THE SUMERIAN PROVERB COLLECTIONS

BY
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The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet
(Diogenes Laertius, Life)

1. INTRODUCTION

The appearance of Alster’s The Proverbs of Ancient Sumer (1997) opens the door to a new phase in the study of the Mesopotamian proverbs. More than 600 individual sources, representing more than 2000 proverbs in 26\textsuperscript{1} collections (plus several groupings of sources not attributed to collections), are edited there. Thus the proverbs, the majority of which were previously unpublished, are made easily accessible to a wide audience. With the bulk of the material now accessible, the emphasis shifts onto analysis. It is a good time to review our understanding of the proverbial material; inevitably, the discussion revolves around Alster (1997)\textsuperscript{2}. Regardless of how we choose to interpret the proverbs and the collections in which they are found, it is clear that we are only in a position to do so thanks to the enormous hard work that undoubtedly has gone in to the two volumes of that book.

No Sumerian text is easy to understand, and proverbs are perhaps harder than most, for several reasons. Even the attribution of sources to collections is difficult — we shall return to this in greater detail later. Most proverbs are attested in only a handful of sources, and many in only one source. The low number of sources means that it is often difficult to establish the text of a proverb on account of breakages, unclear signs or the kind of errors frequently made by the young scribes who wrote the tablets. When a proverb is attested in different forms in two collections, each attested in only a single source, it is not clear whether this is acceptable variation, a different interpretation (perhaps acceptable but perhaps considered ‘incorrect’), or that one variant (or quite possibly both!) is simply erroneous. The whole process is aggravated by the fact that even having established the text, one faces the problem that proverbs can often be heavily abbreviated, leaving just an elliptical rump; for example, 28.8 ša₃
\begin{equation*}
\text{giš}\ \text{g} \text{idru-ka} \ i₃ \ \text{he₂-en-de₂} \ “\text{If oil is poured into the inside of a sceptre}”
\end{equation*}
represents an abbreviated form of the proverb found in 1.104 ša₃
\begin{equation*}
\text{giš}\ \text{g} \text{idru-ka} \ i₃ \ \text{he₂-en-de₂} \ \text{lu₂} \ \text{na-me} \ \text{nu-f} \ \text{zu₁} \ “\text{If one pours oil into the inside of a sceptre, nobody will know}” \ (note also that four of the six sources for 1.104 give the abbreviated form)\textsuperscript{3}. And proverbs are susceptible to existing in multiple forms.

\textsuperscript{1} Although the collections are numbered up to 28, 6 has been joined to 2 and 20 to 8.
\textsuperscript{2} Revised text and the present writer’s attempts to translate the proverbs (in ETCSL house style) can be found at http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/. Collections 23 and 25 there are translated by Gábor Zólyomi.
\textsuperscript{3} For further examples see Alster (1997) p. xv.
Having established the text, one can be left wondering what on earth it means. Each is typically only one or two lines long, and one is deprived of the possibility of using the context to help understand what is meant; as Alster (1997) p. xiii points out, context is very important for the correct understanding of the proverbs. With the exception of the few proverbs that are attested in context elsewhere, the only context is provided by the tendency for proverbs to occur in groups. This is often of little help, however; knowing that a proverb is something to do with a fox or a boat can only provide so much assistance. Sometimes even this little context is denied us; the proverbs can be grouped not thematically but on account of a sign in common. For example, Collection 1 has many entries beginning with the NIG₂ sign, sometimes to be read niₕ₂ “thing” but other times to be read ninda “bread”.

Literal translations are of little use, especially given the many idioms present, for they do not help penetrate the culturally specific repertoire of associations and values — a failure which these texts in particular thrust unforgivingly into focus. Proverbs such as 2.67 “A fox urinated into the sea: ‘All of the sea is my urine!’” seem straightforward enough but then there are many like 2.7 “An acquaintance has gone up onto the roof to them” which are rather less lucid. It is difficult to recognise whether a proverb is intended literally or metaphorically, and whether there is understatement or exaggeration. Frequently it is not clear what reaction the choice of words or images is supposed to evoke, even to the level of whether something is positive or negative. Moreover, we are faced with a situation where we cannot tell whether the line is a statement or a question (the implied answer to which could be anything from “of course it is” to “of course it’s not”), and even whether it is serious or not. Take 15 Sec. B 6 for example: “Don’t give a lame man a staff. Enlil is his helper”. Does this mean something like “God helps those who help themselves” or is it evidence for the opposite? Are these words put into the mouth of a selfish man in order to lambast him? Not infrequently words apparently are those put into the mouth of a fool, by which (s)he betrays himself/herself as such⁴.

In the following paragraphs, discussion of some of the major issues surrounding Sumerian proverbs will be offered. In addition, corrections and suggested improvements to the text as established by Alster (1997) are offered, in the same spirit as his own updates (1999)⁵.

2. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES

It is symptomatic of the still slight progress of Assyriology, and indicative of its enduring power to humble us all, that in a work publishing the Sumerian proverb collections, the author was compelled to justify his use not only of the term “proverb collection” ((1997) p. xvi) but also of the term “proverb” itself ((1997) p. xiii)⁶, and that even the term “Sumerian” requires qualification (to be resumed below). And that is just the tip of the iceberg. As Archimedes might have put it: give me a firm place to stand, and I will move the earth.

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⁵. The length of the list should not be taken as criticism of Alster (1997). The nature of these texts means that it is often very difficult to differentiate between ‘real’ phenomena (for instance, the use of nu instead of nū in CT 58 30 obv. 2) and unfortunate typos which inevitably creep into a work of this size and complexity, without checking against photos or copies each time. Since Alster (1997) doubtless, and rightfully, will remain the standard edition for many years to come, a fuller list is given here than would otherwise be the case, for the convenience of other readers.
⁶. A long established but not uncontroversial term; see Falkowitz (1980) p. 1ff.
The definition of what constitutes a proverb varies widely, and the task of identifying them not always easy. In the present case, we are lucky in that there is one part of this problem that we do not usually need to face; the ancients have gathered the proverbs together for us. Proverb texts almost always bear distinctive double rulings between individual proverbs. But the source tablets do not always agree about where one proverb ends and the next one begins. Thus nir-ĝal₂ ku₃-zu-am₃ uku₂ šu-dim₄-am₃ šu-ĝar-ĝal₂-la aratta₉ ki₉-ka “When the authorities are wise and the poor are loyal, it is the effect of the blessing of Aratta” is given as a single proverb in Collection 9 (Sec. A 3) but as two in collection 10 (10.3–10.4; coll.). Similarly, we might expect 11.147 and 11.148 š₃ ki-āq₂ ni₅₂ e₂ du₃-du₃-um₃ š₃ ḫul-gig ni₅₂ e₂ gul-gul-://${\text{l}}$_{u} -d₃ -am “A loving heart builds houses. A hating heart destroys houses” to be ruled as a single proverb but they are not — according to the tablet at least. Sometimes longer proverbs are broken seemingly arbitrarily; compare, for example, the sources of 2.1 and UET 6/2 356. The latter breaks into several proverbs what the former presents as a single proverb. To further complicate matters, not all tablets are so divided. Collection 22, for example, consists of a single source tablet with almost 300 lines in 8 columns but no line divisions to separate individual proverbs.

The relation of the proverbs to other ‘wisdom’ literature is something of a separate issue and will not be discussed here. But we are left facing two fundamental questions: what are these “proverbs”? And what are the “collections”?

2.1. What is a “proverb”?  

In examining the question of what these “proverbs” which were collected are, there are several related aspects to bear in mind — their origin, their use and their purpose. A key question is whether or not these “proverbs” in the collections are, or were, real proverbs. Of course, the answer is not a straight “yes” or “no” but more of a “some of them — probably”. This ambiguity has led to recurrent disagreements over the best terminology to describe them, both in general terms to distinguish them from other types of text, and specifically as attempts are made to distinguish types within them. To what extent do they display the features apparent in proverbs generally, and what is required before a “proverb” may safely be labelled a “Proverb”?

2.1.1. Origin of the proverbs  

Alster’s (1997) introduction starts (pxiii) by alerting us to “the fundamental recognition that proverbs belong to the speech of daily life, and this is basically where they originate.” He then goes on to set out several criteria for the identification of proverbs, drawn from modern proverb research. By and large, these do seem to apply to the Sumerian proverbs. Falkowitz ((1980) p. 9–11, ch. V) criticised previous methods of identifying proverbs, including Alster’s previous set of criteria ((1975) p. 37–38, 50) which are described as “impossible to demonstrate”. Alster replies (1997) p. xx (see also Alster (1996) p. 2–3), that the argument for assuming that the collections do in fact contain genuine proverbs is related to consideration of syntax (simple), style (concise) and content (derived from observation of the natural world\textsuperscript{7}). As he put it recently (1996) p. 7: “The fundamental problem for students of these collections is that in most cases we know

\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, among the wide variety of animals, domesticated and wild, from birds to cattle to elephants, mythological creatures are conspicuous by their absence.
nothing about the actual use of the sayings in daily speech; so we lack the most important criterion for classifying them as proverbs”.

On p. xvi, Alster (1997) defends the use of the term “proverb collection” (more on this below) “because these collections contain a number of phrases which, with any reasonable degree of certainty, can be classified as ‘proverbs’. This does not imply, however, that every phrase in these collections is by necessity a proverb”. This is an absolutely crucial point to recognise. It is not possible to extrapolate from the known to the unknown, taking the relatively small number of more clearly recognisable proverbs and their behaviour as representative of the whole; material not matching the paradigm cannot be dismissed as contamination, attracted in by early scholastic practices not as rigorous as our own. “Proverb collection” is a convenient tag to apply to the material, and is justified to the extent that some of the entries most probably are proverbs but that is all. Alster justifiably uses his paremiological knowledge to help understand individual proverbs. But this does not automatically mean that we should seek to apply this to the collections as a whole; it is wrong to assume from the tag “proverb collection” that all entries must be proverbs or that the entries (or collections) must share the characteristics of, and conform to behaviour known from, proverbial material in other cultures.

