Bad Moon Rising: 
The Changing Fortunes of Early Second-Millennium BCE Ur

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I see a bad moon rising, I see trouble on the way
I see earthquakes and lightning, I see bad times today
Don’t go around tonight, it’s bound to take your life
There’s a bad moon on the rise

(J. Fogerty)

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, excellent, profound, and comprehensive studies by Charpin (1986), Diakonoff (1985, 1990, and 1995), and Van De Mieroop (1992a and 1992b) have been devoted to the history and society of early second millennium BCE Ur, and it is hard, not to say impossible, to add something to their exhaustive and well-considered analyses, hypotheses, and conclusions. Whereas Charpin’s book is an in-depth study on the clergy of Ur, Diakonoff’s and Van De Mieroop’s works deal with the society of Ur in a more general sense.

While going through these studies on early second millennium BCE Ur, which primarily focus on the city’s socio-economic situation, abundantly and clearly exemplified by in-depth analyses of private and other archives, where possible linked to their archaeological context, a strange paradox struck me. For it seems that the city of Ur was relatively prosperous, both economically and culturally, as is shown by the economic texts, the production of a literary corpus, and inscriptions referring to building activities, whereas this period is generally characterised by instability and chaos caused by wars between competing dynasties, involving invasions and raids, and resulting repeatedly in devastations, famine, and exile.

How is it that economy, religion, and culture could flourish and an apparent social stability could be attained in such politically instable times? How is it that life apparently went on in such a turbulent period? Therefore, the question arises of how we can approach this contradiction, how we can understand and interpret the seemingly evident but no doubt continuously evolving disequilibrium, and how
such an approach could contribute to our understanding of early second millennium BCE Ur.

**Unfortunate Times**

Indeed, the early second millennium BCE did not work out very favourably for the city of Ur. It both started and ended with a violent destruction of the city. In between, the city was subject to the power struggle between the competing dynasties of Isin and Larsa, under the control of which it went to and fro, to end up being incorporated in the Babylonian empire of Ḥammurabi, which soon started to disintegrate under his successor Samsu-iluna.¹

At the dawn of the second millennium, the Ur III dynasty collapsed due to a combination of internal crises, causing massive inflation, and the invasion of the Elamites and Šimaškians from the East, who were able to attack the Ur III state at its heart and destroy its capital.² The Amorites, who entered the Ur III empire at the end of the third millennium BCE—in spite of the wall the Ur III kings built to stop them—seem not to have confronted Ibbi-Sîn’s troops directly, but contributed to the disorganization of the empire by cutting the lines of communication between the cities.³

After this major blow to the city, Ur came under the control of the dynasty of Isin. This dynasty was founded about fifteen years earlier by a previous Ur III official, Išbi-Erra (2019–1987 BCE), who took advantage of the rapidly declining state of the empire to create his own power base.

Eight years after the fall of Ur, Išbi-Erra retook the city, expelled the Elamites,⁴ and started a policy of reconstruction. Išbi-Erra as well as his successors directed

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¹ Recent general overviews of the history of Babylonia in the early second millennium BCE, the so-called Isin-Larsa (or early Old Babylonian) and Old-Babylonian periods, can be found in, among others, Liverani 2014 and Van De Mieroop 2016. An in-depth analysis of the Old Babylonian period, covering political history, literature, religion, economy, and society, is to be found in Charpin, Edzard, and Stol 2004. An overview of the early second millennium BCE political history of the city of Ur in particular can be found in Van De Mieroop 1992a: 45–71. It is by no means my intention here to add to the history of early second millennium BCE Ur as we know it. This short overview, which draws largely on Charpin 2004 and Van De Mieroop 1992a, serves merely to demonstrate the general political instability and chaos that characterizes this period as well as the significance the city of Ur, which had been downgraded from the capital of a large bureaucratic empire to one city-state among many, still had for the consecutive dynasties it was ruled by.

² For convenience’s sake, all dates referred to in this article follow the Middle Chronology. However, even then the absolute chronology of the early second millennium BCE is still problematic and most studies differ slightly in dating the reigns of the Isin and Larsa rulers. Since the exact absolute dating of the rulers and events is of less importance for my purpose in this article, this is not a large problem, and I will not go into this. I will use the absolute dates given in Van De Mieroop 2016: 249–350, as this is the most recent list published.


⁴ This is commemorated in the year names of the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh years of reign of Išbi-Erra: mu (ūš. sa) elam šà úrî̄. ma. ka duru₅.A₅ tukul kal.gà.ni im.ta.e₇ Year (after the year) he (i.e. Išbi-Erra) brought out of Ur, with his strong weapon, the Elamite who was dwelling in its midst (see Sigrist 1988: 19–20), as well as in Išbi-Erra “Hymn B,” see van Dijk 1978; Frayne 1982; and Vanstiphout 1989–90.
their attention to the recovery of the ancient capital, and especially to its trade with the Gulf. His successor, Šu-ilīšu (1986–1977 BCE), claimed to have returned the statue of Nanna, which the Elamites took as booty to their homeland, and to have resettled the scattered people of Ur, implying that there was an exile of at least a part of Ur’s population.

The kings of Isin were able to recover only the heart of the ancient Ur III empire and large parts of periphery became independent. This newly established dynasty no doubt went through turbulent times, trying to hold control over its core territory, maintaining relations with the periphery and especially the East where a new, vast, and powerful Šimaškian empire had firmly established itself, and facing a new social reality in which the autochthonous people of Sumer and the newcomers, in casu the Amorites, had to find a way to cohabitate.

The city of Ur, although it no longer played any political role, remained important for the Isin kings, who, although Amorites, saw themselves as the legitimate successors of the Ur III kings and most of them took the title “king of Ur” or other epithets/titles mentioning the city of Ur. Ur was not only important economically, due to its trade with the Gulf, but also in the realms of religion and culture, as is shown for example by the fact that Išme-Dagan (1955–1937 BCE) installed as

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5. Various Isin kings claim to have restored and/or built structures at Ur, such as Šu-ilīšu, who restored the Edublamaḫ and built a standard for Nanna (see RIME 4.1.2.1–2) and Iddin-Dagan, who made a throne dais for the Edublamaḫ of Nanna (year names l and m: mu (ūs.sa) ści-din-daća-gan lugal eșga.zu bāra dub.li.mah šeš.ki mu.na.dīm, see Sigrist 1988: 25).

6. See RIME 4.1.2.1, esp. ll. 8–11: u₄ nanna an-ša-an₄-ta uri₄ ki₄-še mu-un-túm-ma-a “when he brought (back the statue of) the god Nanna from Anšan to Ur.”


9. One way to maintain relations with the East was through diplomatic marriages. According to Iddin-Dagan’s year names a and b, he gave his daughter Matumniatum to the king of Anšan in marriage: mu (ūs.sa) ści-din-daća-gan ma-tum-nil-a-tum dumu.munu.s.a.ni lugal an.ša.an₄ ba.an.tuk.a (see Sigrist 1988: 24). This, however, might also be an imitation of the famous Ur III king Sūlgī.

10. Šu-ilīšu was the first Isin king to call himself “king of Ur,” see RIME 4.1.2.1, 2 and 4. His successor Iddin-Dagan called himself “king of Ur” (see RIME 4.1.3.2) as well as “king of Isin” (see RIME 4.1.3.1) alongside the more general “king of the land of Sumer and Akkad.” His successor Išme-Dagan called himself “constant (attendant) of Ur” (sag.us.ur₄₈:ma, see RIME 4.1.4.1–2, 11–12 and 15) alongside various other epithets and titles mentioning Nippur, Eridu, and Uruk, “king of Isin” and “king of the land of Sumer and Akkad.” Išme-Dagan is called “king of Ur” only once in the inscription on a stone bowl dedicated by one of his servants (see RIME 4.1.4.2001). His successor Lipit-Ištar called himself “true farmer of Ur” (engar.zi.ur₄₄:ma, see RIME 4.1.5.1–6), alongside various other epithets and titles mentioning Nippur, Eridu, and Uruk, “king of Isin” and “king of the land of Sumer and Akkad.” He is called “king of Ur” in the inscription on two seals of his servants (see RIME 4.1.5.2001 and 2003). Even after the Isin kings lost the city of Ur to the Larsa dynasty, some of them continued using epithets/titles mentioning Ur: Ur-Ninurta called himself “herdsman of Ur” (na.gad.ur₄₅:ma, see RIME 4.1.6.1), Bur-Sīn, who retook Ur but lost it again very quickly, called himself “mighty farmer of Ur” (engar.kala.ga.ur₄₅:ma, see RIME 4.1.7.1), and Enlil-bani called himself “farmer (who grows) tall grain for Ur” (engar še.mah.ur₄₅:ma, see RIME 4.1.10.1, 4–5 and 9).
entum-priestess of Nanna at Ur his daughter En-ana-tuma, who is said to have contributed greatly to the embellishment of the city.\textsuperscript{11}

However, the Isin dynasty was granted only a short life, and the city of Ur soon fell into the hands of the competing Larsa dynasty. The main cause for the confrontation between Isin and Larsa was control over water rights, as is shown by the letters between Lipit-Ištar of Isin (1936–1926 BCE) and his general Nanna-kiaga.\textsuperscript{12} According to Sigrist (1987: 28), Lipit-Ištar was obliged to re-dig the Ninki canal and restore the city of Ur after a first campaign by Gungunum of Larsa.\textsuperscript{13} In his seventh year of reign,\textsuperscript{14} Gungunum (1932–1906 BCE) managed to conquer Ur, after which he called himself “king of Ur.”\textsuperscript{15} It seems that this new leadership did not cause too much disruption in the city as officials installed by the Isin kings were maintained in their posts, just as Išme-Dagan’s daughter stayed on as entum priestess of Nanna and continued her policy of reconstruction (see n. 7). Gungunum even installed Lipit-Ištar’s daughter Enninsunzi as entum-priestess of Ningublaga at Ur.\textsuperscript{16} Like his predecessors from the Isin dynasty, Gungunum pursued the embellishment of Ur through public works.\textsuperscript{17}

However, the loss of Ur was of great importance for the Isin kings, not only symbolically, but especially economically, as it lost access to the Gulf and the thriving maritime trade. Moreover, the conflict between Isin and Larsa continued, as

\textsuperscript{11} See RIME 4.1.4.3–4 and 13. The appointment of his daughter as entum-priestess of Nanna at Ur is commemorated in no less than four consecutive year names of Išme-Dagan, viz. a, b, c, and d: mu (ús.sa / mu.4.kam) īš-me-4-da-gan lugal.e en.ēš.ki īrī.ta ba.hu.n.gā (mu ús.sa.bi) “Year (after the year / third year / fourth year) in which Išme-Dagan installed the en-priestess of Nanna in Ur” (see Sigrist 1988: 26). After Ur was conquered by Gungunum of Larsa, An-ana-tuma remained in office and continued her policy of reconstruction (see n. 7). Gungunum even installed Enninsunzi as entum-priestess of Ningublaga at Ur.\textsuperscript{16} Like his predecessors from the Isin dynasty, Gungunum pursued the embellishment of Ur through public works.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{12} See ETCSL c./t.3.2.03–4 for transliterations, translations, and references. See also Rowton 1967: 273.

\textsuperscript{13} This is commemorated in year names b and d of Lipit-Ištar: mu īš-pi-it-iš-tár lugal.e inim ēn.ēš.ki.ta īrī.ta ki.bē bīn.in.gi.a, “Year in which on the order of Enlil and Nanna (the city of) Ur was restored,” and mu i, īn.ni.ki ba.ba.al “Year the canal of Ninki was dug” (see Sigrist 1988: 28), as well as in RIME 4.1.5.5, ll. 17–21: du₃₄ du₃₄ ga.en.līl.nān.na.ta īrī.ta ki.bē bi.bi.gi.ē šī-ri-tum-bi hu.mu.ba.al “by the decree of the gods Enlil and Nanna, I restored Ur, I dug its moat.”

\textsuperscript{14} According to Charpin (2004: 71 especially n. 223). Note, however, Frayne (1990: 114) according to whom Gungunum took Ur in his tenth year of reign.

\textsuperscript{15} See RIME 4.2.5.1–2. His successors Abi-sare and Sumu-el also called themselves “king of Ur” in their inscriptions (see RIME 4.1.6.1 and 2001 and 4.2.7.1–2001–3). Sumu-el’s successor Nūr-Adad called himself “provider of Ur” (ū.a.ūrī.ta.ma, see RIME 4.2.8.1, 3–4 and 6), “farmer of Ur” (engar.ūrī.ta.ma, see RIME 4.2.8.2) and “true farmer of Ur” (engar.zi.ūrī.ta.ma, see RIME 4.2.8.5) always alongside the title of “king of Larsa.” The same goes for his successors Šin-iddinam and Šin-iqīšam, who stick with “provider of Ur,” alongside “king of Larsa” and sometimes “king of the land of Sumer and Akkad” (see RIME 4.2.9.1–7 and 9–15, and 4.2.11.1–3). Šili-Adad called himself “provider of Nippur” and “governor of Ur, Larsa, Lagaš, and the land of Kutalla” (ū.a.ni.burū én.sī.ūrī.ta larṣī.ta la gàßi.ū ma đa-ka-ka-al-la-ra₂₃-a, see RIME 4.2.12.1–2).

