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**THE ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES
OF THE “CHIEF SCRIBE” AND THE “PALACE SCRIBE”
IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIOD ***

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When we think of the Neo-Assyrian “chief scribe”, *rab tupšarri*,¹ or “palace scribe”, *tupšar ēkalli*,² most of us probably associate their jobs almost solely with scribal work.

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1. The only attested syllabic spelling of the title is LÚ.*rab-tup-šar-re* in a colophon of Issar-šumu-ereš (Hunger 1968, no. 344, 2); in Neo-Assyrian texts, the title is regularly written LÚ/LÚ*.GAL-A.BA (*passim*), once GAL-A.BA (NWL 35 ii 10'); in addition, the spelling LÚ.GAL-DUB.SAR is attested twice by Issar-šumu-ereš (SAA 8, 13, r.1; 33 r. 1) and once in a letter by the Babylonian scholar Bel-ušezip (SAA 10, 116 r. 6'). In colophons of Nabû-zuqup-kenu, the title of his ancestor Gabbu-ilani-ereš is mostly written as LÚ.GAL-DUB.SAR.MEŠ (see PNA 1/II, pp. 414-415 s.v. Gabbu-ilani-ereš [1a.]), a spelling that also occurs in colophons of Inurta-uballissu (see Hunger 1968, no. 313) and Adad-šumu-uşur (PNA 1/I, p. 38 no. 5.a). Note, however, that Nabû-zuqup-kenu also wrote at least twice LÚ.GAL-A.BA.MEŠ. The plural sign MEŠ is attached to the title only in colophons. A further, learned spelling for *rab tupšarri*, LÚ.GAL-GI.U, is attested thrice referring to Nabû-šallimšunu (TCL 3, 428; cf. fn. 17, below) and Nabû-zeru-lešir (Hunger 1968, no. 344, 4, and 4 R 2, 9; see Parpola, LAS II, p. 470).
2. Also often translated “scribe of the palace”. This title is always written logographically in Neo-Assyrian; the attested spellings are: LÚ/LÚ*.A.BA-É.GAL (*passim*, once A.BA-É.GAL only, ND 2088, 10; note, exceptionally followed by a royal name, Nabû-kabti-ahhešu LÚ.A.BA-É.GAL ša ¹LUGAL-GI.NA, “palace scribe of Sargon”, SAA 6, 31, r. 4) and (LÚ/LÚ*.A.BA-KUR (likewise *passim*; administrative and legal documents tend to omit the determinative). The spelling LÚ.DUB.SAR-É.GAL, found in two Neo-Baby-

This is only natural, as these high palace officials must have been preoccupied with the strictly scribal aspect of their work, and the chief scribe and the palace scribe certainly developed and maintained the bureaucratic idiom of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.³ However, their duties included much more than just writing or drawing up different sorts of documents, as I will demonstrate below.

These scribes were influential palace officials but their influence extended far outside the palace: the palace scribe being in charge of the chancery and the chief scribe responsible for scribes in general, the importance of their roles can hardly be overestimated. They were undoubtedly the cornerstones of the administration, and we can find evidence for their scribal work in Neo-Assyrian written records,⁴ be it about writing letters, drawing up administrative documents, or, in the case of the chief scribe, about copying texts, consulting scholarly literature (for example, the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*), and quoting the relevant sources. The chief scribe also prepared royal inscriptions.⁵

In the following survey, I will present the available textual evidence concerning the chief scribe and palace scribe. These two officials constituted the absolute top of the Neo-Assyrian scribes, and by considering them together, it is possible to detect some interesting differences and similarities in their tasks and duties.

As the title “chief scribe” already suggests, the person occupying this post was the chief of scribes, although in practice he was not just a scribe but an astrologer (/astronomer) as well. The title itself is actually not very frequently attested. The bulk of the relevant attestations pertain to Issar-šumu-ereš, who served as chief scribe under Esarhad-don and Assurbanipal.⁶ In his astrological reports to the king, Issar-šumu-ereš identifies himself nine times as *rab tupšarri*,⁷ while 26 of his reports are signed by name only⁸

lonian letters (CT 54, 243, r. 10; 468, 9') occurs only in two texts from Calah, GPA 248 e. 10' and ND 4521, 5 (DUB.SAR-É.GAL).

3. See, e.g., Brinkman 1983, pp. 36-37.

4. For the palace scribe see section “The palace scribe as king’s personal scribe or the head of chancery” below. On the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš’ other scribal activities see PNA 2/I, p. 579 s.v. Issar-šumu-ereš (3 c.). Note also the following remark in one of his astrological reports: “Let them bring in that polyptych of *Enuma Anu Enlil* which we wrote, (and) let the king, my lord, have a look.” SAA 8, 19 r.1-3; cf. also Parpola, LAS II, no. 319 r.1-2 and Pongratz-Leisten 1999, SAAS 10, pp. 297-298.

5. Parpola, LAS II, p. 11 and Tadmor 1997, pp. 328, 335. For evidence that haruspices may have also been involved in the composition of royal inscriptions, see Tadmor – Landsberger – Parpola 1989, pp. 50-51.

6. Glassner (1993, pp. 30, 246 [n. 48]) considers Issar-šumu-ereš also as Aššur-etel-ilani’s chief scribe and *ummānu*, but this proposal seems unlikely (cf. fn.167, below).

7. SAA 8, 2 r.9e, 11 r.5, 12:5, 13 r.1, 14 r.1, 22 r.5', 33 r.1, 35 r.1 and 37 r.5.

and three of them are unsigned.⁹ This practice differs from that in his letters, practically all of which are signed by name only.¹⁰

Thus, it is almost completely thanks to Issar-šumu-ereš’s correspondence with Assyrian kings that we know so much about the duties of the chief scribe, otherwise our knowledge about the chief scribe in the Neo-Assyrian period would be quite poor. Nevertheless, we do know from other sources that family tradition played an important role in the process of getting appointed to the post of chief scribe. The ancestors of Issar-šumu-ereš had either occupied the post of chief scribe or were otherwise well-known scribes. His father Nabû-zeru-lešir was chief scribe under Esarhaddon and already several generations earlier his ancestor Gabbu-ilani-ereš had been the chief scribe during the reigns of Tukulti-Ninurta II and Assurnasirpal II. Some other ancestral members of the influential family of Issar-šumu-ereš as well as his related contemporaries never became chief scribes but are still known to have been scholars: descendants of Gabbu-ilani-ereš, Marduk-šumu-iqiša and his son Nabû-zuqup-kenu, were also scribes. Nabû-zuqup-kenu was the father of the chief scribe Nabû-zeru-lešir and of the chief exorcist Adad-šumu-lešir. Some of the contemporary relatives of Issar-šumu-ereš were also scholars: his brother Šumaya was an exorcist and astrologer, and his cousin Urdu-Gula an exorcist as well as the deputy of the chief physician.¹¹

There are some indications that the position of palace scribe may have been a preliminary step on the professional ladder leading to the position of chief scribe; Issar-šumu-ereš himself may have been a palace scribe before his promotion to the office of chief scribe.¹² As many as nine letters, published in the political correspondence of Esarhaddon may, directly or indirectly, pertain to Nabû-zeru-lešir and Issar-šumu-ereš, as the chief scribe and the palace scribe during the early reign of Esarhaddon.¹³

In practice, the scholarly and more pragmatic part of the chief scribe’s work were so subtly intertwined that his administrative and non-administrative tasks appear rather inseparable. The reason for this is that his activities as king’s adviser were clearly aimed

8. SAA 8, 1, r. 8; 4, s. 3; 5, r. 7; 6, r. 1; 7, r. 5; 8, r. 10; 9, r. 10e; 10, 7; 15, r. 5; 16, r. 1; 17, r. 3; 18, r. 3; 20, e. 7'; 23, r. 6; 24, r. 1; 25, r. 4; 26, 4'; 27, r. 5; 28, e. 5'; 29, e. 5; 30, r. 1; 31, r. 7e; 32, r. 1; 34, r. 1; 36, r. 15; 38, r. 7.
9. SAA 8, 3, 19 and 21 are anonymous reports by Issar-šumu-ereš. His identification is based on orthography, contents, and/or scribal hand.
10. Issar-šumu-ereš’ letters are edited in SAA 10, nos. 5–38, anonymously written are nos. 29 and 30.
11. For this family see the stemma, Chart 3, in Parpola, LAS II, p. XIX. Another descendant of Gabbu-ilani-ereš was Inurta-uballissu (PNA 2/I, p. 557). He even had a Middle Assyrian namesake (Ninurta-uballissu), who is known to have been a king’s scribe, see Jakob 2003, pp. 256–257.
12. See SAA 16, pp. XXXVIII–XXXIX.
13. SAA 16, 48–50; 78–80; 87(?); 89; 125.

at planning, organizing and running the affairs of the Neo-Assyrian state.¹⁴ Therefore, work of a cultic nature, particularly actions based on the astrological observations, formed an essential part of a chief scribe's task.¹⁵

The palace scribe was not just any scribe working at the palace, but presumably he was the manager of palace archives which were organized into “departments” of their own.¹⁶ Moreover, he may have been the personal scribe of the king, or at least one of them,¹⁷ and

