

THE ROVING OTHER: SHEPHERDS, TEMPLES, AND EMPIRES IN FIRST-MILLENNIUM MESOPOTAMIA

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Much of the literature on pastoralists and empire concerns mobile tribes and often focuses on imperial schemes of resettlement, or tribal thwarting of state initiatives. This submission argues that in mid-first-millennium BCE Babylonia, large bureaucratic temples stood between the imperial state and Babylonia's mobile class of shepherds. This article then explores this dynamic further, focusing on the use of administrative information as a point of imperial contestation, examining issues of local control and clashing hierarchies as the shepherds served an imperial obligation in the Mesopotamian hinterland, and finally argues that the pastoral dynamic presented here is of a piece with the larger political role of the temple in Babylonian life—both urban, familiar, and central and at the same time distant, other-like, and enigmatic.

Analytical literature on Mesopotamian pastoralists tends to follow one of two paths, which can crisscross and run together at various points.¹ The first explores the relationship between pastoralism and the imperial state. Some of the most interesting literature here concerns mobile tribes, and focuses on imperial schemes of tribal resettlement, tribal thwarting of state initiatives, or the atypical and idiosyncratic relationships that empires carved out with pastoralists.² The second explores the juxtaposition between sedentary and pastoral societies, often moving to collapse that very distinction.³ Recent work runs the gamut from putting pastoralism at the center of political action, through deconstructing the assumption of a Middle East with a static, perpetually sedentary society interacting with a static, perpetually nomadic one, to effectively writing pastoralists out of the picture in constructing analytical schemes of state-building with

1 Cuneiform texts, journals, and publication series are cited with the system of abbreviations of the Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (CAD), reproduced (with other abbreviations) at <cdli.ox.ac.uk>.

2 As will become obvious, the following is greatly influenced by James Scott's work (especially Scott 1976; 1990; 1998; 2009), but does not give that work near the care and nuance it deserves. For ancient work in particular, Briant 1982b (esp. 6ff., 81ff. 102ff. (on resettlement), 237ff.) is the classic work, but see also Rowton 1973; Balatti 2017; Adams 2006; Howe 2008; the essays in Szuchman 2009. Also particularly useful and informative for me were Nakash 2003: 27ff.; Salzman 2004.

3 See, e.g., Zeder 1988; 1991; 1994; Balatti 2017; the essays in Nicolle 2004; Arbuckle & Hammer 2019.

pastoral products.⁴ Anthropology guides most of these analyses, of course, although it draws liberally on Bronze Age (specifically Ur III) written sources for justifications.

As insightful as these analyses can be, some of the richest sources for pastoralism in first-millennium BCE Mesopotamia do not quite map onto them. There we also find multitudes of mobile animals and their handlers, yet at the same time we find large, bureaucratically complex temples standing between the imperial state and the land famously teeming with herds. As expected, temple shepherds did their work in far-off, rural, difficult-to-govern places, yet the evidence does not show the state approaching them through shaykhs or other types of tribal leaders. Rather, access to the pastoralists, and information about them, was centralized in temples among an urban class of entrepreneurial managers (called “herdsmen”). Although pastoral products were crucial to some state functions—wool for exports, sacrifices for legitimacy—we miss too many of the details by simply classifying those things as convenient state assets. Rather, we find an established, urban institution (the temple) mediating the relationship between the imperial state and rural Mesopotamia.⁵ Assuming a direct relationship between the state and pastoralists—although useful for general insights—glosses over a crucial (and complex) mediating step.

In the absence of a deeply theorized way forward—but still borrowing what is most apt from the literature—I explore a pastoral dynamic that is framed by imperial politics, executed through an urban institution, and carried out in most rural parts of Mesopotamia. After clarifying my approach, I first examine issues of local control and clashing hierarchies as shepherds served an imperial obligation in the Mesopotamian hinterland. Here we see the temple directly involved in the management of its shepherds as they serve this obligation, the texts revealing the difficulties of organizing them at a distance with unclear and overlapping chains of command. Next, I show how the temple’s institutional knowledge about its shepherds attracted the attention of imperial powers. That knowledge was generated in the process of imposing administrative order on the livestock economy; however, it also reflected first-millennium administrative trends, where contractors took over large-scale resource management. Unlike the first point, I show that the use of “balances” (Babylonian: *rēhānu*) deliberately put the shepherds at a conceptual distance—they and their issues were hidden behind administrative terminology shared between temple and state. Finally, we briefly consider a common motif in expressions of Babylonian hegemony (to establish / continue / increase sacrificial offerings). There, I argue that this banal-sounding motif is laden with meaning—it implies a high level of royal coordination and influence in temple affairs. However, the relationship between the imperial state and the shepherds is only implied, with the phrase flattening out the complex politics discussed in the first two points. Here the shepherds are integral to, but are subsumed under, ideas of broader systems building. As I try to show, all of these points complement the literature on pastoralists

4 For pastoralism as the center, see Porter 2012; for breaking down the analytical barriers between nomadic and sedentary, see Arbuckle & Hammer 2019 and the literature cited therein; for ignoring pastoralists in general, see Grossman & Paulette 2020: 6, where they recognize that the “question of mobility in Mesopotamia and the relationships between nomad and settled, tribe and state, desert and sown is a vexed one that has inspired decades of intense debate” but are content to “suffice it to say that caprines are widely considered an indispensable form of state finance in early Mesopotamia.”

