

A Late Babylonian Field Plan

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The tablet which is herein published is part of a corpus of late Babylonian field plans in the British Museum.¹ When known, the provenance of these tablets is, with rare exceptions, Babylon, and they are dated from the reign of King Darius. They form a unified corpus and serve to fill a gap in our knowledge of the cartographic phenomenon of field plans, heretofore attested only for the Neo-Sumerian, Old-Babylonian and Middle Babylonian periods.²

The tablet published below is a record very much in the tradition of the NB field plans in the corpus.³ These field plans, for the most part, show very roughly drawn sketches and contain brief notes as to ownership, borders, size, yield, kind of land, and the date of the record. Such information may have served as the basis for recording more detailed accounts of these sales, measurements, and yields; or the recording of such information may even argue for the archival nature of these field plans in their own right.

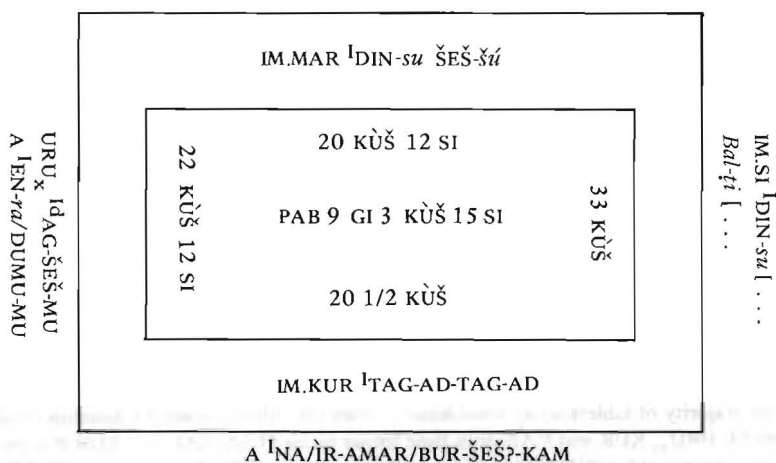


Fig. 1. Transcription

1 The undertaking of a study of this collection owes much to the help, encouragement and guidance of Professor D. J. Wiseman during my residence in London, 1973–75. I also wish to thank Mr. D. A. Kennedy for his help in deciphering this difficult script. The transliteration and commentary are, of course, solely my responsibility.

2 See W. W. Hallo, "The Road to Emar," *JCS* 18 (1964), 57.

3 BM 46703 measures 47 x 67 mm. I am grateful to the trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish this text.

Commentary

The tablet is written in Seleucid script, and the signs are often badly formed.⁴ The drawing of the field is made by laying the reed down along its side.

The scribe is inconsistent in observing certain orthographic conventions found in the corpus. For example, in this tablet all the directions begin with IM except for URU_x.⁵ All the names are marked with the ¹ determinative except for the one *Bal-ṭi*.⁶

The tablet does not have north at the top, south at the bottom, etc., as is often the practice in Neo-Babylonian field plans. However, we should note that when a direction other than north appears at the top of the tablet, that direction is most often IM.MAR 'west' as here.

The obverse and sides of the tablet have been erased and re-used. What remains of the reverse appears to be random numbers with no clear arrangement or pattern to them. The erasure and re-use of a whole tablet is unique in the corpus. Whether this particular tablet is a school tablet can only be speculated. It also remains to be studied further whether this phenomenon of erasure and re-use of a tablet was influenced by the contemporaneous use of parchment, and how much, if at all, these two different media of writing influenced their respective scribal practices.

The prosopography of this tablet presents numerous difficulties. ¹DIN-su or *Balassu* 'his life' is a shortened form of *Nabû-balassu iqbi*. He is mentioned as the neighbor or boundary on both the north and the west sides,⁷ but on the west side he is listed as ŠEŠ-šú 'his brother',⁸ that is, the brother of someone mentioned on the tablet or, perhaps, someone not mentioned on the tablet but who has requested this information about the measurements and yield of the field. However, if he is the brother of *Nabû-ab(a)-ittannu* or ¹TAG-AD-TAG-AD cannot be determined from the information at hand.

Any name beginning *Balṭ-* or the verbal adjective *balṭu* in any position is unattested in the onomasticon. Tallqvist posits a possible *Bal-ṭi-ja*.⁹ The appearance of a name without the personal name indicator is rare in this corpus.¹⁰

4 E.g., ¹DIN-su as it is written along the north and western sides of the field; EN and possibly ra which may be a badly written DUMU.