14. Cf. the definition of administration, e.g., in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 2000*⁶, p. 16.
15. See the letters (SAA 10, 4–38; SAA 10, 22 and 34–36 are unfortunately quite broken) and the astrological reports by the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš (SAA 8, 1–38; especially nos. 19, 22–23 and 38), and also the letters of his father Nabû-zeru-lešir (SAA 10, 1–3). Issar-šumu-ereš is also mentioned twice (SAA 10, 378, 2', 4') in a fragmentary letter that does not yield any tangible context and he appears as a co-author in two badly broken letters (SAA 10, 205 and 232).
16. On the departments and concerning the role of the palace scribe in them, cf. J.N. Postgate 1974, pp. 230–232 and Parpola 1986, pp. 226–227 fns. 22–23.
17. Regrettably the title *tupšar šarri*, “king's scribe”, is not often attested in Neo-Assyrian. The best example comes from near the end of Sargon's “letter to the god Aššur” (714 BC) and reads: ^{1d}AG-šallimšunu LÚ.DUB.SAR-šar-ri GAL-ú LÚ.GAL-GI.U LÚ.um-ma-an of Sargon …”, TCL 3, 428. The title LÚ.GAL-GI.U is a variant spelling for *rab tupšarri*, “chief scribe.” According to ND 1120 (lines 6, 10), the king's scribe Nabû-šallimšunu went to Assur on the 21st day in order to perform an offering there together with the city scribe Zazâ, and later in the same tablet it is stated that the king's scribe will have the usufruct of part of the meat of the offering (r. 12'). The document can be dated to 714-X-22. Nabû-šallimšunu's father Ḥarmakki is also known to have been the king's scribe, (from) Assur: LÚ.DUB.SAR LUGAL BAL.TIL.KI-ú (TCL 3, 429). See Nabû-šallimšunu (PNA 2/II, p. 870 [1]) and his father Ḥarmakki (PNA 2/I, p. 460). Moreover, Nabû-belu-ka?in(?) — the name of the sender is broken away — informs the king that “[I am sending] the whole [stor]y of his that he wrote [in] his letter [t]o Balassu, the scribe [of the kin]g, my lord (‘LÚ.A.BA / [ša LUGA]L ‘EN-a’) …”, SAA 15, 37, 23'-24'. The letter may be dated to 707 BC, see SAA 15, pp. XLI, XLIII. Note also “Witness Nadinu, scribe of the ki[ng]” (LÚ.A.BA šá LU[GAL]), who probably wrote a loan document for Remanni-Adad, the chief chariot driver of the king (666 BC). In general, it may of course be suggested that the situation with regard to the highest offices of scribes/astrologers could have been analogous to exorcists whose highest offices included both the king's exorcist (Adad-šumu-uṣur) and the chief exorcist (Marduk-šakin-šumi). Accordingly, we might assume the king's scribe next to the chief scribe during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. But who could he have been then? From all the known scholars, only Balasî or Nabû-ahhe-eriba may appear serious candidates. They were both scribes/astrologers, Balasî was also the *ummânu* of the crown prince (Assurbanipal), but they may have held other titles as well. Was the king's scribe an honorary and not purely professional title in the Neo-Assyrian period? The nature of documents where it is attested may hint at this. On the other hand, in the Middle Assyrian period, *tupšar šarri* was, in fact, the king's personal scribe, see Jakob 2003, p. 258.

we may see him as a sort of secretary¹⁸ of the state.¹⁹ Therefore, the duties of the palace scribe may have included reading aloud letters to the king, and perhaps to some high officials,²⁰ or at least delivering letters to them either personally or through his assistants.²¹ This is also why the palace scribe’s office may have been closer to the king than that of the chief scribe’s.²² The fact that no letters written by the palace scribe to the king are preserved, or vice versa, only strengthens such a hypothesis.

18. Radner 2005, p. 7, referring to SAA 16, 6, suggests to interpret *bēl tēmi* as a secretary who read letters to the king. However, this interpretation is not supported by the other evidence in which we confront *bēl tēmi*, see SAA 13, 45, 5'; ND 2371, 8' (*Iraq* 23, pl. 12); and the glossary of SAA 4, p. 325a, s.v. *bēl tēmi*. Perhaps SAA 16, 6, was a letter sent to the palace scribe or to some other high official. It is difficult to believe that the Assyrian monarch himself had bothered in any letter to explain so meticulously about his letter (non-)reading/hearing habits. It would be interesting to know the exact route of a letter after arriving at the palace; i.e. through how many hands and eyes it passed before it entered the king’s presence? I assume that letters were first sorted by trusted palace official(s), whose title(s) is/ are not yet known for certain: e.g. scribe or palace manager (*rab ekalli*), and that some of the letters addressed to the king may never have reached him. In any case, the system regarding incoming and outgoing letters of the royal palace must have been strictly organized and controlled by a group of literate people. Moreover, the passage “Maybe the scribe who reads to the king did not understand” (SAA 10, 60, 15-17) implies that it was not always the same person, here clearly defined as a scribe, who read letters to the king. See also SAA 10, 76, in particular ll. 11-r. 6, in which [Nabû-ahhe-eriba] (name broken away) explains to king Assurbanipal how astrological reports used to be read to his father Esarhaddon.

19. See section 1.2.a, below.

20. These high officials probably included at least the so-called “magnates” (*rabūti*). For them see Mattila 2000.

21. It appears from letter SAA 16, 32 (r. 17-22: “Whoever you are, O scribe, who are reading (this letter), do not hide it from the king, your lord! Speak for me before the king, so Bel (and) Nabû may speak for you before the king”) that reading letters to the king, or at least to Esarhaddon, was not limited to a single scribe, unless, but less likely, the sender of the letter Nabû-zer-ketti-lešir, the *overseer of white frit*, did not know about the usual letter reading protocol of the palace. This passage is earlier quoted and discussed by Oppenheim 1965, p. 256, and recently by Radner 2005, p. 7 fn. 27.

22. On the location of scribal offices in the Nabû temple of Calah, where the chief scribe might have worked in the 8th century BC, see Wiseman 1968, p. 148, and Pedersén 1998, pp. 151-152. As to the chancery of the North West Palace, see e.g. Kinnier Wilson 1972, p. 62. For the possible office of the palace scribe in Nineveh see Parpola 1986 (fn. 16, above).

The titles “chief scribe” and “palace scribe” were both unique in the sense that probably only one person could carry such title at any one time.²³ Since the names of the title-holders are not always given next to their titles, we immediately feel the impact of such a unique title when we try to identify the chief and palace scribes in documents that cannot be dated. Indisputably clear proof of the chief and palace scribes’ prestige comes from the Assyrian king-list which includes the chief scribes Nabû-zeru-lešir as *ummânu* (“master scholar”) of Esarhaddon and Issar-šumu-ereš as *ummânu* of both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.²⁴ A similar type of homage is also attested in the case of palace scribes: two of them functioned as post-canonical eponyms in the late stages of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.²⁵

1. Evidence

The earliest evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period concerning the palace scribe comes from the turn of the ninth and eighth centuries BC and was found above royal Tomb III in the domestic quarter²⁶ of the Northwest Palace at Calah (modern Nimrud). It contains administrative tablets which belonged to the palace scribe Nabû-tuklatu'a. These tablets

- 23. This does not preclude the existence of palace scribes working in other Assyrian cities than the capital; and possibly provincial palace scribes existed too. However, the difference between the palace scribe of the main palace complex in the Assyrian capital and some other palace may be spelled out, if necessary, but this depends on the context, see, e.g., how Ubru-Nabû introduces himself as “the Scribe of the New Palace (of Calah)” (SAA 16, 107, 2-3) when he writes a letter to the crown prince. Note also IGI ¹*qur-di-*^dIM LÚ.A.BA *ša* É.GAL-*ma-šar-te* *ša* URU.*kal-hi*, “Witness Qurdi-Adad, scribe of the Review Palace of Calah”, SAA 6, 31, r. 26. The interpretation of the profession in “Witness Abagû, Aramaean palace scribe” (for IGI ¹*a-ba?*-*gu-ú* LÚ*.A.BA / KUR.LÚ*.ar-*ma-a-a*, SAA 6, 127 [ADD 179], r. 3'-4', also so in Pearce 2000, p. 361) can be doubted and I would rather follow the translation of PNA (1/I, p. 1a: *Abā-gū*), “Aramaean scribe”. The spelling KUR.LÚ* in SAA 6 is to my knowledge a *hapax legomenon* and could well be considered an error caused by the scribe’s confusion in choosing between KUR and LÚ (cf. a similar type of writing KUR.URU.za-*b[an]* in ND 2619, r. 9) or less likely the scribe who drew up the document may have wanted to write, for some obscure reason, LÚ*.KUR but failed doing so.
- 24. See, e.g., Weidner 1926, p. 71; SAA 10, p. XXV; Parpola 1983, App. N 1; Grayson 1980-83, p. 120; Kuhrt 1997², p. 524. Gabbu-ilani-ereš is likewise included in a king list, cf. PNA 1/II, p. 414 s.v. Gabbu-ilani-ereš (1). For further “master scholars” mentioned in the Assyrian king-list see also fn. 165, below.
- 25. Palace scribes attested as eponyms are Nabû-šarru-uşur, eponym of the year 629* (for the references see PNA 2/II, p. 878 s.v. Nabû-šarru-uşur [47]), and Sîn-šarru-uşur, eponym of the year 625* (PNA 3/I, p. 1147 s.v. Sîn-šarru-uşur [16]). For the general principles in choosing annual eponyms see Millard 1994, pp. 7-11.
- 26. In Room 57.

originate from the reigns of Adad-nerari III and Shalmaneser IV. It appears that Nabû-tuklatu'a might have shared his office with the treasurer (*masennu*), although the unearthed tablets belonging to the treasurer come from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III and are thus later than those of Nabû-tuklatu'a's.²⁷ In any case, the palace scribe Nabû-tuklatu'a, who served both kings Adad-nerari III and Shalmaneser IV, was probably a wealthy and powerful man as he bought, for instance, many servants — either for his own use or for the palace — a house, part of an outbuilding, and two gardens.²⁸

The purpose of the following survey, with examples mainly coming from the Neo-Assyrian letter corpus, is to illustrate the administrative activity of chief and palace scribes within the central Neo-Assyrian administration. I have organized the attested activities of chief and palace scribes into several categories. All these categories relate to Neo-Assyrian administrative matters. At the end of this survey, the attested activities of the chief and palace scribes will be presented in a short summary in Table II. Depending on the evidence, the chief and palace scribe are treated together or separately.

