

UR-DUMUZIDA AND UR-DUN

Reflections on the Relationship between State-initiated Foreign Trade and Private Economic Activity in Mesopotamia towards the End of the Third Millennium BC*

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Hardly any period of ancient Mesopotamian history has left us in numerical terms such an extensive range of sources as the period of the so-called Third Dynasty of Ur, at the end of the third millennium BC (2111-2003 BC). So far almost 40,000 texts from the Ur III period are known to scholars - mainly in copies or transliterations - with the material basis being constantly expanded by the publication of new texts. The overwhelming majority of the sources contain facts from the areas of state economy and administration. We have private legal documents in much smaller numbers; at present we have some 2,000 texts of this nature. They include the so-called court documents, which derive from the area of state judicial activity, but overwhelmingly concern legal transactions and legal disputes between private persons.

The texts which we so far know come almost exclusively from the southern Mesopotamian towns Girsu, Umma, Puzriš-Dagān, Ur and Nippur, where they have been brought to light by regular or illegal excavations. It is thought at present that there are still some 50,000-60,000 unpublished texts from Ur III, which are distributed among the various museums of the world.¹

The very extent of the documentary material available - supplemented by a law code, royal and private inscriptions and a literary tradition which in part goes back to the Ur III period - makes it clear that investigations into the social and economic problems of Mesopotamia at the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur are especially promising (even if this should not blind us to the fact that because of the curt formulation in the administrative texts and the peculiarities of Sumerian administrative terminology understanding of the administrative and commercial proceedings and material circumstances underlying the documents is still often subject to certain limits). It is not, therefore, surprising in this context if certain themes of Mesopotamian commercial and social history of the late third millennium have been studied. This follows naturally on the one hand from the constantly changing position of the sources and on the other hand from the fact that there are different ways of looking at the material and various interpretive approaches. Both these -

* The present study reviews - and supplements - reflections that have already been produced elsewhere; on the relevant detailed comments and on the details (further references to the literature and in particular textual documentation) see in particular Neumann 1992a and 1993. - Abbreviations of dates: AS = Amar-Su'ena, IS = Ibbi-Sîn, Š = Šulgi, ŠS = Šu-Sîn. Abbreviations follow *PSD* and/or *CAD*. Archi-Pomponio-Bergamini Umma = A. Archi - F. Pomponio - G. Bergamini, *Testi cuneiformi neo-sumerici da Umma*, Torino 1995; Gomi-Yıldız Umma 4 = T. Gomi - F. Yıldız, *Die Umma-Texte aus den Archäologischen Museen zu Istanbul IV (Nr. 2301-3000)*, Bethesda 1993.

¹ Englund 1990, 3 n. 23.

the problem of the sources and the different way of putting questions - also play a role in those studies which seek to describe foreign trade in Mesopotamia and the role and function of the merchants in the Neo-Sumerian period. In the last 20 years there have been studies on this by Englund, Limet, Neumann, Powell, Sigrist - Butz, Snell, Steinkeller, van de Mieroop, and Young.²

The dam-gàr

In addition to determining the commercial goods on the basis of philological analysis, to explaining the administrative procedures in the context of the accounting activity of the merchants and of issues about price setting and value measurement (most recently also Renger 1995 and Powell 1996) and those which relate to inter-regional commerce as a whole in that period, there is also the problem raised in the studies mentioned of how the social position and social function of the persons indicated in the texts as *dam-gàr* ("merchant"; Germ. "Kaufmann") or *ga-eš₈* ("traveling merchant"; Germ. "Kauffahrer") are to be assessed. In essence there are two opinions about this. On the basis of the thesis that palace and temple had a commercial monopoly in third millennium Mesopotamia the role of the Neo-Sumerian *dam-gàr* as an independently and separately acting merchant is often denied. This is usually also expressed in the translations of the term *dam-gàr*, such as where one speaks of the *dam-gàr/tamkàrum* as a "commercial agent" or "Tauschagenten".³ In particular on the basis of the administrative texts from Girsu and Umma - in the latter case this concerns the so-called "balanced accounts" drawn up in connection with the activity of the respective *dam-gàr* (Snell 1982, 15-17; Neumann 1993, 72 n. 14) - but also in view of the corresponding texts from Ur - here related to the activity of the *ga-eš₈* (Neumann 1979, 56-59; Waetzoldt 1984, 414f with n. 66) - one sees in the merchants of the Neo-Sumerian period mainly commercial agents depending on state commercial units and strictly controlled by the state administration (Renger 1989, 244).

