

BABYLONIAN SLAVE-DOCUMENTS IN THE STATE ARCHIVES OF ASSYRIA

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1. The state archives of Assyria also comprised an abundance of documents in Neo-Babylonian script and dialect, as is well known; and the clarification of the function of such documents within the Neo-Assyrian archival and administrative context is a task of decided relevance for a better understanding of the “host” archives themselves.

A case in point is constituted by the not very large, but decidedly intriguing, group of texts commonly known as the “Slave-documents of Merodach-baladan”. The first group of exemplars of this small corpus — 17 in number — were discovered by the French excavator Place in Khorsabad, but only four of them were published along with other epigraphical finds from Dur-Šarrukin by J. Oppert¹. On the other hand, J.N. Strassmaier published a similar tablet with the Museum number K. 3787 in 1889²; and a specimen from Ur made its appearance in 1926³. Only a few years later (1932), a further Dur-Šarrukin tablet was uncovered by the Oriental Institute expedition⁴.

More recent times have brought these varied proveniences in clearer focus: first of all, the remaining exemplars from the French excavation at Dur-Šarrukin were

¹) Oppert in V. Place, *Ninive et l'Assyrie*, II, Paris, 1870, pp. 307-308; cf. also J. Oppert - J. Ménéant, *Documents juridiques de l'Assyrie et de la Chaldée*, Paris 1877, pp. 168-196.

²) J.N. Strassmaier, *Actes du VIII Congrès, Deuxième partie*, n. 1.

³) L. Legrain, *MJ* 17(1926), p. 392, n. 58 = C.J. Gadd - L. Legrain - S. Smith, *UET I*, n. 262. For a list of all these earlier exemplars, cf. J.A. Brinkman, *Merodach-baladan II*, in: *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim*, Chicago 1964, p. 43.

⁴) D-S 32-11, unpublished: cf. Brinkman, *ibid.*; and p. 38, fn. 226, for the previous mentions and present whereabouts of this text.

assembled and critically examined by J.-M. Durand⁵, and secondly a small series of parallel texts proceeding from Nimrud were competently transliterated in the publication of Fort Shalmaneser tablets⁶.

Thus — thanks to the ever-present element of chance in archaeology, Near Eastern or otherwise — we have it that a corpus of Neo-Babylonian documents has been almost totally unearthed in Assyria. Specifically, materials belonging to the corpus are clearly attested for at least two of the Assyrian capital cities, Kalhu and especially Dur-Šarrukin, where they were recovered in the course of different campaigns, even spanning different centuries⁷. On the other hand, the single southern Mesopotamian (Ur) specimen is sufficient proof in itself of the compositional origin of the group outside the borders of Assyria proper, in agreement with what is to be made out from the content of the texts.

The tablets are consistently classifiable as “pierced ovoids”⁸ and appear to be of similar size. They bear, in the majority of cases, an inscription of five lines (indifferently in a 2+3 or 3+2 disposition of the faces) in a Neo-Babylonian script of basically uniform character. The structural features of the epigraphs are as follows:

- a personal name (femin./masc.), preceded by *ša* or lacking this marker⁹ (line 1);
- the expression *ša qāt* followed by a masculine personal name, often recurring in more than one document (line 2 or 2-3);
- Year-date (variable from 9 to 12), and month date (always the 11th month, *Šabātu* (lines 3/4);
- “(in the reign) of Marduk-apal-iddina, king of Babylonia” (lines 4-5/5-6).

⁵ J.-M. Durand, *Les “Slave documents” de Merodach-Baladan*, JA 267 (1979), pp. 245-260. A further unpublished document from earlier finds is the “Texte d’Orléans” mentioned by Lenormant, and seen by Labat, but now misplaced (Durand, p. 247 fn. 2). The year-date “12” on this text is now paralleled by TFS 81 (cf. next footnote, and in general on the dates fn. 43, below).

⁶ S.M. Dalley - J.N. Postgate, TFS, nos. 79-80-81.

⁷ Of course, the K.(uyunjik) specimen would appear to raise the total of Assyrian capitals to three, including Nineveh; but since other texts with low K. Collection numbers have been proven to derive from A.H. Layard’s excavations at Nimrud (1845-47) or other 19th century surveys at various Assyrian sites (including Dur-Šarrukin!), this could also be the case here. In general on the problem of the non-Ninevite “K.s”, cf. C.B.F. Walker, *The Kuyunjik Collection of Cuneiform Texts: Formation, Problems, and Prospects*, in F.M. Fales - B.J. Hickey (Eds.), *Symposium Internazionale. Austen Henry Layard tra l’Oriente e Venezia*, Roma 1987, pp. 183-193, and esp. 186 ff.

