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Diplomatics of Late Babylonian Archival Texts:

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Reinhard Pirngruber and Michael Jursa

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Diplomatics, Prosopography, and Possibly Politics: the Transition from the 'Early' Ebabbar Archive to the Main Archive

By Michael Jursa (Vienna)*

The administrative texts from the Ebabbar complex that were found (mostly) by Rassam and are housed (mostly) in the British Museum should be divided, as is well known, into two parts: the main (or 'later') archive, ending in the second year of Xerxes, and the 'early' archive, beginning in the late Assyrian period but mostly extending over the reign of Nabopolassar and the first 20-30 years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule.[1] The cut-off point of the 'early' archive is not entirely certain; 30 Nbk is a convenient terminus ante quem. The subsequent years are badly attested, the bulk of the 'main' archive dates to the years after 40 Nbk.

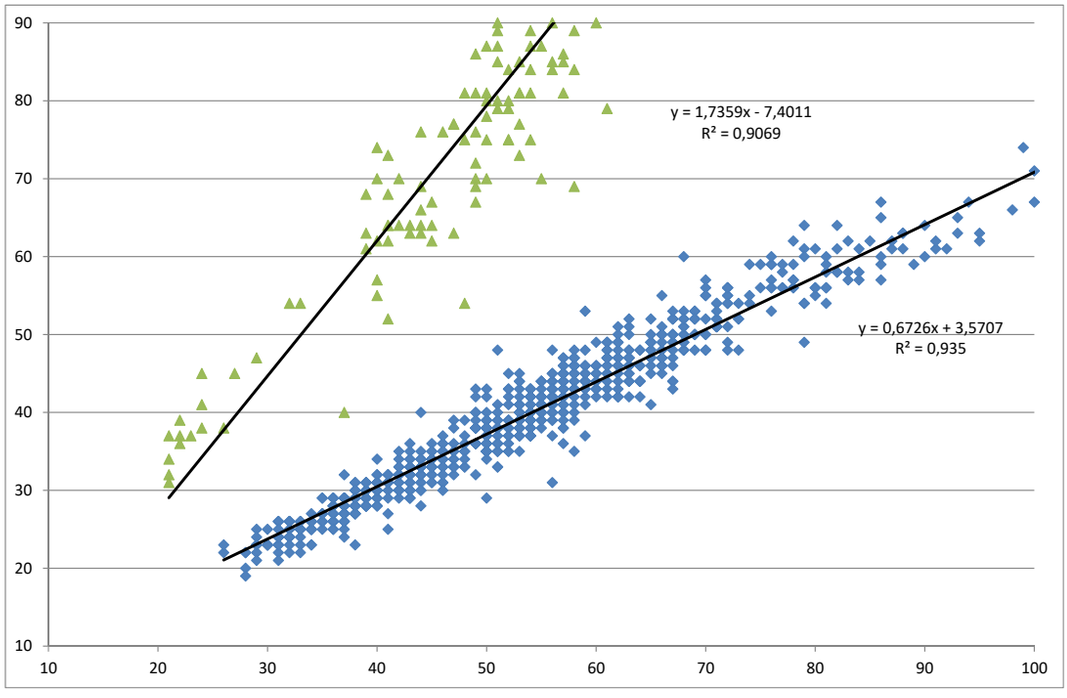

Fig. 1: Eanna tablets, acc Nabonidus - 2 Darius (n = 1000; width = x, height = y; unit: millimetres).

The 'early' archive was first and foremost recognized by the concentration of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar texts in the British Museum's 1882-3-23 collection. Da Riva, in her study on it (Da Riva 2002), added to this a rough, but convenient typology of the principal tablet formats (in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic features) represented in the corpus.[2] Numerically, receipts dominate: most are single transaction texts (using *ittadin* or *maḫir* as principal verbs). The actual transaction is often placed entirely on the obverse, the reverse being empty but for the date. Tablets are often small (2-3 × 3-4 cm) and written rather carelessly. Lists (and multi-transaction texts) are in portrait format, the most important exception being lists of agricultural dues (*imittu*) and field measurements. Accounts, in particular from the sphere of animal husbandry, as well as texts referring to prebend-related payments,[3] bricks and shipping are generally in the landscape format and can be fairly large. Legal documents (witnessed contracts) finally are generally written in landscape format. Much of this, however, is also true for the later or main archive (at least in this very general phrasing), and yet it is frequently possible to distinguish an 'early' from a 'late' Ebabbar text at a single glance, before even the intrinsic features of the texts have been taken into account. Why this is the case will be the first *investigandum* of this paper.

*) A first version of this paper was drafted under the auspices of the research project "Diplomatics and Palaeography of Neo- and Late Babylonian Archival Documents," funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), P26104; it was concluded under the auspices of the project "The Material Culture of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC," likewise funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), I 3927-G25.

[1]) Bongenaar 1997 and Da Riva 2002 are the indispensable guides for the main and the 'early' archives respectively; Jursa 1995 for the agricultural files; MacGinnis 1995 for the letter orders; Zawadzki 2006, 2013a and 2013b for garment texts and the cult; Tarasewicz and Zawadzki 2018 for the animal offering lists.

