

## ИСТОРИЯ И ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЕ

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**lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a: The cat people or clan of the ruler?  
(On an Old Sumerian social term)***V. V. Emelianov*

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The article deals with 5 Sumerian cuneiform texts from the city of Lagash, compiled during the era of the kings of Lugalanda and Urukagina (second half of the 24<sup>th</sup> century BC). The texts contain a list of rations intended for a group of persons, which is written with the cuneiform signs LU<sub>2</sub>.SU.A. The electronic dictionary of the Sumerian language brought these texts to the article su-a “wild cat”. Previously, the researchers believed that this group of people is among the acquaintances of the royal family. It was established on the basis of genealogical explorations that among the LU<sub>2</sub>.SU.A there were close relatives of the king’s and queen’s family. The hypothesis of reading the combination of signs as “people of the flesh” is suggested. It means that this group of people included only those who belonged to the governor’s clan. They figured first in the lists of rations. The author of the article notes that such a group of people appeared only under Lugalanda, which is connected with the subordination of the Bau temple to the royal family. It still existed in the initial era of Urukagina’s rule, but later disappeared as a result of his reforms.

*Keywords:* Sumer, Lagash, Lugalanda, Urukagina, lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a.

Despite the initial ease of use, the translation of Sumerian lexicography into an electronic form entails many problems. The most significant problem is the confusion of meanings for homonymous lexemes. Such confusion can only be addressed by means of detailed studies of each lexeme. This article is a study of one such homonymous lexeme.

Working on an article about cats of ancient Mesopotamia [1], it has become possible to identify an unexpected and interesting case. There is a combination of signs lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a in Old Sumerian period economic texts. If lu<sub>2</sub> means “person”, then su-a is considered to definitely be “a cat”. It can be translated as a “cat-man”. This is exactly how the “Electronic Pennsylvania Dictionary of the Sumerian Language” (ePSD, su-a ‘wild cat’) [2] under-

stands this word. This leads potentially to a translation such as “cat-man”. The word has plural usages further extending the implications of the ePSD translation: lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-me “cat-people”, lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka-ke<sub>4</sub>-ne “cat-people of the ruler”. In our paper, we will analyze all known cases of the use of this word<sup>1</sup>.

## Texts

In VS 14, 106 (Lugalanda) [3, tabl. 106] lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-me receive wool. The document is not dated.

obverse	
column 1	column 2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 10 ma-na siki-ba 10 mana of wool</li> <li>2. gan-<sup>d</sup>ba-U<sub>2</sub> to Gan-Bau,</li> <li>3. nin ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka sister of ensi,</li> <li>4. 5 nar<sub>x</sub> 5 to Nar,</li> <li>5. engar the chief of farmers,</li> <li>6. 5 ušur<sub>3</sub>-ama-mu 5 to Ushuramamu,</li> <li>7. dam lugal-u<sub>3</sub>-ma the wife of Lugaluma,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. gal-UN-ka officer,</li> <li>2. 4 ama-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga 4 to Amasage,</li> <li>3. 5 geme<sub>2</sub>-šu-ga-lam-ma 5 to Gemeshugalama,</li> <li>4. nu-gig hierodule,</li> <li>5. 1 nar<sub>x</sub> 1 to Nar,</li> <li>6. dam sanga-NIG<sub>2</sub> the wife of Sanganig, (who are)</li> <li>7. lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-me "LU<sub>2</sub>-SU-A".</li> </ol>
reverse	
column 1	column 2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 4 šubur 4 to Shubur,</li> <li>2. KID<sub>2</sub>-alan ? statues,</li> <li>3. 4 kur-ġiri<sub>3</sub>-ne<sub>2</sub>-še<sub>3</sub> 4 to Kurgirineshe,</li> <li>4. 4 amar-<sup>d</sup>ašnan 4 to Amar-Ashnan,</li> <li>5. 4 ur-<sup>d</sup>ba-U<sub>2</sub> 4 to Ur Bau, (who are)</li> <li>6. ašgab-me tanners,</li> <li>7. 5 ur-<sup>d</sup>ba-U<sub>2</sub> 5 to Ur-Bau,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ku<sub>3</sub>-dim<sub>2</sub> the blacksmith,</li> <li>2. gašam master.</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> There are more terms with –su-a in Old Sumerian tablets, such as: ma<sub>2</sub>-su-a “ship-SU.A”, GAN<sub>2</sub>-su-a “field-SU.A”; and ePSD also translates their –su-a as ‘cat’. GAN<sub>2</sub>-su-a may be version of GAN<sub>2</sub>-su-ga “empty field, field without grain”. But what about ship? However, there could be some connection to cats, because spelling of ‘cat’ and the second part of the word for various things simultaneously transformed after Sargonic period from su-a to sa-a. So, in Ur III documents one can see gig sa-a “wheat-SA.A”, dabin sa-a “semolina-SA.A” [2, su-a ‘wild cat’]. I think that aforementioned are different cases and have no relation to our subject.

