

I'm not a robot



Instructions of shuruppak

INTRODUCTION Source: Lambert, W. G. (1996) Babylonian Wisdom Literature. Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana. The Sumerian King List and the book of Genesis, as is well known, have a common framework of the early history of mankind: a succession of nine or ten long-lived worthies is brought to an end by a divinely sent flood, which destroys the human race apart from one man and his dependants, who are warned and escape in a specially built boat. Since the wickedness of men had incited the divine wrath, some instructions on living are given at the time of the flood in both Hebrew and Sumerian records. In Genesis, God gives the commandments on consuming animal blood and sheeding human food, which were developed later into a series of ordinances binding on all mankind. In Sumerian there was a work called the Instructions of Shuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu, and consisting of sayings addressed to Ziusudra by his father, Shuruppak. Shuruppak appears in one manuscript of the Sumerian King List as an extra generation between Ubartutu and Ziusudra. In the other manuscripts and elsewhere these two men are father and son, and it has been suggested that the intruder might have arisen through an epithet of the father (man of Shuruppak) having been taken wrongly for a proper name. . . . The mysterious person from Shuruppak deserves further consideration. He is somehow not included in most of the manuscripts of the Sumerian King List, and the later traditions of Gilgamesh (Tablet XI, and Berossus know nothing of him. A reason for his appearance and especially in connection with the Instructions, is to be sought in the original setting and purpose of this advice. Since it was wickedness on the part of humankind that brought the flood, whether gross moral corruption, as in Genesis, or the unnecessary noise that kept the gods awake, according to the Atrahasis Epic, the admonitions given in this context are obviously intended as warnings to mankind against a repetition of the evil. This is very clear in the Biblical account, and the general nature of the Sumerian sayings does not militate against this view, since the several compilations of Ahiqar sayings are examples of the way in which diverse collections of material can get attached to the same figure. A priori the obvious person to have given these instructions was the flood hero himself, and in Genesis Noah was the intermediary. The story of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI, however, must have created a difficulty, because although that account like the Atrahasis Epic describes the boarding of the ark by all the kith and kin of Utnapishtim, when the waters subside it appears that only he and his wife have survived. They are promptly made immortal and are settled on a remote island. If the sayings were pronounced by Utnapishtim, he could not have passed them on to the postdiluvian world. Thus in Berossus he is instructed to write "beginnings, middles and ends" on tablets, and to bury them in Sippar, where they were found after the flood. The Instructions of Shuruppak must have been considered part, if not the whole, of this cache. Berossus, however, in the usual confusion of such traditions, states that there were other people in the ark, who repopulated the earth. This, however, stultifies the burying of tablets, seeing that these people could have spread the teaching. Ovid, however, had a tradition that only two persons were saved, and that they engendered offspring by throwing stones over their shoulders. Teaching implies two parties, and the Mesopotamian version of a flood hero had no dealings with men after the flood did not allow him the opportunity of being the teacher. This seems to be the background against which the stranger figure of Shuruppak is to be set. He may have been invented solely to provide a teacher, or there may have been a little-known recension of antediluvian history from which he was taken. For some reason there must have been an objection to assigning the duty to Ubartutu. . . . Source for the Instructions of Shuruppak: Black, J.A., Cunningham, G., Robson, E., and Zölzomy, G., The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, Oxford 1998. - 1-13 In those days, in those far remote days, in those nights, in those faraway nights, in those years, in those far remote years, at that time the wise one who knew how to speak in elaborate words lived in the Land; Curuppap, the wise one, who knew how to speak with elaborate words lived in the Land. Curuppap gave instructions to his son; Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu gave instructions to his son Zi-ud-sura. My son, let me give you instructions; you should pay attention! Zi-ud-sura, let me speak a word to you; you should pay attention! Do not neglect my instructions! Do not transgress the words I speak! The instructions of an old man are precious; you should comply with them! 14You should not buy a donkey which brays; it will split (?) your midriff (?). 