ASPECTS OF THE MIDDLE ASSYRIAN ḪARBU ARCHIVE

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The so far edited material documenting the MA period has certainly yielded an imposing impression of a vigorous, effectively managed (though not unperiled) Empire. But in many respects and details, historical, social, and economic, our realization of this major political entity was left alone by the extant textual evidence, the royal annals, building inscriptions, laws, instructions, economic, juridic and correspondence documents from private and official archives mainly found in Assur itself and Kār-tukulti-Ninurta and to a smaller amount in provincial sites like Tall Billa, Tall Rimah, and Tall Faḥariya as well as abroad in Boğazköy, Amarna, Ugarit and Nippur.

In recent years new textual finds have been recovered in the periphery of the MA Empire, in the Ḫabur region, especially at Tall Šēh Ḫamad - Dūr-katlimmu, and, to a more reduced extent, farther West along the Bašt, at Tall Šabi 'Abūyad and Tall Ḫuwaira (Chuēra) - Ḫarbu. The as yet small edited fraction of this new material already contributes to our image of Assyria, and we may expect a considerable progress of our knowledge when all the texts will have been published.

The following notes are picked from the remnants of an administrative archive—20 letters and 31 economic texts being distribution lists and receipts etc.—belonging (as far as limu-dates are given or preserved) to the era of Tukulti-Ninurta I. They were found in an as yet only partly excavated MA palace structure at Tall Ḫuwaira halfway between Tall 'Abūyad and Ra’s al-Ṣāin. After two communications at the Rencontres of Leiden 1993 and Berlin 1994 a first report on the archive has just appeared together with a small selection of transliterated and translated texts⁴. Here the contents of the report and the communications the second of which is due in print will only be touched as far as necessary for our present purpose.

Tall Huwaira, one of the great Kranzhuigel of the Early Dynastic Period in the Gázíra, seems to have been deserted in the second half of the 3rd millennium for climatic and eventual man-made environmental calamities. There is no archaeological evidence at hand that could prove the idea that the locality, lying some miles East of the main arm of the Balih at the very edge of the cultivable land against the steppe, might have been incorporated in the Old Babylonian Yale itinerary leading up the Balih from Tutul to Harran. It was probably not before the 15th century (and encouraged by an eventual period of slightly increased precipitation?) that a small part of the Tall overlooking the wide plain in all directions was resettled under the sway of the Mitanni Empire which left, at least to our present knowledge, its local traces in the foundations of a temple and of what seems to be an official building2. When Assyrian rule established itself in the region — the Assyrian archive from nearby Tall Šabi ‘Abyad herefore favours a dating into the (late) era of Shalmaneser I3 — it followed the Mitannian and possibly also Ḥanigalbatean example and kept Tall Huwaira settled. Our texts which evidently do not belong to the oldest local MA layer clearly show that in the time of Tukulti-Ninurta Tall Huwaira, lying by the crossroads of the imperial and international East-West and North-South traffic, served as the official seat of a district governor as well as a highway station and supply centre gaining strategic importance as we may infer from the once documented speedy construction of a defense wall4. The contemporary name of the Tall was Ḥarbu or Ḥarbe (both forms only documented in genitive rection). It is mentioned repeatedly and also known from letters found in Dūr-katlimmu5. Three letters of our archive are addressed to the bēl pāhete of Ḥarbe resp. Ḥarbu6.

Regarding the administration of Ḥarbu, the following may be said: besides the bēl pāhete as the Empire’s local representative who received orders from evidently higher ranking officials residing elsewhere, we find a communal authority in the once-mentioned office of a ḥaziānu. The bēl pāhete is responsible i.a. for the foraging of national and foreign officials and other persons on public errands as well as their gang and animals. Actually most of the letters addressed to a certain SutPu who at least for some length of time must have been the bēl pāhete are concerned with

4) 92.G.143, ll. 18ff., see C. Kühne in Orthmann et al., cit., pp. 213f.
5) Courtesy E. Cancik (Berlin) whose dissertation on the MA Correspondence of Dūr-katlimmu is in print.
questions of supply and transport (i.e. of goods, beasts, and functionaries eventually to be provided with fresh draught animals), thus underlining Ḫarbu’s aforesaid characteristic function as a road station. Other duties of the bēl pāhete regard the charge and employment of the gangs of public workers including the supervision of public works as in the mentioned instance of building fortifications. We encounter the ḫa­ziānu Aššum(i)ja-Adad as involved in transferring (šubalkutu perhaps in the sense of transferring to storage?) barley, while in another case an Aššum(i)ja-Adad, probably the same person, is having access to the silo (bū qupatte) of a domain or private farm (tarbaṣu) in the neighbouring town of Pankibe, where he is commissioning an individual to grind a certain quantity of barley against receipt7. Aššum(i)ja-Adad is also addressee of a letter with orders from a certain Aššur-iddin8, seemingly the Great Vizier of whose fall from royal grace we learn from a letter of Tukulti-Ninurta found at Dūr-katlimmu. The orders concern the undertaking of a cultic offering and (in rather broken context) the foraging of some functionary in which latter case an overlap with a duty of the bēl pāhete may be recognized (unless one would conclude that Aššum(i)ja-Adad himself held the office of bēl pāhete at the respective stage of his career).

