

# AGENCY AND THE NEO-ASSYRIAN WOMEN OF THE PALACE

Saana Teppo

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article<sup>1</sup> is to shed more light on the role of women in Neo-Assyrian society, as it is a fairly underdeveloped subject in Assyriology. To date, no comprehensive presentation on women's position in the Neo-Assyrian Empire has been published, although the Empire dominated the whole of the Near East from c. 934 BC until the fall of its capital Nineveh in 612 BC. By exploring women's agency, this article will produce new perspectives on ways in which women functioned in that society. To achieve this, I will complement the conventions of the Assyriological text-centered approach with theories and concepts from other fields researching culture and society. Theoretical approaches and diverse methods that are found in other fields of cultural studies, anthropology and sociology can be useful in Assyriology as well.<sup>2</sup>

The theoretical emphasis of this article is in the relationships among the individual, society and power, which collide in the concept of agency. To my knowledge, the concept of agency has not been used before in Assyriological research. Implicitly, in most writings, men have been seen as subjects and women as objects, with an exception of the royal women of the Empire.<sup>3</sup> This article hopes to take a broader look at the agency of the women in the palaces of the Empire.

I will first briefly discuss the theoretical considerations relating to the concept of agency, after which I will outline the method and material of this article. In Section 4, a general outline of "normal" Neo-Assyrian women is given in order to emphasize the exceptional character of the women who are the subject of this article. After that, the women that were associated with the palaces will be

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my MA thesis (Teppo 2005), which I am in the process of expanding into a doctoral dissertation. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Simo Parpola, Professor Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Dr. Raija Mattila and M. Phil. Margot Stout Whiting for their valuable help with this article.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bahrani 2001.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Melville 1999.

discussed. These can broadly be divided into three groups: first those who occupy the palace due to their relationship with the king, i.e., members of the royal family (Section 5). Second, there are those women who act as the workforce of the palace (Sections 6–9). These include high-ranking administrators, as well as cooks and weavers. The third group consists of those women who have a connection with the palace, but whose duties or position in the palace is not entirely clear (Sections 10–11). Finally, I discuss the seclusion of the women in the palaces (Section 12) and present some concluding remarks in Section 13.

## 2. AGENCY

Agency is often equated with individual freedom, the capacity to subordinate objects to suit one's own needs.<sup>4</sup> Sirpa Tenhunen, in her doctoral dissertation *Secret Freedom in the City: Women's Wage Work and Agency in Calcutta*, criticizes this and takes the concept of agency further. She writes that agency can be many things and it should be interpreted within specific historical, cultural and social contexts.<sup>5</sup> Tenhunen's view is that subjects are constituted through social discourses while, at the same time, these discourses provide the basis for agency.<sup>6</sup> This will also be the view of this article.

The working class women of Calcutta resemble the women of Neo-Assyrian Empire in many ways. They are poorly researched and mostly portrayed as a passive group, unable to make changes or choices of their own.<sup>7</sup> Like Third World women, Neo-Assyrian women are assumed to be a homogenous group of victims of their own traditional sexist culture. This discourse which implicitly assumes that the emancipated modern Western woman is the "ideal" norm and yardstick by which to measure cultural Others,<sup>8</sup> should be avoided at all costs when one researches these non-Western women.

The question of agency was more widely approached in anthropological discussion in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1984, most of the earlier work on agency was placed under the rubric of practice theory, which was mainly interested in looking at how structures of society are reproduced. Resistance studies, born about the same time, paid more attention to issues of power, change and discontinuity in a society. The problem shared by practice theory, resistance studies

<sup>4</sup> For example, Giddens 1979, 1987; Foucault 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 5–6.

<sup>6</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 11–13.

<sup>7</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 4.

<sup>8</sup> Mohanty 1991: 54–56.

and some feminist studies is that they do not acknowledge subjects as culturally constructed.<sup>9</sup>

The modernist juxtaposing of the individual and structure can be seen, for example, in Anthony Giddens' writings. Although he notes that persons are also products of structures, he still associates agency with power and autonomy, in contrast to powerlessness and dependency.<sup>10</sup> This approach, which juxtaposes subject and object, can lead to a narrow view of agency. There is a danger of imposing the western idea of the free individual as subject and agent on women in cultures where this idea rarely works, for example, in ancient Assyria. Agency and empowerment do not always require self-sufficiency.<sup>11</sup>

Only by understanding the subject as culturally constructed, can we understand that even seemingly submissive behavior can be a form of agency depending on the context. For example, persons in a Bengali village pursue differing and conflicting interests, but always as members of a family hierarchy, not as individuals seeking their individual rights.<sup>12</sup>

I agree with Tenhunen that agency is different in different cultures and it should be interpreted within specific historical, cultural and social contexts. I also agree with her that even seemingly submissive behavior can be a form of agency. Nonetheless, the nature of the material caused me to define the concept of agency in a simpler way. Even a subordinate *act* can be a form of agency, but woman's agency cannot be evaluated if she does not act at all, as is often the case in Neo-Assyrian documents. Therefore, in this article, only those women who act in the society in some way (according to the sources that we have) have agency.

This definition of agency can be further modified and the women "agents" separated into two groups. The *explicit agents* express their agency via *acting*, whereas the agency of the *implicit agents* must be assumed from the context.<sup>13</sup> For example, a *šakintu* ('female administrator') who appears in a document as a buyer of a slave is an explicit agent. On the other hand, a *šakintu* who appears in a list of personnel is an implicit agent because, although she is not acting in the document, her status as a *šakintu* implies her ability to act.

One aspect of agency is the problem of who is designated as an active force, able to practice agency in a society. In other words: where do people think agency resides in their society?<sup>14</sup> Men occupy the valued spatial institutions like courts of

<sup>9</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 6–8.

<sup>10</sup> Giddens 1979: 88–95.

<sup>11</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 6–9.

<sup>12</sup> Davis 1983.

<sup>13</sup> On a related issue: see Wrong 1980: 6–10 for the distinction between "having power" and "exercising power."

<sup>14</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 16–17.

law whereas women's spaces contain devalued knowledge of childcare and cooking.<sup>15</sup> Both a clerk in a corporation and a housewife act in a social setting, but a clerk is usually regarded as the more significant agent. This is not because of anything they do, but because their spheres of action are perceived differently.<sup>16</sup>

This designation of agency does not happen passively, but is a result of a contest of meanings. Culturally constructed gendered spheres are the bases for this designation of agency. Tenhunen examines gendered spaces (for example, home – outside world) as spheres of agency.<sup>17</sup>

However, because all cultures have their own forms of agency, the public sphere is not naturally endowed with agency. Too often women are seen as slaves to the domestic sphere, which has been seen as apolitical, a somehow secondary sphere included in the public sphere. This has served to diminish their agency.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the textual evidence concerning the Neo-Assyrian Empire is connected to the public sphere. Only some tantalizing glimpses of the private lives of women can be caught in literary works such as myths and proverbs, which are outside the scope of this work.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the subtler, private nuances of agency and the finer nuances of relations among the individual, power and society are practically impossible to find and recognize from the material.

The spheres of agency form a difficult problem in ancient cultures. The only information we have concerning women is mostly written by men. Textual evidence is one huge male sphere of agency.<sup>20</sup> Another problem is the possibility of retrojection from the contemporary world. For example, we cannot be certain – without carefully examining the evidence – that the dichotomy in public-private sphere is not just another concept imposed on the ancient world by us.

Marc van de Mierop writes that the opposition public/private-male/female has been too readily used in ancient Near Eastern studies in general. He sees it as too simplistic and too modern. The customary view is that a woman's role was entirely domestic and that all women who were not domestic were aberrations. This is not the most fruitful way of studying the women of Mesopotamia.<sup>21</sup> Joan Goodnick Westenholz is of the same opinion: one should not assume that there universally exist two separate and unequal spheres. Rather, Westenholz sees the spheres of men and women as overlapping.<sup>22</sup> In this study, I have taken this ambi-

<sup>15</sup> Spain 1992: 10–15.

<sup>16</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 17.

<sup>17</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 16–17.

<sup>18</sup> Tenhunen 1997: 13–14.

<sup>19</sup> Naturally, there is no guarantee on the accuracy of these glimpses in any case.

<sup>20</sup> Iconography is, of course, another matter and is not really within the scope of this work. However, there is no reason to believe that women could affect images any more than texts.

<sup>21</sup> Van de Mierop 1999: 159.

<sup>22</sup> Westenholz 1990: 511.

valence of spheres of action into account by using other criteria (instead of public-private) when categorizing the women in my material.

### 3. METHOD AND MATERIAL

The material for this article has been gathered with the help of two main research tools: *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (PNA, 5 volumes in years 1998–2002) and *The Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts*.<sup>23</sup>

The gathering of the material began with those women of the Empire that are known by their names: 712 altogether.<sup>24</sup> Out of these 712 women, I chose 149 explicit and implicit agents for closer examination. The 563 remaining “invisible women,” (discussed in Section 4) were women who were neither explicit agents (did not act in any way in the sources) nor implicit agents (the sources gave no indication that they were even capable of acting).

I also compiled a list of female professions and titles by using the glossaries of the SAA-series.<sup>25</sup> When this list was compared with the *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts*, I acquired a list of every text where any of these titles were mentioned. This was done on the hypothesis that women with titles would have more agency than other women – a hypothesis that was later confirmed.

There are some special difficulties related to the PNA as a research tool. Names are most often mentioned in lists and sales documents, in order to identify an individual. This might cause a discrepancy in the statistics based on the PNA. However, the picture will be balanced with other material.

Another problem relating to use of the prosopography is the large number of contributors, who often use differing terminology. This can be misleading, especially as it was not within the scope of this article to examine all the original texts. Most of the data in this article relating to women in the PNA (i.e., names beginning with A-S) are gleaned from articles in PNA. However, the PNA is only referred to when the contributors present their own views or interpretation of the text; otherwise, original text identification numbers are given.

Due to lack of space, detailed information is only given on explicit agents in this article. More information on implicit agents can be found in my MA thesis<sup>26</sup> and *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*.

<sup>23</sup> The Corpus is an electronic database situated in Helsinki, Finland, which contains transliterations of almost all Neo-Assyrian texts. I have been able to use the database with the kind permission of Professor Simo Parpola, the director of the Corpus project.

