

# The Nuzi Temple Texts: A Complete Edition of an Eccentric Corpus

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Brigitte Lion and Diana Stein have, in *The Tablets from the Temple Precinct at Nuzi*, joined forces to edit the texts of the sixty-nine Nuzi texts found in temples (Lion) and to publish and edit their 282 seal impressions (Stein). This masterful collaboration excels in many areas, including in-depth prosopographical analysis and thorough integration of the local seal practice into the orbit of textual analysis. This volume sets a standard of text edition and analysis that dwarfs the achievements of the students of Nuzi from the first two-thirds of the twentieth century and even since. Nevertheless, the *raison d'être* of this heterogeneous group of texts in the context of their storage in temples remains enigmatic.

The volume under review contains analyses and editions of the texts of sixty-nine tablets (as well as seven other, related texts) originating in the major temple precinct of Nuzi. In addition, publication and edition of the seal impressions contained on these sixty-nine artifacts are presented. This sub-corpus is anomalous and, thus, especially important among the Nuzi documents: the heterogeneity of the documents is unique among Nuzi tablet collections. These documents have never before been extensively studied and analyzed as a group.<sup>1</sup> And so this volume is very welcome indeed.

The book is divided into two major sections. Brigitte Lion treats the text corpus as a whole and edits the tablets, giving transliterations, translations, and commentary (pp. 5–223; in French). In the second main section (pp. 225–358; in English), Diana Stein analyzes, describes, and presents drawings and some photographs of the tablets' 282 seal impressions from a variety of perspectives: archaeological, functional, and so on. A formal edition of the impressions follows. These two sections are followed by indices: personal names, geographic names, Akkadian terms, seal impressions, and personal names of seal users. The volume concludes with a list of abbreviations, a bibliography, and plates, mostly of plans and of photographs of seal impressions.

This work, the edition of texts integrated with the edition of the texts' seal impressions, is an unqualified success and constitutes one of the work's major values (another is the detailing of these texts' assorted peculiarities). The collaboration of Lion and Stein is close and fruitful, extending a scholarly partnership that had already demonstrated its substantial worth in an earlier such exercise (Lion and Stein 2001). Lion's editions are reliable, her commentary sober and appropriately cautious. Stein's editions are equally careful and thorough. Her drawings of the impressions are elegant and seemingly precise. In this, she continues her sterling publication and analyses of the Nuzi seals, whose parade example must be the majestic *Seal Impressions* from the Šilwa-tešup archive (Stein 1993a and b).

Lion's part of the book begins with a general description of the two temples in which tablets were found, those of Šawuška/Ištar (mostly rooms G 29, 73) and Tešup/Adad (room

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1. Jass 2000 is a limited study.

G 53; only four tablets of the total). She describes the cataloguing and contents of the tablets. The tablets are mundane and heterogeneous, with no hint of cultic content or function. They are mostly private contracts and other documents, similar to the contents of private Nuzi archives from private dwellings. There are some administrative texts (inventories and other lists). Some of the principal parties can be linked to non-temple archives. On the other hand, some of the texts are total isolates. Lion notes that, among the Late Bronze archives, only Emar and Rimah offer parallels to Nuzi's temple texts. Lion offers thoughts on the possible function of these documents in their temple context. We shall return to this issue below.

The bulk of Lion's contribution is the presentation of eight principal "dossiers" and seven other miscellaneous groups of texts making up the sub-corpus of sixty-nine. For each section and then for each text, Lion offers valuable interpretive comments. After each text she offers philological and other notes. Especially welcome are Lion's valuable and careful prosopographical discussions of the principal parties in these texts. Note, for example, the excellent charts of attestations of judges (pp. 65–66, 133–34).