15-18You should not locate a field on a road;, You should not plough a field at (1 ms. adds: a road or) a path;, You should not make a well in your field: people will cause damage on it for you. You should not place your house next to a public square: there is always a crowd (?) there. 19-20You should not vouch for someone: that man will have a hold on you; and you yourself, you should not let somebody vouch for you (1 ms. adds: that man will despise (?) you). 21You should not make an inspection (?) on a man; the flood (?) will give it back (?) to you. 22-27 You should not loiter about where there is a quarrel; you should not let the quarrel make you a witness. You should not let (?) yourself. . . . in a quarrel. 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Listen therefore to your elder brother, and you should be obedient to your elder sister as if she were your mother. 175-176You should not work using only your eyes; you will not multiply your possessions using only your mouth. 177 The negligent one ruins (?) his family. 178-180The need for food makes some people ascend the mountains; it also brings traitors and foreigners, since the need for food brings down other people from the mountains. 181-182 small city provides (?) its king with a calf; a huge city digs (?) a house plot (?). 183-188. . . is well equipped. The poor man inflicts all kinds of illnesses on the rich man. The married man is well equipped; the unmarried makes his bed in a haystack (?). He who wishes to destroy a house will go ahead and destroy the house; he who wishes to raise up will go ahead and raise up. 189-192By grasping the neck of a huge ox, you can cross the river. 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The silver on her is borrowed; the lapis lazuli on her is borrowed (1 ms. has instead the line:, the jewellery on her is borrowed, the lapis lazuli on her is borrowed). The dress on her is borrowed; the linen garment on her is borrowed. With, nothing (?) is comparable. 213-214 You should not buy a, bull. You should not buy a vicious bull;, a hole (?) in the cattle-pen, 215 One appoints (?) a reliable woman for a good household. 216-217You should not buy a donkey at the time of harvest. A donkey which eats, will, with another donkey. 218-219 A vicious donkey hangs its neck; however, a vicious man, my son,, 220 A woman with her own property ruins the house. 221A drunkard will drown the harvest. 222-234 A female burglar (?), ladder; she flies into the houses like a fly. A she-donkey, on the street. A sow suckles its child on the street. A woman who pricked herself begins to cry and holds the spindle which pricked (?) her in her hand. She enters every house; she peers into all streets. . . . she keeps saying "Get out!" She looks around (?) from all parapets. She pants (?) where there is a quarrel. 2 lines unclear 235-241Marry (?), whose heart hates (?). My son,, 4 lines unclear A heart which overflows with joy, 242-244Nothing at all is to be valued, but life should be sweet. You should not serve things; things should serve you. My son,, 245 You should not, grain; its, are numerous. 246-247 You should not abuse a ewe; otherwise you will give birth to a daughter. You should not throw a lump of earth into the money chest (?); otherwise you will give birth to a son. 248-249 You should not abduct a wife; you should not make her cry (?). The place where the wife is abducted to, 250-251 "Let us run in circles (?), saying: "Oh, my foot, oh, my neck!". 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On the unfamiliar way at the edge of the mountains, the gods of the mountains are man-eaters. They do not build houses there as men do; they do not build cities there as men do. 1 line unclear 272-273 For the shepherd, he stopped searching, he stopped bringing back the sheep. For the farmer (?), he stopped ploughing the field. 1 line unclear 274-276 This gift of words is something which soothes the mind, when it enters the palace, it soothes the mind, The gift of many words, stars. 277 These are the instructions given by Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu. 278-280 Praise be to the lady who completed the great tablets, the maiden Nisaba, that Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu gave his instructions! Back To Every Day's Life. Section Back To Myths The Instructions of Shuruppak (c. 2000 BCE) is the most famous work of the genre of Sumerian wisdom literature whose purpose was to encourage proper behavior in conformity with cultural values and standards. It is among the oldest works of philosophical literature extant.Also known as The Instructions of Shuruppak, the dramatic setting is the time before the Great Flood, signified by lines 1-13 and the reference to the king Ubara-Tutu, (the last king named before the Flood in the Sumerian King List), given here as the father of Shuruppak, who offers advice to his own son, Ziusudra, hero of the Eridu Genesis, who survives the Great Flood. Ziusudra is understood as the same character as Atrahasis from the Flood story Atrahasis and as Utnapishtim from The Epic of Gilgamesh, who all influenced the later character of Noah and the story of the ark and the flood in the biblical Book of Genesis.The central speaker of the piece may have initially been Ubara-Tutu, king of Shuruppak and identified elsewhere as the father of Ziusudra, the warrior who came to be personified as a king named Shuruppak/Shuruppap. Whichever the speaker, the work would have been understood as the final words of wisdom handed down to Ziusudra, the man who would survive the Great Flood. The piece is thought to have influenced several biblical narratives including the Book of Proverbs.The following passage is taken from The Literature of Ancient Sumer, translated by Jeremy Black et al. The question marks indicate alternate translations for words and ellipses mark missing sentences or words. The piece ends in customary praise of the goddess of writing, Nisaba. 