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ANCIENT ANIMAL VOCABULARY

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Mesopotamian lexical lists consist of lists of words and lists of signs. Lists of words are often thematically organized, such as a list of birds, or a list of professions. Lists of signs provide each cuneiform sign with pronunciation glosses. Word lists and sign lists belonged to the staple of scribal education. Large numbers of school texts with extracts from lexical lists have been found at almost all sites where cuneiform texts have been unearthed. The Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts ([DCCLT](#)) aims at publishing all such texts on the web.

First millennium lexical texts are almost always bilingual: Sumerian - Akkadian. By this time Sumerian had long been a dead language, used only in education, scholarship, and in temple liturgy. The importance of Sumerian in the scribal school demonstrates the weight of the past and the importance of transmitting to a new generation an ancient heritage that went back for millennia. For modern scholarship the bilingual texts are invaluable, because they provide access to the vocabulary of Sumerian, a language that is much less known than Akkadian.

The list of Domestic Animals is tablet (or chapter) 13 of a much longer encyclopedic list that includes the following thematic chapters:

- 1-2 Contract phraseology
- 3 Trees
- 4-7 Wooden Objects
- 8-9 Reeds and Reed Objects
- 10 Clay and Pots
- 11 Hides and leather Objects
- 12 Metals and Metal Objects
- 13 Domestic Animals
- 14 Wild Animals
- 15 Meat Cuts
- 16 Stones
- 17 Plants
- 18 Birds and Fish
- 19 Textiles and Clothing
- 20-22 Geographical Names
- 23-24 Food and Drink

The entire series, which was originally designed in the Old Babylonian period (around 1,800 BCE) is called after the very first entry *urs-ra* = *hubullu* (a type of loan) and is often referred to as Ura. The text was known in many local versions in the Old Babylonian period. In the Middle Babylonian period copies

are found all over the Middle East, in Hattuša (Anatolia), Ugarit and Emar (Syria) and many other places. By the first millennium, the series was mostly standardized. All Old Babylonian and Middle Babylonian period versions of the list are currently available through [DCCLT](#) – the first millennium version is still a work in progress.

The list of Domestic Animals starts with a section of almost 200 lines listing sheep terminology. This includes various kinds of sheep, such as Amorite sheep and long-tailed sheep, but also terms for sexual maturity and procreative stages, sheep used for different purposes (offerings, meals), sheep with different types of wool, sheep illnesses, etc. Much of the Sumerian terminology in the list is indeed known from third millennium administrative texts (sheep are very important for the economy), but the list also includes rare and otherwise unknown words. Some of these words may well be artificial creations of first millennium scholars.

The Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts is set up in such a way that its data feeds directly into the electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary ([ePSD2](#)). In the article for sheep ([udu](#)), for instance, one will find numerous quotations from the list of Domestic Animals, edited in [DCCLT](#). In the study of Sumerian vocabulary, such late (first millennium) evidence needs to be treated with some circumspection, but is necessary anyway because Sumerian has no known cognates. Providing the material in electronic editions makes it easier to update when new copies become available or when new insights change our translations. Online editions, moreover, are available wherever there is Internet, not only in places where highly specialized libraries may be accessed.

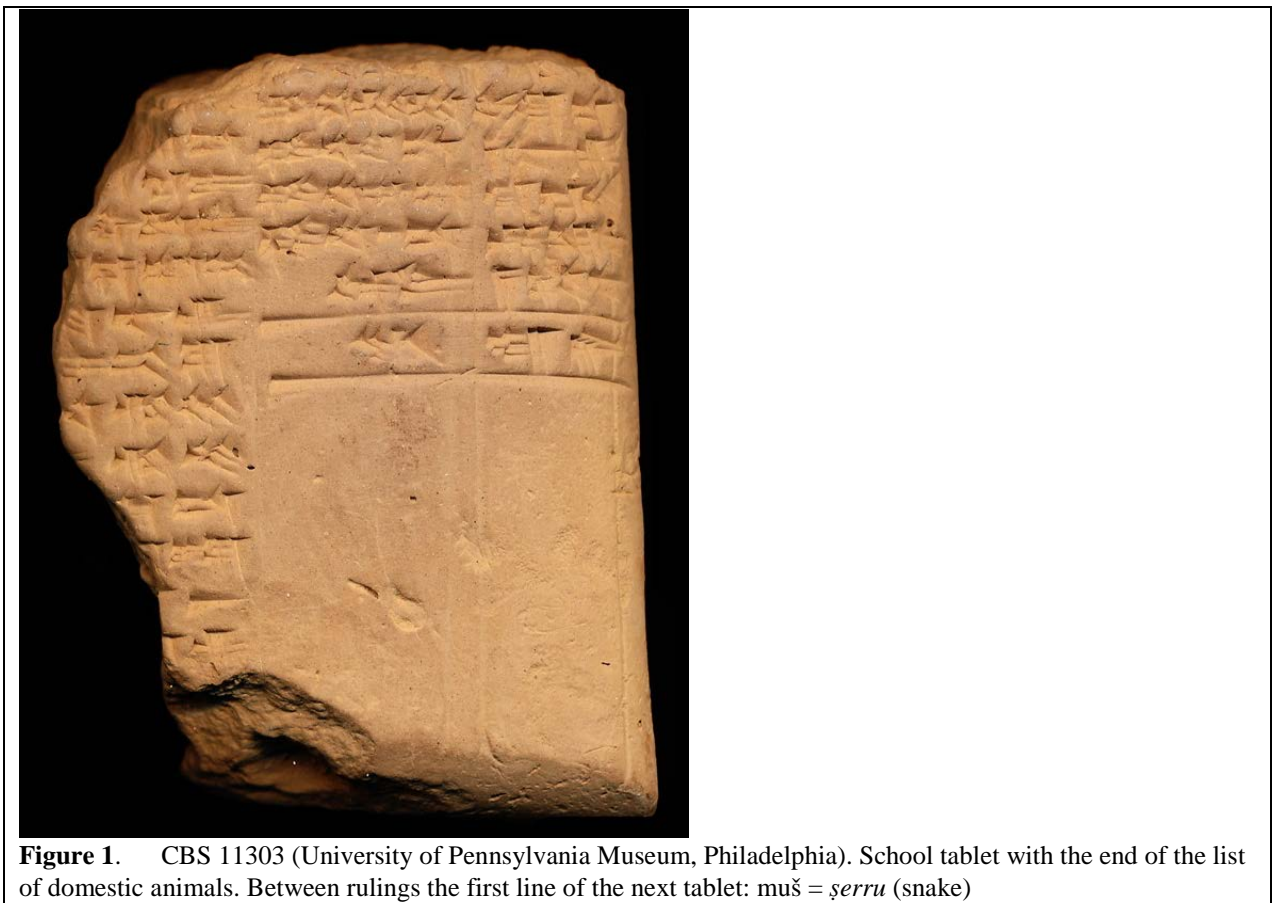


Figure 1. CBS 11303 (University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia). School tablet with the end of the list of domestic animals. Between rulings the first line of the next tablet: muš = *šerru* (snake)