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## ***Illum-asu*. A Scribe from Irisagrig\***

*Magnus Widell*

*In Memory of Eric Cripps*

### *Abstract*

Based on the administrative accounts from the Ur III period (2112–2004 BC according to the Middle Chronology), this article offers an overview of the economic activities of the official *Illum-asu* and his family, who worked as scribes in the important administrative center of Irisagrig in southern Mesopotamia. *Illum-asu*'s father Bibi provided foodstuffs as rations to the female (sesame) oil pressers (mostly different types of birds and animals), and *Illum-asu* and his two brothers (*Mašum* and Ašgi-ibra) can all be attested as the recipients of provisions for this group of workers in the city, in some cases directly from their father. The activities of *Illum-asu* and his family of scribes illustrate the importance of familial affiliations and kinship groupings within the institutional economy of the Ur III state, and demonstrate that administrative roles within the public households would often transcend generations. The article argues that the institutional households of the Ur III state regularly relied on, and even took advantage of, existing hereditary structures and kinship ties within the society as a whole.

### *Keywords*

Ur III | Iri-Sağrig | Al-Šarrākī | *Illum-asu* | administration

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## INTRODUCTION

This article aims to investigate the administrative activities and the familial affiliations of the Ur III official *Illum-asu* (written *dingir-a-su<sub>2</sub>*), who worked as a scribe in the city of Irisagrig during the final century of the third millennium BC.<sup>1</sup> The city of Irisagrig (usually Iri-Saĝrig/*Al-Šarrākī*), generally believed to have been located on the Tigris River, not too far from ancient Nippur, was an important administrative center in southern Mesopotamia throughout the third and early second millennia BC.<sup>2</sup> Most of our knowledge of the city stems from the approximately 2,500 administrative clay tablets dated to the Third Dynasty of Ur (ca. 2100–2000 BC), of which well over 90% have been published in the last decade, by David I. Owen in 2015 (Nisaba 15/2), and Marcel Sigrist and Tohru Ozaki in 2019 (CUSAS 40/2).<sup>3</sup> The publication of these texts has provided scholars of the Ur III period with a remarkable opportunity to study the wider historiography of the state’s provincial administration, particularly from a prosopographical perspective, and to analyze the various individuals living in the city and working within its bureaucratic structures.

*Illum-asu*, the subject of this short communication, who worked as a scribe and administrator in Irisagrig for at least 12 years, from Amar-Suen 9 (month xii) until Ibbi-Suen 3, was brought to the attention of the author by a recent study of cuneiform texts from Irisagrig by Wafaa H. Zwaid and Eric L. Cripps.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All references to cuneiform texts are according to the abbreviations used by the *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative* (CDLI) at <https://cdli.ucla.edu> (accessed September 20, 2021), with CDLI P-numbers for tablets, and S-numbers for seals. The reconstruction of the Irisagrig calendar, and the sequence of the month names in the city, is based on Tohru Ozaki, “On the Calendar of Urusaĝrig,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 106, no. 2 (2016): 135. Readings of cuneiform signs follow the standards set out by the CDLI.

<sup>2</sup> See David I. Owen, “URU-Saĝrig (Iri-Saĝrig, *Al-Šarrākī*, *Šarrākum*),” in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 14, ed. Michael P. Streck (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2014–2016), 498–500. Note, however, Maurizio Viano, “On the Location of IriSaĝrig Once Again,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 71 (2019). Viano has most recently argued for the identification of Irisagrig with *Tell al-Wilaya*, which would place the city on the *Mama-šarrat* canal, some 30 kilometers northeast of the ancient river course.

<sup>3</sup> David I. Owen, *Cuneiform Texts Primarily from Iri-Saĝrig/Āl-Šarrākī and the History of the Ur III Period. Volume 2: Catalogue and Texts. Nisaba. Studi Assiriologici Messinesi* 15/2 (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2015); Marcel Sigrist and Tohru Ozaki, *Tablets from the IriSaĝrig Archive. Part Two. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology* 40/2 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019). All numbers have been obtained through the *Database of Neo-Sumerian Texts* (BDTNS) at <http://bdtns.filol.csic.es>. At the time of writing (July 19, 2021), the BDTNS has offered access to 2,529 Ur III texts from Irisagrig. For more information on the publication of the tablets from Irisagrig, see now David I. Owen, “The Cosmopolitan Society of Iri-Saĝrig,” in *The Third Millennium: Studies in Early Mesopotamia and Syria in Honor of Walter Sommerfeld and Manfred Krebernik*, eds. Ilya Arkipov, Leonid Kogan, and Natalia Koslova (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 585 n. 2.

