



Commercial Activity in Sargonic Mesopotamia

Author(s): Benjamin R. Foster

Source: *Iraq*, Spring, 1977, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1977), pp. 31-43

Published by: British Institute for the Study of Iraq

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4200046>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



British Institute for the Study of Iraq is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Iraq*

JSTOR

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN SARGONIC MESOPOTAMIA

By BENJAMIN R. FOSTER

Records of commercial activity from Sargonic Mesopotamia offer a wealth of evidence to the student of ancient trade and business. In view of the richness of the documentation and the dearth of studies dealing with it, a broad survey of the problems and evidence seems called for in preference to a detailed study of a particular issue or group of texts.¹ Questions that such a survey confronts are the nature and purpose of commerce in Sargonic Mesopotamia; who the people were who engaged in it and why; what the sources of their capital were; what commodities they dealt in, where and why; how their business was conducted, and what sort of records they kept. Documents and letters from various sites provide answers to some of these questions, even if they raise other problems of their own. This essay considers each of these questions in turn and the evidence the texts provide that helps to answer them.

Commerce in the Sargonic period is best defined by recourse to contemporaneous terminology: *šám*, that is, buying and selling of commodities.² The purpose of this commerce was two-fold: to make a profit and to acquire goods not available locally in Mesopotamia. Most of the available documents are records of business transactions of a profitable sort. Of these two possible motives for commerce: personal or institutional profit and the necessity of importing foreign commodities, the profit motive was probably the more important in the Sargonic period. Evidence for this hypothesis will be offered below.

The question of who engaged in this commercial activity is complicated by uncertainty about the role of the state in Mesopotamian commerce of the third millennium B.C. Several theories, which differ in detail, emphasize the importance of the crown in economic activity of third millennium Mesopotamia. These theories, most of which may be grouped under the rubric "state socialism," assign to the state dominance or even monopoly of various means of production and exchange, especially in the Sargonic and Ur III periods.³ The evidence however yields a

¹ No previous study of this subject is known to me. Background information can be found in M. E. L. Mallowan, "The Mechanics of Trade in Western Asia" (*Iran* 3 (1965), 1-7); A. L. Oppenheim, "Trade in the Ancient Near East" (*V International Congress of Economic History* (Moscow, 1970), 1-37); G. Pettinato, "Il commercio con l'estero della Mesopotamia Meridionale nel 3. millennio av. Cr." (*Mesopotamia* 7 (1972), 43-166); H. E. W. Crawford, "Mesopotamia's Invisible Exports in the Third Millennium" (*World Archaeology* 5 (1973), 232-241); Philip L. Kohl, "Carved Chlorite Vessels: a Trade in Finished Commodities in the mid-Third Millennium" (*Expedition* 18 (1975), 18-31). Note for example that the Sargonic period is not referred to in

Leemans' brief sketch of the pre-Old Babylonian merchant, *SD* III, 40 ff. The text references cited below are illustrative only and are not intended to be exhaustive.

² For discussion of this word and its graphic representations, see J. Krecher, *ZA* 63 (1974), 151 ff.

³ For the concept of state socialism, see I. J. Gelb, *Studi in Onore di Edouardo Volterra* (Rome, 1969), 1:146 f., 153; V. V. Struve, *VDI* 1948 No. 2, 22 ff. Additional literature on this question may be found in B. Foster, *Umma in the Sargonic Period* (forthcoming), Chapter I note 12; and M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford, 1967), 3:1327 note 25.

somewhat different picture. While state establishments were indeed active in commerce and enjoyed the advantage of large resources, individuals, sometimes on their own, sometimes through these same state establishments, participated in profitable business enterprises.⁴

To consider first private businessmen, one must distinguish between those who operated entirely on their own with their own resources and those who took advantage of lucrative opportunities that state service provided. One means of identifying such people is to see what sort of records they kept. Some private businessmen kept personal accounts. These were characterized by use of the vernacular and absence of the formal administrative terminology used by the state bureaucracy; a handwriting and tablet form often less refined than those of official records; and use of the first person rather than the third or impersonal usage favoured in official records. Documents that may plausibly be interpreted as records of this type include the archive of Quradum, a businessman perhaps at home in Sippar.⁵ In one letter he went into partnership with a man who put up money for a slave whom Quradum agreed in turn to support for six years.⁶ In another record he noted that he had paid out money to buy a certain slave, but had not received the slave by the time he drew up his accounts.⁷ Some idea of the extent of his dealings can be gleaned from his summary account of copper, silver, livestock, oils, garments, and fruits in Tutul, Mari, and URU.SAG.RIG.⁸ To judge from another record, he kept accounts with over a dozen people.⁹

The archive of a certain Ginunu, who was active at an unknown site in the Diyala, may also be the records of a man doing business on his own, though it is possible he held some official post.¹⁰ He dealt mostly in grain and silver,¹¹ and was party to several legal transactions.¹² An associate of his, a certain Šunitum, is named in a variety of texts having to do with distribution of barley and foodstuffs.¹³ Most of these appear to be records of commercial transactions, one a crudely written text in the first person.¹⁴ The most splendid document in this group is a large, four-column account of foods, implements, lumber, and other goods priced in gold.¹⁵

At Umma a certain Ama-é, wife of Ur-Šara, was an enterprising business woman. Ur-Šara was one of a small group of men who contracted to raise state livestock and make regular deliveries of animals and hides to the owner.¹⁶ Neither he nor his wife

⁴ Diakonoff, who generally stresses the importance of the temple and state households in commerce before the Old Babylonian period, seems to grant this point, *VDI* 1968 No. 4, 9. State control of trade is often posited for the Ur III period, e.g. by Hallo, *JCS* 17 (1963), 60.

⁵ First identified by Sollberger, *CT* 50, 8.

⁶ *CT* 50 71. 5 ff.: *enma Qurādum ana Ūtah eqabbī, atta īr tašamma anāku 6 MU kišrišu* [].

⁷ *CT* 50 72.4: *īr ulla āhuz* "I did not get the slave".

⁸ *CT* 50 72.