1.1. The chief or palace scribe counsels the king or royal family

In an astrological letter,²⁹ the Babylonian scholar Bel-ušezib³⁰ writes to the king that he [should ask] the chief scribe's opinion before appointing a scribe whose name is not preserved as the scribe of the house.³¹

Several letters inform us that the chief scribe was suggesting auspicious days for ceremonies and festivals and communicating or reminding the king about those.³² These ceremonies and festivals include display ceremonies in Arbela³³, the festival of Tam-muz³⁴ and arrangements for an uncertain festival.³⁵

- 27. Oates 2001, p. 88; Pedersén 1998, p. 150; Deller – Fadhl 1993, pp. 243–270.
- 28. These purchases of his inform us that he bought at least twice from two different scribes: Nabû-ahu-iddina (Deller – Fadhl 1993, no. 3) and Bel-ali (GPA 248) — the latter is defined as a temple scribe of the Inner City (= Assur); besides also once from the palace manager of the Inner City of Nineveh. See PNA 2/II, p. 898 *s.v.* Nabû-tuklatu'a (1). Cf. also fn. 66, and pp. 245, 248, below.
- 29. SAA 10, 116. The letter is titled as “Full Moon on 14th Day; Suggestion for Appointments”.
- 30. He was the only Babylonian scholar whom we know to have belonged to the “inner circle”, i.e. he had close relationship with Esarhaddon, see SAA 10, pp. XXV–XXVII, and PNA 1/II, pp. 338–339, *s.v.* Bēl-ušezib (1).
- 31. Esp. r. 3'-10'. See also SAA 8, 19, r. 8-9.
- 32. SAA 10, 5–6, 13–14.
- 33. SAA 10, 18.
- 34. SAA 10, 19. See also SAA 10, 33 and 37.
- 35. SAA 10, 20.

In occasions where the chief scribe's own authority is not sufficient, he regularly uses the precative when writing to the king. In this manner, he advises the king about the works and rituals that should or could be performed.³⁶

A letter by the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš to the queen mother shows that he was not only counselling the king, but also his family.³⁷

In a letter sent to Esarhaddon, the writer Mannu-ki-Libbali complains to the king that the palace scribe had been against his appointment and that the palace scribe's deputy has made Mannu-ki-Libbali out to be even more hateful to the palace scribe.³⁸ Particularly tantalizing in this letter are the following words of Mannu-ki-Libbali to the king: "Would the patronage of the palace scribe have had such an influence over me that I would still be obliged to him?".³⁹ In another letter that concerns the eunuchs to be given for officials, the author of the letter, Nabû-šumu-iškun, tells the king that after he had appealed to the king he "[asked] the palace scribe, (who) [gave] (the following) order: "Three [.....]."⁴⁰

The palace scribe may appear at the end of an important — several gods are called upon in the blessing formula — but badly broken letter fragment by Nabû-ahhe-eriba: "[The king may ask] the pa[lace] scribe. The house is sealed."⁴¹

It is unfortunate that the letter is too broken as it seems that the passage might tell us something about the palace scribe's authority in the palace.

1.2. The palace scribe as the king's personal scribe or the head of chancery

Some references imply that the palace scribe acted as the head of chancery. For example, in a short comment at the end of one of the letters by Nabû-belu-ka'īn, an Assyrian high official operating in the Diyala region, the author tells to the king: "This report is not how the source of the palace scribe has it. If the king my lord (so) commands, he should send another one".⁴²

- 36. See SAA 8, 19, r. 1-9; 22, r. 2'-4'; SAA 10, 2, r. 10-12; 6, 19, r. 3-10, r. 17-19; 7, r. 1-3; 10, 8-9; 13, r. 2'-8'; 14, r. 7-10; 20, 1, r. 7-9; 25, r. 4-5; 27, r. 5-8; 32, r. 4'; 37, e. 7'. He may as well persuasively ask the king: "(However) now the month is completely gone, (so) when can they do it?", SAA 10, 14, r. 3-6.
- 37. SAA 10, 16-17. See also SAA 10, 22, which concerns Esarhaddon's son, the prince Aššur-mukin-paleya (PNA 1/I, pp. 197-198).
- 38. SAA 16, 78.
- 39. Lines 10-11.
- 40. SAA 16, 87, 13-15. Presumably the palace scribe's order goes further than these lines but unfortunately the right part of the letter is badly broken.
- 41. SAA 10, 82, r. 2'-3'.
- 42. SAA 15, 32, r. 5'-8'. This letter is dated in SAA 15 to the year 710, see p. XLIII.

The words of this quotation should be put in their right context and compared with the recurrent phrases referring to the palace chancery and mentioning the palace as a source of a letter or a (sealed) document/order:

ša ina ēkalli iqibûni, “That they ordered from the Palace”⁴³
ina ēkalli iqtibûni, “They told me in the Palace”⁴⁴
issu libbi ēkalli iqtibiu, “They said in/from the Palace”⁴⁵
issu libbi ēkalli / iqtibûni, “They have told me from the Palace”⁴⁶
issu ēkalli iqtibûnâši, “We have been authorized by the Palace”⁴⁷
[issu ēkalli] issaparûni, “They wrote me [from the Palace]”⁴⁸
issu libbi ēkalli issaparûni, “They have written to me from the Palace”⁴⁹
[k]î udîni / egirtu ša ēkalli / ina muhhiya / lâ tallakanni, “Already before the letter of the
 Palace came to me”⁵⁰
akî udîni issi ēkalli lâ isapparûni / ... urkîte / kanîku issaparûni, “... already before they
 wrote to me from the Palace; afterwards, they sent me a sealed document”⁵¹
nibzu issi ēkalli / [itt]annûni, “They have [gi]ven me a document from the Palace”⁵²
unqu / [ša] ina muhhišunu tallikanni, “the sealed order [which] came concerning them”⁵³

The palace scribe and his assistants are certainly referred to in these clauses as they took care of the sending of royal letters, messages and sealed orders to governors and other high officials. Common to this phraseology is that neither personal names nor titles are mentioned in the bureaucratic language. The authority of institution, palace, is sufficient to make the message clear. In any case, the most compelling evidence for the palace scribe’s crucial role at the head of the palace chancery may be deduced from the letters addressed to him.

43. ND 2470, 6, cf. Table I, below.

44. SAA 1, 229, 6, could as well be translated “(and) they ordered me from the Palace”. Note that what follows in this letter (ll. 7-8) may be the words of the palace scribe: “I will send a man with you ...”.

45. TA* ŠÀ É.GAL *iq-ti-bi-ú*: SAA 10, 270, 5.

46. SAA 16, 120, r. 1-2.

47. TA* É.GAL *iq-ti-bu-na-ši*: SAA 1, 118, r. 5'. The translation given in SAA 1 may be free but fits well in the context.

48. SAA 1, 58, 4-5, cf. SAA 15, 129, s. 2-3.

49. SAA 16, 127, 22.

50. SAA 1, 103, 14-e. 2.

51. ND 2715, r. 5-7. Cf. ND 2700, 13'-14', r. 5'-6', and note also the following: *kanîku ša šarri bêlîya / ina muhhiya tattalka*, “A sealed tablet of the king, my lord, came to me”: ND 2665, 5-6.

52. SAA 15, 122, 4-5.

53. SAA 5, 105, 8-9. Cf. also TB 14, e. 9-10 in Dalley 1996-97, pp. 84-85.

1.2.a. Letters addressed to chief and palace scribes

We do not have any extant letters addressed to the chief scribe. This is unfortunate because he is known to have been one of the most prolific writers of letters and astrological reports.⁵⁴ On the other hand, particularly in his letters⁵⁵ and once in his astrological reports,⁵⁶ we find references to letters sent to him by the king himself. The lack of letters addressed to the chief scribe and other scholars⁵⁷ may suggest that they had their premises somewhere further away from the king's domestic quarter at the palace whereas the palace scribe to whom there are extant letters may have had his office closer to the king's residential quarter.

The palace scribe's important role among the palace officials becomes more evident when we turn into the letters which were sent to him. In fact, there are at least eight⁵⁸ extant letters that have been addressed to unnamed palace scribes. These letters contain much direct and indirect information about the palace scribe's position in the palace, therefore, for the sake of convenience, the letters are given in translation (in Table I).

Some of these letters are clearly petitions seeking to improve the status and position of the writer himself/herself or of his friends or subordinates. These letters appeal to the palace scribe's influence at court, be it on behalf of servants, who were not allowed to enter the palace (SAA 16, 49) or on behalf of a friend (SAA 16, 48). It is worth noting that not a single letter of this group mentions the Assyrian king. Note also that in ND 2470 Inurta-ila'i, presumably the governor of the important province of Naşibina, writes directly to the palace scribe and not to the king in response to an order issued "from the palace."⁵⁹

- 54. Even if our evidence is rather one-sided, mainly consisting of the letters sent by the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, we may safely assume that other chief scribes wrote many letters too.
- 55. SAA 10, 8, 5, r 28; 9, 6; 10, 5; 11, 6; 12, 7, r. 2, 10; 13, 8; 14, 10-11; 15, 7-8; 17, r. 6-7 (by the queen mother); 18, 5-6; 21, r. 3'; 22, 7-8; 23, 6, r. 9; 25, 10-11; 26, 7-8; 27, 9; 28, 7; 29, 1, 7; 30, e.14-15; 32, 7-8; 33, 6; 35, 6; 37, r. 3.
- 56. SAA 8, 21, 1; but note also the use of *qabû* in SAA 8, 2, r. 7; 7, r. 1, and *šamû*, SAA 8, 21, r. 6. The last two are Issar-šumu-ereš' own words addressed to the king.
- 57. Note that the word *tupšarru* may also have the meaning "scholar", see among others CDA, p. 415b, and Rochberg 2004, p. 210.
- 58. Also K 18872, a tiny fragment, is possibly a letter addressed to the palace scribe. 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). There are, for example, less extant Neo-Assyrian letters (7) sent to queen mother Naqi'a as to at least two, if not more, palace scribes.
- 59. See fn. 43, above, and the third letter in Table I.

