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THE TABLET HOUSE: A SCRIBAL SCHOOL IN OLD BABYLONIAN NIPPUR

BY

ELEANOR ROBSON

INTRODUCTION

The traditional approach to the study of scribal training has been to focus on the evidence from literature *about* school, especially the Sumerian *eduba* texts of the early second millennium BCE which purport to describe Old Babylonian school life (most recently Volk 1996; 2000). These compositions are illuminating and often entertaining, but have three major limitations as historical evidence (cf. Civil 1980: 229). First, they present a very stylised and even exaggerated picture of scribal schooling, in which we cannot disentangle realistic representation from heightened reality or even wilful misrepresentation for humorous effect. Second, even if we were able to separate the truth from the fiction in these accounts, we would have a very generalised image that does not acknowledge chronological change or geographical variation, or the role of individual anomaly or innovation in the educational process. Third, the *eduba* stories tell us nothing about the physical environment of scribal schools.

More recently, there has been a move towards examining the material culture of scribal education, as scholars such as Tinney (1998; 1999), Veldhuis (1997; 1997–98; 2000) and Gesche (2000) have taken physical tablets rather than disembodied text as their primary subject matter. By emphasising the multi-textual tablet as a by-product of an educational process they have brought major new insights to our understanding of ancient Mesopotamian schooling. This paper aims to take that approach one step further, by examining the archaeology and cuneiform tablets of just

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one scribal school.¹ “House F” was in operation in Nippur during the 1740s BCE (the early reign of king Samsu-iluna).² It was excavated by the joint Chicago-Philadelphia expedition in 1951–52, yielding nearly one and a half thousand fragments of tablets.³ Treating these finds—most of the so-called 3N-T tablets—not as exemplars of Sumerian literary compositions or lexical lists but as the by-products of scribal training in one individual school allows us to pose (if not always to answer satisfactorily) some fundamental questions about the physical environment of education and the consistency and function of the scribal “curriculum” in the early second millennium BCE. This article is much more an interim report than the definitive results of a completed study (which will appear in due course in monographic form). Nevertheless, as issues of Mesopotamian literacy and education are in such sharp focus at the moment, it seemed an appropriate moment to add further evidence and interpretation to the debate.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF HOUSE F

House F was a small domestic dwelling in the middle of urban Nippur, just 250 metres south of the temple of Enlil in the excavation Area TA (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).⁴ It was probably built some time in the early eighteenth century, while Nippur was under the rule of Rim-Sin of Larsa (Stone 1987: 35, 119). The house consisted of a small courtyard, locus 192, with three small rooms (191, 189, and 184) ranged to its northwest and a larger back room or courtyard, 205, to its northeast. The entrance hall, locus 203, was only partially excavated, but the total usable floor area of the house must have been about 45 square metres (Fig. 3).⁵

The excavators found several dozen fragments of domestic pottery, in rooms 205 and 184, as well as about ten pieces of figurines and plaques in rooms 205 and 191.⁶ A fragment of a gaming board made of tablet clay, rather like the Royal Game of Ur, was also

1. Of course, it is not the first to do so: see Charpin (1986). More recently Wilcke (2000) has briefly surveyed the archaeological evidence for Mesopotamian schooling; and see now Tanret’s magnificent study of schooling in the *gala-mahs*’ house in Sippir Amnānum (Tanret 2002).

2. According to the conventional middle chronology (e.g., Walker 1995); or during the 1650s following the ultra-short chronology proposed by Gasche *et al.* (1998).

3. Previous studies of House F and its neighbours were made in the original excavation report by McCown and Haines (1967: 64–66) and in Stone’s study of the architecture and domestic documentation (Stone 1987: 56–59), with important reviews by Charpin (1989–90), Postgate (1990) and Van Driel (1990).

4. TA was dug on the mound now known as Tablet Hill, due to the vast numbers of tablets found there in the University of Pennsylvania’s excavations, precisely in the hope and expectation of finding more of them (McCown and Haines 1967: viii; Zettler 1997: 149–50).

5. Stone’s figure of 35.58 m² excludes courtyard 192 (Stone 1987: 58).

6. McCown and Haines (1967: 116, pls. 88, 95.5, 96.1, 96.7, 127.9, 130.5, 131.6, 134.9, 136.2, 142.10); Stone (1987: Appendix II: Object Catalog, 161–212, sv. 184, 189, 191, 192, 203, 205).

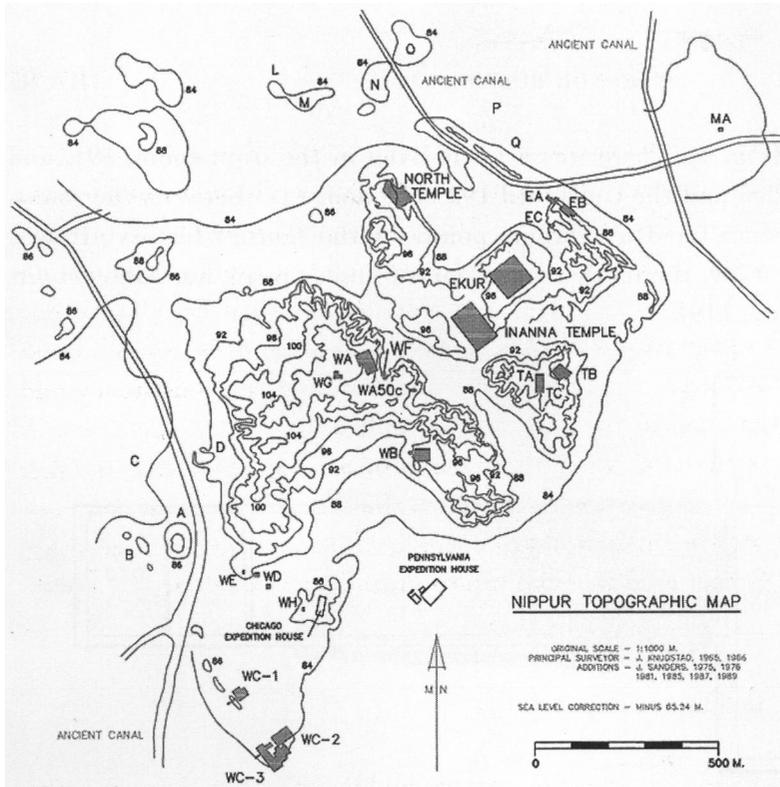


Fig. 1. — Excavation plan of Nippur, showing the location of Area TA (Gibson *et al.* 2001: fig. 1)

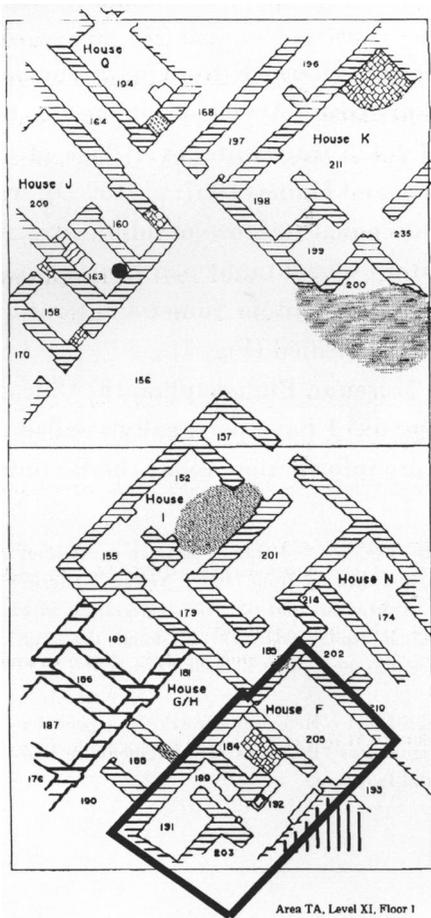


Fig. 2. — Excavation plan of Area TA (after Stone 1987: pl. 19)

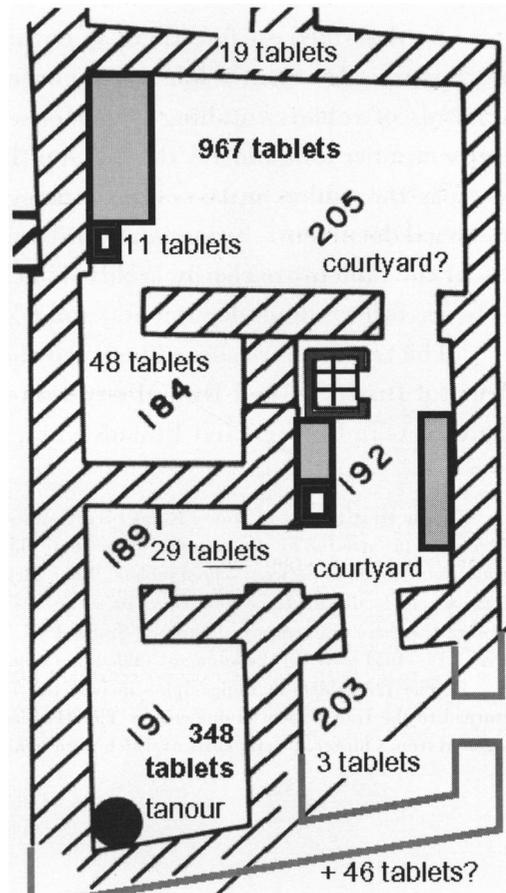


Fig. 3. — Composite excavation plan of House F, Level 10 (after Stone 1987: pls. 17-19)

recovered from the house (Fig. 4). There was a bread oven in the front room, 191, and benches in the back room 205 and the courtyard 192. The doorways between the rooms and the courtyard had been altered at various points of the house's history. It was abandoned some time after 1739, the tenth year of Samsu-iluna's reign, and later rebuilt (Civil 1979: 8; Stone 1987: 57, 119).⁷

