

# 9

## The Beginning and the End of the *Sumerian King List*

### 9.1. *The Sumerian King List*

The “Sumerian King List” is the name given to a literary composition, written in Sumerian, listing a long succession of Sumerian cities alleged to have been invested for longer or briefer periods with *nam.lugal* ‘the kingship’, the names of the kings of the corresponding dynasties, and the individual lengths of their reigns. The content of the king list is known, in diverse variants, from a number of clay tablets, or fragments of clay tablets, most of them Old Babylonian (see below). Since 1999, a compiled edition of the king list is published online as a part of the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* ([www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk](http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk)), in the form of both a transliteration (c.2.1.1) and a translation (t.21.1). The main source for the compiled version is the text of **Ash. 1923.444** (also called WB 444, or the “Weld-Blundell prism”), a relatively well preserved four-sided prism with two columns on each face. An interesting, although now somewhat outdated discussion of the *Sumerian King List* can be found in Jacobsen, *AS 11* (1939).

The *end* of the *Sumerian King List*, essentially corresponding to the version known from Ash. 1923.444, is the “Ur-Isin part” of the list, giving the names and the reigns of the kings of the Neo-Sumerian Ur III dynasty and of one of the Old Babylonian dynasties succeeding Ur III:

#### The Sumerian King List, lines 341-377

úr<sup>ki</sup>im.ma ur.[<sup>d</sup>namma] lugal.àm / mu 18 ì.ak  
<sup>d</sup>šul.gi dumu ur.<sup>d</sup>namma.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 46 ì.ak  
<sup>d</sup>amar.<sup>d</sup>suen.na dumu <sup>d</sup>šul.gi.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 9 ì.ak /  
šu.<sup>d</sup>suen dumu <sup>d</sup>amar.<sup>d</sup>suen.na.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 9 ì.ak /  
ì.bi.<sup>d</sup>suen dumu šu.<sup>d</sup>suen.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 24 ì.ak /  
4 lugal / mu.bi 1 48 ìb.ak /  
úr<sup>ki</sup>im.ma <sup>giš</sup>tukul ba.an.sig /  
nam.lugal.bi ì.si.in<sup>ki</sup>.šè ba.de<sub>6</sub> /  
ì.si.in<sup>ki</sup>.na iš.bi.<sup>d</sup>er.ra lugal.àm / mu 33 ì.ak /  
šu.ì.lí.šu dumu iš.bi.<sup>d</sup>er.ra.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 20 ì.ak /  
ì.din.<sup>d</sup>da.gan dumu šu.ì.lí.šu.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 21 ì.ak /  
iš.me.<sup>d</sup>da.g[an dumu ì.din.<sup>d</sup>da.gan.ke<sub>4</sub>] / mu 20 ì.ak /  
l[i.pí.it.eš<sub>4</sub>.tár dumu iš.me.<sup>d</sup>da.gan.ke<sub>4</sub>] / mu [11 ì.ak] /  
<sup>d</sup>ur.[<sup>d</sup>nin.urta mu 28 ì].ak /  
<sup>d</sup>bur.<sup>d</sup>sue[n dumu <sup>d</sup>ur.<sup>d</sup>nin.urt]a.ke<sub>4</sub> / mu 21 ì.ak /  
<sup>d</sup>li.pí.[it.]<sup>d</sup>en.líl / dumu bur.<sup>d</sup>suen.ke<sub>4</sub> mu 5 ì.ak /  
<sup>d</sup>er.ra.ì.mi.ti mu 8 ì.ak /  
<sup>d</sup>en.líl.ba.ni mu 24 ì.ak /  
<sup>d</sup>za.am.bi.ia mu 3 ì.ak /  
<sup>d</sup>i.te.er.pí<sub>4</sub>.ša mu 4 ì.ak /

**In Urim (Ur)**, Ur-Namma was king, ruled for 18 years.

Shulgi, son of Ur-Namma, ruled for 48<sup>1</sup> years.

Amar-Suena, son of Shulgi, ruled for 9 years.

Shu-Suen, son of Amar-Suena, ruled for 9 years.

Ibbi-Suen, son of Shu-Suen, ruled for 24 years.

**5<sup>1</sup> kings ruled for 1 48 years.**

Then Urim was smitten with weapons.

The kingship was taken to Isin.

**In Isin**, Ishbi-Erra was king, ruled for 33 years.

Shu-ilishu, son of Ishbi-Erra, ruled for 10<sup>1</sup> years.

Iddin-Dagan, son of Shu-ilishu, ruled for 21 years.

Ishme-Dagan, son of Iddin-Dagan, ruled for 20 years.

Lipit-Eshtar, son of Ishme-Dagan, ruled for 11 years.

Ur-Ninurta ruled for 28 years.

Bur-Suen, son of Ur-Ninurta, ruled for 21 years.

Lipit-Enlil, son of Bur-Suen, ruled for 5 years.

Erra-imitti ruled for 8 years.

Enlil-bani ruled for 24 years.

Zambiya ruled for 3 years.

Iter-pisha ruled for 4 years.

<sup>d</sup>ur.dul.kug.ga mu 4 ì.ak /  
<sup>d</sup>suen.ma.gir mu 11 ì.ak /  
 14 lugal / mu.bi 3 23 ìb.ak

Ur-dulkuga ruled for 4 years.  
 Suen-magir ruled for 11 years.  
**14 kings ruled for 3 23 years.**

In three of the known Nippur fragments of the *Sumerian King List*, an interesting summary of the whole king list (except the antediluvian part) follows directly after the Ur-Isin part.

According to this summary, 4 dynasties of kings in Kish, 5 in Uruk, 3 in Ur, and 1 each in Awan, in Hamazi, in Agade, (pus three others), and 1 under the foreign dominance of the Gutians, alternated as the central power in Mesopotamia “after the flood”. For various reasons, this cannot be historically correct. The explanation given by Jacobsen, in *AS 11* (1939), 152-154, is that the original author of the *Sumerian King List* used as his sources a conglomerate of *local date lists* from a number of Mesopotamian cities. These local lists were cut up by him in smaller pieces, the alleged dynasties, which were then placed after each other in a linear sequence, with dynasties that were in reality more or less contemporaneous placed closely together. Jacobsen made the observation that fantasy numbers are used in the king list for the “legendary reigns” of the three first dynasties in Kish, and of the first dynasty in Uruk, while more realistic numbers are used for what he considered to be the “historical reigns” of the remaining dynasties.

