

THE LAND OF ASSUR
& THE YOKE OF
ASSUR

STUDIES ON ASSYRIA
1971–2005

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Front cover: two strips from the bronze ornamentation of gates erected at the Temple of Mamu at Imgur-Enlil (modern Balawat) by king Assur-nasir-apli II in the early 9th century BC. The cuneiform captions tell us that the upper strip shows the King receiving the tribute of Kudurru the ruler of Suhu, and the lower strip has him standing before the gates of Imgur-Enlil receiving further tribute from the same ruler. Drawing by Marjorie Howard; see the forthcoming volume on The Balawat Gates of Ashurnasirpal II by R. D. Barnett et al. (British Museum Press). The strips were conserved at the British Museum and placed on display in the Mosul Museum but were mostly looted in 2003.

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The invisible hierarchy:
Assyrian military and civilian administration
in the 8th and 7th centuries BC. *

Introduction

How the Assyrian empire functioned remains obscure because the royal inscriptions, of which we have many, are not concerned to convey such information, and the administrative texts and archives we have are neither as voluminous nor as transparent as in some other periods of Mesopotamian history. At first sight it seems as though the written word and an elaborate bureaucratic hierarchy were relatively unimportant under the Neo-Assyrian kings, and in what follows an attempt is made to test this impression by examining some aspects of Neo-Assyrian administrative procedure.

By hierarchy, I mean both the personnel through whom the activities of government were administered, and the chain of authority and command which placed one official below or above another, thus obliging one person to carry out the instructions of another by virtue of their respective positions in the system. This is I hope not a controversial definition, but it is worth noting that it already uses some words, like "instruction" or "authority", which presuppose some aspects of the system worthy of further investigation.

Before we can understand *how* the hierarchy functioned, we have to remind ourselves *what* it was supposed to be doing. As the representative of the god Assur, the king was in charge of the administration of the land of Assur. The king was responsible for the prosperity of the land, and in the coronation ritual is explicitly required to enlarge it: "extend your land with your just sceptre" (*ina ešarti haṭṭi-ka māṭ-ka rappiš*).¹ Accordingly aspects of the government of the country of direct concern to the king will have included: defence of the realm,

* The origin of this text is my contribution to a conference on Palace, King and Empire held at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute in May 1999. This was revised and enlarged for the publication of the proceedings in 2000 and minor changes made in 2003. The current version, updated bibliographically but not significantly otherwise, is published here in advance of the conference volume by kind permission of Prof. Mogens Trolle Larsen. Normal Assyriological abbreviations are used (as in W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*); note that although letters are where possible cited after their edition in the *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA) series, the ABL reference has often been left in to facilitate comparison with earlier literature which uses the ABL numbers.

¹ Müller 1937.

construction of public buildings and irrigation works, agricultural reform, judicial administration, and observance of ritual conformity.

If we ask how the king carried out these responsibilities, or from a different standpoint, how the establishment used the monarchy as an instrument of rule, we have to look both at the reality, and at the ideological vocabulary: how was the king's will converted into action by his subjects on the ground, and how was the chain of command described, i.e. what terminology was in use to describe the formal hierarchical structure, and what everyday vocabulary was applied to its functioning? One of the frustrating but familiar aspects of Assyria is that in the inscriptions which are the closest our Assyrian informants come to writing history we have few statements about anything other than the actions of the king himself, and we are obliged to glean hints from the letters and administrative documents which were themselves components of the machinery of government.

Royal or state sector

Before examining the administration in detail, we need to define which sector of society we are talking about. One important distinction is made for us in a letter to the king concerned with how he should deal with people who had appealed to him for justice - *ša a-bat šar-ra-a-te [izkarūni]*.² The writer defines two categories of person who might have made an appeal: a slave of the king, or a slave of an Assyrian (*šumma ĩR ša LUGAL ... šumma ur-du ša aš-šur-a-a*). While all subjects of the king must in one sense have been his "slaves", this passage makes it clear that one sector of the populace was considered to be employees of the king.³ Exactly what this implies is not immediately self-evident. To us it seems reasonable to make a distinction between those in "state" employment, charged with carrying out the civil administration of the country as a whole, and those employed as members of the royal household. In this letter the writer is surely thinking of state, rather than royal, servants. This seems to follow from his expectation that the "slave of the king" would have made his appeal either to his "captain" or to his provincial governor (*ina [UGU] LÚ.šak-ni-šu ina UGU LÚ.NAM-šú iq-ti-bi*). These are two ranks in the upper echelon of state administration, not falling within the royal household.

Nevertheless a royal sector of some nature and size must have existed. Kings, or at least their families, had personal identities independent of their state function, which would involve the possession or at least the occupation of buildings, i.e. palaces, the private ownership of land, the ownership of slaves, not to mention a harem, and the employment of "free" staff (i.e. not slaves) for a variety of purposes which were not part of state administration. It is likely they also engaged in productive activities. When we come across "weavers of the king",⁴ there is a temptation to assume that they served the king himself, rather than the

² CT 53, 78+426. A first attempt at an edition in Postgate 1980b.

³ The precise definition of an "Assyrian" remains to be established (see Postgate 1980b); one might be tempted to say that we see here three categories of Assyrian subject: free Assyrians, their slaves, and state or royal slaves. But provisionally, it is not certain that the free Assyrians were not themselves "slaves of the king".

⁴ MÍ.UŠ.BAR.MEŠ *ša* LUGAL (SAA 1, 33:24).

state as a whole, and it would not be surprising if there were many other employees, whether service personnel or craftsmen, who fall into this category. It seems to me likely that there was a "private" royal sector which was distinct in practice and distinguished in theory, but this is hard to prove, and for our present purposes, it is not specially important. Obviously we cannot always expect to be able to determine whether a single professional title, or a particular administrative action, fell within a separate royal sector or formed part of state administration, but the procedures and ethos are likely to have been similar. We shall be dealing in principle with the state sector, but if some instances derive from "royal" contexts it will not greatly matter.

Military and civilian

The state sector must have comprised an extensive cadre of officials to whom the king's duties of state were delegated.⁵ Quite apart from military field officers, tax collectors and recruitment officers were needed, and the provincial governorates required civil administrators for town and countryside. The supply of clothing and other equipment for the army and public works, whether through the *iškāru* system or from some other source, will have required managers, and the activities of all these officials required monitoring and remunerating by someone (not all can have been allocated land holdings). One issue which needs to be addressed immediately is summed up by the words "military and civilian" in my title, which mask an ambiguity: are we looking at one hierarchy or two? Did the Assyrian government have a single system or two separate branches for the administration of military and civilian affairs? In the case of the Ur III kings P. Steinkeller has reconstructed a dual system comprising a "Civil Service", based on the traditional governing mechanisms in the different city-states, and a military command, presided over by the *šagina/šakkanakkum*, which was centrally run and co-existed with the civilian regime in each province.⁶ Hence the possibility that in the Neo-Assyrian empire the military and civilian branches of the administration were separate is one that must be seriously considered. This is obviously a fundamental question which needs to be resolved before we can look in more detail at what the administrative system really consisted of, and at how it relates to the buildings in which we usually assume it operated.

Generally, we need to bear in mind that the bulk of the correspondence relating to government administration tends to be about military matters, or at least the spin-off from military matters. This is no doubt partly because of the importance and unpredictability of military events, requiring urgent and irregular actions and accordingly generating correspondence. Thus letters not infrequently deal with the disposition of deported populations. This is something which also features in archives of the Middle Assyrian period, and reasons are presumably that these were exceptional events which required ad hoc arrangements, and also events which crossed the boundary between one governor and another or between one governor and the central administration.

⁵ How "extensive" we are unable to say, as we have no comprehensive statements in our sources. Apart from military lists, cf. the round numbers in SAA 7, 21 and 22, with comment on p. XIX; there are 28 procurement-officers (*mušarkisu*) listed in CTN 3, 99 section J.

⁶ Steinkeller 1987.

This said, the evidence does seem to point in one direction:

- Provincial governors, who certainly had responsibility for the conduct of civilian affairs in their provinces, also had military duties. To cite just a few cases, the royal inscriptions of Sargon tell us that they could be expected to prepare stores of flour and wine for military purposes,⁷ and that they were expected to mount campaigns (e.g. under Sargon on the Iranian front).⁸ At Guzana under Adad-nirari III the governor receives an instruction, to be forwarded to his colleague, to send troops to a campaign.⁹
- We know that some of the Assyrian subjects recruited into government service under the *ilku* system became “king’s troops” (*šāb šarri*), but that others were used “to do the king’s work”.¹⁰
- Under Esarhaddon the *kiṣru* (or cohort) system was greatly expanded from its military role into an organization of groups of craftsmen, shepherds etc. under government control (see further, below).
- As we have seen above, CT 53 78+426 distinguishes plainly between persons in state service, who are called “slaves of the king”, and those in the private sector who are called slaves of an Assyrian. Those in state service are identified as coming under a governor and a *šaknu*, which is often a military rank, and there is no attempt to identify whether they are in military or civilian posts.

For all these reasons, in discussing the administrative hierarchy of the state sector, we have to assume that province by province the individual governors were head of both civilian affairs and the military hierarchy. Beneath them, moving down the hierarchy, tasks must obviously have become more specialized, and no doubt most posts were carried out in either a civilian or a military environment. This does not necessarily mean that the titles of offices can always be confidently assigned to one or the other, and indeed, as just mentioned, the military hierarchical structure seems to have been replicated in civilian contexts.

The administrative ethos

The terminology of appointments.

For the system to work, spheres of responsibility need to be well-defined, and appointments to be formal. Certain important appointments were reinforced by ritual. At the highest level each provincial governor mirrored the range of royal functions in his own sub-set of the land, probably exercising the same judicial and military (though perhaps not religious) roles. The ministers of state were chosen as

⁷ TCL 3, 1. 53.