Gordon had started to notice the heterogeneous nature of the proverbs and attempted to provide a descriptive classification of proverbial material. In his classic work (1959) — known to Assyriology simply as SP — p. 1–2, 17–19, he recognises and defines five types of proverb: precept; maxim; truism/simple apothegm; adage; and byword, and a further four types of entry found in the collections “which are not usually regarded as ‘proverbs’ elsewhere”: taunt; compliment; wishes, greetings or ‘toasts’; and short fables, parables(?) and anecdotes or character sketches. But such categories are somewhat ethereal and the systems therefore ephemeral — as demonstrated by the differences between Gordon’s system in SP (1959) and that in his article summarising “wisdom literature” which appeared just one year later in BiOr (1960). Falkowitz (1980) p. 12, 74, 79 highlighted the flaws in this system and, ch. V, proposed instead a new classification, explaining more fully what is meant by each of his terms; in summary, he listed: proverbs, maxims, types of discourse related to proverbs and maxims, riddles, enthymemes, fables, tales and incantations.

In the present writer’s opinion, while it is indeed useful for a modern audience new to the proverbs to have some idea what kind of thing is actually meant by “Sumerian proverb”, the creation of categories of proverb and attempted assignment of individual proverbs to them quickly lead us down a blind alley. The lack of clarity and particularly the lack of context for most of the proverbs (leaving us ignorant of when and how they were used) prohibit meaningful categorisation. Each category requires definition but these definitions can vary widely from scholar to scholar and the dividing line between the categories even within any single system is not clear cut. Neither must a proverb fall neatly into just one single category in even the most clearly divided system. The attribution of proverbs to categories rapidly becomes rather arbitrary and subjective (as Gordon (1959) p. 1 points out). So while it seems likely that there would have been both ‘proverbs’ used quite literally (maxims) and those applied more metaphorically (proverbs), fathoming to

8. Later (1960) this became maxims, truisms, adages, bywords, paradoxes and blasons populaires. To this should be added also precepts, examples of which from the collections were given on p. 130, although he saw this class as being “almost entirely excluded” from the collections.

9. This became (1960) taunts, compliments, wishes, greetings, toasts and short prayers.
which type any given ‘proverb’ belonged is almost impossible; as Falkowitz (1980) p. 107 notes, it could even be difficult to distinguish proverb and riddle\(^{10}\). And since it has not been shown that the ‘Sumerians’ who compiled these proverbs would have recognised any of these modern categories (that is to say, the structural and functional characteristics of these divisions) and the conventions they necessarily impose, attempts to categorise proverbs can easily become futile. With next to no context for the entries and scant prospect of any being recovered in the future for more than a few, the furthest we can go — in the present writer’s pessimistic opinion — is: some of the entries seem to share some of the characteristics of what we might call maxims etc., although in most cases this cannot be confirmed.

While attempts to identify different types of saying on a scientific basis would otherwise be welcome, it is unfortunate that all such attempts ultimately are doomed to failure by the nature of our sources. Alster prudently avoids such attempts at categorisation. Instead (p. xvi) he simply lists some of the non-proverbial contents of the collections:

«Apart from proverbs, the collections contain proverbial phrases; proverbial comparisons; sententious sayings whose origin may be the jargon of the Sumerian schools; technical expressions relating to professions; and phrases used in incantations, prayers, cult, and curse formulae. Some miniature compositions in the form of short stories or anecdotes; animal tales or fables; humorous, didactic or moralistic poems; and jokes are designated as “exempla,” a well-known term from medieval literary history. Also limericks or other kinds of popular verse appear in the proverb collections ... Lastly, there are quotations from literary compositions»

To this list we should add what Alster (p. xxviii) terms “explanatory additions\(^{11}\), and probably also outright “insults”, since that is what a number of the “proverbs” seem to be.

2.1.2. Rhetoric collections?

One of the very few things about the proverbs upon which there is anything like consensus is that at least the majority of entries contain spoken Sumerian. In his thesis (1980) Falkowitz argued against the label “proverb collections” as misleading as to the contents and functions of the texts, and suggested instead “rhetoric collections” (p. 4: “collections of very diverse types of mostly fictive, non-casual discourse which were used to instruct non-native speakers of Sumerian in the rhetoric of Sumerian appropriate to educated and literate Old Babylonian Mesopotamians”). However, as shown by the discussion in Falkowitz (1980) p. 21–29, “rhetoric” is itself not an unambiguous term and is prone to inspiring images which may not be appropriate for OB schools. Falkowitz summarises his own use of the term as follows (p. 29): “… rhetoric concerns the management of discourse (or, ways of saying things) together with its imaginative and emotional content.”

Alster (p. xvii; see also Alster (1996) p. 4 n. 13) rejects Falkowitz’s term “Rhetoric Collection”, for two reasons: 1) because of internal criteria of imagery, social setting etc.; 2) he argues that we now know more about the history of proverbs and that that speaks in favour of a living oral tradition. Instead he prefers to see a situation where the use of

\(^{10}\) 11.55, for instance, looks like a riddle without a solution. Cf. UET 6/2 278 and duplicates. See already Civil (1987) p. 17.

\(^{11}\) “Occasionally phrases seem to have been added by the scribes as explanations”.
proverbs in the schools led to them becoming source books for rhetorical phrases, reflected in the debate texts.

It is a shame that more accurate labels such as “sayings collections”12 or “expressions collections” are so awkward and uninspiring. For as soon as we apply the label “proverb” to such a mélange as found in these text collections, we are immediately burdened by the implications that term brings with it. And we are drawn inexorably into a quagmire as we are forced to explain how and why the various non-proverbial sayings in the collections deviate from what has been learnt from contemporary paremiological study.

2.1.3. Use and purpose of the proverbs

The matters of who used the proverbs, when, where and why are more difficult to address. What can be agreed upon, and this is perhaps the single most important thing, is that they had a purpose in OB scribal education. The proverbs that we have, in the form that we have them, are the product of young scribes learning Sumerian in schools13. Most are from Nippur and most date to the eighteenth century B.C. This much we know; discussion about origins and any purpose beyond this is based to a greater or lesser extent on speculation. As for their exact purpose in education, however, there are several suggestions. Alster (1975) p. 13 noted that the proverbs were transmitted in a literary context, and that they can be expected to have met the needs of scribal education, suggesting the following uses: 1) as simple models for copying; 2) the teaching of manners, and “providing students with a repertory of useful rhetorical phrases to be used in a literary context.” Falkowitz (1980) p. 136 argued that the proverbs were used to teach students those levels of Sumerian discourse which fall between the more elementary “study of orthography, vocabulary and grammar” on the one hand, and “longer narrative and thematic development” on the other. This idea has been taken up and developed by Veldhuis (2000a) esp. p. 385. The proverbs were not all invented specifically for the purpose, and they do not appear to function as ideal paradigms for learning; there may well have been other reasons why these texts were used, enculturation perhaps being among them. So far, so good; but can the surviving evidence give us any hints as to the possible existence of the proverbs outside this environment?

One popular definition of “proverb” asserts that it is “a saying current among the folk”14. This is often claimed for the Sumerian proverbs. Presumably it applies well enough to those proverbs which seem truly to be proverbial but, as noted above, there is much else in the collections which is fundamentally different. Taking the collections as a whole, who are the folk among whom the Sumerian proverbs were current, and just how current were they?

2.1.3.1. ‘Sumerian’ proverbs: popular or learned?

Here, unfortunately, the issue becomes entangled with the debate over whether or not Sumerian was a living language in the OB period. The arguments are well known and there is no need to repeat them here. But the topic must be confronted. Who used the proverbs as we have them: the man-on-the-street or just the scribes who copied them? And when were they current? Are these the arcane, frozen sayings of yesteryear or the latest streetwise savvy? There is no simple answer and almost certainly no single answer. At the

13. See now Veldhuis (2000a) for more detailed discussion.
14. Taylor (1931) p. 3.
time of writing the majority view, although not the consensus^{15}, seems to be that Sumerian was probably not the mother tongue of the scribes who studied in mid-18th century B.C. Nippur (from where most of our sources come), and that it is even less likely that it was the mother-tongue of the man-on-the-street.

The death of Sumerian has been seen as crucial to the correct interpretation of the proverbs by both Falkowitz (1980) p. 30: “The fact primary to understanding the functions of the Sumerian Rhetoric Collections is that Sumerian was a learned language which did not exist as a vernacular, colloquial language in the Old Babylonian period and it had to be acquired in the schools” as well as Alster (1997) p. xix–xx: “The main argument for their use as source books for rhetorical phrases would be that the existing copies of the Sumerian proverb collections date to the early Old Babylonian period, when Sumerian had ceased to be a living language, and had become an academic language spoken only in the schools”.

There are several places where it is clear that the scribes experienced difficulty with the sense of the proverbs; in other words, they were unfamiliar with them, suggesting that they were not current at that time. As mentioned above, Alster (p. xxviii) sees some instances of additional phrases (see, e.g., 2.28) as explanations added for the benefit of the scribes. Then there is 23.7 where a variant seems to have been created by reading ka₃ “fox” (cf. 2.62) as lu₁ (becoming lu₂-lu₁-la “fool”), suggesting a break in the oral chain of transmission and indicating unfamiliarity with the proverb. Note also 22 vii 28 where ba-za “lame” is misunderstood as bi₂-za-za “frog”. To the present writer, at least, this is an unlikely mistake to have occurred were this a proverb in circulation. Falkowitz (1980) p. 56–57 provides further examples. On p. 15–16 he argues against Alster’s close association of the proverb collections with the ‘literary’ composition known as “The Instructions of Šuruppak”. The latter he describes as a collection of precepts (some of which may be proverbs), which had a popular currency and was known outside the schools. The proverb collections, on the other hand “… were not traditional and had neither function nor even existence outside the Old Babylonian schools …”. It does indeed seem unlikely that the collections existed outside the schools; however, this in itself does not mean that individual proverbs found within them cannot have existed outside the schools.