[2]) See also Jursa 2004 for a more general treatment of the typology of administrative texts in Late Babylonian temple archives.

[3]) In particular, texts dealing with the provisioning of prebendary brewers and bakers with their working materials (*pappasu-maššartu-sattukku* texts).

Tablet shapes as a heuristic criterion for establishing the archival provenance of administrative material

Tablet shape as defined by ration of tablet height (y) to tablet width (x) is a useful – if rough – indicator of archival provenance. This can be demonstrated by taking a large number of Eanna tablets (all preserved in the Yale Babylonian Collection, and hence with easily accessible measurements) as a sample case (see Fig. 1).

The graph shows two well-defined clusters: landscape-oriented (squares) and portrait-oriented (triangles) tablets. There is clearly no great degree of standardiation in terms of tablet size. The bulk of the portrait-oriented tablets lies between $35<x<60$ and $60<y<85$ (arithmetic mean: 51/81); for landscape-oriented tablets, much more numerous overall, some ninety per cent fall into the $35<x<75$ and $30<y<55$ range (arithmetic mean: 54/40). Tablet size was clearly flexible. Tablet proportions, however, were far less so. The linear trend lines in the scatter graph define the ratio between the two dimensions. The linear trend lines' coefficient of determination (R^2) is close to 1, so very high: there is only minimal scattering especially in the case of the landscape-oriented tablets. The mean ratio between height and width for portrait-oriented tablets is 1 : 0.64 (coefficient of variation: 0.1); for landscape-oriented tablets, these values are 1 : 1.35 (coefficient of variation: 0.07). The low CVs correspond to the visual impact of the scatter graph: these ratios are stable, extraordinarily so for the landscape-oriented tablets. This cannot be owed to mere chance. Eanna scribes had a virtual 'style sheet' in mind when producing tablets. For portrait-format tablets, their goal was probably tablets with a ratio of height to width of 3 : 2, for landscape-oriented tablets, the ideal must have been 3 : 4. I would suggest that for preparing landscape-oriented tablets, scribes might well have used 'Pythagorean' loops of string bearing 12 even-spaced knots that served as a template when shaped into a 3 : 4 : 5 right triangle. All of this, of course, is evidence for centrally-controlled standardisation within the Eanna temple's bureaus and scribal workshops – which was probably achieved by the imposition of standards already in scribal training.

'Early' *vs*. 'late' in Sippar: a macroscopic approach

While a large-scale comparison of tablet formats in the style of the Eanna case study above would be desirable for Sippar, a lack of easily accessible data for tablet measurements and in particular the much higher number of broken tablets and fragments in the Sippar collection makes this a task for the future. For the purpose of the present paper, a test corpus of 150 contract tablets – official and private – from Ebabbar contexts was evaluated (84 from the reign of Nabonidus to early in the reign of Darius, 66 from the reign of Nabopolassar and the first 25 years of Nebuchadnezzar, so from the 'early' Sippar archive). The results are as follows:

	mean height	mean width	height/width ratio
Nbn-Dar	4.9	6.2	1 : 1.25
Npl-Nbk	3.2	4.9	1 : 1.5

This means: the later tablets are larger in absolute terms, but also more squarish, with a height to width ratio of 4 : 5. This Sippar group is therefore also larger on average than the contemporary Uruk tablets and has a higher height to width ratio (the Uruk tablets having the 3 : 4 ratio discussed above). The earlier Sippar group has the smallest tablets of all our corpora, and those with the lowest height to width ratio for landscape-oriented tablets that we have seen: 2 : 3 – in other words, when turned by ninety degrees, the early Sippar tablets have the same proportions (with smaller absolute measurements, of course) as portrait-format Uruk tablets. It is this distinctly 'rectangular' shape – in contrast to the 'squarish' impression given by later tablets – that makes the tablets of the earlier group stand out in a comparison with later Sippar tablets. If one adds to this the clear tendency of the 'early' tablets, even if they are legal documents, to display irregular outlines, suggesting that little care was invested by the scribe in the shaping of the tablet – a phenomenon that is rare in the later group and virtually unknown in the case of legal documents –, the physical distinctiveness and *prima vista* recognisability of the documentation belonging to the early Ebabbar archive are explained.

Additional distinctive extrinsic and intrinsic features of administrative and legal documents belonging to the 'early' Ebabbar archive

The following observations are restricted to the most characteristic features (on dossiers and files that are distinct to the early (or the later) Ebabbar archive see below).

The heading of administrative texts may be placed on the upper edge so that it would be readable if the tablet was stored horizontally (*e.g*. BM 50501, Da Riva 2002: 287ff.; BM 50381, Lorenz 2008: no. 17; BM 50600, Tarasewicz and Zawadzki 2018: no. 17).

Small administrative notes may sometimes contain information that was added well after the original text was written. In receipts, in the sentence *ul eṭer*(sur), the negation *ul* was sometimes erased, presumably after the payment had finally been effected (*e.g*. CT 57, 323).