⁸ E.g. Fuchs 1993, p. 156, l. 319.

⁹ Weidner 1940, p. 9 Text 1.

¹⁰ See Postgate 1974a, 218-224.

eponyms by the same procedure as the king, and in the coronation ritual were formally reinvested with their sceptre of office by the king.¹¹ From the omen queries we know that some appointments were submitted to divine approval. In SAA 4 we have queries relating to the suitability of a priest (*šangû*), a temple-auditor (*šatammu*), the chief eunuch, and the governor of Ur (*qēpu*). The phraseology of these queries gives us words used to describe official responsibility (*piqittu*, *bēl piqittūti*), and the act of appointment (*paqādu*, *šazzuzu*):

- “should he appoint him to an official post?” (*ana bēl piqittūti lipqid-su* SAA 4, 166)
- “for as long as he carries out that office” (*adi ūmē mal piqittūta šātu ippušu* SAA 4, 156)
- “should he let (him) serve with him?” (*ina panišu lušazziz[-su]* SAA 4, 152).

In the contemporary correspondence also the normal term for nominating a person to an office is *paqādu*, with its derivative *piqittu* “an appointment”. The phrase *bēl piqitti* is current in the letters too, and does not refer to a specific office, but to any “official” or to the “official responsible”. Thus the king may ask a governor “Is there an official of yours over them?” and be told that “The mayor of the village and the chief scout have been appointed as my officials in charge of them” (*bēl pi-qit-te-ka-a ibašši ina pānišunu hazannu ša URU rab dayyāli bēl pi-qit-ta-te-ia [in]a muhhi-šunu paqqudu* SAA 1, 239). Other examples are “I have sent an official with them” (SAA 1, 248) and “Let me appoint my major-domo with the (other) officials” (SAA 1, 264).

To “stand before” is used not only of courtiers, but of civilian service in general:

- “(a scribe) came two years ago and served with Ilaya-bel” (*ina pa-an PN it-ti-ti-zi*, SAA 1, 204)
- “I despatch him to right and to left, (and) he serves with me” ([*ina*] IGI-ia i-za-az SAA 5, 63).

We have seen the causative “appoint to serve” above, in SAA 4, 152; in the letters *šēšubu* “to instal” is more common. The everyday word for “to dwell” in Neo-Assyrian is *kammusu*, while *ušābu* often, though not exclusively, refers to the occupation of a post.¹² See SAA 1, 12, cited below, or “he installed his eunuch into the mayoralty” (LÚ.SAG-šú a-na LÚ ha-za-nu-ti ú-se-še-eb, ABL 473:6-7), in SAA 1, 171:6 (=NL 18) of the king installing a baker in Hatarikka, if rightly

¹¹ *atamanu bēl pāhete ša ukallūni [paḥ]assu luka'il* (Müller 1937, p. 14).

¹² My thanks to Dr. R. Whiting for providing me with a list of occurrences of *ušābu* from the Helsinki data base. We also find *ušābu* used of government allocation of people to new residences. With the Š stem we need to bear in mind that there may not have been an appropriate causative stem to go with *kammusu*. The same uncertainty about the meaning (“occupy (dwelling or post?)”) affects *mūšubu*, e.g. in SAA 7, pp. 9-11 (cf. my hesitation there on p. xvii).

restored, and of military service “he installed his elder brother” (SAA 1, 205 (=ABL 154):17).

This last passage is concerned with service in the army, either as a *mār damqi* (charioteer) or as a *raksu* (meaning unknown). Here the verb in use for “serve” is *lasāmu* “to run”, and these soldiers could be variously serving in the palace contingent, or with the author in Rašappa, or with the king himself. In the other similar context for *lasāmu* the service is also under a *rab kišri* within the military system: “I appointed him to be under PN, another cohort-commander, but he did not consent, saying “I shall serve in my own group” ...” (*ina kal-zi-a-ma a-la-su-u[m]*, SAA 1, 236).¹³

If there was a formal or informal process of appointment, such that it was clear to all concerned whether someone held an appointment or did not, there must obviously have been a process of dismissal too. The term for this in Neo-Assyrian is *pattu'u* (*petû* D):

- “I sacked him from the post of major-domo and removed him, but you installed him in his house in the centre of Arrapha ...” (TA* *pan rab-bētūte up-ta-at-ti-šū attiši ina qabsi Arrapha ina bētišu tussēšibšu*, SAA 1, 12).
- “Just as the king my lord commanded we divided them up, and I appointed a “palace slave” to be in charge of them, but PN dismissed him” (*up-ta-ti-šū*, NL 68, CTN 5, p. 205).
- “The king my lord wrote to me to say “You dismissed him from the post of cohort-commander”... (but) I did not dismiss him at all, he is (still) a cohort-commander” (TA* *muhhi rab-kiširūte tu-up-ta-ti-šū ... laššu la ú-pat-ti-šū rab-kiširi šū*, SAA 1, 235).

Compare SAA 10, 364 (cited below), where the dismissal is carried out by an aide and his deputy at the royal behest. The same word can also be used of foreign governors and local dignitaries outside the Assyrian hierarchical system (ABL 638, of *Ilu-yada'* of Der; ABL 645, of a city-ruler in the Zagros).

Thus, to sum up, although the officials involved in administrative activities are usually referred to by their name, not by their office, the well developed terminology of appointment and dismissal is consistent with the ethos of a formally regulated administration.

Delegation of authority

Although, as shown below, the king was recognized as the ultimate source of authority, in practice as well as in theory, most of the time his authority was of course delegated so that officials could take action and make decisions without constantly referring back up the chain of command. The concept of authority, and

¹³ The precise meaning (as indeed the reading) of *KALzu* (which is attested mainly in Neo-Assyrian contexts, but can now be recognized in a Middle Assyrian palace edict of Assur-uballit, AfO 17 (1954/6) 268, 1:4) remains in doubt.

of authorization, is current, and expressed with the verb *šalātu* "to have authority":

- "I have no authority over anyone in my own department" (*ina muḫḫi memēni ina bēt bēlēya lā šalṭāk* ABL 84).
- "The priest wrote down the dedications in a sealed document and diverted (them) to himself, and I am not given authority in the matter (*anāku ina muḫḫi lā šašluṭāku* SAA 13, 126 =ABL 177).

When we come to look at how authority was delegated and instructions transmitted we have a problem in that our source for such procedures is itself the instrument, causing the risk of circularity in our argument. Put another way, this is a question of administrative style, and the style needs to be understood not only for its own sake, but also because it determines the nature of the written documentation available to us. The royal inscriptions are irritatingly silent about any of the machinery of government or of military command. Much the most informative body of material on this subject is provided by the royal correspondence from Kalhu and Nineveh. There are also what we class broadly as "administrative" documents from both sites, or more precisely, from three main palaces, the South-West Palace at Nineveh, and at Kalhu the North-West Palace and Shalmaneser's Review Palace. The problem is, these are not systematic archives mapping the regular activities of the administration, such as we do have for some sectors of government at other places and times. They give the impression of being, and I am sure they mostly are, pieces of writing produced by officials as part of their official activities *only as and when an occasion demanded*. They are not usually quasi-legal documents constituting proof of a liability, in the way that much of Middle Assyrian administration seems to have been carried out, but notes or accounts written for one official or his department for its own internal reference. There are of course exceptions, but looking at what we have one cannot resist the conclusion that in general administrative commands and decisions were transmitted orally without parallel documentation, and that the system worked via word of mouth within the framework of a recognized hierarchy.

If this is correct, and of course it is partly an *argumentum e silentio* and hence susceptible to disproof or at least disbelief, it has obvious implications for any effort to reconstruct the reality of the administrative structure. Where each administrative liability is not expressed in writing as a legal obligation, the guarantee that the system will work must depend on an ethos of service. Whether the duty of each official is perceived as owed to the system, or to an official or officer immediately above him in the system, the reason for fulfilling that duty is a mixture of loyal conscientiousness -- perhaps even pride -- in fulfilling the assigned role, expectation of reward and improved security in employment, and fear of the consequences of failure. The system will also require common acceptance of the validity of oral commands, and will depend heavily on the mutual acquaintance of at least some of the parties involved. The non-use of regular written instruments in the bureaucracy must have limited the ability of the system to function as single undifferentiated whole in which *any* higher official could give commands and expect performance from *any* lower official. To achieve this in a given situation, it may have been necessary for officials to climb up the administrative tree until they

reached a point where the official they were seeking to control also fell under the same higher command; and sometimes this may have been the king himself.

Those documents from the administration which we have will tend to reflect the exceptional, and not the normal, and need to be treated with caution as a basis for reconstructing the system as a whole. And of course it must always be borne in mind that we cannot recover a representative sample of the complete range of the documents that *were* written, because not all were clay tablets. The problem of perishing Aramaic scrolls may not be too significant here, since we have no evidence that papyrus (or leather) was used for everyday administration. More of a problem is the loss of the wooden writing boards inscribed in cuneiform, which we know were used for making lists of people, for instance.

So to sum up, reconstructing the bureaucratic hierarchy on the basis of the surviving cuneiform documents is doubly difficult, because most routine administration was *not* committed to writing, and what we do have is biased precisely because it records the exceptional. Nevertheless, it is plain from the terminology of appointment and dismissal that a well-defined administrative hierarchy was in place.