According to the other opinion, the *dam-gàr* in the Ur III period was an independent merchant who traded on a profit-oriented basis and for whom the state was indeed an important client and a necessary protector but to which the merchant was not subject as a dependent commercial agent (Powell 1977, 27). Thus the Neo-Sumerian merchant comes close to the Old Babylonian *tamkàrum*, in whom Kraus (1982, 29) saw "nicht primär 'a commercial agent' der Obrigkeit, sondern einen selbständigen Unternehmer", "der auch mit der Obrigkeit Geschäfte macht(e) oder machen (konnte)". In a similar style van de Mieroop (1986) described the position of the Neo-Sumerian *dam-gàr*, using the 40 texts of an archive of unclear origin, which relate to commercial activity of the merchant *Tūram-ilī* during a period of 10 years (ŠS 3 - IS 3), as his basis.

In view of the discussions which have in some cases been conducted from very single minded positions about the *dam-gàr* in the Ur III period, it must in general be remarked that in assessing the social structures of a society one must guard against the assumption of extreme opinions which hardly permitted differences on pain of being

² Englund 1990, 13-55; Limet 1977; Neumann 1979, 1992a and 1993; Powell 1977; Sigrist - Butz 1986; Snell 1977, 1982, 1988 and 1991; Steinkeller 1986; van de Mieroop 1986; Young 1979.

³ Englund 1990, 17f with n. 60.

unable to do justice to the complexity of real social relations and the social and economic factors which conditioned them. It is certainly beyond doubt that the major economic powers were concentrated in the context of the palace and temple economy, which enabled the ruler and the institutions connected with him to put a large part of the profits created in the state commercial units into trade. This was the basis for the dominance of the state in the field of external commerce, which, however, should not be equated to a monopoly. Apart from the clearly demonstrated state initiated and controlled commerce, there was always private commercial and business activity. However, this also means that the merchants did not constitute a uniform social class. Even the position of the trader acting on instructions of state commercial units should be assessed differently, since there were both *dam-gâr(-e)-ne* as part of the personnel to be provided with rations and also independent merchants, who undertook commercial journeys on the basis of commissions from the state and its institutions. This makes it at the same time clear that the state economy on the one hand and private property and private commerce on the other were in closer interaction with one another even in the Ur III period than is usually supposed. In addition, it should be noticed that even the state commissions and commercial enterprises carried out with state funds very much left enough leeway for the accumulation of private wealth, which could even lead to criminal actions on the part of the merchants. In any case, there are examples that merchants were cited as fences or were taken into custody because of embezzled silver.⁴

The "Balanced Accounts"

Investigations of the commercial activity and social position of merchants in the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur are usually based on the cuneiform records from the provincial capital of Umma. The texts from the other provinces and towns of the Neo-Sumerian kingdom - especially from Ur, Nippur and Girsu - are used for purposes of comparison but often play only a subordinate part in the attempt to describe the activities of the Ur III merchant and his position in the context of Neo-Sumerian commercial organization. The concentration on Umma essentially derives from the specific fact of the sources passed down from this city, which particularly well document the commercial activity of merchants.