The immediate superior of the bēl pāhete seems to have resided at Aššukani, the or one former capital of the Mitanni Empire mostly identified with the site of Tall Faṣhariya at Raš al-Ain. His title is not mentioned, his name, Sin-mudammiq, as well as mainly his military activity, is also well-known from the Dūr-katlimmu letters. In his communication to Šutū, forming the bulk of the preserved Ḫarbu correspondence, he is predominantly concerned with traffic. Only once he signalizes the undertaking of a martial action (ḫurādu)9. We may surmise that his competence included the general administrative supervision of the Western pāhatātu, entities that will have been considerably smaller than Neo-Assyrian provinces. This I would infer from the fact that West of the Ḫarbu pāhutu the road to Hatti had to pass (at least!) the pāhatātu of Sahhlalu and Amimu. Sahhlalu, probably modern Tall Sahlan, is identical with uru.sa-ah-la-la of the Yale Itinerary10, lying on the Baliq, nearly halfway between Tuttul and Ḫaruran, only a day’s journey from Ḫarbu, as shown in one of our letters11.

7) 92.G.142, slightly correcting my remark in Orthmann et al., cit., p. 208 fn. 40.
8) 92.G.130, see my report in Orthmann et al., cit., p. 209.
9) 92.G.143, 10-13; see my report in Orthmann et al., cit., p. 213.
11) Compare also F.A.M. Wiggermann’s statement (supra, fn. 2 manuscript p. 3) that Tall Ṣabī ʿAbyad, lying about 20 kilometres SW of Tall Ḫuwaira, was seat of a bēl pāhete. Manuscript p. 6 he states that Sahhlalu belonged to the pāhutu of Tall Sabī ʿAbyad which seems to contradict the evidence supplied by 92.G.211.
There were also direct contacts between the bel pâ hete and the central government. We have five complete and perhaps two very fragmentary letter orders from Sulmanu-mušabši, known as Vizier and Great Vizier from the Dûr-katlimmu evidence. It has to be remarked that they were undersigned by an “inspector of the deliveries” (ša pi qitte)\textsuperscript{12}. These documents regard supplies to be provided by the respective bel pâ hete to homebound foreign diplomats and their retinue as they would stop over at Ḫarbu, Saḥlalu and Amimu. To balance these perhaps frequent though (in their unpredictability) occasional deliveries of considerable value, the letter orders, carrying the Vizier’s seal and the full text of the tablet on the envelope, within a month had to be (or rather should have been) returned to the NA₄.KIŠI.ﺒishments ša kišrâte, evidently at an office of the central administration. There the deliveries were to be credited (the given expression is kašaru), in all probability to the yearly contribution of the respective pâ hutu. It seems that this arrangement differed from, or rather paralleled, the fragmentarily documented and still to be studied collective book-keeping of expenditures, mostly supplies that were to be furnished on the regional level, e.g. upon order of the bel pâ hete’s immediate superior, but in some instances referring to rations handed out to foreign diplomats. These expenditures presumably had again to be handled separately from the account of local (i.e. pâ hutu-intern) distributions and transactions represented by the ration lists, receipts, etc. As to terminology, the clear-cut use of kašaru in our context might help to solve the debate about the meaning of kiširtu which here, as it would seem to me, offers itself as an expression for “note of credit”.

The question why the Vizier’s letter orders, even those addressed to the bel pâ hete of Saḥlalu and the bel pâ hete of Amimu, could remain and be found in our archive, is not yet clear. Circumstantial reasons are to be guessed.

Having fairly large dimensions and thinly populated and vulnerable border zones, the MA Empire, one should expect, had to provide for an effective communications system warranting a quick flow of vital informations, especially during unruly times as were faced by the contemporaries of our archive who were used to the threat of military incursions and of tribal razzias. That certain standards of velocity must have existed for the official messenger service may be concluded from the defective way of dating (the tablet’s expedition) exhibited by seven of our letters, six of them sent by Sin-mudammid\textsuperscript{13}: only the number of the day of the month is given, without mentioning the name of the month itself, a device certainly of no use for archival purposes but rather apt as a means for controlling the messenger’s efficiency.


\textsuperscript{13}C. Kühne in Orthmann \textit{et al.}, \textit{cit.}, p. 205 fn. 19.
In my Berlin communication I could present the evidence for the age group-referencing key according to which the monthly rations of barley were distributed to public workers of Elamite extraction (called ERIN.MEŠ Elami'ajju) and the members of their families\(^{14}\). The social standing of this fraction of the pāḫutu's mixed population (including some Assyrians, native Suteans, deported Babylonians and presumably Ḥanigalbateans) may be inferred from the fact that a number of Elamite workers were, alongside with probably at least one junior official, among a group of Ḥarbean housefathers each of whom received a prisoner of war (ERIN šallu), in most cases of minor age and, with one exception, of female gender\(^{15}\).

\(^{14}\) The respective lists, 92.G.127 and 92.G.172, are also offered by C. Kühne in Orthmann \textit{et al.}, \textit{cit.}, pp. 221-225.

\(^{15}\) List 92.G.140.