<p>ND 2362 (CTN V, p. 241, pl. 35)⁶⁰ (1-3) A tablet of Šarru-<i>d[uri]</i> to the palace scribe. Good health to my lord (DUMU⁶¹)! (4-7) I have sent Nabû-nadin-ahhe to my lord (DUMU); <i>after</i> (Break) (r. 1-4) Let the <i>Gurreans</i> perform this [...].</p>
<p>ND 2391 (CTN V, p. 71, pl. 10, Photo of reverse: Pl. I)⁶² (1-2) [A tablet of NN] to the [palace sc]cribe, his lord. (2-7) (As to) the sacrifice[s] about which my lord wrote, I have presented one ram before Be[l and] one ram before Z[arpanitu]. [DN] stood [...] (8) <i>and the heart of [...]</i> (Break) (r.1-3) not [...]. I have bless[ed] my lord before Nabû and [Marduk⁶³]. (r. 4-6) May Marduk and [Zarpanitu] ble[ss the palace] scri[be], my lord!</p>
<p>ND 2470 (CTN V, p. 84, pl. 13; NL 37) (1-2) A tablet of Inurta-ila'i to the palace scribe. (3-7) Concerning the people of Puqudu in my presence about whom they ordered from the Palace: “Let them be brought here!” (8-12) They are bringing 29 persons. [T]oday they are in ... I am giving them bread (<i>and</i>) [...] to eat [...] (Break) (r. 1-4) Let them <i>deliver [them to]</i> where the people are and let them bring and <i>appoint [them]</i>. (r. 5-8) One of them is in Barhalza. I have sent a word to bring him. (r. 9-10) I am (now) writing to you: check and receive the people quickly!</p>
<p>ND 2757 (CTN V, p. 202, pl. 40) (1-6) To the pala[ce] scribe, my lord: your servant Bel-abu'a. Good health to [m]y lord! The house is very well. The Inner City is well. (7-11) We have fed your house. All the delegates are rejoicing and have blessed my lord. (12-r. 6) (As to) the <i>sas[hes</i> about which m]y lord s]po[ke], there are no [...]s (<i>and</i>) ...s to my lord's liking. The ordinary <i>sashes</i> sell for half a mina of silver each. (r. 7-12) As to that waste land, we have not yet got hold of the (purchase) document, (but) <i>Urdu-Allaya</i> [will gi]ve it to you.</p>
<p>ND 2786 (CTN V, p. 95, pl. 20) (1-2) To the palace scribe, [my] lo[rd]: your servant Nahisi, the [...]. (3-4) I have given 25 sheep to Marduk-apla-iddin (<i>and</i>) brought him out on the 7th day. (5-7) I have fixed the measurements of the doors and am herewith sending them to my lord. (7-15) Concerning the box of sinews about which my lord wrote to me: “Did they give it to you as you had tested?” — I have brought in the sinews of Digrina. When I come, I will tell my lord what I have tested and sold. (16-r. 4) (As to) the letter which my lord sent to the treasurer⁶⁴ regarding the</p>

60. The translations of the five Nimrud letters do not follow those of Saggs 2001. The translations in Table I should only be considered preliminary as they precede the forthcoming SAA volume.
61. Cf. Luukko 2004, pp. 178-178.
62. This is the only extant letter to the palace scribe in Neo-Babylonian.
63. Alternatively perhaps Nanaya or Tašmetu.
64. Three letters are known to have been sent to the treasurer. They are SAA 5, 96, 97, and 110, to be dated to the reign of Sargon II. Sargon's treasurer Tab-šar-Aššur is known to have been one of the most productive letter writers/senders as he sent to Sargon at least the following letters: SAA 1, 41–74; 5, 282–290. On Tab-šar-Aššur and his letters see Mattila 2000, pp. 15, 19, 25–28. Also Tab-šar-

plot of land at our side, he gave it to u[s], saying: “The bought men may dwell there in the care of *your name*.⁶⁵” (r. 5-10) (As to) the letter which my lord sent to me concerning the mayor, he has gone to Assyria, so my lord can speak with him (in person). (r. 11-19) Concerning the revetment of which my lord wrote to me: “Construct it from (materials in) the trunk”—would I construct a revetment without a trunk?! I have laid 30 courses (of bricks). The treasurer, however, has seen it, and is saying: “Patch it up and leave it; it is (*too*) much work”.

SAA 10 130 (= ABL 62 = LAS 79)

(1-r. 3) To the scribe of the palace, my lord: your servant Nabû-šumu-iddina (= foreman of the collegium of ten [scribes] of Nineveh). [Good health to] my lord! May [Nabû] and Marduk, [Ištar] of Nineveh and [Ištar] of Arbela bless my lord! May they keep you in good health, and may you constantly be happy! (r. 4-10) The *palace*⁶⁵ and the inhabitants of Nineveh are well; may Bel and Nabû also grant health to you!

SAA 16 48 (= ABL 221)

(1-10) To the palace scribe, my lord: your servant Tabnî. The best of health to my lord! May Nabû and Marduk bless my lord! Enter Nineveh in good spirits and see the face of Nabû (and) the face of the king in peace! (11-r. 8) Now Abnî, the sheep-tax master of Arpad, is coming to the presence of my lord. He is a great friend of mine, and one who reveres my lord. My lord should trust him regarding the sheep. But give him clear instructions! (r. 8-s. 1) Why does my lord mistreat him? The man has not been properly treated. May my lord speak with the governor, and may the chief of accounts come (and) help him out.

SAA 16 49 (= ABL 220)

(1-7) To the palace scribe, my lord: your maid Sarai. May Bel, Belti[a], the Lady of Babylon, Nabû, Tašmetu, Ištar of Nineveh (and) Ištar of Arbela bless my lord! May they give long days, happiness and physical well-being to my lord. (8-r. 2) There are seven persons, servants of my lord, whom the governor of Bet-nayalani took and gave to Marduk-eriba. (r. 3-7) Now the(se) people are here. They have come to me, saying: “Speak in the presence of the palace scribe as long as Marduk-eriba does not allow us to enter.” (r. 8-9) The eunuch (whom) my lord “sealed” is with them at the moment.

Table I. Letters addressed to the palace scribe.

Aššur’s predecessor/successor/deputy Aššur-dur-paniya (see MAttila 2000, pp. 15, 49 [p. 10]) sent several letters to Sargon (SAA 5, 52–53, 55–61).

65. The sign in the original tablet is É, normally “house, household”, but the context favours to take it as “palace”. Scribal error É for É.GAL might be possible but not necessarily very likely. Alternatively we may tentatively consider “(your) house”, cf. ND 2757, 5, 7.

Some palace scribes such as Nabû-tuklatu'a may have stayed in office for more than twenty years,⁶⁶ and it is quite remarkable that Nabû-šumu-iddina, himself no less than the foreman of the collegium of ten scribes of Nineveh, writes to the palace scribe, his lord, in a tone not different from that found in letters sent to the king.

1.3. The palace scribe supervises the use of precious metals together with the treasurer

The priest Urdu-Nabû from Calah writes to the king that

The gold which the treasurer, the palace scribe and I weighed in the month of Tishri (VII) — 3 talents of refined gold and 4 talents of unrefined gold — was deposited in the storeroom of the director of the royal storehouse. He sealed it and did not give any for the royal statues or the statue of the queen mother. The king, my lord, should issue an order to the treasurer and the palace scribe to make the gold available. *Once* the beginning of the month is favourable, they should give (the gold) to the craftsmen so that they can do their work.⁶⁷

1.4. The chief and palace scribes’ activities in building works and rituals⁶⁸

Inspecting the quality and the correct progress of rituals and works belonged to the chief scribe’s duties, especially if something threatening was involved and the stability of the whole royal house was felt at stake. These significant rituals and works included the substitute-king ritual,⁶⁹ apotropaic rituals, for example, such that was necessitated after an earthquake,⁷⁰ work on temples,⁷¹ divine or royal statues,⁷² offerings,⁷³ and also preparations of a royal funeral.⁷⁴

- 66. The oldest purchase document of Nabû-tuklatu'a is dated to 800 BC and the latest datable document in which his name and title are mentioned by his nephew Nabû-zeru-iddina originates from 779 BC.
- 67. SAA 13, 61, 14-r.12. This passage which includes the treasurer was not mentioned by Mattila 2000, pp. 27-28. The treasurer and the palace scribe probably came from Nineveh to Calah to perform such trustworthy tasks in the 7th century when Calah was no longer the Assyrian capital. Alternatively, but less likely, the local palace scribe and the treasurer of Calah weighed the gold.
- 68. Note that the word *dullu* can mean both “work” and “ritual”.
- 69. SAA 10, 1-4, 11-12 and 25. For a possible apotropaic ritual, see SAA 8, 22 and 25. SAA 8, 23 speaks about a “boat-ritual”. SAA 10, 31 is about Venus rituals of the “overseer’s wife”.
- 70. SAA 10, 10.
- 71. SAA 10, 14-15: Erecting the cella of Nusku; SAA 10, 21: Report on temples in Assur.
- 72. SAA 10, 13 and 27. It is unlikely that the chief scribe gave instructions on the statues for Harrân without visiting the city himself.