The king's role

There is plenty of evidence in the royal correspondence from the late 8th and 7th centuries that the kings played an integral role in the exercise of government, and that they played this role in person. It is noticeable that we not infrequently find letters from persons who have failed to see the king in person, although they plainly would have preferred this. Either they are simply too far away by virtue of the task they are carrying out, or they cannot secure an audience. Writing a letter is a second-best; an audience with the king is much better. SAA 1, 160 (=ABL 843) is a letter Tariba-Issar found himself forced to write because, as he explains, he "stood by the Royal Road in front of the orchards, but the king did not pay attention to me (because) he was talking to Rašappaya. I went to Adian and spoke before the *rab mūgi* but no-one came out and greeted me and I was scared". Seeking (and getting) an audience with the king is of course *šarru maḥāru*. Another word is *qarābu* "to approach (with a request)". ABL 333 is a plea for justice to "the king of righteousness" (*šar kēnāte*) from a subject who had been told by the king to "approach" (*qirib*) him, but "was weeping and did not approach" (*abakka lā aqrib*). Although his full meaning is lost in breaks, the end of this letter is concerned with the circumstances under which the king's servants should or should not approach him. We have already seen CT 53, 78+, a letter advising the king how to deal with appeals to him by "slaves of the king" or by slaves of Assyrian citizens. It seems a subject was entitled to question the authority of a superior officer or a local official by appealing for justice directly to the king, in a procedure known as "to speak the king's word" (*abat šarri zakāru*). In several cases a royal correspondent mentions that he has received such an appeal, and that he has sent the appellant to the king in person. Where it is possible to tell, these appeals are

not made through the process of the law-courts, but through government officials against administrative injustices.¹⁴

Such cases were no doubt the exceptions. In the correspondence officials make it clear that they are prepared to take action without consulting the king. As in any efficient administration, they would know the limits of their responsibilities and powers, and would not have required separate authorization on each occasion, either by word of mouth or in writing. Nevertheless, to judge from the correspondence it often seems to have been a very "hands-on" system. The king interferes in a great variety of matters, and in various ways, and we frequently come across cases where, for one reason or another, the king's permission, influence or authority is sought. Sometimes a correspondent feels it necessary to alert the king to the action he is intending to take (SAA 1, 177) or to advise him, *ex post facto*, of actions already taken. There are of course cases where others, officials or not, protest about the action and have recourse to royal intervention. Thus SAA 1, 205 (=ABL 154) is only one instance where an official (Zeru-ibni) assures the king that he has not done the deeds for which the king has upbraided him (and of which another official, or Marduk-eriba himself, has presumably accused him). These are mostly no more than demarcation disputes between officials, or grievances being taken higher up the chain of authority to outrank an official. In other cases the direct hierarchical chain might be by-passed for purely administrative reasons. The king or central authority may have wished to impose an exceptional request on the official, and/or the job to be undertaken involved two or more officials in different chains, whose co-operation needed to be secured by delegation from higher up the tree. It is worth looking at these instances of "by-pass", or "administrative short-cuts" in more detail.

Direct royal intervention

First, there are the occasions where the king intervenes in person. The initiative usually comes from the top, but it may also be in response to complaints by those lower in the hierarchy, on either public or private matters. The king is ready to intervene directly in matters which are certainly within the responsibilities of an official, either at the urging of some other equal ranking or lower official, or because he is himself dissatisfied. And his interventions are crisp and business-like:

- king writes a brusque note to confirm to a correspondent that he is to have the use of a group of Nabataeans (*ina pāni-ka šunu* SAA 1, 5)
- king writes directly to masons (*urāsē* SAA 1, 25)
- king writes about large quantities of straw and reeds (SAA 1, 26)

¹⁴ Postgate 1974b, 423ff. In this context it may be worth raising the possibility that the *sartennu* was responsible for dispensing justice in the public domain, and the *sukkallu* within the administration. Compare the joint activities of these two officials in Assyrian and Babylonia, e.g. Mattila 2000, 90.

- king writes to Mannu-ki-Adad about his folly in distributing his 1000 men to different military tasks (SAA 1, 11)
- appeal to the king from local kinglets obliged to carry out public works under one of the governors (SAA 1, 146; cf. 147)

Such examples could be multiplied. Obviously the degree of royal intervention, and the areas in which it was prevalent, will have depended partly on the character of the king himself. These cases are from Sargon's reign, and he may have been more inclined to intervene in every day matters than some of his successors, but we cannot judge this.

The royal seal

There are many mentions of the royal seal in Neo-Assyrian letters and in those from Babylonia. Its use can be well illustrated by two such passages:

- "On the 27th day in Anisu the cohort-commander of the Chief Eunuch brought for me a sealed letter of the king" (*rab kiširi ša rab ša rēši un-qi šarri ina libbi uru^{uru}anisu ina muhhi-ia naša* SAA 1, 145 (=ABL 173)).
- "PN the captain (*šaknu*) who is appointed in Nippur for forwarding the sealed-orders and/or messengers of the king" (PN *šaknu ša ana šūtuqūti ša un-qa-a-ti u LÚ.A.KIN ša šarri ina NIBRU.KI paqdu* ABL 238).¹⁵
- "without a royal sealed-order and/or without a royal aide I will not hand him over to to you" (ABL 336).

These last two citations are from Neo-Babylonian letters, and similar instances from the south are found e.g. in ABL 259 and 281.

Unqu is of course in origin a signet-ring, which then (like *kunukku*) came to stand for the document sealed by it. The royal seal itself, with its design of the king in single combat with a lion, is attested in many impressions on royal grants and on labels.¹⁶ It plainly had a variety of uses and probably existed in numerous examples. I tend to assume that these "sealed-orders" were cuneiform tablets with a stamp-seal impression, but this is perhaps not a foregone conclusion. One cannot *a priori* rule out the possibility that a signet-ring itself was carried by a royal representative as token of his authority, or that a scroll (papyrus or leather) was held by a clay sealing. However, another passage does at least make it clear that the *unqu* was itself an inscribed text:

¹⁵ Cf. also SAA 10, 359, and SAA 5, 98 (=CT 53, 42) PN, the aide who brought the sealed-order to me ..." (*ša un-qu ina muh[hi-ia] našani*). In this passage it is not specified that the sealed-order came from the king, though there is no clear instance of such an order from anyone else.

¹⁶ See Sachs 1953; Millard 1965; Millard 1978; and comprehensively Herboldt 1992, 123-34.

• “The king my lord will say ‘The ...-men are not exempt. (Only) those who are in the sealed-document of the king are exempt’” (*ša ina libbi un-qi šarri zakû* NL 74: 9-11, CTN 5 p. 132, see Postgate 1974a, p. 385).

This was surely not so much a letter as a sealed grant, as it must be in SAA 13, 126 (=ABL 177) “PN the priest has inscribed the field, the house and the sons of votaries on a sealed document (*ina libbi un-qi issaṭar*) and diverted them to himself, but I am not empowered in the matter.” We know, from the Assurbanapli grants, that they were sealed by the king’s signet-ring (e.g. “I sealed with my signet of royalty” [*ina u]n-qi šarrūti-ya aknu[k]* SAA 12, 25:27), and examples of such sealings go back at least as early as Adad-nirari III (SAA 12, 6).

I am not aware of any letter attested with the royal stamp seal, but despite this in most cases the royal *unqu* was probably a sealed letter of instruction, rather than a land grant.

Royal representatives

Where the king wanted his wishes to be carried out and a simple message, oral or written, was insufficient, for various reasons, he used specially designated representatives. Sometimes, it is true, we find the king delegating his authority to eunuchs,¹⁷ emissaries, or to “third-riders”,¹⁸ but the royal representative par excellence was the *ša qurbūti*.¹⁹ This term, which is conventionally translated “bodyguard, Leibgardist”, is not to my knowledge found in the 2nd millennium. It is generally accepted that his title means “the one of proximity”, and refers to his role in the immediate entourage of the king (or other member of the royal family), probably referring both to his physical proximity, and to his role as a trusted confidant privy to the royal will. The term “bodyguard” does of course express the physical proximity, but if we seek an English term which also expresses the more metaphorical closeness, I would prefer “aide-de-camp”, or simply “aide”.

He is first attested as a type of official in the Nergal-apil-kumua edict (SAA 12, 82-84) from the reign of Assur-naṣir-apli II. In one context (83 r. 24) he is mentioned after charioteers (LÚ.A.SIG5-*te*), which suggests a military context. In the reign of Adad-nerari III it is listed as a profession, e.g. in designation of witnesses, cf. CTN 2 p. 278, or in SAA 12, 76:14’ as a class mentioned in the same breath as *urad-ēkalli*, neither context explicitly military.

The role of the *ša qurbūti* in the 8th and 7th centuries was very well described by Klauber 1910, p. 105-111 (under the incorrect transcription *mutīr pūti*), and can accordingly be briefly summarized here.²⁰ They turn up in the lists of members of the administrative hierarchy found in the omen enquiries, in what seems to be a

¹⁷ E.g. SAA 1, 11; 124.

¹⁸ Third man as messenger e.g. SAA 5, 217 (ABL 342) r.14 and s.1; 21 (=ABL 506):7; 33 (=ABL 705):4’; in SAA 13, 83 (=ABL 683) “third men” as a group.

¹⁹ in the 7th century perhaps also simply *qurbūtu*, with the loss of the *ša* comparable to the late Neo-Assyrian loss of *bēl* before *pāhīti* in the word for provincial governor.

²⁰ For a representative collection of instances see CAD Q, 315-7.

generally military part of the list, between “cavalry-captains” (LÚ.GAR.MEŠ *pét-hal*) and *ša šēpē* (SAA 4, 142:6), between “team-commanders” (*rab urâte*) and *ša šēpē* (SAA 4, 139:7), and after “cohort-commanders” (LÚ.GAL KA.KÉŠ.MEŠ; SAA 4, 144:6 - the following profession is broken away). They are also mentioned in an explicitly military context in Sennacherib’s royal inscriptions “with my select personal aides” (*itti LÚ qur-bu-ti šēpēya nasqūti* OIP 2 36.iii.81) and “my perfect personal aides, my heroic battle-troops” (LÚ *qur-bu-tú*.MEŠ *šēpēya gitmalūti šābē tāhāziya qardūti* OIP 2 74:66).²¹

In the 7th century palace archives from Kouyunjik we find mention of a *ša qurbūti* of the Crown Prince (SAA 7, 5.ii.17; 7 r.ii.3; 9 r.ii.8, 20; ABL 600:10; ADD 207:6), and also the Queen Mother (SAA 7, 5 r.i.42; 9 r.i.22). A *ša qurbūti* of the Crown Prince (referring presumably to Sennacherib) turns up in a large administrative tablet to do with deported foreigners from the North-West Palace at Kalhu (ND 2803.ii.26, r.i.8; *Iraq* 23 (1961) 56); probably this was during the time when Sargon himself was on his Babylonian campaign and Sennacherib was left in charge of Assyria.