As already briefly mentioned, these texts are so-called "balanced accounts", which were produced by the state administration on the material performances of individual merchants in a specific period of time.⁵ In the documents, the financial and material resources made available by the administration (*saġ-nì-gur₁₁-ra*) are indicated as "debit" in the balance, against which the turnovers realized by the merchants, *i.e.* the "credit", are offset (*šà-bi-ta ... zi-ga*). In order to be able to compare the products and materials with one another in terms of value, the values of the goods are given in silver (*kù-bi*). The difference produced between debit and credit on the account, the "balance", could be positive (*diri*) or negative (*lá-NI*). Since the documents here under discussion are accounts of the performances of the merchants, a turnover which was lower in

⁴ Neumann 1992a, 85f notes 27f.

⁵ But see the criticism made by Englund (1990, 25 n. 90) of the entrenched concept of "balanced accounts".

comparison to the initial fund produced a negative balance, expressed by the lá-NI “negative amount” or “deficit”. This then appeared as the “remainder” (si-ì-tum) of the (balanced) accounting period in the subsequent balanced account as an element of the debit. If the merchants had realized a turnover which in terms of value were above the funds made available, the balance was in this case positive and the “surplus” (diri) was entered in the account on the credit side.⁶

The dam-gàr accounts are not only of great importance for characterizing the activities of merchants, but include in particular important information on prices and value equivalencies in the Neo-Sumerian period. In addition, from the documents essential information can be taken to clarify book keeping practice in the context of state administrative activity. It is true that merchant accounts in the form here described come almost exclusively from Umma,⁷ but a few examples from Girsu show that this type of accounting for the performance of merchants was also standard in the other provinces of the Neo-Sumerian state, although we should of course notice differences in the respective structure of the commercial organization.

Problems of Interpretation

Despite the progress which has now been achieved especially by Snell (1982) and Englund (1990, 13-55) in the understanding of the balanced accounts, it must be said that there are still a series of unanswered questions in connection with this group of sources. In particular, there are problems about the relationship as documented by the texts between the state administration and the merchants and the social and economic reality of the commerce of goods on which it was based. Here in the first place one should mention the problems about the accounting period, which on the evidence of the texts varied greatly. Snell (1982, 106) takes the view that the texts can be made to yield the impression “of a loosely semi-annual accounting”, but this should by no means be considered to be a secure conclusion.⁸ In principle one must also assume that “die Unregelmäßigkeit ... eine Folge unterschiedlichen Tauschvolumens gewesen (ist)”.⁹ However, the question then arises what conditioned the volume - quantitative and qualitative - of business, *i.e.* in what did the true commercial basis of the documented transactions between administration and merchants consist. Snell¹⁰ assumes that the funds made available to the merchants (saġ-nì-gur₁₁-ra)¹¹ were connected with the commission to purchase for them the necessary raw materials and products and to pass these on to the administration. In this connection, he speaks of “standing orders” on the part of the administration, which made specifying the respective purchase orders in the accounts usually not necessary and at the same time made possible an uninterrupted supply of goods.

⁶ Englund 1990, 25-51.

⁷ See also now in this connection the note in the pisaġ-dub-ba-label Grégoire 1996, pl. 22 Ashm. 1911-176, 11, relating to the supervision of (commercial) activity of merchants (gúrum-dam-gàr).

⁸ Neumann 1993, 73 n. 18.

⁹ Englund 1990, 48 n. 166.

¹⁰ 1982, 55, 96-99 and 270-278.

¹¹ On the definition of the term see Neumann 1979, 38 n. 164.

In contrast to this view, Steinkeller¹² takes the opposite line that the funds were made available by a so-called “tax office” and that the raw materials and products delivered by the merchants in reality involved procedures which were not in any direct mutual connection. He assumes that the merchants had adequate storage capacities and could at any time cover from their stocks the requirement of the administration for specific goods. The “tax office” had a “standing account” with the merchants, which was always filled up again at specific intervals by the administration. In return, the merchants supplied the various commercial areas of Umma with the required goods, which were covered by the equivalent of the fund amounts. Individual receipts were given for these transactions which according to the creditor-debtor principle remained in the relevant institution. The “balanced accounts” according to Steinkeller therefore constitute the counter-settlement of these receipts made for a specific period of time, which had the consequence of a positive or negative balance for the respective merchant.