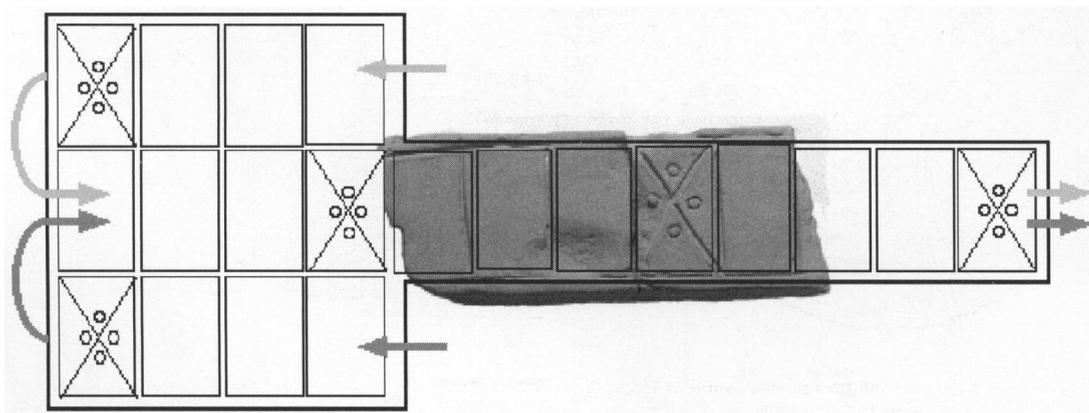


Fig. 4. — Fragment of a gaming board from House F

As described so far, there is nothing to distinguish House F from its immediate neighbours. However, while most houses excavated in Area TA yielded at most a few handfuls of tablets totalling 209, House F produced 1,425 fragments, over 85% of the entire number found in TA that season (Fig. 5; McCown and Haines 1967: pl. 160 D). And whereas the tablets in the other houses were a roughly equal mixture of administrative and legal documents, Sumerian literature, and elementary school tablets, in House F only 2% of the tablets are clearly archival in character. Over 50% contain Sumerian literature, 42% are other school documents, and 6% remain to be identified (Fig. 7).

The tablets were shared between the University Museum, Philadelphia, the Chicago Oriental Institute, and Iraq Museum in Baghdad (Fig. 6).⁸ I have personally studied all the tablets in Chicago and Philadelphia, but most of my information about the Baghdad

7. The stratigraphy of House F has been re-assessed twice: first by McCown and Haines between excavation and publication (as attested by the amendments made to the field notebooks) and then by Stone (1987). Neither analysis took into account the joins between school tablets. When these are factored in, it turns out that the field stratigraphy, in which all the school documents come from Level 10, works best for House F after all. Stone (1987: 133–144) details the equations between the three different stratigraphies. Stone (1987: 118) lists the latest datable tablets in each stratum of TA. In her Level XI (= field level 10) the youngest tablets are from 1739 and 1738.

8. The 733 tablets in Philadelphia include the 533 fragments published by Heimerdinger (1979), expected to be returned to the Iraq Museum in due course. The 347 pieces labelled in Figure 6 as “B/C casts” are fragments returned to Baghdad from Chicago, plaster casts of which were retained in the Oriental Institute.

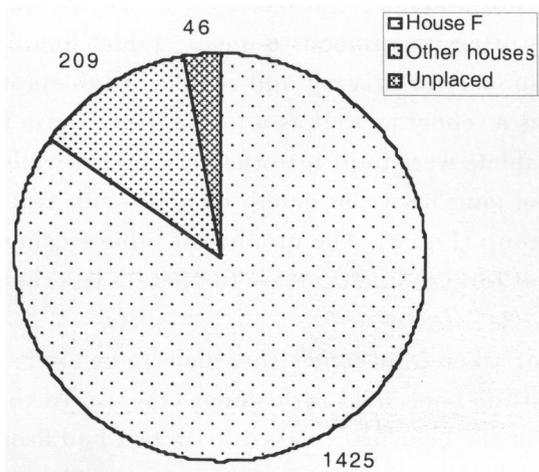


Fig. 5. — Number of tablet fragments found in House F and the rest of TA

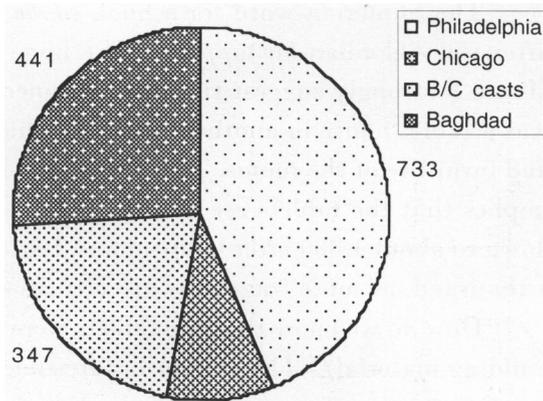


Fig. 6. — Number of museum TA tablet fragments in collections

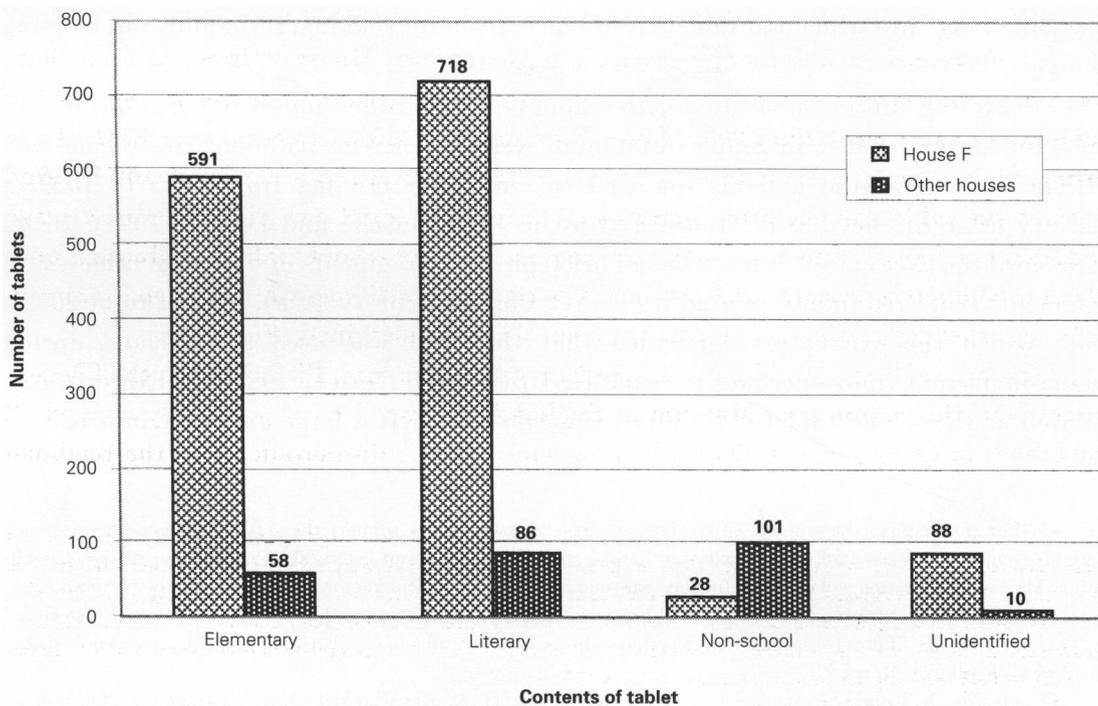


Fig. 7. — Subject matter of the tablets in House F and TA

tablets comes from casts in Chicago and the excavation notebooks held in Philadelphia. I have recently begun the task of examining the tablets in the Iraq Museum, but meanwhile the numerical data I give here are necessarily provisional.⁹

The Sumerian word for school, *eduba*, is often understood to mean “tablet house” after the Akkadian *bīt tuppim*.¹⁰ The huge numbers of literary and scholarly tablets in House F strongly suggest that it functioned as a school as well as a house. But House F was a tablet house in another sense too: the tablets were built into the very floors, walls, and furniture of the rooms. The large number of joins between rooms and across substrata implies that the tablets are a homogeneous group (Fig. 8). The number of tablets comes down to about 1,300 after known joins, but that total should decrease further, to less than a thousand, as more fragments are identified.

How do we know that the tablets were not taken from some other place to be used as building material?¹¹ The answer lies in some of the household furnishings (Fig. 3). In the northern corner of courtyard 192, next to one of the benches, a baked-brick box had been sunk into the floor. When excavated it contained a large storage jar filled with small pots. At the other end of the bench, by the doorway to room 189, a smaller box was later used. A further box was discovered at the eastern end of the bench in 205. It had been built of whole tablets plastered over, and was found filled with tablet fragments and clay (McCown and Haines 1967: 64, pl. 160 E-F). These boxes, it appears, functioned as recycling bins, into which old tablets could be thrown for soaking, reshaping and re-using (Faivre 1995).