## THE SEAL OF *Illum-asu*

The impression of *Illum-asu*'s seal is attested on seven tablets, dated from Šu-Suen 7/vii to Ibbi-Suen 2/x (S002157; see also Table 1). Based on the photos and descriptions available on BDTNS and CDLI of two of these tablets (Nisaba 15/2 439; P387927; and Nisaba 15/2 534; P388002), it is possible to reconstruct the motif on *Illum-asu*'s seal as a common subtype of the so-called “presentation scene,” generally referred to as an “introduction” or “audience.”<sup>5</sup>

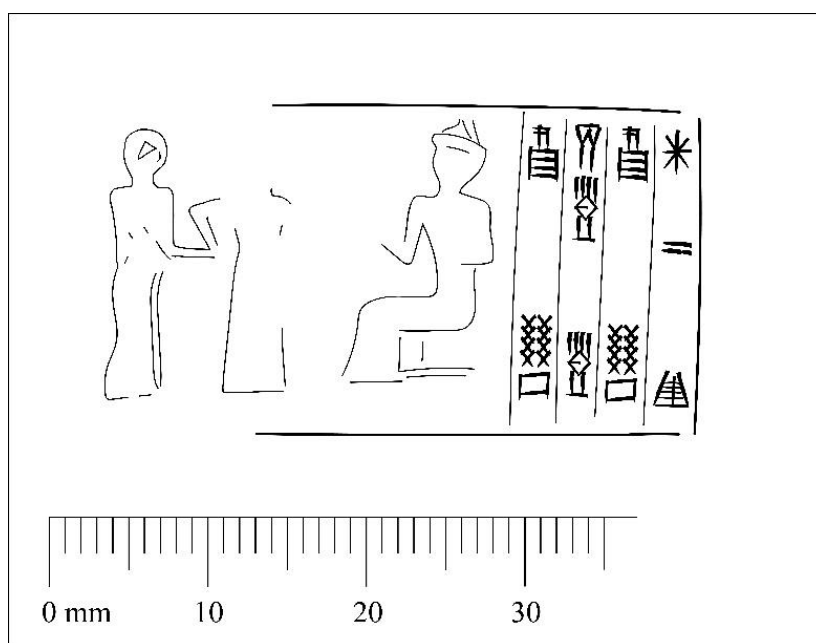


Figure 1. Composite reconstruction of *Illum-asu*'s seal.

The complex relationship between seal legends and the Ur III presentation scenes, and the identification of the figures in these scenes, has been the subject

<sup>4</sup> Wafaa H. Zwaid and Eric L. Cripps, “Some Ur III Texts from Irišaḡrig in the Iraq Museum,” *Akkadica* 141, no. 2 (2020): 101 n. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Mayr, *Seal Impressions on Tablets from Umma* (unpublished manuscript SITU 05 03, March 2005), 55; and Rudolf Mayr, “The Figure of the Worshiper in the Presentation Scene,” in *Garšana Studies. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology* 6, ed. David. I. Owen (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2011), 230; see also Christina Tsouparopoulou, *The Ur III Seals Impressed on Documents from Puzriš-Dagān (Drehem). Heidelberger Studien zum Alten Orient* 16 (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Orientverlag, 2015), 29.

of considerable debate over the years.<sup>6</sup> However, the most recent of these studies has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the person being introduced in these scenes should be identified with the individual for whom the artwork was commissioned, which for cylinder seals would be the seal owner.<sup>7</sup> In other words, we may identify *Illum-asu* on his seal, with some confidence, as the figure standing to the far left in the scene, with his left wrist firmly held by a minor goddess, who is introducing him to an unidentified seated goddess. The seated goddess has her right hand raised, acknowledging the presence of the minor goddess and *Illum-asu*.

By studying the tablets impressed with *Illum-asu*'s seal, it is possible to reconstruct the inscription as: "*Illum-asu*, the scribe, the son of Bibi, the scribe" (dingir-*a-su*<sub>2</sub> / dub-sar / dumu bi<sub>2</sub>-bi<sub>2</sub> / dub-sar).

### THE FAMILY OF *Illum-asu*

The study of the importance of familial affiliations and kinship ties within the institutional (and non-institutional) administration of the Ur III state is complicated by the fact that the Sumerian word for "son" (*dumu*), in some contexts, appears to refer to an administrative relationship between an apprentice and his master, rather than a biological one. The alternative meaning of *dumu*, as a kind of administrative apprentice or deputy, was originally proposed by Tom B. Jones and John W. Snyder in their important study on the Ur III administration from 1961, and an increasing body of evidence has since appeared in support of this hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> So far, discussions of *dumu* as a reference to some kind of professional subordinate have primarily been of relevance for our increased

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Judith A. Franke, "Presentation Seals of the Ur III/Isin-Larsa Period," in *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East. Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 6, eds. McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1977); Irene J. Winter, "The King and the Cup: Iconography of the Royal Presentation Scene on Ur III Seals," in *Insight through Images: Studies in Honor of Edith Porada. Bibliotheca Mesopotamica* 21, ed. Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1986); and Irene Winter, "Legitimation of Authority through Image and Legends," in *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 46, eds. McGuire Gibson and Robert D. Biggs (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Mayr, "The Figure of the Worshiper," 229–31.

