

Preliminary Remarks on

The Middle - Assyrian Archive from Tell Schech - Hamad/Dur Kattlimu

By : Wolfgang Roling/Tübingen

During an archaeological survey conducted by the « Tübingen Atlas of the Middle East » in 1977 on the Lower khabur the first cuneiform tablets at Tell Schech Hamad near Suwwar were found . In the years following this event scientific digging has been systematically organised at this site by Hartmut Kühne, now professor at the Freie University, Berlin, with constant help and strong support from As'ad Mahmoud, the Director of the Museum at Der ez-zor. In the course of the digging it could be shown that the tablets belong to one archive and I intend to present some preliminary remarks concerning the tablets in this paper . They have to be preliminary as the study of the entire set of tablets, around 600, is still in progress in this campaign and, up until now, I have been unable to examine let alone evaluate them .

The archaeological situation is as follows :

The cuneiform tablets belong to the Tell and to a single room, which is situated between a group of rooms within a huge building on the western slope of the Tell . This layer belongs to the layer number 28, the numeration beginning at the hill-top . The last building activities in this room can be

dated with certainty by the names of the eponyms mentioned in the tablets, the middle of the 13th century B. C. at the time of the reigns of the Assyrian kings shalmaneser I . and Tukulti - Ninurta I .

The so-called archive room, which bears the signature A/B, measures 3m by 2. 7m and reaches heights of up to 4 meters . on the east side of the room there was a vaulted door which led to the not yet fully excavated room H. Its floor was made of mud-bricks but it is possible that it had an additional layer of wooden planks . The walls of the room were in all probability also covered with wooden planks . Grain was stored directly on the floor, most probably in sacks . A total of 700kg charcoal rests could be found .

Above the grain a layer of mud-bricks has been found which have fallen either from the walls or the ceiling . on top of this mud-brick layer was a huge mass of debris containing the cuneiform tablets . The southern and eastern walls of room A are burnt to a red colour and most of the cuneiform tablets are either black or red . It is thus absolutely clear that the tablets reached the room where they were found as the result of a fire . It is almost certain

that they were originally stored in a room above and fell through the ceiling . The layer of mud-brick material covering the grain must, therefore, belong to the ceiling of the storage room which formed part of a cellar in the big building . Thus the tablets must have been stored in the first or the second floor of the big building which we will provisionally call a palace .

Along with the tablets bones of several animals, for example sheep, dog and stag, have been found . In addition, there were numerous clay vessels of different shapes, dishes, pots, jars, etc., and a surprisingly large amount of clay bullae often sealed with cylinder-seals of a high quality . It may be that these objects from the remains of an archive room which was situated in the upper floor and indeed it may be that the tablets were stored in some of the clay pots . The original order, if order existed in the first place, was disturbed by the fire and the caving in of the upper rooms .

In contrast to Assur, where the contents of the vessels, namely cuneiform tablets, could be identified, up until now no case-dockets have been identified and no vessel with an inscription found . As a result of the afore-mentioned found-situation it is impossible to reconstruct the original arrangement of the archive .

Comparable archives of cuneiform tablets, especially dating from Middle-Assyrian times, are known for various locations. In 1911 in Assur a room was excavated on the western slope of the god Assur's temple which housed 10 clay vessels with around 650 tablets out of an economic archive dating from the reign of Tiglatpileser I . the results of which have not yet been pub-

lished in full . A broken vessel with 112 tablets, which was found in 1905 in the debris at the gate near the Anu-Adad Temple in Assur, also offers a comparable example . The pot contained a palace archive covering one year only, dating from the reign of the king Ninurta-tukulti-Assur, and it has been published by E. Weidner and V. Donbaz . With the the help of the excavation reports and the published texts, N. Postgate was able to identify 8 additional private archives in the Assyrian capital.

Two archives dating from the Middle-Assyrian times have been identified by British archaeologists at Tell Rimah, both of which were covered by clay vessels. The first belongs to the family of Ilu-nasir and falls within the reign of Shalmaneser I., the second was found in a broken vessel and belongs to the family of a certain Abu-tab, dating from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. All these archives which are known to have been stored in clay vessels cover either one year or belong to a single family . It is, therefore, most likely that a uniform archive practice was developed and used during the Middle-Assyrian times.