⁸ Cf. J.A. Brinkman - D.A. Kennedy, *Evidence for the Economic Base of Early Neo-Babylonian Society: A Survey of Dated Babylonian Economic Texts, 721-626 B.C.*, JCS 35 (1983), pp. 1-90 (cf. pp. 8-12 for the “Slave-documents”, 22 in number). The perforation was usually along the thicker end (see description, TFS, p. 137, ad n. 80 and example TBER pl. 80), so as to make the “egg” hang “downward”.

⁹ *Šá* is attested in texts nos. 1, 7-10, 13-16, 19, 21 of the present corpus; it is lacking in nos. 2-6, 11-12, 17-18, 22; no. 20 is unclear in this respect.

2. Despite these elementary and homogeneous compositional characteristics, bits and pieces of philological work on this material remain to be done, prior to a further attempt at evaluating it historically. I provide in the following a full set of transliterations of the so-called "Slave-documents of Merodach-baladan" known at present¹⁰.

No. 1 (= D-S no. 1¹¹)

Obverse

1 šá^I Man-nu-iz-kur

2 ša (?¹²) ŠU^{II} Id Ba-ba₆-al-si-ki-ab-luṭ

Reverse

1 ITI^I ZÍZ MU.9.KAM

2 Id AMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na¹³

3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 2 (= D-S no. 2)

Obverse

1 DUMU.MÍ 1 e-du

2 šá ŠU^{II} I Ha-am-ka-nu

Reverse

1 ITI^I ZÍZ MU.10.KAM¹⁴

2 Id AMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 3 (= AO 20176¹⁵)

Obverse

1 Id BAD-ha-il

¹⁰ In the following texts, the critical edition-markers □, □, !, ? must be taken as particular to the present rendering, and not present in Durand's transliteration (*q.v.*, e.g. for emendations to Oppert's previous version) or in that of the *TFS* edition.

¹¹ The abbreviation D-S refers to Oppert's numbering in *Inscriptions de Dour-Sarkayan*, corresponding to the one in Place quoted fn. 1, above. Durand refers (*JA* 267 [1979], p. 247) that "D-S n° 1 et n° 2 ne sont pas au Louvre".

¹² Thus Durand, but one would expect šá on the basis of all other cases.

¹³ Cf. Durand, *cit.*, p. 247 fn. 6, for the observation that the "Mr." determinative in front of the king's name was "une 'adaptation' de J. Oppert, aucun des autres documents ne comportant ce trait particulier".

¹⁴ Cf. Durand, *cit.*, p. 248 fn. 9, and Brinkman-Kennedy, *cit.*, p. 10, for notes on the incorrect (and impossible) number "20" which appeared on Oppert's copy, but not in his edition (which bears "10").

¹⁵ According to Durand (p. 247), this tablet might correspond to Oppert's D-S n° 4, "si l'on admet que dans sa copie normalisée, J. Oppert a imprimé IdEN au lieu de IdDIM (le dieu "Bél")". AO 20176 is copied in *TBER*, pl. 80.

2 šá ŠU^{II} ¹Mar-na-lu
3 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.10.KAM

Reverse

1 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na¹⁶
2 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 4 (= K^d 4)

Obverse

1 ^fŠá-la-'a
2 šá ŠU^{II} ^Ha^l-am-ka-nu
3 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.10.KAM

Reverse

1 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
2 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 5 (= K^d 5¹⁷)

Obverse

1 ^fHa-la-mat¹⁸
2 šá ŠU^{II} ¹Mar-na-lu
3 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM

Reverse

1 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
2 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 6 (= K^d 6)

Obverse

1 ^fHu-lu-ma-tu
2 šá ŠU^{II} ¹Mar-na-lu
3 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM

Reverse

1 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
2 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 7 (= K^d 7)

Obverse

¹⁶ Cf. fn. 13, above. The “Mr.” determinative here, which is — as expected — lacking from the king’s name in the *TBER* copy, is for some reason given in Durand’s transliteration (p. 248), in conformity with Oppert’s standardized renderings.

¹⁷ This tablet is surely Oppert’s D-S n° 3, according to Durand (*ibid.*).

¹⁸ Durand (p. 248) reads *ha-la-lat*; but cf. the next exemplar, and see below, section 3.

- 1 šá^f K/Qin-na-at
2 šá ŠU^{II} Id30-APIN-eš

Reverse

- 1 ITI ZÍZ MU.10.KAM
2 dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 8 (= K^d 8)

Obverse

- 1 šá^f Ram-me-ni-ti
2 šá ŠU^{II} Id30-APIN-eš

Reverse

- 1 ITI ZÍZ MU.10.KAM
2 dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 9 (= K^d 9)

Obverse

- 1 šá^f Ma-'a-a-dar-á^f t²⁷ 19
2 šá ŠU^{II} Id Il-a-mar

Reverse

- 1 ITI ZÍZ MU.10.KAM
2 dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 10 (= K^d 10)

Obverse

- 1 šá^{fd} Na-na-a-D[I].KU₅-at
2 šá ŠU^{II} ! 20
3 dBa-ba₆-al-si-ki^f-TIN-ut

Reverse

- 1 ITI ZÍZ MU.10.KAM
2 dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na
3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

¹⁹⁾ Durand, p. 249: *ma-'a-dar-hé*; cf. section 3, below.