<sup>8</sup> Tom B. Jones and John W. Snyder, *Sumerian Economic Texts from the Third Ur Dynasty: A Catalogue and Discussion of Documents from Various Collections* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), 330; also, Francesco Pomponio, "Lukalla of Umma," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 82, no. 2 (1992): 169, n. 1; and Francesco Pomponio, "The Ur III Administration: Workers, Messengers, and Sons," in *From the 21st Century B.C. to the 21st Century A.D.: Proceedings of the International Conference on Neo-Sumerian Studies Held in Madrid 22–24 July 2010*, eds. Steven J. Garfinkle and Manuel Molina (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 227–231; for a different view, see Jacob L. Dahl, *The Ruling Family of Ur III Umma: A Prosopographical Analysis of An Elite Family in Southern Iraq 4000 Years Ago. Publications de l'Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul* 108 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2007), 12.

understanding of the structural organization of the many so-called “merchant houses” of the Ur III period.<sup>9</sup> However, the uncertainty surrounding the expression is not limited to any specific socio-economic group, or even the third millennium. In her recent study of the organization of the household of the Nuzi scribe Taya, Jeannette Fincke writes:<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps student scribes that had entered Taya’s household were later called his “sons.” Since according to all Ancient Near Eastern contracts of apprenticeship the young apprentice entered the household of a craftsman to be taught his profession, a similar procedure may have been adapted to train scribes.

In fact, Sumerian (and Akkadian) vocabulary pertaining to kinship associations often expresses a whole range of relationships of power and obligation, which have little to do with biological relationships.<sup>11</sup> In other words, while the present study takes *dumu* as a genealogical term with the meaning “son,” an alternative understanding of the term as “apprentice” or “administrative subordinate” cannot be entirely ruled out.

As attested from his seal inscription, *Illum-asu* was the son of the scribe Bibi, who can be securely attested from Amar-Suen 7/xii (CUSAS 40/2 276; P515060)<sup>12</sup> until at least Ibbi-Suen 1/xi (Nisaba 15/2 578; P515260).<sup>13</sup> As noted by Jacob Andersson in his brief discussion of this official, Bibi was not just a

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<sup>9</sup> For the central role that kinship ties played in the organizational structure of the Ur III merchants, see for example, Hans Neumann, “Zu den Geschäften des Kaufmanns Ur-Dumuzida aus Umma,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 20, no. 1 (1993); Steven J. Garfinkle, “Family Firms in the Ur III Period,” in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the 57th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Rome 4–8 July 2011*, eds. Alfonso Archi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015); and Steven J. Garfinkle “The House of Ur-saga: Ur III Merchants in Their Non-Institutional Context,” in *Working at Home in the Ancient Near East. Archaeopress Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology* 7, eds. by Juliette Mas and Palmiro Notizia (Oxford: Archaeopress 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Jeannette Fincke, “The Tradition of Professions within Families at Nuzi,” in *Tradition and Innovation in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the 57th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Rome 4–8 July 2011*, ed. Alfonso Archi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 557, with additional literature; see also Magnus Widell, “Reflections on Some Households and their Receiving Officials,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 63, no. 4 (2004). For senior and associate (or deputy) scribes routinely working in pairs in the Ur III administration, see also Sergio Alivernini, “Scribes Working in Pairs on Water Resource Management in the City of Umma during the Ur III Period,” *Aula Orientalis* 37, no. 1 (2019); and Sergio Alivernini, “‘Let’s Move the Earth and Build a Canal!’ The Management of Water Infrastructures in a Sumerian City at the End of the Third Millennium,” *Water History* 12 (2020): 98.

<sup>11</sup> John P. Nielsen, “The Family in the Ancient Near East,” in *A Companion to the Ancient Near East. Second Edition*, ed. Daniel C. Snell (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), 112.

<sup>12</sup> Note also CUSAS 40/2 1489 (P516273) from Amar-Suen 7, with an illegible month formula.

<sup>13</sup> For possible identifications of Bibi in Ibbi-Suen 2, see CUSAS 40/2 576 (P515360) and JAJA 12/41 229 (BDTNS: 205200; no CDLI P-number).