For instance, in a letter that concerns the work on the *ziggurat* of Anu in Assur, the king ordered the writer of the letter, the treasurer Ṭab-šar-Aššur, to:

“Ask the Chief Scribe about it!” — (8) They have [now] asked him, and [he spoke] as follows: “Why should we do [.....] the work [.....] (Break) (r. 4) [.....] will go straight away and inspect the work in the Inner City; returning from the Inner City to Calah, he will go to the Chief Scribe, who will send a detailed report to the Palace.⁷⁵

A quotation from the chief scribe’s letter of which the beginning is broken away:

... the foundation stone has been complet[ely] bui[lt in ...]; they are produc-ing bricks. I have given the ord[ers and they are doing (the work)].”⁷⁶

In another letter, whose beginning is broken away and which is edited in the same volume, an unknown sender writes to the king:

Let the king order the chief scribe to write the name of the king on the stele, and at the same time to look up a favourable day for the (objects) to be placed in the doorjambs of the house.⁷⁷

In a letter by (the deputy of the palace scribe) Kanunayu⁷⁸ and Mannu-ki-Libbali,⁷⁹ published in the political correspondence of Esarhaddon, there is an interesting passage at the end of the letter when both writers urge “the king to give an order to Issar-šumu-ereš about the remaining ones.”⁸⁰ If the letter is correctly dated in SAA 16 to 672–669 we should of course consider Issar-šumu-ereš as chief scribe in this context but an earlier date may not be precluded.⁸¹ Therefore, Issar-šumu-ereš might appear in the letter in the capacity of the palace scribe or the deputy of the chief scribe.

73. SAA 10, 205.

74. SAA 10, 9.

75. SAA 1, 71, 7–r. 11e. Cf. Mattila 2000, p. 27.

76. SAA 10, 4, 5'–r. 3 (= CT 53, 206). The chief scribe is clearly giving orders here to workmen who are not scribes.

77. SAA 16, 125, r. 5–7.

78. Cf. fn. 116, below.

79. SAA 16, 79.

80. The word “ones” probably refers to work assignments in this context.

81. Only an approximate date to 672–669 was given in SAA 16 (p. XIX) but there are no undisputed grounds to stick only to these years.

A subordinate of the palace scribe writes to his lord a letter that concerns building works.⁸²

*1.5. The chief scribe acts as chief of scribes or supervises other workers*⁸³
Issar-šumu-ereš writes in an astrological report to the king:

The scribe [...]nap]ištu-iddin will come [on the xth] day. [I se]nt Nabû-mušeši, the scribe of the temple, [as the k]ing my lord said; *he is bringing the former* ...⁸⁴

The chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš convenes the scribes of Nineveh, Kilizi, Arbela and Assur for the treaty ceremonies and also organizes the scribes, the haruspices, the exorcists, the physicians and the augurs for the same treaty ceremonies (SAA 10 6–7).⁸⁵

It seems that scholars were producing new tablets to the king under the surveillance of Issar-šumu-ereš.⁸⁶

A letter (VAT 9875) by the chief scribe, found in Assur, possibly from the reign of Sargon II,⁸⁷ was addressed to Babu-aḥu-iddina, Babu-mušeši, Miqtu-adur and all their “brothers”, who doubtless were scribes from Assur.⁸⁸

Significant is also a report by (the deputy of the chief scribe) Nabû-mušeši:

This is the time for work. I shall go to Nineveh and station the scribes for writing in the [...] pa[lace]. I shall do whatever the k[ing my lo]rd s[ays] in the center of Nineveh. Maybe they won’t let me enter; let them give me a sealed order.⁸⁹

The chief scribe supervises the substitute king ritual and gives orders perhaps to exorcists and cook(s):

I wrote down whatever signs there were, be they celestial, terrestrial or of malformed births, and had them recited in front Šamaš, one after the other.

82. See ND 2786 in Table I above.

83. For the scarce Middle Assyrian evidence see Jakob 2003, pp. 69 (fn. 70) and 259.

84. SAA 8, 2, r. 4-8. Cf. fn. 94, below.

85. For a discussion of the two letters, see Parpola 1983, pp. 3-6.

86. See SAA 10, 30, 8-9.

87. One asks oneself whether the writer of the letter could be Nabû-šallimšunu. See fn. 17, above.

88. See PNA 1/II, p. 247 s.v. Bābu-aḥu-iddina (6, cf. nos. 3, 5), pp. 247-248 s.v. Bābu-mušeši (1-2), PNA 2/II, p. 755 s.v. Miqtu-adur (13, presumably nos. 5-7 are his later namesakes, likewise from Assur).

89. SAA 8, 157, r. 1-8.

They (the substitute king and queen) were treated with wine, washed with water and anointed with oil; I had those birds cooked and made them eat them. The substitute king of the land of Akkad took the signs on himself⁹⁰

and

[Concerning the s]igns [about which my lord w]rote to me, [after] we had enthroned him, we had him hear them in front of Šamaš. Furthermore, yesterday I had him hear them again, and I bent down and bound them in his hem. Now I shall again do as my lord wrote to me.”⁹¹

The chief scribe seems also to have commanded builders(?) in Akkad during the substitute king ritual there:

I [...] in the city of Akkad; the foundation stone has been complet[ely] bui[lt in ...]; they are p[roducing] the bricks. I have given the ord[ers] and they are doing (the work).⁹²

1.6. The chief or palace scribes' deputies, other personnel or servants mentioned

We can conclude from several references that the work of both chief and palace scribes was often real teamwork by nature.⁹³ Nonetheless, explicit references to their personnel are very rare:

- “Nabû-mušeši, deputy of the chief scribe” is named in a list of officials at court;⁹⁴

90. SAA 10, 2, 6-14.

91. SAA 10, 12, r. 1-11.

92. SAA 10, 4, 5-r. 3.

93. See, in particular, the following: SAA 8, 3; 7, 5-7; 19, r.1-7; SAA 10 5, r.5; 12, r.4; 29, 1-2; 30, 9; 33, r.1-2 and r.11-12; and the letters written by the chief scribe jointly with the most powerful exorcists (Adad-šumu-uşur and Marduk-şakin-şumi), colleague scribes/astrologers (Akkullanu, Nabû-şumu-[iddina]), lamentation priest (Urdu-Ea) and his own deputy (Nabû-mušeši): SAA 10 1, 3, 24-25, 205, 232. Furthermore, Issar-şumu-ereš is also mentioned in the same context probably with the exorcist [Nabû]-naşir: SAA 10, 378, 2'-4'.

94. His title is written as LÚ.2-*u* GAL-A. "BA" (SAA 7, 5, i 50). Together with the chief exorcist Adad-şumu-uşur and Issar-şumu-ereš he is apparently a co-author of a letter (SAA 10, 205), though see Parpolo 1983, p. 158. It is even possible that the same person was referred to in all the following attestations of PNA 2/II, pp. 847-848 s.v. Nabû-mušeši (1-3, 5-6): “1. Scholar at the court of Nineveh, 2. Deputy of the chief scribe, 3. Scribe at the court of Nineveh, 5. Temple scribe from Nineveh, who is mentioned in an astrological report by Issar-şumu-ereš, 6. Astrologer at the court of Nineveh”, to

- “Ezbu, the servant of the chief scribe”, appears in a royal decision;⁹⁵
- Nabû-dammiq, deputy of the palace scribe, acts as a witness during the reign of Sennacherib;⁹⁶
- [NN], deputy of the palace scribe, acts as a witness;⁹⁷
- [NN, ... of the] palace [scri]be, acts as witness for Remanni-Adad during the reign of Assurbanipal;⁹⁸
- The “third man” and the chariot driver of the palace scribe are the subject matter in a letter from Mannu-ki-Libbali to Esarhaddon.⁹⁹ The author urges the king to ask “the [...]s and the servants of the palace scribe”¹⁰⁰ and according to the same letter settling the Kushite girls (in the harem of the royal palace) was the duty of palace scribe’s subordinates;
- Abdâ, the chariot driver of the palace scribe, acts a witness;¹⁰¹
- Seven servants of the palace scribe appear in the letter by Sarai to the palace scribe;¹⁰²
- Moreover, Nabû-eriba, the village manager of the palace scribe, acts as witness in the *house*¹⁰³ of the palace scribe.

the last one is attributed the authorship of SAA 8, 143-159. However, see also Parpola 1983, pp. XVI-XVII and 158.

95. ABL 307, 4. For ABL 307 cf. Luukko 2004, p. 206 fn. 18.

96. SAA 6, 86, r. 11.

97. SAA 14, 135, r. 4. The date is 663-VI-18.

98. SAA 6, 334, r. 34.

99. SAA 16, 78, 4, 10. Cf. fn. 38, above. One possible interpretation of the letter is that the king wanted to hear from (the scribe) Mannu-ki-Libbali himself what exactly was his role, when the chariot driver of the palace scribe perhaps had an affair with the wife of the “third man” of the palace scribe. Mannu-ki-Libbali, the author of the letter, may bear witness to the affair or he may have been gossiping about it. See especially the lines 4-6, r. 6-17 of the letter.

100. Obv. 20-e. 23.

101. BT 117, r. 5-6. See the following section.

102. SAA, 16, 49, 8-r. 3. See Table I, above.

103. Jas 1996, p. 67, interprets É in this context as “the office” of the palace scribe. The interpretation appears plausible but is without parallels: “PN has paid in full his restitution (of) 80 minas of copper in the house of the palace scribe ... Before Nabû-eriba, the village manager [of] the palace scribe”, GPA 95, 2-3, r. 22e-23e = SAAS 5, no. 43. The document is dated to 740. See PNA 2/II p. 826 s.v. Nabû-eriba (2).