5 Although not the aim here, it is worth noting that this mediation might provide another way to critique the “dimorphic” model of a static sedentary segment of society interacting with a static mobile one. Shepherds and their handlers were looped into urban patterns of seeking redress for wrongs, renegotiating their economic standing, and professional mobility (see Kozuh 2014).

and empire, but in distinctly first-millennium Babylonian ways. Chronologically, this paper concentrates specifically on the mid-to-late first millennium BCE, on the Neo-Babylonian and early Achaemenid periods, and leans heavily on evidence from the Eanna temple of Uruk, which is both abundant and particularly informative.

SHEPHERDS, EMPIRE, AND THE BABYLONIAN TEMPLE

Simplifying some, we can say that two sides of the same coin shape the relationship between shepherds and empire. On one side, shepherds are difficult to monitor and control, so they frustrate those particular aspects of empire. They are difficult to monitor and control for the simple reason that they are “people who move around,” to use James Scott’s self-identified crude phrase (Scott 1998: 1–2). Like pirates, raiders, brigands, and nomads, they are people whose otherness stems from the state’s difficulty in categorizing and controlling them, as well as extracting resources from them.⁶ Moreover, by virtue of having mobility, shepherds create a variety of options for themselves that people attached to land do not have, which further frustrates imperial control. They can flee oppressive conditions, join brigand groups, move about and attach themselves to different powers, or, for at least a short time, live without attachment to any power at all.

On the other side of the coin, in moving about from place to place (and often occupying marginal or peripheral areas of empire), shepherds could be uniquely useful for imperial projects. They knew the layout of the land beyond the well-trod areas, and had a wide geographic mental horizon. Like merchants, their itinerancy gave them atypical access to diverse sources of information (Briant 1982b; for merchants, see Highcock 2017). Here, their mobility created imperial opportunities—for example, empires could co-opt shepherds as a fighting force if they had a corporate identity, and/or locate them at strategic access points that could not sustain a village or military outpost. Moreover, shepherds put areas that were otherwise unproductive to work, which was of both ideological and economic significance for empires. Mountains often seem like barriers to agricultural and urban empires, but an empire could claim (as it were) mountains by pasturing animals on them (Briant 1982b; Balatti 2017: 327–338).⁷ If the people who controlled those animals recognized imperial authority, then ideologically that empire pulled a tremendous amount of otherwise unproductive and often dangerous land into the imperial project, rendering it safe, productive, and useful.

Putting these together, we can say that bringing shepherds into the imperial project could be an economic, military, and ideological boon, but that such co-optation required the empire to engage in irregular politics (Balatti 2017: 47–50). As a group, shepherds tend to defy state preferences for sedentariness to monitor and tax and entrenched hierarchies to negotiate with. Thus, shepherds had to be dealt with as a special category of people and required political flexibility to retain them in an imperial project.

That said, it is necessary to make the limitations of the evidence of this investigation clear. The type of information we have—namely, texts generated in the routine institutional business of Babylonian temples—does not allow us to tie Babylonian institutional shepherds into broader patterns and themes of mobile pastoralism in first-millennium Mesopotamia in any meaningful way (on those patterns, see Malbran-Labat 1980; Briant 1982a; 1982b; van Driel 1997–2000; Fales

⁶ For example, see Fuhrmann 2014 and Grünwald 2004: 29–31 on issues with shepherds and the Romans.

⁷ This is true for grazing on fallow land or inarable backwaters as well.

2011; Beaulieu 2013; Frame 2014; Balatti 2017). Instead, our best information shows the state dealing with shepherds through temples, which creates a patchy information environment—we know a great deal about some aspects, and next to nothing about others. For example, those who did the actual shepherding for the temples often have West Semitic names, and so it is possible, even likely, that that identity hints at tribal affiliations, and thus political connections, that are not evident in the documentation.⁸ What is certain, though, is that their potential tribal connection had no discernible legal or administrative bearing on their relationships with the temples. A shepherd did not approach the temple as, say, an Aramean through his tribe (as, for example, discussed in Balatti 2017: 47); rather, shepherds appear as low-order Mesopotamians who connected to the temple through the urban institution of the herdsman (*nāqīdu*, on which see Kozuh 2014: 67–89). If aspects of the management of the animals followed tribal migration patterns or the like—as is likely—this is opaque to us at present.

What we do have are the business records concerning those urban-based herdsmen who worked to bridge the gap between the demands of the temple and the larger pastoral economy (the herdsmen are often referred to as “entrepreneurs”; see Jursa 2010: 286–293; Kozuh 2014: 67–91). They had complex social, legal, and administrative connections to the temples; the documentation reflects those connections from the temple’s perspective, and leaves only hints at how those herdsmen engaged the outside world. We have to cast a sidelong light on the evidence—mostly business and administrative texts—to make it useful for the issue at hand. Although this does prevent some of the most dynamic and interesting literature from fully informing our subject, we are nonetheless dealing with an economic and cultural phenomenon of real significance. Larger temples had hundreds of people involved with the management of tens of thousands of animals (Da Riva 2002: 173–258; Kozuh 2014; Tarasewicz & Zawadzki 2018). Each temple’s animals and personnel were spread throughout Mesopotamia (Jursa 2010: 62–117; Kozuh 2014: 285; Zadok 2019), so this was not a matter of small-scale household management, or of sheep as a supplementary or emergency resource for an agrarian society. The consumption of lambs in temple rituals, often thousands per year, was central to the practice of Babylonian religion (Kozuh 2014; Tarasewicz & Zawadzki 2018), and wool provided the basis for Mesopotamian exports (Kleber in Jursa 2010: 595–623). It was large-scale, institutional management that was centralized in multiple temples, each providing a local corporate identity to its shepherds and herdsmen, and all dealing with the same natural resources and pastoral issues of broader Mesopotamia.

