Abhandlung

Bastian Still* and Rieneke Sonnevelt

On Sippar’s Quay: Cuneiform Tablets with Aramaic Inscriptions from the Böhl Collection in Leiden

https://doi.org/10.1515/za-2020-0008

Abstract: In this article we publish and study three Neo-Babylonian cuneiform texts from the Böhl Collection that contain Aramaic inscriptions. Deriving from the same archival context, these tablets bring to life the complex social fabric of Sippar’s entrepreneurial harbour community and its multilingual landscape. We argue that the appearance of alphabetic inscriptions in this setting is not a coincidence and tells us more about the role of Aramaic in Babylonian society at the time.

Introduction

With approximately three thousand tablets, the Böhl Collection in Leiden is the largest collection of cuneiform records from ancient Mesopotamia in The Netherlands. Assembled by F.M.T. (de Liagre) Böhl in the 1920s and 1930s, and acquired by The Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO) in 1951, the collection incorporates tablets from a large number of textual genres, and stemming from as many historical periods (Van Zoest/Berntsen 2014, 15 f.). This includes, among others, Old Akkadian and Sumerian texts from the third millennium BCE, Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian letters, and Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, as well as Neo- and Late Babylonian legal-administrative records. While some parts of the collection have already been published and made available in in-house series, monographs and other publications,1 the Neo-Babylonian material has remained largely unexplored, since the efforts of professor Böhl himself (in particular Böhl 1936).

In this article we publish, translate and study the only three Neo-Babylonian cuneiform texts from the Böhl Collection that contain Aramaic epigraphs incised into the clay.2 Attracted in the first place by the Aramaic epigraph, LB 1650 – text no. 1 below – was already published by Böhl (1946) seventy years ago. Since then, however, much new information has come to light about the Neo-Babylonian documentation as well as Sippar’s diverse social milieus, and our new reading of the Aramaic inscription warrants a re-evaluation and re-edition of this text. The other two texts – no. 2 and no. 3 below – have remained unpublished thus far.

These legal documents deal with diverse subject matters, viz. an outstanding debt of silver, dirty laundry and the marketing of beer. They date from the late reign of Darius I and the early reign of his successor Xerxes.

1 Most notable are the studies published by the NINO in the series Tabulae Liagre Böhl (TLB) and Studia Liagre Böhl (SLB), as well as the Mededeelingen uit de Leidse verzameling van spijkerschrift-inscriptions I & II published by Böhl 1933–1934.
2 Several tablets from the same environment seem to bear traces of inked epigraphs; these are the subject of ensuing research.
(494–485 BCE) and were written in Sippar and the capital city of Babylon. While two of the tablets are connected by virtue of the protagonist, the archival context of all three documents remains somewhat ambiguous. Yet, we will show that they can in all likelihood be assigned to a known cluster of private archives, following the specific social setting in which these transactions took place: The mercantile community that operated from the harbour of Sippar. This can be gathered from prosopographical evidence, the nature of the transactions, as well as the distinct Akkadian phraseology, and the presence and nature of the Aramaic inscriptions.

In cuneiform tablets from Sippar, Aramaic appears in two different, social settings. In the archives of the Ebabbar temple, Aramaic is mainly used on administrative documents, viz., unwitnessed transactions that record the flow of commodities and silver. When a witnessed, legal agreement from Sippar contains an epigraph, chances are very high that it was not drawn up in a temple setting or among Ebabbar’s priestly families, but in an entrepreneurial context and, more specifically, in the cosmopolitan commercial district of the city that had the harbour (kāru) at its centre. This suggests that Aramaic had a different role in these distinct settings. In this article, we will use the three tablets from the Böhl Collection to explore the entrepreneurial setting. What is characteristic of this harbour community and how does this relate to the prevalence of Aramaic in this specific socioeconomic context?