⁹ *CT* 50 74, subscribed *sūti KÙ.BABBAR Qurādum ilput[ū]*, "those who credited Quradum's silver". For *lapātu* (Sumerian TAG) in the sense "book to one's credit", see Stephens, *RA* 49 (1955), 134. For a parallel Sargonic use of Sumerian TAG,

cf. *MAD* 4 98.5. For a similar text but unsubscribed, see *TMH V* 52.

¹⁰ In *OAIC* 52 he complains that bread (?) has not been given to soldiers (aga-uš). These aga-uš were presumably regular military personnel, cf. M. Lambert, *Iranica Antiqua* 6 (1966), 34 ff.; and *BIN* 8 144, in which they hold land allotments, probably of the šuku-type.

¹¹ *OAIC* 3, 8, 9, 10, 11 (cloth).

¹² *OAIC* 12, 14, 37, 49.

¹³ *OAIC* 17-19, 21, 33.

¹⁴ *OAIC* 21. Compare *MDP* 14 78, another transaction in the first person.

¹⁵ *OAIC* 33.

¹⁶ The "Ur-Šara Archive" is reconstructed and analysed in Foster, *Umma in the Sargonic Period*.

held any state office. Ama-é received extensive land allotments from the state, probably on a rental or other contractual basis, and dealt in real estate, metal, and grain.¹⁷ She invested her wealth with various agents. To one man she entrusted foods, aromatics, and wood, probably as an investment,¹⁸ and to another silver.¹⁹ Through another man she bought and sold wool in large quantities.²⁰ One may suppose that she outlived her husband and assumed his responsibilities at his death.²¹ There is no reason to believe her career was exceptional, as women appear in other Sargonic commercial texts.²²

Some people who held state offices took advantage of their positions to engage in commercial activities on their own behalf. Some of these were people who did not trade themselves, but entrusted commodities to official trading agents who traded for them. At Umma during the reign of Šar-kali-šarri a certain Ur-Ninildum, a granary officer, deposited 50 *gur* of emmer into a fund called the "Fund of the Balanced Account."²³ The nature of this fund is discussed more fully below, in consideration of the sources of capital. This fund was used by a state business agent, a certain Abbamu, and contributors to it were presumably reimbursed in proportion to their contributions. Another record for this same agent has entries on behalf of a cook and a royal carpenter.²⁴ In a similar record a cadaster officer and a food officer contributed dates, priced in silver, to an unnamed fund that was probably a merchant's fund of this same type.²⁵ Many texts which record deposits of silver or other valuables with others may in fact be records of investments with an agent rather than deposits for safe-keeping.²⁶

Other state officers were very active in business on their own behalf, and even kept the records in their offices rather than at their homes. An example of this is the activity of a certain Zu-zu, a cadaster official at Gasur. He appears in various loans and debts of fats, barley, livestock, and silver, records of which were found with other records that appear to be of an official nature.²⁷

The sources of these people's capital must in each case have been their own resources, which they built up through buying and selling, emoluments, and speculation. While many isolated records of this kind of activity occur, they are difficult to interpret as they normally give no hint as to the nature of the transaction they record.

The professional business agent was called *dam-gàr*.²⁸ There is no reason to

¹⁷ *MAD* 4 149 (summary of holdings), 65 (purchase of house), 134 (list of copper implements), 21 (disbursement of barley).

¹⁸ *MAD* 4 41.

¹⁹ *MAD* 4 73. Compare *ITT* V 9314, gold given to the wives of various officials.

²⁰ *MAD* 4 17. See Appendix for a treatment of this text.

²¹ In *MAD* 4 128 (year x + 23) her name appears in place of her husband's in a routine delivery of skins (cf. e.g. *MAD* 4 127, year 4).

²² Cf. *CT* 50 79, Eli, a *dam-gàr* ([É-]i, cf. *CT* 50 80) pays silver to various women, who had probably invested with him in assignments similar to those of *MAD* 4 17. Eli himself probably wrote the tablet, as the script, though fairly neat, is uncommonly large in

relation to the tablet and often intersects the rulings both above and below the line (collated).

²³ *ki níg-kašx* (šID)-ak; *CT* 50 63. This and other funds are discussed in *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter II Part 3.

²⁴ Serota (formerly Pinches) Collection 8 (unpub.). The Sargonic texts in the Serota Collection will be published jointly by the writer and I. J. Gelb.

²⁵ *BIN* 8 213.

²⁶ Contrast *BIN* 8 169, where silver and grain entrusted to another (*an-da-tuku*) are returned (*ba-da-gur*).

²⁷ *HSS* 10 59, 66, 87, 88, 110, 120, 160, 175, 205.

²⁸ For philological discussions of this word and its Semitic cognate, *tamkàru*, see W. F. Leemans, *SD* III, 4 note 24.

assert that the *dam-gàr* was solely a state agent. *Dam-gàr*'s do not appear in the types of ration lists that enumerate the domestic or executive staff of Sargonic state households.²⁹ Some of these men did work for the state, and occasionally received grain and animals from the state household, perhaps for food or personal use.³⁰ As with other professions, their personal status varied widely; thus being a trading agent was no guarantee of social position. Some agents had one or more servants or slaves, and had school training.³¹ On the other hand they or their sons could be state dependents,³² or at least liable for menial labour service.³³ Some made gifts and offerings of metal and animals that suggest they were wealthy.³⁴ That there was some sort of organization for *dam-gàr*'s is suggested by the occasional mention of a "chief trading agent" (*dam-gàr-gal*).³⁵

The outside sources of the *dam-gàr*'s capital included the fund of goods put at his disposal by private parties or the state. At Umma this fund was called the "Fund of the Balanced Account." The largest contributor to this fund was the state household, through the agency of the *šabra*, or household intendant.³⁶ This fund consisted mostly of grain, silver, or foodstuffs, all of which were widely used in commerce. Some of the cash in this fund seems to have come from rentals of land. Two texts from Umma suggest that cash rentals from lands leased by the state to individuals were payable in silver, grain, and livestock.³⁷ Some of the proceeds from these rentals were put directly into this fund of the balanced account. Barley put into the fund was recorded by entering the field from which it came and the name of the lessee of the field, while silver was recorded by entering the name of the officer apparently responsible for collecting it from the lessee. The advantage of this arrangement was that if the lessees deposited silver or grain on their own accounts their deposits could not be confused with what they had paid the state as rent.

