\[\]=akkadien](https://groupes.renater.fr/wiki/txm-users/public/umr_proclac_corpus_akkadien?s[]=txm&s[]=akkadien).

<sup>6</sup> On this territorial division of the kingdom of Mari during the reign of King Zimri-Lim, see LION 2001: 141–209.

<sup>7</sup> CHARPIN 2003.

<sup>8</sup> I was able to bring together these corpora thanks to the project ARCHIBAB and the technical support of D. Charpin. Bibliographical information and an edition of all the letters cited in this paper are available on the project's website: [www.archibab.fr](http://www.archibab.fr).



## 1.1 Labial stops

The first analysis of labial stops reveals that they were strongly associated to a specific sign in the kingdom of Mari. Only in special cases were they associated to a different one. Thus, /pi/ and /pu/ were written with the signs KA =  $pi_4$  and PÛ only in anthroponyms, and /bi/ was written with NE =  $bi$  only in the fossilized spelling *qí-bí-ma* “say” (and sometimes in some other forms of *qabûm* “to say”).

The situation is slightly less standardized in the kingdom of Babylon, since the sign KA =  $pi_4$  was also used apart from anthroponyms, and /pi/ was mainly written with the sign BI =  $pi$ , but could also be written with the specific sign PI.

In both places, the sound /be/ could be spelled with the specific sign BAD =  $be$ , but also with the sign BI.

In the writing system, the distinction between voiced and voiceless labial stops only existed for BA : PA. A same sign was often used for other labials:

- BI = /be/, /bi/ and /pe/, /pi/
- BU = /bu/ and /pu/.

Phonemic values	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
/ba/	BA [×273]	BA [×1241]
/be/	BAD [×53] (in forms of <i>bêlum</i> ) BI = $bé$ [×14]	BAD (mainly in forms of <i>bêlum</i> and <i>bêltum</i> ) [×2423] <sup>9</sup> BI = $bé$ [×166]
/bi/	BI [×573] <sup>10</sup> NE = $bi$ (only in <i>qí-bí-ma</i> ) [×272]	BI [×1325] NE = $bi$ (mainly in <i>qí-bí-ma</i> <sup>11</sup> ) [×721]
/bu/	BU [×140]	BU [×808]
/pa/	PA [×148]	PA [×965]
/pe/	BI = $pé$ [×48]	BI = $pé$ [×146]
/pi/	BI = $pi$ [×192] KA = $pi_4$ [×19] PI [×29] <sup>12</sup>	BI = $pi$ [×710] KA = $pi_4$ (only in anthroponyms) [×7]

Table 1: Signs for labial stops in 18<sup>th</sup> century BC Babylon and Mari.

<sup>9</sup> The sign BAD also appears in some other words: the verb *zabâlum* (ARM 27 57: 26 : *az-be<sup>3</sup>-el-ka*) and the adverb *belânum/bilânum* (ARM 26/1 207: 36 + FM 2 61: 10: *be-la-ni*).

<sup>10</sup> Note that in four letters (sent by Marduk-mušalim and Lu-Ninurta), BI is used for the word *qíbi-ma* apart from the epistolary address: AbB 9 200: 14 and AbB 13 33: 29 (*qí-bí-ma*), AbB 4 115: 21 and AbB 11 174: 10 (*qí-bí-i-ma*).

<sup>11</sup> Occasionally, NE =  $bi$  appears in other forms of *qabûm*: *i-qa-bí* (ARM 10 70: 22), *aq-bí-šu-nu-ši* (ARM 14 89: 8'), etc.

<sup>12</sup> Mainly in letters sent by Lu-Ninurta, but also in the letter AbB 4 70: 7 sent by King Hammu-rabi's minister Taribatum (*pi-ha-as-sú*). It may also appear in the letter AbB 8 53: 5 sent by King Hammu-rabi, but this text has been copied twice (TIM 1 1 and TIM 2 53), and the two copies diverge

Phonemic values	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
/pu/	BU = <i>pu</i> [×201] PÛ (only in anthroponyms) [×3]	BU = <i>pu</i> [×985] PÛ (only in anthroponyms) [×4]

Table 1 (continued): Signs for labial stops in 18<sup>th</sup> century BC Babylon and Mari.

## 1.2 Velar stops

The distinction between voiced and voiceless is clear as regards velar stops: GA : KA, GI : KI, GU : KU.

But the spelling of emphatics is far from clear-cut. The kingdom of Mari has the specific sign SILA<sub>3</sub> for /qa/, which we can trace back to the letters found in the archive of Ikun-piša in Sippar-Amnanum (WESTENHOLZ, J. G. 1983: 224), where it appears alternatively with GA = *qá* and KA = *qà*. Note that both SILA<sub>3</sub> (AS 22 55: 6, Guichard Semitica 58 5: 10+12) and GA = *qá* (Guichard Semitica 58 1: 10+11+42, Guichard Semitica 58 3: 12+4', Guichard Semitica 58 4: 10) appear in letters from Ešnunna, which date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>13</sup> Apart from some exceptions /qa/ was always rendered with SILA<sub>3</sub> in Mari. The association between /qa/ and SILA<sub>3</sub> was thus stabilized at this time.

This was not the case in the kingdom of Babylon, where /qa/ was mainly written with the sign GA = *qá*, which is a remnant of the Ur III and Old Akkadian syllabary (HILGERT 2002: 637, GELB 1961: 29). The sign SILA<sub>3</sub> is not attested within the kingdom of Babylon, but the sign KA = *qà* appears once in a letter sent by King Hammu-rabi.

In both places, emphatics /qe/, /qi/ and /qu/ were rendered with the set of K-signs.

Phonemic values	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
/ga/	GA [×49]	GA [×232]
/ge/	GI = <i>ge</i> [×2]	GI = <i>ge</i> [×31]
/gi/	GI [×19]	GI [×73]
/gu/	GU [×13]	GU [×49]

Table 2: Signs for velar stops in 18<sup>th</sup> century BC Babylon and Mari.

considerably. The first has: *tup-pi an-ni-a-am*, the second: *†{up-pi(?) a}n-'ni'-a-am*. L. Cagni, who edited this letter, said he could not collate the tablet (CAGNI 1980: 34 n. 54 a). I preferred not to consider AbB 8 53.

