Originalveröffentlichung in: Giovanni B. Lafranchi, Robert Rollinger (Hg.) Concepts of Kingship in Antiquitiy. Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop ; held in Padova, November 28th - December 1st, 2007, Padova 2010, S. 15-24

KINGSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE ASSYRIAN PERIOD *

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The history of the Assyrian kingdom, called *māt Aššur*, "the Land of Ashur", by the Assyrians, is closely connected with war and can be divided into four phases.[1] The formation period took place between 1400 and 1200 BC, when the city-state of Ashur in north Iraq became a territorial power that extended to the Euphrates in the west, the upper Tigris in the north and the fringes of the Zagros mountains in the east and dominated the international stage along with Kassite Babylonia, Egypt, and the Hittite empire. This first phase of expansion led by the kings Adad-narari I (1295–1264), Shalmaneser I (1264–1234) and Tukulti-Ninurta I (1233–1197) was followed by a period of recession due to incursions of Aramaean tribes. It lasted from 1200 to 900 BC and saw a partial recovery during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076). When we speak of the Middle Assyrian kingdom we have particularly in mind the kings mentioned, because most of the written evidence that has come to us was produced during their respective reigns. The third phase of Assyrian history extends from about 900 to 745 BC, when the thirteenth-century borders were progressively re-established. The fourth and last period between 745 and 605 BC witnesses an unparalleled expansion that begins with Tiglath-Pileser III, who conquered most of Syria and Lebanon, and ends with Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal's annexation of Egypt and Elam.

The Middle Assyrian kingdom not only precedes the Neo-Assyrian empire in time, but also develops — on the political, social, and religious level — many of the central features that will characterize the first-millennium state. The present contribution focuses on the institutional aspect of kingship, especially on the highest officials that exercised rule along with the king. Its aim is to delineate the basic traits, leaving out questions of detail and underlining its provisional character since some relevant groups of texts are still in course of publication.[2]

* Abbreviations in this paper follow the system of the *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. T (2006), ix–xxvii.

1. Postgate 1992: 47–251.

2. This concerns especially two archives of the royal administration in Ashur. According to the classification of Pedersén 1985 these are the archives M 7, belonging to the storehouse (in charge of E. Cancik-Kirschbaum and Doris Prechel / Helmut Freydank), and M 8, belonging to the granary (in charge of J. Llop). Also important to the present subject are the archive M 4 of the Ashur temple dealing with the administration of *ginā'u* taxes, which has been published in hand copies, but is still awaiting a comprehensive study, and the archive of Dur-Katlimmu referring to the administration of crown land (just published by W. Röllig, but too late to be considered here).

In order to better appreciate the Middle Assyrian situation it seems advisable to take a look at the institutional structure in the Old Assyrian period (20th to 18th century BC), that is prior to the creation of "the Land of Ashur".[3] This short historical retrospect gives also the opportunity to show how different kingship could be in the Ancient Near East. At that time Ashur was a small self-governing city, whose name also applies to its main god. The city's economy was primarily founded on trade with Asia Minor, where Assyrian merchants exported tin and woollen textiles, but also iron ore, lapis lazuli, carnelian, and cowries, in order to get silver and gold. Ashur was a transit place since most of the exported products came from abroad. The political order reflected this socio-economic structure and can be properly described with Max Weber's concept of "*Kollegialität*", which points to a limitation of the ruler's power by political bodies of varying types.[4] In our case those entities were the City Assembly and the City Hall.

The City Assembly (*ālum*) was the highest judicial authority. It functioned as a court of law, solving legal disputes among Assyrians, and could also grant some verdicts a more general validity, giving them the status of promulgated law. At the same time, it had a political dimension, in that it took decisions concerning, for example, the financial contribution of the Assyrian settlements in Asia Minor to the costs of the fortification of Ashur or the protection of the textile trade. The City Assembly always appears as a collective body and therefore it is not possible to find out the identity of its members nor their number. The general assumption is that it comprised the heads of the main merchant families, although other groups like free artisans could be represented as well.