1.7. The chief or palace scribe acts as a purchaser, seller, witness or is otherwise mentioned in legal texts

The chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš acts as witness in two documents when Remanni-Adad is buying two estates that include vineyards; one of the estates is located in Ispallurê and the other in Singara. In these occasions both the name Issar-šumu-ereš and his title of chief scribe are mentioned.¹⁰⁴

The borrower Arbayu gives several persons and his property, especially a vineyard in the village of Bel-ahhe, as pledges in a legal document that records a loan of silver. The vineyard is said to adjoin the vineyards of an unnamed chief scribe and two other people.¹⁰⁵ The chief scribe in that document cannot be Nabû-zeru-lešir, at least he is not attested in the capacity of the chief scribe before Esarhaddon's reign.¹⁰⁶ A pledge of a field includes as second witness a man called Ahabû,¹⁰⁷ chief [...] (title damaged); the SAA edition restores here "chief [scribe]".¹⁰⁸ The passage might be erroneously restored,¹⁰⁹ however, see Ahabû in the following section 8.

Nabû-kabti-ahhešu, the palace scribe of Sargon, king of Assyria, buys plenty of land in Buruqu.¹¹⁰

The palace scribe Nabû-ahu-iddina¹¹¹ is defined as a guarantor for the "festival day" of Arbela when the scribe Mannu-ki-Arbail from Imgur-Illil has to give the king's rations *from* Mamu-iqbi for the banquet of Arbela. Nabû-ahu-iddina is, thus, if I understand the contents of the document correctly, collecting the *ilku*-dues from a scribe who was perhaps connected to the Mamu-temple of Imgur-Illil.¹¹² Moreover, Abdâ the chariot driver of the palace scribe acts as a witness in the same document.¹¹³

A palace scribe or more likely his subordinate is the creditor in a broken loan document or debt-note for silver.¹¹⁴

104. SAA 6, 314, r. 11 (666-XI-10), 329, r. 11 (660-IV-26) and in the duplicate of the latter 330, r. 6'.

105. SAA 6, 97, r. 1. The transaction is dated to the reign of Sennacherib: 693-V-9.

106. Cf. Parpola 1983, p. 470.

107. SAA 6, 268. A document from the early reign of Esarhaddon: 679-X-1.

108. SAA 6, 268, r. 2: *IGI 1PAB-bu-u' LÚ.GAL—[A.BA]*. Cf. also Radner 1997, p. 108.

109. In PNA (1/I p. 58 s.v. Ah-abû [14]) the same passage is interpreted as "Chief [...] ... LÚ.GAL—[xx]".

110. SAA 6, 31, and K. Radner 1997b, pp. 19-23, 27-28. PNA 2/II, p. 838 s.v. Nabû-kabti-ahhešu (1).

111. PNA 2/II, p. 799 s.v. Nabû-ahu-iddina (11, cf. e.g. nos. 7, 14).

112. Cf. BT 116.

113. BT 117, r. 1-6. The document comes from the reign of Sennacherib, and it is either to be dated to 691 or to 686 BC. The presence of Nabû-ahu-iddina's chariot driver may indicate that the palace scribe was only quickly visiting Imgur-Illil where the document was drawn up and found later. Probably he was either the main palace scribe from Nineveh or the palace scribe from Arbela, cf. fn. 23, above.

114. CTN 3, 73, 3, see esp. the commentary, p. 134. See also Fales 1987, p. 21.

1.8. The chief or palace scribe appears in direct or indirect economic contexts

A collection of decrees from various reigns mentions “one ram from the 3,000 sheep of Aḥabū, palace scribe, which the king organized for Ištar.”¹¹⁵ This passage is probably to be dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

A memorandum from the reign of Esarhaddon¹¹⁶ speaks about the “reimbursements (*tašlimāti*¹¹⁷) (to be) paid by the king” which the writer of the memorandum wants to pay. The writer is with considerable certainty the later chief scribe Issar-šumu-eres, possibly having written this document as palace scribe.

1.9. The chief or palace scribe receives tribute, audience gifts or other commodities

In one of the Nimrud Wine Lists from the 8th century, perhaps around 750 BC, an unnamed chief scribe receives rations of wine.¹¹⁸ The palace scribe is attested to receive rations of wine in three wine lists.¹¹⁹

Sennacherib’s letter to his father Sargon deals with the distribution of tribute and audience gifts and informs us that “one mina of silver, one toga, 2 scrolls of papyrus: the palace scribe”.¹²⁰

A “(golden?¹²¹) stylus for wine” is attributed to the palace scribe in an administrative memorandum from Calah.¹²² The memorandum is dated to 788. Hence the unnamed palace scribe is presumably Nabû-tuklatu'a.

Animals and commodities should be given, among others, to the palace scribe in a partly broken “private” letter.¹²³

115. SAA 12, 77, i 33'-37'. See PNA 1/I, p. 58 s.v. Aḥ-abū (13).

116. SAA 16, 80. “The document of the reimbursements (to be) paid by the king, my lord, which Kanunayu took out — I gave it to him, but he has brought it in again. May it be brought out and given to me, so that I can pay the reimbursements according to it”. For Kanunayu, the deputy (of the palace scribe), see SAA 16, p. XXXIX, and PNA 2/I, p. 602 s.v. Kanūnāiu (16).

117. CDA, p. 402a: “*tašlimtu(m)*, *tašlindu* ‘completed handover, final payment’ Bab., NA; <*šalāmu II D*>, and AHw, p. 1338b: “vollständige Übergabe, Vervollständigung”.

118. NWL 35, ii 10'. For an approximate date of the list, cf. PNA 2/II, p. 900 s.v. Nabû-uṣalla (nos. 1, 5).

119. NWL 12, 3'; 19, 22; and 35, ii 9'. In NWL 35 the palace scribe is mentioned just before the chief scribe.

120. SAA 1, 34, r. 19'.

121. Most of the other objects mentioned in the memorandum appear to be golden.

122. GI-*tup-pi ša* GEŠTIN DUB.SAR-É.GAL: ND 5421, 5. Cf. SAA 10, 336, 3, in which the use of stylus in a medical context resembles that of a dropper. However, this passage is difficult to interpret without close parallels. Alternatively we may consider the possibility that the stylus was made out of vine and translate the line accordingly: “a stylus of vine (for) the palace scribe,” cf. e.g. GI DUB.BA.A *ša* GIŠ.GIŠIMMAR listed in CAD Q s.v. *qan tuppi*, p. 80a.

The record of various items, dated to the early reign of Assurbanipal (663-661 BC), includes the following laconic statement: “Total 13 (horses of) the palace scribe”.¹²⁴ This probably means that thirteen (horses) have been delivered to the palace scribe.

1.10. The chief or palace scribe is the writer of administrative documents

Administrative documents were often written anonymously and this fact prevents us from identifying the writers of these texts. The chief scribe Nabû-zeru-lešir sent or personally delivered an administrative type of letter to the palace manager.¹²⁵ The palace scribe Nabû-belšunu is probably the writer of a note concerning some soldiers.¹²⁶ The palace scribe Marduk-eriba is presumably the author of a list that concerns royal charioteers.¹²⁷

*1.11. The chief and palace scribes' material wealth*¹²⁸

As the king's regular counsellor the chief scribe was an influential man and we may expect him being a rich man accordingly. But in assessing the economic status of the chief scribe, we may refer to a letter that concerns the inspection of the chief scribe's house about which is said “The house of the chief scribe is a tiny house. Even a donkey

- 123. KAV 120, 4, r. 6'.
- 124. SAA 7, 118, r. ii 14. For a short discussion of the text see *ibid.*, p. XXIX.
- 125. SAA 16, 50. Nabû-zeru-lešir omits his title in the document.
- 126. SAA 11, 140, r. 2; PNA 2/II, p. 815 s.v. Nabû-bēlšunu (3). In fact, no. 4 might refer to the same person as Nabû-belšunu as he is quite likely the author of an administrative document (SAA 11, 153) which concerns some Babylonians from the most respected families of Babylon. The end of the undated document is translated as follows: “In all, five people, whom Nabû-bēlšunu has exempted (from claims and presented) to the god Bel for the preservation of his life” (r. 11-15). Only someone as influential as the palace scribe could have had the power to do this.
- 127. SAA 7, 18, i 14'-15'. One could suggest to dating this administrative document to the early reign of Assurbanipal because of the occurrence of Marduk-eriba (cf. SAA 16, 49, and Table I above). In SAA 16, 49, he may appear in the capacity of deputy of the palace scribe. Is it also the same man who is mentioned in SAA 13, 7, r. 2? Moreover, according to a legal transaction (SAA 6, 336), Marduk-eriba, Riba-ahhe, and Kenî (PNA 2/I, p. 610 [15]) sell a big estate to Remanni-Adad in Arrapha — I would not be surprised if the same Kenî was the scribe of the crown prince and the person who acted as a witness for Remanni-Adad in another legal transaction (SAA 6, 319), cf. PNA nos. 8-9). For Marduk-eriba cf. PNA 2/II, p. 716, particularly nos. 10-12, 18-19.
- 128. Some parallels between the economic wealth and the high position of the Neo-Assyrian chief scribe and his much earlier Hittite colleague from the late 13th century BC may be sought in the interesting article by Singer 2003, pp. 341–48. Moreover, Singer discusses the important matter that the Hittite chief scribe was probably qualified to bear more than one title (see esp. p. 347).

would not enter there”.¹²⁹ Our ignorance on the context of this letter presents a problem. But the background of this curious text may well be guessed at. I can suggest two possible options for the background of the document. First, the inspection might have been ordered after a complaint and presumably repairs followed.¹³⁰ Actually nowhere in the letter is stated that the inspection really took place in Nineveh. Thus accordingly it may be that we can read about the inspection of the chief scribe’s secondary house, perhaps a farmhouse or a house in another city than Nineveh. Second, since the letter is quite likely datable to the reign of Esarhaddon,¹³¹ we may ask ourselves whether the letter was not written soon after the death of the chief scribe Nabû-zeru-lešir, who presumably died in 673 BC.¹³² The house in question could have been Nabû-zeru-lešir’s last address. Moreover, this may be supported by the fact that all the *equipment* of Aššur-naşir, a *nobleman*, whose house likewise had to be inspected, had been collected by a eunuch and piled up in the unknown writer’s storehouses and even in his bedroom. Therefore, we may witness the result of inspections of the houses of two recently deceased officials.¹³³

Consequently, any interpretations of the chief scribe’s wealth based on the above-mentioned letter reporting the chief scribe’s house may be erroneous. Prudence is called for when interpreting this letter at its face value. On the other hand, some supporting evidence for the potential poverty of the chief scribe may be gained from the famous letter by the exorcist/deputy of the chief physician Urdu-Gula, who writes to the king that his father (Adad-šumu-uşur) portioned out six homers of field with the chief scribe Nabû-zeru-lešir, Urdu-Gula’s uncle.¹³⁴ Urdu-Gula doesn’t praise his own father’s wealth either as he had already previously stated in the same letter that he himself “was a poor man, son of a poor man, a dead dog, a vile and limited person.”¹³⁵ The grumbling and moaning in Urdu-Gula’s letter, however, may be considered a rather relative matter: has anybody else than a man, who has earlier achieved many privileged rights, really nerves to complain about his present situation to the king in such an outspoken manner?

