

# Some Remarks on Women in the Presargonic E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> Corpus from Lagaš/Girsu

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## Introduction

The city state of Lagaš was situated in the southeastern part of the alluvium plain created by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and had three districts, Lagash itself (modern al-Hiba), Girsu (modern Telluh), and Nina (modern Surghul). The Dynasty of Lagaš, founded by Ur-Nanše at c. 2500 BC, continued to be one of the competing city-states of the region till c. 2350 BC when conquered by Lugalzagesi of Umma (Brisch 2013: 116–120). Lugalzagesi was, in turn, defeated by Sargon of the Akkad Dynasty, which marks the beginning of the Old Akkadian (also called Sargonic) period. The era starting with Ur-Nanše and preceding Sargon is called the presargonic period and corresponds archaeologically to the ED IIIb period (Sallaberger - Schrakamp 2015: 67).

### 1. The Presargonic E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> Corpus from Girsu

The corpus comprises some 1,800 texts originating from the district of Girsu in the city-state of Lagaš.<sup>1)</sup> The texts are mostly dated to the reigns of the last three rulers of Lagaš, namely Enentarzi, Lugalanda, and Urukagina, spanning more than twenty years, and are related to the E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> or “Queen’s Household,” which was renamed E<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub>, “Goddess Baba’s Household,” during the early reign of Urukagina (Foxvog 2011: 59; Sallaberger - Schrakamp 2015: 74). The

majority of the documents are administrative records from this institution and deal with a variety of subjects, including cult and ritual activities, rations given to different categories of people, livestock, fish and aquatic resources, agricultural activities such as survey and distribution of land and work assignments for people who were allotted subsistence land, and other activities related to orchards, wood, reeds, flax, and metal (Beld 2002: 8–36; Foxvog 2011: 60).<sup>2)</sup>

The aim of this paper is to present a general view of the women who appear in these documents, identifying who they were, what they did, and what they received. In the present context an exhaustive survey is not possible, so we will focus on particular women from three social strata: the elite, mid-rank professionals, and dependents from the lower echelons of society. We must bear in mind that, in the course of research in this field, we encounter difficulties in identifying the sex of people partly due to the fact that Sumerian uses some gender-neutral words, such as the noun **lu**<sub>2</sub> referring to a person (male or female), **dumu** referring to a child (son or daughter), and **dam** referring to a spouse (husband or wife). Also, some Sumerian personal names can be borne by either gender. Hence, we have to be careful when identifying the gender of participants in public life (Crawford 2014: 13).

## 2. Elite Women

To the top echelon of society belonged women who were members of the royal family, either by birth or marriage.

### 2.1. Royal Women

#### 2.1.1. Queen

Most institutional activities recorded in the texts in question were carried out in the name of three successive queens: Dintur, wife of Enentarzi; Baranam-tara, wife of Lugalanda; and Sasa, wife of Urukagina, the last ruler of Lagaš. This paper follows Maekawa's (1974–75) interpretation that although the institu-

tion was renamed from E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> “Queen’s Household” to E<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub> “The Goddess Baba’s Household,” it was still under the queen’s supervision, and therefore “E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub>” in this paper subsumes “E<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub>.”

The E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> controlled vast agricultural lands, gardens, animals, and other resources, on which a total of 600 to 800 persons depended directly (Sallaberger and Pruß 2015: 74). It was hierarchically organized and composed of various categories of working men and women. The question arises as to how independent the queen was in the management of the E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub>. It seems that the king had some authority over it, especially if Urukagina’s policies contributed to the increase in size of the E<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub> (Maekawa 1973–74: 99). There are, however, some indications of the queen’s independence from her husband to some extent. For instance, Dimtur did not disappear when her husband Enentarzi died, but rather remained in charge of the E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> at least in the first year of Lugalanda’s reign (Van De Mieroop 1989: 55), and Baranamtara had diplomatic relations, presumably of her own, with the queen of Adab (Van De Mieroop 1989: 56) as well as with the queen of Dilmun (Marchesi 2011: 189–199). Adopting a notion presented by Van De Mieroop (1999: 158–159), we may say that the E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> was a smaller institution but was parallel to the principal one controlled by the king.