Tablet headings introducing lists by 'Sumerian' mu-bi/ni "its items (are)" or šid "counted (as follows)", which are frequent in early first-millennium (and earlier) administrative documentation and practically fall out of use later in the sixth cenury are still occasionally encountered (*e.g*. VS 6, 304).

The number "9" is occasionally written with three oblique wedges (*e.g*. ZA 4, 145, no. 18, VS 6, 202); this

practice falls out of use at least in Sippar in the later years of Nebuchadnezzar.

Finally, naming patterns in administrative texts are different from those of the later sixth century, following at least partly in line with the practice of the seventh century:[4] family names are not regularly given, even in legal texts, and full three-part names are rare, especially during the reign of Nabopolassar.

The nature of the break between the 'early' and the main Ebabbar archive

We must take a look at the structure of the 'early' archive and at how its composition and 'interests' differ (or do not differ) from those of the main or 'later' archive. The principal files that make up the 'early' archive and their chronological range (between the first Nabopolassar date and 30 Nbk) are as follows[5]:

Cattle management, including the purchase of animals for silver: 27 texts, 11 Npl until 26 Nbk; *e.g*. BM 63334 (20 Nbk), *Nbk*. 132 (22 Nbk), *Nbk*. 140 (24 Nbk), BM 69211 (26 Nbk). The purchase of cattle is also a major topic in the main archive, but the fodder texts that are frequent in the later periods are missing in the early file.

Sheep (and goats), including the purchase of animals for silver: 80 texts, one of the largest files; *e.g*. MLVS 3, 60 (22 Nbk), CT 57, 214 (24 Nbk), CT 56, 423 (25 Nbk), CT 55, 625 (27 Nbk), BM 79689 (28 Nbk), CT 55, 606 (29 Nbk). This group includes numerous distinct herd inspection texts that have no equivalent in the later archive (van Driel 1993: 257; Da Riva 2002: 235).[6] In other aspects there is continuity, *e.g*. with regard to the role of the shepherd of the regular offerings (*rēʾi sattukki*; Bongenaar 1997: 416ff.).

Birds: 18 texts, 9-26 Nbk, with a concentration of texts in the period from 24 Nbk onwards; *e.g*. CT 55, 723 (9 Nbk), CT 55, 725 (10 Nbk), CT 55, 724 (19 Nbk), Dillard FLP 1534 (20 Nbk), *Nbk*. 145 (24 Nbk), *Nbk*. 152 (25 Nbk), *Nbk*. 159 (26 Nbk). Also here, the fodder texts that are an important sub-group of the bird texts in the later archive are missing in the early archive.

Animal offering lists: a large file, edited in Tarasewicz and Zawadzki 2018. It includes foremost 123 rosters (plus numerous fragments) of six or seven columns, from the Assyrian period until 17 Nbk;[7] there is also a much smaller number of less strictly formatted or untabulated texts. The tabulated texts from the later archive follow a different format.

Prebendary materials (bakers, brewers): most of the pertinent material (90 of ca. 120 texts) belongs to the reign of Nabopolassar.[8] There is little from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, a few examples follow: *Nbk*. 25 (2 Nbk), BM 74415 (13 Nbk), BM 74441 (16 Nbk), CT 55, 765 (18 Nbk), CT 57, 696 (20 Nbk). Most of the documentation concerns the prebendary bakers and, to a lesser extent, the brewers. The organisation underlying the allotment of foodstuffs to these professional groups is not fundamentally different from what we encounter in the later archive (Bongenaar 1997: 166ff.). The office of "overseer" (*šāpiru*) of priestly professions, however, which is quite prominent in the later archive, is either non-existent or at best very rarely attested in the earlier archive (Bongenaar 1997: 176, 207). Sometimes early texts treat bakers and brewers together, which is unusual later (Da Riva 2002: 320). Both facts reflect the different, *i.e*. smaller, scale on which the system operated in the first decades of the Neo-Babylonian period. Also, the format of the texts is different (Da Riva 2002: 320ff.; Bongenaar 1997: 167ff., 201ff.) and the earlier group lacks an equivalent for the accounts of prebendary income (*pappasu*) such as CT 57, 309 (6 Nbn).

Garments of the gods: a large group of well over 140 texts,[9] referring to the manufacturing and maintenance of the divine wardrobe. Tablet formats for the main sub-files are different for the 'early' and the main archive (Zawadzki 2013b).[10] The case of the well-attested and long-lived weaver Nabû-bēl-šumāti is particularly instructive (Zawadzki 2006: 219f.; Zawadzki 2013b: 290ff.). He is attested from Nabopolassar's reign until 23 Nbk – so throughout the time-frame covered by the 'early' archive and then 're-surfaces'

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[4]) For which see Nielsen 2011: 129ff.

[5]) Examples are cited preferably from the second and third decade of Nebuchadnezzar's reign as we are interested in the end of the archive and its transition to the main archive. While the numbers that are given for the size of the individual files are based on my notes and could easily be expanded by including yet more unpublished material, the relative size of the groups is representative of the whole. Only the animal offering lists and the documentation on the garments of the gods are somewhat over-represented, owing to the editing work of St. Zawadzki.