1-13: In those days, in those far remote days, in those nights, in those faraway nights, in those years, in those far remote years, at that time the wise one who knew how to speak in elaborate words lived in the Land; Suruppap, the wise one, who knew how to speak with elaborate words lived in the Land. Suruppap gave instructions to his son; Suruppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu gave instructions to his son Zi-ud-sura. My son, let me give you instructions; you should pay attention! Zi-ud-sura, let me speak a word to you; you should pay attention! Do not neglect my instructions! Do not transgress the words I speak! The instructions of an old man are precious; you should comply with them! 14: You should not buy a donkey which brays; it will split (?) your midriff (?). 15-18: You should not locate a field on a road; . . . You should not plough a field at a path; . . . You should not make a well in your field: people will cause damage on it for you. You should not place your house next to a public square: there is always a crowd (?) there. 19-20: You should not vouch for someone: that man will have a hold on you; and you yourself, you should not let somebody vouch for you. 21: You should not make an inspection (?) on a man; the flood (?) will give it back (?) to you. 22-27: You should not loiter about where there is a quarrel; you should not let the quarrel make you a witness. You should not let (?) yourself. . . . in a quarrel. You should not cause a quarrel; . . . the gate of the palace Stand aside from a quarrel. . . . you should not take (?) another road. 28-31: You should not steal anything; you should not wish for the money chest (?). A thief is a lion, but after he has been caught, he will be a slave. My son, you should not commit robbery; you should not cut yourself with an axe. 32-34: You should not make a young man best man. You should not, yourself. You should not play around with a married young woman; the slander could be serious. My son, you should not sit alone in a chamber with a married woman. 35-38: You should not pick a quarrel; you should not disgrace yourself. You should not, lies;, You should not boast; then your words will be trusted. You should not deliberate for too long (!); you cannot bear, glances. 39-41: You should not eat stolen food with anyone. You should not sink (?) your hand into blood. 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Key Languages Arabic French German Spanish Russian Other Languages Select Language. . . . ab Akkhaian aa Afar of Afrikaans ak Akan sq Albanian ar Amharic ar Arabic an Aragonese by Armenian as Assamese av Avaric ae Avestan av Avaric az Azerbajian bn Bambara ba Bashkir ur Basque be Belarusan bn Bengali bh Bihari bi Bislama bs Bosnian br Breton kg Bulgarian my Burmese ca Catalan ch Chamorro ce Chechen zh Chinese cy Chuvash kv Cornish co Corsican cr Cree hr Croatian cs Czech da Danish dv Divehi nl Dutch dz Dzongkha en English ek Esperanto ee Ewe fo Faroese fj Fijian fi Finnish fr French fr Fulah gd Gaelic gl Galician lg Ganda ka Georgian de German el Greek gn Guarani ht Haitian ha Hausa he Hebrew zw Herero hi Hindi ho Hiri Motu hu Hungarian is Icelandic io Ido ig Igboid Indonesian iu Inuktitut ik Inupiaq ga Irish it Italian ja Japanese jv Javanese kk Kalaallisut kn Kannada kr Kanuri ks Kashmiri kk Kazakh km Khmer kj Kikuyu ur Koiné g Kongo ko Korean kj Kuanyama ku Kurdish ky Kyrgyz lo Lao la Latin lv Latvian li Limburgan ln Lingala lt Lithuanian lu Luba-Katanga lb Luxembourgish mk Macedonian mg Malagasy ms Malay ml Malayalam mt Maltese gv Manx mi Maori mr Marathi mn Marshallese mn Mongolian na Nauru nv Navajo ne Nepali nd Ndebele se Northern Sami no Norwegian bokmål nn Norwegian nynorsk ny Nyanja oc Occitan oj Ojibwa or Oriya on Oromo os Ossetian pi Pali ps Pashto fa Persian pl Polish pt Portuguese pa Punjabi qj Quechua ro Romanian rn Romanish rn Rundi ru Russian sr Sango sa Sanskrit sc Sardianian sr Serbian sr Shona li Sichuan Yi sd Sindhi si Sinhalese sk Slovak sl Slovenian so Somali sr South Ndebele st Southern Sotho es Spanish sw Swahili sv Swati sw Swedish ti Tagalog tg Tahitian tg Tajik ta Tamil tt Tatar te Telugu th Thai he Tibetan ti Tigrinya to Tonga ts Tsonga tr Turkish tk Turkmen tw Twi ug Uighur uk Ukrainian ur Urdu uz Uzbek ve Venda vi Vietnamese vo Volapuk wa Walloon cy Welsh yw Welsh y Western Frisian yo Wolof yi Yiddish yo Yoruba za Zhuang