Another type of commercial agent was the *ga-raš* or *gaeš*.³⁸ He is mentioned in deliveries of commodities to the state.³⁹ On this basis it may be proposed he was a purchasing agent who acquired commodities the state needed, while the *dam-gàr* was a business agent who sought profits in cash or commodities for his clients. In one

²⁹ *MCS* 9 233; *Nik* II 35, 83; Frank, *SKT* 43; *MVN* 3 40; M. Lambert, *OrAn* 13 (1974), 4; *MDP* 14 6, 24, 25 and many others.

³⁰ *ITT* II 3072 (to son); 4460 (sheep, goats); *ITT* I 1431 (donkeys); *HSS* 10 139 (grain). Cf. *MAD* 1 334, where a *dam-gàr* receives grain for rations of slaves from Agade, and note in *MAD* 5 42: PN *sagi dam-gàr ensi*. In *MDP* 14 73 a *dam-gàr* is assigned *guruš*.

³¹ *CT* 50 106, 107; *ITT* I 1300.

³² *ITT* I 1363; for the text type, see *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter II Part 2, Group 4.

³³ *RTC* 96. iv. 9' (*dam-gàr*'s son on labour service); *ITT* II 4621 (*dam-gàr*'s son a fugitive); contrast *ITT* II 4705, where a *dam-gàr*'s son is a *nar-gal*, "chief singer".

³⁴ *ITT* I 1370 (delivery of a bronze object); *ITT* II 4399 (goats); *CT* 50 133 (turtles); *HSS* 10 42, "gift" of grain received by two *dam-gàr*. See also

below, note 56. For *dam-gàr* seals, see R. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit* (Berlin, 1965), Nr. 584, and Abb. 383.

³⁵ *Nik* II 19. ii. 4, 10; *Nik* II 47. 8.

³⁶ *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter II Part 3.

³⁷ *Nik* II 78, summary of rental income in grain, silver, and livestock; *MCS* 9 244, account of grain from holders of fields and a withdrawal of silver from the fund of the balanced account. These texts are discussed in *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter II Part 3.

³⁸ Akkadian *muštamkiru*. For discussion of this word, with literature, see A. L. Oppenheim, *Studies Presented to Hans Gustav Güterbock* (Istanbul, 1973), 237; Klein, *JCS* 23 (1970), 120; *CAD* s.v. *kaēššu*.

³⁹ *ITT* II 4461, delivery of spices; *ITT* II 4380, delivery of a *máš-*[], gold, and alkali by two *garaš*; *RTC* 91. ii. 3 (etc.), receives an allowance (*ki*) of unskilled labor.

case the *ga-raš'* capital was copper provided by the *ensi*, or head of the local state administration.⁴⁰ The *garaš*, unlike the *dam-gâr*, may have been a regular member of the household staff.⁴¹

Besides using the services of business agents, the great state households conducted business on their own account. The archive of a Sargonic state establishment that was located somewhere near Umma, perhaps at the city or to the south of it, provides evidence for this sort of activity.⁴² This establishment was not very large, perhaps about 0.4 square miles of arable land, with a work force of less than a hundred,⁴³ but one of its members, a certain *Me-ság*, undertook a great variety of commercial missions to *Agade*, *A.HA*, *Lagaš*, and other cities.⁴⁴ He was certainly a member of the state establishment, as he held allotments within the household, but was never given a title.⁴⁵ The records of his activity are of the usual official types, but are written for the most part in Akkadian, in contrast to the state records of Umma, which are in Sumerian.

Many commodities changed hands in this commerce, but the two basic commodities of exchange were silver and grain. The two could be used interchangeably, and silver may be considered money in the usual sense of that word. Silver served as a unit of value; therefore commodities were often priced in silver for the purposes of commercial record-keeping.⁴⁶ Silver also served as a medium of exchange.⁴⁷ When an official household for example needed to buy commodities, silver could be used.⁴⁸ Silver could also be bought and sold like any other commodity,⁴⁹ and appears in inventories of goods that were probably commercial in nature.⁵⁰ Silver was widely used in personal loans,⁵¹ and was often to be found in the possession of both private citizens and officials.⁵² A businessman might have silver on deposit at various places; for example a man at *Ešnunna* had silver on account at *Uruk* and a place called *šUBUR*.⁵³ Silver could also be used by individuals or the state in pur-

⁴⁰ *ITT* I 1422, a quantity of copper delivered to the *é-gal nam ga-raš-ak* [x?] *Má-gan*.

⁴¹ *OIP* 14 150, disbursement of foods to the staff of a Sargonic state household at *Adab*, including a *garaš*; *Nik* II 41, issue of flour to a *garaš* (line 2 = *Šeš-tur ga-raš* [coll. M. Powell]).

⁴² Many texts in *BIN* 8, others unpublished. I hope to treat this archive in detail elsewhere.

⁴³ Calculated from its monthly summary rosters, e.g., *BIN* 8 122, 123.

⁴⁴ *BIN* 8 129, 137, 146, 165, 263.

⁴⁵ *BIN* 8 188, 192, 194, 196, 203.

⁴⁶ E.g. *BIN* 8 213, 392; *OIP* 14 160. Note that wool could be measured by the "silver weight", (*NA₄ KÙ.BABBAR*), *OAIC* 36.

⁴⁷ *BIN* 8 168, 175 (account of silver mentioning *dam-gâr's*); *MAD* 1 43 (purchase of animals, slaves, etc.).

⁴⁸ *BIN* 8 180, official disbursements (*kù zi-ga*) of silver for slaves, dates, etc.; cf. *MAD* 1 25 (purchase?); *MAD* 5 17 (grain sold for silver to *dam-gâr*); *MAD* 1 328 (oil and barley for silver).

⁴⁹ *BIN* 8 174; *MAD* 1 208.

⁵⁰ E.g. *MAD* 1 171 (list of wool, grain, livestock, garments, silver); *MAD* 1 302, 303, 304 (aromatics, eggs, silver). For possible purposes of such inventories, see below.