Criteria for reconstructing the function of the *ša qurbūti* are really only available from the correspondence of Sargon and his successors, but from these texts a clear pattern of use does emerge. Specific points are:

- He acts as agent representing the king (or the Crown Prince)
SAA 1, 29 (=ABL 198); 10, 349 (=ABL 476); 364 (=ABL 1214)
- He is appointed (*paqādu*), to supervise others
ABL 127; 415; 552; SAA 10, 349 (ABL 476)
- He is sent (*šapāru*), with a message or task
SAA 1, 29 (=ABL 198+); 10, 338 (=ABL 667); 369 (=ABL 339); 13, 124 (=ABL 558); NL 103 (*CTN* 5, p. 199)
- He escorts troops, horses
ABL 226; 760; SAA 1, 99 (=ABL 99); 5, 215 (=NL 89); 10, 348 (=ABL 340); *Iraq* 27 (1965) 16, no. 6; delivers ice (sic!) to king NL 31 (*CTN* 5, p. 204)
- He appears as the highest agent in an administrative situation
SAA 5 78 (=ABL 246); 82 (=ABL 1012); 104 (=ABL 206); 105 (=ABL 544)
- Two together in a judicial context *Iraq* 32 (1970) 133, new edition Jas 1996, 52-3.
- A reliable (*taklu*) one
ABL 339 r.11; SAA 10, 253 (=ABL 956)

²¹ “Personal aides” (*ša q. ša šēpē*) are also attested as witnesses in ADD 177 and other Kouyunjik legal documents; for *ša šēpē* see below.

Taking this range of activity together, we can say that the *ša qurbūti* works usually on his own or in collaboration with a local official, in which case he is generally the higher ranking officer. He is frequently appointed by the king (or some other official on behalf of the king) to take control of a situation. He is a mobile official: he is sent to a new place, either to deliver and execute fresh instructions, or to exercise his own authority in the situation, or to collect and escort a person, animals, or a commodity from one place to another. The *ša qurbūti* are expected to cope with affairs related to the military, but also cover what we would consider civilian matters. They do not occupy a fixed position within the chain of command, and they were thus in effect the oil between the different cogs of the administrative machinery. It is time now to turn to the silent majority of the system, which needed no such oiling.

It is important, before moving on, to stress again that although there seems to have been no hesitation about direct royal involvement, and it is frequently mentioned in the Neo-Assyrian letter corpus, it was probably nevertheless relatively exceptional. Our letters come from the royal palaces, and are therefore representative of the business which reached the king or his close staff, and completely unrepresentative of the great majority of administrative business beyond the palace limits. There we must expect that the system of delegated authority would normally have operated without the necessity of constant written authorization or consultation with the king.

The military hierarchy

Although we have seen above that military and civilian affairs were dealt with by the same overarching provincial authorities, we also noted that further down the system the distinction between the two sectors must have been clear, and in search of a well-defined hierarchy we cannot do better than to start with the military. Any attempt to reconstruct the Neo-Assyrian military hierarchy has to choose between, or perhaps better bring together, two approaches. On the one hand there is inescapably a model in our own minds of how it might have worked, informed perhaps by comparisons with later or earlier systems, on the other there is the range of technical terms we encounter which may give clues to their relationship to one another and thus to the wider structure. This is not the place to undertake a survey of the entire army personnel, but in our attempt to reconstruct the ancient ethos it seems appropriate to start from their own terminology.

There are many terms used to refer to fighting men in the Neo-Assyrian documentary and inscriptional texts, but they are not all on the same level. At the least one may distinguish terms referring to rank, activity or function, ethnic or geographical origin, and status or sector.

(1) Activity

Of itself, defining a soldier by his characteristic weapon (e.g. "bow-man, shield-man") or similar function (e.g. *ša pēthalli* "horse-rider") tells us nothing about his

position in the hierarchy (although once the system is constructed, and hence to his contemporaries, it may have implied it).²²

(2) Origin

Some ethnic designations may have had equally specific implications for the position of their holders in the system. The best known are the Ituaeans and the Qurraeans, who are known to be included within the “king’s troops”. They were so well established that they actually feature in a lexical text,²³ but other ethnic units, probably mostly Aramaean, are attested and for most if not all of these we may assume that the unit had a recognized position within the system and characteristic equipment and functions.

(3) Rank

Terms implying command over other troops are the most explicit, but the fact is that we have only the slenderest evidence on which to reconstruct a military hierarchy.

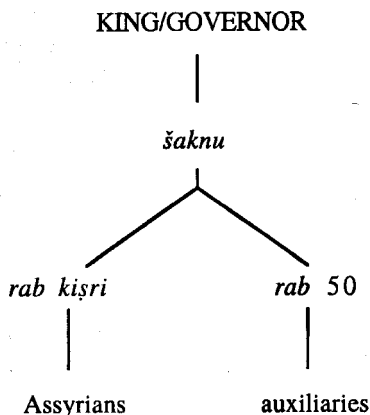


Diagram 1: the basic module

The ranks we can identify are principally *rab kišri* “cohort-commander”, *rab 50* “commander of 50”, and *rab ešarti* “decurion”. In all these cases the term *rab* is taken by us to imply command, but obviously other terms may refer to hierarchical command positions without stating so explicitly. I would claim *šaknu* as one of these on the basis of a study of context.²⁴ There seems to have been a very

²² So e.g. Manitus 1910, 118-133, Malbran-Labat 1982, 59-88.

²³ MSL 12, 238 i.13-14.

²⁴ I think the position of the military *šaknu* as an officer above the *rab kišri* has been sufficiently established (Postgate 1980a), and his position immediately below the governor seems to follow from CT 53 78+, 6-7 (see Postgate 1980b). The principal difficulty still revolves round the relationship between the *rab kišri* and the *rab haššē*, on which cf. Postgate 1974a, 221. They seem to be of approximately equal rank, so perhaps the “commander of 50” exercised a function similar to that of the “cohort-commander” in a sector of the administration which was not divided into cohorts (*kišru*). Note that correspondents in letters do not usually

simple four tier “module”, with the governor at the top, beneath him the military *šaknu*, then the cohort-commander (or the commander of 50), and the ordinary soldier or private. I believe this was a regular chain of command from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III onwards, whereas there is some evidence that the “decurion” (*rab ešarti*) was the lowest officer in the reign of Adad-nirari III and back into the 2nd millennium. This rank disappears from military contexts later on, but the title survives among the court diviners.

While this module was no doubt developed in the army, in the 7th century the *kišru* system also embraced non-military occupations, and we can expect to encounter the module in civilian contexts as well. Hence to progress further with the broad sectors of the administrative hierarchy we need to sort out the terms describing status.

(4) *Status*

This deliberately vague term applies to designations which seem to refer to a person’s position or role within the military establishment (as opposed to role on the battlefield). These are the most difficult to pin down. They may include *šāb šarri*, *raksu*, *ša šēpē*, *qurrubu* and *ša qurbūti*.

It will be obvious that a single person could be classed under three or even all four of these headings. Thus one could be a commander (3) of archers (1) drawn from the Ituaeans (2) who belonged within the “king’s troops” (4). Some titles are a combination of two classes, e.g. *rab urâte* “team-commander”, and which of the varied terms in (4) are incompatible with terms in (1)-(3), either by definition or because of the structure of the army (e.g. only Assyrians were horsemen), has to be worked out laboriously case by case. Even when this has been done (and it cannot be attempted here), there remain further issues to be addressed before we can hope to achieve a clear view of the military hierarchy: who served, and for how long? what was the basis on which they were conscripted? was the conscription process organized by local communities or by the central administration? which officials commanded them once conscripted? There are not likely to be single answers to all these questions. We may expect, by comparison with similar systems, that within the army some personnel served on a different basis from others, but this does not necessarily mean that they came under a separate command structure. There are however two major divisions of the army, the king’s troops and the royal cohort, and since they served different functions, it will be as well to consider them separately.

The “king’s troops”

The evidence of NL 89,²⁵ supported by plentiful other indications, tells us that the core of the forces at the disposal of provincial governor was formed by “king’s

talk of bodies of troops in terms of one or more *kišru*, but rather specify numbers, often in multiples of 50 or 100 [e.g. ABL 273; 521; 561; 622; SAA 5, 33 (=ABL 705)]. Perhaps this means that (like many modern armies) the number of men in contingents with the same designation could vary significantly, and that specifying a number of *kišru* did not give sufficiently accurate information.