<sup>13</sup> The letter AS 22 55 was not found in the “Palace of the rulers” but in the “Audience Hall of

Naram-Sin”, and was written at the time of King Hammu-rabi or even later, according to R. M. Whiting (WHITING 1987: x). The letters edited by M. Guichard (GUICHARD 2016: 17–59) are from Iluni, King of Ešnunna. In the letters AS 22 2–54, dated to the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mil. BC, SILA<sub>3</sub> never appears.

Phonemic values	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
/ka/	KA [×361] GA = <i>kà</i> [×1] <sup>14</sup>	KA [×1859]
/ke/	KI = <i>ke</i> [×7]	KI = <i>ke</i> [×115]
/ki/	KI [×390]	KI [×1450]
/ku/	KU [×171]	KU [×902]
/qa/	GA = <i>qá</i> [×121] KA = <i>qà</i> [×1] <sup>15</sup>	GA = <i>qá</i> [×1] <sup>16</sup> SILA <sub>3</sub> = <i>qa</i> [×965]
/qe/	KI = <i>qé</i> [×4]	KI = <i>qé</i> [×89]
/qi/	KI = <i>qí</i> [×321]	KI = <i>qí</i> [×1038]
/qu/	KU = <i>qu</i> [×74] GU = <i>qu</i> [×1] <sup>17</sup>	KU = <i>qu</i> [×211]

Table 2 (continued): Signs for velar stops in 18<sup>th</sup> century BC Babylon and Mari.

### 1.3 Dental stops

The writing system was again systematic in both Babylon and Mari as regards the distinction between voiced and voiceless. In most cases, they were written with a single sign: DA : TA, DI : TI, DU : TU. The sign DIN was used in anthroponyms (in special cases) for /di/.<sup>18</sup>

The spelling of emphatics was far from clear. In the kingdom of Mari, the sign HI = *ṭà* was massively used, while in Babylon this sign value was confined to onomastics, as it was during the Ur III period (HILGERT 2002: 640). In Babylon, it is the sign TA = *ṭá* which was used. This sign value also appears in the letters from the kingdom of Mari. It goes back to the Ur III syllabary (HILGERT 2002: 144). The sound /ṭi/ was mostly spelled with the sign TI in both places (as in the Ur III syllabary), and /ṭu/ with the sign TU (as in Old Akkadian). For the sound /ṭu/, the sign DU was also used several times in the kingdom of Babylon, not only in letters sent by Lu-Ninurta but also by the Babylonian official Taribatum.

Unlike what happened with other consonants, a special sign for voiceless and emphatic stops with /e/ existed in both kingdoms: TE. But the system was not stabilized, as there was

<sup>14</sup> In the letter AbB 4 31: 9 to Šamaš-hazir, Sin-mušalim and their colleagues from King Hammu-rabi: *ta-ap-lu-<sup>1</sup>kà*.

<sup>15</sup> In the letter AbB 13 21: 6 from King Hammu-rabi (no photograph available). For other references for the Old Babylonian period, see VAN SOLDT 1990: 22 n. 27b.

<sup>16</sup> In the letter FM 9 66: 6 from the musician Akiya (collated).

<sup>17</sup> In the letter AbB 4 154: 26 sent by Lu-Ninurta: *dam-qu* (photograph on the CDLI website: [http://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival\\_view.php?ObjectID=P384891](http://cdli.ucla.edu/search/archival_view.php?ObjectID=P384891)). In other letters sent by this man, the sign KU was used [×20].

<sup>18</sup> In letters, DIN was systematically used in the spelling of anthroponyms made of a preterit form of *nadānum* (Sin-iddinam, Ili-iddinam, Keš-iddinam, etc.).

still some confusion between /e/ and /i/: TI = *te*<sub>9</sub> (both), DI = *te* (in Babylon) and TE = *ti*<sub>7</sub> (in Mari).

Phonemic values	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
/da/	DA [×152]	DA [×799]
/de/	DI = <i>de</i> [×18]	DI = <i>de</i> [×87]
/di/	DI [×267] DIN = <i>di</i> (only in anthroponyms) [×140]	DI [×836] DIN = <i>di</i> (only in anthroponyms) [×53]
/du/	DU [×110]	DU [×609]
/ta/	TA [×393]	TA [×1165] DA = <i>tá</i> [×1] <sup>19</sup>
/te/	TE [×120] TI = <i>te</i> <sub>9</sub> [×1] <sup>20</sup>	TE [×354] TI = <i>te</i> <sub>9</sub> [×12]
/ti/	TI [×422]	TI [×1319] TE = <i>ti</i> <sub>7</sub> [×4]
/tu/	TU [×168]	TU [×876] DU = <i>tù</i> [×1] <sup>21</sup>
/ta/	TA = <i>tá</i> [×19] HI = <i>tà</i> (only in anthroponyms) [×4] <sup>22</sup>	TA = <i>tá</i> [×14] HI = <i>tà</i> [×209]
/te/	TE = <i>te</i> <sub>4</sub> [×69] DI = <i>te</i> [×6] <sup>23</sup>	TE = <i>te</i> <sub>4</sub> [×290]
/ti/	TI = <i>ti</i> [×3] DI = <i>ti</i> [×2] <sup>24</sup>	TI = <i>ti</i> [×65] TE = <i>ti</i> <sub>4</sub> [×12] (?) DI = <i>ti</i> [×1] <sup>25</sup>
/tu/	TU = <i>tú</i> [×66] DU = <i>tù</i> [×11] <sup>26</sup>	TU = <i>tú</i> [×294]

Table 3: Signs for dental stops in 18<sup>th</sup> century BC Babylon and Mari.

<sup>19</sup> In the letter ARM 18 11: 5 from King Zimri-Lim to Mukannišum: *tá<sup>o</sup>-ba-ri-im* (collated by DURAND 1997: 270-271).

<sup>20</sup> In the letter AbB 4 102: 5 from King Hammurabi to Šamaš-hazir, Sin-mušallim and their colleagues: BĀD-*e-te<sub>9</sub>-lum*<sup>(ki)</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> In the letter FM 9 59: 7 sent by the musician Ipiq-Mamma: *šum-ma ri-d[u]-um* (collated).

<sup>22</sup> The sign DA = *ta* appears in AbB 13 30: 10 (sent by King Hammurabi), but this is probably an error of transliteration. In the absence of a photograph or a copy, I could not verify.

<sup>23</sup> In letters from the *šandabakkum* Lu-Ninurta, the minister Iddiyatum and King Hammurabi.

<sup>24</sup> In the letter AbB 2 1: 10 sent by King Hammurabi (*ú-ša-dš-ti-ra-an-ni*) and AbB 4 134: 22 sent by the Babylonian minister Taribatum (*ti-i-ib*).