One wonders whether it was native Sumerian speakers responsible for the variants in 9 Sec. A 6: [nu-m]u-e-da-sa₂, [nu]l unary-da-sa₂, nu-ub-da-sa₂. Indeed, the influence of Akkadian may run deeper than we might expect. While the Akkadian of the bilingual fragments looks to be translation of the Sumerian, we cannot exclude the possibility that some of the sayings are in fact translations of what were not originally Sumerian sayings^{16}. Possible examples might be found among the entries containing what have been identified as characteristic features of OB Sumerian. See, for example, Huber (2001) p. 173 n. 16, 19 with references to earlier literature there.

So, in the present writer’s opinion at least, we are justified in being somewhat sceptical about the extent of the currency of the proverbs. Many show signs of having been real proverbs in circulation once and perhaps some remained — who can say whether or not in a remote village there was still an old woman arguing over the price of fish by

^{15} See now the account in Edzard (2003) chapter 17.
^{16} Proverbs such as 3.34 and 3.27, which mention the earlier kings Ur-Namma and Išbi-erra, respectively, clearly indicate that we need not always search for ED Sumerian forerunners.
quoting 1.165 in a sarcastic voice? — but these are subsidiary issues here. As Veldhuis (2000a) has argued17, what is more important is the nature of these proverbs at the time our sources were written. The supposition that what we have is the result of altruistic scribes recording the folk wisdom of a dying age can be dismissed18; the concentration should be on their role in education19 — since all sources seem to derive from schools and it has been shown that Collections 1, 2+6 and 3, at least, were firmly part of the curriculum.

2.1.3.2. Whose point of view do they represent?20

Alster (1975) p. 13, (1992) p. 34 pointed out that not all the proverbs must have been current among the men-on-the-street, and that “it is difficult to distinguish genuine proverbs from phrases created by the scribes and from other types of literary quotation”. Indeed, the many proverbs relating to scribes are rather unlikely to have been in use outside scribal circles; to these can be added entries such as 3.34: “Ur-Namma ... the large mirrors in Enlil’s temple.” We are entitled to wonder how many more were also composed in this way. Since the scribes clearly created some new proverbs, and since the proverbs had an educational rather than archival function, can we rule out the possibility that occasionally instructors might have created or adapted others in order to demonstrate a point of grammar or vocabulary21? Indeed, the (ancient) editorial style of the proverbs is not unlike that more familiar in other scholastic material such as lexical texts, omens and law codes. The ‘entries’ are linked by graphic, thematic or phonological relations (or combinations of these)22. And the paradigmatic character of such texts lends itself readily to the production of additional entries.

Alster argues ((1997) p. xvii–xviii) that the ED proverbs “clearly testify to the contemporary existence of a completely secular attitude toward social behavior ... a safe conclusion is that the ‘mythopoetic’ way of thinking was restricted to the religious sphere of life and applied to the telling of myths and the participation in rituals, but it was not the normal attitude toward daily life.” As far as the OB Sumerian proverbs are concerned, Alster (1996) p. 13 notes that references to deities are relatively rare when compared to proverbs from other cultures; he further notes that mention of deities does not necessarily imply a theological issue. One might note, however, that by the same token the lack of mention of deities here does not necessarily preclude a theological mindset. And while references to deities are indeed not common (they account for approximately 5% of the proverbs), in those proverbs which do mention deities, it is striking how deeply they permeate the fabric of society. In these texts deities play many and varied roles affecting all aspects of daily life. There are numerous overt references to deities, such as the many actions which are described as niḫ₂-gīg to a particular god. For example, not clearing debts is a matter for Utu (11.133 ; for others see 3.8, 26 Sec. A 11 and parallels, 28.20, YBC 8713, UET 6/2 298 and parallels); bearing false witness is a matter for Suen (3.118;
for others see 3.170 and parallels); greed (3.175; cf. UET 6/2 261/262) and revenge (26 Sec. A 6 and parallels) are a matter for Ninurta (see further 13.57, 22 ii 1'-'3', 26 Sec. A 7); Lumma is entreated to grant prosperity to him who speaks well of others (14.2). Furthermore, it is to Inanna that those seeking a “hot-limbed wife” and “broad-armed sons” (1.147 and 19 Sec. C 5) and the heart-broken (3.128) turn, and Enlil to whom the cripple must turn for help (15 Sec. B 6 and parallels). And when the fuller assures his customer that he will work swiftly, he invokes Enki (3.148 and parallels; see also 11.9)23.

One of the key features of proverbs as pointed out by Archer Taylor, doyen of paremiology, is that they operate “bottom-up” (1931) p. 3:

*Naturally such tradition draws its material from the interests and the world of the common man. There is little or no question of ... intellectual materials which were shaped in higher social circles and have descended from them to lower ones ... certainly most proverbs actually current in oral tradition have been coined by the folk.*

To what extent do the Sumerian proverbs fit this picture? Alster ((1997) p. xvii and (1996) p. 2) highlights the fact that relatively few of the proverbs concern the scribal art or abstract intellectual constructs. Many do seem to stem from the daily life of ordinary people. By this is meant not the poorest in society but those a little higher up; the owners of slaves rather than slaves themselves. They are predominantly concerned with common tasks, observations of the behaviour of animals, the relation between masters and slaves etc. One might conclude that scribes were recording other people’s sayings but it is important to remember that scribes were ‘people’, too, with a range of responsibilities and experiences well beyond that of their school-based scribal activity. It is not possible to draw a sharp distinction between scribes and homeowners; after all, it is the homes of scribes that are the schools where the pupils were taught, producing there the sources for the proverb collections under consideration. Scribes were involved in a wide range of activities, and would have needed to be familiar with the jargons of many trades. The parody of trades (2.54), for example, could well be scribal in inspiration. Indeed, there does not seem to be anything which could not have been in circulation among that class of people who trained as scribes.

Other proverbs do not originate in the daily life of the common man, however. Some proverbs are clearly derived from the daily life of high society. Take for instance 2.72: lugal-dug₄-dug₄ ra-gaba ki-bad-ra₂ “He who always lies is a messenger from distant places”. This is attested also in “A dialogue between two scribes” (Dialogue 1): 66 and “A dialogue between Enki-hegal and Enkita-lu” (Dialogue 2): 69, and seemingly also in the Emar version of lugal₂ = ša, where the negative opinion of the messenger present in the proverb appears to be reflected in the Akkadian equivalence, sarru “liar”24. This charicatured figure is one which presumably originated in court circles.

The relation between the proverbs and contemporary literary texts is complex. There are numerous passages in common, or at least very similar to each other, found in the collections and in literary or other scholastic texts (see 2.1.3.3 below). Note the following:

23. To these may be added proverbs mentioning Iškur (3.36, 3.76, 3.77), Nungal/Ninegal (6.3, UET 6/2 289), Ninazu (6.25), Ningišzida (1.4), Ninninsina (MDP 27 212), Nintu (12 Sec. C 9), Bau (3.105, UET 6/2 328), Ezinu (2.134), Gula (CBS 7968), Lama (1.19, 17 Sec. B 3), Lumma (14.2), Šakan (5.1), plus a further 18 mentioning Enlil, 27 mentioning Utu and 37 mentioning dišir.

24. For this see Civil (1989).
The relation between the compositions is not always clear. It is not obvious whether these are cases of texts quoting proverbs, proverbs quoting literature or both quoting something else. Of course, the answer need not always be the same in every case.

To these can be added more oblique references such as 2.4 referring to 1.8.1.5 Gilgamesh and Huwawa A 26 (see Taylor (forthcoming b)) or 3.2 which may allude to Lullaby 39ff (see Alster (1999); Civil’s piece is no longer accessible online). And note 1.8.1.5 Gilgamesh and Huwawa A 193–199, which can be understood in the light of 2.155 (see now Civil (2003) p. 84–86). On the other hand, there are not a few examples of what seem to be proverbs in literature which do not appear in the collections. For examples see Hallo (1990) and Alster (1997b). 1.8.2.1 Lugalbanda and the Mountain Cave 254–255: “Your sunshine is as mighty as oil. Great wild bulls run forward” also looks proverbial. A systematic study should reveal many more references to images known from literary texts.

Alster (1997) notes that the male perspective tends to dominate in proverbs generally and comments on how remarkable it is that the Sumerian proverbs contain a number of entries in Emesal. He argues ((1997) p. xiv) that: “Such proverbs cannot have been invented by the scribes”. This requires clarification. Firstly, Emesal is also known to have been used by gala-priests and speech assigned to them seems to account for a significant quantity of the Emesal in the collections. Secondly, we know that the scribes were competent in Emesal since it is found in other texts they copied; and scribal creations such as “Two Women” demonstrate that they had not just the ability to create Emesal
material but also the inclination. We noted above that a number of the proverbs contain caricatures of the speech of certain types of people. The (unanswerable) question is whether the scribes felt inclined to create the proverbs speaking, ostensibly at least, from a female point of view or whether, for one reason or another, they placed some value on what were once real proverbs with this view point.

2.1.3.3. Proverbial figures outside the collections

One aspect of interest about the proverbs is where they occur outside of the collections. It has long since been noted that some occur in literary texts. What has received far less attention is where else the proverbs are paralleled. Lambert in BWL p. 275 notes some examples found in lexical texts. Having recently produced a revised edition of Proto-Lu, it became apparent that some of the very unusual terms which spice up that list also occur in, and can to an extent be explained by, the proverbs.

The clearest example remains Proto-Lu 169 zilulu-šu-ḥal-la-zi-zi, which undoubtedly is the same as SP 3.108: zilulu šu ḫal-la ab-zil-zi. I know of no attestation of this as a professional designation. Falkowitz (1980) no. 108 p. 213 translated: “A peddlar ‘skins’ the open hand (of his customer)” commenting “In his anxiousness to consummate a trade, the peddlar grabs from the hand of his customer the offered item before it is freely given”. Alster (1997) translates this as: “A vagabond flays (the skin) of the open hand”, adding the comment (p. 387) “i.e., if one gives something to a vagabond, he will demand more”. Whatever the nuance of this rather opaque saying, it indicates something more than just a professional title.

Nunuz-dalla is a second example. Apart from 1.41–43, it is known from Proto-Lu 738. The entry in Proto-Lu, nunuz-dalla, suggests that in the proverb dalla should be taken as an adjective modifying nunuz rather than in an adverbial use with the ḫe₂-a.