scribe, but in fact a “scribe of oils” (dub-sar i<sub>3</sub>), which appears to be a unique professional specialization in the Ur III period.<sup>14</sup> A small number of references to scribes, with what would appear to be very specific areas of expertise, such as “scribe of oils (and) dates” (dub-sar i<sub>3</sub> zu<sub>2</sub>-lum) or “scribe of fish (and) vegetables” (dub-sar ku<sub>6</sub> nisi), can be found in a group of labor assignments from Girsu.<sup>15</sup> However, these scribes appear on their own in these texts and are never associated with specific/named individuals in the city, and the references to areas of expertise should therefore almost certainly be understood as references to assigned responsibilities (functions) of regular scribes, rather than actual (permanent) specializations.<sup>16</sup> As recently observed by Steven J. Garfinkle, an important aspect of the analysis of Ur III administrative procedures is to distinguish between an individual’s function in a specific transaction, and his/her professional identity within the administration as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Most references to Bibi’s activities in the city date to two distinct periods: Amar-Suen 7–8 and from Šu-Suen 7 to Ibbi-Suen 1.<sup>18</sup> During Amar-Suen 7–8, Bibi is almost exclusively attested providing foodstuffs (typically animal cadavers) to the female (sesame) oil pressers (geme<sub>2</sub> i<sub>3</sub> sur-sur). With his children well established within the city bureaucracy, Bibi would already have been a senior official at a somewhat advanced age at this point. However, as less than 3% of all tablets recovered from Irisagrig date to the period before Amar-Suen 7, the site’s administration during the first 70 years of the Ur III state remains largely uncharted, and we know nothing about the earlier stages of Bibi’s career in the city. Bibi continued to provide foodstuffs to the female oil pressers during his second period of increased activity, although the geme<sub>2</sub> i<sub>3</sub> sur-sur is in these later texts referred to as geme<sub>2</sub> geš-i<sub>3</sub> sur-sur. During this period, he is also attested as

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<sup>14</sup> Jacob Andersson, “Third Millennium Cuneiform Texts in a Swedish Private Collection,” *Cuneiform Digital Library Bulletin* 2014, no. 1, (2014): §3.3. Note also the title/profession “scribe of spices” (dub-sar mun-gazi), associated with the Irisagrig official Ur-Dumuzi (ur-<sup>d</sup>dumu-zi). Like Bibi, Ur-Dumuzi is simply referred to as a “scribe” in seal inscriptions (see Nisaba 15/2 173; P453686 / S004850).

<sup>15</sup> See Alexander Uchitel, “Erín-èš-didli (II): Patterns of Conscription and Work Assignment during the Years AS 8 – ŠS 1,” *Acta Sumerologica* 18 (1996); and Lance B. Allred, “Labor Assignments from the City of Girsu,” in *On the Third Dynasty of Ur: Studies in Honor of Marcel Sigrist. Journal of Cuneiform Studies Supplemental Series 1*, ed. Piotr Michalowski (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, FS Sigrist 16 4 (P381724); and Lance B. Allred, “Cooks and Kitchens: Centralized Food Production in Late Third Millennium Mesopotamia.” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, 2006), 108–11.

<sup>17</sup> Steven J. Garfinkle, “Ur III Administrative Texts. Building Blocks of State Community,” in *Texts and Contexts. The Circulation and Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 9*, eds. Paul Delnero and Jacob Lauinger (Boston and Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 149–50.

<sup>18</sup> These two periods of attested activities by Bibi roughly correspond to the overall chronological distribution of the tablets from Irisagrig, with over 80% of all recovered texts being dated to either Amar-Suen 7–Amar-Suen 9, or Šu-Suen 5–Ibbi-Suen 3.

the recipient of animal fats and other products from various officials/scribes, and for the delivery of sesame oil and labor.

*Illum-asu* was in all likelihood the brother of the scribe *Mašum* (*ma-šum*), who is attested receiving foodstuffs for the female sesame oil pressers from his father Bibi (S003789) from Amar-Suen 8/i to Šu-Suen 2/ix. *Mašum*'s receipts from Bibi consisted of different types of birds and animals (both live and as cadavers) and ordinary beer (CUSAS 40/2 235; P515019, Nisaba 15/2 82; P412146, Nisaba 15/2 158; P453677 and Nisaba 15/2 218; P388086). Other receipts of foodstuff for the *geme<sub>2</sub>* (*geš*-)*i<sub>3</sub>* sur-sur by *Mašum*, with no clear connection to his father Bibi, included barley and (fresh) fish (CUSAS 40/2 1810; P516594, CUSAS 40/2 1897; P516681 and Nisaba 15/2 120; P412120). Some ten years later, in Šu-Suen 9, *Illum-asu* is himself attested as the recipient of sesame oil (*i<sub>3</sub>-geš*)<sup>19</sup> from his father Bibi (CUSAS 40/2 1214; P515998), and other texts from the city, such as Nisaba 15/2 657 (P453987), demonstrate a clear link between *Illum-asu*'s office and the collection of rations for the female sesame oil pressers. The last secure attestation of the scribe *Mašum* dates to Šu-Suen 8/v (Nisaba 15/2 441; P453846), thus overlapping with *Illum-asu*'s earlier career as a scribe in the city.