²⁰⁾ Durand connects this line with the next in his transliteration; but three lines on the Obverse are clearly visible in *TBER*, pl. 79: 10.

No. 11 (= K^d 11)

Obverse

1 ^fNa-mir-ti

2 šá ŠU^{II} ¹Ha-am-ka-nu

3 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.10.KAM

Reverse

1 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

2 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 12 (= K^d 12)

Obverse

1 ^fTa₅¹-ab¹-ha-rat²¹

2 šá ŠU^{II} ¹Ha-am-ka-nu

3 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.10.KAM

Reverse

1 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

2 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 13 (= K^d 13)

Obverse

1 [(šá) ^{f/1}] Man-nu-ki-^fBa-ba₆^f

2 [š]á ^fŠU^{II}^f

3 ¹Hu-us-sa-an-ni-^dE[N]

Reverse

1 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM

2 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 14 (= K^d 14)

Obverse

1 šá ^fŠú-ud-qú-ti

2 šá ŠU^{II} ¹Ha-am-ka-nu

Reverse

1 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM

2 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

²¹) The second sign after the determinative looks to me more like AB than DU (Durand). For the resulting onomastic interpretation, cf. section 3, below.

No. 15 (= K^d 15)

Obverse

1 šá ḫl-šá-ap-ti-taz-kur

2 šá ŠU^{II} ḫa-am-ka-nu

Reverse

1 ḫ^{TI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM

2 ḫ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 16 (= K^d 16)

Obverse

1 ḫ^dá ḫ^d+AG.ḫ^dSUHUS[?]-du-gul²²

2 ḫ^dá BÀD-^d+EN-LÌL

Reverse

1 ḫ^{TI}ZÍZ MU.10.KAM

2 ḫ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.ḫ^dSUM-na²³

3 ḫ^dLUGAL²³ TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 17 (= K^d 17 / Inv. no. III 3162)

Obverse

1 [ḫ^d]UTU-lu-m[ur (x)¹] ḫ^dá ŠU^{II} 23

2 [ḫ^d]ḫ^dE²³-muq-^d+AG šá URU Kar-^d+AG

3 [ḫ^{TI}]ZÍZ UD.26.KAM MU.11.KAM

4 [ḫ^d]AMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.MU

Left Edge

²² Durand's interpretation here (p. 250) is ḫ^dnà-suh[u]š-gub áb-túl. In a footnote (*ibid.*, fn. 11) this interpretation is both rejected and defended, as follows: "Il y a une difficulté nette de lecture. Rien ne s'opposerait semble-t-il à ce que l'on lise ḫ^dnà-<<DU>>-du-gul. Un examen attentif permettrait d'affirmer que le premier DU est sans doute plutôt su[h]uš. Dans ce genre de textes, la différence entre les deux signes est bien aléatoire. ÁB-TÚL (bien attesté par ailleurs) serait un "compromis" entre ÁB-KU et sa "monnaie" phonétique UTUL". In any case, notice that DN-kên(a)-dugul is well attested in NA and NB onomastics (cf. e.g. CAD D, p. 22a) so that — if the second element were to be read DU/GIN — no dittography would have to be surmised.

²³ Durand transliterates "[ḫ^d]utu-lu-mur s[ip]a šá šu²³" in line 1, but absolutely no traces of S[IP]A, "shepherd" are visible from the copy of TBER, pl. 80; and there is the possibility that the break held only the end part of the sign HAR/mur. Some awareness of the rendering is apparent on pp. 258-259: "Selon toute vraisemblance, le travail, puisqu'il demandait une main d'oeuvre à majorité féminine, concernait la laine. Cela peut être corroboré par les mentions explicites pour les hommes qu'ils sont des bergers, si la lecture proposée, néanmoins, est juste!".

LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

Reverse

uninscribed²⁴

No. 18 (= UET I, 262)

Obverse

1 ^{Id}AG-SILIM-*im*2 *ša* ŠU^{II} ^{Id}AG.EN.ŠEŠ

Reverse

1 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM2 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-*na*3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 19 (= K. 3787)

Obverse

1 *ša* ^f*He-pa-a*2 *ša* ŠU^{II} ^{Id}30-APIN-*eš*

Reverse

1 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.11.KAM2 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-*na*3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 20 (= TFS 79, ND 6220)

Obverse

1 []-*sa*[?]-*har*¹-*rat*²⁵2 [*ša* ŠU^I]^{TI} ^{II}*Mar-na-lu*²⁶3 [*ša*[?]] ^É²⁷4 [*ša*^{1?}]KUR.GAL-GIN[?]-SUHUŠ-*ía*

Reverse

1 [^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.1]1.KAM2 [^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.U]Š.SUM-*na*3 [LUGAL TIN-T]IR^{KI}

²⁴) This unique physical layout of the inscription is not pointed out as such by Durand, but is clear from the copy. Notice how it occurs in coincidence with two other unique features of this text: the day-date, and the use of -MU instead of -SUM-*na* in the royal name.