5 The vast majority of tablets under consideration from the British Museum collection consistently show IM with SI, URU_x, KUR and MAR or in their longer forms SI.SÁ, GÀL.LU, KUR.RA and MAR.TU respectively. Only one tablet, BM 31483 has an abbreviated form of the directions, i.e., SI, URU_x, KUR and MAR, and in this case all directions appear without IM.

6 Again, the vast majority of tablets that have personal names along the borders are marked with ¹ID, or MÍ. Only one tablet, BM 47541, which has one border remaining yielding information, has one name and that is unmarked by ¹.

7 Repetition of a name along the borders of the field, though not common, does occur several times within the corpus.

8 Names appear either with a patronymic or without, but this is the only case in which a brother is designated.

9 Tallqvist, *NBN*, 20, 309.

10 See n. 6, above.

The name ¹TAG-AD-TAG-AD (that is, ¹x-y-x-y) cannot be located. His patronymic is equally elusive, with several possible readings, none of which leads to a satisfactory solution, that is ¹NA/IR-AMAR/BUR-ŠEŠ.

Nabû-aḥ(a)-ittannu is not known from the literature to be the son of *Bēl-māra-ittannu*,¹¹ that is ¹EN-ra/DUMU-MU.¹²

The names in their present state of decipherment do not give a clue as to the period and provenance of this tablet.¹³

The size of the field described is rather small,¹⁴ but more problematic is the total.¹⁵ The addition of the sides does not equal the total.¹⁶ What the scribe had in mind when he recorded this total remains a matter for further study.

11 EN appears with ¹ and not ^d in our tablet. Though EN/*Bel* may not be marked with ^d, it does not show ¹ in its stead, see Tallqvist, *NBN*, 233f.

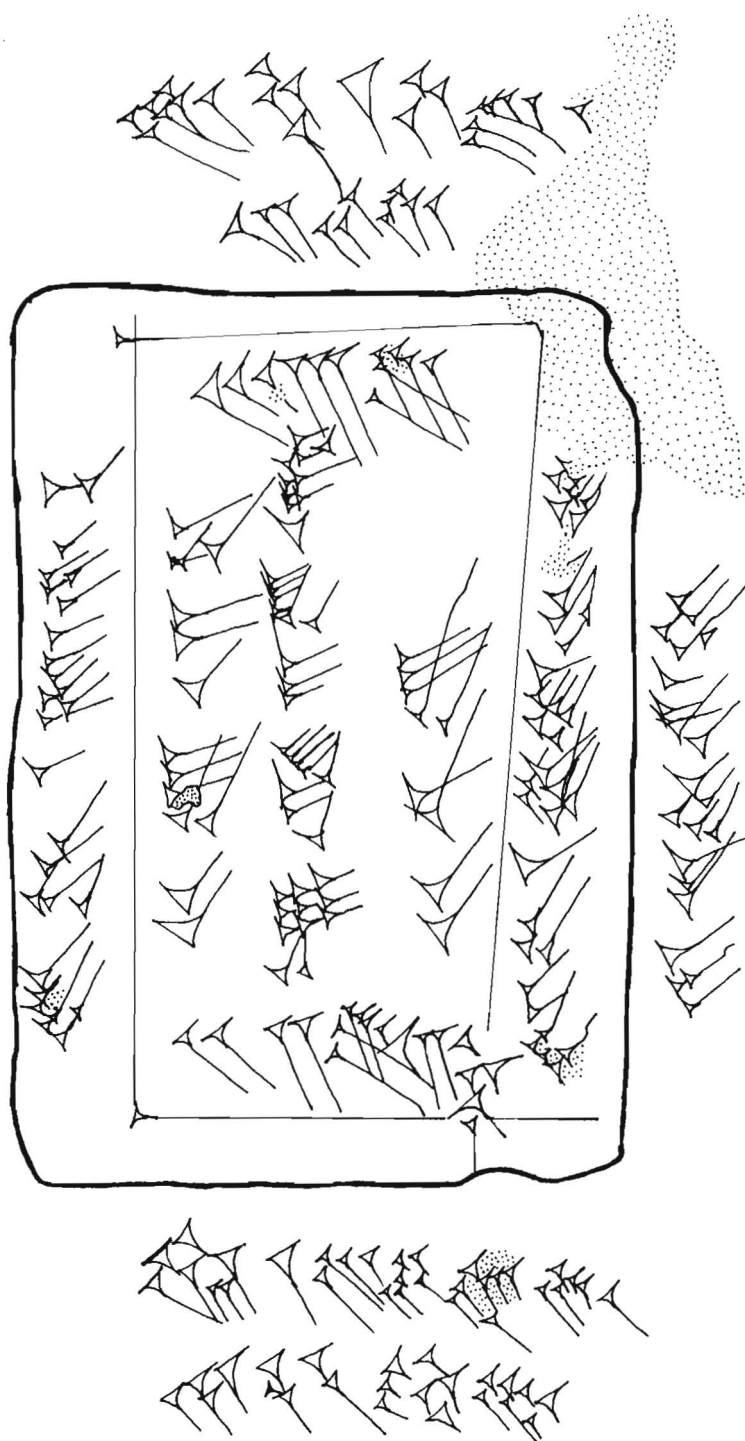
12 See *ibid.*, 41, for a possible reading ^d*Bēl-ra* . . . The MU could be read as ŠEŠ/URÛ; however, Stamm, *Namengebung*, 37, notes *Nabû-māra-ušur* but states that a name of this type is never imitated and probably incorrect. Names of the type DN-*māra-ittannu* are attested; see *ibid.*, 38.