In this context, it is also worth pointing out that in CUSAS 40/2 622 (P515406; and S014217), from Amar-Suen 8/xii, Bibi is again providing food for the *geme<sub>2</sub>* <*geš*>-*i<sub>3</sub>* sur-sur (animal cadavers and birds), this time through his son Ašgi-ibra (<sup>d</sup>aš<sub>3</sub>-gi<sub>5</sub>-ib<sub>2</sub>-ra<sup>?</sup>), who thus also might be identified as an (older?) brother of *Illum-asu*. Unfortunately, we only have this one reference to Ašgi-ibra in Irisagrig, and nothing further can be said about his activities in the city.

An unlikely additional brother of *Illum-asu* is the scribe and chief household administrator (*šabra*) *Aḫuamur* (*a-ḫu-a-mur*), attested in Nisaba 15 415 (P333736; S001746) from Šu-Suen 7/ix, but the identification of *Aḫuamur*'s father Bibi in this text with the father of *Illum-asu* remains unconvincing. Bibi is identified as a scribe (*dub-sar*) in the seals belonging to *Illum-asu* and his brothers, and line 5 (*obv*) in Nisaba 15 415 appears to link an official named Bibi to the city of *Mašan-pūša* (*maš-kan<sub>2</sub>-pu-ša<sup>ki</sup>*).

Assuming that the text Santag 7 26 (P218101) from Ibbi-Suen 2 is from Irisagrig (see the somewhat similar CUSAS 40/2 1870; P516654), it is possible

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<sup>19</sup> Following the Ur III plant/oil terminology in Harmut Waetzoldt, "Ölpflanzen und Pflanzenöle im 3. Jahrtausend," in *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* 2, eds. J. Nicholas Postgate and Marvin A. Powell (Cambridge, 1985): 78: "Die Körner, bzw. Samen der hier zu diskutierenden Pflanze werden in den Texten mit sumerisch *še-giš-ì* und das daraus gewonnene Öl mit *ì-giš* bezeichnet." For sesame cultivation in Irisagrig more generally, see Wolfgang Heimpel, "Āl-Šarrākī and Sesame Cultivation in Sumer," in *Cuneiform Texts Primarily from Iri-Sagrig/Āl-Šarrākī and the History of the Ur III Period: Volume 1: Commentary and Indexes. Nisaba. Studi Assiriologici Messinesi* 15/1, ed. David. I. Owen (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2013).

that *Illum-asu* had a son named Lu-Nanna, who followed the family tradition and pursued a career as a scribe in the city. It should be noted that a (royal) scribe named Lu-Nanna is securely attested in Irisagrig, from Amar-Suen 8/vi/24 (CUSAS 40/2 1465; P516249) to Šu-Suen 3/ix/5 (Nisaba 15/2 249; P453729). A problem with the identification of this Irisagrig official with *Illum-asu*'s son Lu-Nanna in Santag 7 26, is the eight years without references to any Lu-Nanna in the period between the earlier texts and our single reference to Lu-Nanna (son of *Illum-asu*) in Ibbi-Suen 2.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, if the earlier Lu-Nanna indeed was *Illum-asu*'s son (and thus Bibi's grandson), we would have to assume that Bibi was (at least) 60 years old when he first appeared in our records at the end of Amar-Suen 7, and well into his seventies by the time he retired from his office toward the end of Ibbi-Suen 1. While not impossible, this has to be considered a rather unlikely scenario, especially if we take into account that Lu-Nanna was a relatively common name in the Ur III period.

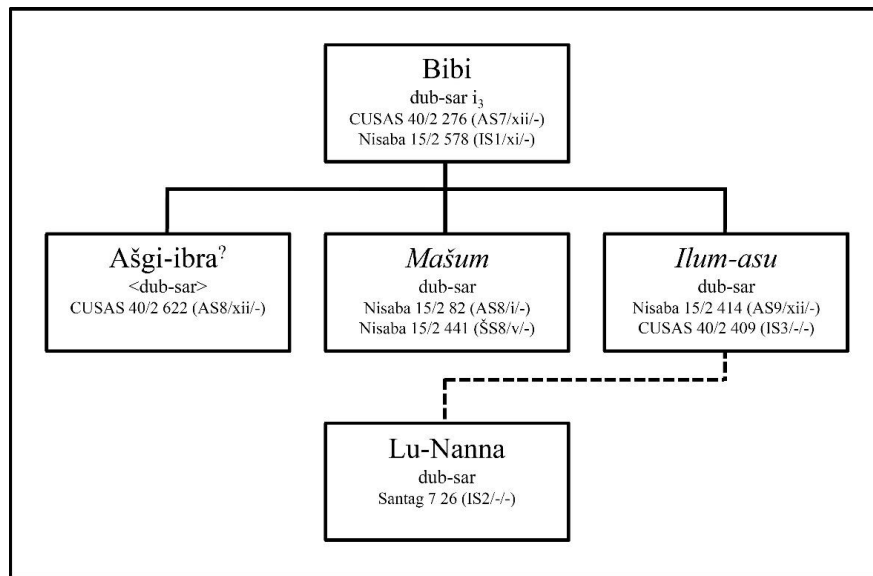


Figure 2. Tentative reconstruction of *Illum-asu*'s family, with three generations of (more or less) contemporary scribes working within the administration of Irisagrig.