One final point of clarification. This paper’s heuristic understands Babylonian temples as institutions separate from the state apparatuses of first-millennium imperial powers. Major Babylonian temples operated as something like mini-states in the first millennium—with (at times vast) geographic influence, hierarchies, bureaucratic surveillance, subsidiaries, literary and scientific cultures, accounting regimes, a military, international connections, a system of legal redress, and so on.⁹ Complicating the issue, the temples’ literary and poetic cultures envisioned temple and state intertwined and integrated; to function properly, the temple needed a

8 On the West Semitic names, see Jursa 2003: 228; Kozuh 2014: 68 n. 4; Nielsen 2019: 17 n.77; Da Riva 2002: 188f.

9 Of the temples we know best, Eanna officials extended their reach from the Sealand to modern Tekrit to the Zagros; Esaglia officials from Lebanon to Persian Gulf; and the Ebabbar of Sippar from the Habur to the Sealand. These are found in Jursa 2010: 316–468 and Zadok 2019. For the international connections, see Kleber 2008: 203–214 for the Eanna; Da Riva 2012 for the Esangil; and Jursa & Wagensonner 2014 for the Ebabbar.

strong king who “maintained cultic order and respected religious traditions ... [and] extended his generosity towards the gods through the patronage of their temples” (Waerzeggers 2015: 187), assigning loyal bureaucrats to oversee these aims. Babylonians castigated kings whom they perceived to fail at this as sacrilegious interlopers (e.g., Cole 1994). Yet royal administrations came and went¹⁰—temple institutions, many of which saw their origins in antediluvian time, far outlasted dynasties and empires, and had pre-commitments, purposes, and aspirations that differed dramatically from those of the imperial state. This made for thorny Babylonian politics. It also put a discernable “temple policy” at the forefront of the memory of many reigns—the destroyer Sennacherib, the rebuilders Esarhaddon, the pious Nebuchadnezzar, the heretical Nabonidus, Cyrus the preserver, Xerxes the destroyer, and so forth.

For the Neo-Babylonian and early Achaemenid periods, scholars until recently described the temple as a *de facto* arm of the royal administration (e.g., van Driel 2002; Jursa 2007; Kleber 2008),¹¹ but recent literature has started to nuance that assumption (e.g., Kozuh 2014; Levavi 2017; Schmidl 2017). Moreover, a spate of at times brilliantly insightful literature has brought real depth and sophistication to our understanding of first-millennium Babylonian temples. Recent work, much of it studying a time of stability during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, now argues for a temple/state *Realpolitik* that involved inter-city colonial priestly families (Jursa & Gordin 2018; 2019), divine syncretisms (Beaulieu 2003: 128–137), targeted administrator removals (Jursa 2007), administrative law (Wunsch, Wells & Magdalene 2019), and pinpoint-precise administrative reforms (Sandowicz 2012: 45–49).

When it comes to first-millennium imperial politics, then, the Babylonian temple was both an imperial challenge and a potential ally; a division of the royal administration and a locus of rebellion; the target of imperial enmity and the recipient of imperial largess; and an institution to treat with political nimbleness or level to the ground. Whether any particular temple acted as an arm of the state or as a separate institution was often a matter of the politics of the time, the disposition of a particular administration, the stage of an evolving political relationship, or even a matter of how we frame the question, and it was never fully over to one side or the other. The point here is not so much to take a strong stance on this issue, but to set up at an angle that best illuminates the evidence.

IMPERIAL SERVICE AND HIERARCHY

At the Eanna temple of Uruk, the herdsmen owed a kind of state military service. Called the LÚ.PAN.ME(Š) *ša* LÚ.SIPA.ME(Š) ‘the bowmen of the shepherds,’ the service was written into a fixed form of the name. As far as we know, of all the Eanna’s personnel only those associated with sheep management were subject to this service; at other places the service

10 Compare to Brinkman in *Prelude to Empire* (1984: 16): “Following the political collapse of Babylonia at the end of the ninth century, the hereditary principle for monarchical secession had been undermined in practice: there is only one known instance of Babylonian father-son succession between 810 and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire in 626. The monarch was further destabilized by a rapid turnover in rulers, especially in the years from 733 to 689 (where there were no less than 14 reigns averaging just 3.2 years each).” This pattern hardly changes after the Neo-Babylonian empire. A successful father-to-son transition (Nabopolassar to Nebuchadnezzar) is followed by instability; the attempt to establish a new dynasty (Nabonidus to Belshazzar) is foiled by a foreign regime (the Teispids). That regime has one successful transition (Cyrus to Cambyses), at which point there is more instability until (another?) outside regime finally brings actual stability (the Achaemenids).

11 Much of this literature sought to counteract the “priests of Marduk” literature of the previous generation; see Jursa 2007: 74ff.; Kleber 2008: 345ff.

was spread more broadly among temple personnel (MacGinnis 2012; Gombert 2018: 36; Da Riva 2002: 187f.). The herdsmen did not perform the service themselves, arranging instead for others (such as family or unrelated shepherds) to serve for them. These shepherds *qua* bowmen have attracted much recent scholarly attention, with at least three full treatments of the evidence appearing in the last dozen years or so (Kleber 2008: 198–214; Tolini 2011: 105–119; Gombert 2018: 208–220). What we can say with certainty is that the bowmen did their service a long way from Uruk, in outposts (*kādānu*) on the other side of (*ahullā*) the Tigris.

