

THE DIVERSE ENTERPRISES OF ŠUMU-UKIN FROM BABYLON¹

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this article is the career of Šumu-ukin of the Basiya family whose activities are attested in many documents from Babylon, Uruk and some other places over the course of forty-three years (588–545 BC). At the beginning of his activities he served as a scribe and was also engaged in business operations. In 560 BC, however, he was appointed as a royal official in the Eanna temple in Uruk and five years later he, together with his kinsman Kalbaya, became a large-scale rent collector in the Eanna temple. Documents containing some information about his domestic affairs, including two of his wives, have also been preserved.

1. ŠUMU-UKIN: AN INTRODUCTION

Šumu-ukin, son of Bel-zeri, descendant of Basiya, left an extensive archive of more than sixty documents drafted in Babylon as well as in Uruk and its neighbourhood, including Larsa. He is mainly known as a large-scale rent collector and his activities in this role have been studied by D. Cocquerillat, F. Joannès, H.M. Kümmel, G. Frame and M. J. Geller. The aim of this paper is to research some of his other enterprises, some of which have not been taken into consideration previously.

Šumu-ukin's family relations have been traced by Kümmel and Geller.² He had two brothers (Silim-Bel and Iqišaya, see below) and was married twice. His first wife, Bu'itu, is known from a number of letters (see below) and a few legal documents from the Eanna temple archive in Uruk. One of these texts (YOS 6 129) was drafted in Uruk in 550 BC and records that a certain Ḫanna' who was a female oblate (*zakītu*) in the Eanna temple branded two of her daughters to be placed at

¹ In this paper cuneiform texts are cited using the abbreviations of the *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (CAD) or of W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (AHw). My estimates of Babylonian capacity measures are based on the assumption that one *qa* was about one litre.

² See Kümmel 1979: 106 and 128, Geller 1995.

the disposal of Bu'itu and of a certain Li'udu-Nanaya (apparently as servants).³ Geller is inclined to assume that the latter was the same woman who is attested in a document from 548 BC under the name Li'idu. As he assumes, Bu'itu and Li'idu were both wives of Šumu-ukin and were living in his household, since polygamy was legally permitted when the first wife was childless.⁴ In one document from Uruk drafted in 548 BC, Šumu-ukin and Bu'itu are mentioned together as protagonists. In the text, an informer bears witness against a woman by the name of Etilitum saying that they entrusted to her some property or that they placed it in the house of her husband and that she is to hand over the property immediately to the Eanna temple.⁵

2. ŠUMU-UKIN'S VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

In a few records Šumu-ukin is attested as a scribe who composed legal documents. For the first time he is referred to in the seventeenth regnal year of Nebuchadnezzar II (588 BC) at Babylon as the scribe of a document that records a loan of money to be repaid in barley (YOS 17 23:11). In 583 BC he drew up a document regarding the sale of a half-share of a boat for 23 shekels of silver to a certain Tabnea. The owner of this boat was Iqišaya, son of Bel-zeri, descendant of Basiya, i.e., the brother of Šumu-ukin. The document was drafted in the locality of Bab-Lamrani, in all probability in the region of Babylon.⁶

In 582 BC he allotted to a certain Zababa-šumu-iddin 3 minas of silver for a "business venture" (*ana ḥarrāni*). This man was obliged to pay half of the profit to Šumu-ukin and could not use the money without his consent (TCL 12 40). One of Šumu-ukin's business ventures was made in partnership with a certain Šillaya. They both were to transfer seven hundred *kurru* (i.e., 1,260 hl) of barley from the village of Ḥarrubati in the Nippur region and deliver it to a scribe of the palace who apparently lived in Babylon.⁷ Probably, in 551 BC the same Šumu-ukin (his filiation is not given) paid 1 shekel of silver through his messenger (*mār šipri*) "as the price of 1 ½ minas of alum from Egypt" and 2 ½ minas of x⁸ (GCCI 1 327).

It seems that only in rare cases Šumu-ukin acted as a witness for legal transactions. For instance, in 557 BC he is mentioned among the witnesses of a document from Šaḥrinu, which was a site between Babylon and Borsippa.⁹ This text records the obligation of a certain man to deliver ca. 1,270 litres of barley "in

³ See Geller 1995: 537.

⁴ Geller 1995: 537.

⁵ Scheil 1917: 157–158.

⁶ Frame 1986: 30, line 11.

⁷ BIN 2 109. Cf. Sack 1972: 78, No 34; Kessler 2005: 279, n. 15.

⁸ *is-si* or *es-si*: an unidentified commodity in this context; a connection with *essû* or *issû* (AHw. 250b, CAD I/J: 204) is unlikely.

⁹ Ner. 67. For the collation, see Sack 1994b: 206–207.

its entirety” at the Borsippa canal to his contracting party. This barley constituted a part of the “business capital” of the well-known businessman, Iddin-Marduk, son of Iqišaya from Babylon.