**The Sumerian King List, lines 378-397, 414-430 (summary)**

šu.nígin 40.lá.[1 lugal] /  
 mu.bi 4<sup>šár.gal</sup> [...] 9 mu [3 iti 3 1/2 ud] ìb.ak /  
 a.rá 4.[kam] / šà kiš<sup>[ki]</sup> /  
 šu.nígin 22 lugal /  
 mu.bi 43 30 [...] 6 iti 15 ud ìb.ak /  
 a.rá 5.kam / šà unug<sup>ki</sup>.ga /  
 šu.nígin 12 lugal /  
 mu.bi 6 36 mu ìb.ak /  
 a.rá 3.kam / [šà] urim<sup>ki</sup>.ma /  
 šu.nígin 3 lugal /  
 mu.bi 5 56 mu ìb.ak /  
 a.rá 1.kam / šà a.wa.an<sup>ki</sup> /  
 [šu].nigín 1 lugal /  
 mu.bi 7 (00) mu [ì].ak /  
 a.rá 1.[kam] / šà ha<sup>?</sup>.[ma].zi<sup>ki</sup>.a /  
 (16 lines missing; 3 cities, 13 kings)

[šu.nígin 12] lugal /  
 [mu.bi 3] 17 [mu] ìb.ak /  
 [a].rá\ 1.kam / [šà] a.ga.dè<sup>ki</sup> /  
 šu.nígin 21 lugal /  
 mu.bi 2 05 mu 40 ud ìb.ak /  
 a.rá 1.kam / šà ugnim / gu.ti.um<sup>ki</sup> /  
 [šu.nigín] 11 lugal /  
 [mu].bi 2 39 mu ìb.ak /  
 [šà ì].si.in<sup>ki</sup>.na /  
 11 iri<sup>ki</sup> / [iri]<sup>ki</sup> nam.lugal.la ìb.ak.kà /  
 [šu].nigín 2 14 lugal /  
 [šu].nigín / mu.bi 8<sup>šár.gal</sup> [...] 1 16

Together 40 - 1 kings  
 ruled for 4 šár.gal [...] 9 years, 3 months, 3 1/2 days,  
 4 times in Kish.  
 Together 22 kings  
 ruled for 43 30 [...] years, 6 months, 15 days,  
 5 times in Unug (Uruk).  
 Together 12 kings  
 ruled for 6 36 years,  
 3 times in Urim (Ur).  
 Together 3 kings  
 ruled for 5 56 years,  
 once in Awan.  
 Together 1 king  
 ruled for 7 (00) years,  
 once in Hamazi.

16 lines missing

Together 12 kings  
 ruled for 3 17 years,  
 once in Agade.  
 Together 21 kings  
 ruled for 2 05 years, 40 days,  
 once in the army of Gutium.  
 Together 11 kings  
 ruled for 2 39 years,  
 <once> in Isin.  
**11 cities**, cities where the kingship was exercised.  
**Together 2 14 kings,**  
**their years 8 šár.gal [...] 1 16.**

A study of the terminology used in various parts of the *Sumerian King List* led Jacobsen to draw the conclusion (*op. cit.*, 141) that the composition of the king list in its original form can be dated to the time of Utu-ḫegal, who reigned in Uruk just before the beginning of Ur III, and that both the “antediluvian” part at the beginning of the king list and the Ur-Isin part at the end of it were later additions.

Most recently, a privately owned Ur III version of the *Sumerian King List* was published by Steinkeller in *FS Wilcke* (2003). It can be firmly dated to between Šulgi 20 and Šulgi 48. The big and numerous discrepancies

between the Ur III version (*USKL*) and the Old Babylonian standard edition (*SKL*) led Steinkeller to tentatively suggest a three-stage development of *USKL*:

“(1) an Akkade (= the original?) version, which originated sometime under Sargon’s dynasty; (2) an Uruk version from the time of Utu-ḫegal, which added the last rulers of Akkade, the 4th dynasty of Uruk, and the Gutian rulers, ...; (3) a local Adab version from the time of Ur-Namma or Šulgi, ...”.

### 9.2. MS 1686. A New Version of the Ur-Isin King List

**MS 1686** (Fig. 9.1 below) is a small, neatly written and perfectly preserved clay tablet with the Ur-Isin king list *in mini-format*. Compared with lines 341-377 of the compiled *Sumerian King List*, MS 1686 lacks the whole narrative framework. Only the names of the kings and the years of their reigns are recorded. The names of the cities, Ur and Isin, are not mentioned. Neither is it mentioned that the kingship was transferred from one city to the other. The phrase *ì.ak* ‘he ruled’ is omitted everywhere, and the names of the fathers of the kings are not mentioned. Even the summaries are missing, so and so many kings for so and so many years.

In other ways, though, there is partial agreement between MS 1686 and the Ur-Isin part of the *ETCSL* version of the king list. The names of the kings are the same, and the lengths of the reigns are nearly the same. The two suspected errors in the *ETCSL* version, 46 instead of 48 years for Shulgi, and 20 instead of 10 years for Shu-ilishu, are corrected in MS 1686. Also, MS 1686 has, like the closely parallel versions A and B in Sollberger, *JCS* 8 (1954) 19 years for Ishme-dagan, 22 for Bur-suen, 3 for Iter-pisha, and 3 for Suen-magir, where the *ETCSL* version has 20, 21, 4, and 4 years.

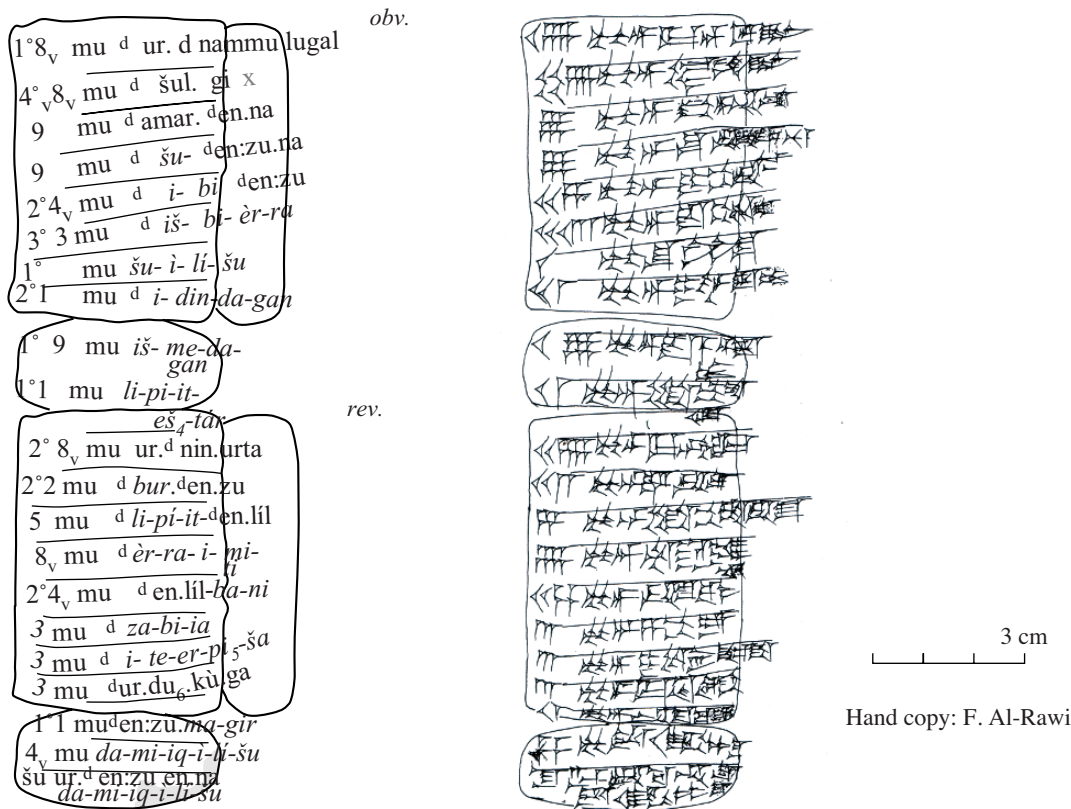


Fig. 9.1. MS 1686. An Ur-Isin king list, written in the fourth year of the reign of Damiq-ilishu of Isin.