<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, an equally long and unexpected period of absence can be observed for *Illum-asu* himself, between his first appearance in the city in Amar-Suen 9/xii, in the recently published text Akkadica 140 99 1 (BDTNS: 205041), and his second attestation in the city's administration, in Šu-Suen 7/vii in Nisaba 15/2 414 (P412049), after which he appears more frequently in the texts. Incidentally, this seven-year period of "silence" from *Illum-asu* roughly coincides with the intermediate period with a limited number of attestations to Bibi, which occurred between Amar-Suen 7–8 and Šu-Suen 7–Ibbi-Suen 1.



The emerging picture of an administrative model that relies heavily on existing kinship ties should not come as a surprise. Scholars of the socio-economic history of early Mesopotamia have long recognized the importance of familial affiliations in establishing the rules for the organization of households and office inheritance within the state's bureaucratic structures. In his 1966 monograph on the development of urbanism in early Mesopotamia, Robert McC. Adams wrote:<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, there were groupings of nuclear families into ascriptive units organized at least in part along lines of descent. Such groups in some (and perhaps in most) cases corporately held title to agricultural lands. They also played a role in the organization of the crafts, of corvee labor called up by the state for certain purposes, and probably of the army. Such widely manifested functions suggest that lineage groupings had not become merely vestigial by late Early Dynastic and Akkadian times but, instead, were still both powerful and important.

Moreover, as demonstrated by Jacob L. Dahl, both patrilineal and fratilineal succession (typically a combination of the two) are frequently attested at all levels within the provincial administration of the Ur III state.<sup>22</sup>

## **THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES OF *Ilum-asu***

The administrative functions of the scribe *Ilum-asu*, as attested in the recovered texts from Irisagrig, are outlined in Table 1 below. Two principal responsibilities within the administration stand out among the attestations:

1. Throughout the entire period of *Ilum-asu*'s activities in Irisagrig, he is attested as the recipient (šū ba-ti) of barley (nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 20<sup>23</sup>) and

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<sup>21</sup> Robert McC. Adams, *The Evolution of Urban Society: Early Mesopotamia and Prehispanic Mexico* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1966), 86. For more recent studies on the importance of kinship ties in the Ur III household economy, see for example, Piotr Steinkeller, "The Foresters of Umma: Toward a Definition of Ur III Labor," in *Labor in the Ancient Near East. American Oriental Series* 68, ed. Marvin A. Powell (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Dahl, *The Ruling Family of Ur III Umma*, 131–37; see also Yuhong Wu, "High-ranking 'Scribes' and Intellectual Governors during the Akkadian and Ur III Periods," *Journal of Ancient Civilizations* 10 (1995); Magnus Widell, "Two Ur III Texts from Umma: Observations on Archival Practices and Household Management," *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal* 2009, no. 6 (2009): §§3.3–3.3.5; and the review of Mas, Juliette, and Palmiro Notizia (eds.), *Working at Home in the Ancient Near East* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), in *Discussions in Assyriology. DABIR* 9, Special Issue, eds. Magnus Widell and Parsa Daneshmand (Irvine, CA: Samuel M. Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture, University of California, Irvine, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> *Ilum-asu*'s receipt of barley in the account Nisaba 15 897 (P387854) is recorded with kišib<sub>3</sub> "sealed (and received)." For a comprehensive discussion of Ur III bookkeeping accounts, and the primary documents upon which such accounts relied, see Robert K. Englund, "The Year:

of rations for groups of workers (nos. 15, 16, 17, 19). Once he received wool (no. 6), and once sesame oil (no. 10). These receipts were made from the wide range of specialized scribes (dub-sar mun-gazi, dub-sar siki, dub-sar i<sub>3</sub>), foremen (ugula geme<sub>2</sub> geš-i<sub>3</sub> sur-sur, ugula simug), and the “steward” (agrig). The rations received by *Illum-asu* were intended for different types of male and female dependent workers, under the supervision of dedicated officials.

2. In addition to his role taking possession of barley and worker rations, *Illum-asu* is frequently attested as the “conveyor” (giri<sub>3</sub>), facilitating the “expenditure” (zi-ga) of labor and rations/barley for workers. In his capacity as conveyor, *Illum-asu* was clearly expected to seal the transactions,<sup>24</sup> and the only unsealed giri<sub>3</sub>-PN tablet in our table is Akkadica 141 99 1 from Amar-Suen 9/xiii (no. 1), possibly because it was written before *Illum-asu* even owned a seal. Ur III receipts were typically sealed by the recipient of their transferred commodities,<sup>25</sup> which would include labor, and it seems likely that the conveyor *Illum-asu* was, also in these texts, the de-facto recipient of the booked out labor/commodities. The focus of these texts is either on the work conducted by geme<sub>2</sub>- and guruš workers with dedicated foremen (nos. 1, 2, 7) and by workers with higher qualifications (no. 11), or on the rations/barley allocated to the workers in question (nos. 13, 14, 21).