The queen was allotted subsistence land (**gan**, **šuku**). The size of Dimtur’s land amounted to 210 **iku** in Enentarzi year 4 (Nik 1, 42 = AWEL 42) and 378 **iku** in Enentarzi year 5 (VS 14, 188 = AWL 8).<sup>3)</sup> Sasa’s land was more than twice as large as that of Dimtur (Steinkeller 1999: 295).

Queens appear as the buyer in several sales documents (Prentice 2010: 129–148). Dimtur purchased a foundling (RTC 16), a lamentation singer (**gala**) (RTC 17), and a house (BIN 8, 351), and Baranamtara purchased two **gala**-singers (VS 25, 13; Nik 1, 17 = SRU 45) and two blind workers (**igi-nu-du**<sub>8</sub>) (VS 14, 141 = AWL 192; VS 14, 144 = AWL 193). We also find a document in which a merchant bought a **gala**-singer on behalf of Sasa (BIN 8, 363). Of special interest in these transactions is the purchase of **gala**-singers by the queen,

because it implies that the queen herself engaged in procuring **gala**-singers to fill vacancies, and that this was related to the queen's responsibility for religious and cultic matters. The queen took the initiative in organizing offerings and ceremonies, and led processions from temple to temple (Cohen 2015: 29–50). Taking into consideration her economic and religious authority, it is plausible that the queen herself was the high priestess (**ereš-dingir**) of the goddess Baba (Maekawa 1996; Beld 2001: 185; Sallaberger and Huber-Vulliet 2005: 636; Suter 2007: 328; Goodnick Westenholz 2013: 260–261).<sup>4)</sup> The cultic duties of this office seem to have been centered on the cult of ancestors, including the queen's own (Civil 2011: 258).

### 2.1.2. Mother of the King or Queen

Geme<sub>2</sub>-ub<sub>5</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>-ga is identified as the queen's mother (**ama munus**) (VS 27, 81; dated to Lugalanda year 3), namely the mother of Baranamtara. In a text dated to Lugalanda year 4, she was allotted 36 **iku** of subsistence land (VS 14, 72 = AWL 5). A queen's mother, presumably Sasa's, was also allotted 36 (?) **iku** of land — not specified in the text but most likely subsistence land (DP 583; dated to Urukagina **lugal** year 2) — as well as 18 **iku** of leased land qualified as **gan<sub>2</sub>**, 5-**tuku** “field that yields 720 **sil<sub>3</sub>**, per **iku**”<sup>5)</sup> (TSA 7; dated to Urukagina **lugal** year 4). The ruler's mother (**ama ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka**), that is, Urukagina's mother, who is named Giš-ri, is also known to us (VS 14, 164 = AWL 168; Beld 2002: 75–77).

### 2.1.3. Princess

In Lagaš princes and princesses each had his or her own household, which was under the queen's management. The barley rations for their personnel were provided from the E<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub>, and the records for each household were put down together on a single tablet every month. These documents were, during Lugalanda year 6, given a new designation **še-ba** “(**gem<sub>2</sub>-dumu**)” **lu<sub>2</sub>** **di<sub>4</sub>-di<sub>4</sub>-la-ne** “barley rations given to those of the households of royal children,” which

Deimel (1928: 2) categorized as barley ration text Type IV.