In VS 25, 19 (the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Lugalanda) [4, tabl. 19] lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-ne again get wool. To them belong only the servants of the “Women’s house” of the queen Baranamtara. Only one name is provided with the position of “singer”.

		obverse		
column 1			column 2	
1.	20 ma-na siki na <sub>4</sub> siki-ba-ta 20 mana of wool (by weight of) stone (for) wool are		1.	10 šubur- <sup>d</sup> ba-U <sub>2</sub> 10 to Shubur-Bau,
2.	geme <sub>2</sub> -ub <sub>5</sub> -ku <sub>3</sub> -ga to Gemeubkuge,		2.	Gala the chorister,
3.	10 amar-ezem 10 to Amar-Ezemu,		3.	10 a-en-ra-gub 10 to Aenragub,
4.	10 a-agrig-zi 10 to Aagrigzi,		4.	10 nin-e <sub>2</sub> -muš <sub>3</sub> -še <sub>3</sub> 10 to Ninemushshe, (empty line)

		reverse		
column 1			column 2	
1.	šu-nigin <sub>2</sub> 70 ma-na siki na <sub>4</sub> siki-ba-ta Total: 70 min of wool (by weight of) the stone (for) wool (which are)		1.	ensi <sub>2</sub> ensi
2.	siki-ba lu <sub>2</sub> su-a-ne ration of “LU <sub>2</sub> -SU-A”		2.	lagaš <sup>ki</sup> -ka-ke <sup>4</sup> of Lagash,
3.	bara <sub>2</sub> -nam-tar-ra Baranamtara,		3.	e <sub>2</sub> -munus-ta from the “Women’s house”
4.	dam lugal-an-da wife of Lugalanda,		4.	e-ne-ba 3 granted to them. 3 (the year of Lugalanda)

The same names and figures of wool rations are found in the fourth year of Lugalanda in VS 25, 54 [4, tabl. 54]. Here, people who receive wool are named lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a of Baranamtara and also receive wool from the “Women’s house”. From the whole text only a year is changing.

In DP 161 of the second year of Urukagina-ensi (= 1 Urukagina-lugal) [5, tabl. 161] lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka-ke<sub>4</sub>-ne receive emmer before the workers of the “Women’s house” and acquaintances of the royal family. And they are not named. This is an issue for the feast of the goddess Bau, and the ration granted to them on behalf of Urukagina’s wife Shasha. The reverse of the text is the following:

3. 22 2 barig ziz<sub>2</sub>-ba lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-ensi<sub>2</sub>-ka-ke<sub>4</sub>-ne  
22 gur and 2 bariga of emmer (are to) “LU<sub>2</sub>-SU-A” of the ruler,
  4. 2 3 ban ziz<sub>2</sub>-ba ušur<sub>3</sub> e<sub>2</sub>-munus-ke<sub>4</sub>-ne  
2 gur 3 ban of emmer (are to) familiar of the “Women’s house”,
- column 2
1. 5 2 barig ziz<sub>2</sub>-ba ušur<sub>3</sub> nam- <dumu> -ke<sub>4</sub>-ne  
5 gur and 2 bariga of emmer (are to) familiar of (children),
- column 3
3. ziz<sub>2</sub> u<sub>2</sub>-rum  
(This) emmer is the property

4. <sup>d</sup>ba-U<sub>2</sub>  
of Bau.
5. ša<sub>6</sub>-ša<sub>6</sub>  
Shasha,
6. dam URU-KA-gi-na  
wife of Urukagina,
7. lugal  
king
8. [lagas<sup>ki</sup>-ka 2]  
of Lagash (2-nd year)