⁵¹ *HSS* 10 110; *MAD* 5 30, 86, and many others.

⁵² *MAD* 1 34, 125, 208, 302, 303; *MAD* 4 124; *MAD* 5 84, 88, 102, 108; *MVN* 3 81, 98; *BIN* 8 168; *OAIC* 35-37. Note for example *MAD* 5 102, where a group of people is described as *bīlū kù.BABBAR*, "owners of (the) silver"; and *BIN* 8 167, where silver changes hands at the conclusion of a case at law. It was also customary to give silver to the judge and the *maškim* of court proceedings, perhaps as "court costs", cf. *MAD* 1 228, 242. For silver in hands of officials, cf. *Nik* II 56; *OIP* 14 197; *ITT* I 1070. For silver going from an official to a private person, see *MDP* 14 19, in which the *ensi* of Umma pays a woman silver in lieu of her income from a land allotment. *MAD* 5 9 seems to be a payment in grain or silver to soldiers on a campaign (?) in Gutium (?).

⁵³ *MAD* 1 32, 166; cf. the archive of *Quradum*, above, notes 4-7.

chasing real estate ⁵⁴ or in paying rentals.⁵⁵ Silver was sometimes offered to the gods or to the royal family either to meet obligations or as a free-will offering.⁵⁶

Grain appears as an item of commerce in many of the transactions noted above in connection with silver. Like silver, grain could be used for buying and selling,⁵⁷ renting,⁵⁸ could be loaned at interest or interest free,⁵⁹ and could be exchanged for other commodities.⁶⁰ As grain was the staple of the Mesopotamian economy, commercial transactions with grain are often hard to distinguish from the many other types of records that deal with it. Was certain grain shipped from Girsu to Agade for example a commercial venture, payment of taxes, or for some other purpose? ⁶¹ Other foods like dates or flour appear in commercial records as media of exchange.⁶² Many city dwellers, if they did not own, rent, or hold allotments of agricultural land, presumably had to purchase some of these foods on the open market (*sila*).⁶³ Oils and fats were important items of commerce,⁶⁴ as well as aromatics and extracts of various trees,⁶⁵ different kinds of wood,⁶⁶ garments, and textiles.⁶⁷

Livestock was another important commodity. Donkeys and asses of various kinds were bought and sold,⁶⁸ and perhaps used by merchants for transporting goods overland.⁶⁹ Cows, oxen, and pigs were also bought and sold.⁷⁰ There are records of large herds of livestock, especially sheep and goats, being moved from city to city. Many of these may have been for commercial enterprises. For example cattle and sheep were shipped through Agade,⁷¹ over 3,500 sheep and goats were sent from Umma to Girsu,⁷² and other sheep and goats were sent from Umma to Uruk.⁷³ It is difficult to see any other reason for this transport of animals than a commercial one, and one text indeed indicates sheep that were sold in Nippur.⁷⁴ Records were kept

⁵⁴ Private treaties: *MAD* 5 82; *MDP* 14 4 (sales of houses); *MAD* 1 168 (sale of a field); official transactions: Obelisk of Manišusu (Scheil, *MDP* 2, 1 ff.); Sippar Stone (Gelb, *RSO* 32 (1957), 83 ff.).

⁵⁵ *BIN* 8 282 (rental of a garden); *OIP* 14 78, 114 (rentals of fields); cf. *ITT* I 1042, below, note 68.

⁵⁶ *OIP* 14 111, 159: máš-da-ri-a offerings of silver by a dam-gàr. This silver must have been his own, as he could hardly have offered state property to a deity in his own name.

⁵⁷ *MVN* 3 60 (barley to dam-gàr's); cf. *MVN* 3 25; *MVN* 3 80 (grain used to buy silver to purchase a slave); *MVN* 3 81; *MAD* 5 88.

⁵⁸ See above, note 55.

⁵⁹ *MAD* 1 17, 105 (?), 110, 148 (records of interest); 275, 321; *MAD* 5 74, 77, 78; *OAIC* 32 (with loan of a lamb).

⁶⁰ *MAD* 5 88, barley and silver; *MAD* 5 3, silver and barley used to buy a house. For silver valued in grain (*še-bi*), cf. *OIP* 14 168.

⁶¹ *ITT* I 1075, 1076; cf. *MAD* 1 18 (barley to a dam-gàr).

⁶² *MVN* 3 62; *BIN* 8 175.

⁶³ For the market, see below. The Leningrad "Larsa Project" has concluded that the city dwellers in the OB period purchased some food for cash, I. M. Diakonoff, *Drevnij Vostok, Goroda i Torgovlja* (Yerevan, 1973), 47 f.

⁶⁴ *MAD* 1 279, 300, 328.

⁶⁵ *MAD* 1 291 (loan), 304 (?); 37 and 300 (sales of aromatics).

⁶⁶ *MAD* 1 318; *OAIC* 4 (sale of a log); cf. *OAIC* 33, a shipment of logs valued in gold.

⁶⁷ Cf. *ITT* V 6748, importation of textiles from Ebla (possibly Ur III); *ITT* II 5804, capital and loss of garments valued in silver.

⁶⁸ *MVN* 3 100; *Nik* II 54. *ITT* I 1042 may be a record of field rents received in silver and donkeys.

⁶⁹ *ITT* I 1452 (asses to a dam-gàr). Perhaps the over 700(?) asses returned to Lagaš from Gutium (*ITT* II 5790) were a military pack train.

⁷⁰ *BIN* 8 180, 181; *MVN* 3 77. Note especially *MAD* 1 269, an account of barley and silver used to buy cattle in Gutium; *ITT* II 4443 where a dam-gàr receives various animals; *ITT* I 2926, account of oxen ní-g-šám-bi nu-ak (not sold, of no commercial value?). For sale of pigs, *HSS* 10 105, 106, 107.

⁷¹ *ITT* II 5845.

⁷² *ITT* V 6691; cf. *ITT* II 4563.

⁷³ *ITT* I 1047.

