

# A Middle Babylonian Cuneiform Tablet in the Public Library ‘Manuel Siurot’ (La Palma del Condado, Huelva, Spain)

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[This article publishes a short Middle Babylonian memo concerning flour and barley, which is currently located at the public library ‘Manuel Siurot’ of La Palma del Condado (Huelva, Spain).]

**Keywords:** Middle Babylonian Period, Nippur, Kariya, Nûr-Marûtuk, Nazi-Maruttaš.

## 1. Introduction

The following article publishes a cuneiform tablet belonging to E. Bernal Pérez (henceforth Mr Bernal Pérez), a resident from La Palma del Condado (Huelva, Spain), with his permission.<sup>1</sup> Mr Bernal Pérez bought this object in autumn 2020 from another Spanish owner<sup>2</sup> through the online auction house ‘Setdart Online S.L.’<sup>3</sup>

This article is a result of Mr Bernal Pérez’s efforts to make this cuneiform tablet publicly accessible to his village by loaning it to the ‘Manuel Siurot’ public library. Mr Bernal Pérez firstly arranged for the conservator R. Díaz Lozano to consolidate the tablet — as the unbaked clay had begun to disintegrate.<sup>4</sup> Then, the present writer was contacted for deciphering the text. On June 8, 2021, he collated the object, which by that time was already in the library.<sup>5</sup>

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1. The abbreviations follow those on *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* (<https://rla.badw.de/reallexikon/abkuerzungslisten.html>). Other abbreviations are CUSAS 30 = van Soldt 2015, CUSAS 37 = Devecchi 2020a, and ProsoBab = Waerzeggers *et al.* 2019.

2. As the previous owner of this tablet, Mr Bernal Pérez talked to the present writer about one ‘A. Cegarra’ from Barcelona, but no further information about said person could be found during this research.

3. In presenting this study, the present writer declares to be aware of the ethical problems of publishing unprovenanced objects with cuneiform texts (see recently Brodie 2020: 96–99). Nevertheless, this study is guided by the (also ethical) arguments, in order to publish those objects given by Földi 2017: 7–9.

4. The restoration process consisted in the application of a solution composed of eight parts of acetone and one part of Paraloid® B72 at 15% already dissolved in acetone (8A:1PB72), to prevent the object from further disintegration in the future. A little box of Expanded Polystyrene and foam core was also prepared for the object. The box was also provided with a little bag of silica gel in order to control the humidity and was covered with *washi* paper as further protection (personal communication from Rocío Díaz Lozano). For a comparison with other restoration methods for unbaked clay tablets, see Gütschow 2012: 49–72.

5. Mr Bernal Pérez allowed said collation and assisted during the elaboration of this study by taking photos to work with remotely before the first-hand work. Victoria Almansa Villatoro informed the present author about the existence of

The tablet measures 34×34×15 mm, and Mr Bernal Pérez was already told by the auction house that it could bear a Middle Babylonian Akkadian text, although without further details. The text lacks a year formula, but the present writer, thanks to several contextual aspects, could confirm relative chronology. A transliteration, translation, and notes, in addition to a hand-copy and photographs of the object, follow this introduction.

## 2. Text Edition<sup>6</sup>

### Obverse

1	4 SILA <sub>3</sub> ZI <sub>3</sub> .DA 0.0.2 'ŠE <sup>7</sup> .BAR	4 <i>qū</i> of flour and 2 <i>sūtu</i>
2	ša'(AB) <i>Ka-ri-ia</i>	belonging to Kariya,
3	ša < <i>it-ti</i> > ERIM.MEŠ <i>a-'na</i> <sup>8</sup>	who came to the summoning
4	'de '-ke-e	<with> (other) workmen.
5	<i>il-li-ka</i>	

### Lower edge

1	0.0.3 ŠE.BAR <sup>diš</sup> ZALAG <sub>2</sub> - <sup>dr</sup> AMAR.UTU <sup>9</sup>	3 <i>sūtu</i> of barley (for) Nūr- Marūtuk,
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### Reverse

1	<i>tab-bi-h[u]</i>	the butche[r].
2	'ITI <sup>7</sup> PARA <sub>10</sub> <sup>7</sup> .ZA <sub>3</sub> <sup>7</sup> .ĞAR <sup>7</sup>	Month I (?)
3	'U <sub>4</sub> <sup>7</sup> .17.KAM	The 17 <sup>th</sup> day.