## CONCLUSIONS

The scribe *Illum-asu* is attested in Irisagrig for at least 12 years, from Amar-Suen 9/xii until Ibbi-Suen 3. The texts show that he was primarily responsible for receiving barley and rations for different types of male and female dependent workers, overseen by a variety of specialized supervisors. He often served as a

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‘Nissen Returns Joyous from a Distant Island,’” *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal* 2003, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>24</sup> Note Hans Neumann, “Staatliche Verwaltung und privates Handwerk in der Ur III-Zeit: Die Auftragstätigkeit der Schmiede von Girsu,” in *Interdependency of Institutions and Private Entrepreneurs (MOS Studies 2). Proceedings of the Second MOS Symposium (Leiden 1998)*, ed. A. C. V. M. Bongenaar (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2000), 127, n. 48: “Dabei ist auch zu beachten, daß giri-PN mit kišib-PN wechseln kann”; see also Jacob L. Dahl, *Ur III Texts in the Schøyen Collection. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology* 39 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 102: “In a number of texts from Drehem the conveyor (giri<sub>3</sub>) acts as sealer.”

<sup>25</sup> Magnus Widell, “Administrative and Archival Procedures in Early Babylonia. With an Addendum on the Implications on Sealing Practices,” in *Of Rabid Dogs, Hunchbacked Oxen, and Infertile Goats in Ancient Babylonia: Studies Presented to Wu Yuhong on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday. Supplements to the Journal of Ancient Civilizations* 7, eds. Sven Günther, Wayne Horowitz, and Magnus Widell (Changchun: Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations, 2021), 304.

“conveyor” (giri<sub>3</sub>), and in this capacity he booked out both labor and different types of rations and barley for work teams in the city.

*Illum-asu*’s father Bibi, attested from Amar-Suen 7/xii to Ibbi-Suen 1/xi, was a “scribe of oils” (dub-sar i<sub>3</sub>), and was responsible for the provisioning of foodstuffs (mostly animal cadavers) to the female (sesame) oil pressers (geme<sub>2</sub> (geš-)i<sub>3</sub> sur-sur). *Illum-asu* appears to have had (at least) two brothers working as scribes in the city, *Mašum* and Ašgi-ibra, and all three are attested as the recipients of foodstuff provisions from their father Bibi. It is possible that *Illum-asu* also had a son named Lu-Nanna, who may have been a scribe in the city, although the concrete evidence for this identification is rather tenuous.

As recently noted by John P. Nielsen,<sup>26</sup> “[f]amily and kinship may be rooted in the biology of procreation, but out of that reality emerged a range of cultural constructs expressed in Mesopotamian society, religion, politics, and institutions.” *Illum-asu* and his family of scribes in Irisagrig offers another excellent example of how several generations of officials often ended up working alongside one another within the Ur III administration, and highlights the importance of kinship ties and familial relationships in the state’s organizational structures.

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<sup>26</sup> Nielsen, “The Family,” 111.

**Table 1. The scribe *Illum-asu*'s administrative activities in Irisagrig.**

No.	Date	Subject Matter	Function	Transaction	Seal	Reference	CDLI
1.	AS9/xii/-	geme <sub>2</sub> / guruš (zu <sub>2</sub> -si / ugula a- li <sub>2</sub> -ni-su) <sup>27</sup>	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	zi-ga	-	Akkadica 141 99 1	BDTNS: 205041
2.	ŠS7/vii/-	geme <sub>2</sub> (ugula a- li <sub>2</sub> -ni-su)	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	zi-ga	✓	Nisaba 15/2 414	P412049
3.	ŠS8/-/-	še (la <sub>2</sub> -ia <sub>3</sub> su- ga) <sup>28</sup>	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (ki ur- <sup>d</sup> dumu-zi dub- sar mun-gazi- ta)	-	Nisaba 15/2 475	P453866
4.	ŠS8/-/-	še (la <sub>2</sub> -ia <sub>3</sub> su-ga)	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (ki bur-ma-ma ugula geme <sub>2</sub> geš-i <sub>3</sub> sur-sur- ta)	-	Nisaba 15/2 476	P453867
5.	ŠS8/-/-	še (la <sub>2</sub> -ia <sub>3</sub> su-ga)	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (<ki> <sup>d.aš</sup> aš <sub>7</sub> -gi <sub>4</sub> -ba- ni ugula simug-ta)	-	CUSAS 40/2 1141	P515925
6.	ŠS8/-/-	siki / še	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (ki ba- az-mu-um dub-sar siki- ta)	✓	CUSAS 40/2 1111	P515895
7.	ŠS8/ix/-	geme <sub>2</sub> / guruš ([... ....])	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	<zi-ga>	✓	Nisaba 15/2 439	P387927
8.	ŠS9/-/-	še (gar-gar-a sag-nig <sub>2</sub> -gur <sub>11</sub> - ra-kam) <sup>29</sup>	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (pisan dub-ba ... i <sub>3</sub> - gal <sub>2</sub> )	-	CUSAS 40/2 565	P515349
9.	ŠS9/-/-	še (si-i <sub>3</sub> -tum še na-di <sub>3</sub> -tum <sup>d</sup> ištaran)	dub-sar	<šu ba-ti> (ki pu-šu-anum- ta)	-	CUSAS 40/2 1188	P515972