The time-span covered by the various archives is, however, not uniform. It is well known that the archive of Ninurtatukulti-Assur covered only one year, whereas the tablets collected in the archive at Tell Rimah stretch over a period of approximately 25 years. In Dur-Katlimmu more than 40 eponyms have in the meantime definitely been identified along with other names which have not yet been verified but which are with all probability not identical with the eponyms already known from other

texts. Therefore, supposing that each of the eponyms followed the other without any interruption, the archive covers a period of approximately 45 years. This supposition is by no means certain. It may, however, be noted that the well known archive at Ebla and archives in the Old-Babylonian Isin stretched over a period of approximately 40 years.

It should also be noted that the texts in the archive of Dur-katlimmu are not distributed evenly over the years. If eponyms from the 113 tablets which have been able to be dated up to the present time appear once, 10 are referred to twice, 10 three times, 2 four times, 4 five times and four six times, i.e. a maximum of six tablets belong to the same year. As such, the amount of information leaves a lot to be desired should one wish to undertake an economic history evaluation. However, through intense study of the texts and with the help of prosopographic comparison, I am certain that the obtainable amount of information may be increased greatly.

If one accepts the order of the eponyms in the Middle-Assyrian times as established by Cl. Saporetti, although it cannot be supported by a traditional eponym list, it can be stated that 15 belong to the reign of Shalmaneser I, 18 to the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. and 3 to the period covering both reigns, i.e. it is not possible to state with certainty to which reign they belong. Four names appear for the first time: Assur-iddan which cannot be identical with either of the two known Assur-iddins; Assur-uballit, referred to in one text; and Ris-Adad which also appears in a list of functionaries Afo 13Tf. 5 dating from the reign of

Tukulti-Ninurta I., thus permitting the eponym to be dated with certainty. Finally Serrija which is referred to in 4 texts from Dur-katlimmu and which has been taken into consideration by Saporetti.

It is well known that the number of eponyms proved to belong to the reign of Shalmaneser I. exceeds the number of years of his reign, i.e. 30 years according to the Assyrian king list thus Saporetti placed all the eponyms which cannot be dated exactly in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I. which, according to the Assyrian king list, lasted 37 years. 27 or 29 eponyms can definitely be dated to this period and, if we accept Saporetti's method, then we have the eponyms for 31 or 33 years which would mean that virtually the entire reign of Tukulti-Ninurta is covered by the names of eponyms. As far as the historical evaluation of the archive of Dur-katlimmu is concerned, it would be useful to know whether the palace fire occurred during Tukulti-Ninurta's reign or at a later date.

It could also throw some light on the vexing problems concerning the end of his reign, as he retreated for some years to his newly built capital Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and no longer showed any interest in his governmental duties.

The eponym Ina-ilija-allak poses a special problem. According to Saporetti, he was rab saqe (head cup bearer) and limu at the beginning of Tiglatpileser I. reign. We now know that he had a namesake in Dur-katlimmu who, however, held his office much earlier than the reign of Tiglatpileser. He is referred to in one text only and thus it is not possible to conclude that the archive of Dur-katlimmu lasted longer than

has been shown above . One can simply conclude that we have a further eponym dating from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I.

Up until now I have termed the collection of cuneiform tablets found at Tell Schech Hamad an archive . Is there any proof for this assumption ?

1 — The general character of the texts is well known : we are confronted here with an economic archive including different types of documents, some of which are already familiar from other sites in Assyria and dating from the same period .

Thus we find long lists of rations of grain for different people, little texts with the registration of loans of grain which must be delivered to the palace at the time of the next harvest . We have receipts for different materials for corvee-work . we often find lists of cattle, small cattle and donkeys given to people for breeding purposes . These are not to be confused with the breeding contracts from the old-Babylonian period, but are simply lists of cattle or flocks given to a shepherd without juridical stipulations . This is once again proof that we are dealing with a state archive and not a private one .

It is interesting to note that these lists follow a fixed sequence : First the cattle and donkeys according to age and then the small cattle according to kind . of interest is also the fact that the number of cattle and donkeys is surprisingly high, especially when compared to the number of cattle found in the region of the Lower khabour today and the standard of pasture land available . This raises the question as to whether the natural resources of the khabour valley have changed or whether the

method of irrigation permitted more intensive cattle-breeding than is possible today. I am quite sure that the documents containing information about the harvesting, ploughing and sowing methods can also provide information concerning soil fertility in this region which can then be compared with the yields achieved today .

