On the Sumerian City UB-me^ki, the Alleged "Umma"

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§1. Introduction

§1.1. Recent publications of texts originating from the Umma region in southern Mesopotamia alongside discussions on the location of its urban centers have inspired the present contribution to the "Umma debate."[1] The dispute arises out of the presence of several writings for what some scholars consider a single city of Umma, and the identification of these names with specific sites in southern Iraq. The term "Umma region" designates cities and towns that belonged to the Umma state in the Early Dynastic Period and represented the Umma province in the subsequent Sargonic and Ur III periods. Cities and towns in which "Umma" tablets were excavated, are Jokha (ancient Umma ?), Umm al-Aqarib (Giš(š)a ?), Tell Ibzekh (Zabala) and possibly Tell Schmid (KiAN ?). Illicit excavations must have started there more than a century ago, the majority of texts being acquired through the antiquities market. However, recent regular archaeological investigations have supplemented the number of "Umma tablets" (Almamori 2014a and 2014b; Monaco 2011: 2; Powell 1978; Schrakamp 2013: 202-203).

§1.2. Most text editions take for granted that different writings—^geš(.KASKAL)KUŠU$_2$^ki, UB-me^ki, ḪI×DIŠ—refer to a single site: "Umma." Consequently, all of them are usually rendered as "Umma^ki."[2] This leaves the careful reader no choice but to consult any photos or handcopy that might be available in each case.

§1.3. Lambert was the first to discuss systematically the names of "Umma" (Lambert 1990). He identified two distinctive writings for the city: ^gešKUŠU$_2$^ki and UB-me^ki. After having studied lexical evidence, Lambert concluded that Babylonians believed "Umma" (Umme(n), Umma, Ummi) to be the Sumerian name of the city, while Kišša or Kissa was its Akkadian counterpart. Lambert argued that either Kišša (^gešKUŠU$_2$^ki) and /Umme(n)/ had both been Sumerian, or alternatively, that Kišša might have been Semitic, or that both names were of uncertain origin. He also suggested the writing ^geš-ša$_3$ was a phonetic rendering of ^gešKUŠU$_2$^ki, and believed that UB-me^ki is identical with UB^ki of the Early Dynastic lexical list "Cities." Essentially, he believed, there were two names but only one city.

§1.4. Subsequently, Selz suggested that Ĝiš(š)a (> Old Babylonian lexical Kiš(š)a or Kis(s)a) and Umma (Ubme or Umme/i/a) could in fact have been two different localities in the Umma region (Selz 2003: 508). Frayne made a further step in this direction, identifying five cities and towns in the Umma region with modern tells. According to him, Ĝiša(^gešKUŠU$_2$^ki) is Tell Jokha, and Umma(ḪI×DIŠ) is Umm al-Aqarib (Frayne 2008: 358). He follows the distinction between Umma and Giš(š)a and their identification with Jokha and Umm al-Aqarib in a later work as well (Frayne 2009).

§1.5. Marchesi rejects the theory that ^gešKUŠU$_2$^ki and UB-me^ki represented two different cities.[3] He considers

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[2]   Examples among recent publications include Milone

2005 and Monaco 2011. Earlier publications almost never questioned the fact that the writing ^gešKUŠU$_2$^ki might not refer to Umma (see Almamori 2014a: 5-9).

[3]   See Marchesi 2006: 22 n. 86 and Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 170-171 for the discussion.

the latter solely as a syllabic writing of the former, basing this assumption on a well-known parallel use of writings $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ vs. UB-me^{ki} in Sumerian and Akkadian versions of royal inscriptions of Sargon and Rimuš.[4] He reconstructs the phonemic structure of this single name as /ubmay/, with reference to the writing $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$-a in a cone of Enmetena. Marchesi argues: "in third millennium texts, -a as an allograph of the genitive only occurs with nouns or names ending in /y/, such as e_2-a" (2006: 22 n. 86). However, he uses evidence of one writing ($^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$-a) to reconstruct the phonemic structure of another (UB-me^{ki}). This reconstruction could be plausible if we had the writing *UB-me^{ki}-a. The writing $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$-a in itself proves neither that $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ should be read "Umma," nor that UB-me^{ki} represents the syllabic variant of $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$.[5] Marchesi's theory hinges solely on the above-mentioned use of UB-me^{ki} instead of $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ in the Early Sargonic royal inscriptions. However, there is no proof that UB-me^{ki} is Semitic. At least, no one has yet endeavored to provide its etymology. Consequently, it is hard to explain the use of this name in the Akkadian versions of the royal inscriptions.