²⁵) Dalley-Postgate read the second sign as -*ru*, which is also a possibility.

²⁶) The transliteration of the “Mr.” sign is not given by Dalley-Postgate, but it should be surmised in the second of the two uprights visible at left after the break, on the basis of the parallel cases above.

²⁷) Dalley-Postgate transliterate LÌL: but of course GÁ, KID and É have largely similar variants in NB script.

No. 21 (= TFS 80, ND 9900)

Obverse

1 ša ^fI-li-ti

2 šá ŠU^{II}

3 ^{1d}Ba-ba₆-al-si-ki-TIN-ut

Reverse

1 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.10.KAM

2 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

3 LUGAL TIN-TIR^{KI}

No. 22 (= TFS 81, ND 7084)

Obverse

1 ^{1d}AG.DÛ-uš

2 šá ŠU^{II} ^{1d}AG-GIN-an-ni

Reverse

1 ^{ITI}ZÍZ MU.12.KAM

2 ^dAMAR.UTU.DUMU.UŠ.SUM-na

3 LUGAL KUR TIN-TIR^{KI}

3. In this body of homogeneous materials, a few elements stand out, and may be worth looking into in some detail. The first of such elements — of possible relevance for the overall interpretation of the texts — is onomastics. As already noticed by Durand²⁸, some of the 31 personal names of the people mentioned in the corpus have a quite clear Babylonian flavor, while others — according to the French scholar — pertain to a “level” which “even if it presents Semitic traits is, however, largely without parallels”²⁹. Now, in the following, it will be argued that the latter names are in the wide majority of Aramaic affiliation. In any case, it may be agreed with Durand that the admixture of Babylonian and non-Babylonian names equally concerns (a) the female/male persons appearing at the beginning of each text, and (b) the male individuals occurring in line 2 of each document³⁰ — a point which leads to considerations of its own.

In particular, the admixture of Babylonian and non-Babylonian names in the texts under study may be shown as follows:

Babylonian names. The following names belong to this group: *Amurru-mukîn-išdiya*, *Baba-alsiki-ablut*, *Emuq-Nabû*, *Hussanni-Bē[l]*, ^f*Il-šapti-tazkur*, ^f*Mannu-izkur*, [^{f1}]*Mannu-kī*-[*Baba*], *Nabû-ušallim*, *Nabû-bēl-ahī/ahhē*, *Nabû*-[*išdi*?/*kēni*?]-*dugul*,

²⁸) Cf. the specific section “L’onomastique” in Durand’s article, *cit.*, pp. 251-254.

²⁹) *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252; translation mine.

³⁰) Resp. “les employé(e)s” and the “chefs de service” (*ibid.*).

Sin-ēreš, *Šamaš-lum*[ur]; they may be characterized as Babylonian on various grounds³¹. Possibly pertaining to this group are also ^f*Iliti*, ^f*Namirti*, ^f*Nanâ-dayyanat*, ^f*Rammeniti*, which all refer to exclusively Akkadian, or at most Common Semitic, roots³².

Non-Babylonian names: the majority, as said above, are of West Semitic affiliation. *Bēl-ha'il* may be considered to mean “Bēl is my strength/wealth” in Aramaic³³; the two names ^f*Halamat* and ^f*Hulumatu* might refer to a same West Semitic root, either **HLM* or **LM* or **GLM*³⁴; the name *Il-amar* need not be explained in Akkadian as a rendering “sans doute dialectal pour *Ilī-amur*, ‘J’ai vu mon dieu’ ”³⁵, but as a Northwest Semitic perfect form, from **MR* “to speak, order”³⁶. A further *qatal* verbal form is reflected in the name ^f*Šala*, a hypocoristic from the West Semitic root **SLW/Y*, “to be tranquil, quiet”³⁷. *Hamkānu* is a variant of *Haukānu*, probably derived from Aramaic **hawk*, “gladness, laughter”³⁸; *Marnalu* could well be viewed as formed by two elements, Aram. **mr* “lord”, with the pron. suffix of the 1st person plural (as in the NA

³¹ Of course, these names may first and foremost be termed “Babylonian” as a result of being common Akkadian onomastic formations attested in Neo-Babylonian documents originating from Babylonia. This said, some of the names may be shown to also bear uniquely Babylonian linguistic markers, such as *alsi* (cf. Assyrian *assi*) and *lumur* (cf. Ass. *lamur*). At a different level, name-types which occur only (or at least prevalently) in the Babylonian onomasticon are Emuq-Nabû, Hussanni-Bēl and Ilu-šapti-tazkur. Other cases still may be surmised to be rather Babylonian than Assyrian due to the presence of particular gods, such as Amurru, Bēl, Baba — although, of course, none of these can be termed totally foreign to the Assyrian cultural horizon as well (cf. B. Menzel, *Assyrische Tempel*, I-II, Rome 1981, *passim*, for these divine figures and their temples in Assyria). Finally, it is interesting to note that a few of these names (e.g. Nabû-kīnanni and Nabû-ēpuš) occur in Assyria exclusively within the learned “Specimen Names Lists” (ADD II, Appendix).