### Text no. 1

**LB 1650**

[Sippar], 24-II-29 Darius I (493 BCE)

promissory note for silver

5.5 × 4.0 × 1.5 cm

| Obv. | Line |
|------|------|
| 1. | 15 GIN KUBBABAR ŠÁ INA 1 GÍN bit-qa BABBAR<sup>g</sup> |
| 2. | nu-uh-hu-tu šá ’du-mu-qu |
| 3. | A-šú šá <sup>i</sup>EN-šú-nu INA MUḥ-ḤI <sup>i</sup>EN-MU |
| 4. | A-šú šá <sup>i</sup>AG-KAR-ZI,MEŠ ul-tu <sup>i</sup>BAŔA |
| 5. | MU 29.KAM (()<sup>erasure</sup>) šÁ ITI INA MUḥ-ḤI MA-ne-é 1 GÍN KUBBABAR |
| 6. | UR₅.RA INA MUḥ-ḤI šÁ i-rab-bi |

| Lo.e. | Line |
|------|------|
| a. | (Aramaic) zy blʾdn |
| b. | br ṭmt |

| Rev. | Line |
|------|------|
| 7. | <sup>i</sup>mu-kin-nu ’ni-din-tu <sup>i</sup>EN A-šú šÁ <sup>i</sup>UTU-MU |
| 8. | <sup>i</sup>EN-it-tan-nu A-šú šÁ ’ni-qu-du |
| 9. | <sup>i</sup>zu-um-bu A-šú šÁ hab-šir-ri |
| 10. | A <sup>i</sup>ZALAG <sup>i</sup>PAP-SUKKAL (several lines drawn) |

| L.h.e. | Line |
|-------|------|
| 11. | [lumbisag Ik] <sup>i</sup>AG-TIN A-šú šÁ ’mu-še-zib |
| 12. | [sip-par] <sup>i</sup>GU₄ UD 24.KA[M] |
| 13. | [MU 29.KAM] <sup>i</sup>da-ri-ʾi-muš |

---

<sup>3</sup> They are part of the so-called non-Rassam archives (Jursa 2005, 129–133).

<sup>4</sup> Sonneveld forthcoming. The three tablets published here are part of the corpus examined, ca. 300 cuneiform clay tablets that contain Aramaic epigraphs from Babylonia that date to the Neo-Babylonian (626–539 BCE) and Achaemenid eras. As the alphabetic texts added onto the three tablets under discussion were incised into the clay, they are referred to as *epigraphs*. In addition, the more neutral term *epigraphs* is employed in this study, as the other mode of writing – using ink on clay – also is employed.

<sup>5</sup> About fifty out of seventy-one tablets with Aramaic epigraphs from Sippar are from the temple archives (70%); thirteen texts are certainly set within the entrepreneurial domain (18%); the context of the remaining documents is elusive, due to their fragmentary nature.

<sup>6</sup> The thirteen texts from Sippar’s commercial hub are all of legal nature. Interestingly, the few remaining legal texts with Aramaic inscriptions from Sippar were written in a context external to the temple proper, in either a physical or managerial sense (Sonneveld forthcoming).
Translation

(1–4) 15 shekels of white scrap silver of 1/8 alloy per shekel of Dummuqu/Bēlšunu are due from Bēl-iddin/Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti. (4–6) From the month Nisannu (I) of the 29th year (of king Darius I), 1 shekel of silver per mina will accrue against him monthly.

(7–10) Witnesses: Nidinti-Bēl/Šamaš-iddin, Bēl-ittannu/ Niqūdu, Zumbu/Ḫabaṣīru/Nūr-Papsukkal. (11–14) The scribe: Itti-Nabû-balāṭu/Mušēzib. [Sippar] 24-II-29 Darius I, [king of] Babylon, [king of the lands].

Aramaic: (Document) pertaining to Bēl-iddin, son of Amia.

Commentary

4: Although Böhl (1946, 65 f.) expressed doubts about the reading of the month name Nisannu due to damage on the right-hand side of the tablet, the signs 𒈴𒈵𒈵 are clearly visible upon close examination.

Lo.e.: The epigraph starts out on the lower edge; the second line is written on the obverse in the space left open after finalisation of the operative part. It is written upside down vis-à-vis the cuneiform text. Hence, both the formatting and the orientation of the alphabetic signs are not in accordance with the cuneiform text. The signs are incised into the clay in a relatively neat and regular manner. Preceding the word br on the second line, however, the tablet is damaged and may show signs of erosion.

12: Reconstruction of the place of composition is based on LB 1719 (text no. 2, edited below), which is written in Sippar and has the same protagonist. Moreover, Dummuqu/Bēlšunu is attested in other texts composed in this town (see below).
Apart from the Aramaic, text no. 1 appears to be an ordinary promissory note, many of which are known from the Neo-Babylonian period. It concerns a debt of 15 shekels of white scrap silver, upon which the standard rate of 20% interest accrues. The fact that the interest is charged from the first month of the 29th regnal year of Darius I, while the loan — judging from the date of composition — was extended only by the end of the second month puzzled Böhl who had no parallels for this ‘type of usury’ (1946, 66).