\textsuperscript{16} See the year name of Gungunum’s thirteenth year of reign: mu en.ēn.ni.zi en ēn.gublaga ba.hu.n.gā “Year in which Enninsunzi was installed as en-priestess of Nin-gublaga,” and year name g of Lipit-Ištar: mu īš-pi-it-iš-tár lugal.e en.ni.ni.zi en ēn.gublaga īrī.ta ma màš.e l.pād “Year king Lipit-Ištar chose by means of the omens Enninsunzi for en-priestess of Nin-gublaga in Ur” (see Sigrist 1990a: 8 and 1988: 28).

\textsuperscript{17} As is shown in the year names of Gungunum’s twentieth and twenty-fifth years of reign: mu kā.gal maḫ īrī.ta.ma ba.dù “Year the magnificent gate of Ur was built,” and year name e of Lipit-Ištar: mu īš-pi-it-iš-tár lugal.e en.ni.ni.zi en ēn.gublaga īrī.ta.ma màš.e l.pād “Year king Lipit-Ištar chose by means of the omens Enninsunzi for en-priestess of Nin-gublaga in Ur” (see Sigrist 1990a: 8 and 1988: 28).
Gungunum was able to take hold of some key cities of Isin’s territory, such as Uruk and Nippur, but Ur-Ninurta (1925–1898 BCE) managed to retake some of the places lost by his predecessor Lipit-Ishtar. The struggle for power between Isin and Larsa persisted during the reigns of Gungunum’s successors Abi-sare (1905–1895 BCE) and Sumu-el (1894–1866 BCE). Bur-Sin of Isin (1897–1876 BCE) succeeded in reconquering Ur temporarily, but the city soon came back in the hands of Sumu-el, who installed his daughter there as entum-priestess of Nanna.

The following period is characterised by ups and downs. The struggle for water seems to have turned out advantageously for the kings of Larsa who, after twenty years of major works, succeeded in diverting a branch of the Euphrates that previously watered the region of Isin in their favour, as a result of which new areas could be opened up and Larsa’s economy grew significantly. However, things changed rapidly for the worse when an unidentified enemy attacked the country, took various cities, and cut off the water supply for Larsa, causing a famine in the city as a result of which the population broke out in revolt. It is as yet not certain when exactly this catastrophe took place. According to the royal inscriptions of Nur-Adad (1865–1850 BCE) and his son and successor Sin-iddinam (1849–1843 BCE), Utu selected Nur-Adad as leader of the people, who cleared the Euphrates from the barrages built by the enemy, restored the water supply, reconquered the countryside, and returned the dispersed population of Larsa, implying the disaster took place before Nur-Adad came to power, viz. at the end of Sumu-el’s reign. However, as Sin-iddinam also claimed to have put down a rebellion and the restoration works

18. Probably during Sumu-el’s seventeenth to twenty-first years of reign as the year names of these years are not attested in Ur, see Van De Mieroop 1992a: 57 and Charpin 2004: 77.

19. According to Charpin (2004: 77), Sumu-el retook Ur at the latest in his twenty-first year of reign, after which he installed his daughter Enšakiag-Nanna as entum-priestess of Nanna in Ur, which is commemorated in his twenty-second (and following) year name(s). However, as the lists with his year names contradict each other, the exact order is not clear (see Charpin 2004: 76 n. 247 with references). According to Sigrist (1990a: 20–21) the installation of Sumu-el’s daughter as entum-priestess of Nanna in Ur is commemorated in his twenty-third to twenty-ninth year names: mu (ú.s.á / .u.bi / .4.bi / .5.bi/kam / .6.bi/kam / .7.kam) en šeš.ki en.sá.ki.ú.gišša.ki baahun.gá “Year (after the year / 3rd / 4th / 5th / 6th / 7th year) in which Enšakiag-Nanna the en-priestess of Nanna was installed.”

20. See the so-called “archive of Lu-igisa,” consisting of more than 100 administrative texts and letters from Larsa, to be dated between Abi-sare 7 and Sumu-el 17, edited by Walters (1970). See also Stol 1971 and 1981, in which he republished the letters of the archive. In some of these texts, the building of a weir at the junction of the Isin canal and the Euphrates involving the use of 1.3 million bricks in Sumu-el 14 is mentioned (see Dight 2002: 119). See also Rowton 1967 and Frayne 1989.

21. See the letter-prayer of Sin-iddinam to Utu, addressed to the statue of his father Nur-Adad, published by van Dijk (1965), in which Sin-iddinam describes the conquest of Larsa by a foreign enemy by obstructing the water supply and the consequent revolt in the city, the election of his father Nur-Adad, and the latter’s reconquest and restoration of the city. It is yet not clear who the foreign enemy was. Van Dijk (1965: 12–13) argues that the enemy must have attacked from the north, as Zabalam, Lagaš, and Ennegi, cities watered by the Tigris, were not affected. This leads him to suggest the possibility that it was Babylon. However, as Sin-iddinam starts his letter-prayer mentioning the fact that his father seized (GN?) and usurped the power of the Sukkal (ll. 50–53; […]‘ib‘á dabá dabá nam.sukkal ‘ibe‘á sá bín.(dú₁)₁) he suggests that the enemy might also have been Elamite.

22. See RIME 4.2.9.11 in which Sin-iddinam claims to have defeated all of his enemies with weapons and provided perpetual water and abundance for his city and land by digging the Tigris and RIME 4.2.9.13 in which he claims to have bowed down and smitten with weapons the land that rebelled against him. Note that both inscriptions also mention public works in Ur, the construction of the Enamnuna and the wall of Ur respectively, which might allude to the fact that the city of Ur had also been affected by the foreign enemy who attacked Larsa, as already suggested by van Dijk (1965: 13). See in this respect
started by his father continued under his reign, it is possible that the problems started during Nūr-Adad’s reign and were not yet completely resolved when his son succeeded him.2⁰ Whatever the case may have been, the Larsa dynasty had clearly been badly hit, and it seems that Nūr-Adad temporarily lost control over the city of Ur, as only six of his sixteen year names are attested on tablets from Ur. Sin-iddinam continued his father’s restoration works, among which were those of the Ganunmaḥ and Ur’s city walls.2⁴ At the end of his reign, though, he expressed his worries about the incessant battles and despair of the people in another letter-prayer to Utu,2⁵ and although we have to take the usual exaggeration into account here, the situation does not seem to have been too favourable at the end of his reign.2⁶ His successors

also MS 5000, published by Volk (2011), in which Sin-iddinam claims to have built the walls of Ur on virgin soil, elevated its battlements like a mountain, and extended its residential estates in a single year in order that its citizens would be able to sleep well (see especially i 39–54, ii 65–72, and iv 26–28, 31–34, and 44–48).

23. According to Van De Mieroop (1992a: 59) the disaster did not take place at the beginning of Nūr-Adad’s reign, as Sin-iddinam’s letter-prayer published by van Dijk (1965) seems to imply, but at the end of his reign and his son and successor Sin-iddinam was the one who settled things.

24. Both Nūr-Adad and Sin-iddinam were highly involved in the organization of great public works, among which various constructions and a statue in Ur, such as the Ganunmaḥ (see RIME 4.2.8.2 and 4.2.9.10), an oven and cauldron for Nanna (see RIME 4.2.8.3), the Agun.ku for Ningal (see RIME 4.2.8.4), the Enamnuna (see RIME 4.2.9.11), a statue for Nanna (see RIME 4.2.9.12), and the wall of Ur (see RIME 4.2.9.13 and Volk 2011).


26. One might even ask oneself whether the disasters mentioned in the two letter-prayers of Sin-iddinam refer to two different incidents or one and the same. Might it be possible that a foreign enemy attacked Larsa and cut off its water supply by damming the river, causing years of fighting, famine, epidemics, and uprisings among the people? It seems that Nūr-Adad and his son Sin-iddinam co-ruled for a period: in Sin-iddinam’s royal inscription commemorating the restoration of the Ganunmaḥ in Ur (RIME 4.2.9.10), he calls himself king of Larsa but dedicates his reconstruction to his and his father’s life, indicating that Nūr-Adad is still alive at the time. He adds moreover that no royal ancestor of his ever restored the Ganunmaḥ before, which is odd, to say the least, as his very father claims to have restored the Ganunmaḥ in Ur (see RIME 4.2.8.2). Might it be that both inscriptions refer to one and the same restoration of the Ganunmaḥ by Nūr-Adad and his son Sin-iddinam? As such, they would date from the time that both were in power. In that case, the foreign enemy would have attacked Larsa during the period that Nūr-Adad and Sin-iddinam co-ruled or just before, which would explain why Sin-iddinam attributes the rescuing of Larsa to his father—who was still in power or at least still alive—in the first letter-prayer, but claims to have defeated the enemy and put down a rebellion himself in his royal inscriptions. In the other letter-prayer (see supra), Sin-iddinam mentions that the plague was already raging for seven (or five, according to another manuscript of the text) years, which has been associated with the duration of his reign, viz. seven years, and is hence believed to date from the end of his reign. This, however, does not necessarily hold true: if the attack causing the seven-year period of total turmoil happened during the period that Nūr-Adad and Sin-iddinam co-ruled or just before, it might have ended early on or in the middle of Sin-iddinam’s solo reign—unless Sin-iddinam’s seven years of reign were all years of co-rule with his father. In RIME 4.2.9.11, Sin-iddinam claims to have defeated his enemies after which he provided perpetual water and abundance for his city and land by digging the Tigris. This last achievement can be linked to his second year name (mu i7 idigna ba.ba.al “Year the Tigris was dug,” see Sigrist 1990a: 24), implying that at least a part of the difficulties might have been overcome at the beginning of his solo reign. As for the unidentified foreign enemy, it is remarkable that in both letter-prayers Sin-iddinam refers to Elam: the first refers to his father usurping the power of the Sukkal and the other puts Larsa’s tragic fate in contrast to the joyful fate of Elam and the godless Subarians and Šimáškians. Especially so since less than ten years after the end of Sin-iddinam’s reign, an Elamite (or at least “Elamitizing”) dynasty under Kudur-Mabuk took power in Larsa. It goes without saying that this hypothesis needs further and thorough investigation.
only reigned briefly; the third of whom was removed from the throne by a new dynasty after only a couple of months of reign.

The founder of this new dynasty, Kudur-Mabuk, who might have been of Elamite origin, did not become king himself, although he seems to have played a very active role in the government, but put his son Warad-Sîn (1834–1823 BCE) on the throne in Larsa. The change of dynasty did not cause any interruption, as is shown by both the literary and documentary texts. Following his predecessors, Kudur-Mabuk started an extensive building programme at Ur that was continued by his sons and successors, and installed his daughter as entum of Nanna at Ur. Warad-Sîn claimed to have enlarged the city of Ur and built a new city wall. After a short reign of only twelve years, his brother, Rim-Sîn (1822–1763 BCE), succeeded him. During the first half of his sixty-year-long reign, he managed to reconquer

27. Sin-eribam (1842–1841 BCE), Sin-iqišam (1840–1836 BCE), and Šilli-Adad (1835 BCE).

28. The origin of the Kudur-Mabuk dynasty poses problems: his name and patronymic, Simti-Šilḫak, are both Elamite, but the titles he bears, viz. “father of the Amorite land” (ad.da.kur.mar.tu, see RIME 4.2.12.3, 5–7, 9–10, 13, and 30) and “father of Emutbala” (ad.da-e-mu.ut.ba-la, see RIME 4.2.12.15, 17–20, 23–24, 26 and 29; RIME 4.2.13a.2; and RIME 4.2.14.2–3) refer clearly to the Amorites. According to Steinkeller (2004: 30–33), Kudur-Mabuk was of genuine Elamite extraction. Residing in Maškan-šapir, in charge of the Emutbala tribes, he was in contact with Larsa already during Sin-iddinam’s reign, positioning himself to take Larsa’s throne.

29. See the letter of Kudur-Mabuk to Ur-Nanna in which he orders to gild the statue of the entum-priestess of Nanna and send goldsmiths to Ur to do so (see Charpin 1986a: 43–44). Moreover, almost all royal inscriptions of Warad-Sîn and those of Rîm-Sîn prior to his eighth year of reign mention their father Kudur-Mabuk. In some of them, he is the agent responsible for restorations and reconstructions of buildings (see for example RIME 4.2.13.3, 5–7, 9–10, 13, and 15). Last but not least, it was his daughter who was installed as entum-priestess in Ur (see infra), a position usually preserved for the daughter of the king.

30. Kudur-Marduk claims to have restored the Eeškite shrine for Nanna (RIME 4.2.13.5–7) and the Ganunmaḫ (RIME 4.2.13.9–10), and to have built a throne and statue for Nanna (RIME 4.2.13.13). Warad-Sîn claims to have restored the Eilurugukalam for Ningal (RIME 4.2.13.1), the Egburana for Ningubalag (RIME 4.2.13.4 and 26), the Egalmah for Ningal (RIME 4.2.13.2), the Etemeniguru for Nanna (RIME 4.2.13.16), the Ekuga for Nergal (RIME 4.2.13.23), the Ekituššatenbi for Zababa (RIME 4.2.13.24), the Nanna-ḫul canal in the harbor district (RIME 4.2.13.25), and the Etilmun for Inana (RIME 4.2.13.27).