§1.6. The final word in the "Umma debate" so far belongs to Almamori (2014a and 2014b). He conducted archaeological research in the region, restudied the already well-known textual evidence on the Lagash-Umma border conflict and supplemented it with archival documents that recently came to light. As a result, he argues that the site Umm al-Aqarib was one of the major cities in the Umma region in the Early Dynastic period. Almamori identifies it with the city Giš(š)a, that appears in Early Dynastic sources mostly in the writing $^{ĝeš(.eš_8)}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$.[6] Umm al-Aqarib declined, probably due to the shift in the river's course that turned the neighboring land into a swamp. An abandonment of the city followed this event. The last traces of occupation might date to the time of Lugalzagesi, according to Almamori (2014b: 156). Giš(š)a and Umma were therefore twin-cities and Jokha-Umma was the less important of two during the Early Dynastic period. Almamori argues that after Umm

al-Aqarib-Giš(š)a had declined, the writing $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ passed over to Umma (Jokha). Accordingly, the logogram changed its pronunciation from /giš(š)a/ to /umme/ or /umma/ (Almamori 2014a: 4-11). Thus $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ of Sargonic and later texts refers to the site Jokha.

§1.7. Taking into consideration the outcome of philological and archaeological research conducted by Selz, Frayne, and Almamori, the hypothesis of two cities, $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ and UB-me^{ki}, during the Early Dynastic period seems plausible. However, here I will neither accept the theory of two cities nor will I support or contest the identifications of the names with respective sites proposed by Selz/Frayne on the one hand and Almamori on the other. This question may receive a credible resolution only after extensive archaeological exploration of the Umma region with the concommitant discovery of provenienced texts. What I am concerned about in the present contribution is to provide another reference to the geographical name UB-me^{ki} in the Early Dynastic material. Why do we still have so few references to this city? Even if we accept the reconstructions by Almamori that UB-me^{ki} was the original Umma, that this site may be identified with Jokha in the Early Dynastic period, and that it had been a "younger sister" to Giš(š)a (Umm al-Aqarib), there must still be more texts recording its name.

§2. References to UB-me^{ki} Hitherto Known
§2.1. As stated above, Sargon and Rimuš used the writing $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$ in Sumerian versions of their inscriptions while UB-me^{ki} replaced it in their Akkadian counterparts. Therefore, both writings refer to a single city during the Sargonic period, according to Almamori Jokha.

§2.2. *RGTC* 1, p. 168, provides a single known reference to UB-me^{ki}—*BIN* 8, 159—that the editors attribute to Early Sargonic Nippur. However, as suggested by Steinkeller, there are a number of Presargonic texts in *BIN* 8 and elsewhere that originate from Isin (Steinkeller and Postgate 1992: 5-8). It may thus be that *BIN* 8, 159, comes from this city as well.[7] As for the date, its appearance resembles texts from "Umma" dating to Lugalzagesi. Therefore, its date may well be either ED IIIb or Early Sargonic. As for contents, *BIN* 8, 159, is a partly damaged cumulative account of transactions with silver and barley. Rev. ii 2 provides the reference to the geographical name: [break] Lugal-inim / UB-me^{ki} / maškim$_x$(KAS$_4$)-be$_6$: "… Lugal-inim (of) UBme, its (i.e. a transaction's) control-

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4   See Almamori 2014a: 10-11 with further references.

5   Here I do not touch upon the question of the reading of $^{ĝeš}KUŠU_2{}^{ki}$. This deserves a separate comprehensive study, which would attempt to not only provide the reading of this logogram but also propose its etymology.

