



# Close Ties (?)

## The King, the Temple and Royal Administration in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Empires According to Epistolographic Sources

The takeover of the Neo-Babylonian Empire by Persian rulers is widely regarded as a smooth and stable process. This reading of the data can be nuanced by information gleaned from official letters<sup>1</sup> from the Eanna and Ebabbar archives. A comparison of the evidence for the two periods shows that the variety of topics the

king is involved in drops noticeably (as does the number of letters dealing with or referring to him). Even when factoring in the satrap's involvement, the difference is undeniable. The overall structure of local government may have remained unchanged, but the very nature of royal domination was altered under Persian rule.

### Neo-Babylonian Empire

Used only with people with close ties to the crown; private and official persons

Private: Šumu-ukīn: YOS 3, 189, AfO 44/45  
Officials: bēl piqittis: YOS 3, 194; YOS 3, 153; YOS 21, 161; JAOS 87, 9f. A5345+5464

u<sub>4</sub>-mu-us-su<sup>4</sup> gašan šá unug<sup>ki</sup> ú<sup>4</sup> na-na-a a-na tin zim<sup>es</sup> pa-ni ha-du-tu<sub>4</sub> šá lugal it-ti en-ia ú-šal-la (YOS 3, 189, 3-6)  
Daily, I pray to the Lady of Uruk and Nanāya for (my lord's) prosperity and for my lord to be in favour with the king.

Royal land allotments to

Persons BIN 1, 94; YOS 3, 200  
Institutions BIN 1, 34

Royal court YOS 21, 149

"amāt šarri"

Juridical means GCCI 2, 395; YOS 21, 140, YOS 21, 89 (?)  
Royal orders YOS 3, 182; YOS 3, 186; crown prince: YOS 21, 176  
Rhetoric device

enhances the user's authority BIN 1, 73; YOS 21, 129, YOS 3, 44  
metaphor BIN 1, 37

calenders YOS 3, 115; YOS 3, 152

adū BIN 1, 93; GCCI 2, 395; NBDMich. Nr. 67; YOS 21, 129

[l]a.kin al-tap-rak-ku-nu-šú<sup>4</sup> um<sup>4</sup>-ma<sup>4</sup> kuš<sup>es</sup>til-lu a<sup>1</sup>-na lugal šu<sup>4</sup>-bi<sup>4</sup>-la-nu<sup>4</sup> kuš<sup>es</sup>til-lu a-na lugal ul<sup>4</sup> tu-še-bi-la-nu<sup>4</sup> ši-pir-ta-a lu mu-kin-nu<sup>4</sup> ina<sup>4</sup> muḫ<sup>4</sup>-hi<sup>4</sup>-ku<sup>4</sup> nu<sup>4</sup> ḫa-an-ḫiš<sup>4</sup> kuš<sup>es</sup>til-lu<sup>4</sup> u<sup>4</sup> ki<sup>4</sup>-di-né-e [šú]-bi-la-nu<sup>4</sup> [ia]-a<sup>1</sup>-nu-ú a-mat [lugal] ina lib-bi [ana muḫ<sup>4</sup>-hi<sup>4</sup>-ku<sup>4</sup>-nu<sup>4</sup>] i-qa-bi (YOS 21, 140: 6-20)  
I (already) send you a messenger, (saying,) "Send the quivers for the king!", (but) you did not send the quivers to the king. My letter is (my) witness. Quickly, send quivers and linen-towels. Otherwise, [we] will speak the "word of the [king]" against you in this matter.

a-mur 50+x lal-ti<sup>4</sup> ūz<sup>mes</sup> ina lib-bi re-ḫa-a<sup>2</sup> a-mat lugal u a-mat gašan šá unug<sup>ki</sup> liš<sup>es</sup>ipa u lu<sup>4</sup>na-qi-du ina muḫ<sup>4</sup>-hi<sup>4</sup>-ia<sup>2</sup> al-ta-kan-a<sup>2</sup> ki-i a-di-i a-na luš<sup>es</sup>.tam-am-mu ta-šap-pa-ru (BIN 1, 37:24-32)  
"... See for yourself, there are (still) 50(+) small goats left. It is both the word of the king as well as that of the Lady of Uruk - you will assign me with a shepherd and a herdsman. Surely you will write to the šatammu."