## 3. Philological Notes

**Obverse 2:** The Hurrian hypocoristic name Kariya<sup>7</sup> (grammatically *kar=i=ya*; without a macron)<sup>8</sup> is written in the tablet without the *Personenkeil*. Such a marker became widespread in cuneiform practice from Middle Babylonian/Assyrian times onwards,<sup>9</sup> and, consequently, there are allusions to the personal name Kariya with this *Personenkeil*:

this tablet and put him in contact with the curator Rocío Díaz Lozano, who made the contact with Mr Bernal Pérez possible and shared her report about the tablet's conservation with the present writer. Lluís Feliu Mateu, Zsombor Földi, and Regine Pruzsinszky read earlier drafts of this article, and their observations were further supplemented with comments from Jerome S. Colburn, Frank Simons, and Susanne Paulus. Two anonymous reviewers offered further remarks. Janet Safford has finally improved the English of the last draft. The last stages of this article were covered by a "Margarita Salas" Postdoctoral Fellowship. Thanks to all of them for their invaluable help! The present author bears all responsibility for the errors.

6. Sumerograms are transliterated here following Attinger's transliteration system (see Attinger 2021: 57–103 for an overview) except for EREN<sub>2</sub> / ERIN<sub>2</sub>, which is transliterated here as ERIM following Bartelmuš 2016: vol. 1 137 based on Middle Babylonian evidence.

7. This name was firstly related to the Karēa / Karēa (Tallqvist 1914: 112) present in some Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid texts (see ProsoBab). A Kassite origin has been later proposed for it, however (Paulus 2014: 592 with the *kudurrū Marūtuk-apla-idinna II 1: iv 8* and *Marūtuk-šāpik-zēri 4: obverse i 6'*).

8. See Richter 2012: 188–189 for the Hurrian *kar*, and Richter 2016: 152 for the grammatical analysis.

9. Edzard 2003–2005: 431; Brinkman 2007: 1. For the Middle Assyrian evidence, see also Saporetti 1970, Freydank/Saporetti 1979, and Saporetti/Mattini 2017.

- CUSAS 30, 394 (Dūr-Enlilē; Šagarakti-Šuriaš ...-VII<sup>7</sup>-01): obverse 8 (<sup>diš,d</sup>Šu-qa-mu-na-URU<sub>4</sub> DUMU <sup>diš</sup>Ka-ri-ia).<sup>10</sup>
- IM 70883 = TF<sub>1</sub> 259 (Kurruḥanni; no date): reverse 10 (NA<sub>4</sub> <sup>diš</sup>Ka-ri-ia).
- MARV 6, 29 (Aššūr; 24-IV-Bēr-nāṣir): obverse 2–3 (<sup>diš</sup>Ka-ri-ia / <sup>lu2</sup>MA<sub>2</sub>.LAH<sub>5</sub>) and 6 (<sup>diš</sup>Ka-ri-ia).<sup>11</sup>

However, the personal name Kariya is written without the *Personenkeil* in many other instances, notably in the texts from Kurruḥanni (mod. Tell al-Fahhār):<sup>12</sup>

- IM 70883 = TF<sub>1</sub> 259 (no date): reverse 4 (IGI Ka-ri-ia DUMU Ha-na-a-a).<sup>13</sup>
- IM 70884 = TF<sub>1</sub> 260 (no date): reverse 5 (IGI K[a<sub>4</sub>-r]i-ia DUMU Ha-na-a-a).<sup>14</sup>
- IM 70981 = TF<sub>1</sub> 436 (no date): obverse 11 (IGI Ka<sub>4</sub>-ri-ia DUMU Ha-na-a-a).<sup>15</sup>
- IM 73243 = TF<sub>1</sub> 555 (no date): reverse 23 (IGI Ka<sub>4</sub>-ri-ia DUMU Ha-na-a-a).<sup>16</sup>