We can agree with this opinion to the extent that the accounts are documents of a book-keeping unit which did indeed keep records of transactions of the merchants but in which it must not necessarily have been involved as an immediate partner itself. As Steinkeller emphasises, this applies in the first place to the relationship between the merchants and the consumer of the products, but a similar conclusion can also be drawn to some extent for the relationship between the provider of the fund amount and the merchant who received it on each occasion. Apart from the competent authority which was directly involved in this, represented in particular by a certain Lukala, it seems that other persons and administrative bodies also made payments to be settled by the merchants. Since products other than silver used to provide the funds (especially barley, wool, dates and fish) show only a narrow range of variation, the number of the relevant suppliers was always lower than that of the customers on the credit side of the accounts, and in addition there were so to speak potential client areas for the same product, which in the accounts are set out one after another. Even in the case of the provision of a fund, there must also have often been direct deliveries to the merchants, as can be recorded on the basis of individual receipts or the existing references in the “balanced accounts”. The provision of funds must of course have been continually in order to ensure as a counterpart the supply of the individual commercial areas with raw materials and products by the merchants. Whether in this connection one can speak of a “standing account” of the administration with the merchants, is a moot point. In any case, one is struck by the different orders of magnitude on the debit side of the accounts. This suggests that the scale of the funds must have stood in relation to the volume of transactions of the merchants, documented on the credit side of the accounts. It is clear that the fund was also geared to the expected or required supplies on the part of the merchants, even if often no direct connection can be perceived between the debit entries and the specific entries on the credit side. The latter point cannot, however, be generalized, since specific notes in the debit section indicate that at least in part the funds were provided in a purpose-linked manner, that selected and essentially named goods were acquired in exchange for the relevant fund amount.¹³ As a rule, the different commercial areas in Umma received the required raw materials and goods from the storehouses of the merchants, *i.e.* the commercial and business transactions of the merchants were overwhelmingly independent

¹² Steinkeller 1986, 4ff.

¹³ Neumann 1993, 75 n. 32.

of the actual notification of requirement by the administration,¹⁴ although of course here too we should note deviations from the rule. Since the texts of the commercial administration of Umma only provide information by exception on the administrative and commercial procedures at that time, no definitive clarity can be achieved on the relationships lying behind the bald book-keeping terminology, which of course also applies to the present question.

In connection with the merchant accounts, reference is usually made to the problem of price and price setting in Mesopotamia towards the end of the third millennium. It is true that on the basis of the texts the value equivalence applying at any time for a large number of raw materials, goods and products can be determined,¹⁵ but it is difficult to explain satisfactorily the connection between these value statistics which were used for internal calculations, and the social and economic price setting factors. This is a highly complex problem, whose treatment must wait until there has been further commercial historical research, although in recent years there have been some programmatic pronouncements.¹⁶ However, even questions of the Neo-Sumerian price structure itself, as it appears in the sources transmitted, have not been adequately treated, if one thinks about the problem of local price differences, say, or fluctuations in the price level of the same products due to quality considerations. In this regard, the "balanced accounts" of the merchants obviously offer the best conditions for the appropriate studies, but there is no getting round the fact in asking this sort of question that the cuneiform source material from that period must be considered in its totality.

The "balanced accounts" make it clear that in the context of the state commercial administration of Umma the commercial activity of the merchants was by no means of minor importance. The acquisition of raw materials and goods by the *dam-gàr*, whether in foreign trade or through purchases in the internal market, supplemented the material basis in the state controlled commercial units or made production possible in them in the first place, as in the case of the metal, wood and stone processing industries. At the same time the commercial activity was very useful for the acquisition of luxury goods. As far as can at present be seen from the sources, it seems that the number of merchants - at least those who were doing deals for the provincial administration - was not really so large.¹⁷

Umma: Ur-Dumuzida

Even if the contingencies of survival must of course be borne in mind, it is still obvious that in the context of the commercial and business activity of the provincial administration of Umma three merchants played a special role: *Šeškala*, *Pada* and *Ur-Dumuzida*. They are most often documented in the texts, and in particular *Ur-Dumuzida* is given an exalted function.¹⁸ About his activity, which is to be sketched as an example in what follows, there are at present nine account texts, which in the words of Englund¹⁹

¹⁴ Steinkeller 1986, 5f.