Recycling bins are associated with school tablets in other houses too. For instance, a more substantial house in Sippir Amnānum was occupied by two successive *gala-mah* priests, Inana-mansum and his son Ur-Utu, and their families from 1655 to 1629, a century after the heyday of House F (Gasche 1989; Gasche and Dekiere 1991). In its courtyard the excavators found a baked brick bin with fragments of 65 school tablets and fragments scattered in and around it (Tanret 1982; Gasche 1989: 19, pl. 9; Tanret 2002), from which the excavators concluded that the yard was used as a school during Inana-mansum’s time—perhaps to teach Ur-Utu himself (Gasche 1989: 20; Tanret 2002). As well as the school tablets, of course, the *gala-mahs* left a large and very informative

9. For this reason I have not used rigorous statistical procedures to support the statements made here as such methods would be unwarranted on an unchecked dataset. Similarly I have not listed tablet numbers or places of publication. The final publication will include a full database and copies and/or digital photos of all the 3N-T tablets from TA.

10. E.g., Pearce (1995: 2270). Volk (2000: 3) has convincingly shown, however, that *e₂-dub-ba-a* is better understood as “the house that distributes (= ba) tablets” or perhaps “house in which tablets are distributed”. They are certainly distributed liberally all over House F!

11. Cf. No. 1, Broad Street in Ur, where a large number of school tablets had been used as fill but, as they were jumbled up with disparate lots of other tablets, may not have been written in the house itself (Charpin 1986: 481–482).

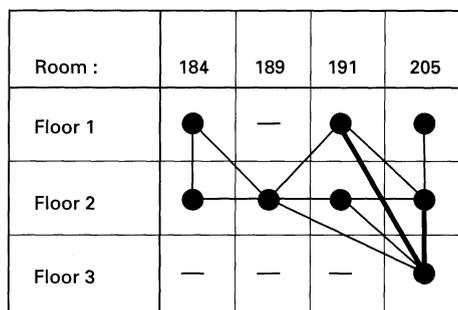


Fig. 8. — Joins between tablet fragments across floors and rooms in House F Level 10¹²

household archive (Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991), from which much has been deduced about their family and professional affairs.¹³ In contrast, we know almost nothing yet about the inhabitants of House F, apart from their educational activities.¹⁴

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN HOUSE F

The school tablets in House F fall neatly into two more-or-less equal halves: Sumerian literature, which I discuss in the following section, and the lists on which elementary education was based. Civil (1979: 5–7; 1995: 2308) identified four different tablet formats¹⁵ were used for school lists in Old Babylonian Nippur; in addition it may be useful to distinguish prisms from other large tablets (Table 1).¹⁶

The Type II tablets are the most useful for recovering information about the educational curriculum. It has long been known that the obverse of these tablets each contains an extract from a composition that a student was learning for the first time: the good version on the left is by the teacher (or an advanced student), and the poor copy (occasionally two copies) on the right is by the student, who often wrote, erased, and re-wrote several times. 3N-T 397 for instance (Fig. 9), has eleven lines from the middle of Syllable Alphabet B on the left of the obverse; the student's copy on the right has been erased ready for re-copying. The first thirty lines of the same list cover the three columns of the reverse.

12. The thickness of the lines between rooms and floors is proportional to the number of joins.

13. E.g., Dekiere 1994; Janssen 1991, 1992, 1996; Janssen *et al.* 1994; Tanret and Van Lerberghe 1993.

14. Eighteen fragments of Akkadian letters from Level 10 of House F could yield at least the name of House F's occupant(s), but it is not yet clear whether these are genuine letters or scribal school exercises (Charpin 1990: 4–5). Tablets from a later occupational phase of House F, after its abandonment and rehabilitation, are discussed by Stone (1987: 57–59). There is no reason to suppose that the later residents of the house were the same as had lived there when it was a school.

15. Tinney (1999: 160) has recently elaborated on this typology; for our purposes, however, the simple four-fold division is sufficient.

16. Some or all of these tablet formats were used outside Nippur too, but not necessarily with the same functions. In Ur, for instance, Type II tablets are virtually unknown, while Type IV tablets were used for mathematical rough work as well as for very short literary extracts (Gadd and Kramer 1966; Robson 1999: 245–272).

Table 1. — Simple physical typology of elementary school tablets from Nippur

I. Large multi-columned tablets

With 2–6 or more columns on each side, containing a whole composition of several hundred lines, or a third or a half of the composition, in small script.

II. Large teacher-student copies

The obverse (conventionally denoted II/1) contains 2–3 columns of about 10–30 lines in large, calligraphic script, with the same text in each column. The left-hand column is more competently written than the right-hand one(s), in which there are frequently erasures. The reverse (II/2) contains a long extract of another composition, or an earlier section of the same one, in 3–6 or more columns of smaller, cursive script.

III. Small one-columned tablets (Sumerian im-gid₂-da)

One column on each side of the tablet, with a 10–30 line extract of a composition, and sometimes the first line of the next section or composition in the series.

IV. Round tablets (“buns” or “lentils”)

Two to four lines of a composition, in various combinations of the teacher’s and student’s copies on the obverse and reverse.¹⁷

P. Prisms

Four- or six-sided prisms, typically with one two columns per face and a hollow central axis, with the same sort of contents as Type I tablets.

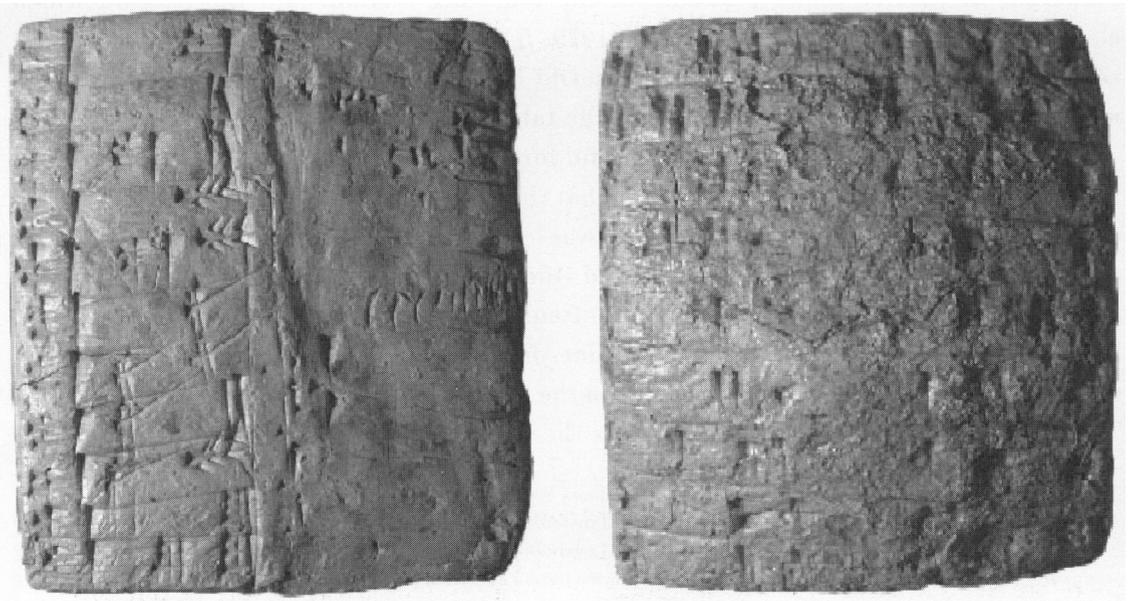


Fig. 9. — 3N-T 397 = UM 55-21-320 (obverse and reverse), a Type II tablet from House F

17. The typology of Type IV tablets was further elaborated by Gordon (1959: 7–8).

Niek Veldhuis studied Type II tablets recovered from all over Nippur (Veldhuis 1997: 40–63). He proposed that the longer extract on the reverse was typically by the *same* student who wrote the obverse, repeating passages of a composition he had learned earlier. Veldhuis was thus able to reconstruct the elementary scribal curriculum from Old Babylonian Nippur by correlating the contents of the obverses and reverses of Type II tablets.¹⁸ His results show consistent patterns of learning, which he grouped into four phases: writing techniques; Sumerian nouns and nominal phrases; sign lists and arithmetic; and Sumerian language (Table 2). Only in the third phase was he unable to determine the exact order of the curriculum (Veldhuis 1997: 58).

Table 2. — The elementary scribal curriculum in Nippur (Veldhuis 1997: 63)

First Phase: writing techniques

1. Exercises in sign forms (single wedges)
2. Syllable Alphabet B (sign forms)
3. *tu-ta-ti* (syllabic values)
4. Lists of personal names (^d*inana-teš*₂) (basic Akkadian and Sumerian)

Second Phase: thematic noun lists (so-called forerunners to UR₅.RA = hubullu)

5. List of trees and wooden objects
6. List of reeds, vessels, leather, and metal objects
7. List of animals and meats
8. List of stones, plants, fish, birds, and garments
9. List of geographical names and terms, and stars
10. List of foodstuffs

Third Phase: advanced lists (order uncertain)

11. Metrological lists and tables
12. Proto-Ea (Sumerian readings of signs)
13. Proto-Lu (thematic-acrographic: occupations, kinship terms, etc.)
14. Proto-Izi }
15. Proto-Kagal } (acrographic: ordered by initial sign(s))
16. Nigga }
17. Proto-Diri (compound signs)
18. Multiplication and reciprocal tables

Fourth Phase: introductory Sumerian

19. Model contracts (Sumerian sentences)
20. Proverbs (literary Sumerian)

The Type II tablets from House F comprise some 16% of Veldhuis's 1,500-strong dataset. Preliminary analysis of the House F tablets alone, using Veldhuis's methodology, therefore not surprisingly shows a similar, although not identical picture (Table 3).