Kleber, echoing Joannès, connects the area where the bowmen were stationed to the summer pastures of Mesopotamian sheep (Joannès 1982: 179–183; Kleber 2008: 213). Indeed, we know for certain that the Eanna controlled some sheep in distant pasturages on the other side of the Tigris as well as in northern Mesopotamia (Kozuh 2014: 285; Zadok 2019). I think Kleber and Gombert correctly highlight the fact that intimate knowledge of this distant, trans-Tigridian pastureland would have made the shepherds valuable for staffing the outposts. It was a rural and tribal place, but one that was particularly important in the mid-first millennium as a political hot spot between Mesopotamia and Iran. Joannès, for example, originally argued that these outposts were established by the Neo-Babylonian kings to guard against a Median invasion (Joannès 1982: 182–183), and that Cyrus and Cambyses maintained them for the purpose of thwarting “razzias de la part des populations des montagnes.” Tolini (2011: 116–117) added that the lightly staffed posts could have served multiple purposes, such as guarding against mountain invasions, protecting access to Susa, general guard duty on roads, and the circulation of information. Gombert (2018: 213–215) makes much of a Diodorus Siculous quote, emphasizing the use of these outposts in surveillance and information sharing.

All of these functions fit a classic pattern whereby the ability of shepherds both to know and surveil rural, difficult-to-govern areas put them into a distinct and idiosyncratic relationship with imperial authority. Here, I want to highlight the distinctiveness, which we see in a variety of ways. As already noted, we have the fixed form of the name of the obligation, which uniquely attaches the profession (“shepherds”) to the service (“bowmen”). In addition, the temple itself armed, outfitted, and fed the bowmen while in service (Kleber 2014; Gombert 2018: 210). This differs considerably from examples of bowman service from later archives, which consist of landed people who take out mortgages to buy their own equipment (Stolper 1985; Gombert 2018: 573–579). The temple as a centralized weapons manufacturer, depot, and supplier is a phenomenon that begs for more attention (see Gombert 2018: 115–191; Kleber 2014; MacGinnis 2012). In addition to outfitting and feeding the bowmen, the Eanna also staffed the outposts with a diverse array of personnel other than its shepherds, including oblates, workers, and temporary hirelings.

The distinctiveness of the obligation shows itself most in a way that cuts against the grain of the prior literature on this subject. Both Tolini (2011: 112–115). and Gombert (2018: 208–213) try to ascertain a working administrative hierarchy and chain of command in the outposts. They do an admirable job trying to read order into the texts, but in doing so miss one of the larger points. The texts seem to be generated at a point of real contestation over what we can broadly call jurisdiction—where one level of command and administration of the shepherds *qua* bowmen overlapped with (and perhaps was supposed to give way to) another. For example, here are a selection of the operative parts of relevant texts in chronological order:¹²

12 The texts that give precise dates are (ruler year/month/day): YBC 7414 (Nebuchadnezzar 38/09/13); GCCI 2 102 (Cyrus 01/06/01); AnOr 8 41 (Cyrus 04/04/01); TCL 13 140 (Cyrus 07/03/24); YOS 7 154 (Cambyses 03/08/12); the rest are dated by the officials who appear in them, by context, or are undatable.

TCL 9 97 (Nbk years 4–19): By Šamaš, the governor will surely return to Uruk; he is worried about the bow service in Uruk, just like my lord (is) ... you have never before released any Urukeans from this duty. (Translation and date follow Levavi 2018, no. 152).

YBC 7414 (Nbk 38/09/13): PN, the herd chief spoke to ... altogether ten headmen of the guards of the herdsmen of the Lady-of-Uruk who are in outposts at the [bank] of the river Tigris, thus: “You need to release the archers who are in the watch of the king at the bank of the river Tigris, and get to collecting the sheep and cattle of the Lady of Uruk instead. If there are fugitives and deserters in the watch of the king, they [should bear] the guilt of (an offense against) the king. If I find in your hands physical evidence related to the archers of the king (whom) you were supposed to release or sheep and cattle of the Lady-of-Uruk (that) you were supposed to round up, you will give cattle and sheep thirtyfold to the Lady-of-Uruk and you will bear the guilt of (an offense against) the king.” (mostly follows Frahm, in Wunsch, Wells & Magdalene 2019, no 2: 345–348)

GCCI 2 102 (Cyr. 01/06/01): the Eanna’s chief administrator and royal supervisor command four herd supervisors to “go and enrol the archers of the shepherds as is done every year in the outposts which are on the [...] river.”

AnOr 8 41 (Cyr. 04/04/01): The citizens in whose presence Nidintu-Bēl/Nabû-mūkin-zēri//Dābibī the chief administrator of the Eanna and Nabû-aha-iddin the royal supervisor of the Eanna spoke to Iqīšā/Nanā-ēreš, Ibnā/Nabû-ahhē-šullim, and Ibni-Ištar/Šuma-ukīn, the herd supervisors of the Lady of Uruk, as follows: “Not one of your(pl.) archers (lit. not one bow) should tarry at (?) [*la ta-mir-ki*] the outpost of the king.”

TCL 13 140 (Cyr. 07/03/24) Seventeen men who are under the control of Iqīšā/Nanā-ēreš ... a total of twenty-nine archers from the shepherds who are under the control of the herd supervisors of sheep and goats of the Lady of Uruk, about whom Gadubu/Ina-šilli-Nanā and Šamaš-rē’ūšunu/Ah-immê—who were in the presence of Ninurta-ēṭir the messenger of Šamaš-balāssu-iqbi the chief of the outposts—spoke to Nabû-mukīn-apli/Nādīnu//Dābibī the chief administrator of the Eanna and Nabû-aha-iddin the royal representative: “(the archers) are stationed for the watch of the king at the outpost on the Tigris. And the three archers whom Kīnā/Dannu-Nergal, Ištar-šuma-ēreš/Nabû-ēpuš, and Nabû-dūr-[pānija], the herdsmen of sheep and goats, brought forth and [...] — [station(?) them with] Ninurta-ēṭir the messenger of Šamaš-balāssu-iqbi for the outposts.” This is apart from eight archers about whom Iqīšā/Nanā-ēreš swore by Bēl, Nabû, the Lady of Uruk, and Nanā that: “by the twenty-sixth of month III (Simanu) I will bring (them) in and send (them) to the outposts. The deadline will not pass.”