¹⁵ Snell 1982, 115-207; Waetzoldt 1986, 331-335.

¹⁶ Renger 1986 and Powell 1990.

¹⁷ Neumann 1979, 25-27.

¹⁸ Neumann 1993.

¹⁹ Englund 1990, 48 n. 166.

describe him as a “sehr beschäftigte(n)” merchant. According to a seal (MVN 13 860) he was dam-gàr-d^dŠára “merchant of the (god) Šára”,²⁰ which may refer to his institutional field of operation. With regard to the sons of Ur-Dumuzida, it can be stated that they - in particular Ur-Šulpae, A'akala and Lugal-ursag - were also engaged in commercial activities to the order of the administration.²¹ This shows that the profession of the father was also exercised by his sons, which may have been the norm and can also be documented for other areas.

As already indicated, Ur-Dumuzida was a merchant for whom commercial and business activity is documented on a not inconsiderable scale. The very period in which he acted as a dam-gàr is itself remarkable. It can be shown that Ur-Dumuzida was active for at least 32 years (Š 36 - IS 1).²² From the entries on the debit side of the “balanced accounts” drawn up for Ur-Dumuzida it is evident that the commercial and trading volume to be achieved by this merchant could reach impressive orders of size. Only twice did the fund fall in value terms below five minas,²³ and twice it was almost 15 minas of silver.²⁴ As a rule, the fund of Ur-Dumuzida was made up of the account transfers of previous accounts (si-ì-tum) and the current deliveries to him, so that in two cases settlement chains can be documented.²⁵ The balance with a negative amount (lá-NI) for the merchant was the rule, but another text (TCL 5 5680) shows that the balance could also be positive, which was credited to the merchant in the next balanced account. A zero balance was produced by an account from the year AS 9 (YOS 18 123), so that neither a deficit nor a surplus had to be recorded.

The fund made available to Ur-Dumuzida on each occasion was not in any way different in its composition to that of other merchants in Umma. In addition to silver (kù-babbar) Ur-Dumuzida was given barley (še), wool (síg), dates (zú-lum), wheat (gig) and fish (ku₆) on sometimes considerable scales. This is also essentially in line with the picture which can be drawn from other texts, which also have the supply of fund amounts as their content but cannot be brought into a direct relationship to the entries in the debit section of the present “balanced accounts”, which is to some extent due to the chances of transmission.²⁶

In the context of his commercial and business activity, Ur-Dumuzida did not specialize in particular products. He supplied the different commercial areas of Umma with both domestic and imported goods. This is shown by the entries on the credit side of his “balanced accounts” as well as notes in the individual receipts which cover an

²⁰ On the seal see also Mayr 1997, 483 no. 881. Šara was the chief god of Umma.

²¹ On the sons of Ur-Dumuzida see in particular Neumann 1993, 78 with notes 54-56. Another son is now documented by MVN 16 718, 4f. (Ur-^dA-šár), although his professional activity and social position cannot yet be determined.

²² Apart from the documents collected in Neumann 1993, 79 note 58 (supplement *ibid*, 86) now see also MVN 20 160, 4 (Š 47); MVN 16 1002, 3 (AS 3/V); Archi-Pomponio-Bergamini Umma no. 530, 2 (AS 5/VII); 651, 2 (AS 7/III); MVN 18 262 (= Molina 1996, 315f.) III 12' (ŠS 2/III); Gomi-Yıldız Umma 4 no. 2307, 3 (ŠS 2/IV); 2413, 4 (ŠS 2/IV); MVN 16 1099, 4 (ŠS 5/VI/11); Gomi-Yıldız Umma 4 no. 2579, 4 (ŠS 5); MVN 16 718, 5 (without date). The same Ur-Dumuzida also in MVN 18 467 (= Molina 1996, 391), 2 (ŠS 1/VIII)?