Of the very elementary writing exercises, *tu-ta-ti* is not attested at all in House F, while there is only one exemplar of the simplest practice in sign writing. There are

18. He has also found a convincing curricular sequence in the Type II tablets from the *Scherbenloch* in OB Uruk (Veldhuis 1997–98: 361).

abundant copies of Syllable Alphabet B and the personal name lists, on the other hand, strongly suggesting that these two exercises comprised the entire first curricular phase in House F. The second phase, namely the thematic noun lists, is entirely as expected. The third phase comprises the sign lists and the arithmetical lists. At this point, where Veldhuis's conclusions for the whole of Nippur are uncertain, we can make a more concrete statement for House F. It is clear that the three acrographic lists were taught first, followed by the professions list Proto-Lu and/or the sign list Proto-Ea. Weights and measures followed by multiplications and divisions were next, while Proto-Diri, the list of compound signs, was the last in the sequence. The fourth and final phase is exactly as Veldhuis demonstrated. The proverb collection most highly attested is SP 2+6 with 28 copies,¹⁹ followed by SP 1 (7 copies) and SP 3 (6 copies).

This comparison between Nippur in general and House F in particular strongly suggests that the order of the curriculum varied from school to school, even within Nippur, although the actual contents of the curriculum were substantially the same. Remarkably few House F tablets contain compositions which fall outside this scheme (although it must be remembered that over 70 exemplars of elementary lists remain unidentified on House F tablets): there is just one copy each of Ugumu and OB Lu, and four of Proto-Aa. However, the picture may get more complicated as further identifications are made.

Table 3. — *The order of the elementary curriculum in House F*

Phase/Composition	Number of tablets in House F ²⁰
<i>First Phase: writing techniques</i>	146
— Exercises in sign forms	1
1 Syllable Alphabet B	70
— <i>tu-ta-ti</i>	0
2 Lists of personal names (<i>⁴inana-téš</i>)	82
<i>Second Phase: thematic noun lists</i>	98
3 List of trees and wooden objects	28
4 List of reeds, vessels, leather, and metal objects	20
5 List of animals and meats	19
6 List of stones, plants, fish, birds, and garments	25
7 List of geographical names and terms, and stars	6
8 List of foodstuffs	7

19. See Veldhuis (2000) for the join between SP 2 and SP 6.

20. Of all types, not only Type II. The numbers in the column are not commensurate because of the co-occurrence of different compositions on the Type II tablets.

	<i>Third Phase: advanced lists</i>	207
9	Nigga }	16
9	Proto-Kagal } order uncertain	10 + 1 bilingual
9	Proto-Izi }	30
12	Proto-Lu	22
13	Proto-Ea	17
14	Metrological lists and tables	15
15	Multiplication and reciprocal tables	93
16	Proto-Diri	16
	<i>Fourth Phase: introductory Sumerian</i>	107
17	Model contracts	54
18	Proverbs	55

Each tablet type, it appears, had a different function. The short extracts on Type II/1 and Type III tablets were deployed in a student's first encounters with a composition, as he memorised it section by section. The longer passages on Types I, II/2, and P tablets, on the other hand, seem to be written in order to revise earlier work, consolidating individually memorised sections into lengthier segments. I have presented the detailed evidence for this argument using the arithmetical lists as a case study (Robson 2002). This shows an even, if thin, distribution of Type II/1 and Type III tablets across the multiplication series but a high preponderance of Type I and Type II/2 tablets covering only the first sections. (There are no Type P prisms bearing multiplications in House F.) It thus appears that students initially learned the whole series but revised only the beginning—again and again. This pattern of learning is also suggested by the numbers of tablets attested across the series of thematic noun lists: there are many more exemplars from the beginning of the series than from the end (Table 3).

The two-fold functional distinction is also reflected in the number of each tablet type attested in House F, after known joins are taken in to account (Fig. 10). My data collection is unfinished as I have as yet had access to very few of the Baghdad tablets, and it is often not possible to determine tablet typology from the Chicago casts. The exact numbers should thus be taken with a large pinch of salt (as should all of those presented here). Nevertheless, as there is no reason to suppose that the tablet types are not randomly distributed across the three museum collections, the broad sweep of these crude and provisional results are still striking. Type IV tablets are almost never attested in House F compared to the other houses in TA; in Houses G and K, for instance, around half of the elementary school tablets are Type IV buns (Fig. 2; Fig. 10). It is not at all clear to me whether the House F teacher disliked Type IV tablets as teaching media, or as a suitable building material. Type II tablets, on the other hand, make up some two thirds of the surviving House F elementary tablets. Again, this may be a reflection of their suitability as hefty substitute bricks, but that factor alone would not account for the fact that

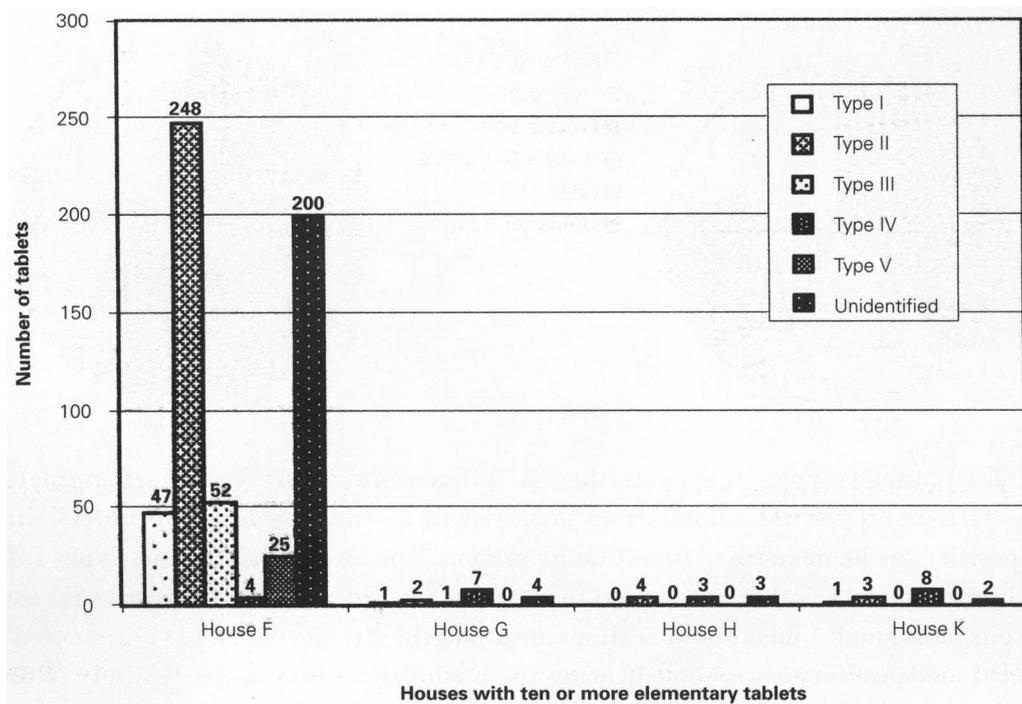


Fig. 10. — Typological distribution of elementary tablets in House F and TA

they outnumber the similarly sized Type I tablets by a ratio of about 5:1. Perhaps their dual role in initial exposure to new material as well as in revision made them particularly attractive as efficient scholastic media.

SUMERIAN LITERATURE IN HOUSE F

The other large group of tablets in House F, as mentioned above, contained Sumerian literature. Even taking joins into account, this makes a corpus of nearly 600 tablets attesting over eighty different literary compositions, in all five of Miguel Civil's general categories (Fig. 11; Fig. 12): myths and epics; city laments and hymns to rulers; law codes and literary letters; hymns to deities; and school dialogues, disputations and wisdom literature.²¹ However, as will become clear, this categorisation is a

21. This is also the typology followed by the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (Black *et al.* 1998–), with the addition of a section for Sumerian proverbs—which, as shown above, constituted the final component of the elementary curriculum. All literary compositions and ancient catalogues are cited according to the ETCSL titles and catalogue numbering here.

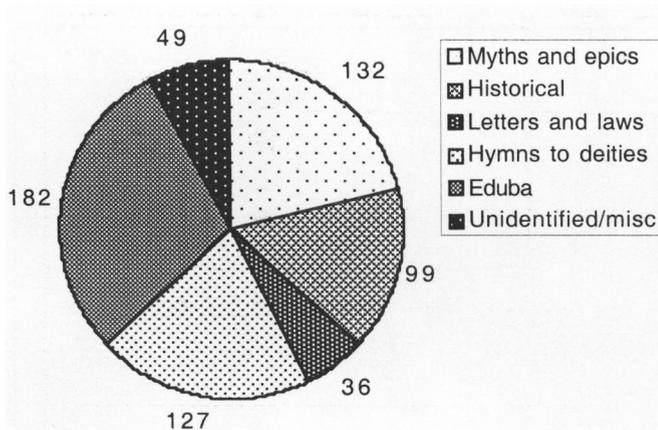


Fig. 11. — Number of Sumerian literary tablets in House F

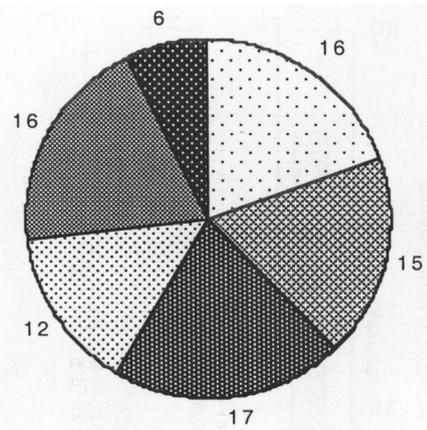


Fig. 12. — Number of Sumerian literary compositions in House F

modern one and does not reflect ancient scholastic usage. I present the data in this format initially in order to provide an overview of the material in terms that we are familiar with. Some forty fragments, just over 5% of the pieces, remain to be identified.