There are also several documents regarding the houses which were the property of Šumu-ukin. As seen from YOS 6 85, in 552 BC one of his houses was rented out to a certain Arad-Nabû for 8 shekels of silver a year. The tenant was obliged to pay this sum in instalments each month. It is noteworthy that the document was composed in Uruk, and thus it is likely that the house was located there. The second document (GCCCI 1 292) is a record of the price of a house belonging to Šumu-ukin that in 548 BC was sold to a certain Šadunu for 6 minas 3 shekels of silver. This is a very high price. The text does not contain any indication of where it was written but it is possible that it also comes from Uruk. In any case, the majority of the texts published in the GCCCI collection come from Uruk.¹⁰ There exists yet another document concerning houses that belonged to Šumu-ukin and were rented out in 551 BC. It states that some shekels of silver (the figures are broken off) and one sheep constituted a yearly rental payment for the houses in the locality of Kurbat in the Uruk region. These houses belonged to Šumu-ukin who is designated in this text as an official in charge of the rent for the Eanna temple and whose full filiation is presented (GCCCI 1 413). Finally, his house (or one of his houses) in Uruk is mentioned in AnOr 8 70, dated in the third regnal year of Cambyses (527 BC), i.e., seventeen years after his death (see below). This house was located near one of the Eanna buildings named Egaḥalanki and by that time belonged to this temple. The temple administration handed it over to two individuals together with one more house for consignment (*mēreštu*). The house of Šumu-ukin was evaluated at 6 minas 5 shekels of silver but the consignors failed to deliver the silver and therefore both of the houses were returned to the Eanna property.

Among the transactions concluded by Šumu-ukin the contract GCCCI 1 269 is of considerable interest. It records that he bought an “exceptionally good” (*rūḫu*) horse from two men for 3 minas 50 shekels of silver. Of this sum he had already paid 2 minas, and was to settle the balance some time later. It should be noted that this was a very high price and that one could have purchased a good house for the same amount. The document was drafted in 548 BC, in all probability, in Uruk.

A number of documents are promissory notes where Šumu-ukin acts as a creditor. For instance, in 572 BC a man from Babylon was charged to pay him about 25 shekels (the figures are partly broken off) of silver within a certain period. The man also had some other former obligations to his creditor for which a part of his house was pledged (TCL 12 48). The following year another man from Babylon swore by the name of the god Šamaš that he would pay his debt to Šumu-ukin within a short period of time (GCCCI 1 167).

¹⁰ See Dougherty’s remark in GCCCI 1, p. 16.

As seen from AnOr 8 19, in 556 BC Šumu-ukin acquired a slave woman with her two sons and a baby daughter for 1 mina 50 shekels of silver. This sum was equal to the value of one hundred *kurru* (i.e. 180 hl) of barley. The seller of the slaves was obligated to deliver this amount of barley to the king but was not able to do so. The document was drafted in the presence of five witnesses in Uruk, in the territory that was under the jurisdiction of the Eanna temple. The following year Šumu-ukin purchased a slave who was a barber by profession for 58 shekels of silver. The document was drawn up in Babylon in the presence of three witnesses (YOS 6 5).

3. ŠUMU-UKIN AS OFFICIAL OF THE EANNA TEMPLE IN URUK

As we have seen above, Šumu-ukin was an inhabitant of the city of Babylon and was engaged there in business transactions. However, some time later he acquired an important position in the administration of the Eanna temple in Uruk. Subsequently, many documents concerning his activities come from the archives of the Eanna temple. During the reign of Neriglissar (559–556 BC) he bore the title *bēl piqitti šarri* (“royal commissioner”) and later, under Nabonidus, his title was *ša-muḥḥi-sūti* (“the official in charge of the rent”) of the Lady-of-Uruk.¹¹ In one text of Nabonidus’ time he is called “the chief of the *ikkarātu* (“plowmen”) belonging to the Lady-of-Uruk” (TCL 12 73:17).

Eanna documents testify that during Nabonidus’ reign enormous land holdings on which rent was paid in hundreds of thousands of litres of grain and dates were rented out. The temple leased their land holdings in large blocks to entrepreneurial renters, who, in their turn, subleased them in small lots. Among the documents of the Eanna archives, the contract YOS 6 11 is particularly interesting. Three copies of this text have been preserved and studied by several Assyriologists. The subject of this contract is the lease of land concluded in 555 BC at Larsa, and in it the king Nabonidus himself granted a lease to two individuals, but the fields belonged to the Eanna temple and covered six thousand *kurru* (ca. 7500 hectares) of land. The tenants were Šumu-ukin and his cousin and partner Kalbaya from the Basiya family. For the first year of the term of the lease they received, among other things, 3,000 *kurru* (ca. 5,400 hl) of seed barley. In addition they received four hundred oxen, and one hundred “large” cows to replace oxen not fit for work. The lessees were to pay the temple an annual rent of twenty-five thousand *kurru* (ca. 4.5 million litres) of best quality barley and ca. 1.8 million litres of choice dates in the measure of the Eanna temple.¹² In some thirty documents from the Eanna archives Šumu-

¹¹ See Kümmel 1979: 105, n. 58.