<sup>25</sup> The value *ti* of DI is written on ARM 13 116: 12: *i-ma-ti-i* (< *maṭūm*) (collated by DURAND 1997: 231-232).

<sup>26</sup> In letters sent by Taribatum and Lu-Ninurta.

## 1.4 Anthology of specific signs

I will now enumerate several syllabic sign values which were characteristic to one kingdom or another, in order to offer a wider view of their respective syllabaries.

Sign values	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
AB = <i>is</i> , <i>iš<sub>7</sub></i> , <i>iz</i> , <i>ès</i> , <i>ěš</i> , <i>ěz</i>	Not attested.	- <i>is</i> [×84] - <i>iš<sub>7</sub></i> [×17]: before dentals <sup>27</sup> ; but not in complementary distribution with IŠ (many occurrences of IŠ before dentals) For example: <i>iš<sub>7</sub>-ta-na-ás-si</i> (A.1025: 71) <i>iš<sub>7</sub>-ta-al-ma</i> (ARM 10 152: 18', ARM 27 84: 16) <i>na-pí-iš<sub>7</sub>-ta-šu</i> (ARM 26/1 199: 31+50)  - <i>iz</i> [×4] <sup>28</sup> : <i>iz-ku-ru</i> (ARM 27 135: 30+32, ARM 27 116: 46), <i>iz-ku-ur</i> (FM 2 50: 10)  - <i>ès</i> , <i>ěz</i> [×6] : <i>ès-ki-ru</i> (ARM 13 6: 19), <i>e-ès-ke-er</i> (ARM 14 18: 7'), <i>ès-ku-ma</i> (ARM 14 48: 47) (I) <i>e-re-ěz-zu-ma-tum</i> [Erêssum-mâtum] (ARM 13 5: 9) and so on.  - <i>ěš</i> [×1]: <i>e-ěš(ki)</i> (ARM 14 78: 11).
BAD = <i>iš</i>	Not attested.	[× 184] In complementary distribution with the sign UŠ: BAD is not used before dentals while UŠ is <sup>29</sup> (×1 exception: FM 9 28: 17 [collated]). Note that UŠ was sometimes used before non-dental consonants in the kingdom of Mari. <sup>30</sup>
BAD = <i>til</i>	Not attested.	[×16] <i>til-la-tim</i> (ARM 6 16: 8', ARM 14 69: 4, ARM 27 124: 6'), <i>til-la-tum</i> (ARM 6 19: 18, ARM 14 92: 17), (I) <i>é-a-til-la-ti</i> (ARM 14 47: 17) and so on.
BÍL = <i>pil</i>	[×25] In anthroponyms: <i>a-pil-i-lí-šu</i> (AbB 4 103: 10, AbB 4 15: 7+19), <i>a-pil-</i> (d)MAR.TU (AbB 2 17: 6) and so on. <sup>31</sup>	Not attested.

Table 4: Anthology of syllabic sign values specific to the kingdoms of Babylon and Mari.

<sup>27</sup> /iš/ was pronounced [is] before dentals, at least in some instances. Hence, AB could be read *is*. See STRECK 2006: 233-237.

<sup>28</sup> STRECK 2006: 226. To be read *iz* according to him.

<sup>29</sup> STRECK 2006: 225+237. /uš/ was pronounced [us] before dentals. Hence, UŠ could be read *us*. See also SOMMERFELD 2006: 369 and KOGAN 2011: 87.

<sup>30</sup> BÉRANGER forthcoming.

Sign	Kingdom of Babylon	Kingdom of Mari
BUR = <i>pur</i>	[×40] In <i>šapârum</i> : <i>iš-pur-am</i> (AbB 4 20: 5, AbB 4 74: 6+7+12, etc.), <i>ta-aš-pur-am</i> (AbB 2 8: 5', AbB 2 43: 8, etc.) and so on.	Not attested.
HA = <i>gir</i> <sub>14</sub>	[×6] In anthroponyms: (d)EN.ZU- <i>ma-gir</i> <sub>14</sub> (AbB 4 21: 10+15+18+22), (d)UTU- <i>ma-gir</i> <sub>14</sub> (AbB 4 21: 7, YOS 15 35: 10). <sup>32</sup>	Not attested.
ME = <i>mi</i>	Not attested.	[×15] <i>da-mi-iq-tim</i> (FM 2 116: 22+26+44), <i>da-mi-iq</i> (ARM 27 14: 43), <i>aš-šū-mi-ia</i> (ARM 10 104: 5), <i>i-mi-it-tam</i> (ARM 27 108: 9') and so on.
NI = <i>ià</i>	Not attested.	[×22] In the two Amorite names Haya-sumu and Hayama-El: <i>ha-ià-su-mu-ú</i> (ARM 27 135: 5+10), <i>ha-ià-ma-DINGIR</i> (ARM 14 93:8) etc. <sup>33</sup> But the sign IA was still predominant, including in Amorite names.
PI = <i>ya, ye, yi, yu</i>	Not attested.	[×119] Mainly in nisbas and Amorite names: LÚ <i>qa-tá-na-yu</i> (ki) (A.2202: 7+9+10), LÚ KÁ.DINGIR. RA- <i>yu</i> (ki) (A.2202: 29), <i>ba-bi-la-yu-um</i> (ki) (A.2983: 6), <i>yu-um-ra-si-AN</i> (ARM 27 83: 7), <i>sa-mu-yi-im</i> (ARM 27 3: 20) and so on.
SILA <sub>3</sub> = <i>qa</i>	Not attested.	[×965]
ÚH = <i>úh</i>	[×26] <i>pu-úh</i> A.ŠĀ (AbB 4 35: 15, AbB 4 166: 18', AbB 13 15: 8 etc.), <i>ú-su-úh</i> (AbB 2 4: 10'), <i>ú-si-úh-šū-nu-ti</i> (AbB 5 136:12) and so on.	Not attested.

Table 4 (continued): Anthology of syllabic sign values specific to the kingdoms of Babylon and Mari.

<sup>31</sup> See below (§II) the discussion on signs specific to anthroponyms.

<sup>32</sup> See below the discussion on signs specific to anthroponyms.

<sup>33</sup> See below the discussion on signs specific to anthroponyms.