31. See RIME 4.2.13.15. This is also commemorated in Warad-Sîn’s seventh year name: mu en.an.e.du₇ en ᵈšēš.ki ʿuri₇ ba.huŋ.gā “Year in which Enanedu was installed as en-priestess of Nanna in Ur” (according to Sigrist 1990a: 33–34 this is Warad-Sîn’s eighth year name contra Sigrist’s website [cdli.ucla.edu/tools/year names] where it is his seventh year name; see also Charpin 2004: 68 n. 202). The seal of Enanedu is impressed on UET 5 272, a donation of an orchard in the harbour district of Ur by Enanedu, to be dated in the eleventh year of Rim-Sîn I: [en.an.e.du₇] en’₄[nanna] ʿuri₇.[ma] dumu ku-du-ur-ma-bu-[uk] ᵈšēš ir₇ “EN[ZU] lugal larsa₇”. ma “Enanedu, entum-priestess of Nanna of Ur, son of Kudur-Mabuk, brother of Warad-Sîn, king of Larsa” (see Charpin 1986a: 60–61 and RIME 4.2.13.32). For the use of “son” (dumu) and “brother” (šēš) for a woman, see Lion 2009: 166–169. As already suggested by Steinkeller (2004: 30–31), it might be possible that Enanedu is the same person as the daughter of Kudur-Mabuk called Manzī-wartāš in a text from Uruk. This would imply that she originally bore an Elamite name, like her father and her grandfather, and adopted the Sumerian name of Enanedu when she became entum-priestess, which was not uncommon among priests (see Charpin 1986a: 396–402, Janssen 1992: 47–48, and Tanret 2010: 201). One might ask oneself whether Kudur-Mabuk’s sons, Warad-Sîn and Rim-Sîn, originally also bore Elamite names, but adopted Akkadian names when they became king.

32. See RIME 4.2.13.18–24. The construction of this wall, which was called “Nanna makes the foundation of the land firm” (Nanna-suḫuš-ma-gengen), is commemorated in the year name of Warad-Sîn’s tenth year of reign: mu ʿir EN[ZU] lugal.e bād gal ʿuri₇.ma mu.du.a “Year king Warad-Sîn built the great city wall of Ur” (see cdli.ucla.edu/tools/year names).
Uruk and Isin. As for Ur, the archive of the merchant Ea-nāṣir mentions enemy activity that made trade difficult, and Sin-muballit of Babylon claimed to have defeated the army of Ur in his fourteenth year name. It only got worse in the second half of Rim-Sin’s reign, when several kingdoms vied with each other for domination: Elam, Ešnunna, Mari, Babylon, and Larsa raided each other’s territories and entered into strategic alliances in order to gain supremacy. Problems with the water supply, whether related to the hostilities or not, caused a shortage of barley, resulting in a famine in the south between Rim-Sin’s thirty-ninth and forty-second years of reign.

Eventually, Hammurabi of Babylon (1792–1750 BCE) was able to conquer the kingdom of Larsa, after which Ur became part of Hammurabi’s Babylonian Empire. This, however, did not mend matters for the city of Ur, which had fallen into decline some twenty-five years earlier due to Babylonian incursions and the fact that the Larsa kingdom had been forced to shift its centre of gravity to the north. Hammurabi set up a large project to restore the water supply for the devastated southern cities and claimed to have resettled the scattered population, but did not

33. Two letters, UET 5 20 and 81, refer to hostile activities and enemy territory (see Oppenheim 1954: 9 n. 11; Leemans 1960: 39–40; Van De Mieroop 1992a: 64–65; and Garfinkle 2010: 198).
35. Various letters (AbB 8 12 and 14; TIM 1 22, 26, and 22; Rowton 1967: 269–270; and A.7535–52 in Christian 1969) show that merchants of Larsa had to buy large amounts of barley in the kingdom of Ešnunna. This caused difficulties, as the transportation of the barley to Larsa by boats implied that the level of the water in the canals needed to rise, which Ešnunna opposed strongly. However, the political decision to obstruct the canals in order to prevent the transportation of the barley to Larsa also caused a shortage of water for watering the fields. Rim-Sin sent messengers to the king of Ešnunna, but even after five months, the canals had not been opened yet (See Charpin 1983: 104–106 and 2004: 126).
36. It is still difficult to pinpoint the exact date of the fall of Larsa (see Charpin 2004: 319–323). Recently, Dercksen (2014) suggested that Larsa fell shortly after the twenty-first day of the tenth month of Hammurabi’s thirtieth year of reign. This fits in well with the year name of Hammurabi’s thirty-first year of reign. A text from Ur (UET 5 419) is dated “the year Hammurabi became king” (mu Ḫa-am-mu-ra-pīlugal.e giskim.ti an ‘en.līl.bi.ta iga ेren.na.še ǐ.gin.na.ām usu maḥ diring gal.gal.e ne mu.un.na.an.sum. uṣ.ām (i.si.in.na) ma.da e-mu-ut-ba-lumšù ु lugal.bi ri-im.”EN.ZU šu.ni sā ṣi.in.du₃₄,ga₃₄ ... x.bi.še zi ni x ba.è ... x ki.en.gi ki uri du₃₄,ga₃₄ ɓi.in.tu.u “The year: Hammurapi, the king, with the help of An and Enlil, went before the army <and>, by the supreme power which the greatest gods had given to him, conquered (Isin), <and> the land of Emutbal and its king, Rim-Sin; he brought forth his life to its”; <and> caused ... Sumer and Akkad to dwell at his command,” see Horsnell 1999 [vol. 2]: 141. Apart from Larsa and Isin, it is very likely that Hammurabi also captured Ur and Nippur at the end of his thirtieth year of reign. A text from Ur (UET 5 419) is dated “the year Hammurabi became king” (mu Ḫa-am-mu-<<ap>>>-ra-pīlugal), which refers to Hammurabi’s thirty-first year of reign; see Horsnell 1999 [vol. 1]: 41–44.
38. It is still difficult to pinpoint the exact date of the fall of Larsa (see Charpin 2004: 319–323). Recently, Dercksen (2014) suggested that Larsa fell shortly after the twenty-first day of the tenth month of Hammurabi’s thirtieth year of reign. This fits in well with the year name of Hammurabi’s thirty-first year of reign. A text from Ur (UET 5 419) is dated “the year Hammurabi became king” (mu Ḫa-am-mu-ra-pīlugal.e giskim.ti an ‘en.līl.bi.ta iga ेren.na.še ǐ.gin.na.ām usu maḥ diring gal.gal.e ne mu.un.na.an.sum. uṣ.ām (i.si.in.na) ma.da e-mu-ut-ba-lumšù ु lugal.bi ri-im.”EN.ZU šu.ni sā ṣi.in.du₃₄,ga₃₄ ... x.bi.še zi ni x ba.è ... x ki.en.gi ki uri du₃₄,ga₃₄ ɓi.in.tu.u “The year: Hammurapi, the king, with the help of An and Enlil, went before the army <and>, by the supreme power which the greatest gods had given to him, conquered (Isin), <and> the land of Emutbal and its king, Rim-Sin; he brought forth his life to its”; <and> caused ... Sumer and Akkad to dwell at his command,” see Horsnell 1999 [vol. 2]: 141. Apart from Larsa and Isin, it is very likely that Hammurabi also captured Ur and Nippur at the end of his thirtieth year of reign. A text from Ur (UET 5 419) is dated “the year Hammurabi became king” (mu Ḫa-am-mu-<<ap>>>-ra-pīlugal), which refers to Hammurabi’s thirty-first year of reign; see Horsnell 1999 [vol. 1]: 41–44.
see to have a special interest in the city of Ur. He did mention the city and its god in the prologue of his Code, but merely as one of the cities dedicated to an astral deity in the enumeration of twenty-five cities grouped on the basis of theology and geography.38

Under the reign of Ḥammurabi’s son and successor Samsu-iluna, the Babylonian empire, if it can be called an empire at all,39 soon started to disintegrate due to a combination of internal economical and institutional crises and the threat of invading Kassites. In the middle of Samsu-iluna’s eighth year of reign, a revolt broke out in the South,40 and Rim-Sin II, who declared himself king in Larsa, soon started to conquer other southern areas. He soon managed to take control of Ur, where he ruled for at least twelve months,41 although it seems that there were plenty of competitors, as is shown by the attestation of a king named Iluni in a seal inscription and year name found in Ur.42 This might have been the ruler of Ešnunna, who also rebelled against Samsu-iluna, and possibly took control of Ur for a short period of time during Samsu-iluna’s seventh year of reign. After having dealt with the Kassites, Samu-iluna started the reconquest of the south in his ninth year of reign and managed to recapture Ur in his tenth year, which was done with great force as he claimed to have destroyed Ur’s walls.43 The recapture of Ur involved its general destruction, and although some resettlement must have taken place, as is shown by a few texts dating from the eleventh and twelfth year of reign of Samsu-iluna.44 Ur headed for a long period of general decline. Samsu-iluna was confronted with more revolts in the south; these revolts eventually led to the loss

40. See Stol 1976: 44–58 and Charpin 2004: 337–339 with references. According to Charpin (2004: 337), the difficulties were probably due to the increasing threat of floods in northern Babylonia, which Samsu-iluna tried to prevent by digging a canal to drain the swollen water of the Euphrates into the depression of the present-day Lake Habbaniyah; but in doing so, he caused a shortage in the water supply in the South, resulting in poor harvests, debts, and eventually revolts. The digging of the canal is commemorated in his third year name: *mu sa-am-su-i-lu-na lugal.e ki.in.gub.(a) nì.u, ul.(li)a.ta ba.šub. ba i, sa-am-su-i-lu-na(lugal)-na-gá-ab-nu-ub-sî mu.un.ba.al.a sà ma.da gân dagal im.ta.an.-ê.a bar kalam ê.a kur.kur.ra “The year: Samsu-iluna, the king, dug the canal ‘Samsu-iluna(, the king,) is the source of abundance for the people,’ a watercourse which from ancient times had fallen into disrepair, and made it flow forth in the broad fields in the heart of the country, overlying the land <of Sumer and Akkad> and going forth into the foreign countries,” see Horsnell 1999 (vol. 2): 177–178. See also Cole and Gasche 1998: 11–13.
42. See the seal inscription on a small receipt dated Si 8/ix/28: ‘EN.ZU-i-bi-ʾšu’ dumu ʾEN.ZU-u-qi-ša-[am] ir ʾi-lu-[ni] (see Ormsby 1972: 96 no. 11 and 99 seal 3; and Charpin 1986a: 127) and the year name on the sale contract HE 167: *mu i-lu-nî lugal (see Charpin 1986a: 174–175).
43. This is commemorated in Samsu-iluna’s eleventh year name: *mu sa-am-su-i-lu-na lugal.e du₄₁, ga an “en.li.bi.ta bad (gal) ūriš (larsa)” (ulu) unu-ga mu.un.gul.la ugnim ki.ūrī a.raqû ... ṣukul.ta.in sig. ga “The year: Samsu-iluna, the king, at the command of An and Enil, destroyed the (great) walls of Ur, (Larsa) (and) Uruk and defeated the army of Akkad <second(?)> time,” see Horsnell 1999 (vol. 2): 195.
44. Three texts from Ur date from Šamsu-iluna’s eleventh year of reign (UET 5 268 and 485; and YOS 12 356) and only one text from his twelfth year of reign (UET 5 868), see Charpin 1986a: 155–156,
of the south, which suffered a great economic decline due to a collapse of the entire system. Urban centres such as Ur could no longer be supported and settlement was reduced to dispersed villages, causing a massive emigration to the north and an, at least partial, abandonment of the south for a long period of time.45

Fortune Against All Odds?

Before being destroyed and consequently abandoned for several centuries, Ur lived through more than two and a half centuries of political instability, came under the control of various dynasties, and fell victim to several violent raids and attacks, water supply problems, famine, and revolts.

Nevertheless, in spite of these turbulent and seemingly unfortunate times, textual evidence from the early second millennium BCE shows that the city of Ur lived through periods of economic, religious, and cultural prosperity and remained important and prestigious as a commercial and sacred urban centre and port.

Indeed, literary production was booming in the early second millennium. Following their predecessors of the Ur III empire, rulers of especially the Isin but also the Larsa dynasty, commissioned the composition of many literary works: hymns, praise poems, literary letters, and letter-prayers alike.46 Lipit-Ištar of Isin even ordered the composition of a so-called law collection,47 no doubt in imitation of his illustrious predecessor Ur-Namma.

A particular literary genre is that of the so-called city laments, one for Ur and one for Sumer and Ur, in which the fall of Ur and its empire is presented in terms of divine abandonment.48 These laments, together with Išbi-Erra’s hymns and royal letters of Ibi-Sin and Išbi-Erra,49 clearly fit in with the attempts to legitimize the new dynasty. As keeper of the tradition and legacy of the Ur empire, Išbi-Erra needed to justify the new royal lineage as well as the new seat of power, namely Isin. As such, the fall and destruction of Ur was presented as an inevitable fact, for it was decided by the gods, who allowed the enemy to destroy the empire.