A third example is ḨAR-ra-tu-da in Ni 5271 5'; the term is also known from Proto-Lu 368, where it is found among terms relating to children. In the present context, the term is clearly an insult. Civil (1974) p. 335 ad 42 suggested a possible connection between our term and hur-ri-da-du (given as a synonym of hurdatu “vulva”); reference was also made to hurdu B “posthumous child”. Alternatively, it is tempting to etymologise as “one fashioned in the innards”, which could refer to a child generally or perhaps have a more nuanced meaning. On the other hand, it might simply be a more explicit writing for ḨAR-tu “house-born slave”; in this case we could read ur₅-ra tu-da, lit. “one born during an interest bearing loan”.

3.37 contains two further examples: ga-ti-ba gu₇-gu₇ and za-ra dug₄-dug₄. The former is a very rare phrase; apart from SP 3.37 it occurs in SP 21 A 12, where it is written ga-ti-bi [gu₇-gu₇]. The context there is of slaves misbehaving and the problems caused by that. The only other attestation known to me is Proto-Lu 367 (ga-ti-ba-gu₇-gu₇ in 5 sources, ga-ti-bi-gu₇-gu₇ in 1, ga-ti-gu₇-gu₇ in 1). There it occurs in a group of terms for minors/subordinates. The term translates literally as “the one who eats the ex-voto” but Sumerian has several idioms based on lit. “eating” e.g. azag/an-zi-l gu₇ “eating the taboo”, eme/in-im-sig gu₇ “eating slander”, so this phrase may well have a more idiomatic meaning. za-ra dug₄-dug₄ is also rare. Apart from SP 3.37 it occurs

25. Some scribes were female but it seems unlikely that proverbs with a male point of view were the product of male scribes, and those with female point of view the product of female scribes.
26. More detailed discussions of all these terms can be found in Taylor (forthcoming a).
27. This is not to suggest either that taking out such a loan reduced one to slave status or that every child born at such a time became a slave.
twice in \( \text{lu}_2 = \check{s}a \), each time being equated to \( \text{muštālu} \); IV 242 (MSL 12 p.136) in a group with other terms related to speech, seemingly all with possible negative or pejorative connotations; Exc. I 225 (MSL 12 p. 103; restored), again in a speech context, after the mocked \( \text{aštālu} \) (see, for example, Father and Son 130 in Sjöberg (1973)) and before the derided perfume-oil maker — for whose lowly status see Haas (1992) p. 48 n. 26. In Nabnitu XVII (=J) 219 (MSL 16 p. 161) the phrase is equated to \( \text{ma-al-lit-tu}_4 \) (var. \( \text{ma-lī-lī-lit-[tu}_4 \) ), a word of uncertain meaning. A phrase \( \text{za-} \ldots \text{ dug}_4 \) occurs several times in OB literary texts but there it seems just to mean “speak to you” (< \( \text{za-} \ldots \text{ dug}_4 \) ); this corresponds to the Akkadian equivalent, \( \text{muštālu} \) (participle of \( \text{šītalu} \) “to interrogate”, Gt from \( \text{šālu} \) “to ask” (contra CAD M/2 p. 284 which suggests possible derivation from \( \text{šālu} \) “attack”, although no such verb is recognised). Our phrase clearly means something more and might possibly derive from an independent expression \( /\text{za-} \ldots \text{ dug}_4 / \); cf. the expression \( \text{za-} \ldots \text{ dug}_4 \) in SP 13.21.

Again, the nature of the relationship between the texts is not clear. It would seem highly unlikely that the proverbs would quote \( \text{lu}_2 \)-texts but it is perfectly feasible that Proto-Lu might contain terms for figures featuring in the proverbs. Or were these figures known elsewhere and is it just accident that we happen to have proverbs alluding to the same figures as appear in Proto-Lu but no other references to them preserved in school literature?

2.2. What is a collection?

Having considered the question of what constitutes a proverb, the second fundamental question facing us when we consider the proverb collections is: what constitutes a collection? “Collection” is not a translation of an ancient term: we never see a subscript saying “(Tablet x of) collection y”, for example. Alster (1997)’s “collections” follows a convention determined by Gordon (1960), and essentially means “series of sayings attested in more or less the same form and order in one or more large fragments, preferably from Nippur”. An exception is what was previously referred to as “collection 22” (UET 6/2 247). Alster places this in his “Minor Sumerian Proverb” section (Alster’s collection 22 is another tablet), along with a number of other fragments bearing proverbs, which although not considered duplicates to other collections are not considered large enough to justify assigning them their own collection number. Collection numbers have been assigned by him to the sources which now form collections 25–28. The retention of the editorial-historical convention of “collections” has led to some anomalies. Alster (p. xxxii) notes “The criteria for assigning collection numbers to some collections and not to others is somewhat arbitrary …” — another crucial point. For instance, several fragments considered “Minor” are of a similar or greater length to the modestly sized “collection 10”, which itself may simply belong to collection 9 (see 2.2.1 below). And there are also some relatively small fragments which might have a better claim to collection status; for instance, Ni 5327 and duplicate UET 6/2 247.

The collections contain almost exclusively sources from Nippur, with relevant sources from other sites or of unknown origin usually being noted at appropriate points. Some lenticular (known as “Type IV”) tablets from Nippur not duplicating proverbs in the numbered collections, the sources from Ur, the tablets curated in Yale, some lenticular tablets of unknown origin and the tablets from Susa are assigned separate sections at the end of Alster (1997). Of the categories created by Alster, while the merits of assigning the proverbs from Ur and Susa to their own categories are clear (although this is done only
where they do not duplicate numbered collections), “Proverbs in the Yale Collection” (again, only where they do not duplicate numbered collections) is a more questionable category. Nothing is mentioned about the provenance of the pieces in this category. It is not clear what it is about YBC 4677 and YBC 8713 that makes them “Minor” rather than “in the Yale Collection”. We might also question whether “Minor” was the best choice of word to describe the fragments edited there, since that term seems to imply something which we do not intend it to mean. However, the sectioning of the ‘uncollected’ proverbs by whatever means at least has the advantage of breaking up the otherwise unwieldy mass of fragments into more manageable groups.

2.2.1. The collections as entities

To what extent do the “collections” correlate with what might have been considered collections in antiquity? Are they all really distinct, established entities? Numerous proverbs (sometimes parts of them) and sequences of proverbs are attested in more than one collection. For example, collections 9 and 10 have a large section in common. 10.1–10.9 duplicates 9 Sec. A 1–8. 10.9–10.12 (together part of “The Old Man”) also appears as 17 Sec. B 3 and 19 Sec. A 1. Does collection 10, previously known only from a single excerpt tablet and a lentil with one entry, really represent an independent collection, or does it belong to collection 9, witnessing a slightly divergent version (cf. 9 Sec. B, which is attested in two divergent versions)? The new piece, N 4684, might suggest independent existence. Certainly, the term “collection” does not always mean the same thing. Even a very superficial look at the number of sources for each of the collections, such as provided by the following simple table, is illuminating (only sources from Nippur are shown here and tablet types are ignored).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2+6</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8+20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>14</td>
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</tr>
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The distribution is far from even. Clearly there is something different between collections such as 1–3 and the other, far less well attested collections. Collections 23, 24 and 25 are thus far attested only on excerpt tablets. Are the better attested collections just more popular than the others or is this a reflection of a difference in nature, function and purpose? Some collections might be ad hoc creations comprising sayings drawn from a common pool. Veldhuis (2000a) p. 385 suggests that while collections such as 2 were a required element of study, those such as 16 were optional elements for brighter students.

28. These tablets are apparently of unknown provenance (pers. comm. Alster).
It is perhaps significant that while we have no evidence of the three best attested OB collections — 1 (74 sources), 2+6 (157 sources), 3 (41 sources) — surviving into later periods, less well attested collections — 7 (1 source), 14 (3 sources), 16 (5 sources) — are known to have survived. In the case of collection 7, it is noticeable that virtually all the proverbs in the collection duplicate those in collections 1–3. Furthermore, only two proverbs in this collection duplicate those in another collection (7.48 = 11.5, 7.104 = 11.53), and both are also paralleled in collections 1–3 (7.48 = 3.55, 7.104 = 1.97). We might then interpret collection 7 as an attempt to distil the benefits of collections 1–3 into a unit of more manageable proportions. This would explain both the popularity of collection 7 and the absence of collections 1–3 in later times.

The last important point to make here (if this has not already become apparent) is that the numbers 1–28 do not mean that this represents an order in which the collections were studied. In fact, very little can be said about order, since there is too little evidence. There is a tablet (HS 1437 = 2QQQQ, 3W) with collection 2 on the obverse and collection 3 on the reverse (so in this case collection 3 was studied before collection 2), one (UM 29-15-667) with collection 16 on the obverse and collection 21 on the reverse (thus collection 21 before collection 16 here), and one (N 4684; see below) with collection 10 on the obverse and collection 21 on the reverse (thus collection 21 before 10) but that is not really enough to say anything with any reasonable degree of certainty.

Some of the collections are distinct, established entities in Nippur; we do not know if these had the same status outside of Nippur. Quite a number of fragments from outside Nippur duplicate the Nippur collections, and in particular collections 1, 2+6, 3, 5 and 8, but many of these sources are lentils or small fragments with just one or two proverbs, so it is not clear that we can talk of these being attested as collections at these sites. However, in the case of collection 4, we now have a large fragment from Uruk (AUWE 23 120–121) with 4.4–4.9 in more-or-less the same order as the sources from Nippur (there is no single, fixed order of entries among the sources from Nippur — see e.g. Falkowitz (1980) p. 17–20), so we can probably posit the existence of that collection as an entity in Uruk, at least.