⁷⁴ *MVN* 3 93; cf. *MVN* 3 57 (sale of a sheep in Agade); *ITT* I 1413, delivery of sheep by a dam-gàr; *MDP* 14 16.

of animals that were removed from city limits, just like other goods.⁷⁶ Of course not all movements of animals were for commerce. Some were taken for slaughter,⁷⁶ for example, or for delivery to cult sites.⁷⁷

The slave trade seems to have been a particularly profitable undertaking in Sargonic Mesopotamia. While Diakonoff,⁷⁸ Gelb,⁷⁹ and Tyumenev⁸⁰ have emphasized that chattel slaves were not a significant productive labour force in third-millennium Mesopotamia, it is clear they were a luxury for which there was a ready market. Slaves appear in many merchants' accounts along with other commodities, or in separate transactions, with or without witnesses.⁸¹ The great majority of them have Mesopotamian names and even patronymics, so there is no reason to believe they were mostly imported from abroad as in later periods.

While some business agents may have specialized in one or another commodity, inventories of merchants' stocks usually contain a variety of goods. For example the balanced account of goods put at the disposal of a certain Sikkur by the intendant of the state household at Umma included silver, garments, wool, and oil, the whole worth nearly 12 minas of silver.⁸²

It is suggestive to consider what commodities are not found in commercial texts as well as those that are. Strikingly absent are the very products one might most expect to find there if one believed that the role of the trading agent was to acquire goods not available locally in Mesopotamia. One searches in vain for accounts of steatite, chlorite, lapis, or other precious and semi-precious stones and their imitations. There seem to be no records of bulk acquisition of copper or silver, but only records of transactions and stocks on hand, sometimes very large and often in the hands of private people.⁸³ While shipments of wood do occur in the records, these are in small quantities and seem to be private enterprise on a modest scale.⁸⁴ There is in short no evidence in the available records that the Sargonic *dam-gàr* played any significant role in the acquisition of products foreign to Mesopotamia, or was anyone other than a businessman who sought profits for clients, including the state, in Mesopotamian markets with mostly Mesopotamian goods. If the majority of foreign imports such as precious stones were acquired in a way that has left no record in the official and private archives of Mesopotamian urban centres, one must assume they were either not accountable property, or became accountable property at a

⁷⁶ *OIP* 14 124; *ITT* 2978 (animals *uru-ta è-a*). Cf. below, note 120.

⁷⁸ *ITT* II 4396.

⁷⁷ *ITT* I 1156 (shipment of fatted sheep to Nippur).

⁷⁸ *VDI* 1968 No. 4, 7; *VDI* 1973 No. 4, 14, 17 and elsewhere.

⁷⁹ *CRRAI* 18 (1972), 84 and elsewhere.

⁸⁰ *Gosudarstvennoe hozjajstvo drevnego Šumera* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1956), 276 f. and elsewhere.

⁸¹ *BIN* 8 173, 177, 178(?); *CT* 50 78; *ITT* I 1040, 1041; *ITT* II 2917, 4516, 4518, 4576, 4578, 4588, 5772, 5798 (valuation of slaves); *RTC* 79, 80 (an entire family), 81; *MAD* 1 33, 43 (with other goods); 140, 225; *MAD* 5 101?; *MVN* 3 81, 102; *Nik* II 68 and many others. Witnessed sale contracts of the Sargonic period have been edited by

D. O. Edzard, *ABAW* NF 67; and J. Krecher, *ZA* 63 (1974), 145 ff. A particularly interesting example from Gasur is purchase by a *dam-gàr* of a Lullubi slave for grain measured by the Agade *gur*, *HSS* 10 99.

⁸² *BIN* 8 286; for balanced accounts, see C. Fossey, *JSOR* 14 (1930), 51 ff.

⁸³ Cf. *Nik* II 57, inventory of 8470 minas of state-owned copper *uru-a* "in the city (account)". For private dealings in metals, cf. *MAD* 4 65, 73, 134; *BIN* 8 310; *OAI*C 7. Some Sargonic texts having to do with metal-working have been discussed by H. Limet, *JESHO* 15 (1972), 3 ff. For further discussion and additional literature, see *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter II Part 2 Group 6c.

⁸⁴ See above, note 66.

point beyond the horizon of these archives.⁸⁵ Gems and rare metals may not have been for the most part accountable property of the state, but private property of the king or other wealthy individuals. This property would appear in records only if it was entrusted to craftsmen for working, and such records are known, especially from later periods.⁸⁶ These goods represent foreign gifts, tribute, or booty accessible to the ruling establishment but not found in state inventories.⁸⁷ As for commodities such as copper that were accountable but were not produced locally, and for which no records of acquisition are available, one can conclude only that they were acquired by the state by means or agents as yet unknown.⁸⁸ One seeks in vain among the thousands of preserved Sargonic records for an example of agents acquiring such goods for the state.

The comings and goings of commercial parties within Mesopotamia are well documented. An early Sargonic ship manifest consists of a list of men with hired attendants called "hired men of the dam-gàr's".⁸⁹ Hired men are seldom encountered in Sargonic texts, so it is not straining the evidence to see in this manifest the embarkation of a commercial party. As water travel was the most important means of transportation, at least in southern Mesopotamia, one would expect the majority of commercial goods to go by boat. There are in fact ship manifests that contain such a varied cargo that here too commercial enterprise seems the best explanation for them. A single such shipment includes jars of oil, animal hides, brewing ingredients, legumes, spices, sea fish, fatted animals, barley, and flour, under the charge of a slave or a servant of an untitled person.⁹⁰ The grain and flour are measured with the standard metrology one often finds in commercial texts.⁹¹

There is not yet sufficient evidence to reconstruct the patterns of commercial connections between the various Mesopotamian cities. One may suggest that both geographical position and regional specialities have to be considered. Gasur was perhaps a centre for swine-herding and lard production;⁹² Lagaš was certainly a centre for fishing, both fresh and salt water;⁹³ Umma may have been a centre for

⁸⁵ A post-Sargonic text edited by H. Sauren, *AIPHOS* 20 (1968), 388 f., under the title "Une Caravane sumérienne" contributes nothing in this respect. Sauren's interpretation of it depends on an antiquity dealer's unreliable assertion that the tablet was found in Luristan, and an emendation of the document (p. 392) to include a non-existent lugal kaskal(a). Kaskal is a category of personnel; cf. *Nik* II 14 iii.1.