³² Some of these names are examined by Durand, *cit.*, pp. 253-254.

³³ Cf. R. Zadok, *West Semites in Babylonia during the Achaemenian and Chaldean Period*, Jerusalem 1978² [WSB], p. 98.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 126, 335; but there are actually grounds for a longer discussion. A full (?) range of possibilities would have to include: (a) **HLM*, “to be healthy, strong” (Hebr., Aram., Arab.); “to be patient, sweet” (Arab.; cf. J. Ryckmans, *Le noms propres sud-sémitiques* [NPSS], I, Louvain 1934, p. 93a; G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* [IC], Toronto 1971, p. 198: *hlm*, *hlmt*, *hlm*, *mhlmt*); (b) **HLM* 2, “to dream” (Hebr., Aram., Arab., Eth.; cf. APN, p. 284a); (c) **LM*, “to conceal” (Hebr.), “to know” (Arab.; cf. IC, p. 432, *lm*, *lmn*); (d) **GLM*, “to be strong, manly, to rejuvenate” (Hebr., Aram., Phoen.; Arab., ESA); cf. DISO, p. 214 for the derivated noun *lm*, “young man, child, slave, etc.”; NPSS I, p. 175a for *glm*, *glmt*, *mglm*, etc.; and AHw., p. 21a for the Akk. noun *ahlamû*.

³⁵ Durand, *cit.*, p. 253.

³⁶ Cf. WSB, p. 82, for the very same name from other NA texts.

³⁷ Cf. WSB, p. 87, for further attestations in N/LB texts, i.e. again presenting the typically N/LB graphemic rendering of West Semitic *š with <š>.

³⁸ WSB, pp. 144-145. For *Haukānu* as an Aramaic name of the age of Sargon, cf. already Brinkman, PHPKB, p. 272.

toponyms *Bur-mar'-na*³⁹), and (*ilu*, “god” (=‘our lord is god’). As for the remaining names, *Šudquti* might refer to the specifically West Semitic root **ŠDQ*; *Ma'-a-a-dar-a-t*, aside from the difficulties of reading, might display the root **DR*, “to help”; while the case of *Ta₅'-ab'-ha-rat* is harder, since the only possible parallel is the NA name *Sa-ab/Sab-har-ru* with a Safaitic parallel (*šbhr*), both cases being without etymology⁴⁰. Finally, *Hepâ* and []-*sa²-har'-rat* are unexplained.

Summing up, then, the corpus under study shows an almost fifty-fifty division between Babylonian names and West Semitic attestations: the latter further present some slight particularities⁴¹ which point to a Southern Mesopotamian ethnolinguistic setting. Now, this double presence refers — as said — both to the women (or, more rarely, men) initially named and to their “supervisors” (the male individuals preceded by the expression *ša qāt*); thus, it may be conclusively stated that the entire social picture depicted in the tablets under study refers back to a local Babylonian (or “Chaldean”) environment.

This result agrees with, and strengthens, the conclusions to be reached concerning the sole two toponyms mentioned as places of origin of the “supervisors”, i.e. *Dūr-Enlil* (no. 16, with no determinative), and ^{URU}*Kār-Nabû* (no. 17). As shown by Durand, the former might be connected to the region of *Dūr-Yakīn* in Chaldea, while the latter might be identified with a city on the bank of the Persian Gulf⁴². A third specification attached to the mention of a “supervisor” should be given in the more recently edited text no. 20, if the suggested reading is correct ([*šá²*] *É¹* / [*šá¹²*] *KUR.GAL-GIN²-SUHUŠ-ia*; in this case, however, a landed estate or fief, and not a toponym, seems to be implied.

4. The same overall impression of documents totally defined with a Chaldean milieu, with no relation to the Assyrian context in which they were deposited, is provided by the system of chronological indications offered in the tablets. In the first place, we have the year-dates, composed between the 9th and 12th regnal years (= 713-710 B.C.)⁴³ of *Marduk-apal-iddina* of Babylonia⁴⁴; then there is the intriguing

³⁹) Cf. Parpola, *NAT*, p. 95; *WSB*, p. 65.