<sup>24</sup> As the PNA has not yet reached the names beginning with š-w, I researched and categorized them myself (119 names altogether), with the help of the *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts*.

<sup>25</sup> State Archives of Assyria, eighteen volumes in the years 1987-2003.

<sup>26</sup> Teppo 2005.

The dates after the end of canonical lists (in 649 BC) are marked with an asterisk after the year (for example 648\*). The post-canonical dates given in PNA (and in this study) are based on Parpola's list of the probable order of post-canonical eponyms. This list can be found in the first volume of PNA.<sup>27</sup> The regnal years of the Neo-Assyrian kings are provided by Amélie Kuhrt.<sup>28</sup> The transliterations in this article follow the style of the SAA-series.

#### 4. INVISIBLE WOMEN

The Urartian [and his magnates] ... are very much afraid of the king, my lord. They tremble and keep silent like women.<sup>29</sup>

With the method described above, I probably reached most of those Neo-Assyrian women of whose agency something can be said. However, from the viewpoint of agency, most Neo-Assyrian women were "invisible" since, for example, a list of women's names says practically nothing of their possible agency. Most of the "invisible women" (563 out of 712 known by name) appear in lists (240 women) and many slaves (195) were also mentioned by name. Dependent women<sup>30</sup> (48 altogether) and women given in pledge for a debt (28) were also found in the documents.<sup>31</sup> This section, with its introduction to these "normal" women of the empire will illuminate the exceptional nature of the women presented later.

There is very little written specifically on Neo-Assyrian women.<sup>32</sup> This deficiency might be partly due to the fact that no law collection is known from the Neo-Assyrian era that would shed light on Neo-Assyrian women in general. On the whole, the lives of the Neo-Assyrian women probably did not differ radically from the lives of other women of ancient Mesopotamia. Certainly, words from the hymn to Gula, goddess of healing, sum it up well:

<sup>27</sup> PNA 1/I: xviii–xxi.

<sup>28</sup> Kuhrt 1995: 479.

<sup>29</sup> SAA 1 32.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to "free men" (*awīlum*) and slaves (*amtum* and *wardum*), there was a class of semi-free people in Mesopotamia, traditionally called *muškēnum* in the law codes. Scholars have had some difficulties placing this class in society outside the framework of the codes. The best suggestion at present is that the *muškēnum* were tied to their land, but were definitely not slaves (Postgate 1992: 237–240). The "dependent women" might have belonged to this semi-free class, even if the term *muškēnum* was not used. The dependent women appear mostly in lists (38).

<sup>31</sup> Teppo 2005: 29–32.

<sup>32</sup> Only one article (Garelli 1998) which deals exclusively with Neo-Assyrian women is known to me. In addition to that, Sarah Melville has written a monograph on Queen Naqia (1999) and an article concerning Neo-Assyrian royal women (2004).

I am a daughter, I am a daughter-in-law, I am a spouse, I am a housekeeper.<sup>33</sup>

A woman lived with her family, under the authority of her father, until she married. The natural state for women was the married one, and her family usually selected her spouse carefully. Both fathers gave contributions for the new household, dowry from the father of the bride and bride wealth from the family of the groom. The marriage was effective only after the bride and groom had moved in together. The aim of any marriage was to produce male heirs. The children would then take care of their parents when they aged.<sup>34</sup>

Divorce was not generally accepted, but did happen in some cases. A husband could send his wife away and pay compensation, but for a woman to leave her husband was a far more serious matter. In a worst-case scenario, the wife was put to death. Polygamy was rare, but presumably did exist.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout Mesopotamian history, women had the right to conduct legal transactions on their own. They engaged in trade, lending, borrowing and acquired property. However, it is unclear how freely they could do all this. Was male consent always a prerequisite for these transactions? The position of women outside matrimony has not yet been properly researched. For example, widows were certainly vulnerable without a male protector, but also less constrained than married women. Some prostitutes (*harimtu*) might also have been rather independent.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. ASSYRIAN ROYAL WOMEN

The implicit agents and sources regarding them are introduced in *Table 1* below. The sources for explicit agents appear in the sections below as the royal women in question are discussed.

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<sup>33</sup> Lambert 1967: 121: 65.

<sup>34</sup> Greengus 1995: 478–480.

<sup>35</sup> Postgate 1992: 105–106. At least from the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods we have evidence of polygamy (Friedl 2000: 36; Kuhrt 1991: 225).

<sup>36</sup> Harris 1991: 146–149.

Table 1: Royal women of the Neo-Assyrian empire

King	Queen	Daughter
Adad-nirari II (911–891)		...-Zarpanitu (SAA 12 2)
Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884)		
Assurnasirpal II (883–859)	Mullissu-mukannišat-Nīnua <sup>37</sup> (BaM 21 471 and 472)	
Shalmaneser III (858–824)		
Shamsi-Adad (823–811)	Sammu-rāmat	
Tiglath-pileser III (744–727)	Iabā <sup>38</sup> (Kamil 1999 14 no. 1 and 2; BaM 21 462)	
Shalmaneser V (726–722)	Banītu (Kamil 1999 14 no. 3 and 4)	
Sargon II (721–705)	Atalia (Kamil 1999 16 no. 5, 6 and 7)	Ahāt-abīša (SAA 1 31)
Sennacherib (704–681)	Naqī'a/ Zakūtu (sister Abi-rāmu) Tašmētu-šarrat (Luckenbill 1924: 152; Reade 1987) SU-xxx-GAL(?)-a (Andrae 1913: 9–10) <sup>39</sup>	Šaddītu
Esarhaddon (680–669)	Ešarra-hammāt (Borger 1956: Ass. I, 5; SAA 10 188; SAA 12 81; AfO 13: 213–216) Ana-Tašmētum-taklāk? (Finkel 2000: 12)	Šērū'a-ēṭirat an unnamed daughter (AfO 13: 213–216)
Assurbanipal (668–631? Or 627?)	Libbāli-šarrat (SAA 16 28; Streck 1916: 390, text 1)	unnamed daughter? (SAA 11 221 <sup>40</sup> )

<sup>37</sup> According to Melville, one explanation for her claim for being the queen of two kings is that she was the queen of Assurnasirpal II who simply outlived her husband and kept her title during the reign of Shalmaneser III (Melville 2004: 44).

<sup>38</sup> Melville (2004: 45) reports that, in a private communication, Stephanie Dalley had suggested that Iabā and Banītu might be the same person since Banītu could be the Akkadian translation of the West Semitic name, Iabā.

<sup>39</sup> An uncertain case at best; the inscription is badly eroded.

<sup>40</sup> In SAA 11 221, "town of the daughter of the king" is mentioned. As the text is from the reign of Assurbanipal (Mattila 2000: 63), it is possible that the name refers to a specific daughter of Assurbanipal rather than to princesses in general.

### 5.1. Queens

The wife of the king was called *sēgallu* (MÍ É.GAL, lit. ‘woman of the palace’)<sup>41</sup> in the Assyrian Empire. The title *šarratu* (‘queen’) was reserved for the women who actually ruled, for example some female tribal leaders<sup>42</sup> and goddesses.<sup>43</sup> Even so, this article follows the traditional translation of the term *sēgallu* as ‘queen’.

In a recent article by Sarah Melville, she claims that, although at first glance, MÍ.É.GAL appears to be a unique title, a closer look reveals that there are many of them. According to her, to the outside world there was only one consort of the king (MÍ.É.GAL), but in the privacy of the domestic quarters, other women had the privilege of using the title MÍ.É.GAL. These “surplus wives” would have been needed, due to the high mortality rate and the hazards of childbirth. Diplomatic considerations might also have made it practical to give the title MÍ.É.GAL to the foreign princesses that the king might have married.<sup>44</sup> Melville writes that, of all the MÍ.É.GAL in *Table 1*, only two, namely Ešarra-hammat and Libbāli-šarrat, were “primary consorts.”<sup>45</sup>

Melville presents some convincing arguments, but one feels that the evidence backing her claim is nonetheless not sufficient. The only direct evidence on many queens existing at the same time is in the lines 40–41 of K 164 where “the queens (MÍ É.GAL.MEŠ) cry out: bury the queen (MÍ É.GAL).”<sup>46</sup> As the text is a funerary ritual (probably for Queen Ešarra-hammat) these multiple queens could perhaps be explained as a choir of ritual performers.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the indirect evidence of the two queens of Sennacherib, Naqī’a and Tašmētu-šarrat, can be explained by them being consecutive wives of the king.<sup>48</sup> In addition to that, no economic or legal document differentiates between the primary MÍ.É.GAL and other MÍ.É.GAL,<sup>49</sup> although the practical problems arising from this lack of distinction would have been considerable. One cannot help but think that the distinction was not made for the simple reason that there was only one queen.

<sup>41</sup> On *sēgallu*, see Parpola 1988.

<sup>42</sup> See Teppo 2005: 47.

<sup>43</sup> Melville 2004: 43. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the texts where *šarratus* were found were written in Standard Babylonian. It is thus also possible that the use of the title *šarratu* is merely a Standard Babylonian feature.

<sup>44</sup> Melville 2004: 46–47.

<sup>45</sup> Melville 2004: 53.

<sup>46</sup> Dhorme 1941: 57–66; Parpola 1983: 190.

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Raija Mattila, personal communication.

<sup>48</sup> However, see Reade 1987: 141–142.

<sup>49</sup> Melville 2004: 48.

Altogether we know eleven Neo-Assyrian queens, but only two can be classified as explicit agents, namely **Sammu-rāmat** and **Naqī'a/Zakūtu**. **Sammu-rāmat**, queen of Šamši-Adad, is a mysterious figure who has given rise to many legends after her death. There has been a great deal of speculation about her origin, but in the absence of further evidence, these proposals must remain speculative.<sup>50</sup>

She is known first from the inscription on her own stele from Assur (RIMA 3 A.0.104.2001). She is also mentioned in another inscription as having gone on a campaign with her son, the reigning – but minor – King Adad-nirari III (RIMA 3 A.0.104.3, a boundary-stone). This inscription describes the defeat of Ušpilulume, king of the Kummuhites. This is unprecedented in Assyrian history and Kirk Grayson writes that she probably had some authority in the state.<sup>51</sup> It seems possible that she acted as regent after the death of her husband Šamši-Adad before Adad-nirari III became of age.