The ruler was the chairman of the City Assembly and played a prominent religious role. On his seal he was called ensí / *iššiakkum*, "steward", of the city-god Ashur, for whom the title "king" was reserved. On royal inscriptions he was also given the titles *rubā'um*, "the big one", and *waklum*, "overseer", whereas Assyrian citizens referred to him as *bēlī*, "my lord". Presumably he was closely associated with the temple of the god Ashur and had cultic tasks. In judicial matters he functioned as one institution together with the City Assembly.

The City Hall (*bīt ālim* or *bīt līmim*) was the main economic and administrative institution. It sold goods for export (tin, textiles, as well as lapis lazuli and iron in a monopolistic position) and for the local consumption (copper, barley). It collected certain taxes, managed the granary of the city, checked the measures of weight and capacity as well as the purity of metals. In addition, it was the custodian of the treasury of the god Ashur and of the archive of the city. The head of the City Hall was the *līmum*, "eponym", the highest individual authority beside the ruler.[5] Since the City Hall could sell the commodities destined for export on credit, the *līmum* was entitled to take measures to enforce payment, such as the confiscation of the house or other possessions of a debtor. He was selected by casting lots from among the important (merchant) families. The royal family was excluded from this office in order to preserve the balance of power. Unlike the ruler, whose position was hereditary, the eponym was appointed for a period of one year, during which he had to discontinue his own business affairs and probably was not paid by the city-state for his service. Apart from the honour that an election as eponym was likely to represent, the reward of the office holder seems to have consisted in the opportunities the position brought with it and in a fee demanded for his services.

3. The following description is based on Larsen 1976, Veenhof 2003, and Dercksen 2004. Most of the written sources came from the city of Kanish (today Kültepe) in Asia Minor, the major settlement of the Assyrian merchants.

4. Weber 2005 (reprint of 1922): 201–211.

5. The meaning of the word *līmum* remains obscure. The translation as "eponym" derives from the fact that the expression *līmum* + personal name of the holder of the office was used as a calendar device.

The end of the Old Assyrian period towards the middle of the 18th century is marked by a gap in the written documentation, which relates to the decline of Assyrian trade with Asia Minor. The gap lasted for no less than 300 years, about which we know simply that there existed a ruler who occasionally undertook building activities and, during the 15th century, was subordinated to the Mittanian king. The political structure that emerges in the texts from the 14th to the 11th century differs profoundly from the Old Assyrian one and is a result of the changed socio-economic conditions. Ashur was no longer a small city without military power, but had become the capital of a territorial state aiming at expansion. The ruling class, which in the Old Assyrian period had been directly involved in trade, assumed primarily military and administrative functions and got its economic resources from land ownership.

The most conspicuous institutional change concerns the role of the king,[6] whose power increased dramatically at the expense of the other political bodies. The City Assembly disappeared and was replaced by royal officials, whose position depended in the first place on their personal relation to the king — they were "royal servants" (*urad šarri*) — and to a lesser extent on their affiliation to a specific social group.[7] The City Hall survived only in a limited function, serving as the place where standard weighing stones were kept,[8] whereas the royal palace became the main administrative and economic institution. The *līmum* lost his power completely and the word was just used to designate a high officer after whom a year was named.

The increase of royal power can best be seen in the royal titles:[9] Ashur-uballit I (1353–1318) was the first to call himself "king of the Land of Ashur" (*šar māt Aššur*). By this title he claimed not just the rule over an enlarged territory, but also the kind of ruling power that had till then been in the hands of the god Ashur only. Adad-narari I, the conqueror of Mittani, the former overlord, referred to himself as "king of the universe, strong king, king of the Land of Ashur" (*šar kiššati šarru dannu šar māt Aššur*), which would become the standard titles of the Assyrian kings. In addition, he assumed titles such as "extender of borders and boundaries" (*murappiš miṣri u kudurri*), which clearly point to his military activities. Under Tukulti-Ninurta I, who marched victoriously against Babylonia, the language became even more pompous with expressions like "king of the four quarters" (*šar kibrat*