Outside Nippur, the site which has produced the most sources of the proverbs is Ur29. Although the sources from there were not found in situ in an archive30, it seems likely that a small number of scribes was behind them. There is only a handful of duplicates (and never more than two for any proverb); this pattern seems to mirror that of many of the other texts found in Ur (although a riddle is attested in 3 mss. (Civil (1987)) p. 19 (these are unlikely to have been written at the same time, however), and Robson (1999) p. 176 concludes that five or more scribes were set the same mathematical problem). Where duplicates are attested among the Ur literary texts, they often display significant textual differences or different types of tablet are used; so it seems unlikely that the manuscripts were produced contemporaneously by two scribes in the same lesson. The short extracts of proverbs display the same differences. Interestingly, there are several clusters of sources within collections; for instance, we have 2.37–40, 5.55, 57, 59–60, 8 Sec. B 23–25. UM 29-16-519 is also interesting; after several unparalleled entries it has 14.3–5 then a short break before resuming at 14.1, then moving on to 26 Sec. A 2, 4, 6. YBC 4677 contains 6 proverbs, all of which are paralleled but the sequence in which they

29. For these see now further Robson (1999) App. 5; many have mathematical rough work on the reverse.
occur does not match that found in other sources (see Alster (1997) p. 301–302 for the text).

2.2.2. The evidence of a colophon

As is the case in the OB period generally, only a few of the tablets containing proverbs have colophons. Ni 4077+ (SP 9 source A) is one of these few. It bears a tantalising colophon, unfortunately broken. What remains is: 'x[...]'x til-bi-še₃ “... to its end.” But to the end of what? We are hampered by a certain lack of standardisation in OB practice, and by the relative paucity of parallels against which to judge this example. Alster restores the second x as [ka]m, which fits the traces and would suggest an ordinal number in the gap; the first x could be d[ub]. According to this interpretation, the proverb collections might be arranged in a particular order. Alternatively, the second x might be [za]g. This would find a partial parallel in UET 6/1 10 rev. 17: im-gid₂-da 3- kam zag til-la. In post-OB texts a phrase zag til-la-bi-še₃ is attested (see Hunger, Kolophone p. 181 for refs.31). Our example and UET 6/1 10 would then be variants of this phrase.

It is not clear how the first part of the colophon should be restored (it is uncertain from the copy how much text is lost). When the phrase zag til-la-bi-še₃ occurs in post-OB texts, it is preceded by the tablet number (optional) and the composition name. UET 6/1 10 is preceded by the tablet number, with the title following afterwards. If Ni 4077+ followed a similar pattern, our first x would be part of the tablet number, and the title of the composition would have been omitted (there is nothing after the line in question). However, the tablet number in UET 6/1 10 refers to arbitrary divisions of the composition in order to fit it onto a series of smaller tablets, whereas Ni 4077+ is a large tablet capable of holding the entire composition; a tablet number is thus not required. Instead we might restore perhaps n[ir-ţal₂-e za]g-, based on the incipit of the composition. Collation of the text would be desirable.

2.2.3. Another interesting colophon

BM 80722 (CT 58 30; Alster (1997) p. 287–288) is another of the few sources bearing a colophon. It raises interesting questions about school practice. As well as recording the number of lines, the designation im-gid₂-da (a “Type III”, excerpt tablet), date of writing (day and month but, frustratingly, not the year) it provides the names of not one but two scribes as author. It is conventionally assumed that such short excerpt tablets (typically holding about 30 or so lines) are in each case the work of a single scribe but it would seem that the answer to the question: “how many scribes does it take to write an excerpt?” might turn out to be “two!”

There are a further two, poorly preserved, signs present on the tablet but not copied in CT 58. They are part of the colophon but not actually part of the main text of the colophon; they are written to one side. They read: 'teš₂-bi’i “together”, which seems a little superfluous but presumably was a note to point out that the two scribes named in the colophon wrote the tablet together. This was then presumably the exception rather than the rule — which would be what prompted the unusual teš₂-bi comment to be written. Quite what each scribe contributed to the tablet’s production is unclear.

31. For 63, 1 there read 83, 1.
2.2.4. A marginal note

In his transliteration of 5.66 in YBC 4604, Alster (1997) p. 132 records the presence of “(ši-in written across the column)”. These signs do not seem to belong with this proverb but may be accommodated instead in 5 Vers. B 73. There are signs of erasure in this line and it is not easy to tell what the scribe finally intended. Alster (p134) reads: \(\text{lx}^3\text{hardly al}=\text{še}_8\). The copy suggests reading rather ba\(^\text{1}\)-ši-ib-še\(_8\). It would seem that the scribe wrote first -ši-ib- before ‘correcting’ in the margin to -ši-in-. Alternatively we might read ba\(^\text{1}\)-ši-še\(_8^3\)-še\(_8\), and assume a correction from -ši- to -ši-in-.

3. ADDITIONS, CORRECTIONS, SUGGESTIONS

Collection 1

1.14: D has na-an-na-ab-be\(_2\)-en. 1.30: I has [niš\(_2\)-n]u-ug\(_7\). 1.67: As Alster p. 348 notes, the reading šassuk derives from a first millennium fragment of Antagal (frag. e1 2’ (MSL 17 p. 248): S\(_9\)šá-su-uk[DÜN] = [šá-as-su-uk-ku]); it is now also supported by Emar Sag (Emar VI/4 no. 575) 12’ sağ-su = ša-as-su-ku’. However, the phonetic var. sa2-du\(_5\) in C and the writing [x].DU in Proto-Lu source CBS 2254+ (source K in MSL 12) speaks for a reading sa2-du\(_5\) rather than šassuk in the OB period. 1.88: read ūa-ba-l-ra-ur\(_3\). 1.99: read ba-gid\(_2\)-i. 1.101: instead of ša3 an-diri we might read ša3 an-si-a; ša3 = šešibum is a verb meaning “to take one’s fill”. 1.125: AA has šir-i-ri-ge. For 23 ii 8 read 23 2(8). 1.144: A has em3-šär-2-ra. 1.148: A has sağ mu-e-kal-1-en. 1.153: in C for umu read dumu. 1.156: the final verbal form does not occur as given in any of the sources. 1.160: the point is probably rather that while marrying is something within human control, having children is within the control of the gods. 1.172: For šum read š[um\(_G\)ir\(_2\)]. 1.178: OO continues: […] e|m\(_3\) nam-ba-ge-men. 1.195: for [nu-un]-da-an-zi-zi read nu-mu-\(_n\)-un-da-zi-zi-i.

Collection 2+6

The photo of C is Gordon SP, pl. 38. 2.7: none of the sources preserve the verb in the form given in the composite text. 2.10: the text of L belongs to 2.9 and 2.10. Correct the first line to \(\text{llu}_3\)-\(\text{ld}_2\)-\(\text{me}\)-en … 2.11: in line 3 for -ab- in the verb read -an- (so in all sources). 2.15: the first line in A reads: uu2-re nî\(_2\) \(\text{gu}_7\)-u\(_2\)-da-ni-še\(_3\). 2.20: A reads: en’2-te-na-ka a\(_3\) nu-ur\(_1\)-\(\text{ru}\) / \(\text{u}_4\) buru\(_{14}\)-ka ūa ga-ar\(_2\)-am\(_2\)-\(\text{du}_3\)-\(\text{du}_3\)-e. 2.22’–2.23’: the composite text is taken from collection 17 not collection 2 source R. 2.26: the composite text is taken from Gordon, SP; it differs from the transliteration made by Alster. 2.37: the composite text is taken from collection 11 not the sources of collection 2. 2.38: in line 2 read dub-sar-re (no source has -ra). 2.49: KKKK: for -tum read -tum\(_3\). 2.54: AA reads: (5) [na]l\(_g\)ar pe-el-\(\text{la}_2\) \(\text{lu}_2\) ti\(_{11}\)bala-a\(_1\)-kam; (6) [sim]\(_g\) pe-el-\(\text{la}_2\) \(\text{lu}_2\) urud\(_{10}\)gur\(_{10}\)-a\(_1\)-kam. Line (3) is omitted in five sources (A, U, LLLL, 3N-T 915b, UET 6/2 267), present in only two (AA, CC). 2.82: the term in line 2 is (ud) za-ḥa-al … ak; for references and discussion see Civil (1993) p. 77 and n. 19 and PSD A/3 p. 107 s.v. u\(_4\)-za-ḥa … ak (8.216). This expression was listed by Civil (RAI 48, Leiden) among a group of Sumerian loanwords ending in -a, with reference drawn to Ar. zaḥala. 2.89: only 1 source has gu\(_4\)-ud-zu, while 6 have the more difficult gu\(_4\)-ud-e-za “in your dancing”, perhaps indicating that the main clause has been omitted (as happens from time to time in the proverbs). The gist of the proverb is made clear by the wordplay on gu\(_4\)(d) “ox” and gu\(_4\)-ud “to dance”. sun\(_2\) is typically female but can have male reference (see further Watanabe (2002) p. 62–63) and gu\(_4\)-sun\(_2\) is of course known as an epithet of Enlil (see Kutscher (1975) p. 84–86 for refs.). There seem to be three variant expressions: (TT) gu\(_4\)-sun\(_2\)-a-gi\(_7\) ġiri\(_1\) gu\(_4\)-ud-zu “Like a wild bull — your dancing feet”; (A, N, EE) gu\(_4\)-sun\(_2\) gu\(_7\)-a-gin\(_7\) ġiri\(_1\) gu\(_4\)-ud-za “Like a grazing wild bull — your nose when you dance”; (PPP, RRRR) gu\(_4\)-sun\(_2\) gu\(_7\)-a-gin\(_7\) ġiri\(_1\) gu\(_4\)-ud-e-za “Like a grazing wild bull — ... when you dance”. ġiri\(_1\) is a type of drum and this variant
could be seen as a reference to a lack of drumming skill, although exactly how this resembles a grazing bull is unclear. gir₁₆ is also attested as a logogram for kirru A "(a type of vessel for holding liquids)". This is unlikely to be intended but perhaps kirru B "(throat region)" might have been intended; this would be a close variant to kirr₁₄ and it is rather easier to understand the bull simile. 2.96: the variants here are interesting. PPP has ᴿᵤ₁₄ˌdᵃ₁ kar-re gaba-kar (an-ᵤ₃₂ˌsᵃ), which Alster translates "let me flee today." gaba-kar is explained as a phonetic variant for ga-ba-kar. Although a little unexpected, this does not seem unreasonable. However, VV also has gaba-kar, which suggests that the variant represents instead a different understanding, "one who ... the chest". It is also interesting that both A and H write the supposed word for "escapist" different ways in each instance. The first occurrence is written ga-.abspath-re in both sources while the second is written ga-ba₂kar-re (and VV and PPP have here gaba-kar). These carefully distinguished writings are unlikely both to represent the same frozen form on the pattern ga+n/b+VERB. 2.99 for un read kal am, as shown by the syllabic Emesal variant ka-na-₃ in A. 2.113: see now Veldhuis (2000) p. 72–73. 2.131: there is no room in CCCC for [engar-e] to be restored; the text of the composite here is based on Coll. 26. 2.135: in FFFF restore at the end [gul-la]. 6.3: see now Civil (2003) p. 65–68. 6.7: CBS 13890 as given on p. 148 appears to show a variant, longer form of 6.7 but the photo on pl. 44 shows only two lines present here. It seems that the second line on the tablet has been transliterated twice; this would explain the difficult -r₁u- in the second line on p. 148 which would be expected to have been -ra-. An extra half line ([g₃₂-e-m-e-en]) must be restored at the end of line 1. 6.32: MDP 27 206 reads ir₅₆uː₅en and me-ta-ra-bi-e. 6.34: Ni 4330 evidently has a different proverb here to that in UET 6/2 244 and MDP 27 206. 6.42: in CBS 19789 for gu₆read gu₇. 6.47: the remark "instead of D11" means 'instead of 6.47' (6.47 is D11 when 6.37 is counted as the first proverb in a new section (D) following the lacuna).