Stein opens the second main section with a similarly valuable general introduction. This includes a useful description of the temple archaeology followed by a description of the temple tablets. She dates the period of the Nuzi texts to ca. 1430–1330 (p. 234). It is a range at odds with my own dating of 1475/1450–1350<sup>2</sup> but this is of no serious consequence in this context. Stein then deals with sealing practice in these documents, placement of the seal impressions and captions on the surfaces of the clay, scribal idiosyncrasies, anomalies, and other factors and practices in sealing these documents. One happily notes that the drawings presented by Stein include improvements over some of her earlier drawings of seal impressions owing to more available data. Like Lion, Stein also offers thoughts on the possible function of these documents in their temple context. We now turn to this problem.

What in fact is going on here? Both authors recognize that the issue of the function of the temples as repositories for a variety of non-temple-related tablets (over twenty genres in Lion's classification [pp. 12–14]) constitutes the great conundrum of these texts. And both authors address the problem in detail. In considering the issue, Lion renders it more troubling still, noting that texts of the same archive are found both within a temple and outside, in clearly private archives. This includes documents dealing with the same matter (see chap. 9). Thus, Lion correctly abstains from calling these temple texts an archive at all.

Lion considers several hypotheses to account for the presence of the sixty-nine heterogeneous texts in the two temples (pp. 20–22): storage to ensure divine protection, storage to protect the tablets in a guarded building (temple guards are well attested in the Nuzi texts), storage in a central location for archives too small to merit an archival chamber in a private house, storage of tablets owned by non-Nuzians (a possibility examined below), storage of "dead," i.e., useless, archives, and, finally—since each of the foregoing possibilities accounts for only some of the tablets at most—storage for a combination of these reasons. In the end, Lion accepts none of these solutions. And correctly so.

Stein wrestles with the same issue (pp. 235–37) and considers some of the same solutions. She too recognizes that, at best, these represent only partial solutions. Actually, she seems more sanguine than Lion in opting for solutions, though her evidence is mostly supposition. However, Stein stresses one of these possibilities—the presence of tablets of non-Nuzians, or at least part-time Nuzians. She notes (p. 236) the presence of documents here of Šilwa-tešup son of the king. "These documents, one may assume, would originally have been stored at the family's main residence in the capital [i.e., in Arrapha City]" (p. 236). Let us, for present

2. See, most recently, Maidman 2018: 20, 22, excursus no. 2.

purposes, accept this assumption. She supposes that “perhaps the rise in hostilities within the land of Arrapha, particularly along its western border with Assyria and in the south prompted some people with local Nuzi connections to move their records to the relative safety of the Nuzi temples”<sup>3</sup> (p. 237).<sup>4</sup>

Stein seems to accept my reconstruction of events leading to Assyria’s conquest of the kingdom of Arrapha. According to this depiction, Assyria attacked from the west, bypassing Nuzi in a southern thrust to Arrapha’s southeastern border, then doubled back to attack Nuzi, and, having achieved Nuzi’s destruction, continued north to take the final prize, Arrapha City. But if this course of events be accepted, why would important tablets be transported *south*, toward the arena of Assyrian activity and demonstrable success? If “the capital was no longer considered safe” (p. 236), then *a fortiori* Nuzi would have been considered even less safe.<sup>5</sup> Logic would dictate (though logic is no substitute for evidence) that any other direction would have been a better choice.

In this volume, no solution is found to the major dilemma posed by the Nuzi temple tablets: Lion herself reaches this conclusion, and Stein’s proposed solutions fail to persuade. They are mere *ad hoc* attempts.

Before turning to various details, a final observation regarding the place of the present volume in the now extensive Nuzi literature: this achievement shows how far in data, in sophistication, and in methodology Nuzi studies have come since the pioneering studies of the first six or seven decades of the twentieth century. The bibliography now is vast and most of the earliest works are now all but totally superannuated.

Some assorted reactions to points of detail follow.

**P. 30**, note to ll. 4 and 11. Lion shows that 1 *kumanu* = ½ *awiharu*, proved by *EN* 9/3 55. For an earlier proof, see Maidman 1994: 328, second note to l. 5.