The fact that the kings of both the Isin and Larsa dynasties attached great importance to the ancient capital is shown in their royal inscriptions and year names, which commemorated the restoration, building, and embellishment activities they

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45. According to Gasche (1989: 109–143), archaeological prospecting shows a complete absence of late Old Babylonian material, implying that Ur (as well as Uruk and Larsa) had been abandoned for a long period. The reasons for this abandonment, and consequent massive emigration to the north, are as yet unclear. It might have been caused by a foreign (Elamite) attack, by kings of the Sealand dynasty, who are thought to have conquered Nippur late in Samsu-iluna’s reign, forcing the populations of the south to abandon their cities, by a considerable shift of the course of the Euphrates causing problems with the water supply; see Charpin 2004: 342 with references.

46. See ETCSL: City Laments (2.2.2–2.2.6), Royal Praise Poetry, Isin Dynasty (2.5.1.2–2.5.8.1) and Larsa Dynasty (2.6.2.1–2.6.9.a), Literary Letters and Letter-prayers, Isin, Larsa, and other dynasties (3.2.01–3.2.05) with extensive bibliography.

47. See Roth 1997: 23–35.


had carried out in Ur (see supra). This is corroborated by the fact that daughters from both Isin and Larsa rulers were ordained entum-priestesses at Ur.  

Moreover, apart from Nippur, the city of Ur is the largest source for manuscripts of early second millennium literature, with at least one, but probably more houses serving as scribal schools, which points to the importance and prestige of Ur as a cultural, intellectual, and educational centre.  

However, the most important information on Ur’s prosperity comes from the economic and legal tablets from private and other archives, as is shown by the works of Charpin (1986), Diakonoff (1985, 1990, and 1995) and Van De Mieroop (1992a and 1992b). Indeed, soon after the fall of the Ur III empire, economic activities started up again. Maritime trade with Dilmun was pursued by Išbi-Erra even before the Elamites were expelled from the city, implying that their control was only minimal. A possible explanation lies in the fact that the sea harbour was no doubt located outside of the city of Ur. Early in the reign of his successor Šu-ilišu, the first texts reappear at Ur, showing a continuation of administrative practices and a sound economy, and implying that the former capital, or at least parts of it, recuperated rather quickly.  

Throughout the next two centuries, until the middle of Rim-Sin’s reign, Ur’s economy was clearly thriving in all of its sectors—temple, palace, and private citizenry, which were largely interdependent. An important part of Ur’s economy was controlled by the temples, whose involvement comprised various sectors, from agriculture to metallurgy.  

However, the role of the temple administration changed over time, due to the fragmentation of temple offices, from a system originally completely supervised by temple personnel to one in which private entrepreneurs played a major role. This is apparent from the change in function that the Ganunmah or “Great Storage House,” which played an important role in the administration of the temple, underwent, as is shown by Van De Mieroop (1989; 1992a: 116–117). The first text from the Isin dynasty found in Ur dates from the fifth year of reign of Šu-ilišu (Loding 1976: 237 no. 1, ŠI 05-x-/), implying there was an interruption of some twenty years in the written documentation, the last texts from the Ur III dynasty dating from the twenty-third year of reign of Ibbi-Sin (UET 3 711, IS 23-xii-22). However, if Ur’s sea harbour was indeed still functioning eighteen years before (see supra), there might have been hardly any interruption of trade activities after the fall of Ur. According to Stone and Zimansky’s latest findings during their recent excavations at Ur, the Ur III–Isin/Larsa transition suggests the fall of Ur did not involve a violent demise as described in the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, notwithstanding the fact that there was at least some discontinuity in architecture and perhaps in subsistence patterns (see Stone and Zimansky 2016).  

As is apparent from the public and private archives excavated by Woolley, see Charpin 1986a; Van De Mieroop 1989, 1992a, 1992b, and 2015.  

tion of the Ganunmaḫ was twofold, viz. (1) the collection and storage of durable materials, payments in silver by various people for rents and taxes, and valuable objects, received as ex-votos, and (2) the collection and storage of perishable food products, such as dairy, oil, dates, and spices, which were issued for offerings and rations. However, from the start of Warad-Sîn’s reign on, the role of the Ganunmaḫ was restricted to the collection and storage of durable materials and valuable objects, whereas the collection and storage of perishable food products were, at least in part, handled by private entrepreneurs. According to Van De Mieroop (1992a: 79–81), this change in function is to be attributed to Sîn-iddinam’s restoration of the Ganunmaḫ.

A simultaneous change is perceptible in the role played by the palace in the administration of Ur’s economic resources. When the temple started to privatize many of its functions, the palace drew administrative duties, originally executed by the temple, away and relocated them in their own Larsa-based offices.  

Ur had a unique position as seaport, and controlled all access routes for products entering Mesopotamia from overseas. From old, Ur’s trading connections extended as far as the coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Indian peninsula. From the early second millennium onward, Dilmun, whose exact location remains uncertain but is to be situated in the area from Falaïka to Bahrain, functioned as a kind of entrepôt where products from Oman, Arabia, and India, such as copper, semi-precious stones, shells, ivory, and spices, were stored to be imported into Mesopotamia in exchange for silver and agricultural and craft products. Both Mesopotamian and Dilmunite traders were involved. Private merchants of Ur, often called ālik Dilmun, Dilmun traders, collected investments from numerous individuals to finance their expeditions. Overall these investments were small, no doubt to reduce the risks, but in case of larger sums a certain return would be guaranteed. Although this trade was undertaken by private citizens, the temple maintained some control by levying taxes on all imported products, a role which was taken over by the palace over time. The imported goods, as well as agricultural and crafts products from Ur, were then traded further inland by boat or caravan. Ur had extensive contacts inland, up to the far north, but the overland trade was subject to the political situation and sometimes warfare and instability prevented merchants from reaching certain areas.

Locally, the urban population traded movables as well as immovables. Bulky agricultural products, such as barley and dates, were traded in the harbour area, no doubt for reasons of storage, whereas retail sale took place in shops and booths located in the city. Houses in the city, orchards outside of the city, as well as temple prebends were traded and/or let. Remarkably, there are very few field sales and no inheritance divisions mentioning fields, implying private ownership

61. Van De Mieroop (1992a: 169) mentions three field sales: UET 5 167, YOS 12 277 (see Charpin 1986a: 173–174), and TS 4 (see Charpin 1980: 36–37 and 203). According to Van De Mieroop (1992a: 169), all three were of a special nature, viz. uncultivated (ki.gál), subject to flooding (ú.sal), and very small. Note, however, that UET 5 167 is probably not from Ur but from Larsa (see Van De Mieroop 1992a: 169 n.
of fields was greatly restricted. Possibly, the arable land was primarily owned by the central institutions, or by landowners who did not reside in the city, as the business contracts between the urban population and people living outside of the city walls seem to imply.  

**How to Approach This Paradox?**

How can Ur’s economic and cultural prosperity and the political instability the city underwent be reconciled? How can we approach this paradox? Usually, the periodic collapse and rise of dynasties, and consequently cities, is considered in political terms or attributed to external factors such as invasions or climate problems. As such, our main focus lies on pinpointing the causes of crises, disruptions, and implosions, assuming that the normal state of affairs is stability and prosperity. In other words, we tend to focus on trying to explain where it went wrong. However, is this the right question to ask? Taking the course of events in early second millennium BCE Ur into account, and the course of history in general for that matter, would we not better ask ourselves why it did not go wrong? Would it not be worthwhile trying to understand why the Elamite invasion followed by centuries of political instability due to the competing dynasties, involving invasions and raids, did not cause Ur’s economy to collapse?

A promising way to approach this paradox is la théorie de la régulation or régulation theory. Régulation theory is a systems theory developed in the early 1970s in response to the economic crisis following the long period of seemingly stable post-war economic growth on the one hand and the inability of neoclassical economic theory to understand and respond to that crisis on the other hand. Régulation theory, which is influenced by structural Marxism and the Annales school, among others, studies “the transformation of social relations as it creates new forms, both economic and non-economic, that are organized in structures.” These new forms then reproduce a determinant structure, the mode of production.

Lipietz (1987: 18–19) formulated the key methodological principles of régulation theory as follows:

1), and that both the area and price of TS 4 are broken (see transliteration in Charpin 1980: 203), which makes it impossible to know how large the field was.

62. The controversy on private individual or collective ownership of arable land vs. the ownership of arable land by the State and/or temples in early Old Babylonian Ur in particular and southern Babylonia in general, goes far back in time and continues until today. As noted by Renger (1995–96: 288) this controversy is based on the “uneven distribution of the sources and heuristic problems with regard to their interpretation.” Various aspects of this controversy are treated by, among many others, Liverani 1984; Diakonoff 1982 and 1985; Renger 1985–96; van Driel 1988; and Garfinkle 2012: Chs. 2, 3, and 8.


64. This and the following paragraphs of this paper largely draw upon Boer 2015, especially his first chapter. A general overview of the history and applications of régulation theory is to be found in Boyer and Saillard 2002. The French term régulation designates “the social, institutional, and ideological factors that determine the stabilities and transformations of a system as a whole”(Boer 2015: 32). Being not analogous to the English term ‘regulation’, and hard to translate, I follow Boer in using the French term régulation. See also Jessop 1997: 288.

65. See Aglietta 1979: 16.


67. See also Boer 2015: Ch. 1, esp. pp. 34–35; and Boyer and Saillard 2002.
1. Society, and within society economic activities, is a network of social relations: individuals connecting with each other and engaging in exchanges.
2. Each of these social relations is in se contradictory, as a result of which living within this network of social relations is difficult. Therefore, crisis is the normal, natural state and non-crisis is a rather chance-event.
3. There are, however, long periods of time when all goes well, when living within this network of social relations, however difficult, works out fine. This is called a régime d’accumulation or accumulation regime.
4. The question is thus how an accumulation regime was achieved. In order for an accumulation regime to be achieved, individual expectations and behaviour must be in line with the needs of this accumulation regime. This is a process with two aspects, the first one functioning as habit, or “habitus, as Bourdieu would say, in the minds of individuals with a particular culture and willingness to play by the rules of the game;” the second one “through a set of institutional forms or codification of the fundamental social relations that underpin economics and may vary widely.”

In other words, the starting point of régulation theory is that all social relations making up society are in se contradictory. Hence, crisis is the normal state of affairs and non-crisis the abnormal or exceptional state of affairs. The key question is therefore how stability is obtained, or as Boer (2015: 37) puts it “how can a system reproduce itself if it is unstable, if the social relations at its core are inherently contradictory and crisis-ridden?” Régulation theory considers the economy to be interconnected with society in its political, social, and cultural systems. The specific shape of these systems at one time constitutes the mode of regulation of that time. Within such a mode, an accumulation regime is defined and can function until regime and mode conflict, leading to a crisis.

Régulation theory distinguishes four types of crises, described by Boer (2015: 36–37) as follows:

1. Exogenous crises are due to an external event, such as invasions or climate change. Although they can be very perturbing, they cannot endanger the mode of régulation. They are not threatening in themselves but become real perils during structural crises.
2. Endogenous crises are internal, cyclical crises that are inevitable and necessary for they “perform a useful function in managing the extremes of the economic system.”
3. A structural crisis is a crisis in the accumulation regime and mode of régulation, and as such a special form of endogenous crisis in which the “internal socially determined tensions that enabled the system to rise to dominance, now threaten to tear it apart.” Contrary to the normal endogenous crises, a system in a structural crisis cannot recover due to its internal dynamics, as a result of which a thorough reconfiguration or shift in the mode of régulation is needed. Such a crisis is often a forerunner for the fourth type of crisis, namely, the ultimate crisis, a crisis of modes of production when the whole economic structure can no longer be sustained and the system collapses completely.

68. See Lipietz 1987: 19.
How to Apply Régulation Theory to Early Second Millennium Ur?

So how can régulation theory be applied to the early second millennium BCE history of Ur? How can the fundamental changes the city of Ur underwent during this period be discussed in terms of the two central concepts of accumulation regime and mode of régulation? And can it help us to approach and understand the contradiction between the politically unstable climate and the apparent economic and social stability?

It goes without saying that the answer to these questions requires an extensive and thorough research into not only the Ur situation, but also that of the rest of the territories controlled by the Isin, Larsa, and Babylonian dynasties, in order to get a complete picture of early second millennium BCE society. It goes without saying that this largely exceeds the present contribution, which restricts itself to the presentation of some preliminary outlines on how the régulation approach can possibly contribute to our understanding of the Ur situation.

Boer (2015: 111) describes ancient Near Eastern economy as basically dominated by two basic institutional forms that were constantly in tension with each other:

1. “subsistence survival:” the crucial allocative institutional form focused on agriculture and socially determined by kinship household
2. “state estate”: the extractive system of temple and palace estates

This certainly works for the early second millennium BCE southern-Mesopotamian economy, where the majority of the population was engaged in subsistence agriculture. Although these rural agricultural villages and communities no doubt comprised the bulk of all socio-economic life, they are almost completely absent in the written documentation. The reason is obvious: the sources originate from urban centres and are thus mainly concerned with the urban elites.