Several syllabic sign values only attested in Mari, and even there attested only once, come from the letter A.1258+, a bilingual petition letter sent by a scribe to King Zimri-Lim:

- *gál*: *i-gi-gál-lim* (A.1258+: 30) > *igigallum* “wisdom”
- *kim*: *mu-ul-tal-kim* (A.1258+: 29) > *mumtalkum* “counsellor, sage”
- *muš*: *muš-ta-lim* (A.1258+: 29) > *muštalum* “who considers”.

This was probably a way for this scribe to show off his abilities (see KRYSZAT 2008 for a similar behaviour), in addition to using a literary vocabulary. This artifice was probably not intended for Zimri-Lim, but for his scribe Šunuhra-halu, for he was the one who read the letters to the king.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusions

The syllabaries used in the kingdoms of Mari and Babylon were close in many aspects, but some differences are characteristic, the most spectacular being in the opposition GA = *qá* (Babylon) : SILA<sub>3</sub> = *qa* (Mari) and TA = *ṭá* (Babylon) : HI = *ṭá* (Mari).

The distinction between voiced and voiceless was clear in both kingdoms, except for labials /be/ : /pe/, /bi/ : /pi/ and /bu/ : /pu/. On the contrary, the distinction between voiceless and emphatics was far from clear.

The attestation of sign values considered to be characteristic of southern Mesopotamia (DI = *te*, DU = *ṭi*, DU = *ṭù*, PI)<sup>35</sup> in letters written within the kingdom of Babylon reveals that the traditional division between northern and southern Mesopotamia was not definitively established in the facts. Among these letters, many were sent by Lu-Ninurta who, according to B. Fiette, must be identified with his namesake attested in Larsa at the time of King Rim-Sin I, and whose scribe (or maybe he himself), according to paleography (e.g. archaic form of signs), was trained in cuneiform in southern Mesopotamia (FIETTE 2018: §1.6.2). However, not all the letters sent by Lu-Ninurta have such characteristics, and some in which “southern” sign values appear (DI = *te*, DU = *ṭù*, PI) are not archaic. Besides, other letters were sent by King Hammu-rabi or his Babylonian administrators (Taribatum, Iddiyatum). The issue is more about understanding when these “southern” sign values were introduced in the syllabary of Babylon. All the letters in which they appear date back to the fall of Larsa. The proportion

<sup>34</sup> On Šunuhra-halu as private secretary of Zimri-Lim, see CHARPIN 1988: 207–208 and CHARPIN 2008: 180–184. Šunuhra-halu served as *ṭupšar sakkakkim* during the thirteen years of the reign of Zimri-Lim (1775–1762 BC), as evidenced by

a letter sent by Habdu-malik (ARM 26/2 396 = ARM 2 132).

<sup>35</sup> See GOETZE 1945: 146–151 and WESTENHOLZ, J. G. 1974: 410–411.

of letters written in Babylon before 1763 BC is minimal (only 17 out of 295).<sup>36</sup> Yet these letters do not contain “southern” sign values. Due to the lack of data, we may only say that these values may have been introduced in Babylon after the annexation of Larsa. In a more general way, these spellings reveal that the classification established by A. Goetze needs to be re-examined in the light of the many texts available today.

Hammu-rabi’s letters are the source of several sign values attested only once (*kà*, *qà*, *te*<sub>9</sub>) or little attested (*ti*) in Babylon. His scribe Marduk-našir was an expert,<sup>37</sup> for he had to write the king’s letters, but also be able to read all the letters sent to the king. Thus, he had to know the syllabaries used in the various kingdoms in contact with Babylon. The set of sign values attested in Hammu-rabi’s letters is representative of this extensive knowledge.

This comment leads me to another consideration: the writing system was rather stabilized in both kingdoms. And yet, a few variations reveal that scribes sometimes made a personal choice, by choosing sign values which were not part of their current repertoire, but which they knew. And this was not always due to amateurism, as is attested by several letters from the kings themselves, where sign values otherwise not attested have been used.<sup>38</sup> From a more general point of view, this supports the need for a thorough investigation on the notion of “orthography” in Mesopotamia.<sup>39</sup>

As the reader has probably noticed, several sign values were only used in anthroponyms. I will analyse this set of sign values in the second part of this paper.

<sup>36</sup> This corpus is made of 15 letters excavated at Tell Hariri/Mari (ARM 6 52–54, ARM 10 168–169, ARM 28 1, ARM 28 3–10) and 2 letters sent by King Hammu-rabi to Ibni-Sin and Marduk-našir (AbB 8 50, AbB 8 53), probably found in Sippar during ancient illicit excavations. I was unable to find information about these two officials (Marduk-našir must not be identified with his namesake known as King Hammu-rabi’s scribe, see below note 37), and the letters are too broken to yield valuable information. As Hammu-rabi’s presence in Sippar is attested before the fall of Larsa (see ARM 26/2 449: 3+5 and CHARPIN 2004: 266–267), these letters may have been written before 1763 BC.

<sup>37</sup> Marduk-našir was King Hammu-rabi’s scribe (*tupšar sakkakkim*) after the fall of Larsa. See CHARPIN 2003.

<sup>38</sup> For a case of amateurism, we have a few letters sent by Yamšum, Kiru and Šimatum while they were in Ilan-šura. This corpus was addressed by DURAND 1984: 162–172, CHARPIN 1989: 31–40 and CHARPIN 2007: 401–402.

<sup>39</sup> The letter AbB 13 5 (from King Hammu-rabi to Sin-iddinam) illustrates the spelling discrepancies: in the same text, the scribe has used different graphemes to spell the word *išpuram* “He wrote to me”: *iš-pur-am* (AbB 13 5: 4) and *iš-pu-ra-am* (AbB 13 5: 13). None of these spellings can be considered incorrect. See LANGLOIS 2017: III.6 for inconsistent spellings in the letters excavated at Tell Rimah/Qaṭṭara (even in one and the same letter). A. I. Langlois pointed out the mixed nature of these letters, as regards paleography and orthography. I will conduct a thorough study of the letters from Tell Rimah/Qaṭṭara and Tell Leilan/Šehna in the future.



## II. Sign values specific to anthroponyms

The Mesopotamian syllabaries were not static, but evolved over centuries. In order to trace back the origin of the 18<sup>th</sup> century syllabaries of Babylon and Mari, I will begin with a limited selection, and study the sign values specific to anthroponyms. M. Stol (STOL 1991: 192) has already pointed out that Old Babylonian anthroponyms tend to use unusual readings of signs, which differ from the writing of other words and are traditional. Old Babylonian personal names are therefore a valuable source in order to observe the emergence of regional differences, and understand the way people were taught to write letters.