6   As one can see, scholars who suggest that Gišša was a city different from Umma dispute the phonemic structure for the name of the city: Ĝiš(š)a, Ĝiša, and Giš(š)a. I conventionally employ the latter. No etymology has been offered yet.

7   I thank Aage Westenholz for this suggestion. See recently *CUSAS* 26, 44, for another similar Early Dynastic / Early Sargonic text from Isin.

ler."[8]

§2.3. An Ur III reference to UB-me^{ki} booked in *RGTC* 2, 202 (unpublished document A 26335), proves to be a phantom, as was demonstrated to me by Walter Farber. The editors of *RGTC* 2 seem to have taken a reference Ur-^{ĝeš}gigir ensi$_2$ UB.ME^{ki} "Urgigir, the governor of UB.ME" directly from the PhD dissertation by W. W. Hallo (1953: 50 and 77) without collating the unpublished tablet. As suggested by Farber, Hallo did not collate the tablet either, but took this reference from a hand-written catalogue of the Chicago Oriental Institute Ur III tablets. As collation by Farber shows, the tablet is a "well preserved short standard withdrawal of two amounts of barley (zi-ga-am$_3$), sealed on both sides, demonstrably from Umma and clearly Ur III (undated)." The passage of interest appears on a seal impression whose legend reads: Lu$_2$-i$_3$-⌈zu?⌉ / dub-sar / dumu Ur-^{ĝeš}gigir / ensi$_2$ ^{ĝeš}KUŠU$_2$^{ki}-ka. This leaves us with a single known reference to UB-me^{ki} in archival texts.[9]

§3. UB$^{(ki)}$ is Not UB-me^{ki}

§3.1. Lambert believed that UB-me^{ki} is the successor of the writing UB$^{(ki)}$ in lexical lists (Lambert 1990: 78). The scholarly community almost unanimously accepted his opinion. This leads to the interpretation of the sign UB in Late Uruk texts as referring to "Umma", because the predecessor of the lexical list "ED Cities" (*MEE* 3 p. 233 l. 90), "Archaic Cities" (*ATU* 3 p. 146 l. 21), uses UB instead of later UB^{ki}. According to this line of logic, the writing for Umma has evolved as follows: UB > UB^{ki} > UB-me^{ki}. This seems a logical, and thus seductive conclusion. Nevertheless, it is incorrect.

§3.2. The geographical name UB$^{(ki)}$ of Late Uruk and Early Dynastic sources cannot be identical with UB-me^{ki} = Umma, because UB$^{(ki)}$ may have been the writing of several localities, none of which were situated in southern Mesopotamia.

§3.3. Relying on the analysis of pictograms for cities on Early Dynastic I seal impressions from Ur, Matthews suggested that UB could represent the site Jemdet Nasr. The

city UB appears on five of 23 sealings (Matthews 1993: 41-43). Matthews summarized his analysis in a figure (ib.: 42) and explained: "These correlations may be at least partly understood in terms of the geographical spread of the named cities, as depicted on the map (Fig. 26), which also shows ancient water courses as reconstructed from modern survey work. The high correlation between Keš and Adab and Larsa and Ur may reflect the intimate water connections between these cities, while low correlation between Nippur and UB (if indeed Jemdet Nasr) and Keš and Eridu, for example, may indicate an absence of water connections" (Matthews 1993: 42-43).

§3.4. Englund tentatively suggested that Jemdet Nasr could be identified with the writing NI.RU. The latter appears frequently in texts from that site (Englund 1998: 179 n. 450, 209). Monaco contested this interpretation by postulating that NI-RU was an administrative term (Monaco 2004: 3 n. 4).