²⁵ A new edition of this letter is offered in Postgate 2000.

troops”, who included among their number both Assyrians and auxiliaries. The Neo-Assyrian evidence for this class of soldier is clear on some points:

- the “king’s troops” (*šāb šarri*) served in a **military** body (e.g. NL 89)
- some at least were conscripted under the *ilku* system, and they were a selected group, since other such conscripts acted as reserves (*ša kutalli*) and yet others as corvée labourers, doing the *dullu ša šarri* (see simply SAA 1, 99 (=ABL 99)).
- they were “reviewed” (*ašāru*) and lists of their names were kept on boards (CTN 3, 21-22).
- some, if not all, auxiliary units, such as the Ituaeans and the Qurraeans, were included within the “king’s troops” (NL 89); it is unclear whether or not these would have fallen under the *ilku* system of conscription (in favour of this note that at least one Ituaean had a “bow-field” (SAA 5, 16 (=ABL 201)).
- they came under the command of provincial governors: NL 89; SAA 1, 149 (=CT 53, 108); SAA 1, 236 (=ABL 639); and probably SAA 1, 91 (=ABL 94). Taklak-ana-Bel is another case of a governor in charge of both military and civilian personnel (e.g. SAA 1, 235 (=ABL 1432), though these soldiers are not explicitly stated to be *šāb šarri*).

It is clear that these are the king’s troops in the sense that they are recruited into the service of the state. Nevertheless, they do not serve directly under the king but are at the disposal of the governor in his role as the head of the provincial administration. Some may have been professional Assyrian soldiers for whom the army was a career, not a temporary obligation, while others may be auxiliaries under different conditions of service. It seems possible, though, that the majority of the “king’s troops”, especially those technically considered “Assyrians” (cf. NL 89), were recruited to serve in the army under the terms of the state-wide *ilku* system.

A text from Tell Billa²⁶ demonstrates that *ilku* obligations were administered at provincial centres in the 9th century, and there is every reason to think that at least the theory behind *ilku* service went back into the 2nd millennium. Middle Assyrian military records from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta indicate that there were at least 4 “boards” (*lē’u*) named after the king or one of a few high officials, and listing the soldiers falling under each person’s command. These were described as *šāb šarri*.²⁷ The procedure for conscripting these men was probably known as the

²⁶ JCS 7 (1953) 141 texts 86-90; note that, as hypothesized by Finkelstein, these pieces probably all belong to a single tablet, and some of them can now be physically joined, as I was able to establish when collating these pieces in 1989. My thanks to Prof. Å. Sjöberg and the late Father Hermann Behrens for their assistance on that occasion.

²⁷ Middle Assyrian instances of *šāb šarri* are both from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta: VS 21 1.vii.26 and Postgate 1979a, MAH 16086, which lists military garments *ša šāb šarri* (see Postgate 2000, 106 fn. 94).

pirru,²⁸ and this is relevant, because in Sargon's 8th campaign one of the crack regiments is described as the *pirru* of Sin-ahu-ušur (Sennacherib's brother): although there is a gap of 500 years, I think it is reasonable to assume that the core army which served under the king was still composed of regiments or legions, each under the command of a highly-placed member of the elite. However, it seems likely that such troops formed part of the royal cohort. Whether they were also *šab šarri* still is impossible to say at present.

The "royal cohort"

As already stated, in Neo-Assyrian times the royal core of the army was known as the *kišir šarrūti*.²⁹ This term is attested in Old Babylonian texts, but not at present in Middle Assyrian contexts.³⁰ In seeking a precise definition of this body the word *kišru* itself is unhelpful because it has several usages. In administrative and legal texts it is of course the word for the cohort of an unknown number of men commanded by a *rab kišri*. In his 8th Campaign letter Sargon uses it in the plural: *lā upaḥḥira kišrē-ia* ("I did not gather my cohorts" l. 230), and elsewhere tells us that his provincial governors had their cohorts (LÚ.šu-ut-SAG.MEŠ-ia LÚ.EN.NAM.MEŠ a-di ki-iš-ri-šu-nu, TCL 3, l. 333) and that Merodachbaladan "gathered his cohorts" (*upaḥḥira kišrē-šu*, Fuchs 1993, p. 138 l. 266). When Sargon states that he added troops to his "royal cohort" the numbers involved make it clear that he is not talking about a cohort of the size usually commanded by a *rab kišri*, and indeed it must presumably have contained within it many such cohorts.³¹ On the other hand a smaller body is obviously in question when a correspondent writes to the king about "the Palestinians whom the king formed into a cohort (*ki-iš-ru ik-šur-u-ni*) and gave to me" SAA 1, 155 (=ABL 218). In the Nimrud Wine Lists there is also a "cohort of Šamaš", of unknown size. Hence in any given context we can only guess how large a *kišru* is meant from the context itself.³²

28 This term, and the related adjective *perrūte* (if it exists and is not *utrūte*), remain difficult. "Enrolment or taxation (procedure, centre)" seems to be the approximate meaning.

29 This phrase is found in the royal inscriptions. The phrase *kišir šarri* is attested as the "profession" of four witnesses to a slave sale dating to 682 B.C. in the reign of Sennacherib (=SAA 6 192 (=ADD 276) r.5'-8'), and of at least one witness in SAA 6 246 (=ADD 251) r. 2' (probably reign of Esarhaddon to judge from the other texts of the same purchaser). The obvious assumption would be that this was the vernacular equivalent of *kišir šarrūti* (as proposed e.g. by Mattila 2000, 149, but on reflection this seems less likely because at this time the "royal cohort" was so extensive that membership of it would hardly act as an identifying profession. Conceivably this phrase is here used for a much smaller body or troops closely attached to the king (in which case its relationship to the groups known as *qurrubu* and *ša šēpē* would need elucidation). See also footnote 31 below.

30 Even if the term *kišir šarrūti* was ever used in the Middle Assyrian period we do not know enough about the composition of the army to be able to guess what it might have referred to (e.g. the contingent listed on the "king's board", all the contingents listed on boards, or an entirely separate (and smaller) body of permanent professional soldiers accompanying the king). Given the high-ranking title *rab kišri* at this date (see below, footnote 32), it seems likely that *kišir šarrūti* was not in current use.

31 Manitius 1910, 114 remains an adequate source for this.

32 I know of no evidence that this *kišru* commanded by a *rab kišri* existed before the 8th century. The identical title, *rab kišri*, is used on three late 2nd millennium stelae: Nos. 57, No.

The classic statement on the *kišir šarrūti* is in Manitius 1910, 114-117, and there is still little that can be added to it. This is because the term *kišir šarrūti* itself is known exclusively from passages in the royal inscriptions of the last four major kings. In one recurring topos they report the addition of personnel from defeated enemies to their *kišir šarrūti*. Under Šargon and Sennacherib these are a variety of fighting men, under Esarhaddon and Assurbanapli they also include craftsmen.³³ In the inscriptions of Sargon and Sennacherib the kings also mention occasions when they sent their "royal cohort" to assist their governors with local campaigns in Elam and in Anatolia.³⁴ A further complication in the 7th century is the existence of a "new cohort", which is mentioned in administrative documents. It occurs twice in the title of Nabû-šarru-ušur "Governor of Nineveh, New Cohort of Sennacherib" (SAA 7, 3.i.5-6; 4.i.7-8). In the first case his entry follows Ahu-ilaya, who is simply styled "Governor of Nineveh". In three other passages the "Review Palace, New Cohort" follows on from "Review Palace, Central Nineveh" (SAA 7, 23), or from both "Central Nineveh" and "Review Palace, Nineveh" (SAA 7, 115.i.2-4; 148.ii.13-15). Plainly this was an organization which required a governor and a separate Review Palace, and we can only assume that enough troops had indeed been added to Sennacherib's "royal cohort" to warrant the creation of a new establishment parallel to that which already existed under Sargon for the administration of his *kišir šarrūti*. The use of Sennacherib's name in these phrases would probably only have begun after his death, and certainly SAA 7, 3-4 come from late in the reign of Esarhaddon or early in his successor's reign (cf. SAA 7 p. xix).³⁵

Location and composition of the "royal cohort"

Along with Manitius and his successors I imagine that the *kišir šarrūti* was a body of troops not commanded via the provincial governors but under the separate

67 (of Marduk-uballissu and Ninurta-apla-iddina, see Saporetti 1979, 21 with fn.6) and No. 58 (of Ipparšidu, whose sole title is GAL *ki-iš-ri*, Saporetti 1979, 154-5). The stele must imply a high rank, so this can hardly be the equivalent of the later Neo-Assyrian title, but more than that it is hard to say.

³³ For the non-military *kišru* see Postgate 1979b, 210-1 with footnotes; CT 53 13 probably exemplifies a cohort of ironsmiths. For Esarhaddon's account see Borger 1956, 106, iii.14-20. For Assurbanipal see Borger 1996, 58-9 "I added to my royal cohort bowmen, shieldmen, specialists, craftsmen whom I had plundered from inside Elam, and the remaining ones I distributed like sheep to my governors, magnates, cult-centres, and the whole of my camp" (in text F; a standardized phrase going back to Sargon).

³⁴ Sargon: Fuchs 1993, p. 178, l. 404 (Kummuḥ); Sennacherib: Luckenbill 1924, 61 ll. 69-71 (Cilicia); 62 ll. 6-8 (Tilgarimmu); 87 ll. 29-30 (Elam).

³⁵ Although Esarhaddon writes at some length in his inscriptions about his expansion of the system, he does not state that he created a new *kišru*, merely added to his own *kišir šarrūti* (l. 15), and to "the *ki-šir* of the earlier kings his (fore)fathers" (l. 19; this was perhaps the Sennacherib *kišru*). In one legal document from his reign Nabû-bel-ušur the eponym for 672 BC is uniquely given the designation "cohort of (*ki-šir*) Esarhaddon, King of Assyria". Since he was Governor of Dur-Šarrukku both before and after the date in question (Millard 1994, 104), he can hardly have been commander of a cohort, and I suspect this refers to membership of a much smaller group, and is equivalent to the titles *kišir šarri* used in other texts from Esarhaddon's reign (see above, footnote 29).

command of the king. If so, it, or much of it, would have been based at the seat of government, hence at Kalhu up until the move to Dur-Šarruken, and at Nineveh from Sennacherib's reign onward. Within each city it seems fair to assume that the main military component of the *kišir šarrūti* would have been based at the Review Palace (*ēkal māšarti*), which the royal inscriptions tell us were designed as military headquarters. I also suspect that it was under the command of the chief eunuch (*rab ša rēši*). The military role of the chief eunuch was already remarked on by Manitius and Klauber, and he is the only high officer of state ("magnate") without responsibilities away from the capital.³⁶ This remains only a best guess: we do not have any compelling evidence associating him either directly with the command of the *kišir šarrūti*, or with the Review Palace.