zu Zisi Go World History Encyclopedia is an online organization publishing free history content that has been carefully researched and reviewed. If you liked this content, please consider donating at www.worldhistory.org/donate/. To remove this message from printouts, you can become a supporting member at www.worldhistory.org/membership/. Thank you for supporting our work! The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature Catalogues: by date | by number | in full | Website info: navigation help | site description | display conventions | recent changes Project info: consolidated bibliography | about the project | credits and copyright | links This composition: composite text | bibliography 1-13In those days, in those far remote days, in those faraway nights, in those years, in those far remote years, at that time the wise one who knew how to speak in elaborate words lived in the Land; Curuppap, the wise one, who knew how to speak with elaborate words lived in the Land. Curuppap gave instructions to his son; Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu gave instructions to his son Zi-ud-sura. 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You should not place your house next to a public square: there is always a crowd (?) there. 19-20You should not vouch for someone: that man will have a hold on you; and you yourself, you should not let somebody vouch for you (1 ms. adds: that man will despise (?) you). 21You should not make an inspection (?) on a man; the flood (?) will give it back (?) to you. 22-27 You should not loiter about where there is a quarrel; you should not let the quarrel make you a witness. You should not let (?) yourself. . . . in a quarrel. You should not cause a quarrel;, you should not take (?) another road. 28-31You should not steal anything; you should not wish for the money chest (?). A thief is a lion, but after he has been caught, he will be a slave. My son, you should not commit robbery; you should not cut yourself with an axe. 32-34You should not make a young man best man. You should not, yourself. You should not play around with a married young woman; the slander could be serious. My son, you should not sit alone in a chamber with a married woman. 35-38You should not pick a quarrel; you should not disgrace yourself. You should not, lies;, You should not boast; then your words will be trusted. You should not deliberate for too long (!); you cannot bear, glances. 39-41You should not eat stolen food with anyone (1 ms. has instead: a thief). You should not sink (?) your hand into blood. After you have apportioned the bones, you will be made to restore the ox, you will be made to restore the sheep. 42-43You should not speak improperly; later it will lay a trap for you. 44-46You should not scatter your sheep into unknown pastures. You should not hire someone's ox for an uncertain, A safe, means a safe journey. 47You should not travel during the night: it can hide both good and evil. 48You should not buy an onager: it lasts (?) only until the end of the day. 49You should not have sex with your slave girl: she will chew you up (?). 50You should not curse strongly; it rebounds on you. 51-52You should not draw up water which you cannot reach (1 ms. has instead: grasp); it will make you weak. 1 line unclear 53You should not drive away a debtor: he will be hostile towards you. 54-57You should not establish a home with an arrogant man: he will make your life like that of a slave girl. You will not be able to travel through any human dwelling without being shouted at: "There you go! There you go!" 58-59You should not undo the . . . of the garden's reed fence; "Restore it! Restore it!" they will say to you. 60You should not provide a stranger (?) with food; you should not wipe out (?) a quarrel. 61-62My son, you should not use violence (?);, You should not commit rape on someone's daughter; the courtyard will learn of it. 63-64You should not drive away a powerful man; you should not destroy the outer wall. You should not make him turn against the city. 65-66The eyes of the slanderer always move around as shifly as a spindle. You should never remain in his presence; his intentions (?) should not be allowed to have an effect (?) on you. 67You should not boast in beer halls (1 ms. has instead: breweries) like a deceitful man; (1 ms. adds: then your words will be trusted), 68-72Having reached the field of manhood, you should not jump (?) with your hand. The warrior is unique, he alone is the equal of many; Utu is unique, he alone is the equal of many; Utu is unique, he alone is the equal of many; Utu is unique, he alone is the equal of many. With your life you should always be on the side of Utu. 73-75: Suruppap gave these instructions to his son. Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu, gave these instructions to his son Zi-ud-sura. My son, let me give you instructions; you should pay attention! Zi-ud-sura, let me speak a word to you; you should pay attention! Do not neglect my instructions! Do not transgress the words I speak! (1 ms. adds the line: The instructions of an old man are precious; you should comply with them!) 83-91The beer-drinking mouth, My little one, The beer-drinking mouth, Ninkasi, 5 lines unclear 92-93Your own man will not repay (?) it for you. The reed-beds are, they can hide (?) slander. 