

Women's Role in the Economy during the 3rd Millennium B.C.:
The Laws of Ur-Namma and Women's Property

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M. Civil's publication of a new Ur III text of the Laws of Ur-Namma (LUN) and of his comments have renewed interest on property holding and inheritance by women during the 3rd millennium B. C. LUN §§27-29 deal with the widow who goes to reside with her father-in-law and with "slaves of her inheritance and the marriage gift"; LUN §B8 deals with the limitation of the husband's disposal of his wife's extradotal gift (*sag-rig₇*) after her death; §E4 permits a widow to assume the role of "a single heir" (*ibila 1-gin₇*) in the household, and LUN §E5 inhibits such a woman from remarrying a younger brother of her dead husband. Furthermore, we have LUN §B3, whose text, although heavily damaged, is our best preserved copy (see below). It concerns landed property and inheritance by daughters. The following is Civil's translation of LUN §B3:

If [a man dies] (and) his daughter [is the heir, she will inherit] the goods of her father's house, a younger sister [...] the inheritance of the state, (but) the working teams will share the father's allowances. (2011: 249)

What does this paragraph mean? The same paragraph is found in the Law of Lipit-Ištar c (Roth 1995: 26). However, it is not much help because the text suffers from even worse damage, in that the problematic last sentence, *šuku ad-da erín-e [i]-ba-e*, is not preserved. Again turning to Civil's study, we read:

(A)t the death of a man who has no male heirs, the (eldest) daughter will inherit the goods (*níg-gur*) of his household, and the younger sister will also received her share, the father's land allotments (*šukúr*) will be divided between his workers (*erín*). One can take the last line as referring to food allowances..., but also to field allotments. It is known that the *erín* could have a *šukúr*..., but the present paragraph reveals a reason why this could happen. In the latter interpretation, the present paragraph would imply that women could not inherit agricultural land. (2011: 268)

Whether we agree or not with Civil's ideas as to what LUN §B3 implies, it should be

viewed against the background of the land tenure system of the time. From this starting point, I will explore the relationship between the šuku/agricultural land and women during the 3rd millennium B. C. We know that among the Early Dynastic Lagash texts several women are found to get šuku-allotments. Although we cannot infer inheritance, these texts show that the women were, at least temporally, allotted agricultural lands. As the first step of my research, I will study records pertaining to a woman named Emete (Maekawa 1973-74: 104, note 36) and her colleagues who received šuku-allotments in the E₂-MI₂, an institution placed under the name of the queen. In conjunction with this, I will discuss the *grand document juridique de Nippur* published by M. Lambert (1979) and studied by C. Wilcke (1998) and other related material such as ancient *kudurrus* (Gelb, Steinkeller, and Whiting 1991). With results from these investigations I would like to revisit LUN §B3.

References

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