Very much present in the written record is the system of estates, which appeared together with the first urban centres where individuals became disengaged from direct production and needed others to produce food, clothing, etc. At first there were temple estates, but over time the palace took over the existing patterns of estates, along with control of the temples, and gradually members of the wealthy urban elite got involved. The estates employed permanently and periodically indentured labourers in exchange for rations, as a result of which they had direct control over both labour and the means of production. Other estate employees were assigned sustenance fields in exchange for services rendered.

According to Boer (2015: 118–121), the tension between two institutional forms is in part due to the estates having a constant shortage of labour. The need for estates to gain ever-new labourers not only put an increasing strain on the agricul-

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ture of village communities, but also led to the ruling classes seeking other sources for their own needs, namely the institutional form of “tribute exchange.”

This may have played a part in the crisis which would lead to the downfall of the Ur III state, as it largely involved a system of “tribute exchange,” using taxation, tribute, and exchange as mechanisms for appropriating goods. We might even speak of a form of exploitation colonialism when it comes to parts of the periphery. However, both the estate and tribute systems relied on the subtle combination of persuasion and force provided by the state. This clearly went wrong as governors of subject provinces ceased contributing their shares for the support of the palace and the temples and showed their independence by omitting the use of year names proclaimed by the king. The constant shortage of labourers in the estate system, and the influx of newcomers, the Amorites, semi-nomads who would establish self-governing communities and only occasionally entered military service if it served their interest, led to a substantial loss of control over both labour and the means of production by the ruling classes, resulting in a massive economic crisis. Exogenous crises such as foreign invasions and poor harvests only added to this structural crisis, resulting in a crisis in the accumulation regime and mode of régulation.

However, this did not lead to a total collapse of the system, as rather soon after the fall of Ur, a certain degree of recovery had been achieved, as is shown by the continuation of administrative and economic practices apparent in the written documentation. But, whereas we would expect to see a thorough reconfiguration or shift in the mode of régulation after such a structural crisis, this is not really the case. For, a similar system, made up of “subsistence survival” and “state estate,” dominated the following two centuries.

As already noted, the estate system underwent some changes in this period, leading to an increasing role of private entrepreneurs and the privatization by the temple of a part of its functions. This did not change the system in se, for these private entrepreneurs were largely interconnected with the temple and the palace, and acted within the boundaries of this very estate system. It is, however, a symptom of another development. For, the urban elites, whose wealth was generated through the estate system, started to invest their wealth in order to gain profit. As such, a private commercial circuit, parallel to the estate system, came into being. Its origins go back to the third millennium, but it developed further and became more important in the course of the second millennium, although it always remained small-scale obviously. This parallel circuit of private economy was largely interconnected with and dependent on the estate system, of which it was actually a kind of outgrowth, as it was for the most part operated by the same agents: members of the urban elite, who often combined an official temple or palace function with

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72. An extractive form using tribute, taxation, and exchange as mechanisms for appropriate goods that one did not produce, see Boer 2015: 139–163 and 236.
74. Išbi-Erra, who was asked by the last king of the Ur III empire, Ibbi-Sin, to defend Isin against the Amorites, declared himself king in the eighth year of reign of Ibbi-Sin and, as such, founded the dynasty of Isin. The first year name of Išbi-Erra known to us is that of his fourth year of reign (mu girtab1 ba-hull “The Year Girtab was destroyed,” see Sigrist 1988: 13). By then, the extent of the Ur III empire had shrunk to the city’s environs and Ibbi-Sin tolerated a parallel dynasty under his former general Išbi-Erra. See Charpin 2004: 57–60.
75. See Gomi 1984.
private entrepreneurship. The same goes for the private merchants involved in overseas trade, in which the city of Ur being the only seaport played a major role. In order to obtain luxury goods, the estates engaged in international trade. This was contracted out to private merchants who obviously got a piece of the pie.

The estate system and private commercial circuit benefitted from each other, for they had mutual interests. At the same time, the disruption of one system affected the other. When the estate system was put under pressure, which, as we saw earlier, was mainly caused by the constant shortage of labour, the private commercial circuit dried up. The same applies vice versa. Investments and speculation, after all, involve risks. Especially those parts of the urban population that were not fabulously rich, but simply well-to-do, the lower strata of the urban elites, could easily get into temporarily financial trouble, which is apparent from the many loans that are preserved. For the creditors, mostly temple, private entrepreneurs, and merchants, lending was a lucrative business due to the very high interest rates. Although not all debtors were people in economic distress—borrowing could have been necessary and even beneficial in case of an investment with a guaranteed return—the exorbitant interest rates cannot but have led to the insolvency of many a debtor, resulting in them losing their properties and eventually even being forced to do manual labour.

As the mode of régulation in the early second millennium BCE was not fundamentally different from that before the fall of Ur, we cannot but assume that it was bound to go wrong again. In other words, that the built-in limitations of the institutional form of estates kept economic crisis an ever-present reality.

And that seems to be exactly what happened, as is shown by the references to the edicts the kings of Isin, Larsa, and Babylon issued. These edicts functioned as bypasses to ensure that the crisis-ridden system continued to survive, and were as such barometers of economic instability.

No less than five kings of Isin—Išme-Dagan, Lipit-Ištar, Ur-Ninurta, Irra-imitti, and Enlil-bani—issued decrees in which they freed inhabitants and temples from duties, services, and dues, cancelled tithes, lowered the days of corvée labour to be rendered annually, and/or established justice in another way. As most of these edicts mention the inhabitants and/or temples of Nippur, and to a lesser degree Isin, one might question the degree to which these edicts reflected social justice realm-wide, as Renger (2002: 150–151) already noted. One might even wonder whether they were in part political means in order to (re-)gain the allegiance of Nippur, which was after all the religious capital.

76. For the situation in early Old Babylonian Ur in particular, see Van De Mieroop 1992a, esp. 169–210.
77. Loan documents are by far the most commonly preserved records from the Old Babylonian period, see Skaist 1994: 11–21 and Van De Mieroop 2002b. As for Old Babylonian Ur, there are some ninety loan contracts preserved, the majority of which are dated to the reign of Rim-Sîn I (see Charpin 1986a: 472–481; Van De Mieroop 1992a: 253–299; and Skaist 1994: 85–87, 96, 196–170, 235–236, and 288–289). Charpin (2015) mentions the discovery of one silver loan dated to the reign of Samsu-iluna during the recent excavations (autumn 2015) at Ur. It is generally believed that loan documents were broken after repayment, implying that the preserved ones are those that were not paid back.
78. See Kraus 1984 and Renger 2002 for a general overview and analysis of the Old Babylonian royal edicts.
The only king of Isin who explicitly mentions Ur is Lipit-Ištar. This, however, does not come as a surprise, as Ur is lost to the rulers of the Isin dynasty after Lipit-Ištar.

In the prologue of his law collection, Lipit-Ištar states that he set free the inhabitants of Nippur, Ur, and Isin, both male and female, who were put under the yoke of doing bond service, and put them into their previous social status. He made family members support each other and ordered service obligations to be shared by the father and his sons. He also claimed to have lowered the number of working days in the estates to ten per month for the labourers and seventy per year for those who have to render corvée, probably those who were assigned sustenance fields.\(^{80}\)

Six royal inscriptions and two royal hymns refer to the fact that Lipit-Ištar established justice in the land of Sumer and Akkad.\(^{81}\) The same phrase is used in his year name a.\(^{82}\) Renger (2002: 147) argues that the establishing of justice by Lipit-Ištar mentioned in his royal inscriptions must refer to a royal decree issued later in his reign, as they refer to building activities that must have taken some time to complete. Year names e and f, in which he claims to have released the arrears of the land of Sumer and Akkad,\(^{83}\) might refer to such a later decree.

Contrary to later royal edicts, none of the edicts by the Isin kings are referred to in the contemporary administrative, economic, and legal texts. It is, in other words, unclear how these measurements affected daily life.\(^{84}\)

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80. ii 1–40: “At that time, the inhabitants of Nippur, both male and female, the inhabitants of Ur, both male and female, the inhabitants of Isin, both male and female, as well as (or: that is) the inhabitants (of the entire lands) of Sumer and Akkad, both male and female, people put under the yoke of doing bond service, I set them free, put them into their previous status (of free persons). According to the personnel roster (dub.sag) (I decreed) that a father would stand in for his son, that a son would stand in for his father, that a father would do service together with his sons, and that a son would do service together with his father. I imposed service (equally) on the household of a living father and on the undivided household of brothers. I, Lipit-Ištar, son of Enlil, obliged those in the household of a living father and those living in the undivided households of brothers to do service seventy days (per year). I made those living in a household of institutional subjects (gurus) serve ten days per month. ...” (translation from Renger 2002: 145–146). A slightly different translation can be found in Roth 1997: 25–26 (note in particular the passage ii 10–15 [lú giš]·bi·a [šudul(?)] nam.arad [bu]. ‘mu·ni.ib.ak ‘ama’. ar·gi·bi [bu].mu·gar ki.bi.sē ṣē.ṛt.dab, translated by Roth as “I liberated, ..., who were subjugated (by the yoke(?)), and I restored order.” vs. Renger’s “people put under the yoke of doing bond service, I set them free, put them into their previous status (of free persons).”). See also Kraus 1984: 19–27 and Renger 2002: 145–148.

81. u, m.s.sā ki.en.gi.ki.uri.a i.ni.in.garr-ra.a “When I established justice in the land of Sumer and Akkad” (see RIME E4.1.5.2–6 and E4.1.5.8) and m.s.sā ki.en.gi.ki.uri.a mu.ni.gar “I/You established justice in the land of Sumer and Akkad” (Lipit-Ištar A 92, see Römer 1965: 96, and Lipit-Ištar B: 38, see Vanstiphout 1978: 38–39).

82. mu ḫu-pi-it-ī.sā-tār lugal.e m.s.sā ki.en.gi.ki.uri.a mu.ni.in.gar “Year in which king Lipit-Ištar established justice in the land of Sumer and Akkad,” see Sigrist 1988: 28.

83. mu (ū.sā) ḫu-pi-it-ī.sā-tār lugal.e láux ki.en.gi.ki.uri.a i.in.gál.la gár-ra “Year (after the year) king Lipit-Ištar released the arrears of the land of Sumer and Akkad,” see Sigrist 1988: 28.

84. This might be due to the fact that a part of Lipit-Ištar’s measures as expressed in the prologue of his law collection concern obligations within the estate system. However, the liberation of the inhabitants of Ur who were put under the yoke of debt bondage and the restoration to their previous social status—at least according to Renger’s (2002: 146) interpretation of this passage—might refer to insolvent debtors who had to cede their property to their creditors and/or were even enslaved by their creditors in order to pay off their debts, which we would expect to be referred to in the economic and legal texts, as is the case for later edicts. This is not the case, which might imply that this passage does not refer to insolvent debtors, but it might also be due to the gaps in our sources.
The only king of the Larsa dynasty who is known to have proclaimed remission of debts is Rīm-Sîn I, who issued no less than three royal edicts. Contrary to the Isin dynasty, the royal edicts issued by Rīm-Sîn of Larsa are never mentioned in his year names, royal inscriptions, or literary texts, but are only known from the economic and legal texts from private archives, in which they are referred to as šīmdat šarrim “royal decree.” The texts from Ur only refer to two of his edicts, but it seems logical that they were all valid throughout the kingdom of Larsa, including at Ur.

Before his three “official edicts”—i.e. those explicitly referred to as šīmdat šarrim “royal decree”—Rīm-Sîn already seems to have taken similar measures, which are referred to in a rather enigmatic way in TCL 10 40, a sales contract from Larsa. This contract is dated to the last month of Rīm-Sîn’s fifteenth year of reign and concerns the sale of a date orchard by Ku-Ninşubur to Gaz-Sîn “after the forehead of the land became clean and the sealed documents had been discarded.”

Although it remains as yet unclear what is exactly meant with “the forehead of the land having become clean,” Kraus (1984: 31–33) believed it to have been an earlier edict by Rīm-Sîn regulating debts incurred by private individuals. Whether a distinction was made between sustenance loans, which were declared null and void, and business loans, which were not, as was the case in the edict of the later king Ammi-ṣaduqa, is not known. Taking into account Landsberger’s (1939: 230) statement that adding such a phrase expressly marked the contract as not falling under this special measure, Kraus (1984: 33) suggested that the cause for drawing up this document might have been the remission of debts incurred among private individuals: by ceding his orchard to his creditor, Ku-Ninşubur paid off the debt he owed Gaz-Sîn. In other words, notwithstanding the fact that measures cancelling probably both government and private debts had been taken by the king, Ku-Ninşubur settled his debts by selling (giving) his orchard to Gaz-Sîn. If this interpretation holds true, one might ask whether this was an exceptional situation for reasons unknown to us, or a clever way to by-pass the cancellation of debts by

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85. UET 5 253 (RS 35/xii/—) refers to Rīm-Sîn’s second royal decree: ina šīmdat šarrim varkītim (ll. 10–11), and VAS 13 81 (RS 41/i/—) refers to Rīm-Sîn’s third royal decree: warki šīmdat šarrim 3.kam. ma (l. 9), see also Kraus 1984: 33–50.