**P. 71** n. 3. Lion’s rejection of my reconstruction is correct.

**P. 94**. *EN* 9/3 58: 1-3 raises an important point. Šurki-tilla son of Tehip-tilla is the well-known second son of Tehip-tilla son of Puhi-šenni. These lines establish explicitly that Nuzi had a second Šurki-tilla son of Tehip-tilla over and above the more famous one. This is a rare instance in these texts where PN son of PN<sub>2</sub> refers to two separate individuals. Compare Maidman 1976: 131–32 with n. 15—I at that time considered each PN son of PN<sub>2</sub> to represent a unique individual. That is overwhelmingly still the case (and therefore remains a useful prosopographical tool) but not absolutely so. For two other possible instances of two individuals called by the same PN son of PN<sub>2</sub>, see already Maidman 1976: 131 n. 15.

**P. 137** n. 23. Maidman 2010: 138–41 belongs in this list of studies of *JEN* 321.

**P. 185**. *EN* 9/1 5: 8 has *ma-QA-ḫi-ra*. Lion, note to ll. 8, 14, recognizes the difficulty here, with no satisfactory solution forthcoming. Perhaps one might associate the term with *maQaḫu* (the last sign would remain unexplained), a term semantically consistent with *EN* 9/1 5:8. If so, see *CAD* M/1, p. 121b *sub makahu* and Maidman 1994: 301, first note to *JEN* 757:4.

3. In the case of Šilwa-tešup, why not move the tablets to his large suburban villa where his other records were found?

4. But see p. 248, where, in light of the style of the seal impressions, Stein characterizes the collection as a whole as mostly that of “average citizens ... who had nowhere better to store their documents,” thus placing their texts alongside vital texts transported some sixteen kilometers to rescue them from impending destruction. This is a possibility but far from a compelling one.

5. And, in fact, Nuzi most likely fell to Assyria before Arrapha City did.

**P. 185.** In her note to *EN* 9/1 5: 8, 15 (it should be 8–9, 15), Lion notes the traditional interpretation of *paihu* as unbuilt land. This position may require reconsideration in light of *JEN* 816. See Maidman 2015: 91–94, especially p. 93, second note to l. 4.

**P. 202.** Lion reads the start of *HSS*, XV, 32: 5' as *ša<sup>1</sup> mar-ti-a[n-n]i*. In her note to l. 5', she points out that, among other interpretations of this segment, Maidman 2010: 69 reads *ta-mar-ti a[n-n]i*. Her rejection of this rendering is correct.

**Pp. 211–14** (= chap. 14). In this important chapter dealing with royal edicts, the one edict found in the temple, *HSS*, XIV 9, was treated in Maidman 2010: 175–76. There are significant differences of interpretation between the two renditions. Some of these differences are reflected in the style of the translations. Mine is choppy and not entirely clear, reflecting the obscurity of the text itself. Lion's translation is clearer. However, the implication that the *ilku* ought to be performed in one place only is belied by other Nuzi evidence. See Maidman 2010: 171–73 (text 74), 174–75 (text 75), and 175–76 (text 76, the present text, belied here too in my view). Regarding the presence of URU LUGAL, convincingly argued by Lion (p. 213), its attestation as a term is clear. What this shadowy toponym (if it be indeed such) represents is not. Finally, as regards the relationship between the *ilku* and the crown as reflected in this text, Maidman and Lion are in agreement (Maidman 2010: 175; the present volume, p. 212).

There are few mistakes, and they are insignificant. On p. 164, for “Purilliwe,” read “Purulliwe.” On p. 227, for “seventy-nine ... tablets,” read “sixty-nine ... tablets.”

Two additional indices would have been welcome: an index of key terms treated (e.g., *szubumma epēšu* [p. 56]; *hašaḥušennum* [p. 59]; *nāgīru* [p. 85]); and an index of special topics discussed (e.g., discussion of the location, function, and proprietorship of marriage tablets [p. 35]; survey of independent women [pp. 122–23]). But these are minor quibbles in a superb volume.

The physical book itself is very well produced and is gently priced for what it delivers. We have long grown accustomed to such output from the CDL Press.

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