⁸⁶ See for example *ECTJ* 51; for later periods *UET* III 757, 761, 768, 776, 1498 (Ur III); *Sumer* 9 (1953), 21 ff. (Kassite period); *ITT V* 9276, which mentions rare stones, is unfortunately badly broken.

⁸⁷ This way of acquiring foreign goods is well documented in the Amarna letters (D. O. Edzard, *JESHO* 3 (1960), 38 ff.) and is still found in the records of the Neo-Assyrian kings, who distinguish between tribute (*biltu*, *mandattu*) and "gifts" to the king (*namurātu*, *kadrū*); cf. *OIP* 2 33.iii.36 (Sennacherib); and for *namurātu*, Golovleva, *VDI* 1975 No. 3, 3 ff.

⁸⁸ Importation of building stone, for example, was a royal undertaking impracticable commercially. Thus Maništušus caused stone to be brought from Iran, but one finds no archival records of such stone (H. Hirsch, *AfO* 20 (1963), 69 f.). Gold is exchanged for silver in *ITT V* 9277; for a merchant's account of copper and bronze, cf. *RTC* 100.

⁸⁹ *Nik* II 19, cf. ii. 12: lú-hun-gá dam-gàr-ne; cf. *ITT* II 2915, another passenger list.

⁹⁰ *BIN* 8 267, 276, 280; cf. *RTC* 102; *ITT V* 9296(?).

⁹¹ For the metrology of commercial texts, see below.

⁹² *HSS* 10 177, 181 (accounts of swine); *HSS* 10 168, 169, large shipments of l-šah to Assur, Agade.

⁹³ There are over a hundred published Lagaš texts recording fish, often in enormous quantities (e.g., *RTC* 129, nearly 60,000). For drying and salting of fish at Sargonic Lagaš and Uruk, see Crawford, "Invisible Exports", 233 f.

production of aromatic oils,⁹⁴ and appears to have exported large numbers of sheep and goats.⁹⁵ Apparent commercial contacts between Uruk and Ešnunna,⁹⁶ Uruk and Umma,⁹⁷ Girsu and Umma,⁹⁸ and Ešnunna and Gutium⁹⁹ can be documented, both of a private and commercial nature. Quradum, a private business man apparently residing in Sippar, had business as far off as Mari and Tutul on the Euphrates.¹⁰⁰

Commercial contacts of Mesopotamian cities with points outside of Mesopotamia are best documented at Umma. Gasur and especially Umma had good connections with Susa and southern Iran for most of the Sargonic period, the latter via its port at Zabala and both via an outpost at Sabum.¹⁰¹ Documents from Susa suggest people from Umma were residing there.¹⁰² Later in the Sargonic period these connections were cut off, first perhaps when the Sargonic ensi's were expelled from Susa and Elam,¹⁰³ and later when Umma itself was attacked and perhaps destroyed in the time of trouble following the death of Šar-kali-šarri.¹⁰⁴ Her position as Mesopotamia's entrepot with southern Iran was thereafter to be assumed by Lagaš, her perennial rival. Umma also appears to have had direct connections with Dilmun (= Bahrein),¹⁰⁵ Magan (= Makran?),¹⁰⁶ and Meluhha (= Indus Valley?), as an Indus seal impression is said to have been found at the site and a ship's agent from Meluhha received oil rations at the city.¹⁰⁷ Sargon's well-known assertion that ships from Magan and Meluhha docked at Agade,¹⁰⁸ as well as Naram-Sin's conquest of Magan,¹⁰⁹ suggest that the interconnections between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley were both direct and frequent in this period.¹¹⁰ As for the North, it is known Ebla exported textiles to Mesopotamia.¹¹¹

⁹⁴ *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter II Part 2 Group 3g. For oil from Umma found at other cities, cf. Nakahara, *Sumerian Tablets Kyoto 1* (KI.AN); *BIN* 8 333 (Zabala); *Nik* II 48 (Der, Bad-Rabilum); *BIN* 8 298 (Kar-sig.).

⁹⁵ Above, notes 72, 73.

⁹⁶ Above, note 53.

⁹⁷ Above, note 73.

⁹⁸ Cf. *RTC* 84, a letter found at Girsu concerning the property of Ur-nu, a dam-gār, brought from Umma; above, note 72.

⁹⁹ *MAD* 1 269.

¹⁰⁰ *CT* 50 72.

¹⁰¹ For connections between Umma, Sabum, and Susa, see *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter III. For Sabum and Gasur, see *HSS* 10 201. Sabum was the site of a fortress constructed by the ensi of Umma on behalf of Rimuš; for discussion, see *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter III.

¹⁰² *MDP* 14 19. Note *MDP* 14 13, a business record from the Susa region of silver received in Surgul; *MDP* 14 22, a duplicate record (gaba-ru) of quantities of grain on hand in various cities in Umma province and to the east of it.

¹⁰³ Evidence is collected in *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter IV notes 140, 141.

¹⁰⁴ For Umma in the "Gutian Period" see Hallo, *RIA* s.v. "Gutium", although the "mu-iti" texts do not belong to the Gutian period.

¹⁰⁵ Two men from Dilmun appear in *NBC* 11447 (unpub.); *CT* 50 55; *Serota* 18 (unpub.).

¹⁰⁶ A messenger (ra-gaba) from Magan draws beer at Umma in *MCS* 9 245. Copper from Magan is mentioned in *ITT* II 2864, and above, n. 40.

¹⁰⁷ V. Scheil, *RA* 22 (1925), 55 f.; *BIN* 8 298. In *CT* 50 76 a man from Meluhha receives an advance of silver. A Sargonic seal belonging to a Meluhha interpreter has survived; Boehmer, *Glyptik*, Abb. 557.