[6]) The similar cattle inspection texts (van Driel 1995: 239) have an equivalent in the later archive. The sheep group includes a file on sheep 'distributed' to tenants of the temple's houses (Tarasewicz and Zawadzki 2018: nos. 328ff.); this file begins in 9 Npl and continues into the main archive.

[7]) Tarasewicz and Zawadzki 2018: nos. 1-126; nos. 27-29 are supposed to be from the time of Cyrus. After 17 Nbk the sequence of these texts picks up again only under Nabonidus. A different text format is introduced at the latest in the 31st year of Nebuchadnezzar (Tarasewicz and Zawadzki 2018: nos. 237ff. and p. 44f.). These texts are part of the main archive.

[8]) Da Riva 2002: 315. She has 80+ texts from the reign of Nabopolassar and 110 in total.

[9]) Zawadzki 2006, 2013b. Quantification is difficult owing to the high number of (hard to date) fragments.

[10]) "Early *dullu peṣû* texts" *vs*. "classical [*i.e*. 'later', MJ] *dullu peṣû* texts"; "early *miḫṣu tenû* texts" *vs*. "classical *miḫṣu tenû* texts".

again in 39 Nbk, when the documentation from the main archive becomes denser again – there is continuity in the personnel, but change in the documentation.

Wool and garments, not related to the cult: some 20+ texts, of various formats, mostly 'small'; *e.g.* BM 49529 (2 Nbk), BM 49214 (4 Nbk), BM 73327 (11 Nbk), CT 56, 619 (21 Nbk).

Silver expenditure: this is a relatively small group of tablets (30+) if one excludes texts dealing with the purchase of animals and building materials; *e.g.* HSM 1891.12.5 (acc Nbk), *Nbk*. 30 (3 Nbk), CT 56, 593 (6 Nbk), *Nbk*. 81 (9 Nbk), BM 75307 (22 Nbk), *Nbk*. 171 (26 Nbk), CT 57, 865 (27 Nbk), BM 68389 (28 Nbk). Most texts are quite short. The impression given by the documentation is that the temple did not yet rely as heavily on money-based transaction during the early Neo-Babylonian period as it did from the reign of Nabonidus onwards.[11] This is probably owed to the increasing importance of the temple's use of dates as cash crop in the later period (see below).

Field measurements, agricultural dues: some 90+ texts; *e.g.* CT 57, 14 (7 Nbk), CT 56, 191 (14 Nbk), CT 56, 484 (20 Nbk), BM 59157 (22 Nbk), CT 56, 264 (24 Nbk), BM 83693 (26 Nbk), CT 56, 471 (29 Nbk). Some subfiles are restricted to the 'early' archive, such as the field measurement texts (Da Riva 2002: 141ff.); in other cases, essentially identical administrative procedures are documented with texts of different formats in the two archives.[12] The principal difference between the 'early' and the 'late' agrarian regime in Ebabbar is the dominance of the rent farm system in the latter from the reign of Nabonidus onwards (Jursa 1995: 85ff.; the early archive does not provide evidence for 'forerunners' to this system).

Building and building materials: this is a rich dossier of 80+ texts,[13] ranging from short notes dealing with the delivery of bitumen to lengthy accounts of building work; some examples: BM 51815 (1 Nbk), BM 52662 (2 Nbk), BM 49247 (3 Nbk), BM 50187 (5 Nbk), BM 49685 (7 Nbk), BM 49831 (8 Nbk), BM 49568 (9 Nbk), BM 78923 (10 Nbk), BM 49528 (11 Nbk), VS 4, 14 (16 Nbk), CT 55, 322 (19 Nbk), CT 55, 401 (20 Nbk), CT 55, 325 (25 Nbk). There is no direct continuity with the later archive, which has its own building files.

Craft production related to the cult: I know of less than 30 texts referring to goldsmiths and other craftsmen employed in the ambit of the cult; *e.g.* *ArOr* 33, 21 (5 Nbk), CT 55, 300 (24 Nbk), *Nbk*. 158 (25 Nbk), BM 63856 (27 Nbk), *Nbk*. 208 (29 Nbk). The text types are not substantially different from what we find in the (much more substantial) corresponding file of the 'later' archive.

Craftsmen, expenditure of materials and delivery of products: a file of about 40 texts; *e.g.* BM 63443 (1 Nbk), *Nbk*. 23 (2 Nbk), BM 49668 (3 Nbk), BM 114789 (10 Nbk), CT 57, 690 (11 Nbk), CT 55, 233 (12 Nbk), CT 55, 221 (14 Nbk), CT 56, 12 (20 Nbk), *Nbk*. 126[14] (21 Nbk), CT 55, 246 (22 Nbk), CT 55, 236 (23 Nbk), BM 63839 (26 Nbk), *Nbk*. 177 (27 Nbk), BM 63828 (28 Nbk). The text formats have been described by Bongenaar 1997: 357ff. and are not substantially different in the two archives.