Besides the above listed, Kariya is also spelled without *Personenkeil* in another four texts. At least in the first three cases,<sup>17</sup> this might occur because of the usual tendency of omitting such the *Personenkeil* with patronymics. Here are the texts:

- EN 6, 95 (Nuzi, no date): reverse 7–8 (<sup>f</sup>A-kap-šu-uš-a / DUMU.MUNUS Ka<sub>4</sub>-ri-ia).
- MARV 5, 3 (Aššūr; 11-VIII-LUGAL): obverse 4 (<sup>diš</sup>NIĜ<sub>2</sub>.BA-nu DUMU 'Ka-ri-ia').<sup>18</sup>
- MARV 6, 29 (Aššūr; 24-IV-Bēr-nāṣir): obverse 4–5 (<sup>diš</sup>NIĜ<sub>2</sub>!.BA-nu / 'DUMU Ka<sup>!</sup>-ri<sup>!</sup>-ia').
- MRWH 21 (Nippur, Kudur-Enlil ...-XII-01d): obverse 2–3 (<sup>diš</sup>Kal-bu / DUMU Ka-ri-ia).

Therefore, the lack of a *Personenkeil* for Kariya in the present text should come with no surprise, as other Middle Babylonian (and Assyrian) texts do not use it.

The last excerpted text, MRWH 21, is of particular interest because it may refer to the very same Kariya of the edited tablet, but in an earlier moment of his life. As will be said below, the present tablet might be dated during the reign of Nazi-Maruttaš (ca. 1307–1282 BCE), before Kudur-Enlil’s reign (ca. 1254–1246 BCE).

**Obverse 3–5:** The *ša* seems to act here as a particle introducing a subordinate clause dealing with the Kariya of obverse 2 (i.e. ‘Kariya, who ...’). In that way, the verb of this sentence, *illika* (G Preterit, 3sgc of *alāku* with an unmimetic ventive),<sup>19</sup> should bear an *-u* marking the subordinate.

10. In this article, the chronologies of Kassite rulers follow Brinkman 2017: 36. The dates are given according to the sequence day-MONTH-year.

11. See Saporetti/Mattini 2017: vol. K 10–11 (with previous literature) for remarks.

12. See Qader 2010–2012: 62 and Richter 2016: 152.

13. See al-Rawi 1977: 283 (edition), 459 (copy).

14. See al-Rawi 1977: 205 (edition), 460 (copy), and al-Rawi 1980: 135–136 (edition and comments), 138 (copy). Richter 2016: 152 only referred to al-Rawi 1977: 205, 460 amongst its previous studies.

15. See Fadhil 1972: 86.

16. See al-Rawi 1977: 245 (edition), 470 (copy).

17. Hölscher 1996: 118 emended the fourth case as <<sup>diš</sup>>Ka-ri-ia.

18. See Saporetti/Mattini 2017: vol. K 10–11 (with previous literature) for remarks over this and the following text.

19. On the lack of mimetic in the Middle Babylonian dialect, see Aro 1955: 32.

Nonetheless, the ventive *-a(m)* has been recently shown to exclude the particle *-u*.<sup>20</sup> A similar instance with *alāku* in a Middle Babylonian document is to be found in EA 20: reverse 23–24.<sup>21</sup>

How should the Akkadian *šābī*(ERIM.MEŠ) be parsed in this context, then? The verb *alāku* only has a transitive meaning in the expression *ēṣidī alāku* ‘to bring harvesters’.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, such an expression is mostly used in Old Babylonian times, while the present tablet is a Middle Babylonian one. In addition, *ēṣidī alāku* lacks the ventive, whereas *alāku* does bear one in the edited text. This is relevant, as the meaning of *alāku* changes with the ventive (‘to go’ without ventive, but ‘to come’ with it). Therefore, *šābī* cannot be seen in the present text as a direct object of *alāku*. More likely, something like *itti* (‘with’) is missing between *ša* and *šābī*, and the text is emended here accordingly.