Contact with the king was possible and direct

Letters mentioning

personal audiences YOS 3, 129; private letter VAT 3137  
messages to the king('s son) CT 22, 3; YOS 21, 156; TCL 9, 132; YOS 19, 105; YOS 3, 136

from the king('s son) YOS 3, 186; YOS 21, 52; TCL 9, 132, Mesopotamia 31, 20; YOS 21, 176;

Talking to the king('s son) YOS 3, 200; YOS 21, 172; YOS 21, 164; PTS 2001; JAOS 87, 9f. A5345+5464; CT 22, 62; Mesopotamia 31, 12; Mesopotamia 31, 17

Lobbying via a third person YOS 21, 53

Direct involvement PTS 2001

Deliveries to the king/court (?) YOS 21, 140; Mesopotamia 31, 20

ina tē-em, šá<sup>4</sup> amar.utu-pab lib-bi šá e[n-ia] lu-ú<sup>4</sup> ta-ab-šú pa-ni šá lugal it-ti-šú<sup>4</sup> ba-nu<sup>4</sup>-ú ud.25.kam šá iti.šig<sup>4</sup> lu<sup>4</sup> man-za-za pa-ni gab-bi ip-te-qi-dá(āš)-šú<sup>4</sup> um<sup>4</sup>-ma<sup>4</sup> ina igi-ka lil-li<sup>4</sup> ku<sup>4</sup> ud.25<sup>4</sup>.kam it-ta-lak a-di la uš-šú-ú ina ugu<sup>4</sup>-ni<sup>4</sup> luš<sup>es</sup>ir-ki<sup>4</sup> ip-te-qi-id<sup>4</sup>-su<sup>4</sup> um<sup>4</sup>-ma<sup>4</sup> lu<sup>4</sup>nun<sup>mes</sup> gab-bi luš<sup>es</sup>ir<sup>4</sup>-ra<sup>4</sup>-ku ta-maḫ<sup>4</sup>-ḫar<sup>4</sup> (YOS 21, 53:4-11)

My lord should be pleased by Marduk-nāšir's report. The king favours him. He entrusted him with all of the courtiers, at the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Simannu; (saying,) "Let them be sent to you." (However), the 25<sup>th</sup> day has gone by before I (even) departed. He (then) entrusted us with a širku, (saying,) "You will receive temple-oblates, (as) all noblemen."

Preparation/delivery of goods for royal movements

Royal visits to the temple TCL 9, 89

Royal campaigns YOS 3, 190

Royal visit (location unknown) BIN 1, 25

Cultic involvement not only under Npl and Nbk, but also under Nbn

King's cult BIN 1, 25

King performing an offering YOS 3, 60 (harū-offering)

Crown prince's niqū YOS 21, 3 (broken)

King giving goods to the temple JAOS 87, 9f. A5345+5464

Varia

Lēse-majesty BBVOT 3, 54

mašartu ša šarri/dullu ša šarri BIN 1, 92; CT 22, 121; PTS 2014; TCL 9, 125; YOS 19, 107 (letter order); UET 4, 183

Royal goods of various kinds, e.g. BIN 1, 14 (šēnu); YOS 21, 51; BIN 1, 54 (royal fields and land); YOS 3, 190 (royal account, clothing issues); maybe CT 22, 60 (donkeys, but its dating could also be Achaemenid)

Gifts by the king (apart from the aforementioned issues) YOS 3, 90

Goods at the king's disposal YOS 21, 27; YOS 21, 52 (barley)

Requests for people (workers, farmers, kurgarrū-priests)

BIN 1, 83; YOS 3, 188; VS 20, 75

### Royal features in letters

#### Greeting formula

#### Judicial matters

- Distribution of land (source of conflict with the temple)
- amāt šarri
- adū

#### Royal influence

- Personal audiences
- Personal communications (oral and written)
- Lobbying and networking
- Direct involvement
- Deliveries to the king/court(?)

#### Royal presence

- Campaigns
- Visits to the temple

#### Cultic issues

- Royal offerings
- Performing of offerings
- Royal donations to the temple

#### Varia

- Exceptional instances
- Services due to the crown
- Royal possessions
- Livestock, fields, land, etc.
- Royal gifts

### Achaemenid Empire

TCL 9, 95 – Unidentified sender Mukkēa, if used as during nB times, maybe with the notorious embezzler Gimillu as addressee (in agricultural context, so if that is the case, it could be dated to Dar); CT 22, 53 (unclear dating, nB or Achaemenid; to a šangū of the Ebabbar)

No royal land allotments, unclear involvement of a royal official in measuring a plot YOS 21, 150

No "amāt šarri" in letters that can be dated to the Achaemenid period with certainty  
In sources other than letters: amāt Gubāru AnOr 8, 43; amāt Uštānu (governor of Babylon) Dar. 27:3  
no adū, but "dāta ša šarri", only in private letters ZAR 16, 67ff.; CT 22, 7 (both Dar)

Work matters

King's decision YOS 3, 117

Royal pressure YOS 3, 103

Royal messenger keeping track of the progress of a building project YOS 3, 37

Private letters

Meetings with the king CT 22, 201; CT 22, 202

Official:

tē-e-mu šá lugal kap-du ū dul-lu im-di ina ugu-i-ni (YOS 3, 117:24-25)

(I/we want to hear) orders from the king quickly, our workload is numerous.