Her high status can also be surmised from the fact that Bel-tarši-ilumma, governor of Kalhu, dedicated and set up two identical inscribed statues to the god Nabū in the Nabū Temple of Kalhu. Both statues state that they were made and dedicated for the life of Adad-nirari and Sammu-rāmat (RIMA 3 A.0.104. 2002). Sammu-rāmat also appears in post-Assyrian sources under the name of Semiramis.<sup>52</sup>

**Naqī'a** was the queen of Sennacherib (704–681), daughter-in-law of King Sargon II (721–705), mother of King Esarhaddon and grandmother of King Assurbanipal. She was also known as Zakūtu. Nothing certain can be said concerning her origins, although her name is West Semitic. She had probably married Sennacherib by the penultimate decade of the 8th century. In c. 713, she bore him a son, Esarhaddon, whose promotion to crown prince was somewhat unexpected. However, in her book *The Role of Naqia/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics* – the only monograph written on the topic of Neo-Assyrian women – Sarah Melville writes that there is no indication that Naqī'a was in any way responsible for this promotion.<sup>53</sup>

In many of the sources, Naqī'a is referred to as the “queen mother” rather than by her name. Some texts (SAA 12, 21–23 and SAA 6 143) refer to the queen mother of Sennacherib and one text (SAA 6 325) may refer to the queen mother of Assurbanipal – all other occurrences refer to Naqī'a.<sup>54</sup> It seems that the basic structure of the queen mother's household was similar to that of the queen and other high officials. She undoubtedly had residences in other major Assyrian cities

<sup>50</sup> PNA 3/I: 1084, Novotny.

<sup>51</sup> Grayson 1993: 29.

<sup>52</sup> Concerning the legend of Semiramis, see PNA 3/I: 1084, Novotny.

<sup>53</sup> Melville 1999: 29.

<sup>54</sup> Melville 1999: 105.

in addition to Nineveh and was extremely wealthy, possibly even wealthier than the queen. She had an extensive staff<sup>55</sup> and she made numerous donations to temples and contributed horses to the palace. Obviously, some of these expenditures were tax obligations.<sup>56</sup>

After Esarhaddon's accession to the throne, Naqī'a's authority definitely grew. She built a palace for her son at Nineveh and composed an inscription commemorating it (ARRIM 6 11 no. 91-5-9, 217). She also made a dedication (ADD 645) to the goddess Belet-Ninua for her own life and that of her son Esarhaddon. The other side of this tablet bears an inscription recording a dedication made by Zakūtu to the goddess Mullissu.

A number of letters addressed to her underline her exceptional position. Flattering epithets are used, such as "able like Adapa" (SAA 10 244). It is also said that "[The verdict of the mother of the king, my lord], is as final as that of the gods" (SAA 10 17). In the texts, she is often spoken of in the third person masculine singular form, which is quite exceptional and is probably a prestige form.<sup>57</sup>

Letters to the queen mother deal mainly with cultic matters (for example, SAA 10 274 and 313, SAA 13 76-77), but some also concern political affairs (for example, SAA 18 85 and SAA 10 154). A letter from the king to the queen mother is also preserved (SAA 16 2).

Naqī'a also owned estates in the city of Lahiru in Babylonia (SAA 14 469). It is unclear whether the estates of the queen mother in the town of Šabbu (SAA 12 21-23) belonged to Naqī'a since the "queen mother" here might refer to the mother of Sennacherib.<sup>58</sup>

A number of letters from scholars also refer to the state of the queen mother's health (for example, SAA 10 200-201, 244 and SAA 4 190). A query to the sun god concerns a potential appointment; it asks whether the person in question will guard Naqī'a like his own self (SAA 4 151).

Melville explains Naqī'a's prominence by her son's long-range political plans. Melville suggests that the civil war after the death of Sennacherib caused Esarhaddon to desire a smoother ascension for his sons. Melville claims that Esarhaddon promoted his mother's status, so that she could ease the ascension for Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn. The latest evidence for Naqī'a is from the

<sup>55</sup> Fourteen attested offices: eunuch, treasurer, scribe, palace superintendent, village manager, cohort commander, bodyguard, guard, chariot driver, third man on a chariot, deputy cupbearer, deputy chief of quays, chief fuller and chief confectioner (Melville 1999: 106-107). Although these officials are mentioned specifically with Naqī'a, it is quite possible that other queens and queen mothers had similar, if perhaps not as large, staffs.

<sup>56</sup> Melville 1999: 105-112.

<sup>57</sup> Hämeen-Anttila 2000: 115.

<sup>58</sup> Melville 1999: 105.

beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal (end of 669). That is when, using her Akkadian name Zakūtu, she had the king's family, the aristocracy and the nation of Assyria swear an oath of loyalty to her grandson (SAA 2 8). According to Melville, this was the climax and the endpoint of her political career, the consummation of her son's plans.<sup>59</sup>

Other views have also been presented. Melville sees Naqī'a primarily as a mother, who unselfishly helped her son to achieve his goal, whereas Ben-Barak is of a totally different opinion. He sees her as a woman chiefly devoted to her own personal advancement. He argues that she achieved power by exploiting every opportunity that came her way, including her husband and son.<sup>60</sup>

Although all the royal women of the Neo-Assyrian Empire ultimately derived their power from their relationship with the king, they were certainly more than just his pawns. The evidence presented above demonstrates that the queens had many roles and duties to perform in addition to producing an heir to the throne. The notable possessions of queens were probably mostly managed by subordinates, but it seems that the queens did have the ultimate say in their own financial matters. At least nothing implies that the king interfered in his wife's business affairs. In addition, Sammu-rāmat and Naqī'a – the only two explicit agents among the queens – act in various ways at a very high level of government. That is why it seems possible that also the other nine queens, the implicit agents, were more important figures in the court than the sparse evidence we have available at the moment leads one to believe.

## 5.2 Queen's household

In this article, a queen's household is defined as a unit consisting of the queen herself and the staff under her command. This staff included both administrative and military officials. A queen's household is not the same thing as a "harem," which – especially when not properly defined – calls to mind orientaling stereotypes.<sup>61</sup> Although we do not know what the life in these "harems" was like, the term itself persuades us to see the evidence in a certain light. This is why the term is not used in this article.

Much of our knowledge of the queen's household comes from Kalhu (Nimrud). For the most part, documents found in the Review Palace Fort Shalma-

<sup>59</sup> Melville 1999: 91–92.

<sup>60</sup> Ben-Barak 1987: 35–40. Ben-Barak (1987: 36–40) also sees Sammu-rāmat in a similar role: a mother of a younger son, who helps her son to achieve the throne in order to guarantee her own power.

<sup>61</sup> See Said 1978; Bahrani 2001: 161–179.

neser in Kalhu were written in either the late 8th century or in the post-canonical period. The existence of a queen's household in the Review Palace was evident in both time periods and archaeological finds concerning the layout of the palace also seem to support the idea of a separate queen's household.<sup>62</sup> The existence of regular military activity is documented mostly from the first time period, the late 8th century. Nonetheless, Dalley and Postgate speculate that the queen might also have had her own military unit in Fort Shalmaneser in the post-canonical period.<sup>63</sup>

Royal palaces existed throughout Assyria and the royal couple could even have more than one residence in one city. Many of these palaces had women's quarters (queen's or *šakintu*'s households).<sup>64</sup> It therefore seems that the household in the Review Palace was maintained without the queen for most of the time, at least if we assume that there was only one MÍ.É.GAL at a time.<sup>65</sup>

From the Nimrud Wine Lists, one can get some clues concerning the number of members of the queen's household. The daily allocation of wine to the queen's household was 3 *sūtu*. According to Kinnier Wilson, this means that the queen's household had c. 300 persons.<sup>66</sup> However, as Fales has later convincingly argued that the Nimrud Wine Lists represented the result of a *one-day* distribution for a feast of some kind,<sup>67</sup> Kinnier Wilson's estimate should be reduced. A festive mood was probably not achieved with only 1.8 or 0.8 deciliters per person.<sup>68</sup> At any rate, it seems probable that the number of functionaries differed greatly from one queen's household to another, depending where and when the household existed.

Sarah Melville sees the many royal residences around Assyria merely as holding areas for the hundreds of women associated with king – MÍ.É.GAL and others.<sup>69</sup> I feel that the large number of these women's quarters indicates something else. It seems unlikely that *all* of these hundreds of women could have been doing nothing, but using up royal resources. Rather, the provincial palaces and their women could have been part of a financial network under the directorship of

<sup>62</sup> Dalley & Postgate 1984: 1, 11–12; Oates & Oates 2001: 78, 187–188. See also Section 12 for seclusion of the royal women.

<sup>63</sup> Dalley & Postgate 1984: 1, 11. References to a queen's (or queen mother's) military establishment begin during Sennacherib's reign and continue down into the post-canonical period (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 41).

<sup>64</sup> Melville 2004: 37–38.

<sup>65</sup> See beginning of Section 5.1. In any case, Dalley and Postgate (1984: 11–12) found no reference to any secondary wives or "harem" in the Review Palace.

<sup>66</sup> Kinnier Wilson assumes that 1 *sūtu* was 10 *qū* and that 1 *qū* was meant for 10 men. (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 44)

<sup>67</sup> Fales 1994: 361–380.

<sup>68</sup> 1 *qū* was either 1.842 liters (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 114–15) or 0.8 liter (Powell 1990: 502).

<sup>69</sup> Melville 2004: 37–38, 48.

the *šakintus* (see Section 6) and the queen.<sup>70</sup> The association of palace women with textile production also supports this theory.<sup>71</sup> This also explains how the immense fortune of the queen was managed and possibly enriched.

The evidence from Fort Shalmaneser also supports this. There the *šakintu* was specifically the administrator of the queen.<sup>72</sup> This was probably also the case with other *šakintus*.<sup>73</sup> In addition, other evidence suggests that queens and queen mothers had considerable financial networks across the empire.<sup>74</sup> It would therefore be logical that the queen would have her own administrators taking care of her interests in the region. Thus, it becomes probable that all the queen's households were like the one in Kalhu – financial and administrative units functioning under the directorship of a *šakintu* without a resident queen.

### 5.3 Daughters of kings and other royal women

The evidence suggests that other royal women are also quite active. The princesses send and receive letters and one of them buys land. Half (three out of six) of the women in this section are explicit agents, the other half (daughters of Adad-nirari II, Sargon II and Assurbanipal) are implicit agents. These women are nonetheless exceptions in the sense that most of the royal daughters were apparently married off advantageously – thus disappearing from the palace sources.

