

THE CHIEF SINGER AND OTHER LATE EPONYMS

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The chronological order of the post-canonical eponyms has – understandably – been subject to the interest of scholars. Recent studies include those by Robert Whiting, Simo Parpola and Julian Reade.¹ In contrast, little attention has been given to the new officials who rose to the ranks of eponym during the last decades of the Assyrian empire.² The present paper views the evidence for the new offices and draws attention to the changes in the eponym system during the late Neo-Assyrian period. These new offices are:³

Chief singer, *rab zammāri*

Palace scribe, *tuṣṣar ekalli*

Chief cook, *rab nuḥatimmi*

Palace supervisor, *ša-pān-ekalli*

Chamberlain, *ša-muḥḥi-bētāni*

1. CHIEF SINGER

Bulluṭu, *rab zammāri*, was eponym of 634*⁴. As Bulluṭu, chief singer, is known only from the eponym dates,⁵ we know nothing of his background or possible personal merits that could have gained him the status of an eponym.

¹ Whiting in Millard 1994:72–78, Parpola in PNA 1/I: XVII–XX, and Reade 1998.

² Whiting commented briefly on the historical changes in the eponym system and drew attention to titles of eponyms that occur only in the post-canonical period (Whiting in Millard 1994: 76). However, he did not mention the palace supervisor. See also Zawadzki 1997: 388.

³ The title *rab ālāni*, village manager, for Nabû-sagibi, eponym of 618* (Reade assigns this eponym to 629), has proved to be a mistake. Millard (1994: 106) and Reade (1998: 256) suggested this title on the basis of ADD 193. However, the new edition of this text in SAA 14 153 shows that there is not enough space on the lines r.11–12 for the date, and Nabû-sagibi, village manager, is in fact the last witness of the document. This point is further strengthened by the prosopographical evidence that places this text in the reign of Assurbanipal. The eponym Nabû-sagibi is now known as governor of Laḥīru, see PNA 2/II: 866 s.v. Nabû-sagibi nos. 3 and 13. However, under Nabû-sagibi no. 13, correct the reference SAA 6 55 to SAA 14 153. For new evidence of eponym dates where Nabû-sagibi bears the title governor of Laḥīru, and for the dating of this eponym, see the article by Karlheinz Kessler in this volume.

⁴ For the post-canonical dates, the conventions and dating of PNA (PNA 1/I: XVIII–XX) are used.

⁵ See PNA 1/II: 351 s.v. Bulluṭu no. 5. His title [LÚ].GAL–NAR is attested in the eponym date of SAA 14 112 r.16–17.

Equally, virtually nothing is known about the office outside its literal meaning as chief singer. An earlier chief singer, Šulmu-mati, is known from two documents⁶, but only as a witness. In the first document (SAA 14 65) the chamberlain Urdu-Issar buys two slaves in 668. The other witnesses in these two documents include Ța-bašti, chief gatekeeper, and Dannaya, chariot driver, both from the circle of Assurbanipal's chariot driver Remanni-Adad.

A chief singer of Til-Barsip⁷ is also attested showing that the title of chief singer was not restricted to the royal palace.

2. PALACE SCRIBE

Two post-canonical eponyms bear the title of palace scribe. Nabû-šarru-ušur, *tuṣšar ekalli*, was eponym of 629* and Sîn-šarru-ušur, *tuṣšar ekalli*, of 625*. Both are attested as eponyms in numerous date formulae, but it has not been possible to identify them in any other texts.⁸

The offices of the chief scribe and the palace scribe have recently been subjected to a thorough study by Mikko Luukko (2007). Luukko has been able to identify nine palace scribes (2007: 253), the earliest of them being Nabû-tuklatu'a from the reign of Adad-nerari III and Shalmaneser IV (Luukko 2007: 232–233).

Whereas the chief scribe was predominantly a scholar, the palace scribe was an administrator. According to Luukko “The palace scribe was in charge of the Neo-Assyrian chancery. He managed the palace archives, and may well have been the king's personal scribe and secretary at the palace” (Luukko 2007: 251). The palace scribe worked in close contact with the king, and his office was probably situated close to the domestic quarters of the king (Luukko 2007: 236). The importance of the palace scribe and his influence at court is reflected in the fact that at least eight letters were addressed to this official (Luukko 2007: 236–238). Luukko draws attention to the fact that “only the Assyrian king, the crown prince and the governor of Calah are attested to have been receiving more letters than the palace scribe(s)” (Luukko 2007: 236 n. 58). The position of the palace scribe granted him shares of tribute and audience gifts; he is also mentioned receiving wine in the Wine Lists (Luukko 2007: 245).

⁶ SAA 14 65 r.8: [IGI mD]l¹-KUR LÚ.GAL-*za-am-ma-ri* and SAA 14 66 r.5 [IGI mDI-m]u¹- KUR LÚ*. GAL¹-*za-ma-ri*.