²³ Chiera STA no. 22; YNER 8, pl. XVIIIf no. 10.

²⁴ AOAT 203, 216; YOS 18 123.

²⁵ Chiera STA no. 22 and YOS 18 122; YNER 8, pl. XVf no. 9 and *ibid* pl. XVIIIf no. 10.

²⁶ See Neumann 1993, 81f and now also MVN 18 262 III 11'f (síg).

extremely wide range of raw materials and products, as were required to satisfy the needs of production and the demands for luxury goods in the commercial and administrative units. The goods to be acquired by Ur-Dumuzida were in particular gold (kù-sig₁₇), copper (urudu) and tin (naġġa [AN.NA]), as well as products which are described generally as resins, essences and oils. The latter were particular luxury goods, which were needed above all in the household of the provincial governor (énsi). It seems that Ur-Dumuzida in particular had adequate stored stocks of such products, which made it possible for him to supply the interested administrative and commercial areas on a continuous basis. In addition, the activity of Ur-Dumuzida in the context of the acquisition and provision of bitumen (ésir), wood, “alkali” (naġa-(si-è)), reed (gi), fruits and honey (lâl) is recorded.²⁷

As already mentioned, Ur-Dumuzida was dam-gâr-dšára, which perhaps does not only refer to his area of activity but could possibly also indicate a particular position of this merchant as against other merchants in Umma. It is also striking that according to the “balanced accounts” that we have the commercial and business volume of Ur-Dumuzida was sometimes much greater in value terms than that of other merchants. A similar impression can be gleaned from the texts in which several merchants are mentioned together in a comparable function. The products made available on each occasion and goods delivered vary in terms of quantity very significantly, however, at least with regard to their relation to the debit and credit of Ur-Dumuzida. Most usually, the business volume of the merchants Pada and Šeškala came closest to that of Ur-Dumuzida.²⁸ Of particular importance in this connection could be the text Sauren New York Library No. 335, since this possibly allows us to see a superior responsibility on the part of Ur-Dumuzida in relation to other merchants. To what extent one should already see here a reference to the existence of a professional organization of merchants in Umma must remain an open question. However, the “foreman of the merchants” (ugula-dam-gâr-ne) evidenced in another text indicates that we should assume some such arrangement in Umma (Nikolski II 447, 27). The role which Ur-Dumuzida may have played in the context of this organization can only be conjectured, but must not have been insignificant.

Evidence for the private commercial activities of Ur-Dumuzida is available, but is extremely scarce, so that no conclusions can be drawn even about the extent of the private transactions of Ur-Dumuzida. The extensive lack of relevant private contracts is due in the first place to the chances of transmission, but certain peculiarities of private book keeping should also be borne in mind. In principle, the basic assumption must be that the “Abgrenzung zwischen Staats- und Privathandel ... schwierig (ist) und nie genau möglich sein (wird)”²⁹. In the case of Ur-Dumuzida, one may certainly suppose that his position can be assessed similarly to that of the merchants from Nippur for whom extensive private commercial activities are documented.

²⁷ On the goods delivered by Ur-Dumuzida to the administration see in particular Neumann 1993, 83-85 and also now for *metals*: MVN 20 160; *oil*: Gomi-Yıldız Umma 4 no. 2307; *bitumen*: Archi-Pomponio-Bergamini Umma no. 651, Gomi-Yıldız Umma 4 no. 2413; *wood*: MVN 16 1099, Gomi-Yıldız Umma 4 no. 2579; “*alkali*”: MVN 16 1002, Archi-Pomponio-Bergamini Umma no. 530.

²⁸ Englund 1992, 82-87; Neumann 1993, 85 n. 118.

²⁹ Waetzoldt 1984, 410.