In administrative contexts we occasionally come across troops "of the palace". These include:

- chariotry (GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ *ša* É.GAL SAA 1, 10 (= ABL 306)r.14)
- a charioteer (LÚ.A.SIG *ša* É.GAL SAA 1, 205 (=ABL 154):12)
- cohort-commanders (LÚ.GAL *ki-šir*.MEŠ *ša* É.GAL SAA 11, 36 (=ADD 1036).iii.19-20); and
- Ituaean auxiliaries (LÚ.i-tú-'a-a *ša* É.GAL SAA 5, 3 (= ABL 424) r.10).

That it is a precise designation is clearest from SAA 1, 205, a letter which is explicitly concerned with the details of army service. The most revealing instance is however in the horse lists from Fort Shalmaneser. Here, in CTN 3, 103 r.ii.4-6 we have "Total 373 horses: the procurement-officers of the palace chariotry" (LÚ.mu-šar-kis.MEŠ *ša* GIŠ.GIGIR É.GAL), and they are contrasted with an earlier section of the list, of which the only surviving part is the end of the last line: "[Total n horses]: the procurement-officers of the *qurrubtu* chariotry" (LÚ.mu-šar-kis.MEŠ *ša* GIŠ.GIGIR *qur-ub-te*). Since this refers to a muster at Borsippa in Babylonia, it is plain that these two groups remained identifiably separate even away from their base. The question is: which palace? To judge from the provenance of the tablet, these troops came under the administration of the Kalhu Review Palace, and there is no reason to think, here or in any other passage, that they came from one of the governors' palaces. Indeed, since the writers do not specify which palace is meant, it must be self-evident, and from the time of Shalmaneser III we know that it was the *ēkal māšarti* which served as the headquarters for the Assyrian army par excellence, and is regularly described as designed for the administration and equipment of the army.³⁷ The only alternative would seem to be that they were troops serving directly under the monarch, and hence based at the principal residential palace - in Kalhu the North-West Palace. This cannot be completely discounted, but in CTN 3 no. 103 the "palace" troops are expressly differentiated from a sector of the army designated *qurrubtu*, and this seems much more likely to refer to the king's sector and to have been based at the residential palace.

³⁶ See Mattila 2000, 163-4.

³⁷ See already CTN 3, p. 29 n. 15. If the much-quoted statements to this effect by Sennacherib and Esarhaddon are not thought sufficient, the variety of military administrative documents found in the Kalhu Review Palace should be enough to satisfy us.

qurrubtu

Philologically this word poses problems which cannot be resolved in this context. No-one doubts that it is related to *qurbu* “close, near”, but is it just the feminine *qurubtu*, or are the writings with *qur-ru-* to be taken as conveying a genuine geminated consonant, in which case it could presumably be a D-stem adjective (for **qarrubtu*)? Whichever it is, the meaning is not much affected, as it is generally agreed to refer to bodies of troops or individuals serving in close proximity to the king. Esarhaddon lists *qurrubtu* chariotry and *qurrubtu* cavalry (Borger 1956, 106 16), units which are also attested in the administrative records.³⁸ It remains unclear whether all *ša qurbūti* were members of a *qurrubtu* unit, and/or all members of a *qurrubtu* unit could be called *ša qurbūti*. I suspect not,³⁹ as it is plain that not every *ša qurbūti* formed a member of the king’s *qurrubtu* unit, since some served the Crown Prince and the Queen Mother (cf. again CAD Q 317). On the other hand, the not infrequent appearance of *ša qurbūti* in the Kouyunjik legal documents is consistent with their attendance in the entourage of the king, and there may well have been a considerable overlap (cf. also footnote 38 for Kalhu). For practical reasons, I would assume that the *qurrubtu* contingents were much smaller in total than the rest of the *kišir šarrūti*, and within the contingents a yet smaller group was known as *ša šēpē*, generally recognized as those in the immediate entourage of the king himself.⁴⁰ The qualification “right” and “left” applied to *ša qurbūti* in CTN 3, 108.i.7-8 may refer to these aides’ positions by the side of the royal person, to judge from their place near the beginning of the list.

The “standing army”?

We have therefore two main sectors of the Assyrian empire’s military establishment: the “king’s troops” under the command of provincial governors and therefore distributed throughout the empire, and the “royal cohort” based at one of the capital cities under the king in theory, and in practice perhaps under the Chief Eunuch. Although we have some evidence about the composition of these two

³⁸ Chariotry: ABL 1009 7 *ša GIŠ.GIGIR qur-x*[traces (coll.) insufficient to identify the broken sign; cavalry: ND 2386+ (*Iraq* 23 22 cf. Postgate 1974a, p. 372) ii.15’-17’ *ša pēt-ḫal qur-uḫ(b-x)*). Two contexts in the Nimrud ration lists are atypical: bread rations for LÚ.EN GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ *qur-ub-tú* ND 2489 (*Iraq* 23 32, CTN 1 No. 35) i.7-8; and to *ša qur-ru-ub-tú* and EN GIGIR.MEŠ *qur-ru-ub-tú* ND 2371 (*Iraq* 23 21, CTN 1 p. 154-5 No. 34) 7-8. Note that unlike the wine lists, these come from the North-West Palace, where the king resided.

³⁹ Pace CTN 3 p. 32ff. Although they look similar at first sight, the graphic habits of the scribes keep the terms distinct, as indeed they are grammatically. The word *qurrubtu* comes of course from the same root as *ša qurbūti*, but in Assyrian texts a distinction is clearly maintained between the individual professional title, where the *qur* sign is followed directly by the *b*, and the designation of a body of troops, where the *qur* sign is followed by *ru* or *ub*. In Babylonian texts the individual profession is also given as *qurrubtu*, but whatever the pronunciation of the words in Assyria, scribal practice maintains a distinction, and we should observe this. For this reason I would take the phrases LÚ.GAL *kišir qur-but* SAA 6, 323 (=ADD 115) and LÚ.GAL *ki-šir ša qur-but* ADD 211; 235; SAA 6, 329 (=ADD 444) as meaning either “cohort-commander and aide” or “commander of a cohort of aides”. Note that pace CTN 3 p. 33 with note 37, Sargon’s inscriptions do not explicitly identify the 1000 cavalry which accompanied the king as *qurubtu*.

⁴⁰ CAD Q 317a-b; with reference to CTN 3 p. 39 with note 73, note that it is only in l. 150 of the annals (Fuchs 1993, 114) that the cavalry is designated “personal” (GIR.2-ia), because in the other passages where the phrase occurs it applies to his “single chariot”.

sectors, we have seen little to tell us how permanent these two sectors were. Manitius identified the *kišir šarrūti* as a “stehende Königsschar”, a standing body of troops attached to the king himself, rather than to individual governors. In this sense he remains correct, and it is unfortunate that he also uses the phrase “the standing army” (*des stehenden Heeres*), because there were also regular bodies of troops under the command of the governors. Since we guess that both the royal and the provincial sectors were in existence throughout each year the phrase “standing army” should apply to both, in contrast to a force raised seasonally from among the civilian population (the *dikūt māti*).

Even if correctly used, the phrase “standing army” conceals a large area of ignorance, since it need only imply that the army as a whole remained ready under arms throughout the year, without specifying the terms of service of the individual soldier. We need to know how permanently they served: in each sector were some or all of them a “conscript army” composed of young recruits serving out a short period of state service, or full-time, professional soldiers? Did they live in barracks 12 months a year, and did they spend more than a few years as soldiers? No administration will take kindly to feeding and housing a large body of idle troops. It is plainly conceivable that the Assyrian governors had lists of current king’s men who were technically in service but not physically armed and assembled, but since we have a term for “reserve”, *ša kutalli*, it seems reasonable to assume that those designated as *šab šarri* were currently in service under military command. As for how many years one served, that remains an area of complete ignorance. There is evidence for time-accounting of *ilku* service in the Middle Assyrian period, but nothing really comparable in the 1st millennium (with the possible exception of ND 3467 mentioned below). Nevertheless, the link with *ilku* does suggest that service with the king’s troops was something one did for a limited period, and not a lifetime’s employment (compare SAA 1, 205 (=ABL 154)). That said, we need to bear in mind that some of the king’s troops were professionals: the Ituaeans and others, and also presumably some of the officers.

Military rank was of course formally recognized, as shown by ABL 85 (quoted below), where the king is elevating people to the ranks of *rab kišri* (cohort-commander), *tašlišu* (“third-rider”) and *ša qurbūti*, and note in particular that the third-rider’s post is specified as “permanent” (*kayyamāniu*). Some other instances of this word, written logographically SAG.UŠ have recently been identified (SAA 7, 150.ii.3’; 154.r.ii.19’, both *tašlišu*; 152.r.i.9 without further specification). Some “permanent” soldiers were no doubt “Assyrians” (whatever that precisely implied⁴¹), but it seems likely that most of the foreign contingents which we know to have been incorporated into the *kišir šarrūti* were also long-term professional soldiers who did not disperse annually to their places of origin in the off-season.

As we should expect and as the evidence of the sculptures makes clear, the rank and affiliation of soldiers were reflected in their uniform. In the texts there are a few allusions to this, which have been discussed by the author elsewhere (Postgate 2001). In SAA 11, 30.r.3-5 Mannu-ki-abi is identified as a cohort-commander

⁴¹ On the term “Assyrian” in an administrative context cf. Postgate 1980b.