Variant number signs are used in MS 1686 for the digits 4, 8, and 40, which seems to suggest that the tablet was written in the earlier part of the Old Babylonian period. This conclusion, though, is in conflict with the observation that MS 1686 was written by a scribe called Ur-Suen, in the fourth year of the reign of Damiq-

ilishu. At least, that is what is indicated by the subscript and by the fact that Damiq-Ilishu's reign is said to have lasted only 4 year. Compare with the *ETCSL* version which ends, like Ash. 1923.444, with 11 years for Suen-magir, but does not mention Damiq-Ilishu. Compare also with **CBS 19797** (the *Sumerian King List*, variant P<sub>5</sub>), which ends in the following way:

**CBS 19797 (PBS 5, 5; BE 20/1, 47)**

<sup>d</sup> suen.ma.[g]r mu 11 i.[ak] / da.mi.iq.i.lí.šu dumu <sup>d</sup> suen.ma.gir mu 23 in[ak] / [... lugal m]u.bi 3 45 iti 6 in.ak
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Suen-magir ruled for 11 years.  
Damiq-ilishu, son of Suen-magir, *ruled* for 23 years.  
... **kings ruled for 3 45 years, 6 months.**

This text shows that Damiq-Ilishu's reign lasted for 19 more years after the date when MS 1686 was written. As the first published fragment of the *Sumerian King List*, CBS 19797 originally appeared as text 47 in Hilprecht's *BE 20/1* (1906), that is in the same volume as excellent reproductions of Old Babylonian mathematical and metrological table texts, a mathematical algorithm text, and a fragment of a mathematical problem text, all from Nippur. Some of those texts were mentioned above. Hilprecht could read only the reverse of the fragment, which happened to contain the entire Ur-Isin part of the king list. The inscription on the obverse, which was difficult to read because the clay tablet needed to be cleaned, was published by Poebel in *PBS 5* (1914). Ironically, the upper half of the first column on the obverse of CBS 19797 is lost, precisely the part of the text that probably contained a version of the antediluvian part of the king list.

Here is a transliteration and translation of the text on MS 1686:

**MS 1686**

1	18 <sub>v</sub> mu <sup>d</sup> ur. <sup>d</sup> namma lugal	18 years Ur-Namma (was) king,
2	4 <sub>v</sub> 8 <sub>v</sub> mu <sup>d</sup> šul.gi {x}	48 years Šulgi,
3	9 mu <sup>d</sup> amar. <sup>d</sup> en<:zu>.na	9 years Amar-Suen,
4	9 mu <sup>d</sup> šu. <sup>d</sup> en:zu.na	9 years Šu-Suen,
5	24 <sub>v</sub> mu <sup>d</sup> i-bi- <sup>d</sup> en:\ zu	24 years Ibbi-Suen,
6	33 mu <sup>d</sup> iš-bi- <sup>d</sup> er-ra	33 years Išbi-Erra,
7	10 mu <sup>&lt;d&gt;</sup> šu-ì-lí-šu	10 years Šu-ilišu,
8	21 mu <sup>d</sup> i-din-da-gan	21 years Iddin-Dagan,
9	19 mu <sup>d</sup> iš-me- <sup>&lt;d&gt;</sup> da- / gan	19 years Išme-Dagan,
10	11 mu <sup>d</sup> li-pí-it- / eš <sub>4</sub> -tár	11 years Lipit-Eštar,
11	28 <sub>v</sub> mu <sup>d</sup> ur. <sup>d</sup> nin.urta	28 years Ur-Ninurta,
12	22 mu <sup>d</sup> bur- <sup>d</sup> en:zu	22 years Bur-Suen,
13	5 mu <sup>d</sup> li-pí-it- <sup>d</sup> en.líl	5 years Lipit-Enlil,
14	8 <sub>v</sub> mu <sup>d</sup> er-ra-i-mi-ti	8 years Erra-imitti,
15	24 <sub>v</sub> mu <sup>d</sup> en.líl-ba-ni	24 years Enlil-bani,
16	3 mu <sup>d</sup> za<-am>-bi-ia	3 years Zambiya,
17	3 mu <sup>d</sup> i-te-er-pi <sub>5</sub> -ša	3 years Iter-piša,
18	3 mu <sup>d</sup> ur.du <sub>6</sub> .kù.ga	3 years Ur-dukuga,
19	11 mu <sup>d</sup> en:zu-ma-gir	11 years Suen-magir,
20	4 <sub>v</sub> mu da-mi-iq-ì-lí-šu	4 years Damiq-ilišu.
21	šu ur. <sup>d</sup> en:zu en.na / da-mi-iq-ì-lí-šu	The hand of Ur-Suen, until Damiq-ilišu.

King lists like MS 1686 can be used to compile lists showing the *relative* dates of the reigns of the kings in various Mesopotamian cities. In order to arrive at the *absolute* dates one needs additional information. Recently, it has been shown by Manning, *et al.*, *Science* (2001), that a refined tree ring chronology definitely supports the so called "middle chronology", which puts the fall of Babylon at 1595 BC. (On the other hand, Gruzadyan claims in *Sky and Telescope* 100 (2000) that astronomical evidence related to eclipses mentioned in Tablets 20 and 21 of the *Enuma Anu Enlil* fixes the date of the fall of Babylon to 1499 BC, 96 years later.)

Ur III	Eshnunna	Larsa	Isin	Babylon I
Ur-Namma <b>18 years</b> 2112-2095				
Šulgi <b>48 years</b> 2094-2047				
Amar-Suen <b>9 years</b> 2046-2038				
Šu-Suen <b>9 years</b> 2037-2029	Ituria			
Ibbi-Suen <b>24 years</b> 2028-2004	Ilushu-Ilia 19 years 2028-2010	Naplanum 21 years 2025-2005	Išbi-Erra <b>23 years</b> 2017-1985	
	Nur-Ahum 10 years 2009-1990	Emisum 28 years 2004-1977	Šu-ilišu <b>10 years</b> 1984-1975	
	Kirikiri 15 years 1989-1975	Samium 35 years 1976-1942	Iddin-Dagan <b>21 years</b> 1974-1954	
	Bilalama 15 years 1974-1960	Zabaya 8 years 1941-1933	Išme-Dagan <b>19 years</b> 1953-1935	
	Ishar-Ramashshu 15 years 1959-1945	Gungunum 27 years 1932-1906	Lipit-Eštar <b>11 years</b> 1934-1924	
	Azuzum 5 years 1944-1940	Abisare 11 years 1905-1895	Ur-Ninurta <b>28 years</b> 1923-1896	
	Ur-Ninmar 5 years 1039-1935	Sumu-el 19 years 1894-1866	Bur-Suen <b>22<sup>?</sup> years</b> 1895-1874	Sumu-abum 15 years 1894-1881
	Ur-ningizzida 5 years 1934-1930	Nur-Adad 16 years 1865-1850	Lipit-Enlil <b>5 years</b> 1873-1869	Sumu-la-El 36 years 1880-1845
	Ibiq-Adad I 20 years 1929-1910	Suen-iddinam 7 years 1849-1843	Erra-imitti <b>8<sup>?</sup> years</b> 1868-1861	Sabium 14 years 1844-1831
	Sharria 10 years 1909-1900	Suen-eribam 2 years 1842-1841	Enlil-bani <b>24 years</b> 1860-1837	Apil-Suen 28 years 1830-1813
	Belakum 20 years 1899-1880	Suen-iqišam 5 years 1840-1836	Zambiya <b>3 years</b> 1836-1834	Suen-muballit 20 years 1812-1793
	Warassa 5 years 1879-1875	Silli-Adad 1 year 1835	Iter-piša <b>3 years</b> 1833-1831	Hammurabi 43 years 1792-1750
	Ibal-Pi-el I 15 years 1874-1860	Warad-Suen 12 years 1834-1823	Ur-dulkuga <b>3 years</b> 1830-1828	Samsu-iluna 38 years 1749-1712
	Ibiq-Adad II 30 years 1859-1830	Rim-Suen 60 years 1822-1763	Suen-magir <b>11 years</b> 1827-1817	Abi-ešuh 28 years 1711-1684
	Naram-Suen 25 years 1829-1805		Damiq-ilishu <b>23 years</b> 1816-1794	Ammiditana 37 years 1683-1647
	Dadusha 25 years 1804-1780			Ammisaduqa 2 years 1646-1626
	Ibal-Pi-el II 17 years 1779-1763			Samsuditana 31 years 1625-1595