Ration payments, ration lists and related expenses: about 30 texts; *e.g.* *Iraq* 28, 157c (3 Nbk), BM 62387 (7 Nbk), *Nbk*. 75 (9 Nbk), CT 56, 448 (10 Nbk), CT 56, 370 (16 Nbk), CT 57, 267 (19 Nbk), *Nbk*. 148 (25 Nbk), CT 56, 492 (26 Nbk), *Nbk*. 174 (27 Nbk), *Nbk*. 190 (28 Nbk). This file is much smaller (also in proportion to other text groups) than the corresponding file in the 'late' archive, and there are fewer long lists. However, no structural change in the organisation of the ration system is apparent when comparing the two archives. The workmen, mostly *širku*s, of the inner city, *ša qabalti āli* (*e.g.* Bongenaar 1997: 356f.), the largest body of Ebabbar's non-rural workforce, are already attested in the 'early' archive (*e.g.* BM 63809 (23 Nbk)).

Dates sold: only a few texts can be listed here, *e.g.* CT 56, 474 (19 Nbk). This is in striking contrast to the 'later' archive, where this file is quite substantial. This is owed to the changing focus of the Ebabbar's agrarian economy (Jursa 2010: 357ff., 576ff.).

Lists of workers (and working materials): a small file (< 20; *e.g.* VS 6, 27 (7 Nbk), CTMMA 4, 10 (7 Nbk), BM 114819 (11 Nbk), CTMMA 4, 4 (14 Nbk), CT 56, 591 (20 Nbk); many or most texts are probably related to the building files mentioned above.

Travel expenses: a small file of less than 20 tablets, *e.g.* BM 49824 (3 Nbk), BM 74876 (7 Nbk), BM 79705 (9 Nbk), BM 74446 (20+ Nbk), Dillard, FLP 1539 (23 Nbk), CT 57, 266 (25 Nbk), *Nbk*. 165 (26 Nbk), *Nbk*. 173 (27 Nbk), BM 78828 (28 Nbk). This includes texts dealing with provisions for temple personnel drafted for royal campaigns or for men taking the royal share of the offerings to the king (*ša kurummat šarri*; *e.g.* BM 74876). Both text types also exist in the 'later' archive.

There is thus evidence for files that are limited to the 'early' archive (*e.g.* building, field measurements) and refer to particular concerns that were no longer present

[11]) Discussed in Jursa 2010: 510ff.

[12]) See Da Riva 2002: 59ff. for pertinent text types. The most distinctive text type of the 'early' archive that is not continued in the 'late' archive is the multi-column *imittu* list (Jursa 1995: 150ff.).

[13]) Many more texts will be available once the monograph on the subject announced by S. Zawadzki will be published.

[14]) One of several texts dealing with glue and carpenters from this period.

later. Conversely, some important themes of the main archive are not yet attested in the 'early' group, as the institutions in question still had to be developed (rent farming, date sales and generally the use of silver). Some files may simply be missing in the smaller, earlier group owing to the accidents of discovery (*e.g.* fodder, *kissatu*, texts). When direct comparisons can be made, we see most often what might be called 'diplomatic change' from one archive to the other: changes in the style of the documentation that do not imply fundamental changes in organisation and at best an expansion in scale of the temple's activities from the 'early' to the main archive (*e.g.* offering lists, management of prebendary service, ration payments, *imittu* lists, garments of the gods).

Comparative evidence for other archival 'breaks' may be invoked for an attempt to explain this pattern. The two main temple archives from the long sixth century, Eanna and Ebabbar, provide evidence for a total of three, possibly four, such archival ruptures: Eanna in the second year of Darius, Ebabbar in the second year of Xerxes, the break between the 'early' and the main Ebabbar archive here under discussion, which dates to the third decade of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and finally a break in the Eanna archive that occurred at roughly the same time or slightly earlier, in Nebuchadnezzar's early twenties, and that divides the Eanna documentation in an 'early' and a main group.

In Uruk, in the second year of Darius, the political upheavals of the period (related to the rebellions against Persian rule) and temple-internal difficulties connected with the rent farmer Gimillu precipitated administrative reform, almost certainly with royal consent and/or at royal instigation: several officials were deposed, others were appointed (from within the temple). Accounts were settled and old files were subsequently put into storage, while the working archive was moved elsewhere. There was, however, no complete interruption of the temple's economic and cultic activities.[15]

Events in Sippar in the second year of Xerxes were different. The Ebabbar temple archive did not undergo a systematic process of accounting and reorganisation as did the Eanna establishment a few decades earlier. There is no explicit evidence for a settlement of accounts, and there is also no numerical build-up of tablets right at the end similar to what we see in Uruk, which could be taken as a reflex of more intensive administrative activities in this phase: we do not have the main Ebabbar temple archive minus a few files that were considered crucial in the second year of Xerxes. It is possible that the bulk of the main Ebabbar archive was in fact discarded around 20 Dar and that some ephemeral material continued to be added unsystematically to this lot until the second year of Xerxes. However, there is a preponderance among the 'late' administrative material of ephemeral documentation related to the cult and the preparation of the food offerings that cannot easily be accounted for in this way. This bias towards documentation for cult-related activities in the context of a discarded lot of tablets might be taken to suggest that there was less interest in the cult than in other aspects of the Ebabbar's activities after 2 Xer: perhaps the offering cycles were suspended, at least temporarily. In any case, this aspect of the archive's closure must be linked to the historical events evolving around the rebellions against Persian rule after the death of Darius.[16]