¹⁰⁸ H. Hirsch, *AfO* 20 (1963), 37 f.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁰ The abundant literature on this problem has been collected by G. Komoróczy, "Himi o trgovle Til'muna" (*Drevnij Vostok* 2 (Yerevan, 1976), esp. notes 43, 44, and 76).

¹¹¹ *ITT* V 6748 (date uncertain); recent discovery of thousands of commercial records at Ebla (= Tell Mardikh in Syria) shows an extensive trade was carried on between North Syria and Mesopotamia (G. Pettinato).

Sargonic administrative and private texts provide evidence for a rich vocabulary of commercial terms, including for example *ki*, “fund”,¹¹² *kù-bi*, “price”,¹¹³ *ganba*, “equivalent”,¹¹⁴ *sag-níg-ga-ra*, “capital”,¹¹⁵ *níg-(ga)*, “property, asset”,¹¹⁶ and many others. Space permits discussion of only two terms here: *sil-a-a gál/sig₇*, and *è-a*.

The term *sil-a-a gál/sig₇* (lit. “on the street”) might, especially if one did not believe in the existence of a market place in ancient Mesopotamia,¹¹⁷ be taken to mean “in transit”, but this meaning does not fit all instances.¹¹⁸ A good example is *CT* 50 80, edited below, Appendix. The most probable explanation of this document is that it is a record of three investments, one in a calf, and the other two in slaves or in the form of deposits with individuals, with the total described as “on the market” (that is, invested with the hope of a profit). The explicit subscription suggests the silver was probably state property confided to a certain *Eli the dam-gàr* in hopes of a return.¹¹⁹ In form and content it is similar to the list of investments recorded by *Quradum* in *CT* 50 74. That there was a commodity market, however primitive the modern economist might dub it, seems undeniable. That there were actual market places is more difficult to prove, but the expression “on the market” implies that such existed.

Another accounting term found in commercial texts is *uru-ta è-a*, “going out of the city”.¹²⁰ This belongs to a class of terms that denote where, and on what fund, property was accounted. “In the city” (*uru-a*), a counterpart, is a well-attested category of goods within the city limits of the place where the accountable office was located. *Umma* for example was a regional capital and seat of accountability, so goods in the city itself were so described (*uru-a*), whereas goods in outlying installations or towns were so specified, and changes in their locations noted.¹²¹ Goods *uru-ta è-a* were goods leaving the place where their accountable office was located, in many cases no doubt for commercial purposes.

Private records of a commercial nature are the most difficult to interpret, as often they lack the formulary of contracts or the entries of disposition of administrative texts. Records such as *PUL* Plate VI No. 20, a list of livestock, 1½ jars of

¹¹² *MAD* 4 42 (private); *CT* 50 60; *Nik* II 69; *Nik* II 45 (royal); *CT* 50 63 (commercial, with unpublished parallels).

¹¹³ Cf. W. W. Hallo, *HUCA* 30 (1959), 105 with note 6; *CAD K*, 247a. For a brief list of Sargonic prices, see H. Limet, *JESHO* 15 (1972), 31 ff.

¹¹⁴ *MDP* 14 41 [KI].LAM; cf. B. Landsberger, *MSL* 1, 26, 124 f.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *ITT* II 5804, capital (*sag-níg-ga*) and loss (*i-bí-za*) of garments valued in silver; *RTC* 176 (wool).

¹¹⁶ *BIN* 8 282; *MAD* 5 85 (*níg-é*). For *níg-gál-la*, “property on hand,” see *Nik* II 82, *ITT* I 1183, 1395; *BIN* 8 229; *MSL* 13, 116.

¹¹⁷ K. Polanyi, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economics in History and Theory* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1957), 14.

¹¹⁸ For discussion, see T. Jacobsen, “On the Textile Industry at Ur under Ibbi-Sin” (in W. L. Moran, ed., *Towards the Image of Tammuz* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), note 7); *CAD* s.v. *babtum*. Lexical equivalents can be found in *MSL* 13, 182. Note in *BIN* 3 500 (Ur III, Drehem) cattle are disbursed (*zi-ga*) or “in transit(?)” (*sil-a-a sig₇-a*). For a different interpretation, see Hallo, *BIN* 3, 11.

¹¹⁹ Comparable texts are *BIN* 8 221 (investment of four quantities of grain); *HSS* 10 106.

¹²⁰ *uru-ta*: *OIP* 14 124; cf. *é-ta è-a*: *ITT* II 5884; *BIN* 8 124, 165, 206 (grain? to a *dam-gàr*), 271 (*gá-nun-na ba-sar*, “entered on the storehouse account”).

¹²¹ For documentation, *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter III notes 466 and 467.

butterfat, and one mina of silver, may in some cases be accounts of purely personal property, such as might be acquired from a sale of real estate or grain, or might in other instances be private commercial records the significance of which remains to be discovered.

One helpful criterion for distinguishing commercial texts and contracts from routine administrative records is the use of metrology. In a land where many standards were used side by side, even in the same locality, the possibility of fraud, receiving by one standard and paying back by another, was a real one. The most commonly used standard in commercial texts is the *gur-sag-gál-si-sá*, “standard gursaggal”, composed of 240 sila.¹²² In administrative texts the standard is often presupposed, or specified only when doubt might arise. On the other hand, commercial texts generally specify the standard used, in this case the *gur-sag-gál*, and further define it as the *gur-sag-gál-si-sá*, “standard gursaggal”. This was presumably a regular absolute capacity, as the absolute capacity of the *gur-sag-gál* probably varied from place to place. Survey of the contexts in which this standard is used suggests that most documents that specify the *si-sá* measure are commercial transactions.¹²³

The day-to-day life of the Sargonic business man is best revealed in his correspondence, as letters sometimes give a clearer picture of his dealings than do records. To quote one example, a business agent from the imperial capital, perhaps sent to Girsu, was prevented from doing any business in the following letter (*MCS* 9 252).