## List of lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a

a-agrig-zi m sanga of the temple of Ninmar [6, S. 63]  
 a-en-ra-gub m son of Urukagina [6, S. 67]  
 ama-sa<sub>6</sub>-ga f is associated with work on wool and flax [6, S. 87]  
 amar-ezem m [6, S. 89]  
 gan-<sup>d</sup>ba-U<sub>2</sub> f sister of Lugalanda [6, S. 174]  
 geme<sub>2</sub>-šu-ga-lam-ma f hierodule [6, S. 182]  
 geme<sub>2</sub>-ub<sub>5</sub>-ku<sub>3</sub>-ga f sister of Lugalanda [6, S. 183]  
 nar<sub>x</sub> 1 m chief of farmers [6, S. 306]  
 nar<sub>x</sub> 2 m / f husband (or wife?) of Sanganig [6, S. 306]  
 nin-e<sub>2</sub>-muš<sub>3</sub>-še<sub>3</sub> f [6, S. 321]  
 šubur-<sup>d</sup>ba-U<sub>2</sub> m singer [6, S. 389]  
 ušur<sub>3</sub>-ama-mu f wife of Lugaluma, military commander (gal-UN) [6, S. 456]<sup>2</sup>

A text available in the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (henceforth CDLI) needs to be discussed critically. In the Old Babylonian list of professions, available as CDLI 000010, ex. 022, there is mentioned someone by the name Amar-An, working as a lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-si [7]. This, however, is rather a spelling of the susig “buckler” (lit. “skin scraper”). However, this example is important for us in terms of spelling, as will be discussed below.

## Who is lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a?

The very first translations of the word lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a were provided by A. Falkenstein and J. Bauer. Falkenstein understood it as “vertraute Personen” [8, S. 66–67]. Bauer translated it as “Bekannte des Stadtfürsten” [9, S. 343–344]. Bauer, on the other hand, apparently proceeded from the possible reading of SU as a variant of zu, and then it would be lu<sub>2</sub>-zu-a “familiar”. Such a word is known in Sumerian, it occurs in the letter-prayer of Sinshamuh to the god Enki [10, p. 39, 228, 281]:

29. lu<sub>2</sub>-zu-a-mu na-ma-te-ĝe<sub>26</sub> inim-ma na-ma-ab-be<sub>2</sub>  
 My acquaintance did not approach me, he did not speak to me,

<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that on the tablet VS 27, 81 (Lugalanda 3) [11, tabl. 81], which deals with receiving oil and cream for the “Nanshe malt eating feast”, some of them are named without the announcement of their status: Gemeubkuga, Aenragub, Aagrigzi, Ninemushshe, Shubur-Bau. The products issued on behalf of Baranamtara [12, p. 177]. The absence of naming indicated some special privilege of this group.

30. ku-li-mu ad nu-mu-da-gi<sub>4</sub>-gi<sub>4</sub> ša<sub>3</sub>-mu la- <ba> -sed-de<sub>3</sub>  
My friend gave me no advice, he did not relieve my heart.  
[7, CDLI no. P305845]

However, this text is from Old Babylonian tablet and therefore not as relevant. The name of the original lu<sub>2</sub>-zu first became known only from Old Akkadian period texts. Apparently, this name should be translated as a “nobleman”.

Another hypothesis was proposed by P. Steinkeller, who showed that in the texts of Ur III LU<sub>2</sub>-SU. A means “people (from the region of) Simashki”, and its attestations “are confirmed almost exclusively to Ur-III sources” [13, p. 197]. Furthermore, G. J. Selz demonstrated that all the people mentioned in the Old Sumerian texts as LU<sub>2</sub>.SU. A, were native inhabitants of Lagash and related to the royal family [14, S. 67–68]<sup>3</sup>. R. Prentice suggested in her recent work that all the people included to category lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a were closely associated with those who were engaged to ušur<sub>3</sub>. From her point of view, in the first category there were mostly women, and in the second category there are mostly men. However, it is clear that both categories should be regarded as the designation of the highest nobility, although it is not clear how to translate them exactly [12, p. 178]<sup>4</sup>. T. Balke supported Prentice, who wrote in his study of Old Sumerian onomastics of Lagash that the lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a represent a small group of members of the ruler’s family, and confirmed the interpretation of Bauer (‘bekannten Personen’, ‘Bekannter (des Herrschers)’) [6, S. 63, Anm. 2].