13 The British Museum records the provenance of this tablet as Babylon.

14 The field plans in this corpus show a number of small size fields similar in size to our tablet but few large fields, i.e., fields all of whose sides are, for example, over 100 KÜŠ. Many fields have two sides over 100 KÜŠ but the other two sides are under this (arbitrary) measurement, e.g., 62½, 61, 535 and 550 KÜŠ; that is, many of the fields described in this collection resemble long narrow strips.

15 All the linear totals inscribed within these field plans seem to bear no relation to addition of the component sides.

16 Correction of 33 to 23 does not offer a solution. Furthermore, the evidence for the measurements of opposite sides of a field plan to be equal or very close is not weighty enough to assume a mistake here. Howard Wohl has suggested that the seeming discrepancy between the combined length of the sides obtained by calculation and the combined length stated as the total on the tablet may be justified by calculating the former in terms of the short cubit and the latter in terms of the long cubit. The remaining difference has less than a 5% error. If the field was measured twice, this might be an acceptable error, or such involuted mathematical computations might point to this particular tablet's being a school text, viz., a surveyor's examination. On the other hand, no other text in the corpus having a linear total can be explained by this method. Furthermore, the tablet has KÜŠ, rather than the expected KÜŠ.GAL-tú.



Obv. BM 46703



Rev. BM 46703



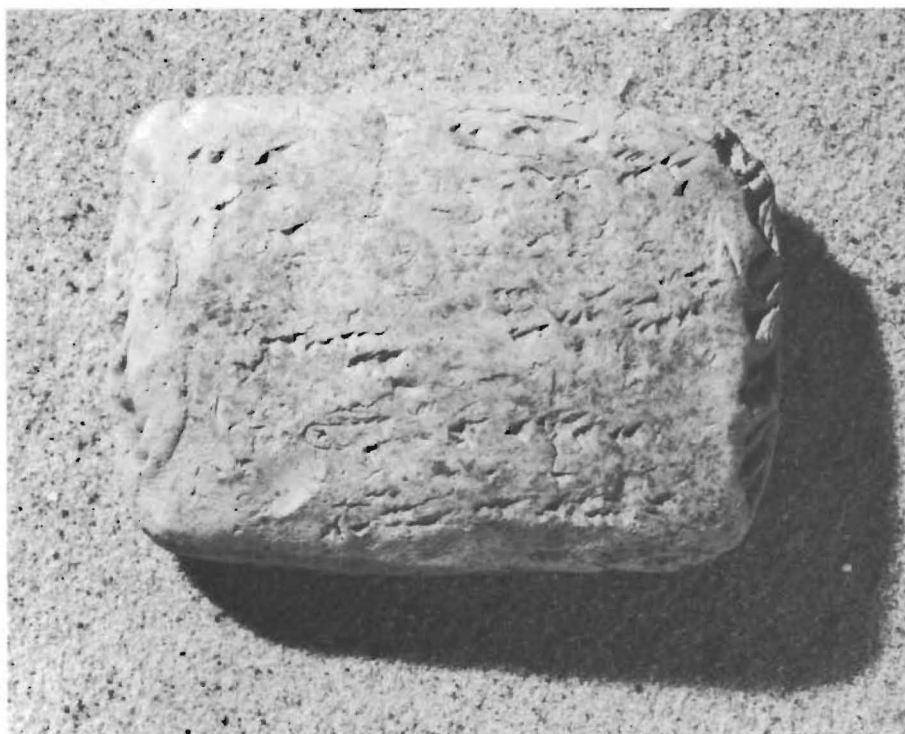
Edges



Obv. BM 46703



Lower Edge



Rev. BM 46703