Ur- ^d Utu-ke ₄	Thus says Ur-Utu
na-bé-a	
Šeš-šeš-mu	Say to Šeš-šeš :
ù-na-dug ₄	
[^I A]-ga-dè ^{kl} -lugal-àm	Agade-lugal-am,
lú A-ga-dè ^{kl}	a man of Agade,
na-bí-šám-e	must not make purchases!
ki ĩr-gi ₄ -gi ₄ -šè	Let him return to Irgigi.
lú hé-gi ₄ -gi ₄	

Study of this and similar documents must of course consider not only the situation but the principals. Was this same Šeš-šeš the one who received silver in *ITT* II 4401 and bitumen in *CT* 50 68, not to mention the gold, precious stones, tin, and other valuables in *ITT* V 9276? Was the sender of this letter also the sender of *ITT* V 9309, and perhaps the *ensi* himself, as in *ITT* V 6689 (account of gold), *RTC* 83 and 132? Both names are common at Girsu, and the other two elude identification, so such questions must be left open at present for lack of evidence. Many other letters dealing with commercial activity are available, such as *BIN* 8 156; *JCS* 10

¹²² Documentation will be found in *Umma in the Sargonic Period*, Chapter III Part 3.

¹²³ *MVN* 3 19 (shipment of flour to Nippur); *BIN* 8 143, 165, 208, 233 (with *gur-mah*), 236, 244, 245, 255; note for example the unusual use of this unit at Gasur, in a text in which a *dam-gàr* appears :

HSS 10 125 line 4 rev. : [*dam-g*]àr; cf. *BIN* 8 124. For interesting uses of this unit within administrative contexts, see for example *BIN* 8 230; *ITT* II 4529 (3 different *gur* in one text); *ITT* II 4560. Note also the use of a standard weight (*na₄ si-sá*) in *ITT* II 5799.

(1956), 13 ff.; *MAD* 1 282 and 290 (part of a large commercial archive, see Appendix).

This preliminary survey of commercial texts from the Sargonic period should conclude by stressing that trade, either institutional or inter-city, may be seen as but one facet of a vital and profitable business activity that flourished throughout the empire of the Sargonic kings and beyond. Individuals, alone or in partnership, the state, on its own behalf or through agents, the king himself, participated in this business activity. Taking a broad view, one may say that the purpose of this business was to keep up the circulation of commodities that were essential to the economy and civilization of the land. From the point of view of the individual businessman, the goal was surely more modest: the good life, neatly summed up perhaps in an otherwise cryptic document that lists a donkey, a garden, and a house in Agade.¹²⁴

APPENDIX

This appendix contains editions of three selected Sargonic commercial texts, two documents and one letter, in support and illustration of the foregoing discussion.

Text 1: *MAD* 4 17

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) 20 síg ma-na | 10) Ama-é-e |
| 2) Ama-é-e | 11) Barag-nita-ra |
| 3) Barag-nita-ra | 12) Zabala ^{kl} -šè |
| 4) ša ₄ -ma ì-na-dug ₄ | 13) gin-né ì-na-sum |
| 5) 15 síg ma-na | 14) 8 síg ma-na |
| 6) Ama-é-e | 15) Ama-é-e |
| 7) Barag-nita-ra | 16) Barag-nita-da u ₄ -bi-ta |
| 8) ì-na-sum | 17) ì-da-tuk-àm |
| 9) 20 lá 2 síg ma-na | 18) šu.nigín 1 síg gú 1 ma-na |

(Translation)

20 minas of wool: Ama-é said to Barag-nita: "buy."

15 minas of wool: Ama-é sold it to Barag-nita.

18 minas of wool: Ama-é sold it to Barag-nita when he went to Zabala.

8 minas of wool: Ama-é has on deposit with Barag-nita from that time.

Total: 1 talent, 1 mina of wool.

(Notes)

For ša₄ as a writing for sa₁₀, "buy", see the literature collected by Falkenstein, *NG I*, 121 note 1.

(Interpretation)

In this record Ama-é orders an agent to buy wool, notes the sale of two lots, one when he went to Zabala, the main port and commercial centre of Umma province, and a fourth quantity she entrusted to him when he went to Zabala. This last he was probably supposed to trade with on her behalf.

¹²⁴ *OAIIC* 31.

Text 2 : *CT* 50 80.

1) 1 amar gud	1 calf
2) kù-bi 6 gín	price : 6 shekels
3) Kur-ra	Kurra.
4) 6 gín kù-babbar	6 shekels of silver :
5) Šu-bi-kum (?)	Šubikum.
6) 1 gín igi 4-gál	1 ¼ shekels
7) Bar-ra-an	Barran.
8) šu.nigín 13 gín igi 4-gál	Total : 13¼ shekels
9) sila-a gál-la-àm	“ on the market ”
10) È-li dam-[gàr]	Eli, trading agent.

(Notes)

Line 5 : The reading and interpretation of this name are unclear to me.

Line 7 : For the full form of this name, cf. *ITT* I 1438 : Bar-ra-ni-šè.

(Interpretation)

Eli, a trading agent, here records his investments of three quantities of silver.

Text 3 : *MAD* I 290. Letter of Šu-ma-ma to Egia. Both of these men were active in commercial undertakings in the Diyala region and beyond. The obverse is lost except for the salutation, which includes the “ whole of the È-gemé ”. The reverse includes the following :

- x + 1) ù a-na Iš-nun^{k1}
 2) [l]i-it-ru-ù-nim
 3) [ù] šu-lum é kà-lí-su
 4) [i]n DUB li-iš-tú-ru-nim
 5) 2 (PI) NÍG.HAR.RA
 6) ù e-tim-da-su
 7) ni-se₁₁-bí-lam
 8) 4 (PI) DABIN 2 (PI) ZÍD.GU
 9) 2? SÌLA Ì.DU₁₀.GA 2 SÌLA Ì
 10) a-dum mi-nim
 11) la è-e-ša-ru-ni

(Translation)

. . . and let them take to Ešnunna and write in a letter how the whole household is faring. We are sending 2 PI of *mundu*-flour and its . . . (As for) the 4 PI of *tappinu*-flour, the 2 PI of *zíd.gu*-flour, the 2? sila of perfumed oil and the 2 sila of (sesame?) oil, why won't they take care of me? . . .

(Notes)

Line 11 : cf. *a-lu-um ù be-lí e-ša-ru-ni* (*BIN* 6 199 12 f., Old Assyrian letter).