- 129. SAA 16, 89, 9-11.
- 130. The immediate continuation of the letter reads as “(Whereas) the house of Aššur-naşir, a nobleman, is good (but) much repair (must be done) there” (ll. 12-15). The author of the letter may have wanted, of course, to stress that the house of the chief scribe is particularly tiny when compared to the house of Aššur-naşir.
- 131. In PNA (1/I, p. 203 *s.v.* Aššur-naşir [6]), however, the letter is dated to the reign of Sargon II.
- 132. See PNA 2/II, pp. 910f. *s.v.* Nabû-zēru-lēšir (4, cf. nos. 1-2).
- 133. It should be stressed that the partly broken words in lines r.7'-10' “[Let] him be told: [...] / the [who]le [...] ...” were probably meant to the eunuch who had collected Aššur-naşir’s belongings.
- 134. SAA 10, 294, r. 21. Six homers is not much if e.g. compared with the 10 homers of cultivated land given by Esarhaddon to Marduk-šumu-uşur (SAA 10, 173, 7).
- 135. SAA 10, 294, 14-15.

At least during the reign of Sennacherib a vineyard belonging to the chief scribe in the village of Bel-ahhe is attested.¹³⁶

The wealth of the palace scribe is obvious but needs to be ascertained from several implicit references. Economic matters are involved in the letters to the palace scribe and in other contexts where the palace scribe appears.¹³⁷ He is, for example, handling a lot of money,¹³⁸ supervising the use of precious metals together with the treasurer.¹³⁹ Hence he must have worked closely together with the treasurer and the chief of accounts.¹⁴⁰ He bought a large estate,¹⁴¹ and the early 8th century palace scribe Nabû-tuklatu'a purchased several servants, a house, part of an outbuilding and two gardens. The palace scribe may also have been involved in financial matters dealing with the dues and taxes of the temple personnel.¹⁴² Furthermore, he is receiving gifts and commodities.¹⁴³

1.12. Other references to chief and palace scribes

The chief scribe is mentioned in the so-called Lu-list that lists professions. His title is only preserved in the list from Sultantepe.¹⁴⁴ A potential chief scribe *laš-šur-ba-ni* 'LÚ.GAL-A?B[A?] xx' acts as a witness when Sennacherib dedicates personnel to his newly-built Akitu temple.¹⁴⁵ The profession of Aššur-bani is uncertain, and it may not be necessary to consider him the chief scribe of the Aššur Temple so far as such a profession is not explicitly attested.¹⁴⁶

136. SAA 6, 97, r. 1.

137. His involvement in logistical issues is clear from ND 2470 when he is receiving people from the governor Inurta-ila'i and relocating them. ND 2757 that concerns scarves, on the other hand, seems to have a business dimension.

138. SAA 16, 80.

139. SAA 13, 61.

140. On the palace scribe's collaboration with the treasurer, see above the section "Evidence" which discusses Nabû-tuklatu'a, as well as ND 2786 and SAA 13, 61, and for the chief of accounts SAA 16, 48.

141. Cf. fn. 110, above.

142. BT 117, possibly SAA 11, 153 as well (see fn. 126, above), and SAA 16, 48, where the sheep-tax master's connection to the temple is possible but not necessary. See also SAA 12, 77, i 33'-37'.

143. SAA 1, 34, r. 19'; NWL 12, 3'; 19, 22; 35, ii 9'; KAV 120, 4, r. 6'; ND 5421, 5; SAA 7, 118, r. ii 14.

144. MSL 12, 233, i 6'.

145. SAA 12, 86, r. 19. The document comes from the late reign of Sennacherib and is to be dated either to 684 or to 683 BC.

146. "Chief scribe? (of the Aššur Temple?)" in PNA 1/I, p. 159 s.v. Aššur-bāni (7).

A person called Šumaya appears several times in a document in which 10 ox-skins are said to be at the disposal of the chief scribe.¹⁴⁷ It appears plausible to me to identify Šumaya of the document as an exorcist and astrologer, the brother of the chief scribe Issar-šumu-ereš. The chief scribe is attested twice in an administrative document that comes from Dur-Šarruken and is to be dated after the reign of Assurbanipal.¹⁴⁸ In a fragmentary Babylonian letter, the palace scribe is mentioned in a broken context. The letter may relate to the matters of Uruk, ca. 652-648.¹⁴⁹ The palace scribe appears in a badly broken Babylonian letter.¹⁵⁰ According to a memorandum of legal transactions Kuwasi has been selling *fields* of the palace scribe.¹⁵¹

147. KAV 76. The document originates from the archive N 5 about which Pedersén 1998, p. 134, writes: “One library N 5 (Assur 16) ... was found in the Prince’s Palace ... Found with the cuneiform tablets was one Aramaic docket, possibly once fastened to an Aramaic scroll of papyri or similar material. ... So far, this library with archive can only be said to have contained common exorcistic literature and administrative texts.” In any case, the said ox-skins of KAV 76 were probably meant for cultic purpose or were perhaps used as writing material.
148. CTDS 1, i 7'; r. i 13.
149. CT 54, 468, 9'. See, e.g., PNA 2/II, p. 716 s.v. Marduk-erība (18). It is not impossible that this Marduk-eriba who appears on ll. 10', 12' is in fact Assurbanipal’s palace scribe, who could have been mentioned already at the broken end of line 8'.
150. CT 54, 243, r. 10'.
151. ND 2778, 14 (*Iraq* 23, pl. 27). The date of the document is lost, but see Parker 1961, p. 15.

Area of activity	Chief scribe	Palace scribe
1. Counselling the king	+	(+)
2. Letters sent to	(+)	+
3. Supervising the use of precious metals	– ¹⁵²	+
4. Building works and rituals	+	(+) ¹⁵³
5. Chief for other scribes	+	+ ¹⁵⁴
6. Personnel mentioned	+	+
7. Appears in legal texts	+	+ ¹⁵⁵
8. Economic contexts	(+)	+
9. Receiving gifts, commodities, etc.	+	+
10. Writing administrative documents	(+)	+

Table II. Chief and palace scribes' attested activities¹⁵⁶

152. Curious is the passage in a letter either from Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal to a high official: “and concerning the golden waters about which you spoke to me: write to Marduk-šarru-uṣur, Marduk-eriba, Nergal-šarru-uṣur, the ‘third man,’ and Issar-šumu-ereš (that) they should go; if it can be done, they will make the gold available; they will also inspect those Flood *monsters*. And concerning the bronze and iron about which you wrote to me: write me how much the Flood *monster* of [...]”, SAA 13, 7, 9'-r. 10. The letter could have been sent e.g. to the treasurer, the palace scribe, the chief scribe, or a high priest. Regrettably the beginning of the letter is broken away. As a more precise dating of the letter is not possible at the moment, the title which Issar-šumu-ereš held is unknown, but he could well have been the chief scribe, the deputy of the chief scribe, or the palace scribe. On the other hand, PNA (2/I, p. 579 s.v. Issar-šumu-ereš [5]) interprets Issar-šumu-ereš of the letter as “Official/craftsman(?)”, but, it may well be justified to ask whether the context of the letter differs much from the following passages from Issar-šumu-ereš’ letters: “..., he showed it [to me, saying]: ‘There is no gold here; they have diminished the [...]’”. Whatever old work there is, is full (weight) as if cast; (but) all the new stuff which has been manufactured recently is too thin.” SAA 10, 21, r. 4-8; “Concerning the four [...] -gems of the statue [of ...] about which the ki[ng, my lord, wrote to me]”, SAA 10, 27, 7-9, r. 7'-17. Besides, inspecting (*amāru*) matters related to the state cult is an essential part of the chief scribe’s duty, see SAA 10, 21, 5-6. Cf. also SAA 1, 71, r. 4'-8', in which the person inspecting works is not the chief scribe but someone closely collaborating with him.
153. No explicit connection to rituals is attested; for a building context, see ND 2786 in Table I.
154. See e.g. SAA 10, 130; 16, 48, 78.
155. Also attested as an eponym, cf. fn. 25, above.
156. + stands for attested, – for not attested, and (+) signifies that even if the activity is almost certain, primary evidence is still missing.