¹² On this and other contracts regarding the lease of the Eanna temple lands, see: Cocquerillat 1968: 38–51, Cocquerillat 1984: 145–151, Joannès 1982: 130–141, Frame 1991: 59–61, Kessler 2005: 278–279 (with references to previous literature). Add to the references given there the following publications: Dillard 1975: 113–114, no. 1561; Sack 1994a, nos. 89, 92–93 and 101.

ukin is attested as a rent collector. For instance, in 553 BC he paid the temple a total of 10,136 *kurru* (18,244.8 hl) of barley as rent from plowmen of the temple at his disposal (YOS 6 78). In the same year he, together with Kalbaya, paid the same temple 10,020 *kurru* (18,036 hl) of dates (TCL 13 227). In his letter to Šumu-ukin a certain man addresses him as “my master” and informs him of a royal order concerning some oxen and a driver. He then assures Šumu-ukin that the king’s command about the measuring of dates will be carried out in the near future.¹³

Šumu-ukin served as a rent collector of the Eanna temple for ten years. In BIN 2 109 he is mentioned as a rent collector for the first time. Together with a palace scribe he supplies 700 *kurru* (1,260 hl) of barley from a certain locality in the Nippur region. In this document Kalbaya appears as a witness.¹⁴ The amount of the income collected by him during this time (partly together with Kalbaya) constituted about 450,000 hl of barley. In one document dated at Uruk in the fourth year of Nabonidus (552 BC) Kalbaya bears the title “commissioner” (*bēl piqitti*) of Šumu-ukin, i.e., the official in charge of the rent of the Eanna temple. In this text two individuals make some statement before him in the presence of several witnesses but the text is almost completely destroyed in key places (YOS 6 88).

So far, it has been common opinion that Šumu-ukin is attested in documents from Babylon, Uruk and some other places over a period of thirty-seven years, beginning from the 23rd year of Nebuchadnezzar II’s (582 BC) reign.¹⁵ But now it is also known that his activities started at least five years earlier. As we have seen above, in YOS 17 23 (line 11) he is already attested as the scribe of this document dated at Babylon in the 17th regnal year of the same king. Thus, already by 588 BC he was an adult man. The last record of his dealings was composed forty-three years later, in 545 BC, i.e., in the eleventh regnal year of Nabonidus (YOS 6 242). It contains an account of imposts of barley and dates from temple lands for three years (regnal years 8–10 of Nabonidus, i.e., 548–546 BC).

At the beginning of his activities he lived in Babylon where he was engaged in various business operations. Then, in the second regnal year of Amel-Marduk (560 BC) he was appointed as a royal official in the Eanna temple in Uruk.¹⁶ Five years later he, together with his cousin Kalbaya, became the first large-scale collector of the payments (*fermier général*) from the Eanna temple lands. Among his other dealings can be mentioned that in 548 BC he paid a man 10 shekels of silver by a proxy “for digging work on 30 cubits of canal” which apparently belonged to the Eanna temple.¹⁷

¹³ See Jursa 1997/1998: 165–166.

¹⁴ See Cocquerillat 1984: 145.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Joannès 1982: 131.

¹⁶ See Joannès 1982: 130–131.

¹⁷ See Dillard 1975: 192 (FLP 1612).

As it was said above, the first wife of Šumu-ukin was Bu'itu. In a letter from the Eanna archive, sent to Bu'itu by Kalbaya, the latter addresses her as “my mother” (YOS 3 22) which is probably merely a polite expression.¹⁸ Another letter from Uruk says that Kalbaya is going to Babylon together with Šumu-ukin (YOS 3 46). As seen from a document drafted in Uruk in the fifth regnal year of Cyrus (534 BC), Bu'itu was already dead by that time.¹⁹ This text contains a legal suit against Li'idu who was the second wife of Šumu-ukin. Now, ten years after the death of her husband, she was claiming his income derived from some temple rituals on the grounds that she remained a widow after his death. The case was tried in the assembly (*puḫru*) of Uruk citizens in the presence of the temple administrators, but the decision of the assembly was not in her favour. Thus, it seems that Šumu-ukin died in the twelfth regnal year of Nabonidus (544 BC).²⁰ This is also in accordance with the data of the above-mentioned YOS 6 242.²¹ As was said above, after the death of Šumu-ukin his house in Uruk was taken by the Eanna administration into the temple property.²² Thus, he left no children and at least some of his assets were taken for the temple.

¹⁸ See Geller 1995: 538. Cf. also Kümmel 1979: 106.

¹⁹ See Geller 1995: 537.

²⁰ See Geller 1995: 537.

²¹ Cf., however, Geller 1995: 538, according to whose opinion Kalbaya had succeeded Šumu-ukin in the office of the rent collector of the Eanna temple by the seventeenth year of Nabonidus, i.e., 539 BC.

²² It can be noted that a similar fate also befell the house of a prosperous merchant from Uruk whose house was taken after his death into the property of the king (*makkūr šarri*) and entrusted to the management of the Eanna temple administration (see BIN 1 118 from 531 BC).