Nippur: Ur-DUN

With regard to the private business activity of the Neo-Sumerian merchants in Nippur, up to the most recent period more than once reference has been made to the special position of Nippur in the context of the commercial organization of the Ur III state, which in fact because of the differing archives in the individual provincial capitals can hardly be right. Whereas the majority of the texts from the other locations of the Neo-Sumerian state of Ur, *i.e.* in particular from Girsu, Umma, Puzriš-Dagān and Ur, come from the area of the state administration, most of the documents excavated in Nippur are documents in private law, *i.e.* the majority of the Neo-Sumerian text transmission derives from the state archives of an integrated palace and temple economy, whereas the legal documents are mainly derived from private archives, and the majority of the Ur III Nippur texts belong to such private archives.³⁰ A more extensive complex of documents from the area of the temple administration of Nippur has now been published and analyzed by Zettler (1992). The material comes from the Inanna Temple and includes also private law documents relating to the transactions of the senior administrative personnel.³¹

The assets of the merchants as they can be seen from the Nippur documents and the role of the *dam-gār* in credit transactions at that time has already been discussed many times in the literature and will not interest us here further as a general problem. However, so far the role of the merchants has not been much considered in the context of the inter-regional commercial traffic. Despite the unsatisfactory situation of the sources in this respect, however, certain conclusions can be drawn. The evidence that merchants from Nippur were integrated into the external trading activity of that time is particularly interesting because the private legal transactions of the merchants in the area of the inner city commercial life can and should no longer be assessed in isolation.

The basis for the reflections to be made in this connection is the activity of a certain Ur-DUN who according to the seal of his son was a merchant (*dam-gār*) and whose activity probably stretched over 20 years to the year ŠS 8 (Neumann 1992a). In contrast to the other merchants from Nippur, we do not have any texts with regard to Ur-DUN which can be unambiguously allocated to the archives of this merchant. We are thus referred to the mentions of Ur-DUN in texts from other archives.

For example, there is the document Owen Nippur No. 302 which provides information in particular on the assets of the (subsequently deceased *dam-gār*) Ur-DUN. According to this text, in which there is an inheritance dispute between the brother and the widow of Ur-DUN (Owen 1980), Ur-DUN inherited from his father Namḥani fields outside the city (*uru-bar-ra*), household utensils, property in the city (*uru-šà-ga*) and 17 male and 10 female slaves. This makes it clear that Ur-DUN must have been a very wealthy merchant. This is also basically shown by those documents which relate directly or indirectly to the commercial activity of Ur-DUN. Of particular interest in this connection is a document literarily transmitted in several copies, which has as its content a (public) announcement of loss of the seal of Ur-DUN.³² Even if linguistically and indeed in terms of content this is a new creation of the Old Babylonian *é-dub-ba-a*, the reference to the historically documented Ur-DUN - and indeed it is a situation which can easily be

30 Neumann 1992b and van Driel 1994.

31 On this see above all van Driel 1993 and Sallaberger 1994.

32 Ali 1964, 113-116; Neumann 1992a, 97 n. 47.

imagined for him - shows that in the context of the commercial life and the local administrative hierarchy of Nippur he must have held a prominent position, so that the memory of it in the Old Babylonian period was still present either because of archives which had survived or because of an oral tradition.

The social position of Ur-DUN however, is not only to be ascribed to his commercial activity and to his relationships in the local area, important as they may have been. Ur-DUN was particularly connected with the royal house, to which a letter (YBC 5011) which is preserved in the literary tradition and so far in only one copy, seems to refer, which mentions the merchant Ur-DUN as the sender and probably was directed to king Šulgi.³³ Without going into details here about the authenticity of the event described in this text, mention should be made of the fact that the letter may not indeed be a primary source in the strict sense but because of the circumstances represented in it and the range of persons connected with them it seems nevertheless to reflect thoroughly real events more or less correctly. At least the text, which indeed not without reason mentions the very Ur-DUN as its author, refers to the inter-regional importance of the activity of this merchant in the Ur III period, which was also often apparently recognized later. Ur-DUN is shown in the letter mentioned as a merchant by royal commission in “the far-off mountain land”, who has fallen out with measures of a high state authority taken against him (removal of the commercial goods by the representative of the king in Subir, Apillaša), which has finally led to the present letter of complaint. With regard to the specific role of Ur-DUN, it is interesting that he carried out commercial transactions by commission of the royal house, himself undertook the appropriate commercial journeys and did not have the deals concluded by commercial agents. It appears that he enjoyed the full confidence of the king, and one would not be wrong to suppose that in such enterprises commercial activity and diplomatic mission were combined. His relationship to the royal house may in essence have been the basis of the privileged position of Ur-DUN.