Rather than contemplating a form of extortionate money lending, much easier solutions can be proposed: text no. 1 does not correspond to the original lending contract but can be interpreted instead as a follow-up arrangement concerning the timing and amount of the interest. In other words, the loan might initially have been extended as a short-term, interest-free loan. However, since the silver had not been repaid by the due date — perhaps the end of year 28 — it became liable to the standard rate of interest, which had to be recorded officially in written form.

So much for a basic legal understanding of this contract, but how about the background of this loan? One way to find out more about the social and economic setting of this transaction is by taking a closer look at its protagonists. The scribe and the witnesses, some of which are present under nicknames, are thus far not attested elsewhere. The reading of the Aramaic epigraph, that has been published by Stevenson (1902, no. 37), Delaporte (1912, no. 101) and others (see Oelsner 2006, 93 for all references), has been improved and contains information regarding a deposit not mentioned in the cuneiform document.

Let us therefore start with the creditor, Dummuqu/Bēlšunu. Besides being attested in text no. 1 and text no. 2 (edited below), Dummuqu is found in MacGinnis (1995, no. 32), a letter order from the Ebabbar temple in Sippar written in the 17th year of Darius I (505 BCE). On behalf of the temple authorities, two cuneiform scribes and an alphabetic scribe order one of their colleagues (perhaps to be identified as the rabia ša dulli?) to give Dummuqu 20 kur of dates in compensation for the price of an ox and sheep that he had provided to the temple. While not much else can be said about this event, Dummuqu does not seem to have been part of the temple establishment but instead must have been commissioned as an outsider.

Dummuqu’s primary social backdrop transpires from his attestation as a protagonist in yet another text: CIS 2, 65, written in Sippar in the same year, which also bears an Aramaic inscription. This is a contract regarding a copper kettle, weighing half a Babylonian talent (c. 15 kg.), which is rented out to a certain Kī-Šamaš/Eṭēru and his son Šamaš-iddin for c. 108 litres of barley per month by Dummuqu, whose father’s name is here spelled out in full as Nabû-bēlšunu. It is not hard to fathom that this rather capacious kettle was leased for business rather than domestic purposes, and the regretfully damaged references to barbers and additional kettles in CIS 2, 65, although enigmatic, may indicate that it was part of a larger enterprise. We will come back to the possible nature of this business later.

Informative for the milieu in which Dummuqu’s kettle rental takes place, is the first witness of CIS 2, 65, Nabû-šumu-ḫur/Nabû-šumu-iškun/Rakṣu, who attended at least two other transactions in Sippar. Firstly, in the 8th year of Darius I (514 BCE) he witnessed a debt note belonging to the archive of the Maštuk and Balihu families, a complex family cluster which maintained at least some connections to both the Ebabbar temple and the local mercantile sector.

Secondly, he is found in the 20th year of Darius I (502/1 BCE) as witness to a silver loan of Iššar-tarībi/Bunene-ib-ni. The latter was a true tradesman, whose interregional business enterprises in agricultural staples, beer and especially textiles extended from the harbour district in Sippar to Humadēšu in Iran (Jursa 2005, 124; Bongenaar 2000, 89 f.; Waerzeggers 2014, 86–90). Iššar-tarībi’s texts survived as one of the “satellite archives” of Marduk-rēmanni/Šāḥit-ginē (A), a prominent inhabitant of Sippar who successfully combined a career as temple priest with that of a quayside entrepreneur, and whose remarkable life story and archive have been disclosed by Waerzeggers (2014).