2 — The fact that we are confronted with an economic archive is further supported by the distribution of the tablets over the year . I have studied 129 tablets, of which more than one third is dated in the month Hibur, 21 belong to the month Muhur-ilani while the rest cover the remaining months with the exception of kuzallu which is not mentioned once . Could this be chance ? Thus it can be seen that the documents are not distributed evenly throughout the year which supports the theory of an economic archive although one must not overlook the fact that it covers a period of 45 years. Particularly interesting is the fact that of the 44 tablets from the month Hibur, 33 are from the 20th of the month .

In connection with this date the phrase « *masartu sa lime PN* », i. e. « the inventory of the eponym period of pN » is often used. It follows that on a fixed date in the year, namely the 20th of Hibur, an inventory was carried out . It is possible that a small-scale inventory was carried out on the 5th of the month Muhur-ilani . Once again, however, problems are raised . we may argue that the inventory month, i. e. the Hibur was the last (or the first) month of the year during the reigns of Shalmaneser I . and Tukulti-Ninurta I . However, we know, and E. Weidner has often stressed the fact that the Middle-Assyrian calendar

used the lunar system which means that inter-calary months were unknown and thus no fixed beginning for the year . The administration practice where a certain month was set aside for inventory purposes does not, therefore correspond with this dating system and the question must thus remain open for the time being .

3 — The archival nature of the tablets is further underlined by the fact that we have texts in which the same transaction is repeated annually, the transaction being the rationing of grain . The names, relationships and occupations are always the same . In this case they are the families of farmers with their wives and children and it is possible to follow the individual family members through babyhood, childhood up to the *talmidu* i. e. apprentice stage . on the other hand we have people listed in one text with rations and then in a following text the names are to be found at the end of the list without rations and a postscriptum US « dead », showing that in the meantime the person has deceased . We can, therefore, assume that a certain part of the population, with all probability the palace workmen, underwent an annual census, a typical characteristic of an archive .

4 — Finally it should be mentioned that certain tablets have been found with very fine prints of cylinder seals . The seals are always the same and thus it can be stated that the owners of the seals repeatedly sealed document which were then incorporated in the archive . This is supported by the fact that the same officials are repeatedly mentioned, for example the vezir, the head vezir, the *qépu* , the *bél pahete* (provincial governor), the head of the farmers, the head of the herdsman, etc. There is, theref-

ore , continuity over many years, another typical characteristic of an archive . The only question which remains to be answered is : with what kind of archive are we confronted in Dur-katlimmu? It is most certainly not a private archive but we should also avoid the term « state archive » as it cannot be compared with those found at Ninive or Nimrud . In actual fact it was a provisional governmental deeds deposit during the Middle-Assyrian times .

The governmental centre was in the palace at Dur-katlimmu and, the large building which has been excavated was almost certainly part of the palace . The governor was in residence here and we have texts concerning the delivery of grain to the king, meaning most probably deliveries to the court at Assur . It is possible that , through a more intense study of the texts, the interconnection between the provincial centre and the capital might be better understood . This interconnection is further underlined by the fact that a series of letters has also been identified in another part of the archive. The letters are basically of an economic nature but also contain descriptions of affairs outside the provincial town . Cities such as Terqa, Assuganni, karkemis, etc . are mentioned and some of the letters came from the court at Assur and from the Assyrian king himself . The study of these interesting but mostly not well preserved texts is, however, still in its initial stages.

These preliminary remarks on the cuneiform texts from Dur-katlimmu must be regarded simply as initial impressions concerning the relevance of the archive with respect to the history, economic history and the administrative practices in the Middle-Assyrian Empire . These aspects of the

cultural history of this scarcely documented period can thus be seen under a different light and a new chapter in the history of the khabur region can be opened . The situation on the Lower khabur in the second half of the 2nd Mill . B. C. may thus be more clearly recognised and it may be

hoped that, through an intense study of the texts and comparisons with material from Assur and elsewhere, new and surprising insights may be given into a virtually unknown part of Assyria and thus help us to better understand the role played by the khabur region in history .