§3.5. It seems that UB indeed referred to an ancient site, either Jemdet Nasr itself or a neighboring town/city. This assumption draws on the numerous references in which the sign UB appears in the colophons of Jemdet Nasr texts. Notably, UB appears in such sign combinations that make it tempting to interpret it as a geographical name. See for instance UB AB which may be eš$_3$:UB "sanctuary of UB."[10]

§3.6. Steinkeller compared UB of the "List of Geographical Names" (LGN)[11] in line 90, with U-bi$_2$-um^{ki} in Ur III sources (Steinkeller 1986: 34 + n. 33). The reason for this identification is not evident from the article itself. Steinkeller saw UB as an abbreviation of UB-me^{ki}, thus taking Lambert's opinion for a proven fact. UB appears in LGN after ŠID.NUN^{ki} = Gi-zu$_2$-na^{ki}. The site was situated in northern Babylonia, according to Steinkeller.[12]

§3.7. Frayne proposes reading *Kibrātu(m)* for UB of LGN. He provides no explanation for that choice either (Frayne 2009: 52, 56).

§3.8. Summing up the discussion of the geographical name UB$^{(ki)}$: It was a town or a city in northern Babylonia

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[8] This interpretation of KAS$_4$ courtesy Aage Westenholz. Despite the fact that KAS$_4$ means "messenger," the context of iv 7'-rev. i 1, where the receipt of silver is confirmed by Ur-gu, the overseer, implies that KAS$_4$ is here an abbreviation of the term maškim(PA.KAS$_4$), "controller."

[9] *RGTC* 2 (Ur III period) pp. 204-211, provides only GIŠ.UH$_3$ for "Umma." Lambert 1990: 75 rejected the reading Um-ma^{ki} recorded in *RGTC* 2, p. 212.

[10] E.g. in *MSVO* 1, 13, the sign combination UB AB appears two times.

[11] See Frayne 1992: 1 with further references for the publication history of this lexical text.

[12] See *CUSAS* 17: 213, for the location of Gizuna. See also Schrakamp 2015: 222 + n. 255.

Figure 1: photo of MS 4746, with detail view of obv. iv 9.

whose name and identification with a modern site remain uncertain. It certainly was not Umma, which was much further to the south. As to the connection between UB$^{(ki)}$ and UB-me^{ki}, there is no proof whatsoever that the former is the predecessor of the latter.

§3.9. There is an interesting writing in the LGN resembling that of UB-me. This is LAK457-me^{ki} appearing ten lines after UB^{ki}.[13] LAK457 is a star-formed sign and thus resembles UB. Nevertheless, I doubt that LAK457-me^{ki} of LGN is identical with UB-me^{ki}. LAK457-me^{ki} occurs in the context of northern Mesopotamian towns and cities; see, for instance, the well-known Akšak and Aššur.[14] However, the text edited below implies that UB-me^{ki} was a locality in southern Mesopotamia.

§4. The Earliest Definite Reference to UB-me^{ki}
§4.1. To my knowledge, the geographical name UB-me^{ki} first appears in the text MS 4746. This administrative

document is of uncertain provenience and, judging from its script, dates back to the Early Dynastic IIIa ("Fara") period, ca. 2600 BC. Measurements of the text are: 72×73×28 mm. I was able to collate it several times during my visits to the Schøyen Collection in 2013-2015.

§4.2. MS 4746 is an account of personnel listing 22 individuals mentioned by their personal names. Their professional titles, and localities they are from, also appear sporadically. The reason for listing these persons is unclear. An individual named Ka'a appears in the colophon. This indicates that he was either the supervisor of the persons in question, or was responsible for the transaction, the nature of which is also unclear.

§4.3. *MS 4746* (see figure 1)
Account of personnel
Early Dynastic IIIa; unclear provenience

obverse
i

1.	1 šubur	*1 Šubur,*
	KA-gul	*the …;*
	1 e$_2$-UD-pa-⌈e$_3$⌉	*1 E'UDpa'e;*
	1 šeš-ĝeštin	*1 Šeš-ĝeštin;*
5.	1 ^{d}en-lil$_2$-ak	*1 Enlilak;*
	1 amar-saman$_x$	*1 Amar-saman;*
	(ŠE.BU.NUN)	

ii

1.	1 ba-za	*1 Baza,*
	ur:^{d}šara$_2$	*(of) Ur-Šara;*
	1 en-ḫe$_2$:ĝal$_2$	*1 Enḫeĝal;*
	1 ur:nin-ĝir$_2$-su	*1 Ur-Ninĝirsu;*
5.	1 nagar	*1 Nagar;*
	1 ⌈ḪAR?⌉-ĝeštin	*1 …ĝeštin;*[15]
	1 šubur	*1 Šubur,*
	sa$_x$(ŠU$_2$.SA)-du$_8$-du$_8$	*(of) Sadudu;*
	1 pa$_4$-NAM$_2$	*1 PaNAM;*