---

7 This tablet is listed in both the overview of Aramaic inscriptions contained on clay tablets by Zadok (2003) and its extended and corrected version by Oelsner (2006, no. 107).
8 For the rate of interest commonly found in Babylonia of the first millennium BCE, see Jursa (2010, 490–499).
9 See Bongenaar (1997, 134 f.) for this official who was responsible for the Ebabbar temple’s work forces deployed in the countryside.
10 The reading of the Aramaic epigraph, that has been published by Stevenson (1902, no. 37), Delaporte (1912, no. 101) and others (see Oelsner 2006, 93 for all references), has been improved and contains information regarding a deposit not mentioned in the cuneiform document.
11 The father’s name, Nabû-šumu-iškun, is given as ‘Idag-mu-undin(?)’ according to Stevenson (1902, 103), which must be a scribal error for ‘Idag-mu-gar-um(?)’.
12 His first attestation is in FLP 1473 (FLP 652 duplicate), published by Waerzeggers (2002, 2). For the archive, which was previously known as the “archive of Ardia(//Balīhu)” and now as the “Maštuk archive”, see Jursa (2005, 130 f.). Cf. Waerzeggers 2002; Bongenaar 2000, 84.
13 BM 74576. Two of Iššar-tarībi’s tablets, BM 84101+ and BM 101523, contain Aramaic inscriptions as well.
It is to the social world of this man that our breadcrumb trails lead. As it turns out, Nabû-šumu-ušur’s father, Nabû-šumu-šukun/Mār-bīti-iddin/Raksu, attended the marriage negotiations of Marduk-rēmanni’s father in the 8th year of king Nabonidus (547 BCE; Waerzeggers 2014, 175f.). Although he only witnessed the contract, this encounter may well point to deeper and more intimate connections between the Raksu and Šāhit-ginê families, both of which were in fact immigrants and relative late-comers to Sippar’s established society.\(^\text{14}\)

Last but not least, the protagonist Dummuqu himself is attested as witness in the Šāhit-ginê (A) archive as well: MR 106 (20 Dar I, 502 BCE) is a debt note concerning 1/3 mina\(^\text{15}\) of silver that Marduk-rēmanni owed as life sustenance rations to a certain Nabû-ušuršu/Nabû-iddin/Ea-ibni (Waerzeggers 2014, 283f.). Interestingly, this agreement was also witnessed by the latter’s brother, Hašdāya, who is also found in the above-mentioned kettle rental contract, albeit without family name. He serves as an additional link between the separate texts.

Having thus come full circle, it appears that Dummuqu’s business activities and contacts took place in a social milieu in which Marduk-rēmanni, his family, and associates also had a stake, namely the bustling mercantile sector that revolved around the local harbour and connected Sippar to the outside world.

This impression is confirmed when we turn our attention to the other protagonist of text no. 1, the debtor Bēl-iddin/Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti. We encounter him as a witness in MR 167 (35 Dar I, 487 BCE), a contract from the Šāhit-ginê (A) archive pertaining to a house that is leased to Marduk-rēmanni’s son, Bēl-bullissu (Waerzeggers 2014, 345–347). More precisely, it involved a house (biṭu) of Adad-aḫu-iddin, presumably the same house which the latter’s father Būru-zēru-iddin, a professional merchant (tamkāru), had previously put at the disposal of a large brewing enterprise of Bēl-uballiṭ, the father of Marduk-rēmanni (MR 20, before 519 BCE; Waerzeggers 2014, 193f.).\(^\text{16}\) After Marduk-rēmanni inherited his father’s company he also extended the lease agreement (MR 30), just as his son did more than thirty years later (MR 167).

Unfortunately, the function of the property is never spelled out explicitly, but accommodating up to twenty-five thousand litres of beer it presumably served as a storage facility, brewery or tavern (Waerzeggers 2014, 76f.). Moreover, considering the profession of the initial owner Būru-zēru-iddin and his apparent Syrian origin,\(^\text{17}\) it can be surmised that the property was located on the quay of Sippar, a hotspot for domestic and foreign merchants. Even if Bēl-iddin/Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti only assumed a passive role as witness in MR 167, the identity of the property in question is significant and tells us more about his social environment. Like creditor Dummuqu, Bēl-iddin not only stood in direct contact with the Šāhit-ginê family but, more importantly, his presence at this transaction shows that he was no stranger in Sippar’s entrepreneurial circles either.

Böhl (1946, 67f.) read the Aramaic epigraph on text no. 1 as zy bl’dn br nphy, ‘pertaining to Bēl-iddin, son of Nappâhu/member of the smiths guild’, and believed to have found another attestation of this man in VS 4, 83. While this debt note does indeed contain a witness by the name of Bēl-iddin/Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti/Nappâhu, it is written during the reign of Cambyses, more than thirty years before text no. 1, in a place called Til-bûri – a small village not located in the vicinity of Sippar but in the green belt surrounding the city of Borsippa, almost 100 km to the south (Zadok 1985, 309; 2006, 397–399).\(^\text{18}\)

While these temporal and spatial arguments make Böhl’s proposition questionable – albeit not impossible – it can now be refuted with more certainty. The new collation no longer validates the earlier proposed familial (Nappâhu) or professional (smiths) background of the debtor, as it reads: zy bl’dn br ṣmyt, ‘pertaining to Bēl-iddin, son of ṣmyt’ . The latter noun (f.sg.) means ‘my maidservant’,\(^\text{19}\) also in use as a female given name, which

\(^{14}\) According to Waerzeggers (2014, 45–49), the Maštuk family also belonged to this local “immigrant network”. For a recent study on witnessing in the context of trust, friendship and intimacy in Neo-Babylonian archives, the significance of the particular social settings, and the underlying implications the latter could have for the relationship between the protagonist and his or her witnesses, see Still (2019, Chapter 4).