House F has given us an average of eight cuneiform sources for each composition found there, but in fact the sources are not distributed at all evenly (Fig. 13). If each literary work in the house had originally been recorded on roughly the same number of tablets, and those tablets had been broken or lost randomly, we would expect most compositions to have between four and twelve sources each, with a very few found either on one fragment alone or on many. The picture we get is very different: nearly fifty compositions are found on one, two, or three fragments, while over twenty of them have more than ten exemplars. In fact, our graph shows two different corpora: one large group of compositions written on just a few tablets each; and a smaller group, each written on an average of eighteen tablets. What are we to make of this?

Steve Tinney (1999) has recently analysed the curricular setting of Sumerian literature. He sees two bodies of school texts: a group of four very elementary hymns which he calls the Tetrad (Table 4), and ten more advanced compositions which he labels the Decad (Table 5). The Tetrad has almost no presence in House F, but as expected (Veldhuis 1997: 67; Tinney 1999: 162) the few witnesses we do have are quite clearly written on tablets belonging to the typology of the elementary curriculum (Table 1). All members of the Decad, on the other hand, are very well attested, with an average of twenty sources each in House F.

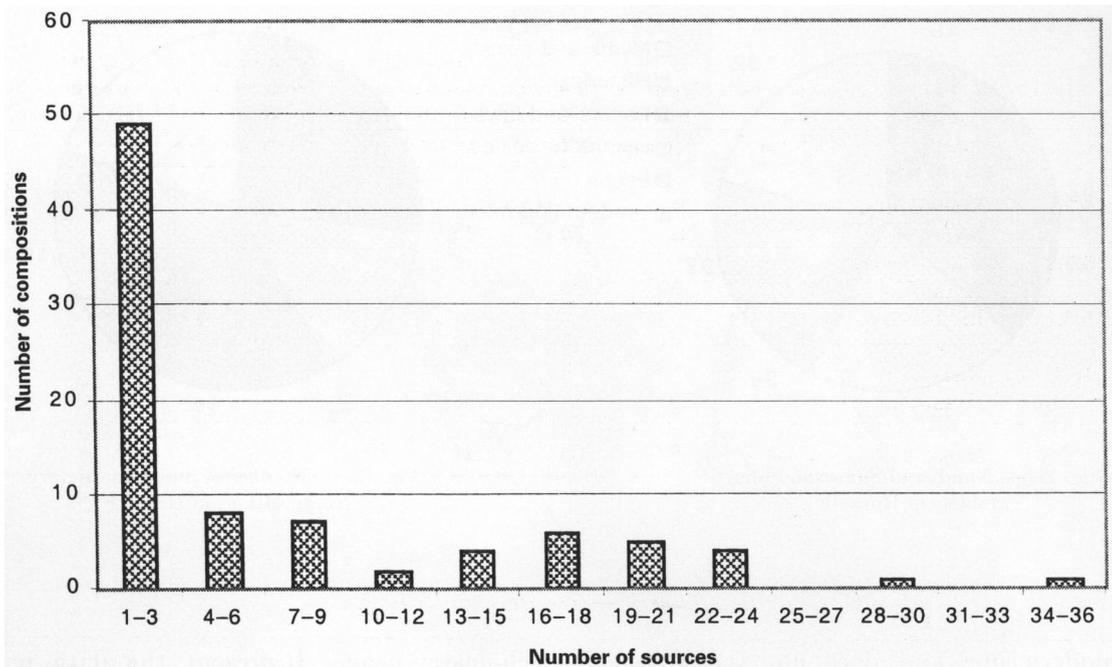


Fig. 13. — Tablets bearing Sumerian literary compositions in House F

Strikingly, Table 5 shows that the House F tablets account for between a fifth and a half of the total number of Nippur sources for each of the Decad members. The majority of the other Sumerian literary tablets from Nippur were excavated by Hilprecht's expedition from Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century, and very little reliable archaeological information about them survives. The data presented here, however, along with other evidence from House F, lead to the hypothesis that most of the Sumerian literary tablets may have come from three or four small, densely packed schools like House F. The rest may have been scattered more sparsely through other dwellings, like the neighbours of House F in Area TA. We can also see how heavily Nippur and House F have contributed to our overall picture of Sumerian literature, and potentially skewed our understanding of what is normative within the corpus: over a quarter of all Decad tablets are from House F, and all but a fifth of them are from Nippur more generally. The much more varied evidence of the Tetrad (Table 4), though, shows that Nippur is not necessarily simply a magnified reflection of the rest of the Sumerian literary world.

The Decad are not the only well attested literary compositions in House F: a further fourteen have over ten exemplars and/or account for a significant proportion of known

Table 4. — *The Tetrad in House F*²²

ETCSL no.	Composition	Sources from House F	Sources from Nippur	Sources from all sites	House F sources as % of Nippur sources	House F sources as % of sources from all sites	Nippur sources as % of sources from all sites
2.5.5.2	Lipit-Eshtar Hymn B	3 ²³	25	39	12	7	64
2.5.3.2	Iddin-Dagan Hymn B	0	2	20	—	—	10
2.5.8.1	Enlil-bani Hymn A	2 ²⁴	8	19	25	11	42
4.16.1	Nisaba Hymn A	0	3	14	—	—	21
	Mean	1.2	9.5	23.0	13	9	61

Table 5. — *The Decad in House F*²⁵

ETCSL no.	Composition	Sources from House F	Sources from Nippur	Sources from all sites	House F sources as % of Nippur sources	House F sources as % of sources from all sites	Nippur sources as % of sources from all sites
2.4.2.01	Shulgi Hymn A	17	46	66	37	26	70
2.5.5.1	Lipit-Eshtar Hymn A	12	56	70	21	17	80
5.5.4	Song of the Hoe	24	70	92	34	26	76
4.07.2	Inana Hymn B	36	83	96	43	38	86
4.05.1	Enlil Hymn A	24	57	73	42	33	78
4.80.2	Kesh Temple Hymn	22	69	89	32	25	76
1.1.4	Enki's Journey to Nippur	9	53	64	17	14	83
1.3.2	Inana and Ebih	18	60	75	30	24	80
4.28.1	Nungal Hymn	19	48	56	40	34	86
1.8.1.5	Gilgamesh and Huwawa (A)	21	72	92	29	23	78
	Mean	20.2	61.4	77.3	33	26	79

22. Numerical data based on Tinney (1999: 171–172).

23. Two Type II/1 tablets, one with Syllable Alphabet B; one collective tablet with Lipit-Eshtar Hymn D (ETCSL 2.5.5.4).

24. One Type IV tablet, one of unknown format.

25. Numerical data based on ETCSL database.

Table 6. — *The House F Fourteen*

ETCSL no.	Composition	House F sources	Nippur sources	Total sources	% Ho. F in Nippur	% Ho. F overall	% Nippur overall
5.1.2	<i>Eduba</i> Composition B	11	45	56	24	20	80
5.1.3	<i>Eduba</i> Composition C	14	38	39	37	36	97
1.8.1.4	Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Nether World	15	47	59	32	25	80
1.6.2	Deeds and Exploits of Ninurta	15	75	82	20	18	91
2.1.5	Cursing of Agade	15	90	102	17	15	88
2.4.2.2	Shulgi Hymn B	17	65	70	26	24	93
2.2.2	Ur Lament	17	76	94	22	18	81
5.6.1	Instructions of Shuruppag	18	54	68	33	16	79
5.1.1	Schooldays (<i>Eduba</i> A)	18	69	71	26	25	97
5.3.2	Debate between Sheep and Grain	19	56	66	34	29	85
1.4.3	Dumuzid's Dream	20	52	66	38	30	79
5.6.3	Farmer's Instructions	21	35	44	60	48	80
5.4.1	<i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 1	22	50	59	44	37	85
5.3.1	Debate between Hoe and Plough	30	52	59	58	51	88
	Mean	18	57	67	31	27	86

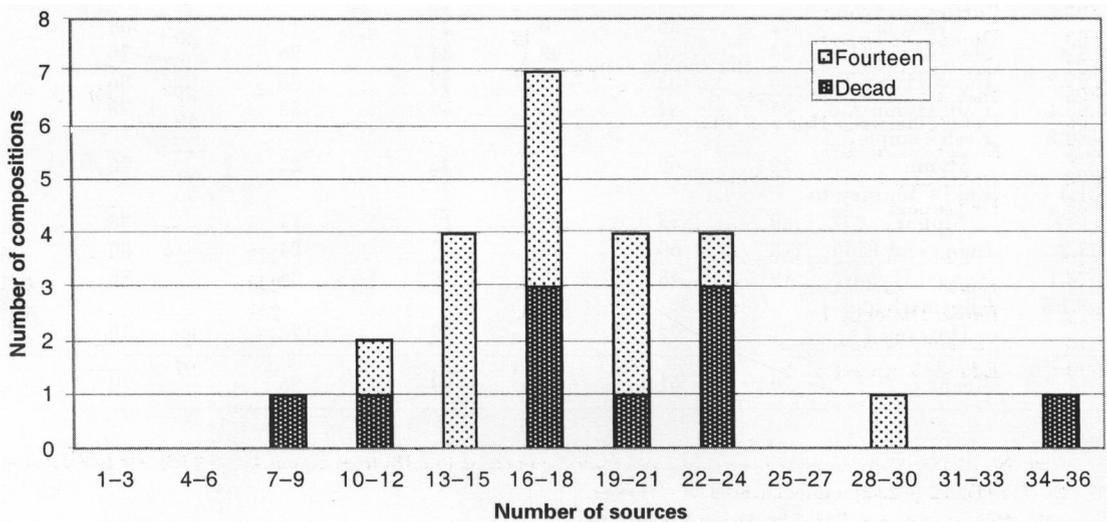


Fig. 14. — Sources for the Decad and the Fourteen in House F

sources (Table 6). As a group, their number of attested sources is not significantly different from the Decad (Fig. 14). I have called this group the House F Fourteen.