**Šadditu**, the daughter of King Sennacherib and sister of King Esarhaddon buys land for the considerable sum of 8 minas of silver (SAA 6 251). Her high status can also be seen from a letter to Esarhaddon by Nabû-nadin-šumi, the chief exorcist and one of king's Inner Circle.<sup>75</sup> He is annoyed because a colleague of his performed a ritual for the princess without his consent. Šadditu obviously had a very high rank at court since a man of such high standing was so eager to perform the ritual (SAA 10 273, dated 672).

**Šērū'a-ēṭirat**, Esarhaddon's daughter is mentioned in many documents and is the sender of one letter, which is addressed to her brother's wife, Libbāli-šarrat (SAA 16 28). In the letter, she sharply reminds her sister-in-law of the differences in their rank. Šērū'a-ēṭirat apparently not only outranks her sister-in-law, but also some of her brothers. In a document concerned with offerings (SAA 13 56), she is

<sup>70</sup> See also Teppo forthcoming b.

<sup>71</sup> Professor Simo Parpola in a forthcoming article.

<sup>72</sup> Dalley & Postgate: 1984: 9-14.

<sup>73</sup> According to Heltzer, however, that was not always the case. Heltzer bases this conclusion on the absence of the definition "queen's *šakintu*" in many cases. (Heltzer 1987: 88) Nonetheless, the absence of this definition hardly proves that they were not part of queen's staff.

<sup>74</sup> See also Melville 1999: 105-112.

<sup>75</sup> Parpola 1993: xxvi.

listed after the crown princes Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn but before two other princes.<sup>76</sup>

Šērū'a-ēṭirat is mentioned as part of the royal family in other documents as well. In an account of food and possible gifts distributed at the royal New Year's reception,<sup>77</sup> her name is listed along with her brothers' names (SAA 7 154). She also appears in a grant of Assurbanipal (AfO 13: 213–216) and in a medical report (SAA 10 223, dated 669) concerning the health of the royal family.

Esarhaddon queries the sun god concerning his daughter's (possibly Šērū'a-ēṭirat's) marriage to Bartatua, king of the Scythians, but it is uncertain whether the marriage ever took place (SAA 4 20). In a similar query (SAA 4 21), the name of the proposed groom is unfortunately lost. A very fragmentary letter from the reign of Assurbanipal mentions Elam, a princess and Kandalānu, king of Babylon (CT 53 966).

The Babylonian chief exorcist Nabû-nadin-šumi (reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal) sent a letter to the princess to let her know that he is praying for her and her father (SAA 18 55). The receiver of the letter was probably Šērū'a-ēṭirat since the only other known daughter of Esarhaddon is mentioned only once, in a list of Esarhaddon's children. Even her name has not been preserved. (AfO 13: 213–216).

In addition to the above-mentioned texts, Šērū'a-ēṭirat is also mentioned in a later fictional Aramaic text (Steiner & Nims 1985: 60–81), telling a tale of two brothers, Assurbanipal (called Sarbanabal in the story) and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn (Sarmuge) and their sister, Šērū'a-ēṭirat (Saritrah).

**Abi-rāmu**, a sister of Naqī'a, can also be described as part of the royal family although her origins (like those of Naqī'a) are obscure. She loaned silver against a pledge of land in the year 674 (SAA 6 252).

## 6. ŠAKINTU

The term *šakintu* has often been translated as 'harem manageress.' This is a very narrow translation, especially because rarely does anyone bother to define "harem." Undefined, it conjures exotic images of oppressed women sequestered from the outside world at the mercy of an insatiable despot.<sup>78</sup> The question of the "harem" in the ancient Near East is a complex one and it is not within the scope of this work to analyze it. Therefore, in this article, *šakintu* is translated as 'adminis-

<sup>76</sup> Melville 2004: 42.

<sup>77</sup> Mattila 1990: 16.

<sup>78</sup> See for example Van de Mieroop 1999: 147–154; Westenholz 1990: 513–516.

trator.’ This term is also in accord with her many different activities, which also sprawled outside the palaces.

The administrators and their staffs and relatives are the largest group of women agents within the Assyrian royal palaces. Altogether there are 54 *šakintu* and 24 of them can be classified as explicit agents. The office of *šakintu* was obviously of very high rank and considerable sums of money were available to her. The administrators took care of various matters, mostly in the financial sphere. In addition to buying land and slaves, lending and borrowing, they also sometimes appear as participants in legal cases. Despite the fact that most of the transactions were probably connected to their professional duties, some documents imply that they had similar autonomy in their private lives.<sup>79</sup> The reason for the large number of *šakintus* being categorized as implicit agents is their frequent appearance in different kinds of lists, most notably in SAA 7 23 (a list of *šakintu* and weavers).

In the Review Palace of Kalhu, the *šakintu* was the housekeeper of the queen, the “queen’s *šakintu*.”<sup>80</sup> According to Heltzer, however, that was not always the case. Heltzer bases this conclusion on the fact that many royal palaces had *šakintus*, who were not specifically called the queen’s *šakintu*. However, the absence of the definition “queen’s” does not conclusively prove that they were not part of the queen’s staff. In any case, a *šakintu* had a high administrative position and had her own staff. She could possess considerable property and freely participate in legal actions.<sup>81</sup>

Due to a *šakintu*’s extensive duties, she had a large staff. **Amat-Ba’al**, the *šakintu* of the Old Palace of Kalhu, had a female steward, **Ahat-abû** (see *lahhinutu* below, ND 2309). In the Review Palace of Kalhu, the *šakintu* had at her disposal the “female scribe of the household of the queen” **Attār-palṭī** and also a female deputy, **Kabalāia**.

Attār-palṭī was the scribe of the queen (LÚ.A.BA -tú ša É MÍ.KUR) some time after reign of Assurbanipal. It is probable that she actually worked for the *šakintu* since it seems that the queen did not reside in Fort Shalmaneser.<sup>82</sup> In two separate documents (CTN 3 40 and CTN 3 39) both datable to 615\*, Nasī and Šalmu-šarri-iqbi borrow silver from her. The silver she loans to these men is (at least in no. 39) silver of the temple of Mullissu.<sup>83</sup> She is the only female scribe known by name in

<sup>79</sup> They could have children, but nothing is known about their husbands. In BaM 24: 263–264, rev. 1. 1–2 the son of a *šakintu* (DUMU MÍ.ŠÁ-kin-ti) named [x]-qa-da-qa-pa-x[x] is mentioned in a witness list of a sales document. In ND 2307 (Parker 1954: 37–39), *šakintu* Amat-Astārti marries off her daughter.

<sup>80</sup> Dalley & Postgate: 1984: 9–14.

<sup>81</sup> Heltzer 1987: 88–90.

<sup>82</sup> See Section 5.2. on the queen’s household.

<sup>83</sup> People could store their capital in the temple by giving it to the temple as an “offering.” In reality, the silver was still available for the depositor, who could “borrow” it if needed. This

the Neo-Assyrian era, although a group of six female scribes is mentioned in a list of female personnel (SAA 7 24).<sup>84</sup>

**Kabalāia** was at first a deputy of the queen's household (LÚ.2-i-tú ša É MÍ.KUR in SAAB 1 10) and later deputy of the female administrator of the Review Palace (LÚ.2-i-tú ša MÍ.šá-kin-te šá É.GAL ma-šar-ti in CTN 3 30). The administrator in question is probably **Šiti-ilat**. In 626\*, Kabalāia lends ten shekels of silver to La-qepu (SAAB 1 10). In another, judicial document (CTN 3 30) from 617\*, she has brought a court case against Andasu, who gives her a woman and ten shekels of silver in settlement of the affair. Kabalāia is probably also the unnamed deputy of the *šakintu* in CTN 3 29, who instigates a court case over a slave girl.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to the female steward, scribe and deputy, other persons also belonged to the *šakintu*'s household. It is, of course, not possible to know how much the size and composition of the staff varied from *šakintu* to *šakintu*, but at least a cook (NL 81), "the man in charge of the sacks (?) in the household of *šakintu*" (SAAB 9 67) and two eunuchs (SAA 6 152, SAA 14 177) can be found.

A few words should also be said of the women related to *šakintus*. The daughter of the administrator Amat-Astārti (see below) is an implicit agent, but obviously has high rank. A sister of an administrator (NIN-sa ša šá-kín-te) called **Abi-rahî** buys three women in Nineveh, probably during the reign of Esarhaddon (SAA 6 250). Whether the high status of these women was due to their relationship with a *šakintu* is unclear. It is possible that the position of *šakintu* could only be achieved by women whose family was already "aristocratic."

Although documents concerning the *šakintus* were found in only five cities (Assur, Nineveh, Kalhu Tušhan and Til-Barsip), they mention 54 *šakintus* in 51 documents and give the locations of 22 *šakintu*-headed households. Assur, Nineveh, Kalhu, Tušhan and Kilizi are mentioned several times as locations for *šakintus* while other cities are mentioned only once. In Nineveh, four different palaces are mentioned (Central City of Nineveh, Review Palace of Nineveh, Review Palace of the New Military Contingent, The Household of the Lady of the House), in Kalhu three (Old Palace of Kalhu, Kalhu Review Palace, New Palace of Kalhu). It seems that it was not unusual to have a *šakintu* in a royal palace, but as the exact number of royal palaces in the Neo-Assyrian Empire is not known, it is not possible to say how common it was. As proposed in Section 5.2, it is probable that the *šakintu* was in charge of the queen's households in these palaces.

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way, the depositor had a safe-deposit in which to store money and the temple secured a considerable holding in the currency of the time. (Postgate 1983: 158)

<sup>84</sup> Possibly from the reign of Esarhaddon (Fales & Postgate 1992: xvii–xix).

<sup>85</sup> Although the eponym of Sin-šarrussu-ukin is not datable, the other texts of the group are dated between 641\* and 615\* (Dalley & Postgate 1984: 10).

Probably the *bēt isāte* ‘the house of women,’ where the *sekretus* (‘palace women,’ see Section 10) resided, also fell under her jurisdiction. This hypothesis is strengthened by the case of **Ahi-ṭallī**, who rose from the ranks of *sekretu* to *šakintu* in 686.

I will now introduce the evidence concerning the *šakintus* in approximately chronological order, but giving details only on the explicit agents. A table of all 54 administrators can be found in Appendix 1.