In the context of his activity as a merchant, Ur-DUN also collaborated with other merchants. His documented partners include Adda'a and Ur-Nusku. For the latter, an extensive and diverse commercial activity over 38 years can be established.³⁴ He is also mentioned as dam-gâr-10,³⁵ and so was something like a “chief merchant”, with ten other merchants below him. The merchant Katar seems have been a predecessor of Ur-Nusku as dam-gâr-10 (FAOS 17 No. 7, 8f). In this function, they are both comparable with the ugula-dam-gâr(-ne) “foreman of the merchants”, as is indeed documented for Umma (see above page 50) and Girsu (MVN VI 395 e. 1). It seems that in Nippur and other cities of the Ur III period there were professional merchants' organizations, to which reference is also made by the titles ħa-za-núm-dam-gâr-ne “mayor of the merchants” in a document of unknown origin (Gomi-Sato British Museum No. 220, 14) and dub-sar-dam-gâr “clerk of the merchants” in a text from Girsu (Reisner Telloh No. 130, 17). However, these references in themselves tell us nothing about the level of organization of the merchants in the Ur III period. Of particular interest in this connection should be the text Owen Nippur No. 511, according to which Ur-Nusku carried out transactions with the already mentioned Adda'a, who at the time of writing the document was resident in Zimudar in

³³ Michalowski 1976, 216-220.

³⁴ Š 31 - IS 2; Neumann 1992b, 169 n. 49.

³⁵ BE 3 15 + Owen Nippur no. 367, 4.

the Diyala Region. The communication was through a messenger (lú-kíḡ-gi₄-a) of Adda'a in the é-dam-gâr "merchant house",³⁶ which should perhaps be interpreted with Steinkeller³⁷ as "the headquarters of the Nippur guild". It would not be wrong to suppose that we are here dealing with a kind of organization such as is similarly described by Kraus (1982) for Ešnunna, Larsa and Babylon in the Old Babylonian period. However, the question arises here whether this organization was a state dominated or at least controlled system or rather an association to represent (private) commercial interests. With regard to the already mentioned merchant Tûram-ilî of unknown origin, who was also ugula-dam-gâr,³⁸ van de Mieroop³⁹ was disposed to make the latter assumption. This may also be true for Nippur which of course does not rule it out that the merchants conducted commercial transactions to state commission, to which the relevant texts refer.⁴⁰ That this type of commercial activity was of particular importance has already been stressed at the start.

In addition, there are a number of indications that the merchants also conducted privately initiated and financed transactions. In the case of loan transactions for which there is abundant evidence in Nippur at least in some cases it must be assumed that these were not consumer but investment loans. Also the earliest examples of *kasap tappûtim* transactions, which also come from Nippur, point in this direction.⁴¹ The sworn declaration of a merchant which can be found in a loan document, to pay back the amount lent "if he gets back from his commercial journey (kaskal)",⁴² may also be mentioned as evidence for a privately financed enterprise.

In conclusion, it should be stated once again that the comments here made on the Ur III merchant and his transactions should make it clear that our current picture of Ur III society and its economy requires a stronger differentiation, not least with regard to developments which are perceptible in the subsequent Old Babylonian period.

36 See also Civil 1990, 110.

37 Steinkeller 1986, 7.

38 *JCS* 38, 77 no. 37, 3.

39 Van de Mieroop 1986, 15.

40 Neumann 1992a, 90 n. 81.

41 Neumann 1992b, 174f.

42 Owen Nippur no. 322.