

Miguel Civil

The results of a personal project to investigate how the archaic cuneiform writing, originally used only for accounting and word lists, was adapted to represent full sentences in narrative texts were presented by **Miguel Civil** in an article in the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 65 (2013). He believes that there was a stage in which the scribes wrote down only the participants or arguments of the sentences, leaving out the predicate itself to be supplied by the “reader” in what could be called “information-by-allusion.” It is a strategy similar to saying “do you know the one about the fox and the grapes?” A secondary result establishes the existence of a legendary “Enmerkar cycle,” now mostly lost except for the King List, some passages toward the end of the Lugalbanda II epic, and the curious tablet AO2 6522, with Hurrian(?) glosses, published by Kramer in 1990. The themes of this cycle are the introduction of agriculture, contrasting with life in the marshes, and the brick construction of villages. A communication of Civil in the 2010 Madrid International Conference on Ur III texts has appeared in S. J. Garfinkle and M. Molina, eds., *From the 21st Century B.C. to the 21st Century A.D.* (Eisenbrauns 2013). It is a study on some of the linguistic innovations of the Ur III texts: are they purely graphic, or do they affect the language itself? A contribution to solve the mystery of how and where were trained the many hundreds of Ur III scribes is the subject of an article to appear in a forthcoming festschrift. Civil is presently working on a chapter on lexicography for an Assyriology handbook to be published by de Gruyter, and on several grammatical studies, including a study of the “five tongues,” the system devised by the native scribes to deal with synonymy and metonymy. Among Civil’s present preoccupations and investigations is the clarification of the status of literacy in Mesopotamian society. There is obviously an elite that, thanks to its literate education, keeps old traditions and knowledge alive (with the traditional word lists playing a role similar to the “sacred books” of other cultures), and controls the flow of goods and services (and with it the economic power). But was there some restrictive policy to keep Sumerian literacy away from certain social strata or ethnic groups, like perhaps the fourteenth-century AD Mongols forbidding Chinese to learn Mongolian?