6. Jakob 2003: 19–22.

7. In the so-called Assyrian coronation ritual the present officials resign symbolically putting their badges at the feet of the king. Afterwards, the king confirms them with the following words: "Each one shall hold his office" (Müller 1937: 14, col. III, 1–14). Nevertheless, it seems that membership in traditional families played a greater role in Middle than in Neo-Assyrian times. Cf. Postgate 1979: 202: "... whereas under Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I the government was in the hands of a number of 'houses' which, whether in origin merchant-houses or not, were run along commercial lines, in the Neo-Assyrian period much of the fiscal and administrative work of the government was carried out by a 'civil service' with an existence quite distinct from family or firm."

8. Cf. Faist 2001: 151 note 32.

9. Grayson 1971. Many of these titles were borrowed from Babylonia and are an important hint regarding the Babylonian influence on the Assyrian concept of monarchy. The prominent role played in this process by Samsi-Addu, who was king of Ekallatum and conquered Ashur towards the end of the Old Assyrian period, introducing Babylonian (Old Akkadian) imperial ideas, has recently been the subject of an excellent study (Galter 2002–05). Unfortunately, we have too little information about the institutional changes carried out in Ashur during his reign and about the impact they might have had on later developments. We know at least that Samsi-Addu appointed his son Ishme-Dagan as *līmum*, seriously disturbing the former balance of power between the king and the important families (Dercksen 2004: 58). On the other hand, we know that some Middle Assyrian institutions have Hurrian forerunners and that the Mittanian kingdom should have acted as intermediary. But also in this case the available documentation is extremely scanty (Postgate in press; cf. also Radner 2004: 69–72, 113–115).

erbetta) and "king of kings" (*šar šarrāni*), "lord of lords" (*bēl bēlī*), and "ruler of rulers" (*mālik mālikī*). As far as we know, on campaigns the king conducted the army in person.

In the religious sphere his role acquired a new dimension. He continued to be *iššiak Aššur*, "steward of Ashur", and hence administrative head of the god's temple (sanga / *šangû*) as well as an important cultic player. But in addition and reflecting the military expansion, he represented the interests of Ashur and the other great gods to the world outside. That is to say, the king went to war in their name and with their support, giving the military activities the necessary ideological legitimation.

Moreover, a significant shift can be traced in the judicial realm. Unlike the ruler in the Old Assyrian period, who participated directly in the legal practice, the Middle Assyrian king was not primarily concerned with judgement (*dīnu*),[10] even if the supreme judicial authority must have resided in his own person.[11] In the needs of government, including lawsuit, the king was assisted by an administrative apparatus, which had a permeable hierarchical structure and no sharply outlined competences.[12] Nevertheless, the king reserved his right to intervene at any level whenever he considered it necessary, either by command (*ina abat šarri*, "according to the king's word")[13] or by decree (*riksu*).[14]

The backbone of the administrative organisation was represented by the provinces, whose governors were responsible for the agricultural production of the crown land, its storage and distribution, the

10. Cf. Jakob 2003: 183–189. An exception is represented by cases that directly involved royal interests, such as booty: KAV 217: 9′–19′ with comments by Freydank 1992b; see also the following footnote.

11. Some royal titles allude to the king as instrument of justice, for example the epithet "sun (god) of all people" (*^{d}šamšu kiššat nišē*), used by Tukulti-Ninurta I for the first time (cf. Maul 1999, esp. 206–207). In three paragraphs of the Middle Assyrian Laws the king is explicitly mentioned as judicial instance (translation in Roth 1997^{2}: 158, 172–173, and 184 respectively): Tablet A § 15 (concerning adultery), Tablet A § 47 (regarding witchcraft), and Tablet C § 8 (concerning theft of booty; for this interpretation see Freydank 1994: 206). But note that the Laws, although we know them from twelfth-century copies (cf. Weidner 1937 and Freydank 1991: 68), go back — at least in part — to the fourteenth century, i.e. to the beginning of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom, prior to the major expansion in the 13th century (cf. Koschaker 1921: 71-79).