⁴⁰) For the NA attestations, cf. *WSB*, pp. 181, 184 (the Safaitic name is in *IC*, p. 338); for the possible link of these cases with the one in the present corpus presenting <*t*>, cf. F.M. Fales, *OrNS* 47 (1978), pp. 91-98.

⁴¹) Such as e.g. the cuneiform renderings with <*s*> for etymological **š* (fn. 37, above), and the — however vague — connections with a North-Arabic onomastic horizon (fns. 34, 40).

⁴²) Cf. Durand, *cit.*, pp. 255-256.

⁴³) In the corpus as we have it now, the 10th year of reign occurs in 12 texts; the 11th year in 8 texts; and one attestation each is reserved for the 9th and 12th years.

⁴⁴) The particular phase of *Marduk-apal-iddina*'s political career during which he reigned over Babylonia (approx. 722-709 B.C.) is studied in detail by Brinkman, *Studies ... Oppenheim, cit.*, pp. 12-18.

aspect of the month-dates, invariably in the 11th month, *Šabātu*, within these years⁴⁵. In sum, the documents would seem to refer back to a matter, or a circumstance, taking place in Babylonia during the month of *Šabātu* at regular yearly intervals (minimally) during the last 4 years of Marduk-apal-iddina's reign; this matter, which led to the recordings on the tablets — with implications in some way or another for the existence and/or status of the people mentioned, and of their “supervisors”⁴⁶ — would seem to be devoid in itself of connections with the Assyrian environment. In other words, it would seem to be anterior and exterior to the transfer of the tablets to Assyria. Now, which matter of administrative and/or social relevance may be suggested by the historian to fit the compositional framework of the documents in Babylonia, and to further justify their presence in Assyria?

Basically, two attempts have been made to answer this question in previous literature⁴⁷. The first is the traditional interpretation of the tablets as **slave tags**, which, as is well known, goes back to J. Oppert⁴⁸. In particular, Oppert had already noticed the peculiar regularity of the month-dates (“on ne pourrait guère penser à l'acquisition d'un esclave ordinaire, car il n'y aurait pas de raison pour expliquer la mention unique sur ces briques de la date du Sebat (Février)”), and had tried to explain it in connection with public festivities occurring in the 11th month of the year⁴⁹. At all events, the various unsolved aspects implicit in the slave-tag or slave-document thesis were competently

⁴⁵) Only no. 17 has a day-date (the 26th of the month); but Durand's statement on the matter (“L'absence d'une telle notation dans la majorité des documents est donc purement fortuite”; *cit.*, p. 257) may be considered debatable, due to the various particularities of this tablet, discussed in fn. 24, above.

⁴⁶) Notice that the “supervisors” with more than one presence occur in different years, with no exception, viz.:

“SUPERVISOR”	DATE	TEXTS
¹ <i>Ha-am-ka-nu</i>	MU-10-KAM	2, 4, 11, 12
	MU-11-KAM	14, 15
^{1d} <i>Ba-ba₆-etc.</i>	MU- 9-KAM	1
	MU-10-KAM	10, 21
¹ <i>Mar-na-lu</i>	MU-10-KAM	3
	MÜ-11-KAM	5, 6, 20
^{1d} 30-APIN- <i>eš</i>	MU-10-KAM	7, 8
	MU-11-KAM	19

⁴⁷) It may be recalled just in passing that, at variance with all other opinions, both contemporary and following, J.N. Strassmaier described no. 20 as “eine Art Amulet” in his publication of 1889 (cf. fn. 2, above).

⁴⁸) Cf. fn. 1, above; and see Brinkman, *Studies ... Oppenheim, cit.*, p. 38, fn. 225, and Durand, *cit.*, p. 245-246.

⁴⁹) *Ibid.*

and clearly summarized by Brinkman more than two decades ago⁵⁰ — and it may be safely stated that the growth of the corpus since that time has done little but corroborate such a problematical outlook.

In this light, the new interpretation brought forth in 1969 by J.-M. Durand⁵¹ had the undoubted merit of raising attention to the corpus once more, and of examining it in the light of some issues of social and economic history, crucial to modern research. Durand begins by relating the texts to the overall textual genre of administrative tags, known from the 3rd millennium onward as attached to various computable entities, from animals to men to realia. Viewing this Mesopotamian genre *in toto*, he further states, one must not search for the exceptional event, but for the everyday occurrence; and such is the case for the corpus under study. The *ša* linked to the first (mainly) feminine name — being, moreover, attested only 50% of the time — cannot refer to the named people, but plausibly to a goods connected with them — quite probably a primary or a transformed product, such as wool. **Wool-tags** it is, then⁵²: the tags were connected to bales of wool which were pillaged by the Assyrians at the time of the fall of Marduk-apal-iddina's stronghold, in 709; and “quand on s'en est servi à Ninive ou Khorsabad, les étiquettes qui les fermaient, ont été jetées”⁵³. The dates in the years prior to Sargon's invasion would refer to still unopened bales, lying in the depot in Dūr-Yakīn; while the regular month dates in *Šabātu* would correspond to the date of the shearing, as known from OB parallels⁵⁴.

