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and Symbols of Power  
in the Ancient Near East*

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## *Cuneiform Documents Search Engine*

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### *Introduction*

As more and more cuneiform documents were published, the problem arose of searching for documents relevant to the investigated topic. As a solution to these problems we propose a computer system: Cuneiform Documents Search Engine (CDSE).

The objective of CDSE is to:

1. retrieve cuneiform documents according to textual pattern;
2. be independent from the transliteration variants
3. ignore editors' records and text arrangement on tablet
4. retrieve all the documents that might be relevant to the query
5. have simple interface and predictable behaviour

The search engine is available at [www.ur3.historia.uw.edu.pl](http://www.ur3.historia.uw.edu.pl).

CDSE is written by Wojciech Jaworski (interface, searching algorithm, data conversion) in cooperation with Marek Stępień i Jerzy Tyszkiewicz. Contact email: [cdse.admin@gmail.com](mailto:cdse.admin@gmail.com).

CDSE contains all documents that were available on CDLI [1] at the beginning of June 2008.

### *Queries*

Searching algorithm matches sign sequences provided in query with their occurrences in documents. Then documents that possess at least one occurrence of each sequence are retrieved. Interface provides 10 entries, so search engine may retrieve documents according to the queries that have up to 10 sequences.

In each entry, a Sumerian text should be typed. Queries should be written using numbers and Latin characters with 'sz' for shin. Search engine ignores the following editor's marks: -, !, ?, {, }, [, ], <, >, #, \*, ,, |, +. On the other hand symbols (,), @, ~, & are treated as parts of sign names. For example the following queries are equivalent: `mu# {d}amar!-{d}suen [lugal = mu d amar d suen lugal`

Ligatures (compound signs) are split into sign sequences. For example:

`|PU3.SZA|-ha-li = PU3 SZA ha li = PU3-SZA-ha-li`

`|SZU+LAGAB| = SZU LAGAB = SZU-LAGAB`

but

NUN&NUN <> NUN-NUN  
 HIxNUN <> HI-NUN

Search engine uses the ePSD [2] syllabary to make the queries independent from the selected transliteration variant. For example the following queries are equivalent:

|PU3.SZA| -ha-li = puzur4 ha li  
 mu-TUM2 = mu-DU  
 ur-(d)ba-ba6 = ur-(d)ba-u2

Signs qualified by the sign name placed in parentheses are treated in the following way:

{gesz}asalx(|A.TU.NIR|)(A-TU) du3-a

will be retrieved by query

{gesz}asalx du3-a

as well as

{gesz}|A.TU.NIR| du3-a

or

{gesz}A-TU du3-a

but the query

{gesz}asalx(|A.TU.NIR|)(A-TU) du3-a

or

{gesz}asalx(|A.TU.NIR|) du3-a

will not work.

Search engine translates query into the sequence of sign names (according to ePSD syllabary). For example :

ensi2 nibru{ki} = PA TE SI EN KID KI

In case when the translation is ambiguous search engine analyses all possible interpretations.

asalx = TU NUN&NUN LISZ A, KAxIGI, GABA LISZ, A TU GABA, A TU  
 NUN&NUN, A TU, A GISZ TU GABA LISZ, A GABA LISZ TU, ASAL2~a

Search engine processes sequences that have up to 10 sign names. Longer sequences are cut to 10 sign names.

Apart from searching by sign sequences it is possible to search by tags. Up to now only tags for Neo-Sumerian year names are available. For example, if we wish to find all the documents that contain a year name that might be interpreted as the fourth year of {d}amar-{d}suen's reign, we input AS04 into the entry.

One year name may be simultaneously tagged by many years. For example

mu bad3 ba-du3 is tagged by SZ05, SZ37, SS04.

Available tags: SZ01, SZ02, . . . , SZ48, AS01, . . . , AS09, SS01, . . . , SS09, IS01, . . . , IS24.



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Tags should be written one per entry.

## Search Results

The search result page provides the following information:

1. sign sequences translated into the sequence of sign names and marked by different colours;
2. number of documents found;
3. retrieved documents.

Parts of documents that match to sign sequences in query are marked by their colours.

The documents are displayed in the same format in which they were received from CDLI. Search engine retrieves all the documents that might be relevant to the query and display them all on one page. In case when there is many documents matching a query search result page may become big and the downloading process may take a while. In order to stop the downloading process the stop button in a web browser may be pressed.

Search engine looks for the sign sequences split between many lines (see Fig. 1). This behaviour allows us to find the documents in which text is arranged in an untypical way, yet, sometimes it results with irrelevant documents retrieval. This is a consequence of the assumption that it is better to obtain sometimes an irrelevant document than not to obtain a relevant one.

```

107. la2-ia3 3(szar2) 6(gesz2)
108. 45#+ 3(disz) 5/6(disz) gurusz u4 1(disz)-sze3 (szf. 1(gesz2) 5(u) 1(disz))
109. mu en-mah-gal
110. an-na en {d}nanna
111. [ba]-hun
@column 5
111. 3(szar2) 6(gesz2) 4(u) 8(disz) 5/6(disz) gurusz u4 1(disz)-sze3
113. si-i3-tum# mu en-mah-gal-an-na {d}nanna ba-hun
$ double blank line

```

**Figure 1:** An example of sign sequence split between two lines

In order to restrict the results to a given transliteration variant the search in page option of a web browser may be used.

Copying and pasting phrases from documents is a fast and simple method of query generation.

### Example<sup>1</sup>

For the query puzur4-ha-li, SIG4-de3-li-e, ARAD2-{d}nanna, the following two documents were found:

CDLI Id: P100899  
signature: Amherst 061

1. In the following example colors (yellow, green, blue) have been replaced by different underlines.



#atf: lang sux

@tablet

@obverse

1. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
2. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
3. |PU3.SZA|-ha-li sukkal
4. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
5. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
6. SIG4#?-de3-li-e sukkal
7. 1(ban2) kasz lugal
8. 1(ban2) ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
9. sa2-du11 u4 2(disz)-kam
10. lu2-{d}inanna sukkal

@reverse

1. 3(disz) sila3 kasz
2. 2(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
3. szu-zu-lugal maskim
4. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
5. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
6. ARAD2-{d}nanna sukkal
7. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
8. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
9. iri-ki-bi sukkal
10. iti sze-il2-la
11. mu {d}amar-{d}suen lugal  
ur-bi2-lum{ki} mu-hul

CDLI Id: P209891

signature: A 00797

# BDTNS ID = 0519481. 5(disz) sila3 kasz

2. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) [gin2 i3]
3. puzur4-ha-[li sukkal]
4. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
5. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
6. SIG4-NE-li-e [sukkal]
7. 1(ban2) kasz lugal
8. 1(ban2) ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
9. sa2-du11 u4-2(disz)-kam
10. lu2-{d}inanna sukkal

@reverse

11. 3(disz) sila3 kasz
12. 2(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
13. szu-ZU {lu2}maskim
14. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
15. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
16. arad2-{d}|SZESZ.KI| sukkal
17. 5(disz) sila3 kasz
18. 5(disz) sila3 ninda 4(disz) gin2 i3
19. uru-ki-bi sukkal
20. iti ezem-{d}dumu-zi
21. mu {d}amar-{d}suen lugal ;  
ur-bi2-lum{ki} mu;-hul

The contents of the above documents is nearly identical. However, personal names are transliterated differently.

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The Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI): <http://cdli.ucla.edu>

The Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary (ePSD): <http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd>



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