The first *šakintu* (implicit agent) of the Neo-Assyrian Empire appears in 788 (BaM 24:263-264).<sup>86</sup> During the reign of Sargon II (721–705), there are no explicit agents. In a ration account from the North-West Palace in Nimrud (ND 2803),<sup>87</sup> four *šakintus* (of Arbail, Kilizu, Adian and Kasappa) are mentioned and there is evidence on one implicit agent in Kalhu (NL 81).

During the reign of Sennacherib (704–681), we have 11 agents. The only implicit agent comes from Nineveh in 687 (SAA 6 152), all others are explicit agents. **Addatī** was an administrator from Nineveh. The deputy village manager Bibia owes silver to her and pledges an estate and seven persons to her (SAA 6 81). In another document, Addatī buys a slave woman (SAA 6 82).

The unnamed *šakintu* of this era engage in various activities. A *šakintu* receives a fine (SAA 6 83, dated 694), loans sheep (SAA 6 84, dated 694) and a *šakintu* of the Central City buys two slaves (SAA 6 85, dated 692). Additionally, in a document presumably from the reign of Sennacherib,<sup>88</sup> a *šakintu* lends barley to Il-amara, chief of granaries (SAA 14 471).

**Ahi-ṭallī** was the administrator of the Central City of Nineveh. She is only a *sekretu* (‘a palace woman,’ see Section 10) in 687 (SAA 6 88), but she is the administrator of the Central City of Nineveh after 686. Several documents concern her purchase of slaves (SAA 6 89–90, 92), and once an orchard with slaves and land “for the king’s life” (SAA 6 93).

Also probably during the reign of Sennacherib, a *šakintu* of the Central City buys slaves for 18 minas of silver (SAA 6 86, SAA 6 87), a *šakintu* of the Central City releases 31 people for 17.5 minas of silver (SAA 6 94) and a *šakintu* forfeits a pledged field (SAA 6 95).

During the reign of Esarhaddon (680–669), there are altogether 17 mentions of *šakintus*, but none of them can be classified as explicit agents. Nonetheless, the

<sup>86</sup> There is also some additional evidence concerning the *šakintus* in Kalhu at this time. Kinnier Wilson writes that, although no *šakintus* are explicitly mentioned in the Nimrud Wine lists, certain entries “may be thought to concern *šakintus*, most obviously perhaps pl. 32, 21 ff.” (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 44) The Nimrud Wine Lists have been dated to 780s and 770s by Fales (1994).

<sup>87</sup> Parker 1961: 55–61.

<sup>88</sup> Mattila 2002: xxiii.

documents of this period reveal the many different locations where they were situated – the personnel list SAA 7 23 alone mentions 12 different locations.

During the reign of Assurbanipal (668–631?), there are eight *šakintus*, all of them explicit agents. **Zarpî**, an administrator from Nineveh buys a woman in 668 (SAA 14 8). A *šakintu* of the Central City buys a slave in 668 (SAA 14 9) and in 654, a *šakintu* assigns her female slave to lifelong service to Sinqi-Issār in order to cover a debt (SAA 14 11). Two documents, (SAA 14 13, dated 650 and SAA 14 14) relate to the *šakintu* of the city of Assur buying slaves. An unnamed *šakintu* buys a very expensive slave for thirty-five shekels of silver (TB 13, dated 645\*). Also in the reign of Assurbanipal, a *šakintu* buys two slaves for 50 shekels of silver (SAA 14 12). Probably during the reign of Assurbanipal, but perhaps later, there also exists one implicit agent from Assur (StAT 2 244).

Dalley and Postgate assign texts 28–45 from Kalhu as “The *šakintu* group: texts from the Queen’s Household.” The texts were probably stored together in a single office under her administration. The documents are mostly related to the administration of the queen’s household during the time period 642–615.<sup>89</sup> Dalley and Postgate suggest that the *šakintu* of the household of the queen in the Kalhu Review Palace was **Šiti-ilat**, although her name is actually mentioned only in CTN 3 35. That document concerns her buying some people, a house and a field. She is probably also the unnamed *šakintu* in CTN 3 34, who buys the daughter of Mannu-ki-Ninua.

The last documents concerning the *šakintus* come from the very end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, from the reigns of Assur-etel-ilani (630?–623?) and Sin-šarru-iškun (622?–612). In 625\*, a *šakintu* of the Central City of Nineveh (*ša MURUB<sub>4</sub> – URU*) lends silver (SAA 14 159), and in 622\* **Amat-Astārti**, administrator of the New Palace of Kalhu, gives her daughter **Šubētu** in marriage to Milki-ramu (ND 2307).<sup>90</sup> It seems that Amat-Astārti was able to dictate remarkably good marriage terms for her daughter. That and the size of the dowry indicate that she and her daughter definitely had high status in Neo-Assyrian society. In 620\*, a *šakintu* is mentioned in a document from Assur (SAAB 9 67) and in 611\* a *šakintu* receives 4000 litres of barley (ZTT 11).

Finally, I shall discuss those *šakintus* who can only be dated loosely, or not at all. We have four occurrences that can be dated to the reign of Assurbanipal or later. A *šakintu* of the Central City of Nineveh buys land (SAA 14 175) and a *šakintu* buys a slave woman for one mina of silver (ND 2344<sup>91</sup>). **Amat-Ba’al**, the administrator of the Old Palace of Kalhu is only known through her steward

<sup>89</sup> Dalley & Postgate 1984: 9–14.

<sup>90</sup> Parker 1954: 37–39.

<sup>91</sup> Parker 1954: 47.

(**Ahat-abû** in ND 2309,<sup>92</sup> see *lahhinutu* below), but **Ilia**, who also was an administrator in Kalhu, purchases a child from its father Kaparia in ND 2313.<sup>93</sup>

Lastly, in a document presumably from the 7th century, a *šakintu* of the city of Haurina is mentioned (SAA 7 134). In a fragmented texts from Nineveh, a *šakintu* buys something – the beginning of the document, as well as the date, is lost (SAA 14 176). In another undatable text (SAA 14 177) an eunuch of the *šakintu* appears. *Šakintus* are mentioned also in mystical and cultic explanatory works (SAA 3 34 and 35). The passages seem to reflect their position as leaders of households.

## 7. LAHHINUTU – OFFICIAL

Although some sources translate *lahhinutu* as ‘temple stewardess’ (for example, the SAA-series), according to CAD, she was a female official at the queen’s court. The evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period also suggests that the title was more tightly connected with the palace than with the temple – although her male counterpart, the *lahhinnu*, undoubtedly worked both in temples and in palaces.<sup>94</sup>

**Ahat-abû** was a steward of Amat-Ba’al, the administrator of the Old Palace of Kalhu in the 7th century. She buys the daughter of Nurtî to dedicate her to the goddess Mullissu. Her title is *mí.láh-hi-nu-tu mí.a-ma-ti—ba-a[l]* (ND 2309).<sup>95</sup> It is not known if she bought the devotee in her official capacity or as a private person. The second explicit agent of the *lahhinutu*-group is mentioned in a letter (SAA 13 157) where the steward’s statement concerning the theft of a golden statue of Erra from the Succession Palace is quoted.

Bahianu, village manager of the steward (LÚ.GAL – URU.MEŠ *ša mí.láh-hi-ni-te*) appears in 21 texts (SAA 6 60–80) dated to the years 704–682. Unfortunately, they do not contain any information on the steward he is working for. Stewards are also mentioned in lists of female personnel, namely SAA 7 24 (group of six *lahhinutus*) and SAA 11 152.

Menzel describes a *lahhinnu* as a treasurer, who had an important role in the economy and administration. The importance of his function was in proportion to the size of the institution – a temple or a palace – in which he served.<sup>96</sup> It appears that the *lahhinutu*’s role was similar to that of the *lahhinnu*, although she only worked in the service of palaces. Even if a *lahhinutu* exercised considerable

<sup>92</sup> Parker 1954: 39.

<sup>93</sup> Parker 1954: 39.

<sup>94</sup> See Menzel 1981: 223–228.

<sup>95</sup> Parker 1954: 39.

<sup>96</sup> See Menzel 1981: 223–228.

power in her role in the economic administration of the queen's household, there is little direct evidence for this. Most of them are mentioned in personnel lists, which means that, out of ten occurrences, only two are explicit agents.

## 8. MUSICIANS

The terms *nuārtu* and *nargallutu* are translated as 'female musician' and as 'chief female musician' by CAD.<sup>97</sup> However, in many sources, *nuārtu* and *nargallutu* have been translated as 'singers.' The exact nature of their performance is still unclear. The only evidence concerning their performances in the Neo-Assyrian era is van Driel 1969: 121–131 (text A 125), where it seems that a *nargallutu* is singing or reciting something.

The musicians seem to have duties relating to both the palace and the temple. In the Neo-Assyrian period, it seems that they are more involved with palaces than temples, as they appear most frequently in wine lists and as part of the booty taken from palaces. The only two texts that link them explicitly with temples are van Driel 1969: 121–131 and PKTA 12f (see below).

There are only two mentions of *nargallutu* in the Neo-Assyrian evidence. The first one is in personnel lists (SAA 7 24). The second case is less clear. An unclear line in van Driel 1969: 121–131 apparently refers to a *nargallutu*.<sup>98</sup> According to van Driel, the text gives a day-by-day description of acts of worship performed by the king Assurbanipal in Assur.<sup>99</sup> It seems that a *nargallutu* recites or sings a passage in front of king in the ritual.<sup>100</sup>

Regular female musicians, the *nuārtu*, are usually found in lists of wine and ration distribution<sup>101</sup> or as part of the booty that the Assyrian kings ransacked from enemy palaces.<sup>102</sup> They sometimes also appear in lists in connection with

<sup>97</sup> CAD N: 363–364.

<sup>98</sup> Van Driel reads the line as SAL.É x?? ZI translating it as 'the queen (?) has risen,' (Van Driel 1969: 121–131, text A 125, v 22). However, Menzel (as well as the *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian Texts*) identifies the line in question as referring to a *nargallutu* (Menzel 1981: 254).

<sup>99</sup> Van Driel 1969: 121–131.

<sup>100</sup> Menzel 1981: 254.