If this analysis is correct so far, Kariya received his ration after having come ‘to the summoning’ (*ana dekē*)<sup>23</sup> ‘with (other) workmen’ (<*itti*> *šābī*). The purpose of the summoning is not explicitly described, but the presence of *šābu* in the text suggests an intensive agricultural work broadly defined.<sup>24</sup> Several Kassite letters from Nippur use *dekū* as an allusion to the calling for a workforce to sow the *harbu* fields.<sup>25</sup> However, the present text is to be dated to the first month of the Babylonian calendar (March-April), so it would be, at most, around the time of the (barley) harvest rather than the sowing (which occurs in autumn).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in case of a harvest, one expects the mention of ‘harvesters’ (*ēṣidū*) rather than the *šābu* workers. Due to these reasons, the present writer thinks that the call-up for workers mentioned in the present text refers instead to the maintenance of a canal. This would align with the usual performance of dewatering tasks by the *šābu* in Middle Babylonian times.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the text from a Kassite *kudurru* employs *dekū* (the same verb as in the present tablet) for alluding to the ‘mobilisation’ (*dekēmma*) of a city (*ālšu*, ‘his city’) in order to upkeep the Nār-Šarri canal.<sup>28</sup>

In summary: although not specifically mentioned in this text, Kariya was probably employed for work involving canal maintenance.

**Lower edge 1 – reverse 1:** The corner of the tablet is damaged, but the reading Nūr-Marūtuk is acceptable due to the frequency of this personal name in Middle Babylonian texts.<sup>29</sup> The reading is also supported by the appearance of this individual, on the reverse of line 1, mentioned as a ‘butcher’ (*tābiḥu*), written with a typical Middle Babylonian spelling (*tab-bi-ḥu* = *tabbiḥu*, with quantitative metathesis).<sup>30</sup>

20. Bjørn / Pat-El 2020: 72 n. 5, 74.

21. <sup>diš</sup>*Ma-ne2-e* LU2.KI62-ŠU ŠEŠ-*i*[*a u3* ER]IM[.MEŠ-Š]U *ša* ŠEŠ-*ia* *ša* *it-ti* <sup>diš</sup>*Ma-ne2-e* / *il-li-ka* *uk-te-eb-’bi-*<sup>i</sup>*[t-na-k]u* [*g*]*a*[*b2-b*]*i-šu-nu* (edition from Rainey *et al.* 2015: 152) ‘(As for) Mane, the messenger of m[y] brother, [and the tr]oo[ps] who came with Mane, I have honoured to all them’.

22. See Rositani 2011: 23 (with previous literature) for study of this expression.

23. The spelling *de-ke-e* for the G Infinitive, genitive singular, of *dekū* used in the present text mirrors the one adopted for the Kassite text PBS 1/2, 50 (no date): obverse 26 ([... *de*]-*ke-e*) and 28 (*de-ke-e*).

24. Sassmannshausen 2001: 123–125.

25. The reader is to be addressed to the evidence in CAD D, 128, s.v. *dekū*, section 4.

26. See Devecchi 2020b: 212 for recent considerations on harvest time in Middle Babylonian sources.

27. Sassmannshausen 2001: 124.

28. *Meli-Šipak 1 (kudurru)*: ii 27.

29. See a list of allusions in Hölscher 1996: 161, which updates a first list in Sommerfeld 1982: 207.

30. About this spelling, besides the evidence on CAD T, 6, s.v. *tābiḥu* (lexical and Section a, 2'), see now CBS 4742: 61 (*tab-bi-ḥu-u2*; see van Soldt 1988: 117 for a tentative transliteration of this still unpublished tablet). There is also a personal name, *Tābbiḥu*, spelled in this way. The texts containing it are: CUSAS 30, 316 (broken date): reverse 11

A Middle Babylonian text from Nippur (BE 14, 44 (Nazi-Maruttaš 05-II-06<sup>2</sup>)): obverse 7' refers to a butcher called Nūr-Marūtuk (written <sup>m</sup>ZALAG<sub>2</sub>-<sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU as in the text edited here), so both texts may refer to the same person. Another text from Kassite Nippur, MRWH 31 (Nazi-Maruttaš ...-VII-08): reverse 3', refers to one Nūr-Marūtuk who appears in the text without his profession mentioned, but is connected with the butcher Nūr-Marūtuk of BE 14, 44.<sup>31</sup> If the Nūr-Marūtuk named in the present tablet is to be identified with the one named in these other texts, then the text edited here might be located in the Nippur area during the reign of Nazi-Maruttaš (ca. 1307–1282 BCE).