YOS 7 154 (Camb. 03/18/12): Šamaš-udammīq/Ina-tēšī-ēṭir and Anu-mukīn-apli/Nanā-iddin, oblates of the Lady of Uruk, take responsibility for stationing fifty oblates of the Lady of Uruk (as) the archers [...] of the outposts. Monthly they will check the aforementioned fifty oblates in the outposts—apart from the hirelings of Innin-ālik-pāni—and give [...] to Šamaš-erība the chief of the outposts [...] (the city of) Harzibaya.

YOS 3 21 (Camb. year 3): “The king will soon move out to (come to) us. Nanaya-iddin and the (other) decurios should not stay longer in Uruk after the lords have seen my letter. My lords should make them move out. My lords should send me a letter as soon as they have left; they (the decurios) must not delay anything! The lords need to give him(?) men to replace the men of the outposts—” (translation and date follows Kleber 2012: 226)

YOS 3 133 (date uncertain): “... with regard to the outposts, about which my lord wrote to me. I am not responsible (for them)! I myself am only responsible for the work of the palace ...

These texts reveal a dizzying array of responsibilities and hierarchies for what was by all accounts a fairly small-scale operation: citizen assemblies, oblates, temple management, herdsmen, herd supervisors (*rab būli*), chiefs, decurions, kings, governors, royal messengers, and so on. But, contrary to previous approaches, I am not convinced that some set order underlies all of this, waiting there for us to discover it.

Rather, I think the contestation over jurisdiction *in itself* serves to spotlight the distinct relationship between the shepherds and imperial authorities. The many complex hierarchies herein did not just give way to each other (shepherds being notoriously resistant to hierarchy

as it is). All these hierarchies and chains of command existed at the same time, fighting for authority, direction, and distinction as new situations presented themselves in the execution of the bowman service. As that happened—and for reasons we do not necessarily understand—various parties turned to witnessed legal texts to document that particular people took particular actions in particular circumstances. If nothing else, these texts testify to extensive hierarchical ambiguity; they capture distinctive situations in a grey area precisely because those situations were unfamiliar and different. One might argue that these texts show the sorting out of the obligation, but even that puts too much emphasis on the result over the process. These texts do not show the solution to the contestation as much as they show the area and contours of contestation around disputed hierarchies as each one asserted itself.

But generally speaking, the texts show contestation where and in ways one should expect to find it (and might even be overemphasized in letters). The Eanna as an institution had connections to a mobile class of people in a remote part of Mesopotamia. These connections were long-lived, business-like, and administrative (Kleber 2008; Kozuh 2014; Gombert 2018: 33). Imperial authorities then worked with the temple to use its connections for the benefit of the empire—that is, the crown needed to bring order to a difficult-to-govern area, and did that, at least in part, through the Eanna’s established relationships with difficult-to-govern people. The texts then reveal the inevitably messy politics of this “policy” as it happened. Imperial powers pushed down, trying to impose order and regularity; local hierarchies and *modi operendi* pushed back upwards, trying to maintain the status quo, deal with the new order, and perhaps evade responsibility. In the middle stood the temple bureaucracy, with the independence of shepherds and remoteness of the location overcomplicating the situation.

TEMPLE RECORDS

Indeed, I think this state of affairs speaks to a broader point about temple records. As the bow-obligation texts show, Babylonian temples had robust and sophisticated traditions for documenting operations, often in ways that produced copious amounts of written documentation (Jursa 2004b; 2005; 2011).¹³ If one of the first orders of empire was to capture and process basic information about areas under the empire’s control, Babylonian temples had that information in spades and at granular levels.¹⁴

One finds institutions documenting the economic activities of shepherds and their minders in other periods of Mesopotamian history, with rich pockets of information in the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods, from Nuzi, and in the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian eras.¹⁵ Despite some superficial similarities, the records differ significantly from one time to another in terms of the type of institution generating the texts, herding strategies, terminology, herd compositions, expectations of outcomes, metrics for herd assessment, and the sizes and scopes of the animal

13 For major temples, we have around 2,000 texts from the Ezida temple, 8,000–9,000 texts in the Eanna archive, and over 35,000 in the Ebabbar archive. It is unclear how much Aramaic or wax-writing boards may have played a role in administration. The latter are definitely referenced in specific spheres of the temple economy (see Jursa 2004b: 155ff.); references to the former are not common (in general, see Beaulieu 2006).

14 One might draw a parallel here to the famous interest of some Assyrian kings in copying literary and scientific tablets in the collections of Babylonian temples (Fincke 2003: 115–124). Jursa’s points about the difficulties of recognizing and reconstructing temple “libraries” are well taken (Jursa 2011: 198–200).