86. There is no consensus on the exact meaning of šīmdat šarrim and to what it refers when used in legal and economic texts and letters, viz. general legal custom or a particular royal regulation such as the nīṣarum acts, which were issued in order to restore equity in times of crisis and restricted in time, or other royal decrees, which were probably restricted to a particular legal problem but not time sensitive. An excellent overview of various interpretations by various scholars is to be found in Graetz 2015: 254–260 and especially n. 74. I tend to follow Kraus (1979: 62) who interprets šīmdat šarrim as “the present royal regulation” when used in the phrase ana/kīma/warki šīmdat šarrim in legal and economic texts. The fact that there are specific references to the second and third šīmdat šarrim of Rīm-Sîn seems to confirm this. See Kraus 1984: 31–50 and Renger 2002: 151–152.

87. According to Jean, the tablets published in TCL 10 originate from Larsa, which is confirmed for the series AO 6346–6442—among which TCL 10 40 being AO 6394—by the merchant who sold them to the Louvre Museum (see TCL 10 p. 1). Kraus (1984: 31) also considers this tablet to originate from Larsa. However, in his “Renger Corpus Berlin” available at archibab.fr, Renger believes this contract to be from Ur instead of Larsa (“wohl nicht Larsa sondern Ur,” see http://pix.archibab.fr/4Dcgi/13937D4577.pdf).

88. TCL 10 40 (RS 15/xii/—): 19–20: ištu pūtu mātim īliluma u kunukkātum ittabkā. For translations and interpretations of this passage, see Kraus 1984: 32–33; CAD E sub ēlēlu 1b and ēlēlu 1e, CAD P sub pūtu 1b2 and CAD T sub tabāku 10a.

royal decree—which was resolved in the later decrees by adding the cancellation of all expropriation of property due to insolvency.

However, the phraseology of this contract differs from that of later documents referring explicitly to a *ṣimdat šarrim* “royal decree,” which complicates the analysis of its meaning and does not rule out the possibility that it concerns a one-off settlement between individuals. The phrase “after the forehead of the land became clean and the sealed documents had been discarded” might simply refer to an earlier agreement between Ku-Ninšubur and Gaz-Sîn, as a result of which the date orchard was sold.

Rim-Sîn’s three official edicts, issued in his twenty-fifth, thirty-fourth, and before his forty-first year, all concern the alienation of urban real estate, orchards, and temple prebends. Kraus (1984: 42) suggested that this measure was taken because insolvent debtors had to cede their property to their creditors and thus lost the basis of their livelihood. As this became a widespread situation causing social imbalance, intervention was needed to re-establish the equilibrium by reinstating the debtors in their former properties.

References to at least two of these edicts are found in the Ur texts, mostly claims, lawsuits, and verdicts in which, according to the royal edict, property had to return to the original owner (or his heirs), as he had been forced to sell his property to pay off his debts.

TS22/22a (RS 28/viii/—)\(^90\) states the return of one sar of a built house, adjacent to that of Ku-Ninšubur and that of Narām-ilīšu, from the children of Sāsiya to Sîn-imguranni, son of Ipquša, according to the royal edict (*ana ṣimdat šarrim*). Charpin’s study of the Sāsiya dossier revealed that Sāsiya owned the house since the sixth year of reign of Rim-Sîn.\(^91\) In other words, twenty-two years after Sîn-imguranni’s father Ipquša was forced to cede his house to Sāsiya, to whom he must have been indebted, Sāsiya’s children were forced by the royal decree to return the house to Ipquša’s son. This, however, does not seem to have taken place without difficulties, as Rim-Sîn’s edict was issued in his twenty-fifth year of reign\(^92\) but the house was returned only three years later to its rightful owner. It seems therefore plausible that Sāsiya’s children were sued by Sîn-imguranni and a trial preceded the actual return. Actually, this would not be the end, as, seven years later, on the occasion of Rim-Sîn’s third royal edict, Sāsiya’s children would attempt to regain the one sar house from Sîn-imguranni (see *infra*). The fact that Sîn-imguranni is only able to reclaim his property after Rim-Sîn’s first official edict (in RS 25), and not after his possible earlier edict (in RS 15) seems to indicate that there was in fact no earlier edict, or at least that it did not concern the alienation of urban real estate.

UET 5 263 is an undated fragmentary tablet stating that, after having investigated the matter, the king returned a temple prebend to Kiag-madana from whom it had been taken by Appâ, son of Bēlī according to the royal edict.\(^93\) Because the beginning of the text is lost, we know that Kiag-madana originally bought the

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\(^92\) According to Kraus (1984: 38) this edict was issued at the latest in the seventh month and before the nineteenth day of the eighth month of Rim-Sîn’s twenty-fifth year of reign.
\(^93\) UET 5 263 1’–12’: [mar.za a-ap-pa-a?] ‘[ki.Ša-a-da.‘na’ id-di-in ma i-sa-am i-na ši-im-da-at šar-ri-‘im ‘a-ap-pa-a dumu be-li-i mar.za i-ki-im-šu-u šar-ru-um wa-ar-ka-ta-ša ip’ru-is-[(x?)]-ma ša ma]{mar.za [a-ap-pa-a?] mar.za ‘gá nun.mah(?)] um.e 10.kam mar.za tuk.lú.lú šar-ru-um a-na ki.Ša-a ma]
prebend, but it is not clear from whom: this might have been Appâ, to whom it was returned after the royal edict, but it also might have been another person, whose legal heir was Appâ. Ellis (1972: 79) believes this to be a case in which the king reversed an earlier decision made on the basis a *ṣimdat šarrim*, which causes some difficulties in interpreting *ṣimdat šarrim* as a royal decision (or royal edict) in her opinion.

In my opinion, the king did not overrule his own edict, as a result of which the interpretation of a *ṣimdat šarrim* is not affected. From this and other texts, it seems clear that these returns of property and prebends were not applied automatically: people had to go to court and sue their former creditors. It is obvious that the claimant had to produce proof that hardship was the cause of the sale and that this proof had to be evaluated by judges. In the present case, if Appâ was the original seller, he would have retrieved his prebend by trial, invoking the royal decree. Kiag-madana would then have appealed to a higher authority, the king, who—on the basis of more or better evidence?—would have annulled the first judgement, no doubt by stating that his edict was not applicable here, and returned the prebend to him. This means that the king would not have overruled his own edict.

The tablet can be dated during Rim-Sîn’s reign, as one of the witnesses, Nامت- nibani, as well as Kiag-madana, also appear in UET 5 194 (RS 19/xii/—), stating the sale of a temple prebend of Amurru bought by Kiag-madana from Qîstum and Sin-imguranni, sons of Ur-Ningirsu. The edict referred to in UET 5 263 is likely to have been Rim-Sîn’s first official one, which would allow us to date UET 5 263 post RS 25.

TS 24 (RS 34/vi/—) is the equal division by the children of Sâsiya and Sin-imguranni of Ipquša’s orchard “as much as they (i.e. the judges) reverted according to the royal edict.” In other words, at some point in time, Ipquša, Sin-imguranni’s father, was forced to cede an orchard to Sâsiya, to whom he must have been indebted. After Rim-Sîn’s second official edict, Sin-imguranni reclaimed his property, but the judges decided that the orchard, more precisely as much of it as was concerned by the edict, should be divided between both parties, viz. Sin-imguranni and the children of Sâsiya (see infra). Again, this is clearly the outcome of a trial in which both parties are deemed to have equal rights on the contested property.

UET 5 253 (RS 35/xii/—) relates how Šēp-Sîn and Ili-imguranni approached the judges of Ur and Larsa concerning the sale of two plots of land, a one bur orchard with date palms and a one bur empty lot, by Sin-iqīšam, son of Dān-Lulal, to Iškur-gugal, son of Ilšu-bani, according to the second royal edict (*ina šimdat šarrim warkītim*), referring as such clearly to Rim-Sîn’s second official edict. A part of the tablet is broken, and the relationship between the plaintiffs on the one hand, and the buyer and seller on the other, is therefore not clear.

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98. CAD *Ṣ* sub *ṣimdatu* 1a.
99. It would only make sense for Šēp-Sîn and Ili-imguranni to contest the ownership of the two plots of land Iškur-gugal bought from Sin-iqīšam if they were Sin-iqīšam’s heirs (and thus his sons?)
It seems, however, that these edicts incited people to claim property even if they had no right to it. Indeed, some of the texts from Ur do not explicitly refer to a ṣimdat šarrim issued by Rīm-Sîn but can be linked to one, such as UET 5 252 (RS 35/v/—), in which the judge confirmed before witnesses the right of Ea-gāmil and his brother Apil-kittim to detain and possess ½ sar of a built house. In other words, after Rīm-Sîn’s second official edict, Ea-gāmil and Apil-kittim, brothers of Ku-Ningal (see infra), were sued concerning the possession of ½ sar of a built house, but they were determined to be in the right.

The same goes for UET 5 124 (RS 35/xi/—), in which Sin-ereš, son of Annanesag, was able to obtain compensation for a house that his father had to sell earlier to Ku-Ningal. Ku-Ningal’s children did not want to return the original plot, as it was now part of a larger house, but gave Sin-ereš a larger plot elsewhere.

Another example is TS 25 (RS 35/xii/30), in which the children of Sāsiya attempted to regain real estate and various temple prebends from Sin-imguranni, son of Ipquša, and Sin-uselli, son of Šumi-abum. The text concerns one sar of a built house, adjacent to that of Ku-Ninšubur and that of Narām-ilšu, which Sāsiya’s children had to return to Sin-imguranni, son of Ipquša, seven years and four months earlier, as a consequence of Rīm-Sîn’s first official edict, as stated in TS 22/22a (RS 28/viii/—), and three temple prebends, of respectively five, sixteen, and eight days per year in the temples of Nanna, Ninlil, and Gula. Sāsiya’s children pressed charges against Sin-imguranni, son of Ipquša, (about the one-sar house) and Sin-uselli, son of Šumi-abum, (about the three temple prebends) but the royal judges of Larsa and Ur disallowed their claims. Remarkably, the case states that the judges of Larsa and Ur removed them from the house, prebends, and orchard, whereas there is no mention of an orchard in the claim. As Charpin (1980: 32) already remarked, this must have been the orchard mentioned in TS 24 (RS 34/vi/—), stating the equal division by the children of Sāsiya and Sin-imguranni of Ipquša’s orchard “as much as they (i.e. the judges) reverted according to the royal edict” (see supra).

It is clear that the dispute between Ipquša’s son, Sin-imguranni, and Sāsiya’s children went back a while. Due to his insolvency, Ipquša was forced to sell an

and Sin-iqīšam had been forced earlier to sell his plots to Iškur-gugal due to insolvency. However, we do not know when Iškur-gugal bought the plots of land from Sin-iqīšam, nor do we know whether Šēp-Sîn and Ili-imguranni were related to Sin-iqīšam. Iškur-gugal, son of Ilšu-bani, is attested in three other texts from Ur. In UET 5 144 (RS 08/vii/—), he bought ½ sar nine gin of a built house from Ur-ḫegal, son of Sin-nūr-māṭi; the house he bought is adjacent to another house of his, implying he was expanding his property. In UET 5 145 (RS 09/viii/—), he bought one sar of a built house from Sin-pater, son of Sin-iqīšam. About a year later, he also expanded this part of his property by buying another 1 1/3 sar of a built house from Sin-pater, son of Sin-iqīšam, as recorded in UET 5 146 (RS 10/v/—). In other words, about twenty-five years before Šēp-Sîn and Ili-imguranni went to court to contest the ownership of the plots of land Iškur-gugal bought, the same Iškur-gugal was expanding his property. However, given the fact that Rīm-Sîn issued a first official edict concerning the alienation of property in his twenty-fifth year of reign, and Šēp-Sîn and Ili-imguranni, not Sin-iqīšam, contested the ownership of the plots only after Rīm-Sîn’s second official edict in his thirty-fourth year of reign, it seems probable that Iškur-gugal bought the later disputed plots of land from Sin-iqīšam between RS 25/viii/20 and RS 34. See also Ellis 1972: 75 nn. 11–12 and 80; and Kraus 1984: 44–45.

103. TS 25a 15–18: di.ku₅.e.ne lugal ša larsa₅i₄ u úrⁱ₃.ma ina é mar.za u kiri₃ issuḫ₃u₃n₃u₃t₃, see Charpin 1980: 217.
orchard and one sar of house to Sâšiya. In RS 28, after Rîm-Sîn’s first official edict, Sîn-imguranni recovered the one-sar house. In RS 34, after Rîm-sîn’s second official edict, the judges decided that the orchard should be divided equally between Sîn-imguranni and the children of Sâsiya. However, one and a half year later, the children of Sâsiya tried to regain the house and the orchard, based on the same second official edict of Rîm-sîn, but this attempt was unsuccessful. This indicates how fundamental the measures must have been and how families and individuals were affected by the royal edict.