Private:

at-tu-nu<sup>4</sup> la<sup>4</sup>-igi<sup>4</sup> gar umuš pal-ḫa<sup>4</sup>-tu<sup>4</sup>-nu a-na lugal ul ta-qab-ba-a<sup>2</sup> (CT 22, 202:14-18)

You, yourselves, are (apparently) afraid of the šākin tēmi and (so) you don't talk to the king (about it).

Royal presence

Only two letters; no visits to the temple

Connected to Camb' travels from Abānu BIN 1, 29, YOS 3, 21

lugal a-na kap-du a-na muḫ<sup>4</sup>-hi<sup>4</sup>-ni us-sa-a<sup>2</sup> (YOS 3, 21:8-9)

The king will soon move out (to come) to us. (transl. Kleber, K., Famine in Babylonia [ZA 102, 219-244]:226; letter from Babylon)

Cult

Only two letters

King's order (sheep for the gods) Mesopotamia 31, 21

Sacrifice on behalf of the king (bulls set aside for it by the

ša muḫ<sup>4</sup>hi quppi) YOS 3, 41

lugal iq-qū<sup>2</sup>-x<sup>3</sup> um-ma udu.nita a-na dingirm<sup>es</sup>-nu i-na-a<sup>2</sup> (Mesopotamia 31, no 21:11'-14')

The king has said as follows, "Give the sheep for the gods!"

Varia

Debts from the time of Nbn paid under Cyr TCL 9, 89

Royal possessions and manpower YOS 3, 47 (shares); CT 55, 66

(men; letter order); probably BIN 1, 7 and YOS 21, 72 (workers

of the royal cattle shed, dated Nbn-Camb); YOS 3, 171

(soldiers), maybe possessions (PTS 2007, PTS 2027, both

undatable)

New elements

royal beer (probably due to electiveness of our sources)

MacGinnis, Letter Orders no. 17 and no. 109

Royal rations GCCI 2, 126

Goods for the naptānu ša šarri YOS 3, 66 (Camb) Zadok,

AfO 51, 156, No. 16, (letter order, Dar)

New administrative level – Gubāru and Parnakka

Gubāru – five letters, Parnakka – three letters

Involved in the administration of workers and rations in Achaemenid History XIII, 272ff.

Letters to Gubāru RA 11, 166f. + AfO 44/45, 163f.

from Gubāru YOS 3, 160; YOS 3, 111; RA 18, 31f. no. 22

Visit by Gubāru YOS 3, 106

Talking to Parnakka BIN 1, 86

<sup>1</sup> Leaving aside the official state correspondence because the pertinent evidence for the Achaemenid period has not yet been found and probably will never be fully discovered due to the partial usage of Aramaic and therefore perishable writing material, see Jursa, M., 2014, "The Lost State Correspondence of the Babylonian Empire as Reflected in Contemporary Administrative Letters", in: Radner, K. (ed), State Correspondence in the Ancient World: From New Kingdom Egypt to the Roman Empire. Oxford, 94-111.

### Comparison

There are clear differences in the variety of cases that mention the king: there is no evidence for direct involvement in the cult, and there are hardly any references in the greeting formula (since this is used with people in close contact with the king, this is not surprising for the time of the conquerors Cyr and Camb, but for the time of Dar). References to direct orders by the king are absent in administrative letters but attested in private letters, as is the case with personal audiences and direct contact with the king. Although we know of journeys to the royal court from other sources, the letters do not mention anything in this respect, and no visits to the temple by the king are recorded anymore. Gubāru, not the king, was invoked to sort out conflicts between high temple officials. The stress on labour requirements can be observed in both periods while the only new feature in the Achaemenid period are duties relating to the king's table. Even taking into account the takeover of various functions by Persian high officials and considering the advance of writing on perishable material at least in the royal sphere, the nature of the ties between temple and crown was more distant and definitely less personal than under nB rule. There seems to be a change during the reign of Dar, but it can only be shown to have affected private persons. Despite the well-known stability in administrative structures and personnel, there is a noticeable decline in the number of letters showing royal involvement and in the variety of situations the king is mentioned in; the only new feature is related to new obligations to the crown, an aspect that might have contributed to the deterioration of the relationship between the two institutions.