Durand's thesis has met with interest, but has at the same time been subjected to a slight adjustment in the recent publication of Fort Shalmaneser tablets⁵⁵. The authors of this volume, Dalley and Postgate, would rather interpret the presence of the alleged wool-tags in Assyrian sites (now including Nimrud) as evidence of “genuine trade between two countries at war”, i.e. the Assyrian empire and the reign of Marduk-apal-iddina. Even though “official records seem to imply that booty and tax alone supplied

⁵⁰ Brinkman, *cit.*, p. 38: “Why were these documents (except the Ur specimen) sufficiently important to be carried all the way to Assyria? Why is their time range so restricted, i.e. from the ninth to the eleventh (or possibly twelfth) years of Merodach-baladan? Why are they all dated in the same month of these years, without any day indicated? I do not see how these questions are answered by the popular suggestion of ‘slave tags’ ”.

⁵¹ Durand, *cit.*, *passim*, and especially pp. 256-260.

⁵² Durand, pp. 258-259: “Selon toute vraisemblance, le travail, puisqu'il demandait une main-d'oeuvre à majorité féminine, concernait la laine. Cela peut être corroboré par les mentions explicites pour les hommes qu'ils sont des bergers, si la lecture proposée, néanmoins, est juste! L'étiquette fermait donc des ballots de laine, livrée par des pâtres ou nettoyée, cardée ... etc., par les servantes du palais”. Cf. fns. 22, 23, above for the “bergers” and “pâtres”.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ S.M. Dalley - J.N. Postgate, *TFS*, *cit.*, pp. 16, 139.

Assyria", this trade would have been carried on up "to the end of the year before that in which Sargon II besieged Dur-Yakin"⁵⁶.

5. Slave tags or wool tags? In my opinion, neither of the two solutions fits all the variables in the picture convincingly — but both theories present some interesting points, which may be taken into account toward a further interpretative attempt. In particular, the slave theory and the wool theory appear mutually conflicting insofar as they refer back, in general terms, to two opposing institutional and organizational levels, resp. that of the *household* or *estate*, and that of the *palace*. But if one splits up the document in their constitutive aspects, there is something to be said for either level, the "private" and the "public" one.

— *The dating system*: in the slave theory, the year-dates may not be a problem, but the month-dates in *Šabātu* have absolutely no justification, no visible link with the household system. On the other hand, as implied by Durand, a consideration of the *Šabātu*-dates in the realm of public administration leads necessarily to the notion of a fixed annual occasion (like shearing). It is this very occasion, then, that would represent the justification for the writing out of the documents themselves. On this count, the "public" approach seems sounder.

— *The initial ša, and the "real" object of the texts*: if one exploits to the full the slave-tag thesis, the referent and object of the documents can only be the person named at the beginning, corresponding to the individual physically bearing the pierced ovoid around his/her neck. The presence/absence of initial *ša* in different texts would be irrelevant: both (a) *ša PN* and (b) *PN* would be formulae meaning "document of PN, (the bearer)". In Durand's approach, on the other hand, the indifferent presence/absence of *ša* before the name is used to deny a semiological connection of the tablet with physical persons; and to introduce the notion of a goods (the wool-bale) as a mediating element between the named people (who produce work on it) and the text (the record of performed work). Now, as implied in the philological part above, there is absolutely *no evidence* in the corpus of any connection with wool and its collateral productive activities, on the part of males or females. Thus, the wool-bale theory has no leg to stand on, purely and simply. And, conversely, the view that the (*ša*) *PN* formula established a link between the tablet and the bearer of the pierced ovoid, remains the most acceptable one.

— *The "supervisors"*: in the slave-tag theory, the expression *ša qāt PN₂* would single out persons having some sort of socially determined jurisdiction over the initially

⁵⁶) *Ibid.*, p. 16. As a matter of fact, some evidence of earlier (ca. 730-720 B.C.) dealings between the Assyrian state and Marduk-apal-iddina would seem to be provided by the letter ND 2385 (*NL* 65: H.W.F. Saggs, *Iraq* 25 [1963], pp. 71-72, pl. XI; recently, F.M. Fales, *CLNA*, pp. 34-37, 66-67).

named individuals. In other words, Hamkānu, Marnalu, etc., could have been anything from household or village chiefs to merchants; in all cases, however, the reason(s) behind the frequent (re)occurrence of this crowd within the corpus would not be *per se* transparent. In the second case, on the other hand, a hierarchical system of responsibility and/or command would be implied: Hamkānu and his cronies would form a small group of bureaucratic supervisors of the lower-level personnel involved in a “cog” of the productive “wheel”. In sum, both of these possibilities for interpretation appear plausible, and would largely depend on the stance taken on the remaining points.