Another example is PBS 8/2 264 (RS 35/xii/20), a lawsuit in which Lu-dingira claimed two temple prebends, both of twenty days per year in the temples of Bawa and Nergal, from the children of Waqar-abušu. The latter came into possession of the prebends when he was adopted by Ur-Ningirsu. Lu-dingira claimed that this adoption had been invalidated, as a result of which Waqar-abušu, and after him his heirs, were no longer entitled to Ur-Ningirsu’s prebends. However, Lu-dingira’s claim was declined by the servants of the king and the judges, who appointed the heirs of Waqar-abušu as the rightful owners, because, contrary to Lu-dingira’s assertion, the adoption had never been invalidated. The relation between the plaintiff, Lu-dingira, and the original owner of the prebends, Ur-Ningirsu, is not clear. However, Lu-dingira was clearly confident that he was entitled to Ur-Ningirsu’s prebends if the latter had not adopted, or had unadopted, Waqar-abušu, implying he must have been biologically related to Ur-Ningirsu. Lu-dingira’s patronymic is not mentioned in the text, and the legend on his seal, although very fragmentary, seems to suggest his father’s name started with dingir. Lu-dingira might have been Ur-Ningirsu’s nephew or grandson.

After his conquest of Larsa, Hammurabi issued an edict in which debts and sales were annulled. According to Charpin (2000a: 188), Hammurabi issued this edict in the middle of his thirty-second year of reign, on the occasion of his accession to the throne in the south—he did not simply conquer the kingdom of Larsa but succeeded Rîm-Sîn as king. This edict applied throughout the kingdom, including the city of Ur. There are, however, no preserved documents from Ur referring to this edict.

His successor Samsu-iluna did the same on the occasion of his accession to the throne and in his eighth year of reign, four years before Ur would be abandoned. The latter is one of the few actual royal decrees that have been preserved, albeit in a fragmentary state. There are, again, no preserved documents from Ur referring to Samsu-iluna’s edicts, which is not surprising at all, given the political crises and revolts that took place in southern Mesopotamia at the time.

Apart from the economic and legal documents explicitly referring to a royal edict or those that can be linked to one based on their content and date, another genre

107. See Charpin 1988 and Charpin 2000a: 189–190. Samsu-iluna’s first edict is commemorated in his second year name: mu sa-am-su-i-lu-na lugal.e še.ga dingir gal.e.ne amar.ar.gi ki.en.gi ki.uri.(a) i.ni.in.gar.ra ša ma.da du₄ mu.ni.in.du₄ du₄ ni.si.sā pa.e br.in.ak “The year Samsu-iluna, the king, the favourite of the greatest gods, established the freedom of Sumer and Akkad, made the heart of the good land very glad and made justice manifest,” see Horsnell 1999: 177.
of texts is linked to and can give information on royal edicts, viz. loan contracts. Indeed, as already mentioned above, loan contracts are by far the most commonly preserved records from the Old Babylonian period. Charpin (2000a and 2001) was able to show that there was a peak in the frequency of preserved loan documents in the years preceding a royal edict, showing that loans that were declared null and void by the royal edict, and as a result were not paid back, were kept by the creditors in their archives.

If we take a look at the loan documents from Ur, we see a peak of sixteen loan documents that were retrieved from Dumuzi-gamil’s house.109 Half of them are dated to Rim-Sin’s thirty-third year, four to his thirty-second year, three to his thirty-fourth year and one to his thirty-first year. Is it possible that these loans had been cancelled by Rim-Sin’s second royal edict, and were therefore kept by Dumuzi-gamil, as Van De Mieroop (1992a: 118) already suggested?

According to Kraus (1984: 45), the latest possible date for Rim-Sin’s second edict is the eleventh day of the first month of his thirty-fourth year. Dumuзи-gamil’s archive, however, contains three loans dated respectively in the fifth, tenth, and eleventh months of RS 34. If Kraus’s hypothesis is correct, and Rim-Sin’s second royal edict was indeed issued at the very beginning of his thirty-fourth year, these three loans could not have been cancelled by the edict. Still, they were kept by Dumuзи-gamil, implying that they had not been paid back. How can we explain this? Charpin (2000a: 197) came across the same phenomenon in two dossiers of preserved loans prior to Samsu-iluna’s second edict, that of Awiliya, rāʾibānum, and that of Marduk-muballit of Lagaba: both dossiers contain one loan document that can be dated after Samsu-iluna issued his second edict in the third month of his eighth year of reign.110 The same phenomenon can be observed in the archive found in the house of Ur-Utu during the Belgian excavations at Tell ed-Dēr (Sippar-Amnānum),111 where we see an enormous peak of preserved private loans prior to Ammi-ṣaduqa’s first edict on the occasion of his accession to the throne, after which the number of preserved, and thus unpaid, loans goes right back to “normal.”112

Charpin (2000a: 197, n. 44) suggested the possibility that the creditors had new, fictitious loan documents drawn up after the edict with the consent of the debtors in order to recover those cancelled by the edict. This is of course possible—although contrary to the very purpose of the edict—but maybe the explanation is simpler: whereas the edict did indeed solve acute economic problems—all outstanding debts were cancelled, giving people some breathing room for a while—it obviously could not solve the structural problem, and soon enough a new crisis occurred. In the case of Dumuзи-gamil, it seems that it took less than half a year before people were not able to repay their debts again, which explains why Rim-Sin had to issue a third official royal edict rather soon, viz. before his forty-first year of reign.

109. UET 5 365 (RS 31/viii/—), 311 (RS 32/vii/—), 312 (RS 32/i/—), 347 (RS 32/x/30), 348 (RS 32/xi/—), 349 (RS 33/i/30), 350 (RS 33/ii/—), 351 (RS 33/iii/—), 313 (RS 33/v/13), 352 (RS 33/vi/30), 314 (RS 33/x/21), 315 (RS 33/x/21), 353 (RS 33/xii/—), 356 (RS 34/v/—), 354 (RS 34/x/—), and 317 (RS 34/xi). All these tablets were found in AH, 3 Niche Lane, room 3, see Van De Mieroop 1992a: 275–277. For the well-known entrepreneur from Ur called Dumuзи-gamil, see Van De Mieroop 1992a: 132–136.
111. See Gasche 1989.
112. A study on the loan documents found in the archive of Ur-Utu by M. Tanret and myself is forthcoming.
It is, however, remarkable that there are no later loans preserved from Dumuzi-gamil, whom we know to have been active from RS 27 to RS 36. Is it possible that Rîm-Sîn's second edict was issued later, at the end of his thirty-fourth or the start of his thirty-fifth year of reign? In that case, the three loans from RS 34 would have been cancelled by this edict.

Kraus' hypothesis to date Rîm-Sîn's second edict at the very beginning of his thirty-fourth year is based on YOS 8 141 (RS 34/i/11), a text from Larsa recording the donation of property by Šilli-Âḫua to his wife Burtum, who lost her inheritance rights as a result of a family dispute. The property is said to have been reverted for the second time by Šilli-Âḫua on the orders of the king after the death of his father. As Kraus (1984: 44) already pointed out, it is not at all certain that this refers to Rîm-Sîn's second edict, for it is not known when this event took place, and how long before this the text was written. Moreover, if Rîm-Sîn's edict was issued at the beginning of his thirty-fourth year, Šilli-Âḫua's claim would have been settled within ten days, which seems rather improbable. It is, therefore, in my opinion, unlikely that this text refers to Rîm-Sîn's second edict: it does not refer to an edict (simdatum) but to the orders of the king (awat šarrim), hinting rather at a lengthy process concerning the inheritance of Šilli-Âḫua's father in which the king ultimately passed judgement, especially as it also states that his brothers have no claims against him.

Given the fact that the above-mentioned court cases in order to reclaim property all took place during Rîm-Sîn's thirty-fifth year of reign, it seems indeed possible that Rîm-Sîn's second edict was issued at the end of his thirty-fourth or the start of his thirty-fifth year of reign.

The only document implying an earlier date of issue is TS 24, recording the equal division of Ipquša's orchard between the children of Sâsiya and Sin-imguranni and referring explicitly to a royal edict, which is dated in the sixth month of RS 34 (cf. supra). However, it is not inconceivable that the edict referred to in TS 24 is actually Rîm-Sîn's first royal edict, and that it took the children of Sâsiya and Sin-imguranni almost nine years of litigating to come to a mutual agreement concerning the orchard of Ipquša. As such, the children of Sâsiya tried to regain the house and orchard, which were returned to Sin-imguranni and equally divided between both parties after Rîm-Sîn's first royal edict, on the basis of Rîm-Sîn's second edict, which would make much more sense indeed.

Another problem to be tackled is the fact that all but four loans issued by Dumuzi-gamil were short-term loans. Apart from four šu.lá loans—which were in all probability commercial loans and therefore not qualified for cancellation on the basis of a royal edict—with which were due in two months or after the end of the expedition, all but one of the loans issued by Dumuzi-gamil were due within
one month.\footnote{\textit{[adding within thirty days (iti <u>4.>30.kam).]}} This means, that whenever the edict was issued, it would only have affected one or two actually outstanding loans. In other words, the edict must have concerned not only the outstanding loans, but also those that were expired but not yet paid back. Charpin (2000a: 203) already noted that the peak of preserved loan documents before a royal edict did not only contain loans concluded in the months preceding the edict but also those that went back several years and were long expired when the edict was issued.

This accumulation of unpaid loan documents, starting years before and reaching its peak in the year preceding the royal decree, can only be explained if we assume that the royal decree was issued \textit{because} of this accumulation. When too many loans were not repaid, and people undoubtedly stacked debt on debt, resulting in the sale of their property, the loss of their livelihood, or even debt bondage, the authorities could not but intervene to get the economy up and running again. As such, not only the debtors, but also the creditors benefitted from the royal decree: the cancellation of the outstanding debts prevented the economy from complete stagnation or even collapse.

The reason why these invalid loan documents were kept by the creditors is as yet unclear. We would expect them to be broken, as is shown by CT 48 15, a legal text from Sippar, dated to the thirteenth year of reign of Hammurabi, stating that the loan document concerning 1/3 mina of silver that Nuṭuptum, daughter of Warad-ilušu, loaned, was lost. and could therefore not be broken according to the royal edict. In order for the debtors not to risk being asked repayment later on, a clod of earth was broken instead.\footnote{\textit{[Charpin (2000a: 187, 197, and 204) quotes two other texts showing that loan documents cancelled by a royal edict were supposed to be broken. The first one is a tablet from Larsa (Anbar and Stol 1991 no. 4, Ḥa 32/i/—) stating that the document concerning the loan of four mina of silver that Apil-Kittim lent from Ibbi-Sin could not have been broken as it had not been stored, but is consigned to be broken, (as) it dates from RS 59.\footnote{\textit{[According to Charpin (2000a: 197) this tablet shows that Hammurabi’s second edict was, although only issued in the middle of his thirty-second year, already applicable from the first month. This seems rather unlikely, especially as AUCT 4 80 records the partial repayment of a loan in the fourth month of Ḥa 32.\footnote{\textit{[Why would a debtor repay a part of his debt to his creditor when the royal edict was already applicable? Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the breaking of the loan document mentioned in the above quoted Larsa tablet is related to a}]

\footnote{\textit{[\textit{[adding within thirty days (iti <u>4.>30.kam).]}}}}}}}}
royal edict. What happened and why was it drawn up? In RS 59, Ibbi-Sin lent four mina of silver to Apil-Kittim. When Apil-Kittim paid his loan back, Ibbi-Sin was not able to provide the loan document in order to (give it to the debtor to) destroy it. At that point, a tablet similar to CT 48 15 must have been drawn up, stating that although Apil-Kittim paid back his loan, the document was lost and could not be broken, in order to safeguard Apil-Kittim against later claims of repayment should the original loan document turn up. About two years later, in the first month of Ḫa 32, the original loan document did turn up, but as the loan was already repaid, and in line with the earlier document, the tablet was now consigned to be broken.122

The second one is BE 6/1 103 (Aṣ 01/x/03), a tablet from Sippar stating a sequence of claims and statements concerning sixty gur of barley that Warad-Sîn, son of Eṭerum, was loaned by Gimillum, the servant of Marduk-mušallim, son of Utul-Ištar, who was replaced123 by Iluni, son of Sizzatum. Although the king issued an edict, cancelling Warad-Sîn’s debt, the creditor and his representative insisted on getting their barley back. When Warad-Sîn argued that he on his turn lent out the barley, which had also been cancelled by the king’s edict, Gimillum and Iluni took barley that was heaped up in Warad-Sîn’s house. Warad-Sîn went to the judges in Babylon, was determined to be in the right, and brought the tablets of the judges of Babylon to those of Sippar, after which Iluni accused Gimillum of having stolen the barley from Warad-Sîn’s house. After further examination of their case, they came to a mutual agreement. Finally, it is stated that should the sealed document concerning the sixty gur of barley that Warad-Sîn, son of Eṭerum, was loaned, appear in the basket of Marduk-mušallim, son of Utul-Ištar, it is invalid.124 Note that this tablet does not mention witnesses, implying it was a draft or a copy of the original.

It seems thus, as Charpin (2000a: 204–205) already noted, that the legal status of loan documents was similar to that of title deeds. When a seller of a property could not produce all the necessary title deeds that had to be handed over to the new owner according to the principle of the “chains of transmission,”125 a document had to be drawn up listing the missing tablet(s) in order to replace it/them. The same goes for loan documents: if the creditor was not able to produce a loan document that needed to be broken, the debtor was given a document stating the original loan document had not been broken, but was to be considered invalid and was to be broken whenever it turned up.