**Collection 3**

Translations of most of collection 3 can be found in Alster (1997a) p. 563–567; some differ slightly from those given in Alster (1997). 3.5: correct according to Civil (2002) p. 65–68. 3.8: eme-ak here is perhaps rather something to do with magic, given the magical connotations of spittle: an-du₃ would then be "protection". Translate perhaps: "not putting in place protection when incanting at midday ...". 3.23: source A has u₃ mu-un-ši-ku-ku "(but he who has livestock) can sleep". It is difficult to tell from the photo of the cast whether or not this source has ur₁ rather than the ur₂ we would expect. 3.29: delete the l-xl after abul. 3.63: in H for sun read sun₇. 3.66: A provides the end of line 2. 3.80: for da read da₃. 3.88: A provides a second line (see the individual transliteration of this source), not included in the composite. 3.100: CC has al-₄ak[(-a)]. 3.150: the e₂-nar-ra-ka is not translated; read: "the monkey sits in the house of the singer" (JJ has nam-nar "singers"; H has "in the house of the senior singer, the monkey sits i₄-tum⁻₃a₃", which we could translate perhaps "looking around"). 3.153: for sug₂(SUD) read z₄g₂(K₄xL I). 3.179: the second half of line 2 is preserved in X. 3.183: a variant has "one slave girl" and "two slaves" instead of "two slave girls" and "three slaves".

**Collection 4**

4.6: the translation assumes sa₃-gu₃⁻ne-ka to be a syllabic rendering of saغاز(a) "cupbearer". More likely is a connection to saغاز-gu₃₂-šgal/tuku (= šarḫum) "proud". 4.13: there is no room to restore [du-bu]. mu and gu₇ should be reversed. 4.42: read ḡiš ab-ra-ra.

**Collection 5**

BM 58648 (CT 58, 67 A) and CBS 8019 are both used in the composite for this collection but not noted in the source list. 5.1: YBC 9886: Alster transliterates the verb in lines 2 and 5 as al-ša₂-me-en but comparison with source A shows that this is a syllabic writing for al-di₃-m-e-en, and can be read al-di₃-me-en. 5.2: The translation of the Akkadian should read: "An elephant is lead to a sunken boat in order to raise it". 5.35: D has [₄mar]. 5.36: A line 4: for ḫa₁-ab-ṣub read ḫa₁-an-ṣub. In D for ab₂ read amar. 5.55: UET 6/2 212: in (5) and (9) there is no room for the restorations
suggested; there is room for only two or three signs in each instance. 5.57: CT 58 67A: for úba read ú2 ba. For eš read eš. CBS 8019 line 3: after eš-eš3 comes a line [x u]r-l-maḫ1-ka. The last line reads [x]n-i-b₂-tum₁-e-eš. 5.62: in YBC 4604 line 3 is probably just ‘tū1. 5.63: N has […]-un-ra-ra. In CT 58 67A for [r]a read [g]a½ (coll.). 5.66: see 2.2.4 above. 5 Vers. B 70: the “ka” is not a KA in the copy, although it is not clear what it actually is. 5 Vers. B 71: P i 10-11’ are ruled as two separate proverbs. 5 Vers. B 72: YBC 4604 1: for giš.ini₂(A) read giš-ši₂-ad, a variant writing for eš₂-ad “trap”. 5 Vers. B 73: see 2.2.4 above. 5 Vers. B 75: for in-ka r-re read in-ka r-ra, as expected. 5 Vers. B 76: see 2.2.4 above. 5 Vers. B 79: the “-ka” is not a KA in the copy, although it is not clear what it actually is. 5 Vers. B 80: YBC 4604 1: for giš.ini₂(G) read giš-ši₂-ad “trap”. 5 Vers. B 82: see 2.2.4 above. 5 Vers. B 84: for ii 20 read iii 3. 5.75: YBC 4604 has -si₃₂ge-e-de₂₂. 5.77: Q has igi nu-du². 5.78: the dog is not speaking in Emar. P has bi₂₂-za-ḫu₁₀. In UET 6/2 264 for bi₂₂-za mu:nu:ra- read bi₂₂-za-ḫu₁₀ nu-ra-. The proverb translates something like: “A dog spoke to his master: ‘If my pleasure does not exist to you (i.e., as far as you are concerned), then my misfortune should not exist either!” 5.81: In P and Y for kiri₁₄ read kiri₁₅ in all cases. 5.95: MDP 27 102 (here source U) is transliterated also on p. 336. In the transliteration on p. 138 for giš.ini₂ read giš-ši₂-ad, a variant writing for eš₂-ad “trap”. 5.102: the object in line 2 is su₃ub'( giš-ši₂DU;DI.EFI) “bolt”. A has a defective writing GIfi.DI.EFI. X has GIfi.fiU.[…]. 5.108: for giš_tuku₃ read giš-ši₂-tuku₃. 5.112: the 5.90 in Y is Gordon’s 5.88, Alster’s 5.86.

Collection 7

7.88 3: for ba-[a]b-ḫul-ḫul read ga-[b]-a-ab-ḫul-ḫul and translate “let me destroy”.

Collection 8

Collation of HS 1430 by K. Lämmerhirt (pers. comm. 01/11/02) has clarified several readings. p. 165: Gordon’s collection 20 is here source D, not C. It is C that shares a proverb with B. 8 Sec. A 2: for x₂ x₁ read š₁₃-ḫu₁₁-ni. 8 Sec. A 3: for x₂ x₁ read x HA x; a reading a₁₃a₂₃a₃₁₃am₁₁ seems to be ruled out. 8 Sec. A 4: the tablet reads lugal-a-ni-E-am₁₃-e-eš; the “E-” should be corrected to -še₁₃ or perhaps better-ra₂. 8 Sec. A 5: this is 5.4.11 A diatribe against Engar-dug (Diatribe B) 8. 8 Sec. B 1: the first sign is giš₁₂ (not me gi da₂). UD here is read zalag; note š₃₃ … zalag “to cheer the heart” as, for example, in Nuska B 75: š₂₃-zalag-zalag a-a ḏEn-lil₂₂-ka-me-en "You are the one who cheers father Enlil’s heart”. 8 Sec. B 2: the first sign here and in Sec. B 3 are identical, and the result of schoolboy copy error. The front end of the sign looks like AN, and there is a further diagonal wedge in the lower middle position. Given the context, it seems best to read megi₂. 8 Sec. B 3: in A the proverb ends -ga₂. 8 Sec. B 15: <nu-> should probably not be supplied on the verb in C, since *nu₃-mi-ni₂ is an unlikely prefix chain at this period. 8 Sec. B 22: for ka₄ read ka₃. 8 Sec. B 23: the Nippur and Ur mss. have different interpretations here. The Nippur ms. has “A fox was preparing a threshing floor. It (the grain heap?) did not become small on the threshing floor, but he did not become tired.” (su₇ … du₈ = mšk₃nam nad₃u; see CAD N/1 s.v. nad₃u). The Ur ms. seems to have “A fox was chasing a su-bird. The su-bird did not become weak and the fox did not become tired.” (the su-bird is known from the ED Bird list, source A 73 (see MEE 3 109 p112ff); TUR.TUR can mean “weak”). The implication of the latter would seem to be that the fox took on too equally-matched an opponent and the contest went on forever. 8 Sec. B 24: for ka₄ read ka₃. 8 Sec. B 29: UET 6/2 220 for an-na-gin₇-nam read a-na-gin₇-nam. 8 Sec. C 2: E 2’ : for ugu₃muen read ugu₃muen.

Collection 9

Ni 9867 obv. 4: could belong instead to Sec. A 5. The trace read as ki fits better ta.
Collection 10

10.5: copy has du₃ (apparently a gloss) but this is not present on the tablet (coll.). For -ka read ke₄. 10.9: for ḫaš₂ read ḫaš₄. 10.13: this proverb is difficult. It appears as though the two lines contain parallel expressions, the first being elliptical. Given the imin-e in the second line, it is tempting to read am-mu-uš-e (Emesal for “three”) in the first. However, even the general sense is unclear. What does “destroying the parapet” mean here? The other proverbs here describe a man lamenting the loss of his youthful virility; this proverb may well have the same connotations. Cf. 4.08.25 Dumuzi-Inanna Y 30–31: bad₃-si-me al-ḫal₃ bad₃-si-me gul-lu / nitalam₃-me a₂ kuš₂-u₃ kuš₂-u₃ “Here is our parapet! Tear down our parapet! Our spouse, exert(?) yourself, exert(?) yourself!” Sefati (1999) p271 ad 30–31 interprets the line as follows: “Perhaps ‘parapet’ is used here as a metaphor for the familial protection of an unmarried girl ... In this case the man is probably urged by the family to breach the barriers keeping him from the girl”. This line occurs in amid a dialogue of sweet nothings. Here, too, destroying parapets would make more sense were it to have a sexual connotation. The girl is imploring her lover; we might suggest a translation along the lines of “Breach my defenses”. This is not to suggest that every occurrence of the phrase should be so translated; SP 1.186, for instance, contains the phrase bad₃-si ... gul but has apparently nothing to do with sex. There is a line count (10) at the bottom of the reverse of CBS 14059. A new source has come to light. N 4684 obv. reads (10.8–10.12): 1’ [...]-gā₂ x[x (x)], 2’ [...-gi]n₇ ḫaš₄-gā₂ (ba₁-{x x}, 3’ [...x ba-an-m[u₂], 4’ [...m]u-e-ši-in-lgi₁¹ / [...-ma-an-sum, 5’ [...g]u₇-gu₇-gu₇₉. For the reverse see the comments to collection 21. Thanks to Jeremie Peterson for bringing this piece to my attention and allowing me to include it here.