### 2.1.3.1. Daughter of Lugalanda

Baranamtara gave birth to a daughter in the month of the Festival of Baba (= the twelfth month) of Lugalanda year 4.<sup>6)</sup> The girl was named Munus-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga and was a younger sister of Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše. Text DP 160 mentions only personnel of Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše, to whom the eleventh ration of Lugalanda year 4 was distributed, thus corroborating that Munus-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga had not been born yet. The households of both Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše and Munus-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga employed several cupbearers (**sagi**), a wet nurse (**um-me**), a nursemaid (**um-me-da**), and a few female servants (**ar<sub>3</sub>-tu-munus**), but the number of staff of the elder sister was always larger than that of the younger. Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše's additional personnel included women engaged in wool textile manufacture (**ki-siki**) or grinding grain (**geme<sub>2</sub>-kikken**), a type of worker who was blind (**igi-nu-du<sub>8</sub>**), an opener of the regulators of a water (conduit) (**du<sub>3</sub>-a-ku<sub>5</sub>**)<sup>7)</sup>, and a gardener (**nu-kiri<sub>6</sub>**) who worked in the orchard, and others with professions such as cook (**muhaldim**), smith (**simug**), brewer (**lu<sub>2</sub>-bappir<sub>3</sub>**), potter (**bahar<sub>2</sub>**), and so forth, none of whom are found among the personnel of Munus-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga (BIN 8, 23; RTC 53; DP 157; VS 25, 37; VS 25, 14) (Asher-Greve 1985: 152).

These two princesses owned animals. Lugalanda gave two donkeys to Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše in his year 4 (Nik 1, 202 = AWEL 202). We find that when the assets of both princesses were concerned, they were put down together on a single tablet. This was the case for a tag attached to a tablet container (Nik 1, 205), which records both princesses' possession of donkeys. But their animals were separately managed by two men: Ur-<sup>d</sup>igi-ama-še<sub>3</sub>, overseer of royal children (**nu-banda<sub>3</sub>**, **nam-dumu**), was in charge of Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše's animals (DP 214; DP 42), and a certain Lu<sub>2</sub>-na-nam, a shepherd (**sipa**), was in charge of Munus-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga's (VS 14, 170 = AWL 7). Geme<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Nanše owned thirteen donkeys, while Munus-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga owned seven (Nik 1, 203-204 = AWEL 203-204). Two mother cows that were counted among the princesses' possessions had been purchased

by Munus-kur-ra, a merchant (**dam-gar**<sub>3</sub>), possibly a woman given the name that can be translated “woman of the mountain,”<sup>8)</sup> and the cows were put under the responsibility of Baranamtara and managed by the abovementioned Ur-<sup>d</sup>Igi-ama-še<sub>3</sub> (VS 14, 55 = AWL 96).

### 2.1.3.2. Daughter of Urukagina

Two daughters of Urukagina, Game<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub> and Geme<sub>2</sub>-tar-sir<sub>2</sub>-sir<sub>2</sub>, are attested in Type IV ration lists together with their two brothers (ex., DP 116; HSS 3, 25 = AWAS 24; Nik 1, 16 = AWEL 16; TSA 18). Game<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub> is always mentioned first in these lists, meaning that she was the eldest, and she owned the largest household among the four. The households of both Game<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub> and Geme<sub>2</sub>-tar-sir<sub>2</sub>-sir<sub>2</sub> included cupbearers (**sagi**), female servants (**ar**<sub>3</sub>-**tu-munus**), one or two barbers (**šu-i**<sub>2</sub>), and female textile workers (**ki-siki**), but several professions such as carpenter (**nagar**), fisherman (**šu-ku**<sub>6</sub>), **igi-nigin**<sub>2</sub>-man (**lu**<sub>2</sub>-**igi-nigin**<sub>2</sub>), herder of donkey teams (**sipa anše sur**<sub>1</sub>-**ka**), and plowman (**sag-apin**) are listed only with the former (Asher-Greve 1985: 152).