The fact of having an object of this area in a private collection is not surprising, since many Kassite-period tablets appearing in this kind of collections in the last decades seem to have a similar provenance.<sup>32</sup>

**Reverse 2:** Mostly tentative reading, as this is the most damaged part of the tablet.

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(<sup>munus</sup>IGI-GAŠAN-lu-mur DAM *Tab-bi-<sup>h</sup>i*), CUSAS 37, 89 (Kadašman-Turgu ...-iv-...): obverse 4 (<sup>diš</sup>BA-<sup>ša</sup>-<sup>d</sup>A[MAR.UTU DUMU <sup>diš</sup>Tab-bi-<sup>h</sup>i]), CUSAS 37, 182 (Kadašman-Turgu ...-...-...): obverse 3 (<sup>diš</sup>BA-<sup>ša</sup>-<sup>d</sup>AMAR.UTU DUMU <sup>diš</sup>Tab-bi-<sup>h</sup>i), CUSAS 37, 247 (Nazi-Maruttaš ...-vi-19): obverse 4 (PAP 2 DUMU <sup>diš</sup>Tab-bi-<sup>h</sup>i), and CUSAS 37, 256 (27-vii-9 Nazi-Maruttaš): reverse 3 ([DUMU] <sup>diš</sup>Tab-bi-<sup>h</sup>i).

31. See Hölscher 1996: 161 for this proposal, but it also suggests that they might be two different people.

32. Devecchi 2020: 18 with previous literature.

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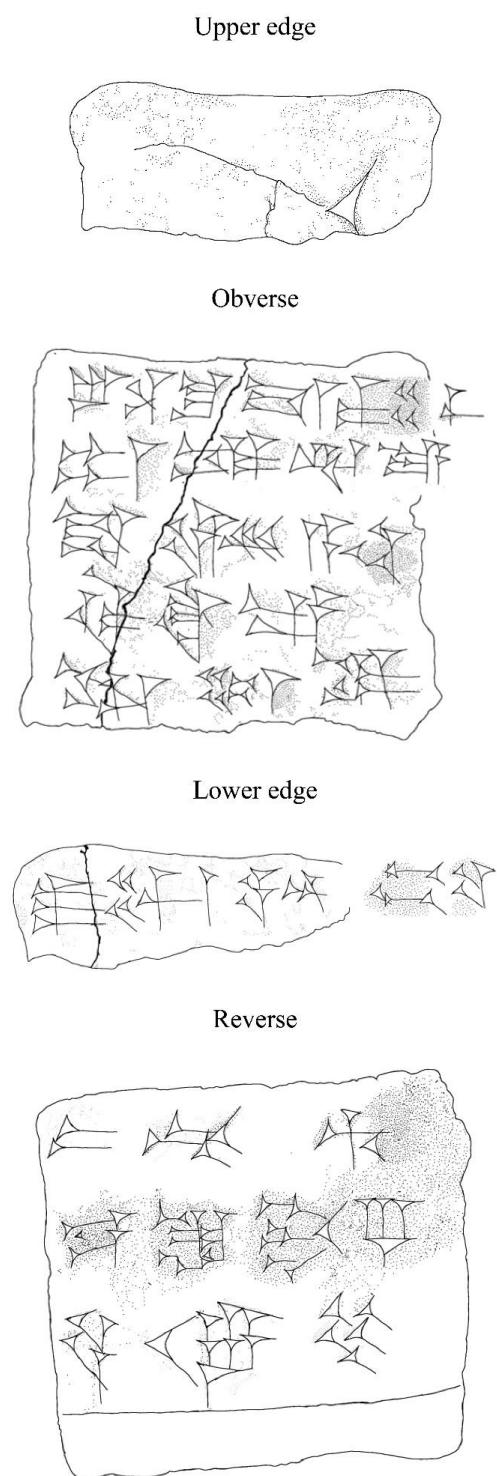


Fig. 1. Hand-copy of the tablet by the present author



Fig. 2. Composition made by the present author with the photos, taken the day of its collation, for the different sides of the tablet