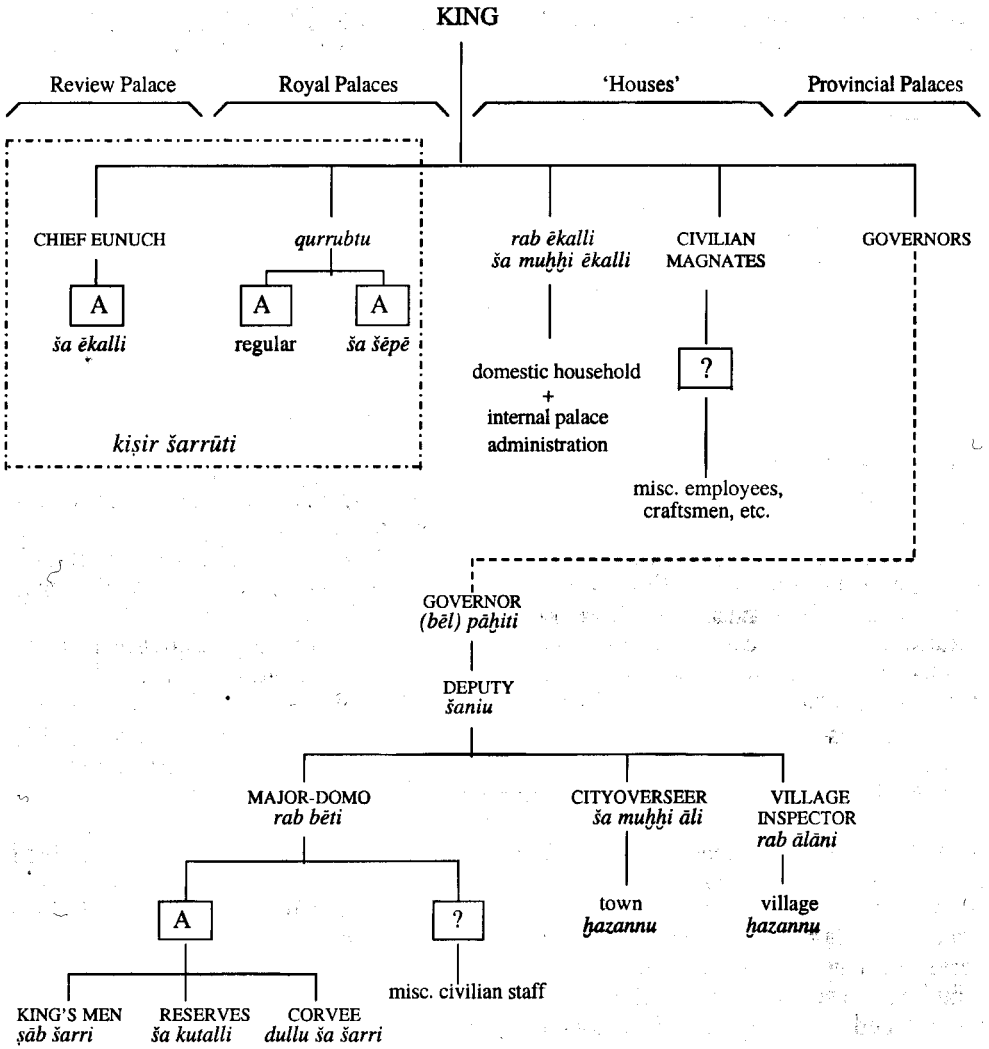


Diagram 2: hypothetical reconstruction of the principal sectors of the administration. The boxes marked A represent the basic module as shown in Diagram 1.

“who has not been uniformed” (*ša la labbušūni*). One of the pertinent texts is SAA 11, 122, where the numerical contrast of 6 or 8 “uniformed” (*labbušu*) to 208 or 96 “daily” (*ša ūmē*) troops is intriguing. It seems plain that the contrast is between officially uniformed and less definitively enrolled troops.⁴² Although the meaning of *ša ūmē* is not transparent, the best explanation may be that these are conscripts serving out their “days” of *ilku*-service owed to the state. Such “days (of

⁴² For *labbušu* “uniformed” see also CTN 1, p. 144 No. 16.

service)" are probably referred to in ND 3467 which is a list of *ilku* contributions in kind received "during my days" (*ina libbi UD.MEŠ-ia*; see Postgate 1974a, p. 399). In that case, we may not be looking at the *kišir šarrūti*, but at a governor-commanded force of "king's troops". At least the newly incorporated personnel of the *kišir šarrūti* in the 7th century were plainly "slaves of the king",⁴³ who were by definition permanently in royal service, and there is no evidence that any of the "king's troops" served in the *kišir šarrūti*. Nevertheless, if the provincial levies were to be competently commanded, there must have been some exchange of personnel between one sector and the other.

Palaces and houses

Even if the administration is invisible in the texts, it can hardly have been invisible on the ground, but where, in practice, did it operate? As we all know, the kings had a variety of palaces, some in different cities, sometimes more than one in the same city. In the 10th and 9th century the kings resettling the countryside built "palaces", and while theoretically no doubt these were outposts of the main royal palace, they must also have served as the places of work, and probably residences, of the local governors. Palaces were also storehouses, and when Sargon tells us that Ullusunū had stocked up flour and wine for his army just like his own provincial governors, we are entitled to assume that it was in their palaces that they kept these supplies.⁴⁴ This in any case is the clear implication of SAA 1, 160 where the author is involved in storing grain for the king in three different palaces, Arbil, Kilizi, and Adian (which was probably not a provincial capital).

While the provincial palaces, like Til-Barsip or Dur-katlimmu, may have contained all the functions - residence, ceremony, administration and storage - in one, in the capital cities some of these functions were separated out. The Review Palace (*ēkal māšarti*) not only acted as a place where the army was reviewed, but also stored military equipment, incorporated a harem area, housed the administration including the scribes, and no doubt acted as a residence for some of the personnel who worked in the palace. At Kalhu and Nineveh the Review Palace was at some hundreds of metres from the principal royal palace and cannot just have been an enlargement of its administrative functions. As far as I am aware, apart from the palatial residences of members of the royal family, no other buildings were known as "palaces". If there were other buildings which housed government administration, they were probably "houses" of one kind or another. This brings us to look at one recurrent phrase in the Neo-Assyrian texts which does seem to have a specific reference to the administrative system.

⁴³ For the *İR ša šarri* contrasted with *urdu ša aššurāyi* ("slave of an Assyrian") cf. CT 53, 78+426, above, p. 2 with footnote 3.

⁴⁴ TCL 3, l. 53.

"Their Master's House"

ABL 85 is a letter from Bel-iqiša to the king Assurbanipal (Baker, PNA 1/ii, 316 no. 10) complaining about some of his colleagues within the administration:

5 İR.MEŠ *ša* É.EN.MEŠ-*ia*
 6 *ša* LUGAL *be-lí* UD-*mu*
 7 *an-ni-ú* *ú-par-ri-su-u-ni*
 8 ¹*tab*-URU-*a-a* DUMU ¹EN.KASKAL--PAB--PAB
 9 *ša a-na* LÚ*.GAL *ki-šir-u-te*¹
 10 LUGAL *be-lí* *ú-še-lu-u-ni*
 11 ¹.dPA--*sa-kip* *ša* TA* LÚ*.3.U₅.MEŠ
 12 *ka-a-ma-nu-te*¹
 13 LUGAL *be-lí* *ú-še-lu-u-ni*
 r.1 ¹IGI.LÁ--*dšú*
 2 *ša* TA* LÚ* *qur-but*.MEŠ
 3 LUGAL *be-<lí>* *ú-še-lu-u-ni*
 4 3 *an-nu-tú* ÉRIN.MEŠ
 5 *ša-ak-ra-nu-tú* *šú-nu*
 6 *ki-ma i-šak-ki-ru*
 7 LÚ GÍR AN.BAR
 8 TA* *pa-an me-hi-ri-šu*
 9 *la* *ú-sa-ah-ra*

"The servants of my government department whom the King allocated(?) today - Tabalayu, son of Bel-Harran-ahu-ušur whom the King promoted to a cohort-commandership; Nabū-sakip, whom the King promoted to(?) / from(?) the permanent 'third-riders'; Atamar-Marduk whom the King raised to(?) / from(?) the *ša qurbūti* - these three men are drunkards. When they get drunk one man does not turn (his) iron dagger away from his colleague."⁴⁵

This same Bel-iqiša is also the plaintive author of ABL 84, in which he maintains that "Since the time the King appointed me to my government department, I have had no authority over anything (or: anyone ?)." (TA* É LUGAL EN *ina* É EN.MEŠ-*ia ip-qid-da-ni-ni ina* UGU *me-me-ni ina* É EN.MEŠ-*ia la šal-ṭa-ak*, r.4ff.), and goes on to explain how his secretary is in control.