**The reigns of the kings of Ur (NS), and Eshnunna, Larsa, Isin, Babylon (OB), in the middle chronology.**

In the table above are listed the dates for the kings of Ur III (Neo-Sumerian) and for the kings of Eshnunna, Larsa, Isin, and the first dynasty of Babylon (all “Old Babylonian”) according to the middle chronology.<sup>1</sup>

The location of Ur, Eshnunna, Larsa, Isin, Babylon, and some other important sites in ancient Mesopotamia, are shown in the map below (Fig. 9.2).

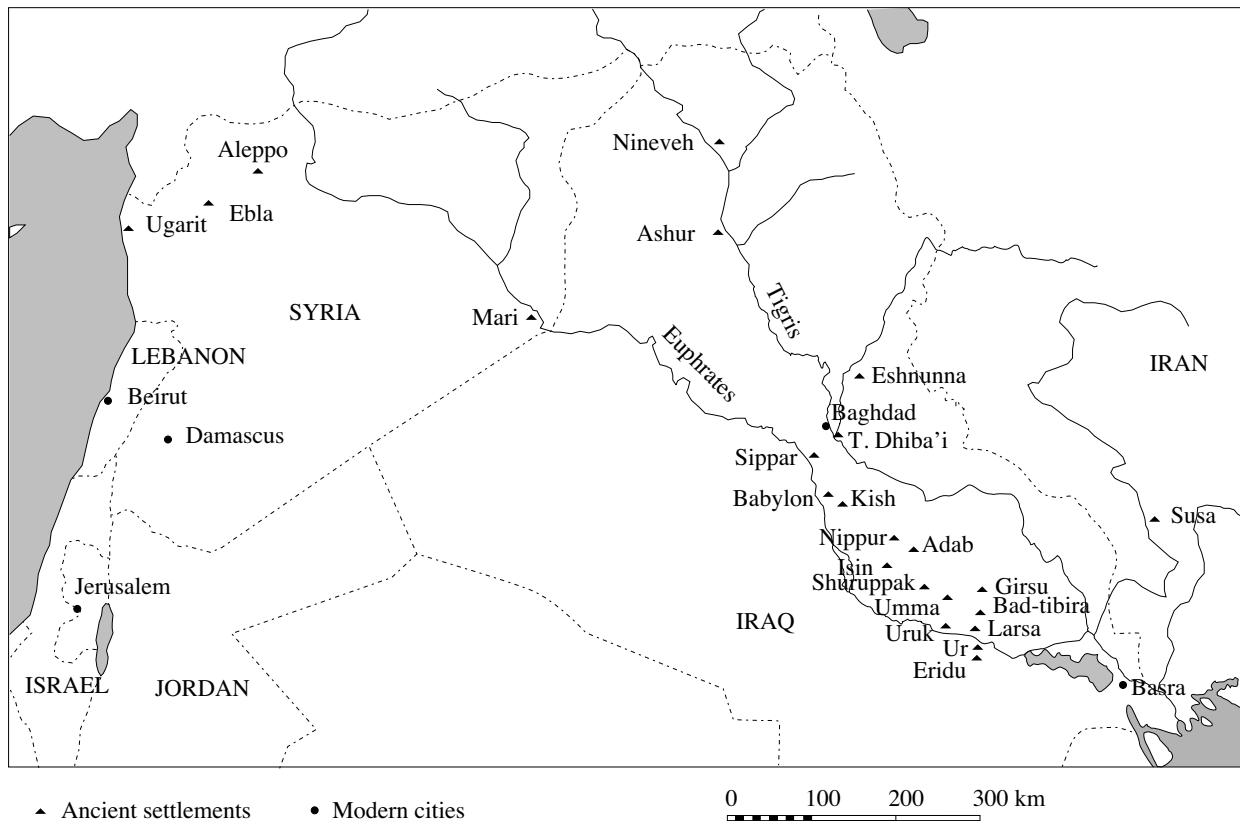


Fig. 9.2. A map of Mesopotamia and surrounding regions.

### 9.3. MS 2855. A New Version of the Antediluvian Part of the Sumerian King List

The beginning of the *Sumerian King List* is reproduced below, in the Ash. 23.444 version:

**The Sumerian King List, lines 1-39**

1	[nam].lugal an.ta èd.dè.a.ba /	After the kingship descended from heaven,
2	[eri]dug <sup>ki</sup> nam.lugal.la /	In <b>Eridu</b> was the kingship.
3-4	eridug <sup>ki</sup> .á.lu.lim lugal / mu 8 <sub>šár</sub> ì.ak /	In Eridu, Alulim (was) king, ruled for 8(šár) years.
5	á.làl.gar mu 10 <sub>šár</sub> ì.ak /	Alalgar ruled for 10(šár) years.
6-7	2 lugal / mu.<bi> 18 <sub>šár</sub> ìb.ak /	<b>2 kings ruled for 18(šár) years.</b>
8	eridug <sup>ki</sup> ba.šub.<bé.en> /	Eridu <I> let fall,
9-10	nam.lugal.bi bàd.tibira <sup>ki</sup> .šè / ba.de <sub>6</sub> /	the kingship was taken away to Badtibira.

1. In Friberg, *RA* 94 (2000), 174, the dates must be corrected. Thus, the dates of the known “early OB” mathematical texts are from around 1821 BC to 1763 BC, the year when Hammurabi defeated Rim-Suen of Larsa. The ones called “middle OB” are from 1763 BC to 1739 BC = Samsuiluna 11, the year when Ur, Larsa, and Uruk were abandoned. Similarly, the mathematical texts from Nippur cannot be from a date later than 1721 BC, the year when Nippur and Isin were abandoned.