Like the Decad (Tinney 1999: 168–169), the Fourteen are listed together on some Old Babylonian catalogues of Sumerian literature (Table 7). This strongly suggests that House F, and perhaps also in others in Nippur and Ur, they held a similar curricular status to the members of the Decad. This curricular status was not as strong or as pervasive as the Decad's though, even in Nippur. For instance, in Catalogue N2 from Nippur there is a six-composition gap between the Decad and the House F Fourteen,

Table 7. — House F literary compositions in Old Babylonian literary catalogues

Composition	Line number of catalogue ²⁶						
	N2	L	S1	U1	U2	B4	Y2
D01 ²⁷ Shulgi Hymn A	01	[01]	01	—	04	07	01
D02 Lipit-Eshtar Hymn A	02	[02]	02	—	05	08	02
D03 The Song of the Hoe	03	[03]	04	—	—	09	03
D04 Inana Hymn B	04	[04]	03	—	08	03	04
D05 Enlil Hymn A	05	05	05	—	16	10	—
D06 Kesh Temple Hymn	06	06	06	—	23	—	—
D07 Enki's Journey to Nippur	07	07	07	—	28	24	—
D08 Inana and Ebih	08	08	08	10	13	02	—
D09 Nungal Hymn A	09	09	09	18	14	—	—
D10 Gilgamesh and Huwawa (A)	10	10	R3	14	09	—	—
F01 Debate between Sheep and Grain	17	11	—	—	15	—	—
F02 Cursing of Agade	18	12	—	—	17	—	—
F03 Dumuzid's Dream	19	13	R4	—	26	—	—
F04 Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World	20	14	—	—	29? ²⁸	—	—
F05 Instructions of Shuruppag	21	15	—	—	29?	19	—
F06 Debate between Hoe and Plough	25	16	—	—	18	—	—
F07 Shulgi Hymn B	26	17	—	01	—	—	—
F08 Deeds and Exploits of Ninurta	—	18	—	—	41	—	—
F09 Ur Lament	32	26	—	—	44	—	—
F10 Schooldays (<i>Eduba</i> Composition A)	50	—	—	24? ²⁹	33?	—	06?
F11 <i>Eduba</i> Composition C	51	—	R9	24?	—	—	07?
F12 <i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 1	52	—	—	24?	—	—	08?
F13 Farmer's Instructions	53	—	10	22	35	22	—
F14 <i>Eduba</i> Composition B	54	—	—	—	07	—	—

26. N2 (ETCSL 0.2.01) from Nippur; L (0.2.02) from Nippur?; S1 (0.2.18) from Sippir; U1 (0.2.03), U2 (0.2.04) from Ur; B4 (0.2.11), Y2 (0.2.12) unprovenanced. R = reverse.

27. D01–10 = Decad; F01–14 = House F Fourteen.

28. This entry, *ud re-a ud sud-ta re²-a*, could be the incipit of either Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World or the Instructions of Shuruppag.

29. This incipit, *dumu e₂-dub-ba-a*, could belong to any one of *Eduba* A, *Eduba* C, *Eduba* F (ETCSL 5.1.a, unpublished), *Eduba* Dialogue 1, or *Eduba* Dialogue 3 (ETCSL 5.4.3).

Table 8. — Other Sumerian literary compositions in House F

Composition	Sources	Line number of catalogue				
		N2	L	S1	U2	
1.1.3	Enki and the World Order	3	42	32	—	—
1.2.1	Enlil and Ninlil ³⁰	4	22	19? ³¹	R10	—
1.2.2	Enlil and Sud	7	23? ³²	—	—	—
1.3.3	Inana and Shu-kale-tuda	1	44	34	—	36
1.4.1	Inana's Descent to the Nether World	3	41	33	—	27
1.6.1	The Return of Ninurta to Nippur	7	—	43	—	42
1.8.1.2	Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven	4	11	37	—	22
1.8.2.1	Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave	7	38	22	—	37
1.8.2.2	Lugalbanda	7	39	23	—	39
1.8.2.4	Enmerkar and En-suhgir-ana	2	40	24	—	—
2.1.4	Sargon Legend	1	—	—	—	—
2.2.3	Sumer and Ur Lament	3	34	—	—	45
2.2.4	Nippur Lament	8	33	27	—	—
2.4.1.1	Ur-Namma Hymn A	1	—	—	—	—
2.5.4.01	Ishme-Dagan Hymn A+V ³³	3	—	58	R02	51
2.5.4.05	Ishme-Dagan Hymn E	1	—	—	—	—
2.5.4.06	Ishme-Dagan Hymn F ³⁴	1	—	—	—	—
2.5.4.07	Ishme-Dagan Hymn G	1	—	—	—	—
2.5.4.12	Ishme-Dagan Hymn L	2	—	—	—	—
3.4.02	Law Code of Lipit-Eshtar	1	—	—	—	—
4.07.3	Inana Hymn C	9	—	40	—	—
4.07.4	Inana Hymn D	1	45	50	—	—
4.08.18	Dumuzid-Inana Hymn R	1	—	—	—	—
4.10.1	Lisin's Lament	1	—	—	—	—
4.14.1	Nanshe Hymn A ³⁵	6	24	19? ³⁶	R11	—
5.3.3	Debate between Winter and Summer	4	29	30	—	22
5.3.4	Debate between Tree and Reed	1	28	21	—	20
5.3.5	Debate between Bird and Fish	1	—	—	—	19
5.4.02	<i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 2	3	58	—	—	32
5.4.03	<i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 3	3	59	—	—	06
5.4.05	<i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 5	6	55	—	—	—
5.9.2	Heron and Turtle	2	30	53	—	—

30. 1 tablet with Nanshe Hymn A.

31. The incipit *iri na-nam*, which occurs in all three catalogues, also opens Nanshe Hymn A (ETCSL 4.14.1).

32. The incipit of the composition itself is damaged.

33. One tablet also contains an unidentified hymn.

34. On the same tablet as Ishme-Dagan Hymn G.

35. 1 tablet with Enlil and Ninlil.

36. The incipit *iri na-nam*, which occurs in all three catalogues, also opens Enlil and Ninlil (ETCSL 1.2.1).

while the Deeds and Exploits of Ninurta (F 08) is not listed at all.³⁷ Apart from that, there is complete agreement between Catalogues N2 and L in the order of nine of the Fourteen, though other compositions are scattered among them. The only non-Nippur catalogue with strong evidence for the Fourteen is U2 from Ur, but it clearly reflects a very different curricular order, or some other ordering principle entirely. This is hardly surprising, given how very Nippur-dominated the sources for these compositions are (Table 5, Table 6). No catalogue has yet been identified in House F itself.

What of the rest of House F's literary contents? Table 8 lists all the remaining compositions identified so far, sorted by their ETCSL catalogue number, apart from the literary letters and related compositions, which are treated separately below.³⁸ Most have only one or two sources, but another cluster of eight compositions emerges (shown in bold) with 6–10 exemplars each and a presence in the three ancient catalogues N2, L, S1, and U2. A further fourteen, with just 1–4 exemplars, are also listed in the same catalogues. (Indeed only nine of the forty-odd House F compositions we have considered so far are not known to have been catalogued in ancient times.) This suggests that the Decad and Fourteen were not the only curricular groupings in the House F but rather that there were clusters of compositions that were regularly taught together. We have already seen that Lipit-Eshtar Hymn B, one of the two Tetrad members attested in the house, shares a tablet with the apparently non-curricular Lipit-Eshtar Hymn D (Table 4). Other pairs of compositions on the same tablet are Enlil and Ninlil with Nanshe Hymn A (perhaps because they share the same incipit); Ishme-Dagan Hymn F with Ishme-Dagan Hymn G; and Ishme-Dagan Hymn A with an as yet unidentified composition.

The fit between the catalogues and the House F corpus is not perfect: many House F compositions are not listed in the catalogues (Table 8), while for instance Gilgamesh and Aga (N2 12, U2 12: ETCSL 1.8.1.1), Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta (N2 48, L 24, U2 40: 1.8.2.4), Ishbi-Erra Hymn E (N2 15, U2 2: 2.5.1.5), the Temple Hymns (N2 49, L 31, U2 21: 4.80.1), and the Home of the Fish (N2 16, L 48, S1 R5: 5.9.1) are (hitherto) unattested in House F.