Reviewing these arguments, the results are that (1) the date-system referred to a public annual occasion which led (in a direct or indirect fashion) to the compilation of the texts themselves; (2) the initial formulae on the ovoidal documents pointed to nothing else but to the existence and identity of their physical bearers; and (3) the “supervisors” could have indifferently been part of the organization of the household or of the palace.

Now, if the setting had been the Assyrian empire of the very same age, the most appropriate framework for the concurrent fulfillment of all the above conditions would have been the royal census bureau — an institution (physically based or not) aimed at regular listings in written form of varying quantity of data concerning existences, social status, and dislocations of subordinate people, in themselves and in relation to landed property⁵⁷. Despite the different geographical and institutional context, it may still be useful to ask: is there any, however slight, trace in the so-called “Slave-documents of Merodach-baladan” that a matter in the general interest of a census office was concerned?

A possible trace does, in fact, exist. It may be noticed that one text (no. 2⁵⁸) lacks the required personal name in the top line, and in its stead presents the expression DUMU.MÍ 1 *e-du*. Although with some reservations, I take this expression to mean “a female child: 1: ALONE” in very abbreviated writing⁵⁹. It would provide the identification of a girl as such, while at the same time presenting her familial status as “single,

⁵⁷) A discussion of the various administrative “bureaus” of the Assyrian empire is planned in connection with the edition of the imperial administrative records in the series *SAA*. For the moment, notes on the Assyrian census office and its concerns may be found in F.M. Fales, *CCENA*, *passim*; J.N. Postgate, *JESHO* 17(1974), pp. 225ff.; S. Parola, *ZA* 64 (1974), pp. 96ff.

⁵⁸) Cf. fn. 11, above.

⁵⁹) The formula is certainly difficult to make out. Note that, in itself, the adjective *e-du* should hardly refer to the girl, since it would require concordance in the feminine (**ettu*); on the other hand, perhaps a bureaucratic “label” with no respect for the finer points of grammar was employed. Among other solutions, a personal name ¹*E-du* is improbable, even in the sphere of hypocoristics (for names built with (*w*)*edu(m)*-, “only child”, cf. e.g. *CAD E*, p. 37a).

alone". The latter qualification finds a certain parallelism precisely in contemporary NA census texts, where the cognate adjective *edumānu* ("alone, by himself, single") is applied in opposition to the frequent label *adi nišēšu* ("together with his family")⁶⁰.

Now, this deviating attestation might bear in itself the germs of clarification of the remaining, "standard", cases. Proceeding from the fact that we have here an unnamed "girl" described as "by herself", I would assume that the remainder of the texts may have portended the very opposite case, viz. that of adults, bearing personal names as such, and at the head of structured family groups. At the same time, however, the presence of the "girl" in text no. 2 could show that the focus of the tags was not so much on the adults, as on the children depending from them. In other words, it may be suggested that *the first line of the texts indicated the name of an adult (father/mother), but that this indication was used for the identification of a child, who physically bore the pierced tag around his neck*. "Belonging to (the family of) the woman Šudquti"; "Belonging to (the family of) the woman Rammeniti"; "Belonging to (the family of) Nabû-ušallim": such would, to my mind, be the meaning, and at the same time the scope, of the initial formulae.

In this view of the matter, then, the tags would have had the simple function of identifying the children who bore them according to their family ties. If this were acceptable, the additional mention of the "supervisors" would have merely represented another step in the identificative process: i.e., the subjects would have been further classified in their links to a wider social grouping (whether familial or palatial), the "leader" of which is named.

And how would the date system fit into the picture? I suspect that the occasion of the month *Šabātu* recorded on the tags had a less picturesque drift than the public festivities envisaged by Jules Oppert; perhaps, in fact, it had no drift at all. The 11th month of each year, quite simply, could have been the period chosen by the bureaucracy of Marduk-apal-iddina's Babylonian reign to distribute the identification tags to specific families under its jurisdiction. As for the year-dates, their function here might be, by and large, compared to that of a sealing of scribes or officials in other periods: i.e., a sign, or mark, that these "family identifications" tags were an official and not occasional product of the census bureau of the palace.

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⁶⁰ Cf. F.M. Fales, *CCENA*, p. 70 and *passim*.

One final point: are there any implications of the hypothesis set forth above for the presence of the tags in different Assyrian sites? The only possible comment on the subject is, I believe, that we have a sufficient amount of general information on Sargon's deportations from Chaldea to Assyria⁶¹ to accept the possibility that our tags came to the northern kingdom physically attached around the necks of Chaldean children. They were subsequently discarded in the various sites, probably because their function, as well as Marduk-apal-iddina's reign, had come to naught.

⁶¹) Cf. B. Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Wiesbaden 1979, *passim* and esp. pp. 116ff.