11-12	bàd.tibira <sup>ki</sup> en.me.en.lú.an.na / mu 12 <sub>šár</sub> ì.ak /	In <b>Badtibira</b> , Enmenluana ruled for 12(šár) years.
13-14	en.me.en.gal.an.na / mu 8 <sub>šár</sub> ì.ak /	Enmegalana ruled for 8(šár) years.
15	<sup>d</sup> dumu.zi sipa mu 10 <sub>šár</sub> ì.ak	Dumuzi, the shepherd, ruled for 10(šár) years.
16-17	3 lugal / mu.bi 30 <sub>šár</sub> íb.ak /	<b>3 kings ruled for 30(šár) years.</b>
18	bàd.tibira <sup>ki</sup> ba.šub.bé.en /	Then Badtibira I let fall,
19-20	nam.lugal.bi la.ra.ak <sup>ki</sup> .<šè> ba.de <sub>6</sub> /	the kingship was taken away <to> Larak.
21	la.ra.ak <sup>ki</sup> en.sipad.zid.an.na / mu 8 <sub>šár</sub> ì.ak /	In <b>Larak</b> , Ensipadzidana ruled for 8(šár) years.
22-23	1 lugal / mu.bi 8 <sub>šár</sub> íb.ak /	<b>1 king ruled for 8(šár) years.</b>
24	la.ra.ak <sup>ki</sup> ba.šub.bé.en /	Then Larak I let fall,
25	nam.lugal.bi zimbir <sup>ki</sup> .šè ba.de <sub>6</sub> /	the kingship was taken away to Sippar.
26-27	zimbir <sup>ki</sup> en.me.en.dúr.an.na / lugal.àm mu 18 <sub>šár</sub> 50 <sub>gěš</sub> ì.ak /	In <b>Sippar</b> , Enmendurana was king, ruled for 18(šár) 50(gěš) years.
28-29	1 lugal / mu.bi 18 <sub>šár</sub> 50 <sub>gěš</sub> íb.ak /	<b>1 king ruled for 18(šár) 50(gěš) years.</b>
30	zimbir <sup>ki</sup> ba.šub.bé.en /	Then Zimbir I let fall,
31	nam.lugal.bi šuruppak <sup>ki</sup> .<šè> ba.de <sub>6</sub> /	the kingship was taken away <to> Shuruppak.
32-33	šuruppak <sup>ki</sup> ubur.du.du / lugal.àm mu 5 <sub>šár</sub> 10 <sub>gěš</sub> ì.ak /	In <b>Shuruppak</b> , Ubartutu was king, ruled for 5(šár) 10(gěš) years.
34-35	1 lugal / mu.bi 5 <sub>šár</sub> 10 <sub>gěš</sub> íb.ak /	<b>1 king ruled for 5(šár) 10(gěš) years.</b>
36-38	5 iri <sup>ki</sup> .me.eš / 8 lugal / mu.bi 1 <sub>šár.gal</sub> 7 <sub>šár</sub> íb.ak /	<b>In 5 cities 8 kings ruled for 1(šár).gal 7(šár) years.</b>
39	a.ma.ru ba.ùr.<<ra.ta>>	Then the flood swept over.

This is the so called “antediluvian” part of the *Sumerian King List*, with the names of five cities that allegedly held the kingship “before the flood”. The numbers for the reigns of the eight antediluvian kings are so large that it is clear that they are non-historical and unrealistic. They are therefore traditionally referred to as “legendary numbers”. In previously published discussions of the *Sumerian King List*, including the compiled *ETCSL* version, the legendary numbers are converted to decimal numbers, which in no way makes it easier to understand what they stand for. In the transliteration and translation above, the numbers are reproduced, without conversion to decimal numbers, as multiples of the gěš (60) and the šár (sq. 60).

**MS 2855**, lines 1-22 (see Fig. 9.3 below) is, essentially, a close parallel to Ash. 1923.444, lines 1-39 (col. i). The same cities, and the same kings, are listed in both texts, in the same order, although the MS 2855 version is much less elaborate than the version in Ash. 1923.444.

#### MS 2855

1	eridu <sup>ki</sup> <-ga> nam.lugal	In <b>Eridu</b> (was) the kingship.
2	a.lu.lim [lugal] / mu 8 <sub>šár</sub> .ì.ak /	Alulim (was) <i>king</i> , ruled for 8(šár) years.
3	e.lál.gar mu 10 <sub>šár</sub> 2 <sub>šár</sub> .ì.[ak] /	Alalgar <i>ruled</i> for 12(šár) years.
4	eridu <sup>ki</sup> ba.šub	Eridu fell,
5	nam.lugal.šè / bàd.tibira <sup>ki</sup> ra.<šè> ba.de <sub>6</sub> /	as for the kingship, it was taken away <to> <b>Badtibira</b> .
6-7	am.mi.lú.an.na lugal / mu 10 <sub>šár</sub> .ì.ak /	Enmeluana (was) king, ruled for 10(šár) years.
8	en.me.gal.an.na mu 8 <sub>šár</sub> .ì.ak	Enmegalana ruled for 8(šár) years.
9	<sup>d</sup> dumu.zi mu 8 <sub>šár</sub> .ì.ak /	Dumuzi ruled for 8(šár) years.
10	bàd.tibira <sup>ki</sup> ra [ba.šub] /	Badtibira <i>fell</i> ,
11	nam.lugal.šè la.[ra.ak <sup>ki</sup> .šè ba.de <sub>6</sub> ] /	as for the kingship, <i>it was taken away to Larak</i> .
12-13	en.sipa.zi.[an.na lugal] / mu 3 <sub>šár</sub> .50 <sub>gěš</sub> .ì.[ak] /	Ensipaziana (was) king, <i>ruled</i> for 3(šár) 50(gěš) years.
14-15	la.ra.ak<sup>ki</sup> ba.šub / nam.lugal.šè zimbir <sup>ki</sup> .[šè ba.de <sub>6</sub> ] /	Larak fell, as for the kingship, it was taken away to <b>Sippar</b> .
16	<en.>me.dur.an.na mu 2 <sub>šár</sub> .ì.ak /	<En>medurana ruled for 2(šár) years.
17-18	zimbir <sup>ki</sup> ba.šub / nam.lugal.šè šuruppak <sup>ki</sup> .šè ba.[de <sub>6</sub> ]	Sippar fell, as for the kingship, <i>it was taken away to Shuruppak</i> ,

19	ubur.du.du <lugal> mu 10 <sub>šár</sub> .i.ak /	Ubartutu ruled for 10(šár) years.
20	[š̄u.niġ]in 8 lugal /	<b>In all 8 kings,</b>
21-22	[m]u.bi.me.eš 1 <sub>šár</sub> ×1.gal 1 <sub>šár</sub> 50 <sub>gés</sub> / {x x} i.ak	<b>their years 1(šár).gal 1(šár) 50(gés) (that) they ruled.</b>
23	ši.mi.it <sup>?</sup> nam <sup>!</sup> .lugal <sup>!</sup> mi.r[i.x x] /	?
24	ab za.gi im mu za ni eš lu [x] /	?
25	ki ig.bi ni im ši sá x /	?
26	da a na x [xxx] /	?
27	ù [x x x x x]	?
28	i za [x x x x x]	?
1. e.	ši ta za am ù diri lú diš / gù dè <sup>!</sup> <a> <sup>?</sup>	?

(The subscript near the lower edge of the reverse and on the left edge is shallowly impressed, partly damaged, and totally unintelligible. The language may be neither Sumerian nor Akkadian.)

MS 2855 is a relatively small and fairly well preserved clay tablet with rounded corners and elaborate sign forms. It is probably from the early part of the Isin period. (Of all the clay tablets discussed above in this book, the only one of a similar format is the table of reciprocals HS 201, which is either early Old Babylonian or from the Ur III period. See the photo in Oelsner, in *ChV* (2001), 53-59.)