⁷ See SAA 6 312 and 313 where Bel-aplu-iddina, chief singer of Til-Barsip, sells a tailor and his family to Remanni-Adad in 666.

⁸ See PNA 2/II: 878 s.v. Nabû-šarru-ušur no. 47, and PNA 3/I: 1147 s.v. Sîn-šarru-ušur no. 16. Concerning the prosopography of Nabû-šarru-ušur, see also the earlier study by Fales (1988).

3. CHIEF COOK

Sa'ilu, *rab nuḫatimmi*, eponym of 620*, is known from eponym dates only.⁹

The office of the chief cook is well attested in the Neo-Assyrian sources starting from the reign of Sargon II. Befitting his title, the chief cook is frequently attested in connection with the supply and distribution of animals, mainly for offerings. A text concerning distribution of a levy of oxen and sheep mentions 140 oxen for the house of the chief cook, consisting of 40 oxen classified as (offerings of) first-fruits¹⁰, and 100 as regular offerings (SAA 11 90, not dated). According to a decree from the reign of Sargon II, the chief cook of the palace takes one sheep for the constant offering from Ḫatarikka and Šimirra (SAA 12 77). A letter from Babylonia, also from the reign of Sargon II, mentions that the bulls of the Labdudaeans are due to the chief cook (SAA 15 187). The chief cook delivered rams for a ritual to Adad-šumu-ušur, the chief exorcist of the king, according to SAA 10 202, a letter from the reign of Esarhaddon.

Two letters refer to other activities of the chief cook. The chief cook is attested in a broken context with governors of Rašappa and Til-Barsip transporting heavy logs during the reign of Sargon II, presumably connected with the building of Dur-Šarrukin (SAA 1 32). According to SAA 16 120, from the reign of Esarhaddon, the chief cook received an order from the palace to have Kinâ, the author of the letter, to line up (the exempts presently staying outside Arbela under his control) in the presence of the king.

The chief cook received tribute: 100 tribute sheep, 2 sheep, and 2 bowls of wine in a list of distribution of tribute to palace personnel (SAA 11 36 i 9–10). The first recipient in this list is the treasurer and the chief cook is followed by the chief of accounts, the chief fuller and the oil and fruit masters. The palace supervisor and his deputy and scribe are also attested in this text.

The chief cook had a chariot driver who acts as a witness in SAA 6 36, dated 695.

Several chief cooks are known from Assur. A chief cook, Nergal-bel-ušur, is known from a letter from Assur. The unknown author from the Aššur temple states that Nergal-bel-ušur, chief cook, can report on the author's loyalty (SAA 13 45, reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal). A chief cook Nabû-šarru-ušur imposed a verdict in Assur in two court cases (StAT 2 165 and 166, dated 650 or post-canonical eponymy of Bel-šaddû'a).¹¹ These two chief cooks may well be chief cooks of the temple of Aššur. A chief cook called Nasî and a chief cook of Ištar are also attested

⁹ For details see PNA 3/I: 1064 s.v. Sa'ilu no. 19. His title is written logographically LÚ.GAL–MU.

¹⁰ For the interpretation of SAG.MEŠ, see Postgate 1983.

¹¹ See PNA 2/II: 877–878 s.v. Nabû-šarru-ušur no. 45 and no. 46. The son of the chief cook may be one of the witnesses in StAT 2 166.

in a text from Assur.¹² In addition to the chief cooks known from Assur there was a chief cook of Ḫarran.¹³

4. PALACE SUPERVISOR

Bel-aḫu-uṣur, *ša-pān-ekalli*, was eponym of 616*. He is known solely from the eponym dates.¹⁴

The office of the palace supervisor is frequently attested in the Neo-Assyrian sources.¹⁵ In two letters the palace supervisor is mentioned in connection with treaty ceremonies. According to SAA 1 76, a letter written by Ṭab-ṣil-Ešarra, governor of Assur during the reign of Sargon II, officers of the palace supervisor took the treaty tablet of Gurdî to the temple for the treaty ceremony. In SAA 18 162, from the reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal¹⁶, Kabtiya writes to the king that he missed the treaty ceremony in Babylon due to military obligations, but “on the way home I went to see the palace supervisor, he took me along, and I joined the treaty in Nippur and Uruk”.

A palace supervisor called Aššur-balti-niše is known from the reign of Sargon II and he is attested in connection with deportees and captives in three texts. In SAA 1 257 he checked and received 277 deportees. In SAA 1 10 Aššur-balti-niše (without his title) is sent by the king with instructions concerning Uraṭian(?) women in Arrapha. The palace supervisor seems to be seeking out the women and taking them separate from other captives. Aššur-balti-niše wrote a letter to the king from Kar-Šamaš concerning the transport and feeding of prisoners of war (SAA 5 242).