12. Cf. Jakob 2003: 22–24.

13. The expression *ina abat šarri* is attested both in documents and in letters and refers to royal orders primarily given in connection with the distribution of commodities (often as rations, sometimes as royal gifts) and the organisation of labour force: KAJ 113; KAJ 121; BATSH 4, 1; BATSH 4, 21; MARV I, 1; MARV I, 27 + MARV III, 54; MARV I, 40; MARV II, 17+ (reconstruction of the tablet based on all identified fragments in MARV IV, p. 14); MARV III, 11; MARV IV, 33; MARV IV, 34; MARV IV, 45; MARV IV, 48; MARV IV, 59; MARV IV, 71 + 113; MARV IV, 79; MARV IV, 97; MARV IV, 105; MARV IV, 118; MARV V, 20; MARV VI, 45; MARV VII, 16. Cf. also KAV 211 (*ina abat Aššur-uballiṭ*) and discussion by Saporetti 1968; KAJ 192: 5 (*ina abat Ninurta-tukul-Aššur*); MARV III, 8 and MARV VII, 4. In addition, there are some letters with instructions sent by the king himself: BATSH 4, 9; MARV IV, 8; MARV IV, 10. The addressee is in all cases the grand vizier Ashur-iddin, the most important authority after the king. We may not expect the king to approach other than highest officials personally. In the Neo-Assyrian period the king's word (*abat šarri*) could be invoked (*zakāru*) when a subject felt treated unfairly by members of the administration (Postgate 1974; Postgate 1980).

14. The Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees, a collection of regulations by various kings concerning the palace personnel, are the best known texts of this sort (translation in Roth 1997^{2}: 195–209). But there are other examples more closely connected to the requirements of government: George 1988: 26–29 (a collection of decrees of Shalmaneser I concerning among others the milling and distribution of grain as well as measures to be taken against theft); MARV IV, 115 (a collection of decrees of Tukulti-Ninurta I concerning his new capital Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta); MARV IV, 151 (a debt relief of Ashur-tishamme, son of Shamash-aḫa-iddina, by Tukulti-Ninurta I; for a connection with the appropriation of land by the crown in the conquered territories see Freydank 2005: 64–66). Cf. also Weidner 1939, pl. 6 (cf. p. 114); MARV IV, 116; and MARV VII, 16 as well as the expression *kī pī riksi ša šarri*, "in accordance with the royal decree", in Roth 1997^{2}: 197 § 2 (Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees) and Wiseman 1968: 179 (TR 3004, cf. collation by Postgate 1982: 309).

organisation and maintenance of labour force, the levy and provisioning of soldiers, as well as the sending of a part of the surplus to the capital.[15] If we look at the central government, the viziers and the steward of the royal palace clearly emerge from the available evidence as the highest officials. The vizier (*sukkallu*) must have been a high dignitary of the royal court.[16] During the reign of Shalmaneser I, as a result of the territorial expansion, the office seems to have been divided into two:[17] one vizier was responsible for the western part of the Assyrian realm, i.e. for the recently conquered regions, the other one was entrusted with the core of the kingdom, a heart-shaped territory with three important towns at its corners, namely Ashur, Nineveh, and Arbail. The vizier of the west territories probably resided in (W)ashukanni, whereas the vizier of the heartland might have stayed in Arbail.