During the most elementary phase of the scribal training, lists of personal names were used in order to teach the spelling of Akkadian, Sumerian and Amorite names (PETERSON 2011: 246–273, VELDHUIS 2014: 212–215). These lists were found in most Mesopotamian cities where cuneiform was taught, but a lot were found during illegal excavations, and many are still unpublished.<sup>40</sup>

### II.1 A common heritage

Many sign values only used for the spelling of anthroponyms (or more broadly in onomastics, i.e. anthroponyms, divine names and toponyms) appear in the letters from both Mari and Babylon. When a sign value is attested in both places, it is often also attested in lists of personal names, as can be seen in Table 5.

Sign values	Attestations in lists of personal names (among others) <sup>41</sup>
<i>bar</i>	(I) <i>u-bar-ru-ni</i> (PBS 11/1 7 ii:12), (I) <i>u-bar-(d)EN.Z[U]</i> (PBS 11/1 7 ii:13)
<i>dan</i>	(I) <i>dan-i-li</i> (PBS 11/1 4 i:10, PBS 11/1 5 i:3), (I) <i>dan-i-li-šu</i> (PBS 11/1 4 i:12, PBS 11/1 5 i:5)
<i>dī</i>	<i>a-hu-i-dī-nam</i> (Ni 4827, Ni 3955 = AS 16 p. 51), <i>a-bu-um-i-dī-nam</i> (Ni 3462 ii = AS 16 p. 54), (d)UTU- <i>i-dī-nam</i> (Ni 5079 = AS 16 p. 48), (I)DINGIR- <i>i-dī-nam</i> (PBS 11/2 2 i: 20)

Table 5: Sign values specific to anthroponyms in both kingdoms and their attestations in lists of personal names

<sup>40</sup> See the references given by the project *Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts* (DCCLT) on the ORACC website: <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus> > Oracc Search: List of Personal Names. The lists of personal names found on site K at Tell Hariri (Mari), mentioned by A. Cavigneaux and L. Colonna d'Istria (CAVIGNEAUX / COLONNA D'ISTRIA 2009: 52) have been dated

to the reign of Zimri-Lim. They are still unpublished. School exercises excavated in Babylon in the Merkes district have not been edited yet. See indexes provided by O. Pedersén (PEDERSÉN 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Attestations here cited come from CHIARA 1916a, CHIARA 1916b, CHIARA 1919 and ÇİĞ/KIZILYAY 1965: 41–56.

Sign values	Attestations in lists of personal names (among others)
<i>din</i>	(I) <i>i-din</i> -DINGIR (PBS 11/1 1 r. iv:2, PBS 11/1 5 r. iv:3, PBS 11/1 6 r. iii:3, PBS 11/1 19 ii:3), (I) <i>i-din-é-a</i> (PBS 11/1 1 r. iv:3, PBS 11/1 5 r. iv:4, PBS 11/1 6 r. iii:4, PBS 11/1 19 ii:4)
<i>gir</i>	(d)EN.ZU- <i>ma-gir</i> (Ni 3883, Ni 4791 = AS 16 p. 50), (d)UTU- <i>ma-gir</i> (Ni 4972, Ni 3918) [(I)] <i>a-bi-ma-gir</i> (PBS 11/2 28 ii: 5), (I)AN- <i>ma-gir</i> (PBS 11/2 7 r. iv: 18)
<i>i</i>	(I) <i>nu-úr-i-lí</i> (PBS 11/1 7 i:4, PBS 11/1 22 r. i:1), (I) <i>nu-úr-i-lí-a</i> ((PBS 11/1 7 i:5, PBS 11/1 22 r. i:2), (I) <i>nu-úr-i-lí-šu</i> (PBS 11/1 7 i:6, PBS 11/1 22 r. i:3), (I)DU <sub>10</sub> - <i>i-lí-šu</i> (PBS 11/1 6 r. ii:20)
<i>iš<sub>8</sub></i>	<i>pù-zur<sub>8</sub></i> -(d) <i>iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (Ni 10102+Ni 10107 = AS 16 p. 46), (I) <i>taš-me-iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (PBS 11/1 7 ii:16), (I) <i>nu-úr-iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (PBS 11/1 2 r. v:7)
<i>lí</i>	<i>a-lí-iš-me-a-ni</i> (Ni 3451, Ni 5171, Ni 4806 = AS 16 p. 52), (I) <i>a-lí-na-šir</i> (PBS 11/2 50 i:2, Ni 5171 = AS 16 p. 53) (I) <i>nu-úr-i-lí</i> (PBS 11/1 7 i:4, PBS 11/1 22 r. i:1), (I) <i>nu-úr-i-lí-a</i> (PBS 11/1 7 i:5, PBS 11/1 22 r. i:2), (I) <i>nu-úr-i-lí-šu</i> (PBS 11/1 7 i:6, PBS 11/1 22 r. i:3)
<i>lik</i>	(d)IŠKUR- <i>ma-lik</i> (PBS 11/2 21 ii:6)
<i>pi<sub>4</sub></i>	(I) <i>e-tel-pi<sub>4</sub></i> -[...] (PBS 11/1 7 iv:17+18)
<i>pil</i>	(I) <i>a-pil-é(?)</i> -[a] (PBS 11/3 77 iii:2-3)
<i>pù</i>	<i>pù-zur<sub>8</sub></i> -(d) <i>da-gan</i> (Ni 10102+Ni 10107 = AS 16 p. 46), <i>pù-zur<sub>8</sub></i> -(d) <i>iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (Ni 10102+Ni 10107 = AS 16 p. 46)
<i>qar</i>	(I)(d)UTU- <i>wa-qar</i> (PBS 11/2 24:7, Ni 5080:6 = AS 16 p. 47)
<i>šil</i>	no attestation
<i>šir</i>	[(I)](d)NIN. <sup>r</sup> AMAŠ.KUG.GA/- <i>na-šir</i> <sup>r</sup> (PBS 11/2 23 ii:8)
<i>šur</i>	(I) <i>i-šur-é-a</i> (PBS 11/1 1 r. iii:3, PBS 11/1 4 ii:11), (I) <i>i-šur</i> -(d)IŠKUR (PBS 11/1 4 ii 12, PBS 11/1 5 r. iii:5)
<i>tár</i>	<i>pù-zur<sub>8</sub></i> -(d) <i>iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (Ni 10102+Ni 10107 = AS 16 p. 46), (I) <i>taš-me-iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (PBS 11/1 7 ii:16), (I) <i>nu-úr-iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (PBS 11/1 2 r. v:7)
<i>tà</i>	(d)EN.ZU- <i>tà-bu-um</i> (Ni 3287:3, Ni 10493:3 = AS 16 p. 50), <i>a-bi-tà-bu-[um]</i> (Ni 4737:17 = AS 16 p. 51)
<i>u</i>	(I) <i>u-bar-ru-ni</i> (PBS 11/1 7 ii:12), (I) <i>u-bar</i> -(d)EN.Z[U] (PBS 11/1 7 ii:13)
<i>zur<sub>8</sub></i>	<i>pù-zur<sub>8</sub></i> -(d) <i>da-gan</i> (Ni 10102+Ni 10107 = AS 16 p. 46), <i>pù-zur<sub>8</sub></i> -(d) <i>iš<sub>8</sub>-tár</i> (Ni 10102+Ni 10107 = AS 16 p. 46)