This would also explain the presence of UET 5 361 and 126 in Dumuzi-gamil’s archive.126 UET 5 126 (RS 32/iii/—) records that Dumuzi-gamil paid back his half of the one mina of silver he borrowed together with Šumi-abîya from Šumi-abum five years earlier, including interest for five years, to Nūr-ilîšu and Sîn-ašarêd. UET 5 361 (RS 27/ii/03) records the loan of one mina of silver by Dumuzi-gamil and Šumi-abîya from Šumi-abum and the respective amount both have to pay back, viz. ½

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122. Both Anbar and Stol (1991: 17) as Charpin (2000a: 187 n. 12) interpret ana ḫepê nadi as a future tense (“sera donnée pour être brisée” and “est destinée à être brisée”). However, nadi being a stative, it seems more appropriate to translate “it is now being consigned.”

123. See Tanret and Janssen 1992 for the interpretation of ana qabê as “replaced by.”

124. BE 6/1 103: 40–42: kanîk 60 še.gur ša Warad-Sîn dumu Eṭerum ina pisan Marduk-muššalim dumu Utul-Ištar illiam ḫepî. Charpin (2000a: 204) translates ḫepî ‘il sera brisée’. Being a stative, it seems more appropriate to translate ‘it is broken’ and understand this in a figurative sense ‘it is invalid’.

125. See Charpin 1986b.

mina 7 1/6 sheqel and ½ mina 9 sheqels. The fact that Šumi-abīya’s interest rate is higher implies a longer term of repayment and explains the existence of UET 5 126: the loan document—originally kept by Šumi-abum, but handed over to Nūr-ilīšu and Sīn-ašarēd who had taken over the loan—could not be broken, as Šumi-abīya’s part was not yet repaid, but UET 5 126 provided Dumuzi-gamil with the necessary proof his part was repaid. Note that Dumuzi-gamil paid back his own debt in RS 32, whereas four of his debtors were not able to do so, corroborating the phenomenon of the accumulation of unpaid debts, starting years before but reaching its peak only in the year preceding the royal decree.

This shows that in special circumstances, when loans were lost or otherwise unavailable for breaking, documents were drawn up ensuring the rights of the debtors, whereas in “normal’’ circumstances we can sometimes observe that rather large groups of cancelled loans would simply have been kept in the creditor’s archive. As is shown by YOS 5 58, a cylindrical tag (possibly from Ur according to cdli), to be dated to the eleventh year of Warad-Sīn, tablets that had lost their value were collected in baskets in order to be broken.¹²⁷ In the case of YOS 5 58, these were accounting tablets, such as receipts (mu.DU) and arrears (lāl), whose data had probably been incorporated into summary lists, and therefore had lost their value. Charpin (2000a: 205) argues that the same may have happened for loans cancelled by a royal edict: creditors would have stored their loan documents in baskets in order to be destroyed, which eventually did not happen. The debtors were safeguarded against claims of repayment by the pre-edict date of the loans, the creditors must have kept them for archival and bookkeeping reasons. We do not know whether this was a general rule or whether loans were eventually broken or discarded.

But, as Charpin (2000a: 204) noted, the main difficulty in providing a clear explanation of the phenomenon is that we are dealing mainly with tablets from illicit excavations. Without archaeological context, it is hard to know whether they were actually kept in the archive of the creditors, were buried under the floor of a room,¹²⁸ or were disposed of in another way.

However, the few Old Babylonian private archives that were found during licit excavations and for which archaeological context is available seem to show exactly the same peak of loan documents prior to a royal decree. This goes for the tablets found during the Iraqi excavations at Abu Ḥabbah (Sippar-Yaḥrûrum)¹²⁹ in the late 70s and early 80s in room 2 of house 11 (level III of U 106), among which a group of (at least) twenty loan documents, belonging to the archive of Ḫumṭi-Adad and Tarīb-ilīšu, children of Ili-kīma-abīya, the majority of which are to be dated in the sixth and seventh years of reign of Samsu-iluna, prior to his second edict (in Si 8).¹³⁰ It is, however, not entirely clear where exactly these tablets were found—in a

¹²⁸. Loan documents have been found under the floor in Ur-Utu’s house at Sippar-Amnānum (see Tanret 2004) and in Igibuni’s house at Susa (see De Graef 2008).
¹²⁹. See al-Jadir and Abdullah 1983. The Old Babylonian tablets found in private houses during the Iraqi excavations at Abu Ḥabbah in the late 70s and early 80s are published in al-Rawi and Dalley 2000.
¹³⁰. Charpin (2001) enumerates nineteen loan documents, four in which Tarīb-ilīšu (aka Taribyía) is creditor: nos. 16 (Si 7/iii/26), 17 (Si 7/iii/26), 14 (Si 7/ix/23), and 20 (Si 7/ix/—), and fifteen in which Ḫumti-Adad (aka Ḫumtiya) is creditor: nos. 58 (Si 17/[…] /[…]), 34 (Si 4/xi/[…] ), 10 (Si 6/iii/01), 7 (Si 6/ iii/25), 11 (Si 6/vii/22), 23 (Si 6/viii/[…] ), 42 (Si 6/x/09), 31 (Si 7[…] /[…]), 9 (Si 7/iii/01), 35 (Si 7/iii/14),
—and if they were found together, as the catalogue in al-Rawi and Dalley (2000: 27–33) does not mention a findspot for every tablet, which makes it difficult to reconstruct their archival context.

As mentioned earlier, this also goes for the archive found in the house of Ur-Utu, where we see a peak of preserved private loans prior to Ammi-ṣaduqa’s first edict on the occasion of his accession to the throne. In other words, creditors indeed tended to keep the loan documents that were cancelled by a royal decree, as they no doubt wanted to keep their accounts, and book the loss they suffered due to the cancellation of all outstanding debts. The total amount of more than 330 unpaid and/or cancelled loan documents that Ur-Utu kept in his archive seems to indicate that, although the intention might have been to destroy or break them once they were booked as loss, this never actually happened. The reason is obvious: archives were only sorted out on the occasion of a move or renovation of a house. Moreover, although the creditors kept the loan documents, the debtors were safeguarded against claims of repayment by the pre-edict date of the documents, which made them de facto invalid. One might therefore wonder whether ḫepûm is always to be understood in its literal sense “to break.” It is clear that in some contexts ḫepûm is to be understood in a figurative sense “to be invalid.” Ammi-ṣaquda’s edict (§3) states that when an Akkadian or Amorite has lent barley or silver for interest (…) and had a tablet drawn up, his tablet is void (hepi), and he cannot have barley or silver collected according to the wording of this tablet. The same goes for the above-mentioned BE 6/1 103 and CT 4 42a, an adoption contract from Sippar, mentioning at the end, after the list of witnesses: “after Sumu-la-ila voided the tablets” (ištu Sumu-la-ila kunukkāti iḫpû), where it is difficult to suppose that the king broke all the tablets.

In other words, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Loans that were paid back disappeared from the creditor’s archive, as there was no need to keep them for accounting purposes. It seems logical that debtors received the loan documents upon repayment, after which they could be broken or discarded. Loans that were expired but not paid back, even though they were cancelled by a royal edict, were kept by the creditor for accounting purposes. Loan documents that were lost and could not be given to the debtor upon repayment in order to be broken, or could not be kept by the creditor after cancellation by a royal edict, were replaced.

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131. See al-Rawi and Dalley 2000: 5, “Some or all these tablets with seal impressions were found in a jar.” In their catalogue, only one tablet (no. 38) is said to have been found in “level III house 11 room 2 in a broken jar.”

132. According to the catalogue in al-Rawi and Dalley 2000, only nos. 7, 10, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30, 31, 35, and 37 are found in room 2 of house 11. For nos. 8, 11, 32, 34, and 42, no findspot is given. Moreover, no. 58 is said to have been found in room 26 of area 3.

by another document stating that should the original document reappear, it was invalid.

Going back to the main subject of this paper, the city of Ur, we witness an accumulation of internal crises during the first centuries of the second millennium BCE, leading up eventually to a structural crisis in the second half of the eighteenth century, which caused massive emigration to the north and an, at least partial, abandonment of the south for a long period of time.

If Lipit-Ištar’s edict mentioned in the prologue of his law collection is to be understood as the liberation of those living in debt-bondage, Ur lived through its first economic crisis less than fifty years after its recovery. Hereafter, there seems to have been a long century of relative economic stability. Economic troubles start again under the reign of Rim-Sin I, who had to intervene at least three (but possibly four) times in order to restore the economic balance. Here we see a clear cycle of internal economic crises that succeeded each other at a high speed. Various documents from private archives found at Ur concern claims in order to retrieve property that was lost due, in all probability, to enduring debts. It seems, moreover, that thirteen outstanding private loans, given by Dumuzi-gamil, were cancelled by Rim-Sin’s second edict.

Things did not change for the better once Ur became part of the Babylonian kingdom of Hammurabi; on the contrary, the cycle of internal crises continued, but now at an even higher speed: Hammurabi issued an edict on the occasion of the fall of Larsa at the end of his thirtieth year of reign, but his son and successor, Samsu-iluna, deemed it necessary to issue an edict thirteen years later, when he took over the throne, and again eight years after that. Four years later, exogenous crises such as continuing raids, water supply problems, revolts, conquests, and reconquests resulted in a crisis in the accumulation regime and mode of régulation.

It is important to stress that, although the royal edicts were no doubt issued to restore the means of self-support of the agrarian population, who ended up in debt-bondage, as a result of which the estates had a constant shortage of labour, the edicts also affected the urban elites, who, although largely interconnected with the temple and the palace, and acting within the boundaries of this very estate system, were involved in a private commercial circuit, parallel to the estate system. This is apparent from the documents concerning the property of Ku-Ningal, Ipquša, and Sâsiya discussed above. Not only the individuals reclaiming property that had to be sold due to debts belong to the urban elites, the same goes for the creditors and debtors: quite often they seem to belong to the same high class of urban elites. Lending and borrowing seems, at least partly, to have been a means of investing. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Dumuzi-gamil, well-known entrepreneur and creditor of Ur, borrowed ½ mina of silver from Šumi-abum.

Renger (2002: 139–141 and 153–154) argues that royal edicts were so frequent in the Old Babylonian period because of the privatization by the palace of a part of its functions and the increasing role of private entrepreneurs. The frequency of the need for debt remission reflects the precarious economic situation created by the franchise system through which the palace outsourced various economic activities (the so-called “Palastgeschäfte”). The business operations entrusted to private entrepreneurs did not produce enough to pay the stipulated annual dues, as a result

of which arrears accrued that had to be remitted by the palace, which was dependent on the service of these entrepreneurs.

The documents from private archives mainly inform us on how this precarious economic situation affected the urbanites, some of whom stacked debt on debt and had to sell property, and show once more how the parallel circuit of private economy was interconnected with and dependent on the estate system.

However, whereas the cancellation of outstanding debts prevented the economy from complete stagnation and collapse, it was only a short-term solution: soon enough, debts began to accumulate again, resulting in a new need for debt remission to keep the economy going. By issuing royal edicts, the Old Babylonian rulers temporarily counteracted the symptoms, but were never able to solve the causes of the failing economic system.

After the structural crisis in the second half of the eighteenth century, which caused massive emigration to the north and an, at least partial, abandonment of the south for a long period of time, internal crises kept accumulating in the north, eventually leading to an ultimate crisis in the middle of the second millennium BCE when the system collapsed completely and the Old Babylonian period came to an end.

**Conclusions**

The *régulation* approach can certainly be used in the study of Mesopotamian economy. In our case, it opened up new ways in looking at the early second millennium BCE, especially as it reveals the internal dysfunctions inherent in the system, which caused it to ultimately implode. As such, our paradox is maybe less a paradox than we initially thought.

First, our view is biased by our sources, which are overwhelmingly concerned with the estate system, whereas the subsistence agriculture in the rural villages and communities is almost completely absent, although they must have comprised the bulk of all socio-economic life. Moreover, our sources provide a warped picture of the economy, seen from the perspective of the ruling classes, written by and for the elites.

Second, whereas the times were indeed turbulent, this was not the main problem. The main problem seems to be internal, namely the inability to adjust the economic system when necessary.

As stated above, our textual sources paint a picture of a thriving community: commerce, sales, leases, and rents depict a prosperous economy, but only as long as it lasts, between crises. Each moment of crisis is shown by peaks in lending and is short-lived, leaving only subtle traces in our documentation, thanks to the royal intervention, but these crises return and are only bypassed, not cured. Internal cyclical crises are supposed to perform a useful function in managing and adapting the economic system, and restoring the economic balance. However, the royal edicts, cancelling debts and sales, do not restore the economic balance—at least not fundamentally. They soften the blow, but do not cure the disease. They treat the symptoms on a temporary basis, but do not solve the underlying problem. Once the immediate crisis has been averted, the same system starts over again. As a result, the crises repeat themselves over and over again, eventually leading to a structural crisis. Their inability to reconfigure the mode of *régulation* due to a lack of insight
into their own economic system will eventually lead to a total collapse of the system in the middle of the second millennium.

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