The archival break in the Eanna documentation in the mid-reign of Nebuchadnezzar is still awaiting a full discussion. It is reflected in the closure of several different administrative 'files'.[17] Also, the overall nature of the archive changes: from this point onwards, we have many more witnessed legal documents while the relative share of the administrative documentation within the temple archive declines. This change can be linked to a royal intervention in the administration of the temple, which aimed at strengthening the central control over temple resources: the power of 'priestly' self-governance was curtailed and more royal administrators were brought in. This happened, at least in part, as a response to abuses of power attributed to the High Priest (*šatammu*) of Eanna, Nabû-ahhē-iddin of the Nūr-Sîn family, who was removed from office at this juncture.[18]

Do any of these three archival breaks provide a model for the transition in Sippar from the 'early' to the main archive?

Clearly, both the case of Eanna in the second year of Darius and that of Ebabbar in the second year of Xerxes are not easily compared to the present case: the background in major political disruptions is missing in the case of Ebabbar around or after the twentieth year of Nebuchadnezzar. On the other hand, the almost contemporary case of Eanna is an obviously more promising *comparandum*. Are there signs of an administrative shake-up that accompanied the change in administrative procedures also in Ebabbar?

The incumbent of the highest priestly office, that of Chief Priest, *šangû*, changed about the time we are interested in, but the outgoing (dead?) *šangû* was simply replaced by his son. What is more, the office remained in the hands of the same family (Šangû-Sippar) until the reign of Nabonidus when it fell into the control of a family originating in Babylon, Šangû-Ištar-Bābili (Bongenaar 1997: 13). It is unknown what happened to the office of 'Royal Resident', *qīpu*, who outranked the *šangû*, during the period of transition (Bongenaar 1997: 47): while the

[15]) The discussion is summarized in Frahm and Jursa 2011: 19.

[16]) The end of the main Ebabbar archive is discussed in Jursa 2018.

[17]) See also Pirngruber's paper in the present volume.

[18]) Jursa and Gordin 2018, esp. 58-63.

incumbents changed, it is not evident that the nature of the office did, too. In sum then, the top echelon of Ebabbar's administration does not seem to have undergone a structural shift at the juncture we are interested in.

The perhaps most incisive new feature of the new administrative regime in Eanna after the mid-reign of Nebuchadnezzar is the much greater role played by courtiers, *ša rēši* or *ša rēš šarri*. The evidence in Sippar is only superficially similar. Courtiers have indeed no role in the early archive, those that are mentioned in the sources were not affiliated to the temple on a permanent basis. Such royal administrators appear regularly only later, from the (very) late reign of Nebuchadnezzar onwards, and they played a role in the temple on a major scale only from the reign of Nabonidus onwards.[19] So, also Ebabbar came under close royal control in a similar way to Eanna, but the process was slower and cannot be directly connected to the change in archive (and/or archival procedures).

Scribes and scribal families

It remains to turn to the most obvious agents of diplomatic and administrative changes, the scribes. Administrative texts do not indicate the names of the scribes who produced them, but the numerous legal documents written in the ambit of the temple bureaucracy do. It is therefore possible to track the major scribal families in the 'early' archive and compare them to those in evidence in the 'later' archive.

The following scribes of temple texts and of private texts displaying a connection to Ebabbar are attested in the 'early' archive;[20] the listing is ordered according to family name (in bold):

Nabû-ahhē-bulliṭ/**Agru** 21 Kan (CTMMA 4, 2)
Nabû-būnu-šūtur/**Ahūtu** Npl
Nabû-bēlšunu/Nadnāya/**Atû** 18 Npl (B)

Etellu/Saggilu/**Bēl-eṭēri** 19 Npl - Nbk
Nabû-naʾid/**Bēl-[eṭēri]** 8 Nbk
Nergal-nāṣir/**Bēl-eṭēri** 15-19 Npl (frequent, often private)
Rēmūt-Nabû/Bēl-aḫu-iddin/**Bēl-eṭēri** 15 Npl - 2 Nbk (frequent)

Rēmūt//**Dābibī** (9 Npl, once; private?)