Table 5 (continued): Sign values specific to anthroponyms in both kingdoms and their attestations in lists of personal names

Specific sign values attested in letters from both Mari and Babylon mostly come from lists of personal names. The scribes had obviously learned these values during their training. This statement reveals that despite the lack of documentation the school materials were probably the same in Babylon and Mari. In general terms, it seems that the Old Babylonian curriculum was relatively homogenous: the same tools seem to have been used in most cities where cuneiform was taught (VELDHUIS 2014: 212–215).<sup>42</sup>

And yet, values *pil* and *šil* rarely appear in lists of personal names. The reading *pil* is attested in PBS 11/3 77 which records, according to E. Chiera, a portion of text without parallel in other lists of personal names, and contains several scribal mistakes (CHIERA 1919: 201–202). The value *šil* is not attested, but the alternative spelling *ši-li* appears in a copy ([I]é-a-ši-li, PBS 11/2 16 i:3). The sign values specific to anthroponyms, listed in Table 5, come from the 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC (GELB 1961, DI VITO 1993, KREBERNIK 1998: 284–298, HILGERT 2002, RUBIO 2006). The value *pil* was common at that time, thus its rarity in Old Babylonian lists of personal names is probably due to the fragmented nature of our documentation. On the contrary, *šil* and *šir* were almost never attested during the 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC.<sup>43</sup> Thus, these sign values may have never been added – or were added late – to Old Babylonian lists of personal names.<sup>44</sup> This hypothesis is supported by the absence of the sign AMAR in Old Babylonian lists of personal names. This absence is probably not due to coincidence, but to the little importance of the god Marduk [(d)AMAR.UTU] before the Old Babylonian period. Indeed, Marduk does not appear in theophoric names from the 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC, nor in lists of gods from that period (whereas he is present in Old Babylonian lists of gods).<sup>45</sup>

The choice of using some 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC sign values in anthroponyms reveals a desire to preserve certain writing conventions from the past, which had by then become obsolete. These sign values reflect the community identity of the scribes, and reflect their traditionalism.<sup>46</sup> Such spellings have been labelled “historische Schreibungen” by W. Sommerfeld (SOMMERFELD 2006: 361 n. 3).

<sup>42</sup> The school tablets excavated on site K at Tell Hariri/Mari are also, according to A. Cavigneaux and L. Colonna d’Istria, close to the ones found elsewhere in Mesopotamia. See CAVIGNEAUX / COLONNA D’ISTRIA 2009: 52. See also the commentary of LAMBERT 1985: 188–189 to a list of gods’ names excavated on site A at Tell Hariri.

<sup>43</sup> *šil* was used at least once during the Ur III period, in the name *šil-lu-uš-DÜG*. See HILGERT 2002: 655.

<sup>44</sup> The presence of *šir* in lists of personal names dated to the Old Babylonian period might reveal their updating (at least partially) at that time.

<sup>45</sup> On the 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC, see SOMMERFELD 1982: 11 n. 4 and 19–21; SOMMERFELD 1987–1990: 362–363; DI VITO 1993. On the Old Babylonian period, see PETERSON 2009: p. 32 n. 97.

<sup>46</sup> On this issue, see LÜPKE 2011: 322–324 and 330–331. In a recent article, M. Marazzi (MARAZZI 2016: 115–141) has reiterated the importance of studying graphemes beyond their mere phonetic function.

## II.2 Development of regional traditions

Some sign values specific to anthroponyms were only used in one kingdom. The differences in the use of graphemes between Mari and Babylon reveal that scribes sometimes innovated with traditional onomastics, and show local specificities.

The sign value *šir*, attested in lists of personal names, is for example hardly attested in Babylon (where scribes preferred *šī-ir*), while it is systematically used in the letters from the kingdom of Mari. This shows that the Babylonian scribes received the school tradition, but innovated by introducing the spelling *šī-ir*, otherwise common apart from anthroponyms.

The sign value *pil*, attested in Babylon alongside *pil* (as in Ur III Akkadian), had disappeared in the kingdom of Mari, leaving room for *pil* only. From a paleographical perspective, the sign NE (= *pil*) is a simplification of the sign BÍL (= *pil*).

The sign value *ià* (also attested during the 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC) appears in several letters [×15] written in the kingdom of Mari, but never appears in those written in Babylon, where scribes used the sign value documented in lists of personal names (*ia*). In the kingdom of Mari, *ià* was used for the spelling of two Amorite names: Haya-sumu and Hayama-El. But the sign value *ia* was still predominant for the rendering of the glide /y/, including in Amorite names: Himdiya (ARM 27 177: 9), Habdiya (FM 2 49: 14), Haya-abum (ARM 14 102: 18 , ARM 26/2 319: 8), etc.

The sign value *gir*<sub>14</sub> appears in two letters written in Babylon,<sup>47</sup> in the spelling of the names Šamaš-magir and Sin-magir, even if *gir* was largely preferred in Babylon [×23]. The sign value *gir*<sub>14</sub> is never attested in Mari. The sign HA (= *gir*<sub>14</sub>) is a simplification of the sign GIR (HAGunû). It was rare during the Old Babylonian period, and was mainly used in southern Mesopotamia.<sup>48</sup> It was hardly ever used in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>49</sup>

Other differences probably existed, but I lack data to consider them as representative of local particularisms. This is the case for the spellings *la-al* (Mari) vs. *lâl* (Babylon and lists of personal names) and *mu-ur* (Mari) vs. *mur* (Babylon and lists of personal names).