The structure of the Letter Collections (Ali 1964) is strongly reflected in the House F finds (Table 9). Letter Collection A, which Ali constructed on the basis of a House F tablet containing all three of its component letters A 01–A 03 was clearly a local reality but may not have had a life outside this particular school. Collection B, comprising 17 letters and three other short compositions, is more interesting for us, as Ali's primary source was a single tablet from elsewhere in Nippur containing the whole sequence of twenty, with half a dozen others from Nippur and Ur bearing sub-sequences of letters. These show that the collection was rather fluid, and that 3.1.05, 3.3.13, and 5.7.3—marked (B) in Tables 9

37. Neither is *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur* (Table 8).

38. There are also over forty tablets bearing still unidentified literary compositions.

Table 9. — *Literary letters, and related compositions, in House F*

	Letter	Sources	Letter Coll.	Cat. W1 ³⁹
3.1.01	Letter from Arad-ngu to Shulgi about Apillasha	5	A 01	—
3.1.02	Letter from Shulgi to Arad-ngu about Apillasha	2	A 02	—
3.1.05	Letter from Arad-ngu to Shulgi about Aba-indasa's missing troops	1	(B)	—
3.1.17	Letter from Ishbi-Erra to Ibbi-Suen about purchasing grain	1	—	—
3.1.19	Letter from Puzur-Shulgi to Ibbi-Suen	2	A 03	06?
3.1.21	Letter from Aba-indasa to Shulgi	2	B 01	11?
3.2.01	Letter from Suen-illat to Iddin-Dagan	2	B 02	—
3.2.08	Letter from Iter-pisha to a deity	1	—	—
3.3.01	Letter from Ur-shaga to a king	1	B 06	—
3.3.02	Letter from Lugal-nisang to a king	3	B 07	—
3.3.03	Letter from Lugal-nisang to a king	3	B 08	—
3.3.04	Letter from Ur-Enlila to the <i>ensi</i> and <i>sanga</i>	2	B 10	28
3.3.05	Letter from the <i>ensi</i> and <i>sanga</i> to a king	1	B 11	27
3.3.06	Letter from Aba-tah-lugalnga to his brothers	2	B 13	16
3.3.07	Letter from the “Monkey” to his mother	1	B 14	17
3.3.08	Letter from ^d UTU-HI to Ilak-ni'id ⁴⁰	2	B 15	24
3.3.09	Letter from Lugal-nisang to Enlil-massu	2	B 16	26
3.3.10	Letter from Inanaka to Nintinuga	2	B 17	22
3.3.11	Letter from KA-Inana to Enlil-massu	1	B 19	15
3.3.12	Letter from KA-Inana to Lugal-ibila	2	B 20	—
3.3.13	Letter from a <i>šabra</i> to the generals	2	(B)	29
3.3.32	Letter from Nabi-Enlil to a king	2	—	—
2.1.3	History of the Tummal	1	B 09	14
5.7.2	Nintinuga's Dog	1	B 18	30
5.7.3	Dedication of an Axe to Nergal	2	(B)	20

and 10—were all considered to belong to the collection at different times and by various people. Only three of the House F letters are not from Collection A or B, namely a Letter from Ishbi-Erra to Ibbi-Suen (3.1.17), which I have shown elsewhere is heavily scholasticised (Robson 2002), the Letter from Iter-pisha to a Deity (3.2.08) and the Letter from Nabi-Enlil to a king (3.3.32), written on the same tablet as B 10. All the other House F sources are single-letter tablets. The only letters missing from House F are B 03–B 05 (from Iddin-Dagan to Suen-illat, from Nanna-kiang to Lipit-Eshtar, and from Lipit-Eshtar to Nanna-kiang) and B 12 (Public Announcement of the Loss of a Document).

An OB catalogue of some thirty literary letters and related compositions, found in the Uruk *Scherbenloch*, lists many of the compositions from the second half of Collection B, albeit in a different order to the Nippur collective tablets. It omits B 12 (as in House F) but

39. Cavigneaux (1996: no. 12); ETCSL 0.2.17.

40. On the same tablet as extracts from the lexical list Nigga.

includes items, namely, the Letter to the Generals and the Dedication of an Axe to Nergal, which are in House F and on the periphery of Collection B. The degree of variation within this part of the curriculum, between schools and between cities, seems to be similar to the disparities in the Fourteen-like compositions chosen for inclusion in catalogues and curricula. However, for whatever reason, the letters are attested in smaller numbers in House F, with an average of fewer than 2 sources each. However, as only two known sources come from the Iraq Museum, further fragments may yet come to light there.

Four of House F's neighbours left identifiable literary tablets behind, all in single exemplars (Fig. 2; Table 10). Their range is in general very similar to those from House F itself—and again there is no sign of the Tetrad.

Table 10. — Sumerian literary tablets in other TA houses

House	Level ⁴¹	ETCSL no.	Composition	Comments
G	10.2	1.6.2	Deeds and Exploits of Ninurta	F 08
	10.2	5.4.2	<i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 2	
	10.1	1.6.1	The Return of Ninurta to Nippur	
	10.1	1.8.2.1	Lugalbanda in the Mountain Cave	
	10.1	3.3.6	Letter from Aba-dah-lugalnga to his brothers	B 13
	10.1	1.1.3	Enki's Journey to Nippur	D 07
	8.3	1.2.2	Enlil and Sud	
	8.3	1.8.1.2	Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven	
	8.3	1.8.1.4	Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World	F 04
	8.3	2.1.5	Cursing of Agade	F 02
	8.3	5.6.1	Instructions of Shuruppag	F 05
I	8.2	2.1.3	History of the Tummal	B 09
	8.2	2.5.1.5	Ishbi-Erra Hymn E	Not attested in House F
	8.2	3.1.05	Letter from Arad-ngu to Shulgi	(B). On the same tablet as 3.2.01
	8.2	3.2.01	Letter from Sin-illat to Iddin-Dagan	B 02. On the same tablet as 3.1.05
	8.2	—	Literary (unidentified)	
J	12.2	2.2.2	Ur Lament	F 09
	12.2	5.4.5	<i>Eduba</i> Dialogue 5	
	9.3	—	Literary (unidentified)	
K	11.3	2.5.5.1	Lipit-Eshtar Hymn A	D 02
	10.1	1.6.1	The Return of Ninurta to Nippur	
	10.1	4.14.1	Nanshe Hymn A	
	9.2	1.4.3	Dumuzid's Dream	F 03
	9.2	—	Literary (unidentified)	
	9.2 fill	2.8.7.5	Prayer for Samsu-iluna	Not attested in House F
	8.1 fill	—	Literary (unidentified)	

41. Levels 11 and 12 date to before the school was active in House F; level 10 is approximately contemporary with it; levels 8 and 9 are post-school.

SUMERIAN AND AKKADIAN IN HOUSE F AND AREA TA

It should be obvious from the preceding discussion that the House F curriculum was substantially in Sumerian: only around twenty exemplars of bilingual elementary compositions have so far been identified (1 Proto-Kagal, 4 Proto-Aa, and the 16 copies of Proto-Diri; see Table 3), and just one piece of Akkadian literature: a fragment of OB Gilgamesh (Cavigneaux and Renger 2000).⁴² The established understanding of this situation is that the Old Babylonian scribal schools were deliberately traditionalist, continuing to promulgate Sumerian while most administrative, business, and legal documents were already written in Akkadian (e.g., Pearce 1995: 2270). Indeed an element of traditionalism is displayed in the fact that, even outside the Tetrad, Decad, and Fourteen (which as curricular groupings we might expect to be conservative), the royal praise poetry in House F is all to Ishme-Dagan (1953–35), who had ruled some two centuries earlier.⁴³

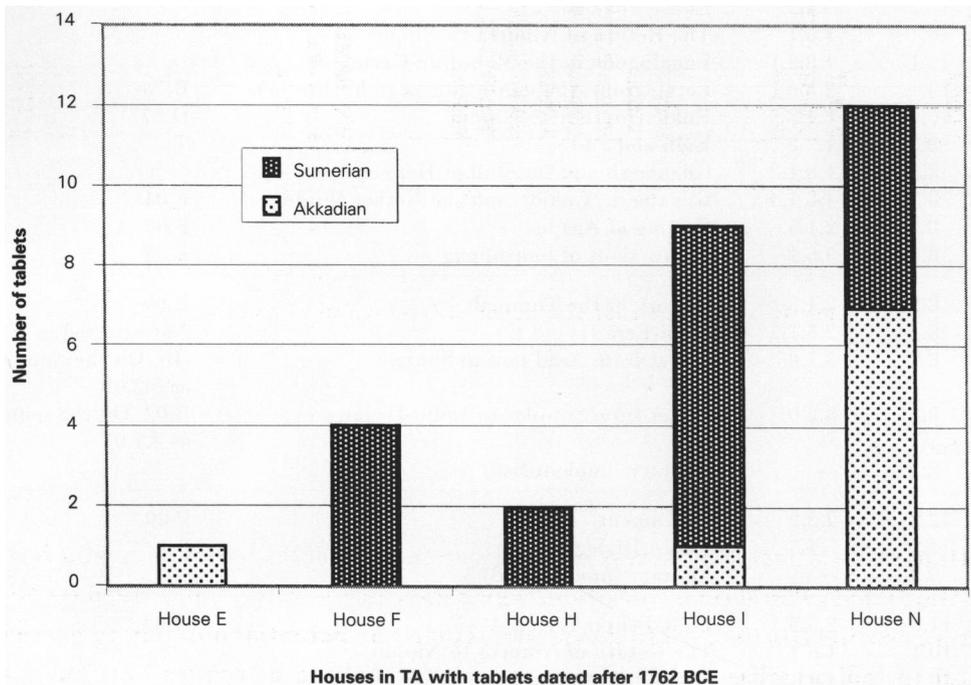


Fig. 15. — Household distribution of dated tablets in TA (after 1762)

42. As mentioned above, the eighteen Akkadian letters discovered in the house may also be scholastic compositions.

43. Compare the relatively up-to-date school at No. 7, Quiet Street in Ur, destroyed like House F in about 1740 but which had probably not been used as a school for some time, in which Rim-Sin (1822–1763) was the main subject of royal praise poetry found there (Charpin 1986: 429–431, 433).