Most of the information about the duties of the *sukkallu* comes from letters excavated during the past three decades at Syrian sites like Tell Sheḫ-Ḥamad / Dur-Katlimmu and Tell Ḫuwera / Ḫarbe. According to them, he stood above the provincial governors and was mainly concerned with the consolidation of Assyrian authority in the annexed territories, leading military operations and taking fortification measures. In contrast to the ideologically coloured statements of the royal inscriptions, the letters show that even at the height of its power, the Assyrian administration could not prevent disturbances nor attacks on caravans. Moreover, the *sukkallu* represented the Assyrian authorities towards foreign diplomats and merchants. He was responsible for the provisioning of diplomatic missions that travelled through Assyrian domain and for the compensation of merchants assaulted on the road. Finally, we see the *sukkallu* taking decisions about the destination of workers and the disbursement of barley from the royal granaries as well as giving instructions concerning some cult sacrifices.

In the western territories a grand vizier (*sukkallu rabi'u*) was also appointed beside the *sukkallu*. He became the most powerful authority after the king. In a letter found at Tell Sheḫ-Ḥamad / Dur Katlimmu the king allows the grand vizier Ashur-iddin to change the wording of a royal writ *ad libitum*.[18] In addition, the grand vizier was designated "king of Ḫanigalbat" (*šar māt Ḫanigalbat*), a honorary title that accounted for his outstanding position and also for the definite submission of Mittani, also called Ḫanigalbat.[19]

15. See Jakob 2003: 111–131. The recently discovered texts at Tell Ṭaban / Ṭabetu show, however, that at least this city and its immediate surroundings had not the status of a province, but of a little kingdom, called "land of Mari" and governed by a family from Ashur probably related to the royal dynasty. See Shibata 2007 and Shibata 2008. But contrary to the "king of Ḫanigalbat", the "king of the land of Mari" seems to have been at the same hierarchical level than the governors and appears with this title in administrative documents as well (cf. fn. 19, below).

16. According to the Middle Assyrian Laws (Tablet B § 6 = Roth 1997[2]: 177–178), the *sukkallu* was involved, together with the city scribe, the herald, and royal representatives, in the transfer of property around Ashur. This regulation probably predates the great expansion of the 13th century (see fn. 11, above). Since the text reads 1 *ina* sukkal *ša pāni šarri*, "one *sukkallu* of the royal court", we may assume that at least at that time there existed more than one.

17. See Jakob 2003: 55–65.

18. BATSH 4, 9: 4–16.

19. Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 28–29. Dalley 2000: 81–83 seems to confer a real political dimension to the title and speaks of a viceroy. Against this assumption one may recall that in the Middle Assyrian text corpus it only appears in commemorative inscriptions (in the so-called *Stelenreihen*), but never in documents resulting from the governmental practice such as administrative records, a fact already pointed out by Cancik-Kirschbaum, *op. cit.* For additional remarks see Faist in press b, comment to text 1.

The royal palace was the main economic institution. In this sense, the Middle Assyrian kingdom can be defined as a patrimonial state.[20] The royal palace was not only the biggest consumer of resources, but also a centre for manufacture, and it possessed large storage facilities.[21] Its manager, head of a vast administrative structure, was called *mašennu*, "steward", and later *mašennu rabi'u*, "great steward", to differentiate him from the holders of similar offices in other administrative units as well as in private households.[22] Most of the resources consumed by this institution were produced in large estates owned by the palace and spread throughout Assyrian territory.[23] Responsible for these estates were the governors. They were regularly controlled by representatives of the central power (*qēpu ša šarri* or simply *qēpu*),[24] who in this respect can be compared to the *missi dominici* of the Carolingian administration.[25] While the agricultural activities were carried out primarily by dependent workers supplied with rations (*šiluḫlu*), the stock farming seems to have been entrusted to herdsmen as fiscal obligation.