94-96The palace is like a mighty river; its middle is goring bulls; what flows in is never enough to fill it, and what flows out can never be stopped. 97-100When it is about someone's else bread, it is easy to say, "I will give it to you", but the time of actual giving can be as far away as the sky. If you go after the man who said "I will give it to you", he will say "I cannot give it to you - the bread has just been finished up". 101-102: Property is something to be expanded (?); but nothing can equal my little ones. 103-105: The artistic mouth recites words; the harsh mouth brings litigation documents; the sweet mouth gathers sweet herbs. 106-108: The garrulous fills (?) his bread bag; the haughty one brings an empty bag and can fill his empty mouth only with boasting. 109: Who works with leather will eventually (?) work with his own leather. 110: The strong one can escape (?) from anyone's hand. 111-114: The fool loses something. When sleeping, the fool loses something. "Do not tie me up!" he pleads; "Let me live!" he pleads. 115-117: The imprudent decrees fates; the shameless one piles up (?) things in another's lap. "I am such that I deserve admiration". 118: A weak wife is always seized (?) by fate. 119-123: If you hire a slave girl, you should not let her be borrowed; the lapis lazuli on her is borrowed. The dress on her is borrowed; the linen garment on her is borrowed. With, nothing (?) is comparable. 213-214: You should not buy a, bull. You should not buy a vicious bull; . . . a hole (?) in the cattle-pen 215: One appoints (?) a reliable woman for a good household. 216-217: You should not buy a donkey at the time of harvest. A donkey which eats, will, with another donkey. 218-219: A vicious donkey hangs its neck; however, a vicious man, my son,, 220: A woman with her own property ruins the house. 221: A drunkard will drown the harvest. 222-234: A female burglar (?), ladder; she flies into the houses like a fly. A she-donkey, on the street. A sow suckles its child on the street. A woman who pricked herself begins to cry and holds the spindle which pricked (?) her in her hand. She enters every house; she peers into all streets. . . . she keeps saying "Get out!" She looks around (?) from all parapets. She pants (?) where there is a quarrel. 2 lines unclear 235-241Marry (?), whose heart hates (?). My son,, 4 lines unclear A heart which overflows with joy, 242-244Nothing at all is to be valued, but life should be sweet. You should not serve things; things should serve you. My son,, 245You should not, grain; its, are numerous. 246-247You should not abuse a ewe; otherwise you will give birth to a daughter. You should not throw a lump of earth into the money chest (?); otherwise you will give birth to a son. 248-249You should not abduct a wife; you should not make her cry (?). The place where the wife is abducted to, 250-251"Let us run in circles (?), saying: "Oh, my foot, oh, my neck!". Let us with united forces (?) make the mighty bow!" 252-253 You should not kill a, he is a child born by, You should not kill, like, you should not bind him. 254 The wet-nurses in the women's quarters determine the fate of their lord. 255-260You should not speak arrogantly to your mother; that causes hatred for you. You should not question the words of your mother and your personal god. The mother, like Utu, gives birth to the man; the father, like a god, makes him bright (?). The father is like a god; his words are reliable. The instructions of the father should be complied with. 261Without suburbs a city has no centre either. 262-263My son, a field situated at the bottom of the embankments, be it wet or dry, is nevertheless a source of income. 264It is inconceivable (?) that something is lost forever. 265. . . of Dilmut 266-271To get lost is bad for a dog; but terrible for a man (1 ms. has instead: An unknown place is terrible; to get lost is shameful (?) for a dog). On the unfamiliar way at the edge of the mountains, the gods of the mountains are man-eaters. They do not build houses there as men do; they do not build cities there as men do. 1 line unclear 272-273For the shepherd, he stopped searching, he stopped bringing back the sheep. For the farmer (?), he stopped ploughing the field. 1 line unclear 274-276This gift of words is something which soothes the mind, when it enters the palace, it soothes the mind, The gift of many words, stars. 277These are the instructions given by Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu. 278-280Praise be to the lady who completed the great tablets, the maiden Nisaba, that Curuppap, the son of Ubara-Tutu gave his instructions! Top | composite text | bibliography Revision history 101.1999-5.11.1999 : GZ : adapting translation 11.1v.1999-13.iv.1999 : JAB : proofreading 26.1v.1999 : GZ : SGML tagging 04.v1.1999 : ER : proofreading SGML 04.v1.1999 : converting to HTML 4.0 7.x.2001 : ER : header and footer reformatted; substantive content of file not changed