Now let’s return to the spelling of the last mentioned Old Babylonian list of professions mentioning lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a. The word su-sig “buckler” consists of su “flesh, skin” and sig “cut, pinch.” So, according to this spelling, su-a can be understood as “flesh”. In this case, one can translate the combination of lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a-me as “people of the flesh”<sup>5</sup>. Probably, the term comprises the ensi’s inner circle, and not his friends, as Bauer supposed. To prove this assumption, one can refer to a fragment of the New Sumerian Laws of Ur-Nammu: GIR<sub>3</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub> + GIR<sub>3</sub>.NITA<sub>2</sub>-mu-ne ama-mu-[n]e šeš-šeš-mu-ne su-a-[su-a-ne]-ne ki ḥa-b[a-ni-ḡar]-re-eš “My elders, my mothers, my brothers, su-a-su-a-ne-ne, I settled in safe places” (A IV 169-170 = C II 42-43) [15, p. 17–18]. C. Wilcke reconstructed the same lines differently: C 42-43 su-a- [sa-a (?)-ḡ]u<sub>10</sub><sup>1</sup>-ne sa<sub>2</sub> ha-m[a-an-ḡar]-re-eš ‘meine Verwandten und Verschwägerten haben mich wirklich beraten’ [16, S. 311]. In Anm. 78 Wilcke com-

<sup>3</sup> “Anzumerken bleibt noch, dass, wie LU<sub>2</sub>.SU.(A), auch S/Simaski vorsargonisch und sargonisch nicht nachgewiesen ist”; “lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a ist damit als eine der Bezeichnungen für Angehörige der Oberschicht im altsumerischen Staat Lagas erwiesen”; “GANA<sub>2</sub>-su-a als ‘Feld ohne «grain ratio»». Altsumerisch dürfte dies jedoch durch den Ausdruck GANA<sub>2</sub>-su-ga bezeichnet werden” [14, S. 67–68].

<sup>4</sup> “It is not clear what the terms ‘lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a’ and ‘ušur<sub>3</sub>’ signified. On the basis of the names and relationships given in VAT 4431, VAT 4479, and Fö 106 the designation ‘lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a’ appears to indicate persons (mainly women) of high social status, some of whom are related to the ruler’s family. In contrast almost all the individuals described as ‘ušur<sub>3</sub>’ are male and are identified by name and occupation rather than by a kinship connection with the ruling family. These persons (those described as ‘ušur<sub>3</sub>’) do not otherwise appear in the documents of the archive so possibly they are performing their stated occupations for other institutions, or even acting as independent workers. The term ‘ušur<sub>3</sub>’ is sometimes translated as ‘friends’, ‘neighbours’, or companion <...> Since it is sometimes specified whether these persons are ‘ušur<sub>3</sub>’ with regard to the e<sub>2</sub>-MI<sub>2</sub> or to the nam-DUMU, or lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a ‘of the ensi’, it must have some significance and indicate a more complex system than simply a relationship to the ruling family. Possibly it referred to an honorary occupation or position connected to a specific household” [12, p. 178].

<sup>5</sup> Cf. PN in two versions: ARAD<sub>2</sub>-zu-ni, ARAD<sub>2</sub>-su-ni [17, S. 247–248]. Vitaly Bartash wrote in his private communication: “This phrase in CUSAS 35, no. 275 rev. 16 means ‘the slave of his flesh’, which refers to the slave of his kin, clan, or blood relatives”.

pared the Sumerian *su* and Akkadian *kimtu* “clan, family” [16, S. 311]. Here the ancestors are named in the plural, and after the “brothers”, there appears the very word *su-a*-[*su-a-ne*]-*ne* (without the first person possessive pronoun) that can only denote the degree of kinship. If we take into account the fact that *su* can be the equivalent of Akkadian words for family designation, clan (*SU* = *ki-im-tum*, *nišūtum*, *salātum* [18, K, p. 375]) in syllabaries, there is no doubt about translating them as “clans”.