These two letters may serve as a starting point for consideration of the phrase *bēt bēlēya*, literally "house of my masters", which I have translated "my government

⁴⁵ There are uncertainties about the correct translation. In the first place it is not clear to me whether the *ana* in l. 9 has the same meaning as TA* in l. 11 and r. 2, hence my hesitation between "to" or "from" in these two cases. Secondly, I am unsure whether LÚ*.3.U₅.MEŠ *ka-a-ma-nu-te* and LÚ* *qur-but*.MEŠ are to be understood as plurals, or abstracts ("from/to the permanent 'third-riders'" or "from/to a permanent 'third-ridership'"). Whether plural or abstract, I have no idea if the form in r. 2 should be taken as simply (*ša*) *qurbūti* or (*ša*) *qurbūtūi*!

department". It is plainly important for us.⁴⁶ In CTN 2 p. 186 I wrote that: "*bēt bēlē* "masters' house" is a phrase used (with suitable changes of suffix), to refer to the administrative department under which a person works" (with references to CAD B 195a and K. Deller, Or NS 35 (1966) 312). This still appears to be a reasonable approximation, but some examples will help to sustain it.⁴⁷

The phrase "Masters' House" is attested already in a Middle Assyrian administrative context (AfO 19 Taf. VI see Freydank & Saporetti 1989, p. 52 Rs. 17-19), where members of Babu-aha-iddina's household are not to take garments out of "their Masters' House", but to check them within it. In this archive it is almost certain that the textile store belonged to Babu-aha-iddina, which suggests that already in the 13th century the phrase referred not to some other unspecified superiors but to the establishment by which an official was employed. In Neo-Assyrian contexts the concept certainly seems to have this meaning: in ABL 561 the king himself writing to some correspondents shows that it should be loved: "you are people who love your Masters' House" (*rā'imūte ša bēt bēlē-kunu attunu*). In ABL 778 the king again writes "I shall hold you to account for the work of your Masters' House" (*dullu ša bēt bēlē-ka ina qāti-ka uba'a*), and his subject replies "I am doing ... the work of my Masters' House, I am keeping guard for my Masters' House" (... *dulli ša bēt bēlē-ya eppaš, maššartu ša bēt bēlē-ya anaššar*). Revealing also is ABL 415, written to the king by a *rab bēti* and his scribe.⁴⁸ They complain that "our Masters' House" is being despoiled by the Governors, and more specifically the Governor of Arrapha.⁴⁹

Of course the two components of the phrase, "house" and "master", can each be used independently of the other with specific reference to the administrative system. A Babylonian letter associates the phrase *būt bēli-šu* with the term "master" (*bēlu*): "a man who loves his Masters' House, and who sees and hears (anything) will open the ears of his masters" (ABL 288). This satisfactorily confirms that the "Masters" in the phrase are indeed the writer's administrative superiors. As for the "House", although the word obviously has a wide variety of usages, it can also have a precise meaning in an administrative context. In ABL 84, cited above, Bēl-iqīša's rival says "I will cut you off from this House" (*anāku*

⁴⁶ After the text had been submitted I received the substantial study of Fales 2000 devoted to this phrase. This is not the place to comment on his discussion in detail, but our understanding of most of the contexts is broadly similar, and where he detects a different nuance it does not seem to me that this affects the situation as I have described it.

⁴⁷ In addition to passages cited in the text, I have noted the following instances (the list is unlikely to be complete, cf. now Fales 2000): Neo-Assyrian: ABL 523; 620; 845; 1101; SAA 1, 223 (=CT 53, 87); 5, 31 (=ABL 139); 154 (=ABL 787); CTN 2, 186; ADD 62 (see Postgate 1974a, pp. 303-5; SAA 6, 95, not an improvement); SAA 11, 202(=ADB 2).ii.14'-15'; Neo-Babylonian: ABL 897; 1119.

⁴⁸ For the role of the scribe here, compare the pertinent comments of Kinnier Wilson 1972, 95-97.

⁴⁹ Read at the end of l. 9 *ub'-ta-di-du'* (coll.). Typically the writers mention neither the identity of their "House" nor the office of their "Master" (who was recipient of a gift from the king, but has failed to engage in litigation). In the context, he does not seem likely to have been a provincial governor, reminding us that each department, not only provincial governorates, probably had a *rab bēti*.

TA* É *annî aparras-ka*), with the consequence that later “he has gathered my entire Masters’ House, and put it under his control” (*bēt bēlē-ya gabbi iktirik šapluš issakkan*). In ABL 415 the king is exhorted by the major-domo and his scribe to “appoint an aide over his servant’s House, to carry out the House’s legal cases” (*ša qurbūtu ina muḫḫi bēt urdī-šu lipqid dēnāni ša bēti lēpuš*); here the house described by the two officials as “our Masters’ House” is described, from the king’s viewpoint as “his servant’s house”.⁵⁰ From such passages it is clear that such a “House” was a specific entity within the administrative system. Compare also SAA 1, 12 (=ABL 1042) where the king, probably, describes how a man he had dismissed from his post of *rab bēti* had then been installed by the recipient of the letter “in his House inside Arrapha”. Later in the same letter the king says “He is not a good man in the field, and in the House he is not one who organizes(?) his Masters’ House” (*la ina É-im-ma ka-ši-ru ša É EN.MEŠ-šū šu-ú*).

The variety of usages of *bētu* has already been mentioned. The question arises of any “House” whether it is to be understood as an administrative department, a private (if extensive) domestic establishment, a complete agricultural “estate”, or a combination of one or more of these. The Crown Prince and the Queen Mother had their own “House”. For the meaning “estate” SAA 11, 221 (=ADD 675) is valuable, since it proves that the term *bētu* can include a house, people, fields, orchards and sheep. Four of these estates belonged to magnates (the *sartennu*, *sukkallu*, Chief Eunuch, and Deputy Treasurer), but since they are mentioned by their personal names, like the other estate-owners listed in the text, we should probably see these “houses” as their personal property, but the magnates also had administrative “Houses” attached to the office.⁵¹ These are likely to refer to entire organizations rather than single buildings as such, if only because in the provincial capitals, at least, the governors had “palaces” (*ēkallu*) at their disposal. We also have Houses under less exalted officials, such as the House of the Chief Cook (É LÚ.GAL MU.MEŠ, SAA 11, 90 (=ADD 754)). In SAA 7, 115 (=ADD 953), a list of raw materials for textile production, we meet the House of the Carpet-worker (É LÚ *ka-šir*) three times, but also the House of the Cupbearer (r.ii.8; presumably not the Chief Cupbearer), and the House of the Deputy (É LÚ.2-*e*, r.ii.9, also, without the LÚ, i.12).⁵² Where it is used to describe a sector of the administration, we can hesitate as to how exactly it achieved this meaning. Was the shift in meaning from *house* to *office-building* to *government agency* housed within it? Or from *house* to *members of household* to *administrative staff* to *government agency*? However it arose, in the phrase “Masters’ House” *bētu* plainly refers to an administrative department, although that does not necessarily mean there was not also an identifiable building with the same designation.

⁵⁰ The “legal cases” would presumably have been aimed at recouping the depredations of the provincial governors, which sheds rare light on the level of formality prevalent in relations between departments.

⁵¹ Mattila 2000, 143; Postgate 1989, 147 discusses the prebendary land-holdings or estates attached to the offices of some magnates. These are called É, and are particularly difficult to distinguish from administrative households.

⁵² The use of the determinative LÚ obliges us, I think, to translate “House of the Deputy” (pace the SAA edition), and to adopt the same translation for i.12 in the same text, where no LÚ is written, which admittedly makes it difficult to differentiate from the “Second House”.

Sometimes the subject matter does betray the nature of the department. Some are clearly operating in a military context. Our plaintive Bel-iqīša in ABL 84 is involved in horses, and horses belong in the army. Other passages confirm that the concept of the "Masters' House" operates within the military administration.

- CTN 617: "twice or three times we have sent messages to our Masters' House for horses".
- CTN 2, 186 "I sent a message to PN saying 'The forces of their Masters' House are assembled in Halzi'".
- SAA 1, 223 (=CT 53, 87) "Let the king give orders that each man should go to his Masters' House. The troops should not be weakened, not one man should [be missing] from the campaign".

Almost the only official who we know for certain served on the staff of a provincial governor was the *rab bēti*, the "major domo", both for civilian and military affairs. In SAA 1, 264 the author (if the editor is right, perhaps the Governor of Isana) writes "Let me appoint my *rab bēti* along with the responsible officials" to deal with grain supplies. In NL 89 the remainder of the provincial army is delayed, but "the major domo will bring (them)"; similarly in ABL 242 (cf. Postgate 1974a, p. 269).⁵³ He plainly acted as deputy to provincial governors, and we may guess that some of the "Masters' Houses" we encounter in the correspondence were simply provincial governorates. We have already seen that these had both civilian and military functions. Under the governors came an unknown (and no doubt variable) number of *šaknūte*. I see no evidence at present that they had "Houses" of their own, but equally, it can not be ruled out. On the other hand, there must have been government departments which did not fall under the provincial governors, either inside or outside the "royal cohort", and it seems probable that these too were designated "Houses". One example is probably to be found in ABL 415 (see above). Questions that remain to be addressed include the place of work of the members of the administration - were there specially designated government buildings dedicated to certain administrative activities outside the palaces, or were some functions exercised from home?

While the "Masters' House" thus refers to the government department in which someone works, unfortunately the use of this phrase conceals from us the identity and functions of the department in general and of its officials in particular. The problem is that the texts never, or hardly ever, tell us WHO these masters are. It is almost as though the different government departments had responsibilities so nebulous and ill-defined that they did not have designations of their own. Officials writing letters do not specify their own rank or office, and when referring to their superiors they just talk about their "Masters' House". If only they had mentioned their own or their masters' title(s), we should be much better informed as to the

⁵³ For examples of the *rab bēti*'s military role cf. CTN 2, p. 15, footnote 27. However, the fusion of military and civilian administration means that there is no need to maintain my opinion expressed there, that "his original association with the household seems to have become secondary".

structure of the Neo-Assyrian administrative machinery. Nevertheless, one thing does seem clear, that, as we might deduce from the phrase, there was an identifiable *bētu* or department, even if its masters are not specified. Any diagram representing the system would have to take account of these "houses".

Conclusions

My conclusions are

- that the Neo-Assyrian administration was not bureaucratic, and depended on a sense of institutional loyalty and personal interaction up and down the system.
- that the administrative ethos was nevertheless well-developed, with well formulated concepts of responsibility and authority, and of appointment to and dismissal from, offices.
- that the hierarchy of posts within the system is largely invisible to us because of the combination of the non-bureaucratic ethos, and the tantalizing usage of the phrase "Masters' House".

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