However, although the school may have promoted old-fashioned literary models of kingship, the linguistic medium in which they were couched was not necessarily redundant too. Some thirty or so household documents written after Hammurabi's conquest of Nippur in 1762 survive from House F and its neighbours in Area TA.⁴⁴ Over two thirds of them were written in Sumerian (Fig. 15),⁴⁵ and continued to be written in Sumerian until the area was abandoned after 1721 (Fig. 16). As House F presumably trained scribes who lived locally this should hardly be surprising.

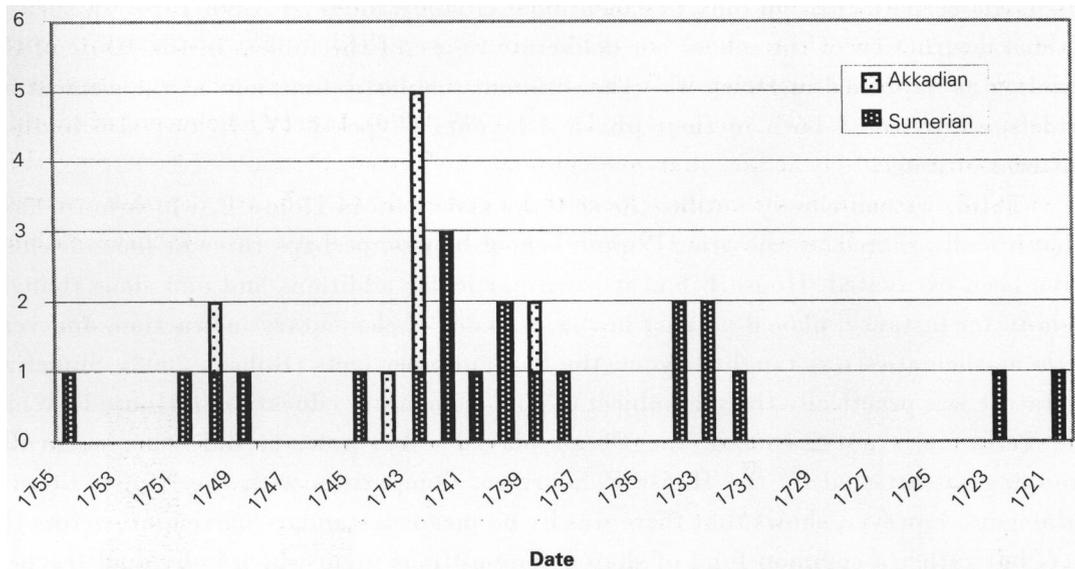


Fig. 16. — Chronological distribution of dated tablets in TA (after 1762)

CONCLUSIONS

House F is a remarkable test case for our more general hypotheses and intuitions about Old Babylonian scribal education, which have necessarily been derived for the most part from decontextualised textual evidence. It has the potential not only to particularise but also to individualise and humanise our understanding of the scribes' physical and mental world. Although my ongoing study is by no means complete, there are already some important initial conclusions to be drawn.

44. Stone 1987: texts 12–15, 22–23, 25–29, 31–32, 34, 38, 42–47, 49–50, 54, 56–57, 59–61.

45. I have used a simplistic method to assign languages to documents: those with any Akkadian at all (excluding personal names) are designated as Akkadian, and those without as Sumerian. As the issue here is literacy not orality I have not been concerned to determine what the language of speech in Area TA was.

First, its physical environment is much smaller and more domestic than the Sumerian school literature would have us believe; there is no room in the tiny courtyard, less than 10 m², for all the teachers and pupils described in the famous “Schooldays” story (Kramer 1949). There must have been a significant mismatch between the idealised image of scribalism portrayed in the Sumerian literature taught in House F and the experiences of the students who were learning it.

Second, the presence of facilities for recycling used tablets explains why large scholastic corpora turn up only in exceptional circumstances (cf. Civil 1979: 7), such as sudden destruction of the school⁴⁶ or deliberate re-use of the tablets in the fabric of the building as happened in House F.⁴⁷ The different scholastic functions of the elementary tablets are reflected both in their physical layouts (Types I–IV, P) but also in their patterns of usage.

Third, we can closely outline the scribal curriculum in House F, which must have been broadly shared by the other Nippur school houses, perhaps three or four of which have been excavated. House F had its own particular additions and omissions though: *tu-ta-ti*, for instance, played no part in the sequence of elementary instruction, and very little mathematics was taught beyond the basic number facts (Robson 2002). Sumerian literature was practically the sole subject of post-elementary education in House F. While the Tetrad was not favoured, the Decad played a key role, as did other curricular groupings as attested by the House F Fourteen. Comparison with the Nippur literary catalogues, however, shows that there was by no means a standard curriculum across the city, but rather a common fund of shared compositions upon which individual teachers drew according to personal taste or pedagogical preference. The House F teacher made curricular choices that differentiated it from other Nippur schools. The predominance of Sumerian-language teaching is reflected in the preponderantly Sumerian-language documents drawn up for the households neighbouring House F.

Fourth, the curricular groupings within the educational corpus cut right across the generic boundaries the modern discipline has imposed upon Sumerian literature: the Decad and the Fourteen both mix myths and epics, royal praise poetry, and hymns to deities with the sort of compositions we have customarily described as “scribal training literature”. Even the literary letters are not rigidly demarcated from the rest of the corpus. Incantations, however, had no role in the House F curriculum.

Finally, the House F material has the potential to answer many more questions about Old Babylonian scribal education. For instance, when the dataset is complete it may be possible to estimate its “coefficient of completeness” (Civil 1980: 231): namely, how much survives of what might have been a “full set” of scribal exercises. That could lead in turn to

46. For instance, No. 7 Quiet Street in Ur (Charpin 1986: 433).

47. And, for instance, in No. 1 Broad Street in Ur (Charpin 1986: 481–2).

an educated guess at the number of students trained in House F at any one time, and/or how much they wrote. We are still a long way, however, from determining the average duration of scribal education or the ages at which students typically started school or left it. It may be that these most basic of questions can never be answered, simply because such matters were so obvious they were never recorded (cf. Civil 1980: 227).

As long as the 3N-T tablets were used simply as a rich fund of sources for Old Babylonian literary and lexical compositions they inevitably distorted our image of Old Babylonian Sumerian. Disentangling House F from the rest of Nippur and, in the future, comparing it carefully with other sources of well provenanced contemporary corpora, such as the Uruk *Scherbenloch*, No. 7 Quiet Street in Ur, and the *gala-mahs'* house in Sippir Amnānum, will enable us to see a more nuanced picture of Old Babylonian scribal education and its literary by-products, in which chronological and regional variation, and even individual choice, can be more clearly distinguished.

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RÉSUMÉ

La maison F dans la Nippur du XVIII^e siècle a livré plus de 1 400 tablettes dans un contexte archéologique précis. Elle fournit donc une occasion unique de vérifier nos théories relatives à la nature de la formation des scribes et au rôle de la littérature sumérienne à l’époque paléo-babylonienne. On constate que la sagesse,

reposant avant tout sur la littérature de l'*eduba* relative à l'école, est absente, tandis que les hypothèses récentes formulées par Veldhuis et Tinney sur l'enseignement élémentaire et celui de la littérature sont confirmées et élargies. Il apparaît qu'il n'y avait pas un curriculum monolithique à Nippur mais plutôt un répertoire de compositions et un petit nombre de genres de tablettes standardisées qui étaient considérés comme formant un matériel pédagogique approprié, que les maîtres pouvaient utiliser quand ils le jugeaient opportun. En outre, le simple volume de tablettes de la maison F en particulier et de Nippur en général a presque certainement déformé fortement notre image de l'éducation scribale paléo-babylonienne en leur faveur, au détriment d'autres sites moins intensivement fouillés.

ABSTRACT

House F from eighteenth-century Nippur has yielded over 1,400 archaeologically contextualised tablets. It thus offers a unique opportunity to test our assumptions about the nature of scribal education and the role of Sumerian literature in the Old Babylonian period. The received wisdom, based predominantly on the *eduba* literature about school, is shown to be wanting, while more recent hypotheses put forward by Veldhuis and Tinney on the elementary and literary curricula are upheld and developed. It appears that there was no monolithic Nippur curriculum but rather a repertoire of compositions and a small range of standard tablet formats which were considered appropriate teaching material, both of which scribal teachers could draw on as they saw fit. Further, the sheer volume of tablets from House F in particular and Nippur in general has almost certainly skewed our picture of Old Babylonian scribal education heavily in their favour compared to other less intensively excavated sites.

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