Aqarā//**Ileʾi-Marduk** or **Zērāya**[21] Npl
Itti-Marduk-balāṭu/**Ileʾi-Marduk** or **Zērāya**, temple scribe, *ṭupšar bīti*;[22] Npl-Nbk
Marduk-šākin-salīmi/**Ileʾi-Marduk**, 15 Npl (B)
Nabû-tultabši-līšir/Aqarā/**Ileʾi-Marduk** 16 Npl - 2 Nbk (frequent)
Nergal-uballiṭ/Aqarā/**Ileʾi-Marduk** 17 Npl
Itti-Šamaš-balāṭu/Zikaru/**Isinnāya** 16 Npl - 11 Nbk
Šamaš-nāṣir/Bēl-ibni/**Isinnāya** 12 Npl - 2 Nbk

Aplāya/**Ša-nāšišu** 17-19 Npl
Bēl-usāti/**Ša-nāšišu** 23 Npl (CTMMA 4, 3)
MU?/**Ša-nāšišu** 5 Npl
Erība-Marduk/Marduk-zēru-ibni/**Šangû-Ištar-Bābili** ca. 5 Nbk
Nabû-ēṭer/**Šangû-Ištar-Bābili** 17 Npl (Babylon)
Zēria/Bēl-ibni/**Šangû-Šamaš** Kan - 20 Npl
Šamaš-munammir/Šamaš-mukīn-apli/**Šangû-Sippar** 2 Npl - 4 Nbk (B)

Overall, taking into account also the number of attestations of the individual scribes, the most prominent families by far are the Ileʾi-Marduks (or Zērāyas) – the only known holder of the office of 'Temple Scribe' is one of their number – and the Bēl-eṭēris, who number the best-known and most active scribe in the early archive among their members.[23] These two families are followed at some distance by the Isinnāyas. Otherwise, apart from a few families that are otherwise nearly unknown, there are only a few members of the Ša-nāšišu and Šangû-Sippar/Šamaš clans, as well as two members of the Šangû-Ištar-Bābili family – but they are rare, and at least one of the Šangû-Ištar-Bābilis is only attested in Babylon.

The evidence from the later archive is strikingly different.[24] The important 'temple' or 'College Scribes' are nearly all Šangû-Ištar-Bābilis,[25] with a few Šangû-Sippars[26] and one Ṣāḫit-ginê, the famous Marduk-rēmanni (Waerzeggers 2014). Among the scribes of official documents of Ebabbar in general, the Šangû-Ištar-Bābili family is again the best-attested,[27] followed by Ša-nāšišu und

[19]) The evidence is collected in Bongenaar 1997: 99ff.; prosopography p. 108ff. Alphabet scribes (*sēpiru*) became important even later, under Persian rule (Da Riva 2002: 416 for a rare exception (Bēl-ibni)).

[20]) Only texts dated to Nabopolassar's and Nebuchadnezzar's reign (until 30 Nbk) are taken into account. The data come mostly from Da Riva 202: 363ff. (no explicit references are given in such cases) and from Bongenaar 1997: 481ff. (indicated "B"); names not listed in either collection are given full references.

[21]) These two family names are used interchangeably (see also Da Riva 2002: 409f. and Jursa 1995: 73).

[22]) See Bongenaar 1997: 56ff. for this high administrative office. Itti-Marduk-balāṭu is the only securely identified office holder in the 'early' archive.

[23]) Da Riva 2002: 339ff.

[24]) Data come from Bongenaar 1997.

[25]) Bēl-iddin: 3 Cyr - 28 Dar; Habaṣīru, acc Camb - 20 Dar; Kî-Bēl, 6-12 Nbn; Kî-Nabû, 14 Nbn - 3 Camb; Marduk-bēlšunu, 29 Dar - 2 Xer; Marduk-mukīn-apli, 28 Dar - 2 Xer; Marduk-nāṣir, 8 Nbn - 6 Cyr; Nabû-aḫḫē-šullim. 6 Cam - 18 Dar, Nabû-šumu-līšir, 5 Nbn - 7 Cyr; Uballissu-Gula, acc - 36 Dar.

[26]) Balāṭu, 6 Nbn - 1 Camb; Bēl-uballiṭ, 10 Nbn - 4 Cyr.

[27]) Aḫḫē-iddin-Marduk, Bēl-iddin, Bēl-ittannu, Erība-Marduk, Iddin-Nabû (2), Kî-Nabû, Marduk-bēlšunu, Marduk-nāṣir,

Šangû-Sippar/Šamaš.[28] There are also a few Isinnāyas.[29] Otherwise no prominent Sippar family is well represented among the scribes of Ebabbar.[30] The dominant scribal clans from the time of the early archive, however, the Bēl-eṭēri and the Ileʾi-Marduk, play practically no role whatsoever for the Ebabbar administration in the later archive.[31]

Conclusion

The distinctiveness of the 'early' archive, extending into the third decade of Nebuchadnezzar's reign but not beyond, from the 'later' or main archive of the Ebabbar temple is beyond doubt: the distribution of the pertinent texts in the British Museum's collections cannot be explained otherwise. Macroscopically, the 'early' tablets are distinct from the 'later' Sippar documentation in their format. The files represented in the 'early' archive are likewise distinctive, containing document types and *foci* that do not reappear in the main archive, while lacking files that are important in the 'later' group. At the same time, there is no evidence for far-reaching, structural change in the temple's administrative procedures. What substantial change there is seems mostly related to the smaller scale on which the temple operated in the early period and to the subsequent expansion. Contrary to the somewhat similar case of the Eanna, there is no evidence for change in the highest echelons of the temple administration – change that in Uruk was imposed by the royal administration. Courtiers and other representatives of royal power who take over many aspects of Eanna's administration half-way through the reign of Nebuchadnezzar make their appearance in Sippar only with Nabonidus.