2. Summary

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. He was a very influential man, as petitions to him demonstrate that he had the power to improve someone’s status and position. In general, the nature of his duties were of a rather practical and mundane nature (administration, management, supervising use of precious metals), in comparison with the tasks of the chief scribe. Even in letters which concern rams or sheep for ceremonial purposes his role appears more that of the manager, who sees to the practical arrangements.¹⁵⁷

The most conspicuous difference between palace and chief scribe appears to be that the former was not necessarily a scholar while the latter certainly was one. It should, however, be noted that some misinterpretations may have resulted by the scribe reading scholarly letters to the king, and thus may even concern interpretations of the palace scribe.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, such problems in the chain of palace communication should be considered rather exceptional than commonplace.

The chief scribe was a regular adviser of the king who reminded him constantly of what should be done. Thus, his role was inevitably both political and religious and his duties were administrative in the sense that, potentially, the consequences of his advice were felt in the whole country if not even further away. His role included determining the perils that threatened the king and royal family and he had to prevent these threats by various means. He did not only calm down the king but also the other members of the royal family who sought his advice, including, e.g., the queen mother.¹⁵⁹

The chief scribe was not only supervising literary works to be prepared at the palace, he was one of the main coordinators of works and rituals in the Neo-Assyrian administration. He must have been a sort of mastermind who planned how cultic matters should be prepared and performed. Accordingly the chief scribe’s responsibility was to take care of the preparations of many rituals and to supervise that everything happened smoothly when these rituals were performed. Thus he needed a lot of assistants in his charge. He suggested to the king the best possible dates for the treaty ceremonies. He regularly observed the sky to assess astrological, celestial phenomena, and interpreted these events in the sky according to his manuals. The chief scribe’s further responsibilities included instructing the king about his ritual purity¹⁶⁰ and mental health. Although *rab tupšarri* was nominally the chief of scribes, it needs to be stressed that there is no

157. Cf. ND 2391 above. The palace scribe or his subordinate is also connected with rams or sheep in ND 2786; SAA 12, 77; SAA 16; 48.

158. See especially SAA 10, 60, 15-17, r. 11-14.

159. SAA 10, 16-17.

160. Cf. SAA 10, 29, and warnings expressed of “not to go out tomorrow” in 10, 38.

evidence to suggest that the palace scribe had been a subordinate of the chief scribe. The reason behind this must at least partly be explainable because of the different types of tasks and duties between the two influential scribes. We can maintain the chief scribe being the more theoretically orientated scribe whilst the palace scribe mainly specialized in practical and economic matters.

In any case, the opinions of both men, the chief and the palace scribe, were highly valued by the king and it seems that when the king decided about appointments he listened to both the chief and palace scribes' opinions about the candidates.¹⁶¹

Apparently the palace scribe had part of his household in the Inner City (Assur). He seems to have been involved there more in his economic duties and interests and not because of cultic matters.¹⁶² On the other hand, the chief scribe was certainly a regular visitor in Assur especially because of his cultic duties.¹⁶³ Both of the scribes also clearly had their connections to Babylonia.¹⁶⁴

In assessing the duties and authorities of many important palace officials, including the palace scribe, future research could still delve more into the details of the attested duties of various officials of the palace, such as the chamberlain (*ša-muhhi-bētāni*), chief eunuch (*rab ša-rēši*), major-domo (*rab bēti*), palace herald (*nāgir ēkalli*), palace manager (*rab ēkalli*), palace superintendent/supervisor (*ša-pān-ēkalli*).

Another pertinent question is: should we consider scholars like Akkullanu, Balasî, Nabû-ahhe-eriba, and Bel-ušezip, about whom we did not discuss here but who are otherwise well-known, only as scribes/astrologers, and Adad-šumu-uşur merely as the (king's personal) exorcist? The same question is valid for many other scholars.

That the so far rather unknown Nabû-šallimšunu was the chief scribe during the reign of Sargon II may help us to envisage the overall picture of the most influential scribes in Assyria. It seems reasonably clear that there were rivalling families to compete with one another for the positions of highest scribes; namely at least those of the family of Gabbu-ilani-ereš and Harmakki scribes from Assur but probably there were many

161. See fns. 31 and 38, above.

162. Cf. ND 2757, perhaps also KAV 120.

163. It appears plausible that the chief scribe visited Assur when the work on the *ziggurat* of Anu was prepared, even if the fragmentarily preserved letter (SAA 1, 71) is not clear about it. Further documents that connect the chief scribe in his duties to Assur, the Assyrian religious capital, are SAA 10, 21; VAT 9875; and KAV 76.

164. In regard to the preparations of a royal funeral, the king ordered Issar-šumu-ereš to consult Babylonians as follows: "As to what the king, my lord wrote to me: 'Ask Bel-naşir, Bel-ipus and (other) Babylonians whom you know'" (SAA 10, 9, 6-10). Moreover, the chief scribe reported to the king about the substitute king ritual that took place in the city of Akkad (SAA 10, 4).

Chief scribes	Palace scribes
Gabbi-ilani-ereš (reigns of Tukulti-Ninurta II and Assurnasirpal II)	Nabû-tuklatu'a (800–779)
Nabû-šallimšunu (714)	Nabû-kabti-ahhešu (709-VIII-13)
Kalbu(?) (reign of Sennacherib) ¹⁶⁵	Nabû-aḥu-iddina(?) (691 or 686)
	Aḥ-abû/Aḥabû (after Nabû-aḥu-iddina?)
Aššur-bani(?) (684 or 683)	Issar-šumu-ereš(?) (c. 678–674?)
Nadin(?) (c. 680) ¹⁶⁶	Nabû-belšunu (after Issar-šumu-ereš?)
Aḥ-abû/Aḥabû(?) (679-X-1)	Marduk-eriba (c. 668–650)
Nabû-zeru-lešir (678?-673?)	Nabû-šarru-uşur (eponym 629*)
Issar-šumu-ereš (672–657 ¹⁶⁷)	Sîn-šarru-uşur (eponym 625*)

Table III. Chief and palace scribes.¹⁶⁸

165. Whether Kalbu was the chief scribe is uncertain, however, cf. SAA 10, 109, r. 1-9, and Pongratz-Leisten 1999, p. 35. Other candidates include Nabû-aplu-iddina, but also both Nabû-bani and Bel-upaḥhir, who are known like Kalbu to have been “master scholars” (*ummâni*) of Sennacherib, see Grayson 1980-83, pp. 120, 125; Frahm 1999, p. 79 fn. 27; Parpola 1983, p. 449; and Parpola 2005, in which the possibility of identifying Bel-upaḥhir as Aḥiqar of the famous Aramaic Story of Aḥiqar is also considered.
166. On details of the theory concerning Nadin see Parpola 2005. The name can be standardized as Nadinu: a common name in the Neo-Assyrian period, see PNA 2/II, p. 919-921. The identification is of course speculative as this particular Nadin or Nadinu — adopted son of Aḥiqar — is so far only known from the Story of Aḥiqar and not from any Neo-Assyrian document.
167. For (the length of) Issar-šumu-ereš’ career see Parpola 1983, pp. 3, 16, 18, 468, and Melville 1999, p. 74. Frahm 1999, p. 78, has estimated that Issar-šumu-ereš may have lived from around 705 to 630 BC.
168. Note also Dādiyû, LÚ*.DUB.SAR É-DINGIR 保住 É.GAL-lim, Hunger 1968, no. 235, 7, and cf. PNA 1/II, p. 364; and relating to this see also what is said about Nabû-zeru-lešir (8) (PNA 2/II, p. 911): “Young apprentice scribe, descendant of the temple and palace scribe Dadiyû, from Assur ... scribe of the temple and of the palace, copied and collated an incantation tablet, according to its colophon KAR 23+25 iv 4 = Hunger 1968, no. 235, 2”.

other families who could offer serious contenders. This might have created a healthy competition from the reigning king's point of view and given him suitable leeway to tactically choose either the person whom he found best or make a good move in choosing someone from a less mighty family in order to keep the influence of any family limited. Therefore, it seems certain that we should not either postulate any hereditary automatism for any family, for instance, to be elected to the post of the chief scribe, even though the most influential families were likely to occupy the most important posts within the administration of the empire. It remains to be emphasized that it was not enough to have the right pedigree. Consequently, we may also get a partial explanation of why particularly Nabû-zuqup-kenu, who is well-known from colophons, or some other members of the Gabbu-ilani-ereš family never became chief scribes but occupied other influential positions in the Neo-Assyrian administration. On the other hand, it would be erroneous to imagine that the competition between families and individuals stopped after the important positions were filled. Rivalry between the highest officials in the Neo-Assyrian Empire is recorded numerous times in the corpus of correspondence discovered at Nineveh and Calah.¹⁶⁹

APPENDIX A ISSAR-ŠUMU-EREŠ' TITLES

Issar-šumu-ereš may even have held all the following professional and honorary titles during his career:¹⁷⁰

- 1) *šamallû*, “apprentice, junior scribe”, and/or *šeħru*, likewise “apprentice”;
- 2) *tupšar ēkalli*, “palace scribe”;
- 3) *šaniu (ša) rab tupšarri*, “deputy (of the) chief scribe”;
- 4) *tupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*, “the scribe of Enūma Anu Enlil”;¹⁷¹
- 5) *rab tupšarri*, “chief scribe”;
- 6) *ummānu*, “master scholar”;
- 7) *tupšar šarri*, “king's/royal scribe”.¹⁷²

169. See in particular SAA 10, 13, and 16.

170. It should, however, be borne in mind that, so far, the textual evidence provides him only with these titles: Chief scribe, master scholar and scribe of *Enūma Anu Enlil*.

171. SAA 7, 1, i 1-8. The profession may be interpreted as “astronomer/astrologer”, but see Rochberg 2004, pp. 219-236. A clue to the importance of Issar-šumu-ereš is that he is heading this important list of experts at the court as *tupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* (SAA 7, 1).

172. Purely conjectural as never attested referring to Issar-šumu-ereš.

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