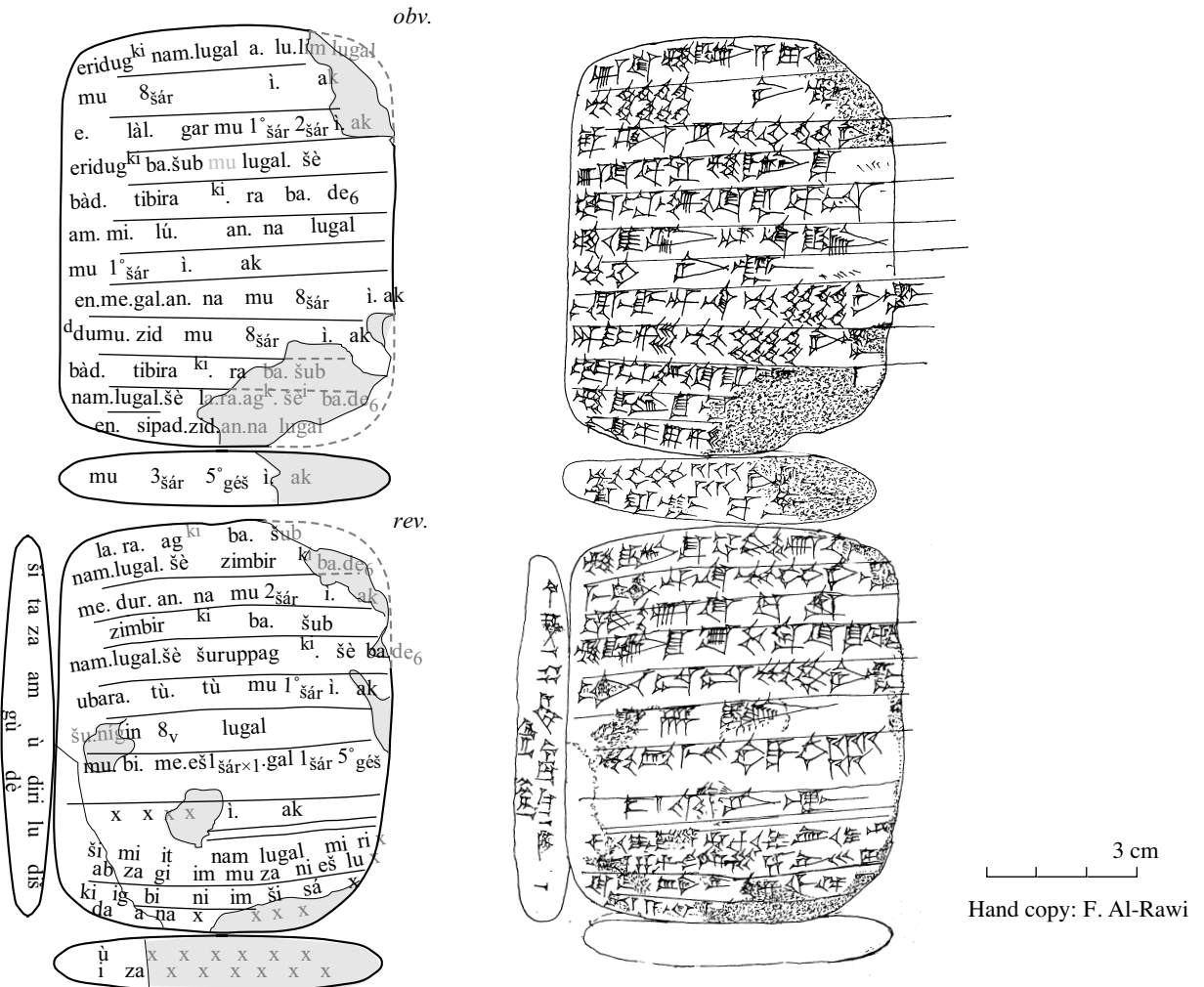


Fig. 9.3. MS 2855. An early OB or Ur III version of the antediluvian part of the *Sumerian King List*.



If this assumption is correct, MS 2855 is older than the other known versions of the antediluvian king list, which are all Old Babylonian or later. This is somewhat curious, in view of the fact that much of the narrative framework in Ash. 1923.444 is missing in MS 2855 (see below).<sup>2</sup> The lengths of the reigns of the kings are also not the same in the two texts. Thus, even if it is likely that there was a common source to the two texts, one is not a copy of the other.

The reference to the kingship descending from heaven in Ash. 23.444, line 1,

[nam].lugal an.ta èd.dè.a.ba	After the kingship descended from heaven
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and the reference to the flood in Ash. 23.444, line 39,

a.ma.ru ba.ùr	Then the flood swept over
---------------	---------------------------

have no counterparts in MS 2855. Jacobsen observed in *AS 11* (1939), 58-61, that these lines suggest that the antediluvian section of the king list was in some way derived from the Sumerian story about the beginning of the world and the flood ([www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/section1/c174.htm](http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/section1/c174.htm) & [tr174.htm](http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr174.htm)).

That story describes in segment A the creation of men and animals, then proceeds in segment B, 6-7, to tell about the descent of kingship from heaven:

6	[ud x] x nam.lugal.la an.ta èd.dè.a.ba / men mah <sup>giš</sup> gu.za nam.lugal.la	After the ... of kingship had descended from heaven, the exalted crown and throne of kingship
7	an.ta èd.a.ba / ...	had descended from heaven ...

The story goes on, in segment B, 9-15, to describe the founding of five cities, mentioned in the same order as in MS 2855 and Ash. 1923.444: Eridu, Badtibira, Larak, Sippar, Shuruppak:

9	... [iri.bi.e].ne [sig <sub>4</sub> .bi ki kug.ga im].ma.an.da.šub /	...the bricks of the cities were laid in holy places,
10	mu.bi ba.an.sa <sub>4</sub> kab dug <sub>4</sub> .ga [ba.ħal].ħal.la /	their names were announced and the ... were distributed.
11	nesag iri.bi.e.ne eridug <sup>ki</sup> máš.sag <sup>d</sup> nu.dím.mud mi.ni.in.šúm /	The first of the cities, <b>Eridu</b> , was given to Nudimmud the leader.
12	2.kam.ma.šè nu.gig.ra bad.tibira <sup>ki</sup> mi.ni.in.šúm /	The 2nd, <b>Badtibira</b> , was given to the Mistress.
13	3.kam.ma la.ra.ag <sup>d</sup> pa.bíl. {ħur}.sag mi.ni.in.šúm /	The 3rd, <b>Larak</b> , was given to Pabilsag.
14	4.kam.ma zimbir <sup>ki</sup> šul <sup>d</sup> utu mi.ni.in.šúm /	The 4th, <b>Zimbir</b> , was given to hero Utu.
15	5.kam.ma šuruppag <sup>d</sup> sùd <sup>ki</sup> .ra mi.ni.in.šúm / ...	The 5th, <b>Shuruppak</b> , was given to Sud. ...

After a lacuna, segment C begins the story of the flood, which, interrupted by new lacunas, continues through segments D and E. The end of the flood is related in segment D in the following words:

3	ud 7.àm gi <sub>6</sub> 7.àm /	7 days, 7 nights,
4	a.ma.ru kalam.ma ba.ùr.a.ta /	the flood swept over the land,
5	giš <sup>ma</sup> gur <sub>4</sub> .gur <sub>4</sub> a gal.la im.ħul tuk <sub>4</sub> .tuk <sub>4</sub> .a.ta /	the big boat was rocked by waves and windstorms,
6	<sup>d</sup> utu i.im.ma.ra.éd	Utu the sun-god came out,
	an.ki.a ud gá.gá /	brightening heaven and earth with his rays.
7	zi.ud.sù.rá <sup>giš</sup> má gur <sub>4</sub> .gur <sub>4</sub> ab.búr mu.un.da.bùru /	Ziusudra could break an opening in the huge boat, ...