The most probable agents of change 'on the ground' that can be identified are clearly the scribal families: at the time of the shift from the 'early' to the 'late' archive, the Bēl-eṭēris and Ileʾi-Marduks lose their important role in the scribal community of the Ebabbar, to be replaced essentially by the Šangû-Ištar-Bābilis. This family had been present in the temple earlier, also in scribal circles, but there at least it had played a minor role. The same is true for the Ša-nāšišus. Also they were present in Sippar in the late seventh and early sixth century, but they rose to prominence only later in the sixth century. Concomitantly, it follows that scribal training was strongly family-based in this period, as it continued to be over half a century later, according to the evidence of the Bēl-rēmanni archive.

Causation remains uncertain. Was the change in Ebabbar in the end a change in scribal families whose reasons must be sought in entirely local upheavals of uncertain origin? This is possible, but arguably improbable. The change in archives roughly[32] coincides with the arrival in Sippar of families from Babylon that subsequently would gain much importance in the city and the Ebabbar administration – including one branch of the Ša-nāšišu family.[33] While not all local structures were overturned – the Šangû-Sippar maintained their hold on the office of Chief Priest (*šangû*), as we have seen – these families from Babylon strengthened the link between the provincial city of Sippar and the capital. They did so certainly in the royal interest, if not with explicit royal backing.[34] This must also be true for the Šangû-Ištar-Bābili family, whose very name betrays their link to Babylon, their presence in Sippar already in the late seventh century notwithstanding. The newly important scribal clans thus probably owed their enhanced status to a facet of the Neo-Babylonian state's interest in centralisation and institution building,[35] while the losers – the Sipparean Bēl-eṭēri and Ileʾi-Marduk clans – probably regretted a bygone era of strong local autonomy.

Nabû-aḫḫē-šullim, Nabû-ittannu, Nabû-šumu-līšir, Nidintu, Šamaš-tabni-uṣur (2), Šamaš-uballiṭ.

[28]) Šangû-Sippar/Šamaš: Bēl-aḫḫē-iddin, Bēl-rēmanni, Bēl-uballiṭ, Ea-mudammiq, Iddin-Nabû, Iqīša-Marduk, Nabû-mukīn-zēri, Šamaš-munammir; Ša-nāšišu: Arad-Gula, Iddin-Nabû, Marduk-ēṭer, Mušallim-Marduk, Nabû-šumu-iškun, Naʾid-Bēl.

[29]) Arad-Bēl, Nabû-zēru-līšir, Nidintu, Rēmūt-Bēl, Šamaš-kāṣir.

[30]) But mention should be made of the important scribe Arad-Bēl of the Adad-šammê family – his clan had no particular role in the city.

[31]) The Bēl-eṭēri family has the following scribes, all of whom are only attested in private contexts: Bēl-rēʾûšunu, Erība-Marduk/Sîn-il, Gimillu/Erība-Marduk, Itti-Šamaš-balāṭu. Ileʾi-Marduk: Nidintu (only private), Šūzubu (mostly private, very occasionally official contexts, reign of Darius).

[32]) Given the scarcity of texts from the third decade of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, the dating of the phenomena in question is necessarily imprecise.

[33]) Waerzeggers 2014: 28ff.

[34]) The fate of the Sipparean Ṣāḫit-ginê and Ša-nāšišu in the later Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period bears out the peristence of these family's links to the capital and the centre of power (Waerzeggers 2014).

[35]) Jursa and Gordin 2019: 38ff.

Abbreviations and Bibliography

AnOr 8 = Pohl 1933; AUWE 5 = Gehlken 1990; *BaM* 21 = Stolper 1990a; BE 8 = Clay 1908; BE 9 = Hilprecht 1898; BE 10 = Clay 1904; BIN 1 = Keiser 1918; CD = Sack 1994; CT 55-57 = Pinches 1982; CUSAS 28 = Pearce and Wunsch 2014; EE = Stolper 1985; GC 1 = Dougherty 1923; GC 2 = Dougherty 1933; IMT = Donbaz and Stolper 1997; *Iraq* 59 = Jursa 1997; JCS 36 = Ellis 1984; *Nisaba* 20 = Altavilla and Walker 2009; *Nisaba* 28 = Altavilla and Walker 2016; NRVU I = San Nicolò and Ungnad 1935; OECT 10 = McEwan 1984; OIP 122 = Weisberg 2003; PBS 2/1 = Clay 1912; *SbB* 2 = Levavi 2018; *TuM* 2/3 = Krückmann 1933; UCP 9/1 = Lutz 1927; TCL 12 = Contenau 1927; VS 4 = Ungnad 1907; VS 7 = Ungnad 1907; VS 20 = Jakob-Rost and Freydank 1978; YOS 6 = Dougherty 1920; YOS 7 = Tremayne 1925; YOS 11 = van Dijk, Goetze and Hussey 1985; YOS 15 = Goetze 2009; YOS 17 = Weisberg 1980; YOS 19 = Beaulieu 2000; YOS 21 = Frahm and Jursa 2011.

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