Collection 11

11.26: this is ruled as two proverbs on the tablet (see photo pl. 58). 11.57: for “obverse column 3” read “obverse column iv”. After i-gi’-in there is an extra line: a-ga-de”‹-a; cf. Coll. 18.15. More precise estimates of the extent of the gaps between sections of text can be given: at start — 4 lines; between 11.10–11.18 — 14 lines; 11.29–11.35 — 21 lines; 11.44–11.51 — 24 lines; 11.57–11.66 — 26 lines; 11.71–11.82 — 30 lines; 11.134–11.146 — 29 lines; 11.150–11.160 — 30 lines; at end — 18 lines.

Collection 12

ad source D: 15–20 lines would be a better estimate of the number of lines per side. CBS 7130 rev. contains Proto-Lu. 12 Sec. A 2: the sources are closer than the transcriptions suggest: A obv. i 2 second line reads probably [nu-g]ur ... . In C first line read: [X X (X)] inim-ba ... (thus in source A read inim-ba). 12 Sec A 5: inspection of the photos indicates that dim₃ is not so far fetched; a reading [di]m₃-dim₃-ma seems possible. dim₃-dim₃-ma = dun-na-mu-u “fool” (Erнимхu IV 118 ; MSL 17 p. 62), sak-l[u?] “imbecile” (Ernímхu IV 125 ; MSL 17 p63). 12 Sec. B 12: Alster tentatively suggests a meaning “to despise” for the expression igi ... tur; this is actually supported by Antagal VIII 64–65 (MSL 17 p. 172) ḫiɡil-tur = na-a-šu “to scorn”, ḫiɡil-tur-tur = šā-a-šu “to ignore someone”. 12 Sec. B 13: in B there is a dividing line between lines 3 and 4. 12 Sec. C 2: read perhaps an-gu-lu-[u]₃ at the end of both lines. 12 Sec. C 4: for bir₇ read bir₇-bir₇. 12 Sec. C 9: inim ... si₃ = šutēmaqum “to pray devoutly to someone”; cf. Lu Exc. II 78 (MSL 12 p. 106): inim-si₃-si₃-ga = šu-te-mu-qu. 12 Sec. D 1: for mu-ni-in-be₂ read mu-ni-in-ba₂. 12 Sec. D 2 (3): x looks like a[b. 12 Sec. D 6: x x looks like fṣa al. 12 Sec. F 1: “DUN” here, as in many places, the copies in ISET and TAD differ. The sign on balance looks closer to gu₇. p. 205 CBS 7800 r. 4: for ḫiš read ḫiš₃.

Collection 13

13.9: x on the photo looks rather narrow for gi₄; a reading e₂ seems satisfactory. p. 429 ad 13.29: for 9 Sec. C 4 read 9 Sec. D 3.
Collection 14

14.2: although egerrû commonly has ominous meaning, note the idiom e. dummuqum / lumnunum “to speak well/ill of others”. 14.41: in the list of parallels, read 23.2 (8). 14.43: pe-en-ze2-er is not a ‘functionary’ of any sort (leather worker or otherwise (PSD A3 p107 sub 8.217 ugun—ak translates here “menial’’) but is actually a word referring to the female genitals32. Even without the leather worker, this proverb remains difficult to understand and hard to translate. The interpretation of u2 depends on what the phrase ugun … ak “to make a decoration” means here (see PSD A3 p107 s.v. for other refs.). Might it be an expression for pregnancy or menstruation? Then is the u food, medicine or a menstrual rag? And what is the significance of the husband fetching it? There is much about this saying that eludes us. 14.46: the tablet has a ruling after the first line; thus mi Ï-usÏ-saÏ ... is the start of a separate proverb, as in 1.169. For ußbar (U fiÏxUÏ) read uß bar» (URÏxUÏ).

Collection 15

15 Sec. A 5 [and ad Veldhuis (2000) p. 393]: the text designated as from B is actually from A; the two lines are not variants and belong together. 15 Sec. B 1: the signs read kapar here are SIPA.TUR. sipa-tur equates to Akkadian kaparrum “junior herder” but no reading /kapar/ is yet known for these signs. A lemma kapar is of course known in Sumerian, written ga-ab-ra, gabô-bar etc. (see further Selz (1993)), and occurring in Dirî V 43 (MSL 15 p. 43) written PA.DAG.KISIMÌxGAG and assigned the reading [ka]-bar. If SIPA.TUR is to be read /kapar/, it requires a new index value. 15 Sec B 2: see 14.3–5. 15 Sec B 6: -sum¿-mu¿-un¿. 15 Sec. C 6: for ra(sic!) read ßid¡. 15 Sec. C 13: in A ii there is room for bi or ße3 but not both. 15 Sec. C 14: in A for im-ma-zi read im-ma-an-zi. 15 Sec. C 15: in A read idîdigna and idîburrûnù. The copy favours readings -an-ku’ instead of -an-ŠAR. 15 Sec. F 1: in ii x looks like √en∫.

Collection 16

ad source A: rev. ii has Sec. E 1–3, rev. iii has Sec. F 1–8. Source C is type II. 16 Sec. B 7: see 15 Sec. B 1. 16 Sec. C 2: see 15 Sec. B 1. 16 Sec. D 2: SP 3.17 is quoted incorrectly; cf. p. 83. 16 Sec. E 5: according to the copy, A has u2-fi bi gid2-da1 in-[...]us2-dub2-e-se. 16 Sec. F 5: in B restore only di[ri]; there is no room for an extra [diri]. 16 Sec. F 6: in B restore U[M], to be read d[êli] — see comments to 3.5. In Ni 9752 rev. iii 8’ the copy seems to favour mu (pace Civil (2002) p. 67 n11). 16 Sec. F 7: in A i for de23 read ab-kaI. In A iii restore possibly [I]u2. For im-x read im-x-x-x. In B ii the -d[a] could be -N[E].

Collection 17

17 Sec. B 2 and 22 vi 38–48: ki-nu3 is translated “bed” as expected. However, in the present context ki-nu3 seems to refer rather to one’s final place of rest (usually ki-ma/h). 17 Sec. B 3: for g[û7-gû7-mu] read gû7-gû7-gû10. 17 Sec. B 4: for tibi read tibi2.

Collection 18

ad B: photo pl. 79. A and B are type III tablets. C is a type II model with the copy erased. 18.4: traces of da- remain in the erased copy of C. 18.5: C has šir3-ra-[x-(x)-]ab. 18.6: the translation “valid money” is uncertain (pace Alster in Mélanges Limet; see (1997) p. 438 for details). dannum can have the sense “valid” but the present writer has not been able to find it used this way in relation to kaspum, nor Sum. ku” … kalag with this meaning. kalag/dannum with ku”/kaspum in Old Assyrian texts seems to refer to silver being hard to obtain, and thus trading at a high rate (see Veenhof (1972) p. 88, 386 (with n. 507), 406, 443, where the translation “hard to obtain” is advanced). 18.9: in i read […]-a-kam. 18.14: there is no room to restore [bal-e]; the traces suggest e.

32. As made clear by the lu2-lists; the same conclusion was also reached by Civil at RAI 48.
Collection 19

In the list of sources, Ni 4469 is ISET 2, 110. 19 D 11: “plucking” with reference to a person is uncommon. Tearing at hair is an indication of distress of various kinds and in addition is attested in MA/MB as a punishment (see CAD B p. 98 s.v. baqāmu c for refs.).

Collection 21


Collection 22

22 vi 6: for ga-ab-il₂ read ga-ba-ab-il₂. 22 vi 34, 36: A writing gu; for ga (34) is difficult, as is ka for ga (36). It seems more likely that we should read gu₇ and gu₉. 22 vi 37: for kam read ke₄. 22 vi 38–48: see 17 Sec. B 2. 22 vi 48: restore [ḥe₂-eb]-l-gub₁, parallel to 17 Sec. B 2. 22 vii 25–27: This passage is found also in Proto-Izi I Section AN 1’–3’ (MSL 13 p. 34): an-kur₂, an-kur₂-kur₂, igi-an-kur₂-kur₂ and Erimhiša II 258–260 (MSL 17 p. 41; and the Boghazköy version, p. 112): [an-kur₂]₄₄υ₄ Kur₂ = mu-šu-tap-tu₄ “treacherous”, [an]-kur₂₄-kur₂ = mu-ša₁-b₁-ru “malicious”, [igi]-an-kur₂₄-kur₂ = mu-tir i-na-a-ti “dishonest”. Cf. also 5.6.1 The instructions of Širuppag 65–66. While it is not inconceivable that the proverb refers to a man (or more neutrally to either male or female), there is evidence that a shifty-eyed woman was an established motif. Note OB source SS₁ (from Ur) of ED Proverb 5, which translates igi-an-kur₂-kur₂ with the feminine mu-te-ra-at i-[nim]. See further CAD M/2 p. 289 s.v. mut₄-ṭ numb. This Akkadian expression suggests that the Sumerian igi refers to the eyes rather than to the face. The attestations clarify that to change the eyes’ indicates deception of various sorts. Unfortunately English does not share the idiom so translation of this proverb must be a little free. The present writer suggests: “She is shifty; she is really shifty; she has really shifty eyes.”