<sup>101</sup> SAA 7 140 (16); SAA 7 142 (1); CTN 3 145 (1); NWL 8 (2) and NWL 21 (2). The numbers in the parentheses refer to the number of musicians mentioned. A group of musicians (MÍ.NAR.MEŠ) is counted as one.

<sup>102</sup> Reign of Assurnasirpal II (883–859): RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 col. iii l. 76 (10); RIMA 2 A.0.101.73 (1). Reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727): Tadmor 1994: Summ. 9 (1). Reign of Sennacherib (704–681): Luckenbill 1924: 60, l. 58 (1); Luckenbill 1924: 24, l. 33 (1); Luckenbill 1924: 34, l. 47 (1). Reign of Assurbanipal (668–631?): Borger 1996: 105, 227 (B vi 28 & Asb C vii 23) (1); Borger 1996: 166, 237 (G1D i' 7') (1).

temples and palaces.<sup>103</sup> The only text that refers to their cultic activities is PKTA 12f, which unfortunately is not very well preserved.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this group is their large number: 107 altogether. Their numerousness can partly be explained by the fact that they are often mentioned as part of the booty seized by Assyrian kings. They also often appear in lists; for example, the personnel list SAA 7 24 lists 8 *nargallutus* and 53 other musicians.<sup>104</sup> Both in SAA 7 24 and in the Nimrud Wine Lists, they are divided into different groups according to their native countries.

Agency of the musicians is a difficult question. Although there are 107 of them, only one is an explicit agent and even then the text in question (van Driel 1969: 121–131) is quite fragmentary. It makes sense that their actions would have been recorded only in rare cases, since their status must have been fairly low. Nonetheless, they were active as musicians, and possibly also as some kind of cultic functionaries, so as a group they can – tentatively – be regarded as implicit agents.

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<sup>103</sup> SAA 17 122 (2); SAA 11 152 (1); SAA 7 24 (53); SAA 7 26 (1).

<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, in SAA 7 24, *kurgarrûs*, who are usually connected to ritual performances in the cult of Ištar (see Teppo forthcoming a), are included among the group of 61 female musicians.

## 9. OTHER PROFESSIONALS OF THE PALACE

Table 2: Other women professionals of the palace

Name / profession	Translation	Occurrences <sup>105</sup>	Date <sup>106</sup>
<i>amat ekalli</i>	Palace maid <sup>107</sup>	ND 2307 <sup>108</sup> (1), ND 2078 <sup>109</sup> (1), SAAB 5 35 (1), CTN 2 105 (1), SAA 1 77 (1), SAA 1 99 (1), SAA 11 221 <sup>110</sup> (1), SAA 12 83 (1).	622*; 638*; 635*;742; Reign of Sargon II; Reign of Sargon II; Reign of Assurbanipal; undatable.
<i>karkadinnutu</i>	A baker or cook producing special dishes (CAD K)	CTN 3 87 (1)	Late 8th or 7th century
<i>išpārtu</i>	Weaver	SAA 1 33 (1); SAA 7 23 (145)	Reign of Sargon II; Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>masenmutu</i>	Treasurer	Luckenbill 1924: 52, l. 32 (1); SAA 7 26 (group)	Reign of Sennacherib; Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>nappāhtu</i>	Smith	SAA 7 24 (1–14)	Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>pallissu</i>	Stone-borer	SAA 7 24 (1–14)	Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>gallābtu</i>	Barber	SAA 7 24 (1)	Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>muraqqītu</i>	Perfume maker / Spice-bread baker	SAA 7 24 (1)	Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>šāqītu</i>	Cup bearer	SAA 7 26 (group)	Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>āpītu</i>	Baker	SAA 7 26 (group)	Reign of Esarhaddon?
<i>Rīša(t)-abiša</i>	Servant of the lady of the house of the crown prince	SAA 6 257	680
<i>Sāraia</i>	Subordinate of the palace scribe?	SAA 16 49	Reign of Esarhaddon

<sup>105</sup> Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of professionals in the text. A group (.MEŠ) of women is counted as one.

<sup>106</sup> For the dates of these texts, see the relevant publication.

<sup>107</sup> There are no occurrences of palace maids per se, but there are seven mentions of the sons of palace maids and one attestation of a manager of the house of the palace maids (ND 2307, Parker 1954: 37–39). See Teppo 2005: 66–67.

<sup>108</sup> Parker 1954: 37–39.

<sup>109</sup> Parker 1954: 33.

<sup>110</sup> In SAA 11 221, DUMU!-GĒME—Ē.GAL is translated as ‘princess.’ This is obviously wrong and the correct translation should be ‘son of the palace-maid.’

Damqā	Overseer of women?	SAA 8 305	Reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal
Mullissu-šēzibinni	Official?	CTN 3 38	615*

In addition to *lahhinutu*, *šakintu* and musicians, there were other female professionals in the palace as well. In *Table 2*, all the professionals of the palace that are not mentioned elsewhere in this article are summarized.

Many of the female professionals mentioned above can be found in administrative texts SAA 7 23–26. These four documents cannot be dated with certainty, nor do we know where in Nineveh they were excavated, but they seem to be part of the palace archives, as most titles in these texts are clearly connected with the palace. In text 23, *šakintus* are mentioned, in 24, we find “father of the crown prince” and female cupbearers appear in text 26.

Most of the professionals in the table are obviously implicit agents, as they mostly appear in lists. There are, however, five exceptions. In SAA 1 33, female weavers (*išpārtu*) are mentioned. The text is a letter written by the crown prince Sennacherib to the king and it concerns the tribute brought by the emissaries of Commagene to Sargon II. The letter implies that at least this group of weavers had authority in their own field of expertise – their opinion counted more than that of the male traders.

**Riša(t)-abiša** is the widow (MÍ.NU.KÚŠ.Ù) of Haza-il. Together with her brother-in-law, she sells a slave in 680 (SAA 6 257). She and her brother-in-law are described as servants of the lady of the house of the crown prince (PAB 2 LÚ.MEŠ-e ARAD.MEŠ -ni ša GAŠAN—É ša DUMU—MAN).

**Sāraia** writes to the palace scribe concerning seven servants of the governor of Bit-Naialu who are to be handed over to the house of Marduk-eriba (SAA 16 49). Although it is not certain, she is probably working for the palace as a subordinate of the palace scribe.

In an astrological report (SAA 8 305), Zakir mentions that women were given to **Damqā** in Nineveh so that they could weave (?verb *mahāšu*) under her supervision.

**Mullissu-šēzibinni** is possibly an official (MÍ.<sup>d</sup>NIN.LÍL—še-zib-ni MÍ.xx) from Kalhu who lends silver to Abu-ul-ide in 615\*. Although her title is missing, she was probably part of the queen’s household since the text in question (CTN 3 38) was found in the *šakintu* group.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Dalley & Postgate 1984: 9–10, 92. See also administrator Šiti-ilat.

## 10. SEKRETU

Very little is known about *sekretus*<sup>112</sup> other than that they were part of the palace household. They appear in many different kinds of sources. Many appear in wine lists,<sup>113</sup> or as part of the booty of the Assyrian kings.<sup>114</sup> *Sekretus* are also mentioned three times in the inscriptions in the tombs of queens Iabâ and Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua.<sup>115</sup> In the inscriptions, the queens curse those who might do damage to their graves, including the *sekretus*.

Only in three occurrences (out of 25) do we see *sekretus* as explicit agents. In addition to **Ahi-ṭalli**, who buys a girl in 687 (SAA 6 88, see Section 6), a *sekretu* buys 27 people with their property in 681 (SAA 6 91). During the reign of Sennacherib (SAA 6 99), a *sekretu* purchases real estate. As no name is mentioned in the texts, the buyer in these documents could be Ahi-ṭalli. The advancement of Ahi-ṭalli to the position of *šakintu* (see Ahi-ṭalli in Section 6) gives another angle to the position of the *sekretu*. It was not a position for life – her status could change. This also hints that the *sekretus* might have been under the jurisdiction of the *šakintu*.

Although the Middle-Assyrian Palace Decrees (MAPD) come from an earlier period,<sup>116</sup> it is useful to compare *sekretus* to the “women of the palace” (MÍ ŠA É.GAL) of the MAPD. These women of the palace had quarters in the palace and access to them was restricted. From the MAPD, one gets the impression that these women were not expected to work and the palace provided them with clothing and servants. They are sometimes mentioned together with king’s wife. All this

<sup>112</sup> Written, for example, with MÍ.sek-re-e-tu (‘the confined women’), MÍ.ERIM.É.GAL (‘female personnel of the palace’) or MÍ.UN.MEŠ—É.GAL (‘female people of the palace’).

<sup>113</sup> NWL 3, 4, 6, 8, 18, 29, 21; TH 61. The Nimrud Wine Lists can be dated to the 780s and 770s (Fales 1994), TH 61 from Guzana can be dated to the reign of Adad-nirari III (Weidner 1940: 8–9). The quantities of wine given to the *sekretus* in the Nimrud Wine Lists are between 4 and 8.8 liters (Teppo 2005: 75). This amount in liters is based on the assumption that 1 *qû* is about 0.8 liter (Powell 1990: 502)

<sup>114</sup> Reign of Assurnasirpal II (883–859): RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 col. i l. 85, col 3 l. 22. Reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824): RIMA 3 A.0.102.6 col iv, l. 19; RIMA 3 A.0.102.16 l. 30. Reign of Šamši-Adad V (823–811): RIMA 3 A.0.103.1 col iv, l. 32; RIMA 3 A.0.103.2 col iv, l. 18; SAA 3 41. Reign of Sennacherib (704–681): Luckenbill 1924: 52, l. 32; Luckenbill 1924: 56, l. 9, dupl. C1 l. 8; Luckenbill 1924: 24, l. 31; Luckenbill 1924: 60, l. 58; Luckenbill 1924: 34, l. 46. Reign of Esarhaddon (680–669): Borger 1956: Mnm A r. 43; dupl. Frt K 7; Borger 1956: Mnm C 12. Reign of Assurbanipal (668–631?): Borger 1996: 44, 235 (A iv 64); Borger 1996: 153, 231 (C ix 34); Borger 1996: 105, 227 (B vi 27 & C vii 23).

<sup>115</sup> BaM 21: 471, BaM 21: 472; BaM 21: 462.

<sup>116</sup> The Decrees were assembled in the time of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076). The first decrees in the collection are from the reign of Assur-uballit I (1363–1328). (Roth 1997: 195)

indicates that “the women of the palace” in the MAPD were secondary wives of the king.