iii

1.	1 ak	*1 Ak(a),*
	nagar	*the carpenter;*
	1 ⌈NE⌉-nu-si	*1 NEnusi;*[16]
	1 e$_2$-na	*1 Ena;*
5.	1 ⌈u$_4$⌉-bi-kur-ra	*1 Ubikura;*
	1 ig-nu-gi$_4$	*1 Ignugi*
	SAG-ZA-SI^{ki}	*(from) SAGZASI;*[17]

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[13] See *MEE* 3 no. 56 v 8 (p. 221).

[14] *MEE* 3 no. 56 v 7 and 10, respectively.

[15] The most fitting personal names would be MUNUS-ĝeštin or šita-ĝeštin (Pomponio 1987: 181-182, 230-231). Nevertheless, the traces of the sign look more like a diamond-shaped sign, e.g. ḪAR.

[16] Cf. the personal name Lugal-NE-nu-si (Andersson 2012: 368).

[17] Read saĝ-dir?

1 al$_6$-lu$_5$	*1 Allu(lu);*

iv

1. 1 niĝ$_2$-ti | *1 Niĝti*
   ĝir$_2$-su^{ki} | *(from) Ĝirsu;*
   1 a:zu$_5$ | *1 Azu*
   lagaš$_x$ | *(from) Lagash;*
   (BURU$_4$.LA.ḪU)^{ki} |
5. 1 šeš:tur | *1 Šeštur,*
   simug | *the smith;*
   1 lu$_2$-gid$_2$ | *1 Lugid,*
   e$_2$-la:lum$_x$(LAK218) | *(of) Elalum;*
   UB-me^{ki} | *(from) UBme.*

reverse

i

1. ⌜gu$_2$:an-še$_3$⌝ | *total:*
   22 ⌜ka$_5$⌝:a | *22 (persons under) Ka'a.*
   rest blank

§4.4. Many personal names in the document are recorded in Fara texts. This does not necessary indicate Šuruppak as its provenience. For instance, SA in obv. ii 8 has a writing ŠU$_2$+SA that is not a characteristic of Fara texts. Judging by personal names such as Ur-Šara and Ur-Ningirsu and geographic names Girsu, Lagash and UBme, if it indeed refers to Umma, the text might have been excavated in the territories of the Early Dynastic Umma or Lagash states. We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that the text originates elsewhere, for instance in central (e.g. Adab) or even northern Babylonia (Isin, Nippur, etc.).

§4.5. Four of the 22 individuals are recorded together with their home cities: SAGZASI, Ĝirsu, Lagash and UBme. Two of them (Ĝirsu and Lagash) are from the far south of Mesopotamia. Unfortunately, the localization SAGZASI remains unidentified.[18] If it were a southern Babylonian city, this would strongly suggest that all cities mentioned in the text lay in the extreme south of Mesopotamia. Either way, UB-me^{ki} could not have been situated elsewhere, since Sargon and his son used this writing to refer to Umma.

§5. Conclusions

§5.1. The historical value of the present text consists in offering the earliest known reference to the geographical name UB-me^{ki}. If, as Almamori argues, this writing may be identified with the city of Umma, I fail to see why it is not well documented in the hundreds of Early Dynastic Umma texts that have recently came to light. Both references to UB-me^{ki} appear in Early Dynastic texts, which does not contradict Almamori's theory. However, the scarcity of the references to UB-me^{ki} precludes, for the time being, its unreserved identification with the city of Umma of the Early Dynastic period. Let us hope that further references to UB-me^{ki} will help solve this issue, on which the reconstruction of the geography and history of the Umma region in the Early Dynastic period strongly depends.

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[18]   Cf. the similar geographical names in Abu Salabikh texts a-ḫa-ar-si and ar-A.SI (Krebernik 1998: 295).

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