15 For Ur III, see Stępień 1996; Kraus 1966; Postgate 1975 for the Old Babylonian period; for Nuzi, see Morrison 1981; for the Middle Assyrian era, see Röllig 2008.

economies.¹⁶ What they do have in common is perhaps obvious but often unappreciated: the creation of institutional knowledge in the attempt to impose administrative order on an unruly section of the economy. To take the most basic example, Neo-Babylonian temples had lists of the often hundreds of shepherds under their control, or at least lists of the herdsmen (see van Driel 1993; Da Riva 2002: 186–246; Kozuh 2014). But their information was more than just raw, census-like data, important as that might have been. The temples had accounts, quantitative information, debt obligations, lists of debtors, confirmations of hierarchy, schedules, and so on.¹⁷ That is, the temples did not just have records, they had actionable files that enabled and authorized their legal and administrative reach well into the Mesopotamian hinterlands.¹⁸ These records could not only provide imperial powers with raw information about mobile shepherds and their difficult to govern spaces, they could also sketch out pathways through the temples to effective control.¹⁹

We still do not quite understand how the temples used these texts in administration (in general, see Van de Mieroop 1997; more specifically, see Jursa 2004b; Kozuh 2015). Pushing one approach to its extremity, it is possible that the texts were functionally useless, serving only as symbols of the temple's institutional knowledge and control. In this view, the scribe's function was only performative: his registering of payments, tallying up the herd, and recording it all on tablets was nothing more than a literal show of power, with the information on the texts put to only the most basic of uses.²⁰ I am sympathetic to aspects of this point, and have argued that indeed most economic operations took place extra-contractually and face-to-face (Kozuh 2014; see also Jursa 2011: 196–197 for a discussion of “rules of thumb”). At the other extreme, perhaps scribes ran sophisticated accounting operations, with each text forming part of an interlocking chain of administrative exactitude; in this view, the temple used the texts to monitor the shepherds, punish them for shortfalls, plan for future operations, and so on.²¹ Here authority stood behind the numbers and calculations, undergirded by the inspection and assessment process itself, and was backed with written evidence. This latter way feels very modern, but must have some validity to it.²² Even if we lack analytical precision here, what we know for certain is that it worked. Year after year, organized by their herdsmen, hundreds of temple shepherds roamed far away but then came back, either to the temple itself or to one of the temple's remote administrative locations. Upon their return they paid their lamb dues, turned over their wool, had their concerns addressed by temple authorities, took on some new

16 Noted already in Kraus 1966: 19; Landsberger 1960: 55ff.; Morrison 1981: 270–271. The differences run deep. Most of these earlier archives are of state (or, for Kraus, “state”) herds, and many of them seem to deal with spheres of responsibility that deal with at most hundreds of animals, not, like Neo-Babylonian temples, tens of thousands of them.

17 For types of texts, see van Driel 1998; Kozuh 2014: 21–25.

18 See also Jursa 2010: 64–117; Zadok 2019; see Jursa & Wagensohn 2014 for a parallel with land records.

19 This might be especially relevant given the wool trade, the scope of which has attracted much attention of late; see Kleber 2008; Kleber in Jursa 2010; Quillien 2016.

20 See, e.g., the issues around the Eanna's *huṭāru*-staff (Kozuh 2014: 117; 2015; Kleber 2018), which was used as a divine reckoning device to collect animals from herdsmen.

21 See the discussions about Ur III scribal culture in Robson 2008: 59–73.

22 Beyond these, I think we also struggle to understand how authorities might have used data, quantitative or otherwise (De Odorico 1995; Robson 2008), and upper-level temple officials must have influenced how the crown approached the temple's actionable information, even if (despite copious attestations) their potential roles in this are not understood very well (Da Riva 2002: 47–54; Kleber 2008: 26–49; Waerzeggers 2010: 33–50; note the observations in Levavi 2018: 94–104).

animals, renegotiated their contracts, and began the cycle anew (Kozuh 2014: 285–306; Da Riva 2002: 173–246).

Yet distinct from earlier periods of Mesopotamian history, we see the temple’s institutional knowledge about its livestock economy became a point of imperial contention and negotiation under the Achaemenids. For over eight years, the new administration of Cyrus and Cambyses took an active interest in the Eanna of Uruk’s records on sheep management (Kozuh 2014: 168–171; 2015). In brief, that interest led not only to the generation of the only comprehensive lists of the Eanna’s herdsmen and their balances (YOS 7 39, YOS 7 83, and YOS 7 87) but also produced texts explicitly documenting royal interest in information about livestock operations. For example, we learn of messengers of the satrap Gobyras (AnOr 8 61, lines 13f.) “who [in the 8th year of Cyrus] were sent for an inspection of the sheep, goats, and cattle (of the Eanna).”²³ Those herdsmen with administrative balances were ordered to Babylon (AnOr 8 43), and the royal administration sent messengers who stated, “show us the inspection so that we can take a copy of the ledgers of sheep, goats and cattle with us and show them to [the Persian administrator] Bagdādu” BM 114565: 14ff. (see Kleber 2008, 58f. text nr. 3).²⁴ One of the most colorful and interesting sets of texts, about a well-connected administrator turned cattle thief, was at heart a battle over imperial involvement with temple records concerned with balances in sheep, wool, goats, and goat hair (Jursa 2004a: 119–122; Kozuh 2014: 159–176).

It is not altogether clear what the new administration wanted to do with these records. No doubt the scale of the Eanna’s economy drew their interest, as behind those texts was a livestock economy of tens of thousands of animals and hundreds of shepherds. It is also possible that the administrators of Cyrus and Cambyses were attempting to bring order to an economy that was having difficulties (Jursa 2004a: 122). Yet, I see the nature of these demands in line with a point made by James Scott that

the functionary of any large organization “sees” the human activity that is of interest to him largely through the simplified approximations of documents and statistics: tax proceeds, lists of taxpayers, land records, average incomes, unemployment numbers, mortality rates, trade and productivity figures, the total number of cases of cholera in a certain district. These typifications are indispensable to statecraft. State simplifications such as maps, censuses, cadastral lists, and standard units of measurement represent techniques for grasping a large and complex reality... (Scott 1998: 76–77)