The connection with deportees and captives is also known from two other texts. An unknown author quotes the king saying: “the palace supervisor is right now bringing [capti]ves [to you]” (SAA 1 259, reign of Sargon II). Furthermore, the palace supervisor is mentioned in a broken context in an administrative text in which the reverse lists different professions – including 4 gardeners, 3 brewers, a tailor and 2 carpenters – who may well be captives or deportees (SAA 7 20).

In a letter to Sargon II, Nabû-šumu-iddina, a fortress commander, writes that the appointment of an unnamed palace supervisor has pleased the people of Laḫiru and its environs (SAA 15 136). A letter to Assurbanipal from the *šandabakku* of

¹² The chief cook of Ištār acts as a witness in a sale document from Assur (STAT 2 102, dated 711) where the seller is a cook of Ištār. The other witnesses include a chief cook called Nasî and several other cooks.

¹³ Adad-remanni, chief cook of Ḫarran, is attested as a major landowner in the Ḫarran Census (SAA 11 203 iii 8–9 and SAA 11 213 r. i 12–13).

¹⁴ See PNA 1/II: 284 s.v. Bel-aḫu-uṣur no. 8.

¹⁵ The title is written (LÚ.)ŠÁ-IGI-KUR/É.GAL.

¹⁶ For the historical context, see Reynolds 2003: XXX.

Nippur states “last year after the palace supervisor and the magnates went down to Chaldea” (SAA 18 202).

The influential position of the palace supervisor at the palace is referred to in several texts. Nabû-šumu-iddina, known as the *ḥazannu* of the Nabû temple in Kalḫu, writes to Esarhaddon as he wishes to have an audience with the king: “let an order be given to the palace supervisors: when the elders pass by beneath the terrace, let them allow me to see the face of the king, my lord, and may the king look at me” (SAA 13 80 14–r.6).

The palace supervisor is mentioned in a broken context in a letter from Babylon in which the writer complains about beatings, “Let the king [...] before the palace supervisor” (SAA 13 185 r.17, reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal).

Babylonian scholar Bel-ušeziḫ writes to Esarhaddon: “I have sent four tablets [...] the palace supervisor to the king, my lord” in a letter about suggestions for appointments of scribes (SAA 10 116). Unfortunately it is not possible to tell whether the four tablets concern the palace supervisor in some way or whether the tablets concerned the appointment of scribes and were sent to the king through the palace supervisor.¹⁷

The palace supervisors are listed before staff bearers and watchmen, tailors, kitchen staff and scribes in a two insurrection queries (SAA 4 142:8 and 144:8) dating from the reign of Esarhaddon.

The palace supervisor was responsible for the accounting of timber in SAA 5 295, a letter to Sargon II. According to SAA 1 137 the palace supervisor had a storehouse, and in SAA 7 83 he is mentioned in a broken context with precious stone items.

The palace supervisor is mentioned frequently, altogether 13 times, receiving provisions of wine in the Wine Lists from Kalḫu.¹⁸ The palace supervisor (SAA 11 36 ii 11–17, r. i 30), his deputy (ii 5–8) and his scribe (ii 18) are mentioned as recipients of tribute among palace personnel and military staff.

Two scribes of the palace supervisor are known as authors of letters to the king. Kabṫī, the scribe whom the king installed in the house of the palace supervisor, writes to the king assuring him that he has kept the watch of the king (SAA 16 98, possibly reign of Esarhaddon¹⁹). Nabû-zero-ušur, scribe of the palace supervisor, writes to the king, that donkey herdsmen used to sell donkeys in front of the palace, but the governor has driven them away (SAA 16 88, reign of Esarhaddon).

Mukin-Aššur, servant of the palace supervisor sells a baker to Remanni-Adad, chariot driver of Assurbanipal in 669 (SAA 6 305).

¹⁷ For the possible restorations of this passage, see SAA 10 116 commentary to line r.15.

¹⁸ NWL 2 i 13, 3 ii 8, 4 r.6, 6 r.45, 8:25, 11 r.16, 13:14, 15:3, 16:20, 19:23, 22:8, 33 ii 3, and 41:3.

¹⁹ For the date see Luukko & Van Buylaere 2002: XLV and the earlier literature cited there.

The palace supervisors of the crown prince and of the queen are also known from the sources. Conspirators plotting against the king meet in the house of Nabû-eṭir, [son of] Erišu and Tab-šil-šarri, [superv]isor of the crown prince's palace (SAA 18 101).²⁰ In a fragmentary letter (SAA 18 109) the unknown author complains that the palace supervisor of the Succession Palace refuses to see him. In SAA 6 328 the palace supervisor of the crown prince acts as a witness for Remanni-Adad in 663. Aššur-matu-taqqin, servant (profession lost) of the palace supervisor of the queen, acts as a witness for Nabû-sakip who donates slaves and an estate to the temple of Nabû "for the preservation of the life of Šin-šarru-iškun, king of Assyria, his lord, and the preservation of the life of his queen" (SAA 12 96). A palace supervisor of the queen is also attested in SAA 7 5 i 36 (late reign of Esarhaddon) and probably in SAA 11 36 iii 1–2.