Lists of personal names' manuscripts sometimes vary from one another, but the alternative spellings that I have just mentioned never appear in them, and in a general way, these lists are relatively standardized. Thus, these alternative spellings seem to come from another source of transmission, local and probably oral, to which other pieces of evidence point that I will examine later in this paper.

<sup>47</sup> In a letter sent by King Hammu-rabi (AbB 4 21: 7+10+15+18+22) and in a letter sent by Lu-Ninur-ta (YOS 15 35: 10).

<sup>48</sup> It is attested in several legal and economic texts as well as in letters written in the kingdom of Larsa during the reign of King Rim-Sin I (YOS 8 7, YOS 8 36, YOS 8 42, YOS 8 44, YOS 8 45, YOS 8 48, YOS 8 56, YOS 8 64, A 13120, CUSAS 15 35, AbB 8 15 etc.), during the Babylonian domination

over Larsa (from 1763 on: AbB 14 164, Ellis JCS 29 8, OECT 15 9, OECT 15 21, OECT 15 39–40, OECT 15 63, OECT 15 142, TCL 11 144–146, TCL 11 185), as well as in texts from Uruk (Seri SANER 2 28) and Isin (Ojeil 2, LO.1248).

<sup>49</sup> It appears in texts from Ašnakkum (Chagar Bazar 3 1 (seal), Chagar Bazar 3 73 and Chagar Bazar 3 179).

The relative innovation of the scribes is also revealed by the “trivialization” of some specific sign values. For example, several values only attested in the spelling of anthroponyms in Babylon were used to write other words in Mari: *dan*, *lik*, *qar* and *ṭà*. These sign values were frequent in (and almost always limited to) onomastics in Ur III Akkadian, and were kept to this context in Babylon. Lists of personal names were very probably the source of this repertoire. Conversely, the sign value *pi*<sub>4</sub> was used four times apart from personal names in Babylon. In three letters, Hammu-rabi’s scribe Marduk-naṣir used the sign KA = *pi*<sub>4</sub> (normally only used in anthroponyms) to write the substantive *pûm* “mouth”.<sup>50</sup>

### II.3 Respect for the scribal tradition

The way anthroponyms were spelled in the letters from the kingdoms of Babylon and Mari reveals that people often reproduced the spellings that they were taught during their school training. The data collected indicates that the few other words and epistolary formulas taught during the scribal training also kept their spelling in archival letters. This is the case, for example, with the formulas used in the address of letters (*qi-bi-ma*, *be-li-ia*) and with the conclusive formulas (such as *ap-pu-tum*). These words and formulas were the subject of school exercises, as were anthroponyms. O. Popova called these systematically reproduced means of presenting a word form in writing “orthograms”, and specified that this notion “applies to words which were used in the same form so often that they had been memorized by scribes since childhood and were always written in the same way” (POPOVA 2016: 62–90). Nor should the weight of tradition be underestimated: in Mesopotamia, the scribal community developed a strong sense of identity at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mil. BC, as pointed out by N. Veldhuis (VELDHUIS 2014: 224–225). Indeed, the fact that scribes could write the word *qibi-ma* with BI outside the epistolary address, but systematically with NE = *bi* inside the address (see references in Table 1), or *bêlum* with the sign LI outside the address but systematically with NI = *li* inside the address<sup>51</sup> seems to reveal that, more than being instinctive, scribes reproduced what they had been taught.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> AbB 4 7: 8, AbB 4 13: 7, AbB 4 80: 6+12.

<sup>51</sup> See AbB 4 115: 12, AbB 4 134: 19, AbB 9 6: 11 sent by three different persons.

<sup>52</sup> We know for sure that some school exercises were exclusively meant to teach people how to write the address of a letter (see Si. 441 (Sippar-Yahrurum),

VAS 17 37 (without origin), M.18727 (Mari, unpublished) and MHET 1/1 67 (Sippar-Amnanum)) or stereotyped formulas such as *ap-pu-tum* (HS 1801 and HS 1625, see VELDHUIS 1997: §2.4.1.1 + §2.5.3).

## II.4 Functions of lists of personal names

According to D.-O. Edzard (EDZARD 1998: 101), who commented on Sumerian lists of personal names copied during the 2<sup>nd</sup> mil. BC, these lists forced students to improvise, for they had to write combinations of sounds which they had never studied before:

“Der didaktische Hintergrund war zweifellos die Tatsache, daß der Schreiber bei der Notierung von PN mehr als anderswo zum freien ‚Syllabieren‘ genötigt war; d. h. er konnte bei unerwartet auf ihn zukommenden PN nicht einfach wie bei den Apellativa auf eingelernte Zeichenkombinationen zurückgreifen.”

The use of specific sign values for the spelling of anthroponyms makes his idea of improvisation difficult to accept. By extension, nor were these exercises done under dictation, as D.-O. Edzard thought, but probably by copying from a master’s manuscript or by writing from memory.<sup>53</sup>

Rather, lists of personal names prepared the students to write the numerous archival documents (administrative and legal texts, letters) which were full of anthroponyms. This practical aspect is supported by the limited number of female names identified in these lists, to be compared with the limited number of female names in archival letters: 4 female names are attested in the 295 letters that were written in the kingdom of Babylon at the time of King Hammu-rabi (to be compared with the 412 male names), and 32 female names are attested in the 779 letters written in the kingdom of Mari at the time of King Zimri-Lim (to be compared with the 635 male names).

The usefulness of these lists, however, went beyond the ability to spell anthroponyms, since most Old Babylonian names were written with signs and sign values attested in the spelling of other words. Among the 779 letters from the kingdom of Mari, the proportion of anthroponyms written with a specific sign value was indeed negligible: out of the 667 names identified, only 86 could be written with a specific sign value, i.e. about 12% of the corpus. In addition, 134 signs (and 259 values) were used to write these 667 names, but only 27 signs had a value specific to anthroponyms (with a total of 32 specific sign values). The proportion of specific spellings is higher within the 295 letters written in the kingdom of Babylon, since 135 names out of 418 could be written with a specific sign value, i.e. 32% of the corpus. But, out of the 153 signs (and 274 values) used in Babylon for the spelling of anthroponyms, only 37 signs had a value specific to anthroponyms (with a total of 45 specific sign values). Note that in the letters written in the kingdom of Mari as in those written in Babylon, there was no female name spelled with a specific sign value. The lack of female names in Old Babylo-

<sup>53</sup> On the same issue as regards the copying of lexical lists and Sumerian literature (mostly from memory), see VELDHUIS 1997: 132, DELNERO 2012a and DELNERO 2012b: 200–201. To be compared with