That is, apart from normal state interests in lists of personnel, these texts show imperial officials interested in each herdsman’s balance (Bab: *rēhu*, pl. *rēhānu*) in animals and wool, about which we have some real information (see Kozuh 2014: 92–120). The balance was the difference between projected and actual amounts of herd growth and wool production, and effectively every herdsman ran annual balances in animals and wool. Here, the significance lies in the fact that these balances worked as convenient abstractions; they took the Eanna’s livestock “industry”—which was large, crucial to the temple’s economy, and spread throughout Mesopotamia—and simplified it down to a common measurement. Jursa and others have argued that that simplifications like this one were ultimately the point of having an entrepreneurial class between the temple and its shepherds: the temple could take the messy reality of dealing with its shepherds, turn it into a set of contractually stipulated deliverables (lambs, wool), and then, with those stipulations in mind, farm out the actual risks of managing the shepherds

23 Akkadian: *šá a-na muh-hi a-mir-tum šá še-en ù ÁB.GU4.HI.A šap-par-ru-nu*

24 Akkadian: *a-mir-ti kul-li-ma-an-na-ši-ma GABA-ri GIŠ.DA [šá] še-e-nu ù ÁB.GUD.HI.A it-ti-i-ni ni-iš-ši ‘ma’ a-na ‘ba-ga-da-a-du nu-kal-lim*. For a discussion of the context, see Kleber (2008: 58–60); Kozuh (2014: 37–38).

to an urban entrepreneurial class (Jursa & Moreno Garcia 2015: 121–122; van Driel 1999; Wunsch 2012; see also the discussion in Kozuh 2014: 121–214). From the perspective of the temple and the crown, the complexities of the far-off “other” become deliberately enshrouded in an administrative number—a bookkeeping term (“the balance”)—with the actual work of administering the shepherds shifted over to the herdsmen. If the texts about bowmen reveal the temple struggling to organize a distant and hierarchically ambiguous situation, the texts about balances in some ways show the opposite. Here, temple management pushed off the managerial difficulties to the herdsmen and dealt in a streamlined administrative abstraction, one that it recognized in common with the royal administration.

The administrative issues here run deeper than space allows for elaboration, but do not distract from the larger point. The texts themselves were part of a package that projected a temple’s bureaucratic authority into far-flung areas; reciprocally, those texts then built a base of knowledge about the temples’ spheres of interests. That knowledge contained not only the means to reach and make use of the people located in those far-flung areas, but also the administrative abstractions and simplifications that guided those operations. All of this unsurprisingly attracted the interest of imperial authorities. From their perspective, temples were loci of influence in Mesopotamia that extended, finger-like, well beyond their cities. The texts documenting that influence provided information on the effective governance of areas of Mesopotamia outside the immediate environs of any given temple.

A VIEW FROM ABOVE

Finally, a brief observation. So far we have only seen the herdsmen and shepherds in legal texts and letters, which originate in the actual steps that temples, kings, and their administrators took in order to control Babylonia. Those steps took place against a background of local history and circumstances that is impossible for us to fully reconstruct and understand, with the texts themselves being written in response to particular issues that we may never know existed. While we can be certain that the meeting of imperial actions and local Babylonian politics created complexities far beyond what our sources let on, we can at the same time find public expressions of empire that steamroll over and flatten out these complex politics.

Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions are often disdained for their repetitiveness and lack of originality, in addition to an indifference to political or military information. This is indeed true, yet they are not out of step with normal expressions of hegemony in Babylonia (Porter 1996; Waerzeggers 2011; Zaia 2019). One of the recurring themes we find in them is royal attention to systems of sacrificial sheep offerings—either in terms of supplying temples with the means of producing sacrificial sheep offerings,²⁵ increasing the sacrificial sheep offerings at temples,²⁶

25 See, e.g., “I made the *sattukku*-offering(s) of Egipar abundant. I copiously supplied it with fields, orchards, domestic staff, cattle, and sheep and goats” (Nabonidus 28 [= Schaudig 2001: 2.7, ii 10]).

26 See, e.g., “At that time, with regard to the god Šin and the goddess Ningal, my lords, I made their *sattukku*-offerings more abundant than (they were) in the past. I made everything there is copious in Ekišnugal. Per day, I indeed established for the god Šin and the goddess Ningal, my lords, three sheep above the original *ginû*-offering of a (single) sheep” (Nabonidus 2001 [= Schaudig 2001: 3.2, ii 56b, translation from <oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ribo/babylon7/>. Or, “I was solicitous to provide more lavishly than before for the regular offerings of my lords Marduk and Šarpanitu: daily two fattened ‘unblemished’ *gumahu*-bulls; one fine and ‘unblemished’ bull, whose limbs are perfect, whose body [has no] white spot; forty-four fattened sheep, fine *zuluhhu*-breed; [inclusive] of what (pertains) to the gods of Babylon ... (all this) I provided, more lavishly than before, as the table-spread of my lords Marduk and Šarpanitu” (Da Riva 2012: 46).

or often just taking credit for the successful flourishing of an offerings system.²⁷ The repetitiveness and lack of originality in these claims—even if frustrating (Da Riva 2013: 1–2)—do not render them empty. Rather, these passages celebrate the end result of systems building. To claim that one established or increased sacrificial offerings is to claim that one set up and maintained processes that produced and collected lambs for the sacrificial table.²⁸ In other words, they are claims of having roped mountain pastures to urban spaces, or rural shepherds to elite urban consumers. They strike right at the *raison d'être* of temple animal management.