#### Excursus:

From the period of Ur-Nanše, the founder of the Presargonic Lagaš dynasty, two texts with iconographical representations are indicative of the importance of wives and daughters of the ruler. A limestone plaque (RIME 1.9.1.2 = Frayne 2008: 83–84) depicts a row of Ur-Nanše’s children facing him, the first of whom (the leftmost) is a woman with the caption above her left shoulder, “Abd [a?], daughter” (AB<sub>2</sub>-**d**[a]? **dumu**), who is represented larger than any of her brothers, even A-kur-gal, Ur-Nanše’s successor (Asher-Greve 2006: 60–61; Suter 2013: 209 fig. 10.3). The other one is a limestone stele commemorating the construction of the temple of Inanna Ib-gal (RIME 1.9.1.6a = Frayne 2008: 87–89). This shows Men-bara<sub>2</sub>-abzu, the wife of Ur-<sup>d</sup>Nanše (**dam Ur-<sup>d</sup>Nanše**), and Ur-<sup>d</sup>Nanše’s daughter Nin-u<sub>1</sub>-su<sub>3</sub> (**dumu Ur-<sup>d</sup>Nanše**) seated facing each other (Asher-Greve 2006: 60 fig. 8; Suter 2013: 208 fig. 10.2). These depictions

permit the interpretation that some princesses may have played the role of high priestess, a possibility which has been discussed by Asher-Greve (2006, 2013), Suter (2007), and Goodnick Westenholz (2013), among others.

#### 2.1.4. Sister of Lugalanda or Baranamtara

The so-called **ereš-dingir** ration texts, classified as “barley rations, emmer rations, (and first fruit rations) of the festival of Baba” (**še-ba ziz<sub>2</sub>-ba (nig<sub>2</sub>-sa-ha-ba) ezem<sup>9</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub>-ka**) are important sources for the studies of Lagashite royal sisters. These texts, all dated to the reign of Lugalanda, mention the **ereš-dingir**-priestess of the goddess Baba (**ereš-dingir<sup>9</sup>Ba-ba<sub>6</sub>**) as the first recipient, immediately followed either by the names of eight women and the description “ruler’s sisters” (**nin ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka-me**) (DP 127 = AWEL 53) or by the names of two “men of the **ereš-dingir**-priestess” (**lu<sub>2</sub> ereš-dingir-me**) plus the names of nine women with the designation **lukur**-priestess (Nik 1, 53 = AWEL 53; RTC 61; DP 134). Table 1 lists the **ereš-dingir** and these women together with their rations (barley+emmer).<sup>9</sup>As already mentioned, the **ereš-dingir** of the goddess Baba in the state of Lagaš might have been the queen of Lagaš. Geme<sub>2</sub>-ub<sub>5</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>-ga, who was second to the **ereš-dingir** in terms of the amount of rations, is most likely Baranamtara’s mother (Beld 2002: 187; see also above 2.1.2).<sup>10</sup>If we understand that the expression **nin ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka-me** refers to the women other than the **ereš-dingir** priestess and Geme<sub>2</sub>-ub<sub>5</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>-ga, it follows that the seven women listed in Group A in Table 1 (Bara<sub>2</sub>-lu<sub>2</sub>, Bara<sub>2</sub>-gišgal-a-DU, Nin-ga-eš<sub>8</sub>, Nin-igi-an-na-ke<sub>4</sub>-su, Ku<sub>3</sub>-ge-pa<sub>3</sub>-da, Bara<sub>2</sub>-ir-nun, and Gišgal-uru-nun) were Lugalanda’s sisters. Group B in Table 1 includes six of the same women as A (one of the two persons named Bara<sub>2</sub>-gišgal-a-DU, Bara<sub>2</sub>-lu<sub>2</sub>, Nin-igi-an-na-ke<sub>4</sub>-su, Ku<sub>3</sub>-ge-pa<sub>3</sub>-da, Bara<sub>2</sub>-ir-nun, and Gišgal-uru-nun). Nin-ga-eš<sub>8</sub>, who received as much in rations as the **ereš-dingir** in A, is not mentioned in B. While in B Bara<sub>2</sub>-a-ra-nu<sub>2</sub> preceded Geme<sub>2</sub>-ub<sub>5</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>-ga and once received the same amount of rations as Geme<sub>2</sub>-ub<sub>5</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>-ga, in text DP 127 we find her (**Bara<sub>2</sub>-a-ra-nu<sub>2</sub> / dam Lugal-mu-da-kuš<sub>2</sub>**) with 72 **silā**<sup>11</sup> of barley and 72 **silā**