The word *su* occurs exactly in the sense of “clan” in Sumerian texts, at least according to the epic song “Bilgames and Huwawa” proves:

143. MA-tur nin<sub>9</sub> ban<sub>3</sub>-da-ĝu<sub>10</sub> nam-lukur-še<sub>3</sub> kur-ra ħu-mu-ra-ni-kur<sub>9</sub>-ra-am<sub>3</sub>  
I'll give you Matur, my little sister, as a concubine!
144. ni<sub>2</sub>-zu ba-am<sub>3</sub>-ma-ra su-za ga-an-kur<sub>9</sub>  
Share with me your rays! I want to enter your family!  
[19, c. 1.8.1.5]

Thus, the combination of signs *lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a*, most likely, is not connected with cats, but with members of the governor's clan, which includes most close relatives of the king and his wife.

### Possible word play

However, this does not negate the possible play on words. “People of the flesh” are “cat-people” who are fed first, because they receive their food simply for their closeness to the ruler. In the light of this state of affairs, the Sumerian proverb also reads differently:

- / su \ -a su-a-bi-še<sub>3</sub> <sup>d</sup>nin-kilim niĝ<sub>2</sub> ak-ak-bi-še<sub>3</sub>  
“A cat (appreciated) for (the fact that he is) a cat, (but) a mongoose (only) for her action”  
[19, c. 6.1.15]

It means that a cat was valued not for catching mice, like a mongoose, but for her own sake. We can assume that we are talking about people, one of whom is loved for his own sake, and the other until he is doing something. It may be about social class and inequality. During the Old Babylonian period, this corresponds to the inequality of full community residents (*awilum* in the terminology of the Hammurabi Laws), whom the king and the law appreciate simply on the basis that they live on this land, and the servants to whom the land and the house are given for service and are taken away at the end of their service period (*muškênum* by Hammurabi). However, this proverb could have been understood differently during the Old Sumerian period: the cat corresponds to the people who were full members of the community, the “people of the flesh”, whereas the mongoose refers to those who receive rations for their work (like tanners and blacksmiths in the same wool production lists). There is a possibility that the social category *lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a* came about during the allegedly corrupt regime of Lugalanda, which subordinated the life of the Bau temple to the ruler's family [on the latter, see 20]. This category was still preserved at the beginning of the reign of Urukagina. It then disappeared from economic texts forever, perhaps, as a result of his reforms.

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## lu<sub>2</sub>-su-a: люди-коты или клан правителя? (К уяснению одного старошумерского социального термина)

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В статье рассматриваются пять шумерских клинописных текстов из города Лагаша, составленных в эпоху царей Лугаланды и Урукагины (вторая половина XXIV в. до н.э.). Тексты содержат список рационов, предназначенных для группы лиц, которая пишется знаками LU<sub>2</sub>.SU.A. Электронный словарь шумерского языка занес эти тексты в статью su-a «дикий кот». Ранее одни исследователи полагали, что знаками LU<sub>2</sub>.SU.A в шумерских текстах обозначается область Симашки; другие считали, что данные знаки составляют слово, которым обозначена группа знакомых царской семьи. На основании генеалогии установлено, что в старошумерскую эпоху в числе LU<sub>2</sub>.SU.A находились близкие родственники царя и царицы. Предложена гипотеза чтения трех интересующих нас знаков как «люди плоти». Это означает, что в данную группу лиц входили только те, кто относился к правительскому клану. Они фигурировали в ведомостях первыми и получали рационы раньше мастеров. Автор статьи замечает, что такая группа лиц появилась только при Лугаланде, что связано с подчинением хозяйства храма Бау царской семье. Она еще существовала в начальную эпоху правления Урукагины, но впоследствии исчезла в результате его реформ. В статье также замечена возможная игра омофонов su-a «кот» и su(-a) «плоть, клан». Приводится шумерская пословица, из которой ясно, что одна часть населения получала рационы за свой статус, а другая — за свою работу. Именно статус члена правительского клана мог быть уподоблен в пословице коту, которого ценят за него самого.

*Ключевые слова:* Шумер, Лагаш, Лугаланда, Урукагина, *люди плоти*.

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