It is interesting that Ziusudra, the Sumerian Noah, is not mentioned in Ash. 1923.444 (or MS 2855), but is mentioned in the other known versions of the antediluvian king list.

Missing in MS 2855 are, in addition to the narrative framework, the summaries for each dynasty, ‘so and so many kings ruled for so and so many years’, as well as the final summary ‘In 5 cities, 8 kings ruled for so and so many years’. Finally, the names of the cities are never repeated in MS 2855, as they are in Ash. 23.444, lines 2-3, 10-11, 20-21, 25-26, and 31-32.

2. Much of the narrative framework, including the summaries, is missing also in Steinkeller’s Ur III version (*USKL*) of the *Sumerian King List*, although it asserts in lines 1-2 that “The kingship descended from heaven, Kiš was king”. (The antediluvian king list is not present in *USKL*, which begins with a long, uninterrupted list of kings in Kiš.)

On the other hand, MS 2855 has nearly the same formula for change of dynasty as Ash. 23.444, while other variants of the antediluvian king list have other formulas. In MS 2855, the formula is

A<sup>ki</sup> ba.šub nam.lugal.šè B<sup>ki</sup>.šè ba.de<sub>6</sub>

city A fell, this? kingship was taken away to city B

and in Ash. 23.444 it is the slightly different

A<sup>ki</sup> ba.šub.bé.en nam.lugal.bi B<sup>ki</sup>.šè ba.de<sub>6</sub>

city A I let fall, its kingship was taken away to city B

In *JCS* 17 (1963), 41-42, Finkelstein discusses the verb ba.šub.bé.en and ventures the conjecture that the use of the first person can be “explained as the form which existed in the literary source of the antediluvian tradition – in which the speaker presumably is a god (Enlil)”.

The table below tries to update and make more precise the tabular surveys in Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, 45-46. It demonstrates the lack of agreement between known variants of the antediluvian king list.

MS 2855	Ash. 1923.444	UCBC 9-1819	Ash. WB 62	K 11261+	Berosos
<b>Eridu</b> Alulim 8 <sub>šár</sub> Elalgar 12 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Eridu</b> Alulim 8 <sub>šár</sub> Alalgar 10 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Eridu</b> [Alulim] 10 <sub>šár</sub> [A]lalgar 3 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Ha.a<sup>ki</sup> (=Eridu)</b> Alulim 18 <sub>šár</sub> 40 <sub>gés</sub> Alalgar 20 <sub>šár</sub> <b>Larsa</b> [...]kidunnu 20 <sub>šár</sub> [...]alimma 6 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>[Eridu]</b> [Alulim] <sup>?</sup> [...] [Alalgar] <sup>?</sup> [...]	<b>Babylon</b> Aloros 10 sárous Alaparos 3 sárous
<b>Bad-tibira</b> Ammiluana 10 <sub>šár</sub> Enmegalana 8 <sub>šár</sub> Dumuzi 8 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Bad-tibira</b> Enmenluana 12 <sub>šár</sub> Enmengalana 8 <sub>šár</sub> Dumuzi sipa 10 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Bad-tibira</b> Ammeluana 10 <sub>šár</sub> Ensipadzidana 12 <sub>šár</sub> Dumuzi sipa 10 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Bad-tibira</b> Dumuzi sipa 8 <sub>šár</sub> Enmenluana 6 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>[Bad-tibira]</b> [Enmeluana] <sup>?</sup> [...] [Enm]egalana [...] [Dum]uzi sipa [...]	<b>Pautibiblon</b> Amelōn 13 sárous Amenōn 12 sárous Megalaros 18 sárous
<b>Larak</b> Ensipaziana 3 <sub>šár</sub> 50 <sub>gés</sub> <b>Sippar</b> Medurana 2 <sub>šár</sub> <b>Shuruppak</b> Ubartutu 10 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Larak</b> Ensipadzidana 8 <sub>šár</sub> <b>Sippar</b> Enmendurana 8 <sub>šár</sub> 50 <sub>gés</sub> <b>Shuruppak</b> Ubartutu 5 <sub>šár</sub> 10 <sub>gés</sub>	<b>Sippar</b> Enmenduranki 1 <sub>šár</sub> 40 <sub>gés</sub> <b>Shuruppak</b> [Ubartutu] [?] [Ziusudra] <sup>?</sup> 5 <sub>šár</sub> [+?]	<b>Larak</b> Ensipadzidana 10 <sub>šár</sub> <b>Sippar</b> Enmedurana 20 <sub>šár</sub> <b>Shuruppak</b> Ubartutu 8 <sub>šár</sub> Ziusudra 10 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>Sippar</b> Enmeduranki 15 <sub>šár</sub> [+?] <b>Larak</b> Ensipaziana 10 <sub>šár</sub> 20 <sub>gés</sub> [+?] <b>Shuruppak</b> U[bartutu] [...] Ziusudra [...]	Daōnos, shepherd 10 sárous Euedōrachos 18 sárous <b>Laragchos</b> Amempsinos 10 sárous Otiartes 8 sárous Xisuthros 18 sárous
<b>5 cities, 8 kings</b> 1 <sub>šár</sub> ·gal 1 <sub>šár</sub> 50 <sub>gés</sub>	<b>5 cities, 8 kings</b> 1 <sub>šár</sub> ·gal 7 <sub>šár</sub>	<b>4 cities, 8<sup>?</sup> kings</b> 59 <sub>šár</sub> 40 <sub>gés</sub> [+?]	<b>6 cities, 10 kings</b> 2 <sub>šár</sub> ·gal 6 <sub>šár</sub> 40 <sub>gés</sub>	<b>5 cities, 9 kings</b> [...]	<b>3 cities, 10 kings</b> 120 sárous

In addition to MS 2855 and the first column (of eight) on the four-sided prism Ash. 1923.444, the table mentions the following variants of the antediluvian section of the *Sumerian King List*:

Ash. (WB) 1923.444 (Langdon, *OECT* 2 (1923), pl. 1) is a fairly well preserved four-sided prism, inscribed with two columns on each face of the prism. An elaborate version of the antediluvian king list occupies most of the first column.

UCBC 9-1819 (Finkelstein, *JCS* 17 (1963)) a small clay tablet from Khafājī, ancient Tutub, from the time between Suen-muballit and Samsuiluna of Babylon. It is a school text, with the antediluvian king list inscribed on the reverse, while there is the beginning of a typical Old Babylonian letter on the obverse. The antediluvian king list is just as concisely worded as the one on MS 2855, without much of the narrative framework of Ash. 1923.444. The term used for the termination of a

dynasty is *ba.gul* ‘it was destroyed’, not *ba.šub* or *ba.šub.bè.en* as in MS 2855 and Ash. 1923.444.

Ash. WB 62 (Langdon, *OECT* 2 (1923), pl. 6) is a small clay tablet, inscribed only on the obverse, with a brief version of the antediluvian king list. The insertion in the list of two kings from Larsa shows that the text was written at Larsa. The end of a dynasty is indicated in this text only by a concise summary mentioning the number of kings in that dynasty.