For the supply of luxury goods and raw materials not available at home (metals, wood of high quality, semi-precious stones, cosmetic oils, elaborate textiles, horses) the palace generally engaged both Assyrian and foreign merchants on a commercial basis.[26] Finally, we have to mention the resources appropriated by means of taxation, including the booty and tribute of submitted lands.[27] Many raw materials — be they local or imported — were handed out together with tools to specialised workmen in order to get back the finished products. The system, called *iškāru*, probably worked on the same principle of fiscal obligation as in the case of the herdsmen.[28]

In the Neo-Assyrian empire there were five other dignitaries of paramount status beside the (grand) vizier and the steward of the royal palace.[29] The *turtānu*, "commander-in-chief", was the supreme commander of the Assyrian army after the king. He possessed major forces of his own and, on campaigns, he led the provincial governors, especially in the absence of the king. The *rab šaqê*, "chief cupbearer", and the *nāgir ekalli*, "palace herald", are also attested as high military commanders. Since

20. Cf. Weber 2005 (reprint of 1922): 167–178.

21. For the storehouse (*nakkamtu*) and the granary (*karmu*) in Ashur see provisionally Perdersén 1985: 68–76 and Llop 2005.

22. See Jakob 2003: 94–110. In Middle Assyrian the official is always written logographically. The logogram (LÚ).AGRIG was supposed to be read *abarakku* in Assyrian and *mašennu* in Babylonian (cf. CAD A/I: 35), but at present the reading *mašennu* is also favoured for Assyria (Whiting *apud* Millard 1994: 7 note 14 and Mattila 2000: 13 note 1; still against it Dalley 2001: 197).

23. A distinction between the king's personal estates and crown land is not possible.

24. See Jakob 2003: 261–286.

25. The mechanisms of sending the surplus of the provinces to the capital are badly attested (cf. Faist 2006: 151–152).

26. Cf. Faist 2001: 172–178.

27. The taxation system of the Middle Assyrian kingdom has not been investigated so far. Without any doubt the most important resource appropriated in this way was manpower, i.e. compulsory labour owed to the state, be it military service (*ilku*), civil work (*šipru ša šarri*), handcraft (*iškāru*), or other. The organisation and maintenance of this labour force was primarily a concern of the governors. The connection of state service with the allotment of land is a matter of debate (cf. Postgate 1982). Regarding taxes in kind we know that the provinces delivered corn, honey, sesame, and fruit as offerings (*ginā'u*) to the Ashur temple (cf. Freydank 1992a and Postgate 1992: 251–255), but it is not clear to what extent economic units other than the palace (estates of high officials, rural communities) were involved in this system. Beside this, there are occasional attestations of taxes, especially of a tax on agricultural produce (*šibšu*: KAJ 134) and on imported goods (*miksu*, see Faist 2001: 184–194).

28. Cf. Postgate 1979: 205.

29. Mattila 2000. The author renders *mašennu* as "treasurer", but the traditional translation as "steward" seems to fit better — along the lines of the Middle Assyrian *mašennu* — to the duties of this official (Jakob 2001: 532).

all of these officials were at the same time provincial governors, they performed extensive administrative functions as well. In the Middle Assyrian period information about them is rather scanty. The fact that they were appointed as eponyms shows their important position within the royal court, but it seems that they did not reach the prominence they had in later times.[30] Moreover, two of the Neo-Assyrian magnates, the *rab ša reši*, "chief eunuch", commander of the royal corps, and the *sartinnu*, "chief judge", are not attested in the Middle Assyrian period. Thus, the institutional differentiation was less developed than in Neo-Assyrian times. We may assume that the needs of the central government were fulfilled to a greater extent by members of the royal court, whose duties were only rudimentarily formalised.

Considering the major expansion of the first millennium, it is not surprising that officials who assumed military functions became the highest dignitaries of the state. A different case is represented by the chief judge, first mentioned during the reign of Shalmaneser IV (782–773), but promoted to the highest level in the seventh century. We may interpret the rise of this office as well as the assumption of many judicial duties by the vizier as a means of the central government to get more control over a sphere, which otherwise would have retained too much independence from the central power. In this sense, it is significant that the mayor (*ḫazannu*), who represented the local elite (even if appointed by the king), is more often attested as judge, closely followed by the vizier and the chief judge.[31] Since the latter were travelling judges, it does not surprise that they tried especially crimes (theft, killing), leaving less serious matters to the mayor.