The evidence shows the palace supervisor's involvement in the practical organisation of treaty ceremonies. He and his staff are attested in charge of bringing treaty tablets and people taking the oath to the ceremonies. He was often involved, somewhat unexpectedly, with deportees and captives, and took part in the military campaign to Chaldea with the magnates. At the palace the supervisor administered audiences with the king. There was most probably a palace supervisor in each royal palace, and the crown prince and the queen had their own palace supervisors.

5. CHAMBERLAIN

Šin-alik-pani, *ša-muḥḥi-bētāni*, was eponym of 615*. He is known from eponym dates only.²¹

An earlier chamberlain, Urdu-Issar, bought two slaves in 668 (SAA 14 65). The witnesses include chief singer Šulmu-mati, chief gatekeeper Ḫa-bašti, and chariot driver Dannaya.

Otherwise the office is not frequently attested in the sources. The chamberlain is mentioned among palace personnel in the Wine Lists receiving rations of wine.²² The chamberlain is also one of the officials receiving audience gifts. He is listed after the palace supervisor and before palace scribe, and he receives one mina of silver and one toga (SAA 1 34, reign of Sargon II).

The chamberlain is the recipient of a letter from Aqar-Bel-lumur, military officer at Dur-Abi-ḫara in Gambulu. Unfortunately the content of the letter is lost (SAA 17 103, reign of Sennacherib²³).

²⁰ For the historical context and the person mentioned in this text, see Reynolds 2003: XXVI.

²¹ See PNA 3/I: 1128–1129, s.v. Sin-alik-pani no. 2. The title is written (LÚ.)šá/ša-UGU-É-a/an-ni.

²² NWL 4 r.8, 8 r.14, 23:3, and 40:9.

²³ For the historical context see Dietrich 2003: XXVII.

The chamberlain was present when chief cupbearer Nabû-killanni made a scholar called Kudurru perform a divination asking whether the chief eunuch would take over the kingship (SAA 10 179, reign of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal).

Assurbanipal exempted a chamberlain from taxes. Unfortunately the text is too broken to give the name of the chamberlain or any information concerning his exempted property (SAA 12 30).

Bel-dan, ‘third man’ of the chamberlain, witnessed a sale for Ninuayu, eunuch of the king (SAA 14 21, late reign of Assurbanipal).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Of the officials discussed above, the palace scribe and the palace supervisor are the best attested and they emerge from the plentiful evidence as central figures in the palace administration. The chamberlain was also one of the important palace officials receiving tribute during the reign of Sargon II (SAA 1 34). The official is found already in the wine lists from the early 8th century as part of the palace personnel.

The chief cook, who was in charge of offerings, and the chief singer remain more enigmatic. Reade has even suggested that “Aššurbanipal’s appointment of his chief musician Bulluṭu as eponym recalls the classic image of Sardanapalos (Aššurbanipal); presumably Bulluṭu was effectively a high official, like Sîn-šarru-iškun’s chief cook who was an eponym, but the promotion suggests a self-indulgent and irresponsible king” (Reade 1998: 263).

What the motives behind this appointment were remains unknown. However, the survey of the new officials who rose to the ranks of eponym in the last decades of the Neo-Assyrian empire demonstrates how the power centred increasingly on the king’s person and his closest palace officials.

The centralisation of power to the immediate circle of the king and the royal family is also evident in the increasing importance the administrative departments of the queen and the crown prince during the 7th century, as Karen Radner has shown in a recent study concerning the Neo-Assyrian bureau seals (2008).²⁴

These preliminary findings need to be placed in the larger context of the development of the eponym system during the Neo-Assyrian empire.²⁵ Changes in the system can be seen already during the reign of Sargon II, when the traditional sequence of the high officials as eponyms after the king was abandoned and the *masennu* was the only magnate to become eponym. Esarhaddon was the first king not to take the eponymate and during his reign the *sukkallu* and the *sartinnu* appear as new officials gaining this status. In the early reign of Assurbanipal the *rab kāri*

²⁴ The evidence collected above (at the end of section 4) for the palace supervisors of the queen and the crown prince further strengthens this argument.

²⁵ See the discussion by Zawadzki 1997.

and *rab kāširi* join the ranks of eponyms. It is not in the scope of the present paper to address the whole complicated issue, and the survey of the latest phases of the empire can only aspire to draw attention to the importance of studying the historical development of the eponym system and the way it reflects political and ideological changes during the Neo-Assyrian period.