K 11261+ (Lambert, in *Symbolae Böhl* (1973)) is a join of three small Late Assyrian fragments from Ashurbanipal’s library at Niniveh. The narrative framework seems to be just as extensive as in Ash. 1923.444, with summaries after each dynasty, a final summary, and a (broken) reference at the end of the text to Enlil and the noise [of the humans]. The term used in this text for the change of dynasties is *A<sup>ki</sup> bala.bi ba.kúr nam.lugal.bi B<sup>ki</sup>.šè ba.nigin* ‘the dynasty of city A changed, the kingship moved to city B’.

Berosos was a priest of Bel (Marduk) at Babylon, who wrote a history of Babylon from the mythical beginning, including the reigns of the first 10 kings, and the story of the Flood, up to the time of Alexander. The work (c. 290 BC) was dedicated to king Antiochos I and written in Greek. It is known only through excerpted fragments in the works of several Hellenistic historians. See, for instance, Schnabel, *Berosos* (1923), 261-263.

The list of kings and the years of their reigns in the antediluvian part of the *Sumerian king list* has often been likened to the list of biblical patriarchs in *Genesis* V. Here is, for comparison, the beginning and end of that list:

#### **Genesis V.**

1. This is the book of the generations of Adam. ...  
...
3. And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth;
4. And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years; and he begat sons and daughters;
5. And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.  
...
28. And Lamech lived a hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son;
29. And he called his name Noah, saying ...
30. And Lamech lived after he begat Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begat sons and daughters;
31. And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy and seven years; and he died.
32. And Noah was five hundred years old; and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Including Adam, there are nine patriarchs in this list, before Noah.

The following numbers are mentioned in the list of patriarchs:

	years until the first son is born	years after the first son is born	all the years
Adam	130	800	930
Seth	105	807	912
Enos	90	815	905
Cainan	70	840	910
Mahalaleel	65	830	895
Jared	162	800	962
Enoch	65	300	365
Methuselah	187	782	969
Lamech	182	595	777
Noah	500	—	—

The biblical story of the flood follows in *Genesis* VI-VIII. See, for instance *Genesis* VII, 8:

And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.<sup>3</sup>

3. See Friberg, in *ABD* (1992), for, among other things, a brief account of the use of interesting numbers in the Bible.

#### 9.4. *The Numbers in the Antediluvian King List*

As mentioned already, unrealistically huge numbers are used in the king list for the “legendary reigns” of the antediluvian kings, of the kings of three first dynasties in Kish, and of kings of the first dynasty in Uruk, while more realistic numbers seem to be used for the “historical reigns” of the remaining dynasties. (Similarly, as was shown above, unrealistically large numbers are used in the list of patriarchs in *Genesis V*.) Efforts have been made to explain the origin of such fantasy numbers.

Thus, for instance, in *ASJ* 10 (1988) Steiner tried to find the “real core” of what he called the “legendary numbers” in the *Sumerian King List*. Steiner’s idea was that behind the large numbers for the kings of the earliest dynasties after the flood was the ancients’ concept of the average length of a *generation*, equal to 40 years. He figured that the original author of the *Sumerian King List* had equated each year of the historical reigns of the earliest kings with a generation. Accordingly, he multiplied the lengths of the reigns of the earliest kings with a factor 40. Similarly, Steiner formulated the hypothesis that the reigns of the kings before the flood had been equated with a generation of generations. The effect would be that those reigns had been multiplied with a factor of 40 times 40.

In *JNES* 47 (1988), Young made the interesting observation that many of the reigns of kings in the *Sumerian King List* can be explained as sexagesimal numbers of the kind that one often meets in Old Babylonian mathematical texts: *squares*, *sums of squares*, and *numbers with factors like 7, 11, and 13*.

Both Young and Steiner worked with the decimal equivalents of the sexagesimal numbers actually recorded in the *Sumerian King List*, which made their task more difficult than necessary. A look at a tabular survey like the one exhibited above, shows that there can be no historical background whatsoever to the reigns of the antediluvian kings, since the numbers given in the various variants of the antediluvian king list are so dissimilar.

An alternative explanation, like the one proposed by Steiner, but taking into consideration the fact that the numbers in the king list are sexagesimal, could be that the historical lengths of the reigns of the antediluvian kings were simply multiplied by 1 šár. Then the legendary numbers in MS 2855, for instance, could be interpreted as, respectively, 8, 12, 10, 8, 8, and 4 years, 3 years 10 months, 2 years, and 10 years. However, this alternative explanation, too, is contradicted by the table above showing the dissimilarity of the numbers in the known versions of the antediluvian king list.

It is difficult to see any mathematical pattern behind the numbers in any one of antediluvian king lists, just as behind the numbers in the list of patriarchs in *Genesis V*. The only observable regularity seems to be that all the numbers in the various versions of the antediluvian king list are between  $1 \frac{2}{3}$  šár and 20 šár, with fractions of the šár appearing in four of the 6 versions.

So, perhaps, the correct explanation may be that the origin of the antediluvian king list in its various versions was a popular and long lived *oral tradition*, with the lengths of the reigns imperfectly remembered, but always in the range of the šár because of a natural fascination with big numbers.

In the most elaborate versions of the *Sumerian King List* there are both summaries of the reigns of the kings of each dynasty, and final summaries. Thus, some variants of the *Sumerian King List* end with the final summary ‘11 cities, cities where the kingship was exercised. Together 2 14 kings, their years 8 šár.gal [...] 1 16’ (lines 378-430 of the *ETCSL* version). Also the Late Assyrian fragment has summaries for each dynasty and a final summary. A likely explanation is that Mesopotamian scribes were trained to write not only literary texts, including king lists, but also administrative texts and numerical accounts. So they would naturally have an ingrained habit to include summaries and final summaries in all texts they wrote with long lists of numbers.<sup>4</sup>

#### 9.5. *Mesopotamian Year Names*

The *Sumerian King List*, with its enumeration of kings and the durations of their reigns, may originally, at

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4. Many proto-cuneiform accounts on proto-Sumerian clay tablets from around 3000 BC have summaries (totals) on the reverse of the numbers recorded on the obverse. There may even be final summaries (grand totals) on the reverse, as in the example *MSVO* 4, 66, an important “bread-and-beer text” from Jemdet Nasr (Friberg, *JCS* 51 (1999), Fig. 3.1).

least partly, have been compiled with departure from lists of “year names” for the various kings. Normally, a year was named after a significant event in that year or the immediately preceding year. The following few examples from the reign of the first Ur III king, Ur-Nammu, are borrowed from Sigrist and Damerow, *Mesopotamian Year Names* (2001):

mu ur. <sup>d</sup> nammu lugal	Year when Ur-Nammu became king.
mu ur. <sup>d</sup> nammu lugal.e sig.ta igi.nim.šè gír si bí.sá.a	Year when Ur-Nammu the king put in order the ways from below to above.
mu ur. <sup>d</sup> nammu ni.si.sá kalam.ma mu.ni.gar	Year when Ur-Nammu made justice in the land.
mu en. <sup>d</sup> inanna unug <sup>ki</sup> .a dumu ur. <sup>d</sup> nammu lugal.a maš.e ba.pàd.da	Year when as the en-priest of Inanna in Uruk the son of king Ur-Nammu was chosen by the omens.