On the other hand, it is not at all clear if the *sekretus* of the Neo-Assyrian Empire are the same as these “women of the palace” of the MAPD. If we analyze only the Neo-Assyrian evidence, there is little we can say about *sekretus*. They existed in many palaces and were provided with wine and presumably food. They possibly had a supervisor (*rab isāti*<sup>117</sup>) and they probably resided in the *bēt isāte* (‘house of women’). In war, they were routinely taken as part of the booty, along with other personnel of the enemy palace. They could participate in legal transactions such as purchases and were mentioned as possible threats to the queens’ tombs. Some of them probably came from outside the palace.<sup>118</sup>

According to Melville, the *sekretu* included many types of women: concubines, women from the households of the defeated kings, women related to the king and without male guardians, companions of foreign princesses and of course valuable female hostages – to name just a few groups. In other words, at least in monumental inscriptions and archival texts, *sekretu* meant any woman living in the palace, who was not the queen.<sup>119</sup> Although there is no direct evidence to support this, there is no contradicting evidence either. Certainly all these groups of women lived in the palace and there is no other term in the texts that could refer to them as a group.

Whether we consider the *sekretus* to be merely king’s concubines or a more varied group of high-ranking women, their exact status and duties remain a mystery. This makes defining their agency very difficult as well. Although they appear as explicit agents only three times, they still might have had great influence in the court.

## 11. OTHER WOMEN OF THE PALACE

In this section, I will introduce the remaining women of the palace of whose status in the palace something is known. The first two cases are both some kind of high-ranking court lady and the two introduced after them are married women with connections to the palace. One of the court ladies, as well as one of the wives, is an explicit agent.

<sup>117</sup> ABL 1364; SAA 14 337; SAA 17 114; SAAB 2: 15–16. The title is given as LÚ.GAL.rak.MEŠ, ‘overseer of the *raksute*’ in SAAB, but can of course be read also as LÚ.GAL.—MÍ.MEŠ, *rab isāti*, ‘overseer of women’.

<sup>118</sup> I found three occurrences of women being sent to the palace by high-ranking officials (Re’indu in SAA 18 20, Urkitu-rēmīni in SAA 13 65 and Šuhru in SAA 10 194) but it is naturally very uncertain if these women were destined to become *sekretus*.

<sup>119</sup> Melville 2004: 40.

In a letter addressed to King Esarhaddon, Šamaš-metu-uballiṭ asks for a physician because **Bābu-gāmilat**, who is described by Streck<sup>120</sup> as a slave girl of the king (GÊME ša LUGAL), is ill (SAA 16 26). Here I think Streck's translation of the term *amtu* (GÊME) should be corrected. Surely this servant of king had high status. If she were an ordinary slave girl, she would not have been called the servant of the king, but rather a servant of some court official. The request to the king for a physician also speaks of her high status. It is probable that the title had a specific professional meaning in Neo-Assyrian times since, at least in the Neo-Babylonian legal records, the professions of *amat šarrūtu* ('female servant of the kingship') and *arad šarrūtu* ('male servant of the kingship') are known.<sup>121</sup> In addition to that, in the Neo-Assyrian period, many high-ranking men are referred to as "servants of the king" (*urdu ša šarri*) in order to emphasize their loyalty to the king. Obviously, *amtu ša šarri* should be understood similarly.

A similar case is present in a letter dated to the year 670 from the chief exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur to the king. He reports that he has been contacted by a "maid of the king" concerning an order by Urdu-Gula (SAA 10 194). Like Bābu-gāmilat, this servant was probably a high-ranking lady.

The wives of the high palace officials also sometimes have an active role in the affairs of the palace. In SAA 16 95, the governor's wife has an important role when the city mourns the death of King Sennacherib in 680. The relevant passage (lines 1–7) is translated as follows:

The king received the [wife] of the governor ([MÍ]-šú ša LÚ.GAR.KUR) and brought her into the Palace. On the day we heard that the king was dead and the people of the Inner City were weeping, the governor brought his wife out of the palace. She burnt a female goat-kid, (while) he installed a eunuch of his as the mayor.<sup>122</sup>

In ND 2605,<sup>123</sup> an administrative text from the North-West palace of Kalhu from reign of Sargon II (721–705), another remarkable wife emerges, namely the wife of the *turtan*-official (MÍ.GAŠAN—É ša LÚ.tar-tan). This lady evidently owns estates in her own right since she has her own *rab alāni* -officer.

The following twelve women have a less clear involvement with the palace. Ten of them appear in the Ninevite legal corpus (published in SAA 6 and 14), the archival context of which is rather uncertain.<sup>124</sup> Although the exact position of the

<sup>120</sup> PNA 1/II: 247.

<sup>121</sup> Finkelstein 1953: 126.

<sup>122</sup> Translation by the writers of SAA 16 (Luukko & Van Buylaere 2002).

<sup>123</sup> Parker 1961: 36–37.

<sup>124</sup> However, most of the Nineveh non-literary texts from the reigns of Sennacherib (704–681), Esarhaddon (680–669) and Assurbanipal (668–630) were probably housed in South-West Palace, whereas post-canonical (after 648) texts and texts from the reign of Sargon (721–705, SAA 6 1–33) were mostly situated in the North Palace. (Parpola 1986: 232–233) Concerning

women mentioned in these texts cannot be stated, we can presume that they probably lived and/or worked in the palace.

I shall first introduce seven buyers, then two sellers, two lenders and an “owner” (all in chronological order). All but the owner are explicit agents. The owner is an implicit agent because she is not documented as acting in the document, but her ownership indicates that she had the capacity to act.

**Lā-teggi-ana-...** buys a female slave for nine shekels of silver in 682 (SAA 6 98) and **Barsipītu** buys four slaves, probably also in the reign of Sennacherib (SAA 6 96). **Urkittu-tašmanni** buys a girl for 9 shekels of silver in 667 (SAA 14 10). **Mullissu-šarru-ušri** from Kalhu has some connection to the palace (M[ī.xxx É].GAL) and buys a female slave in 638\* (ND 2314<sup>125</sup>). During the reign of Assurbanipal or later, **Bēssī-ṭalli**, who was probably resident in the Review Palace of Kalhu,<sup>126</sup> buys a slave for one mina five shekels of silver (CTN 3 50). The Egyptian **Nihti-Eša-rau** buys a wife for her son in 623\* (SAA 14 161) and **Eri[...]** buys a woman, probably during the reign of Assur-etel-ilani or Sin-šarru-iškun<sup>127</sup> (SAA 14 174).

**Amat-Sūla** was the wife of Bel-duri, a shield-bearing “third man.” Together with two men she sells a house in Nineveh to an Egyptian scribe in 692 (SAA 6 142). **Daliyâ** sells a girl to the administrator (*šakintu*) **Ahi-ṭalli** in 687 (SAA 6 88).

**Indibî** lends seventeen minas (a very large sum) of silver and receives a vineyard and several people as pledges in 693 (SAA 6 97). **Sinqi-Issar** gets the maid of an unnamed *šakintu* instead of silver in 654 (SAA 14 11). The reasons for this are unclear, but probably the administrator or the servant herself was in debt to Sinqi-Issar.

Muaddî buys real estate from the city of Alli adjoining a field owned by **Aššūr-...** in 729 (SAA 6 22).

Finally, concerning the most poorly known women of the palace; eleven women are mentioned in lists or documents where only the fact that they are somehow connected to the palace can be deduced.<sup>128</sup> Two more women’s names

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the archives of the palace women, there is also some additional supporting evidence. One of the few documents that can be confidently placed in the South-West palace is text SAA 6 88, which mentions the lady **Ahi-ṭalli**, a *šakintu* of the Central City. Thus, the whole Ahi-talli dossier and all the related texts concerning the palace women (SAA 6 81–99) can be placed in the South-West palace. Even those Nineveh texts that cannot be reliably attributed to either of these palaces still probably came from one or the other of them. (Kwasman & Parpola 1991: xv–xvii)

<sup>125</sup> Parker 1954: 40.

<sup>126</sup> Dalley & Postgate 1984: 108.

<sup>127</sup> Mattila 2002: xxi.

<sup>128</sup> Šīti-tabni (SAA 7 24); Aia-ahâ (SAA 7 118); Amat-emūni (SAA 7 24); Ekallītu (SAA 16 67); Damqāia (SAA 13 76); Nikkal-šarrat (SAA 7 26); Humatāti (SAA 7 26); Nikkal-

only appear because they are given a linen garment.<sup>129</sup> Ten women are identifiable as palace personnel on the basis of the wine lists, where they are listed as palace personnel.<sup>130</sup> It is difficult to say anything concerning their agency due to the lack of data. At least the ten women who receive wine are probably high-ranking women with agency because wine was distinctly a luxury item, reserved for the wealthy and the powerful. In the end, these 23 women can probably be classified as implicit agents, although tentatively.

## 12. SECLUSION OF WOMEN OF THE PALACE

The seclusion of women of the palace is a very important point when evaluating the agency of the women in Assyrian palaces. How tightly secluded were the *sekretus* and other women residing in the palace? To what extent could they act outside the palace?

First of all, it is clear that not all the women who were associated with the palace<sup>131</sup> actually lived there. We may be fairly certain that at least some of the palace personnel and officials, in addition to the queen, royal children and *sekretus* lived in the palace. The title *sekretu* already gives a hint as to their seclusion. *Sekēru*, the verbal root of the word *sekretu*, means ‘to confine, etc.’<sup>132</sup> Although this suggests that the *sekretus* lived in confinement, the etymology is not – in itself – sufficient evidence to prove it, nor does the verb explain the extent of this seclusion.

Although the women of the palace had separate quarters,<sup>133</sup> that does not exclude the possibility of women having contact with the outside world. Although the movements of the high-ranking ladies may have been controlled to some degree, the extent of this control is difficult to know.

According to Westenholz, there is not sufficient evidence for the seclusion of women from the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. She writes that even the palace edicts (MAPD) mentioned in the previous section show that the ladies at court

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hammat (SAA 7 26); Attār-dallāti (ND 2443+, Parker 1961: 27–28); Nagibā (ND 2443+, Parker 1961: 27–28); Hazūgā (ND 2443+, Parker 1961: 27–28).

<sup>129</sup> Arbītu and Bazā (ND 2687, Parker 1961: 43–44).

