

## 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 correspondential 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 Faḫariya 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 Šēḫ Ḫamad - Dūr-katlimmu, and, to a more reduced extent, farther West along the Baliḫ, at Tall Šabi ʿAbyad 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 *līmu*-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 Huwaira halfway between Tall ʿAbyad and Raʿs al-ʿAin. 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 texts<sup>1</sup>. 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.

<sup>1</sup>) In W. Orthmann *et al.*, *Ausgrabungen in Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien, I (Vorderasiatische Forschungen der Max Freiherr von Oppenheim - Stiftung, vol. 2)*, pp. 203-205.

Tall Ḥuwaira, one of the great *Kranzhügel* of the Early Dynastic Period in the Ḡazira, seems to have been deserted in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Baliḥ at the very edge of the cultivable land against the steppe, might have been incorporated in the Old Babylonian Yale itinerary leading up the Baliḥ from Tuttul to Ḥarran. It was probably not before the 15<sup>th</sup> 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 building<sup>2</sup>. When Assyrian rule established itself in the region — the Assyrian archive from nearby Tall Ṣabi ‘Abyad herefore favours a dating into the (late) era of Shalmaneser I<sup>3</sup> — it followed the Mitannian and possibly also Ḥanigalbatean example and kept Tall Ḥuwaira settled. Our texts which evidently do not belong to the oldest local MA layer clearly show that in the time of Tukulti-Ninurta Tall Ḥuwaira, 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 ‘wall<sup>4</sup>. 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-katlimmu<sup>5</sup>. Three letters of our archive are addressed to the *bēl pāḥete* of Ḥarbe resp. Ḥarbu<sup>6</sup>.

Regarding the administration of Ḥarbu, the following may be said: besides the *bēl pāḥete* 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 pāḥete* 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 SutṔu who at least for some length of time must have been the *bēl pāḥete* are concerned with

2) “Knickachs”-Cella at the North-Temple site, see A. Moortgat - U. Moortgat-Correns, *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien. Vorläufiger Bericht über die dritte Grabungskampagne 1960*, pp. 17ff., and “Mitanni-Bau”, see A. Moortgat - U. Moortgat-Correns, *Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien. Vorläufiger Bericht über die siebente Grabungskampagne 1974*, pp. 35ff.

3) Communication by F.A.M. Wiggermann, RAI Berlin 1994 (manuscript p. 3, at least concerning *ṭimu Ubru*).

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.

6) 92.G.208, 92.G.222. 92.G.212, see C. Kühne in Orthmann *et al.*, *cit.*, pp. 216-219.

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 pāḫete* 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(ī)ja-Adad as involved in transferring (*šubalkutu* perhaps in the sense of transferring to storage?) barley, while in another case an Aššum(ī)ja-Adad, probably the same person, is having access to the silo (*bīt qupatte*) of a domain or private farm (*tarbašu*) in the neighbouring town of Pankibe, where he is commissioning an individual to grind a certain quantity of barley against receipt<sup>7</sup>. Aššum(ī)ja-Adad is also addressee of a letter with orders from a certain Aššur-iddin<sup>8</sup>, 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 pāḫete* may be recognized (unless one would conclude that Aššum(ī)ja-Adad himself held the office of *bēl pāḫete* at the respective stage of his career).

The immediate superior of the *bēl pāḫete* seems to have resided at Aššukani, the or one former capital of the Mitanni Empire mostly identified with the site of Tall Faḫariya at Ra<sup>c</sup>s al-<sup>c</sup>Ain. His title is not mentioned, his name, Sîn-mudammiq, as well as mainly his military activity, is also well-known from the Dūr-katlimmu letters. In his communication to Sutī<sup>u</sup>, 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*)<sup>9</sup>. We may surmise that his competence included the general administrative supervision of the Western *pāḫatātu*, entities that will have been considerably smaller than Neo-Assyrian provinces. This I would infer from the fact that West of the Ḫarbu *pāḫutu* the road to Hatti had to pass (at least!) the *pāḫatātu* of Saḫlalu and Amimu. Saḫlalu, probably modern Tall Saḫlān, is identical with URU.sa-ah-la-la of the Yale Itinerary<sup>10</sup>, lying on the Baliḫ, nearly halfway between Tuttul and Ḫarran, only a day's journey from Ḫarbu, as shown in one of our letters<sup>11</sup>.

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.

10) W.W.Hallo, "The Road to Emar", JCS 18 (1964), 60, 34; 78. See my report in Orthmann *et al.*, *cit.*, p. 210 fn. 65. Cf. also fn. 11, below.

11) Compare also F.A.M. Wiggermann's statement (*supra*, fn. 2 manuscript p. 3) that Tall Šabi <sup>c</sup>Abyad, lying about 20 kilometres SW of Tall Ḫuwaira, was seat of a *bēl pāḫete*. Manuscript p. 6 he states that Saḫlalu belonged to the *pāḫutu* of Tall Šabi <sup>c</sup>Abyad which seems to contradict the evidence supplied by 92.G.211.

There were also direct contacts between the *bēl pāhete* and the central government. We have five complete and perhaps two very fragmentary letter orders from Šulmanu-mušabši, known as Vizier and Great Vizier from the Dūr-katlimmu evidence. It has to be remarked that they were undersigned by an “inspector of the deliveries” (*ša piqitte*)<sup>12</sup>. These documents regard supplies to be provided by the respective *bel pāhete* to homebound foreign diplomats and their retinue as they would stop over at Ḫarbu, Saḫlalu 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 NA<sub>4</sub>.KIŠIB.MEŠ *ša kišrāte*, evidently at an office of the central administration. There the deliveries were to be credited (the given expression is *kašāru*), in all probability to the yearly contribution of the respective *pāhutu*. 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 *bēl pāhete*’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. pāhutu*-intern) distributions and transactions represented by the ration lists, receipts, etc. As to terminology, the clear-cut use of *kašāru* 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 *bēl pāhete* of Saḫlalu and the *bēl pāhete* 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 Sîn-mudammiq<sup>13</sup>: 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.

<sup>12</sup>) 92.G.208; 92.G.209; 92.G.211; 92.G.212; 92.G.222. Only fragmentary 92.G.232. See my report in Orthmann *et al.*, *cit.*, pp. 216-219.

<sup>13</sup>) C. Kühne in Orthmann *et al.*, *cit.*, p. 205 fn. 19.

In my Berlin communication I could present the evidence for the age group-referring key according to which the monthly rations of barley were distributed to public workers of Elamite extraction (called ERÍN.MEŠ *Elamiʿajjū*) and the members of their families<sup>14</sup>. The social standing of this fraction of the *pāhutu*'s mixed population (including some Assyrians, native Suteans, deported Babylonians and presumably Ȳanigalbateans) 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 Ȳarbean housefathers each of whom received a prisoner of war (ERÍN *šallu*), in most cases of minor age and, with one exception, of female gender<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup>) The respective lists, 92.G.127 and 92.G.172, are also offered by C. Kühne in Orthmann *et al.*, *cit.*, pp. 221-225.

<sup>15</sup>) List 92.G.140.