Indeed, with good information we see just how complex those systems actually were. In continuous operation, they involved multiple people at multiple steps, were spread throughout Mesopotamia, and were all backed up by a systems of policing (Pirngruber 2013; Sandowicz 2018) and legal redress (Kozuh 2014: 179–214; Wunsch, Wells & Magdalene 2019). The thrice-daily coordination of actions that brought about the regular offerings could involve bewildering complexity (Beaulieu 2003; Waerzeggers 2010); and stresses and disruptions to these processes were often at the forefront of administrative concern (Kozuh 2013). We see that temples like the Eanna controlled around 80,000 mature sheep, under the control of hundreds of shepherds and herdsmen, in order to produce the annual 4,000 or so lambs they needed per year for these sacrificial offerings (Kozuh 2014: 1–14; for the Ebabbar, see Tarasewicz & Zawadzki 2018: 104–109). Perhaps other temple systems ran with more efficiency, but when Nebuchadrezzar II speaks of sacrificing forty-four sheep per day at the Esangila (Da Riva 2012: 46), or the Seleucid Uruk ritual text (TCL 6 38) contemplates the daily sacrifice of sixty sheep (Linssen 2004: 172–179), behind those claims are vast systems of control of the countryside and the mountains.

There is no doubt that keeping these systems running was the largely the domain of local administrators. At the same time, it is precisely in this domain that we find the active participation and watchful eye of royal administrations (Beaulieu 1989: 118–119; 2003: 129–138; Kleber 2019: 108–110, 255–310; Waerzeggers 2010: 53; 2011). This reflects, I think, the corollary to the phrasing in the royal inscriptions—that to take credit for the flourishing of sacrificial offerings was to actively work to support and fortify the systems that brought them to fruition. To that end, many temples had a royal official dedicated to supervising the temple (Bongenaar 1997: 34–55; Kleber 2008: 26–30, and we find royal administrations delivering their own animals to the temple for sacrifice (Kleber 2008: 281–285; Kozuh 2014: 240–248), assigning prebendaries (Beaulieu 1989: 118–119; Waerzeggers 2010: 36ff., 53ff.), reforming prebendal systems (Sandowicz 2012: 45–49), and guaranteeing distribution (Kozuh 2013). In other words, the offering system exposes where the rubber of the king as maintainer of the cult met the road of the cult's complex day-to-day management.

Claims of establishing or increasing offerings, then, are claims charged with meaning. At heart they convey Babylonian-specific techniques of hegemony and control; they imply both an expansion and intensification of systems that coordinated the movements of roaming, rural

27 “[Every day one *gumāhu*-bull, fattened ‘unble[m]ished’; sixteen out]standing [*pasillu*-sheep; inclusive of what (pertains) to the gods of Borsip]pa: [a string of fish]; wild [birds;] bandicoot rat; [eggs: the best things of the] marsh; [honey; ghee; milk]; the best oil; [šad]û- [wine], pure wine: [(all of this) I] provided [more lavishly than before for the table of my lords Nabû and] Nanaya ... I established [every day eight sheep, as regular offerings] for Nergal [and Las, the gods of E]meslam] and Cutha, I provided abundantly [for the offerings of the] great [gods], I increased the regular offerings [beyond the old offerings]” (Da Riva 2013: 208–210).

28 In many ways, the literature here on the “royal table” and the “king’s meal,” well known from Assyrian and Achaemenid sources, is relevant here: the table itself is a celebration of control, and the items on the table work as a mini-representation of empire (see, e.g., Briant 1989: 16–20; Kleber 2008: 85–91; Henkelman 2010: 16–20).

shepherds with sophisticated calendars for urban ritual consumption. The ideological phrasing indeed flattens out the complex relationship between empires and the temple shepherds, but one should expect no less in overt expressions of hegemony.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would argue that we see the imperial state engage with “other-like” shepherds through the temples in three different and distinct ways. In the first, we see an imperial service obligation served out in the Mesopotamian hinterland, in an area where the temple could draw upon its long-lived connections to shepherds who pastured animals there. Here we see the Eanna directly involved with the management of this obligation, but we also see ambiguity and contestation in the clash between state desires for hierarchy and order, the temple’s already established way of doing things, and the general messiness of actually managing independent-minded shepherds, all magnified by distance. The texts reveal searches for inter-hierarchical limits and borders.

The second shows something of the opposite. Here we see the state pressing the temple for its store of information about its livestock economy. This reminds us that the temples kept detailed textual records on their shepherds, which not only created a kind of institutional knowledge about them but also charted out paths of effective control. Even if the temple was reluctant to release its records to Babylon, both temples and the state used a language of administrative simplification (the “balance”). Unlike the first point, this language put the actual management of the shepherds at a conceptual distance, which reflects first-millennium administrative trends. If the management of the shepherds *qua* bowmen put the temple in the thick of things, negotiations with the state over temple records happened at a level of abstraction removed from the complexities of day-to-day management.

In the third way, the state—as shown in the inscriptions of Neo-Babylonian kings—uses a common (if banal) motif of Babylonian political hegemony: the establishment, continuation, or increasing of sacrificial offerings. Implicit in these is a claim of successful systems building—to run a system of sacrificial offerings, especially at a Babylonian scale, was to get highly complex systems of geographic administration, bureaucratic order, and imperial law working together and in tandem. If the second way is abstracted right above the actual management, the third way is the bird’s eye view. Here, the shepherds go unmentioned, but their work is subsumed under a larger ideological claim.

Ultimately, then, I would suggest that these three points complement the larger literature on shepherds and empire, but in an idiosyncratic way. They reinforce the idea that bringing shepherds into the imperial project could be a military, economic, and ideological boon, and show how that co-optation required the empire to engage in irregular politics. In this case, though, it was not a matter of intense negotiations with a tribal shaykh, or of simply managing a group of state shepherds. Rather, imperial powers approached the rural Babylonian other through the temples, perhaps the most established, most complex, and most urban institutions in Mesopotamia; this then gives particular shape to issues of delegated control, administrative abstraction, and effective coordination.

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