Finally, some characteristic traits of the political elite have to be mentioned. Regarding their social background, most of the high offices were in charge of (old) Ashur families and members of the royal family.[32] In contrast to the Old Assyrian practice, whereby these positions were taken for a limited period of time, in the Middle Assyrian period they could pass from father to son. This is especially well attested in the case of the office of the grand vizier, which was held by a branch of the royal house. The existence of eunuchs in the Assyrian administration has been a matter of discussion for a long time and is now generally accepted.[33] The main focus has been put on the Neo-Assyrian empire, but we find the same phenomenon already in the Middle Assyrian kingdom. Here, too, the eunuchs could reach the highest ranks of government.[34] A cylinder seal impression from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta published some years ago shows a beardless man standing before the king.[35] The legend identifies him as Uṣur-namkur-sharri, steward (of the royal palace), eunuch of the king Tukulti-Ninurta, and governor of Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. Apart from its iconographic significance, the seal impression provides a new argument in favour of the identification of beardless men, often depicted on palace reliefs, as eunuchs. It also confirms the notion one gets from the texts, namely that accumulation of offices was not unusual. Due to the particular loyalty the king could expect from eunuchs, it is not surprising that many of the royal representatives (*qēpūtu*) were chosen from among them.

The reward of the officials consisted in rural estates with a fortified farmstead (*dunnu*) that were administered by a steward (*mašennu*).[36] In addition, and following the Old Assyrian practice, they could obtain an extra income by means of their position, either advancing raw materials and other

30. See Jakob 2003: 66–72 (*nāgiru*), 92–94 (*šāqi'u*), 191–194 (*ta/urtānu*).

31. Cf. Faist in press a.

32. See Machinist 1982 (with review of Postgate 1983–84); Postgate 1988: viii–xiii; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996: 19–25; Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999; Faist 2001: 98–99; Jakob 2003: 58–65, 269–270.

33. Cf. the last contributions by Hawkins 2002 and Tadmor 2002. A recent article by Siddall 2007 challenges this view again.

34. See Jakob 2003: 82–94.

35. Fischer 1999.

36. See Wiggermann 2000 and Radner 2004: 69–72.

commodities in their charge as loans to private persons[37] or demanding a gift (*šulmānu*) for a service, often referred to as bribe.[38] But in both cases a sealed document was issued, indicating that it was an officially recognised practice. Conversely, it was expected from high officials that in case of necessity they throw in their private assets. Thus, a clear distinction between public and private sphere did not exist.[39]

Simo Parpola has proposed that in the Neo-Assyrian empire the king's magnates constituted a royal council that reflected cosmological ideas[40]. In the Middle Assyrian period the king certainly had close advisers, some of them with enough influence to be recognised by other kings as partners,[41] but they were not part of a political body existing independent of its occasional members. The relationship between the Middle Assyrian king and his officials seems to me less formalised, i.e. less constrained by an institution like the royal cabinet postulated for the Neo Assyrian period, with selected members convening secretly, but rather more open to the free decision of the monarch regarding who he took as counsellor and on what matter.

37. See Jakob 2003: 52–53, 60, 110, 180–181, 269.

38. See Postgate 1988: xiii–xvi.

39. Another case in point for this phenomenon is the fact that documents related to the exercise of an office were often found in the family archives; cf. Postgate 1988: xi–xiii.

40. Parpola 1995.

41. For the (draft of the) Hittite letter addressed to the vizier Babu-aḫa-iddina on occasion of the accession to the throne of Tukulti-Ninurta I see now Mora – Giorgieri 2004: 155–157 (general comment), 168–174 (text). Cf. also Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999: 220–221.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

BATSH = *Berichte aus der Ausgrabung Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad/Dūr-Katlimmu.*

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