<sup>27</sup> For zu<sub>2</sub>-si “sheep plucking” in this text, and in no. 11 (Nisaba 15/2 534), see Zwaide and Cripps, “Some Ur III Texts from Irisaḡrig,” 100, n. 3.

<sup>28</sup> For su.g (Akkadian *ri'ābum*) and la<sub>2</sub>-ia<sub>3</sub> su-ga “repaid/restored arrear,” see Dahl, *Ur III Texts*, 36–37, n. 92.

<sup>29</sup> For gar-gar-a (Akkadian *kumurrîm*), “(accumulated) total,” see David I. Owen, “New Additions to the Iri-Saḡrig/Al-Šarrākî Archives,” in *Libiamo ne' lieti calici. Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to L. Milano on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends. Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 436, eds. Paola Corò, Elena Devecchi, Nicla De Zorzi, and Massimo Maiocchi (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 348, with additional references.

10.	ŠS9/-/-	i <sub>3</sub> -geš	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (ki bi <sub>2</sub> -bi <sub>2</sub> dub-sar i <sub>3</sub> -ta)	-	CUSAS 40/2 1214	P515998
11.	ŠS9/-/-	simug (zu <sub>2</sub> -si udu eme-gi-ra)	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	<zi-ga>	✓	Nisaba 15/2 534	P388002
12.	IS1/-/-	še (la <sub>2</sub> -ia <sub>3</sub> su-ga)	dub-sar	šu ba-ti (ki šu-eš <sub>18</sub> -dar agrig-ta)		Nisaba 15/2 683	P333726
13.	IS1/ix/-	še-ba (lu <sub>2</sub> kin-gi <sub>4</sub> -a lugal)	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	šu ba-ab-ti / zi-ga	✓	Nisaba 15/2 627	P453967
14.	IS1/x/-	še ([... ..] u <sub>4</sub> l (diš)-še <sub>3</sub> )	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	zi-ga	✓	CUSAS 40/2 1150	P515934
15.	IS1/i-xiii/-	še-ba (geme <sub>2</sub> geš-i <sub>3</sub> sur-sur sag-dub nu-dab / ugula a-da-lal <sub>3</sub> )	dub-sar	šu ba-ti	-	Nisaba 15/2 657	P453987
16.	IS1/i-xiii/-	še-ba (geme <sub>2</sub> uš-bar sag-dub nu-dab / nu-banda <sub>3</sub> a-li <sub>2</sub> -ni-su)	dub-sar	šu ba-ti	-	CUSAS 40/2 669	P515453
17.	IS1/i-xiii/-	še-ba (geme <sub>2</sub> / ARAD <sub>2</sub> )	dub-sar	šu ba-ti	-	CUSAS 40/2 101	P514885
18.	IS1/vii-xiii/-	še-ba (guruš azlag <sub>2</sub> ba-uš <sub>2</sub> / nu-banda <sub>3</sub> a-li <sub>2</sub> -ni-su)	dub-sar	šu ba-ti	-	CUSAS 40/2 495	P515279
19.	IS1/vii-xiii/-	še-ba (guruš eren <sub>2</sub> mar-sa ba-uš <sub>2</sub> / ugula qu <sub>2</sub> -ru-ud-sa <sub>3</sub> )	dub-sar	šu ba-ti	-	Nisaba 15/2 661	P453990
20.	IS2/-/-	še (šuku nu-geš <sup>ki</sup> iri <sub>6</sub> )	dub-sar	kišib <sub>3</sub> (i <sub>3</sub> -dub di <sub>3</sub> -ni-ik-tum <sup>ki</sup> )	-	Nisaba 15/2 897	P387854
21.	IS2/x/-	še-ba (lu <sub>2</sub> -kin-gi <sub>4</sub> -a lugal)	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	šu ba-ab-ti / zi-ga	✓	Nisaba 15/2 863	P454088
22.	IS3/-/-	še giš-e <sub>3</sub> -a (a-ša <sub>3</sub> gid <sub>2</sub> -da)	giri <sub>3</sub> / dub-sar	- (pisan dub-ba)		CUSAS 40/2 409	P515193

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