J. Lauinger’s conclusions as to the reproduction of Esarhaddon Succession Treaty (LAUINGER 2015: 285–314).

nian lists of personal names explains why these names did not serve as remaining bastions of (some) 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BC spellings, as male names did. Many sign values used in lists of personal names were actually common outside anthroponyms, such as *bi*, *i*, *im*, *lim*, *mu*, *ša*, *ta*, etc. This observation supports the idea that these lists also prepared the students to spell words other than anthroponyms (VELDHUIS 2014: 149). Indeed, Mesopotamian anthroponyms being meaningful, students learned how to spell short Akkadian sentences while studying these lists. The same idea applies to Sumerian lists of personal names.<sup>54</sup>

There were different steps in the training of Mesopotamian scribes, structured around different teaching tools. N. Veldhuis (VELDHUIS 2011, VELDHUIS 2014: 149) assumed there was a category of scribes who only attended the elementary phase,<sup>55</sup> dedicated to the writing of Akkadian texts. For them, lists of personal names were necessary to understand the basics of the Sumerian language:

“If there was a category of scribes who were trained exclusively in Akkadian writing, the lists of Sumerian and foreign names would be of prime importance. Without understanding Sumerian such scribes had to be able to write Sumerian names correctly, and also names in other languages such as Amorite. Without these skills, even simple documents might well pose insurmountable problems. The existence of such semi-literate scribes cannot be proven, but cannot be excluded either.”

This difficulty experienced with the writing of Sumerian names by “half-literate” scribes is illustrated by three summary accounts listing the rations received by women in the palace of Mari. These texts contain several misspellings. Most importantly, the name of Belti-lamassi (a female scribe working for the palace’s kitchens) was written NIN.LI.MU.GU (FM 4 3: iv 20 and FM 4 30: iv 4’) and (d)ERI.IŠ<.LA>.MA.GU (FM 4 13: iii 77) instead of EREŠ-(d)LAMMA.GU<sub>10</sub>.<sup>56</sup> Summary accounts are simple and repetitive texts that required a very basic mastery of the writing system.<sup>57</sup> Yet, these misspellings reveal that the scribes who wrote them were puzzled by the Sumerian spelling of Belti-lamassi’s name: they were very

<sup>54</sup> UET VI 117 (U.7836), which contains words of praise for various temples, was thought to be a hymn to the Temple of Ninšubur, until D. Charpin understood that it was a Sumerian lists of personal names (CHARPIN 1984: 397–402). This text also reveals that students could have to translate Sumerian names into Akkadian, in order to make sure that they understood them well. See CHIERA 1916a (PBS 11/1 7) for such Akkadian translations and glosses.

<sup>55</sup> On the different levels of literacy, see also WILCKE 2000: 34–49, CHARPIN 2004: 481–508 and MICHALOWSKI 2012: 39–57.

<sup>56</sup> On these alternative spellings, see ZIEGLER 1999: 106 §3.11.11. On the role of Belti-lamassi, see ZIEGLER 2016: § 4.3.

<sup>57</sup> One must be aware that not all economic documents were easy to write. In ARM 1 7: 32–45, King Samsi-Addu writes that he wants to carry out the census and the land division for the country, but complains to his son about not having enough scribes. Since the latter has enough “expert scribes” (DUMU.MEŠ É *tup-pi um-me-nu*) with him, he wants him to send Ur-Samanum and “10 trustworthy scribes who are highly competent as regards fields” (10 LÚ.MEŠ *ták-lu-tim [ša] a-na A.ŠĀ ma-d[i-iš ik]-ki-lu*). These scribes had to master surface calculations and handle large amounts of data.

probably never taught Sumerian extensively. The various misspellings of the Sumerian name Balmunamhe in letters and administrative documents written in Babylon and Mari must be understood from the same perspective.<sup>58</sup> Of course, the scribes who wrote these texts (among them the *ṭupšar sakkakim* Marduk-našir) cannot be labelled “half-literate”. One should rather speak of them as specialized scribes trained in the writing of Akkadian archival documents, who probably did not pursue the traditional scribal training (focused on the Sumerian language and culture)<sup>59</sup> after the elementary phase.

Akkadian school letters support the hypothesis that most people who wrote administrative, legal, and epistolary texts probably dropped the traditional curriculum after the elementary phase, as they were very probably studied during the first steps of the scribal training (as documented by the Akkadian school letters discovered among elementary school exercises in the house of Ur-Utu at Tell ed-Der, and at Tell Uhaimir,<sup>60</sup> as well as by tablets having a letter exercise in Akkadian along with an elementary exercise<sup>61</sup>). Moreover, these Akkadian school letters were not adapted to the complexity of actual communication but were based on models from the 19<sup>th</sup> century BC, and archival letters contain regional variations which do not derive from school exercises (§II.2). All of this tends to reveal that the training in letter-writing had to be completed in real conditions, at the workplace and under the supervision of a master (probably an elder colleague) when the scribal school student was to be a professional scribe, or by regular practice and imitation when he/she was an individual.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> MU.BAL.NAM.HE in the letter AbB 14 117: 2 sent by King Hammu-rabi, *ba-lu-mi-nam-he* (FM 3 42: 9), (*I*)*ba-lu-me-nu-he* (M.10588: 2) and *balum-me-nam-he* (M.13265: 5) in three receipts written in Mari at the time of King Zimri-Lim.

<sup>59</sup> VELDHUIS 2012: 3–23.

<sup>60</sup> The school texts found in the house of Ur-Utu in Sippar-Amnanum (Tell ed-Der) have been published by M. Tanret, who assumes that the many letters discovered with school exercises in this house were archival letters that had been discarded (the association between letters and exercises would only be due to the recycling process). See TANRET 2002: 6–7. The school exercises disco-

vered at Kiš and preserved in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford have been commented by N. Ohgama and E. Robson. See OHGAMA / ROBSON 2010: 217–246.

<sup>61</sup> A sign exercise in AbB 7 68 and AS 22 54, a list of personal names in AbB 9 153 and TU-TA-TI in Cots. Coll. 96225 (WILSON 2008: 143).

<sup>62</sup> On the phraseology of school letters, see SALLABERGER 1999: 149–154. For N. Veldhuis, it is likely that the training in letter-writing was “(...) not taught in a formal classroom setting, but rather through apprenticeships”, and that apprentices may have written real documents under the supervision of their master (VELDHUIS 2011: 85).



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