<sup>130</sup> Abi-rāmu (CTN 3 144); Kisitu-abni (CTN 3 144); Esutu (CTN 3 144); Hassunu (CTN 3 144); Saggilia (CTN 3 144); Qannuntu (NWL 4); Ahātū (NWL 4); Harrānāiu (NWL 8, NWL 13, NWL 18, NWL 21); Hannī (NWL 18); Šilānu (NWL 18).

<sup>131</sup> Here “palace” does not refer only to the royal residence in the capital, but to all the royal residences.

<sup>132</sup> CAD S.

<sup>133</sup> Melville 2004: 37–38; Dalley & Postgate 1984: 11; Oates & Oates 2001: 78, 187–188.

“enjoyed a considerable measure of freedom.”<sup>134</sup> Westenholz’s view, which differs from the opinion of most scholars studying ancient Mesopotamia, shows that the evidence is far from unequivocal.

In any case, because there were clearly several very different groups of women with very different duties in the palace, it seems reasonable to assume that there was also variation in the degree of their control. The existence of female staff, for example female scribes, implies that at least some women had extremely limited contact with men. At any rate, it seems certain that not all the women living in the palace were secluded to the same degree.

Many women of the court, including the queen, owned substantial amounts of land and were involved in complicated financial transactions. This must have meant at least some interaction with the outside world. The *šakintus* and female administrative personnel, not to mention those married women who lived in the palace probably also dealt with merchants, village managers and such people – directly or indirectly.

A complicated – and at the moment unanswerable – question is the cultural significance of seclusion in Assyria. For example in India, although seclusion limits women’s mobility, women perceive this seclusion as a positive value and source of power, as it is a vital element for expressing a superior caste position.<sup>135</sup>

### 13. CONCLUSIONS

As explained in Section 2, the nature of the material led me to use the simplest definition of agency: to have agency is to act in the society and to not have agency is absence of that action. Needless to say, agency can be much more than action, but this will suffice for this article.

This definition of agency also connects with the theoretical emphasis of this article, which is in the relations among the individual, society and power. It is clear that the best way to study these relations is to examine the actions of women. Only the actions of Neo-Assyrian women enable one to evaluate their agency and their ability to make choices.

The aim of this article was to present an as complete as possible evaluation of the agency of women connected with the palaces of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The evidence has confirmed my hypothesis: these women were indeed not merely passive puppets of patriarchal structures, but actually could and did make choices and acted in the society in various ways. They were indeed formed by their society, but they also had the capacity to change it.

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<sup>134</sup> Westenholz 1990: 515–516.

<sup>135</sup> Ganesh 1989.

The essential results of this article, however, lie in researching *how* these women acted in the society. This has been clarified in some detail in the sections above. *Table 3* below tentatively summarizes the results. All figures are naturally only suggestive, as the categories I have used in this article are not definitive, but are rather meant to act as flexible tools. For example, I included only those women who actually existed. Therefore, I have not included in the figures any women appearing in literary texts or omen texts. Furthermore, the exact number of people is not possible to know when women appear in texts as a group of women. In such cases, I have counted one group as one occurrence.

*Table 3. Agency of the women associated with the palace*

Name of the group of women	Explicit agents / all women of the group	Implicit agents/ all women of the group	40 % or more are explicit agents	Less than 40 % are explicit agents	10% or less are explicit agents
Assyrian queens	2/11	9/11		X	
Other Assyrian royal women	3/6	3/6	X		
<i>Šakintu</i> – administrator	24/54	30/54	X		
Female staff and relatives of <i>šakintu</i>	4/5	1/5	X		
<i>Lahhimutu</i> – official	2/10	8/10		X	
Musicians: <i>nargallutu</i> and <i>nuärtu</i>	1/107	106/107			X
Other professionals	5/180	175/180			X
<i>Sekretu</i> – palace women	3/25	22/25		X	
Other women of the palace	13/39	26/39		X	

The concept of agency is a useful tool, but applying it to Neo-Assyrian texts is not without problems. Therefore, the results presented in this article can be considered only preliminary. For example, by concentrating on women's actions, I have been largely forced to overlook the ideological significance of women and their position in the Neo-Assyrian worldview, which doubtless would have illuminated their agency further.

The unbalanced nature of material must also be considered. The surviving evidence illuminates only a fraction of the complex hierarchies and systems of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. This can easily affect the conclusions drawn from the

material and the danger of overinterpreting is constant. The best defense against this is to recognize these dangers beforehand.

In addition to that, we must remember that the women under discussion in this article hardly represent “average” Neo-Assyrian women. Although the agency of the Neo-Assyrian women is a complex issue, it seems that the women associated with palace had more opportunities to act and make choices than other women – at least they have a clear numerical advantage. There are altogether 437 women “agents” to be found in the palaces whereas there are only 35 women “agents” associated with temples and 65 women “agents” that cannot be connected to either of these institutions.<sup>136</sup>

One reason for the high number of women associated with the palace can be found in the research method. In search of material, I extracted all the women with titles from the *Corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts*.<sup>137</sup> As it turned out, there are more women in the palaces who have a title of some kind than there are, for example, in the temples. This could suggest greater autonomy for the women of the palace, or it could just be due to the protocol of the court: symbolic rewards in the form of titles have often been found in many courts throughout history.

In the process of examining the agency of the Neo-Assyrian women of the palace group by group, a surprisingly large amount of information has emerged. In addition to that, considerably more women emerged from this data as explicit or implicit agents than anticipated. These women also functioned in surprisingly manifold ways: they engaged in a range of financial and other activities. It is obvious that further study on this subject is needed, on all the women of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. I hope to do this in my doctoral dissertation, the current title of which is “Women and Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire.”

## SOURCES

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ADD = Refers to two sources: 1) C. H. W. Johns, *Assyrian Deeds and Documents*, I–IV. Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1898–1923; 2) C. H. W. Johns, *Assyrian deeds and documents. American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 42 (1925–26): 170–274.

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<sup>136</sup> Teppo 2005: 111–122.

<sup>137</sup> See Section 3 for description of the method.

- BAM 21 = Abdulilah Fadhil, Die in Nimrud/Kalhu aufgefundene Grabinschrift der Jabâ & Die Grabinschrift der Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua aus Nimrud/Kalhu und andere in ihrem Grab gefundene Schriftträger. *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 21 (1990): 461–483.
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## APPENDIX

The *šakintus* of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in chronological order<sup>138</sup>

No.	Name (if known)	Agency	Dating	Location of her household	Text
1.		implicit	788	Kalhu	BaM 24: 263-264
2.		implicit	Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II	Arbail	ND 2803 <sup>139</sup>
3.		implicit	Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II	Kilizu	ND 2803
4.		implicit	Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II	Adian	ND 2803
5.		implicit	Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II	Kasappa	ND 2803
6.		implicit	Sargon II?	Kalhu	NL 81
7.	Addatī	explicit	694 (no. 81)	Nineveh	SAA 6 81-82
8.		explicit	694	Nineveh	SAA 6 83
9.		explicit	694	Nineveh	SAA 6 84
10.		explicit	692	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 85
11.		implicit	687	Nineveh	SAA 6 152
12.	Ahi-tālī	explicit	687 (no. 88), 686 (no. 89), 683 (no. 90)	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 88-90, 92-93.
13.		explicit	Reign of Sennacherib	Nineveh	SAA 14 471
14.		explicit	Reign of Sennacherib?	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 86
15.		explicit	Reign of Sennacherib?	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 87
16.		explicit	Reign of Sennacherib?	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 6 94
17.		explicit	Reign of Sennacherib?	Nineveh	SAA 6 95
18.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon	Assur	SAA 13 18
19.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon		SAA 16 183

<sup>138</sup> For the locations and dates of these texts, see publication in question and Chapters 6 and 11 of this article.

<sup>139</sup> Parker 1961: 55-61.

20.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Kilizi	SAA 6 247
21.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Nineveh	SAA 6 250
22.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 7 23
23.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Review Palace of Nineveh	SAA 7 23
24.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Review Palace of the New Contigent	SAA 7 23
25.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Našibina	SAA 7 23
26.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Šibaniba	SAA 7 23
27.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Bit-Adad-le'i	SAA 7 23
28.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Šudu	SAA 7 23
29.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Te'di	SAA 7 23
30.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Kahat	SAA 7 23
31, 32.		implicit, implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Sunê	SAA 7 23
33.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	Tušan	SAA 7 23
34.		implicit	Reign of Esarhaddon?	The household of the Lady of the House	SAA 7 23
35.	Zarpî	explicit	668	Nineveh	SAA 14 8
36.		explicit	668	Central city of Nineveh	SAA 14 9
37.		explicit	654	Nineveh	SAA 14 11
38.		explicit	650	Assur	SAA 14 13
39.		explicit	645*	Til Barsip	TB 13
40.	Šiti-ilat	explicit	617* (no. 30), 638* (no. 34), 615* (nos. 39-40), 626* (no. SAAB 1 10),	Kalhu Review Palace	CTN 3 29-30, 34-36, 39-40 SAAB 1 10
41.		explicit	Reign of Assurbanipal?	Nineveh	SAA 14 12
42.		explicit	Reign of Assurbanipal?	Assur	SAA 14 14
43.		implicit	Probably 647-610*	Assur	StAT 2 244
44.		explicit	625*	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 14 159
45.	Amat-Astārti	explicit	622*	New Palace of Kalhu	ND 2307 <sup>140</sup>
46.		implicit	620*	Assur	SAAB 9 67
47.		implicit	Probably 611*	Tušan	ZTT 11
48.		explicit	Reign of Assurbanipal or later?	Central City of Nineveh	SAA 14 175
49.	Amat-Ba'al	implicit	Reign of Assurbanipal or later?	Old Palace of Kalhu	ND 2309 <sup>141</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Parker 1954: 37-39.

<sup>141</sup> Parker 1954: 39.

50.	Ilia	explicit	Reign of Assurbanipal or later?	Kalhu	ND 2313 <sup>142</sup>
51.		explicit	Reign of Assurbanipal or later?	Kalhu	ND 2344 <sup>143</sup>
52.		implicit	7th century?	Haurina	SAA 7 134
53.		explicit		Nineveh	SAA 14 176
54.		implicit		Nineveh	SAA 14 177

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<sup>142</sup> Parker 1954: 39.

<sup>143</sup> Parker 1954: 47.