Collection 25

25.1: (4) read im nu-ba-e. 25.7, 25.8: these entries should be exchanged. 25.8: read mu-un-du₃-a.

Collection 27

If the preserved flake of C really is the reverse, the right hand col. should come before the left, since the rev. is normally read from right to left. C ii’ 2’: (p. 284) for ḥa₂-1a(!) read ḥa₂-e (coll.). C ii’ 3’: 1a looks more like ma₂.

Collection 28

28.7: saq₃-kì ... ḡal₁ means “to be tenacious, obstinate”; see 2.5.1.5: A Hymn to Nisaba for Iṣbi-Erra (Iṣbi-Erra E) 58: saq₃-kì-ḡal₂-ni-me-en “You are his obstinate one” and Examenstext A 48 (Sjöberg (1975) p. 146): saq₃-kì-ḡal₂-1a ḡiš nam-ba-an-tuku (= ṣe-ep-še-ti ṭa t₃a-šem-mi) “You are obstinate, you do not listen”. 28.21: Alster reads gu₁ (... de₂) and interprets this as a syllabic writing of u₂-gu (... de₂). The idea is right but the sign is better read ugu. 28.22: for ke₄ (?) read perhaps ra(?). For AB read bi₃. 28.24: for sa-u₄-sa read sa-u₄-gal. The sic! on the ḡiš is not necessary. 28.28: there is room to restore only [ḡiš].
**Minor Sumerian Proverb Collections**

*CBS 6832:* In 6 for al read dal. *CT 58, 30:* obv. 5: the verb may be syllabic for tu₄₅, b “to strike”. *N 3395:* obv 1’: in the third line of Sumerian e is impossible (coll.); *BWL* (p. 272)’s gār is possible. There is a gloss below the third sign, as indicated in the copy *BWL* pl. 71 (TU LU LU or similar). In the second line of Akkadian read ša-ḫi-i-im. *N 4428:* Sec. A 3: source A ends with -e-še (written on the edge). Sec. B 3: for nin(-?)-a read e. There is an extra sign at the end in the copy of *UET* 6/2 315 obv. 2; the final x in obv. 4 as copied is RU. *CBS 6855:* 1: sig₂ on the photo looks like simple iši. *N 3395:* obv 1’: in the third line of Sumerian e is impossible (coll.); *BWL* pl. 71’s gàr is possible. There is a gloss below the third sign, as indicated in the copy *BWL* pl. 71 (TU LU LU or similar). In the second line of Akkadian read ša-ḫi-i-im. *N 4338:* 3 read šu-ni ma-an-. *N 4469:* in obv. i 1 for inim read imin. In obv. ii 1 (7) an additional half line is preserved after ur₂ na-an-n[a]; it could be restored [ša₃-sig₃-ga]. *N 9832:* obv ii 1’: the third line has pad₃ over an erased gār₃. *TIM 9 18:* obv.: there are traces of a further line between 6 and 7. In rev. 8–9 read [ga-ša]-an-an-na. In 11–12 read 1šu₁-mu₁-[da]₁-e-še. *TIM 9, 19:* in obv. 2 read nir-ša₂-e [k]u₁-[zu]-kam₂ šu-dib-ba [šu₂]-gār₁-gār₁-gal₂-la. In rev. 9 read perhaps: nin-e u₃-ma₃-ta-SĒŠ-SĒŠ. In 14 the copy has ni₃-g₂-gig-zi ḫ₂₂-a ni₃-g₂-tuku ḫa-la-ba-zi ḫ₂₂-a, which we might tentatively translate: “Let it be set aside for you. Let wealth be your inheritance”. *UM 29-16-519:* in obv. 4 for fiš₃ read ḫe₂. In obv. 8 the final sign is -la. In obv. 11 the transliteration doesn’t match the photo; the photo has 6–7 signs lost then a trace of one sign. In rev. 4’ read di₃-nin-urta-kam. In rev. 5’ read perhaps ḫa-la₁-bi₁ ba⁻ab⁻[X (X)] X šeš⁻da⁻[X (X)] gid₂⁻i / [...]. *YBC 8713:* the restorations in (1,3) and 4 are too long.

**Lenticular tablets from Nippur**

*CBS 6504:* this is 2.5.5.2 Lipit-eshtar B 56. As with the other lentils containing literary material published here, this composition belongs to the ‘Tetrad’ group of elementary texts (see Tinney (1999) p. 162), already attested on lentils. *CBS 6551:* (bis). *CBS 7968:* in the model there are traces of e` at the end of the line and room for [še]. *3N-T 731:* (bis). *UM 29-16-394:* the line reads lugal uru ša₃-ge ḫ₁₂-da₁ ḫ₂₂-ti (bis). Cf. 4.13.01 Nanna A 53: uru-uzu urim₂ ki ša₃-ge bi₂-pad₃ “He (Enlil) has chosen your (Nanna’s) city Ur in his heart”; 4.13.09 Nanna I 8: urim₂ ki uru ša₃-ge pa₃-da-na “In Ur, the city chosen in his heart”.

**Sumerian Proverbs from Ur**

Most sources from Ur derive from the secondary context of No. 1 Broad Street; the findspots of these texts can be found in Charpin (1986; see n. 30 above). *UET 6/2 236:* photo now available in Friberg (2000) p. 183. *UET 6/2 274:* for “{numun.Right}” read num₂ (or 1num₂). Photo now available in Friberg (2000) p. 183. *UET 6/2 295:* photo now available in Friberg (2000) p. 183. *UET 6/2 307:* read the third line 1šu₂ kurun-na-ka (thus the copy). *UET 6/2 339+UET 6/3 235:* in l. 2 for zu(?) read [D]IM₂. *UET 6/3 50, 378, 452, 455, 458, 462, 463 and 464 are lentils. *UET 6/3 31 and 80 are single column tablets. UET 6/3 339+UET 6/3 235 is a large tablet. UET 6/3 588 is an unusual shape. It is a small, wide, oblong piece of clay with two lines of text, each of which curves up at the right hand side and continues upside down above the already written text. The reverse is uninscribed. *UET 6/3 31:* in 5 and 6 half a line is missing in each line (a little more in the second line of 6). *UET 6/3 50:* for ab read a[b. *UET 6/3 80:* In 4 delete [gu₃-de₂]; for gu₃-de₂-a-bi aša₃-ga (me-te-bi) read gu₃-de₂ a<s₃> ga me-te-bi. In 9 for MAR read si. In 11 for a read ke₄. There are remains of three lines of text on the base of the tablet: [ ]sum₃ x d[u / ] mu [ / [...]. *UET 6/3 378:* for sili₂ read [s][ili₃]₄ (ŠID). The reverse contains mathes at 180° to the obverse. *UET 6/3 455:* for di₃ read si. *UET 6/3 464:* for [a₃]-[ra₂] read [3]. *UET 6/3 588:* read gu₂ an-ta an da da ri ra kur / {eras. sal} kin` sal a₃ nu₂ u₂ tun₃ ma-ab-gu₂-u₂.
Proverbs in the Yale collections

MLC 618: the reverse is not transliterated. YBC 4727: this is 2.5.8.1 Enlilbani A 74–75. YBC 7297: for am₃ read am₆ (thus the copy). YBC 7345: for -ge read -e. For u₂/sa read perhaps ulu₃. YBC 7351: for bal-a read bal-e. YBC 7693: x looks like sī₂₃. YBC 8929: this is 2.5.5.2 Lipit-éstar B 10–11. YBC 9906: the extra sign is UD. YBC 9912: for zib[a] read ib[a]. YBC 9916: for keštدا read kešt₂-da. YBC 7345 and YBC 9886 are both in the ‘landscape’ format used by Kassite scribes (see Veldhuis (2000)).

Lenticular School Tablets of Unknown Provenance

According to Young, JCS 24 p132, the Free Library of Philadelphia tablet is said to come from Uruk. According to Robson (1999) p. 180 the number of the text is FLP 1283. The reverse contains mathematical work, an arrangement better known from Ur. A possible additional source can be mentioned here; BM 104096 is a lentil on display at the British Museum, labelled there as a proverb: mu udu ka₂-gal e₂-a-bi nam-ra-aš mu-un-ur₂-re “he shears for booty the ... sheep ..., as it goes through the city gate”. Photos of both sides of this piece have been published in several places, inc. C. Walker, Reading the past: Cuneiform (London; 1987) p. 34, A. Robinson, The Story of Writing (London; 1995) p. 82–83.

Proverbs from Susa

For the archaeological context and the dating of these tablets, see Tanret (1986) p. 140–141. For some suggested improvements to the text see now Bauer (2002). 18 48: this tablet is in ‘landscape’ format. 27 100: read just e₂-AMAS₂-e. 27 109: read he₂-em-ṣi-a. 27 114: the last four signs in the first line might be read ga₁₄-ra-du-um (“hero?”) or ga₁₄-ra-ab-ta (“let me speak?”). 27 214: the reverse is not transliterated. The signs are legible (the last two on the first line are the first two of the second, erased; the scribe presumably misjudged the space available) but it is very difficult to extract any sense. Either a phonetic rendering of the Sumerian or an Akkadian translation is expected. 27 215: read ba₂-ab-du₂-g₂₂.


To the bibliography add Å. Sjöberg, review of UET 6, in OrNS 37 (1968) p. 232–241. A number of relevant publications have appeared since Alster (1997):

on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday (Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 89; Leiden 2001) p. 538–539. Nos. 21 and 22 might be proverbs.


– J.A. van Dijk and M. Geller, Ur III Incantations from the Frau Professor Hilprecht-Collection, Jena (TuM 6. Wiesbaden, 2003). No. 23 might be a proverb.


– B. Alster, Wisdom of Ancient Sumer (Bethesda, Ma; 2005), edits two new sources in chapter 6. Other relevant texts, including folk tales quoted in the proverb collections, also appear there. On p. 403 the publication of further new sources is announced.

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ABSTRACT

More than 2000 Old Babylonian Sumerian proverbs are now known to us. This paper reviews our understanding of that corpus. What are the “proverbs”? What are the “collections” into which they are gathered? Who used them and what for? The paper concludes with additions to the corpus and suggested improvements to the published text.

RÉSUMÉ


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