\(^{15}\) The text in line 1 reads: ‘ḫin’, shekel.

\(^{16}\) For more details on the enterprise, see below.
could be a short form of an "Amat-DN" type of name20 – which was also not uncommon in Sippar. In any case, the epigraph refers to Bēl-iddin’s mother,21 who either was Dummuqu’s female slave – as the epigraph was written from his perspective: who owes me? – or, when read as the Judean male name Amitai. However, while Judeans are attested on Sippar’s quay (Bloch 2014) this seems unlikely to be the Aramaic inscription.

In legal and administrative cuneiform documents from this period, individuals are usually accompanied by their mother only in the event that their father had died while they were still underage. In that event children were placed in the custody of their mother, who temporarily assumed the role of head of household.22 This does not seem to have been the case for Bēl-iddin who appears on his own as an independent party while being identified as the son of Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti in the Akkadian text.23 While one might want to argue that the Bēl-iddin from the epigraph is a different individual altogether, this seems unlikely seeing that it was very common to mention the indebted party in the Aramaic inscription.

So why then is he identified through his mother in the Aramaic inscription? This clearly deviates from the standard Akkadian legal practice. If the mother was not exercising legal guardianship over her son at the time of transaction, then she might be mentioned in the epigraph because she was somehow involved in a capacity relevant to Dummuqu and her mention must simply have facilitated identification of Bēl-iddin as the debtor. The background of the transaction and the nature of the enterprise that underlies it could hold the answer.

So how could this lady fit into our picture? We have shown above that both of the protagonists of text no. 1 are connected with members of Sippar’s mercantile community, as is the case for the first witness of Dummuqu’s kettle rental (CIS 2, 65). Moreover, the fact that we have three texts in which Dummuqu is found not only as protagonist but also as the initiating and/or “stronger” contract party – creditor, owner/lessor and patron/customer – suggests that these documents represent the remnant of a (once larger) business file generated by his enterprise. His records would not have been transmitted in isolation, however. In light of the prosopographical links one is probably right to think that it survived as a dossier in one of the known archives belonging to individuals whose business activities on the quay intertwined with both his own and Marduk-rēmanni’s (Waerzeggers 2014, 15–24, 75–93). In fact, documents of the Šāhit-ginē (B) archive belonging to the cousins of Marduk-rēmanni are found in the Böhl Collection and therefore could well have incorporated Dummuqu’s texts. As big players on Sippar’s quay, these cousins must have been well-known to Dummuqu.

To be sure, the harbour district of Sippar was a theatre in which men – merchants, haulers, moneylenders, peddlers, investors, tax collectors, sailors – played the most conspicuous part. Yet, the sources yield scattered but clear indications that the harbour district also offered ample job opportunities for women. In fact, Sippar’s womenfolk must have assumed a far more important role than the extant documentation has us believe.24 Two sectors that relied particularly on the labour of women were the beer and textile industries, both of which had their primary outlet on the local harbour.25 Hence, the above-mentioned beer brewing company set up by Bēl-uballit/Šāhit-ginē (A) explicitly counted on the labour of the business partner’s wife, daughters and slaves, in the same way that other Neo-Babylonian businessmen are known to have employed their female family members and servants as brewers or innkeepers – not sparing aged mothers or pregnant spouses (Waerzeggers 2014, 76; Jursa 2010, 222; Joannès 1992 a; 1992 b).

---

20 See Tallqvist (1905, 6), for an example hereof.
21 A woman with this name and with a son called Bēl-iddin is attested in MR 169. However, his father is identified as Šamaš-erība/Bēl-iqīša/Isinnāya (Waerzeggers 2014, 348 f.). Technically one could read it as the Judean male name Amitai. However, while Judeans are attested on Sippar’s quay (Bloch 2014) this seems unlikely to be the case here, as there is no apparent correspondence between the Hebrew and Akkadian name that is found in other instances (e. g., Bēl-sharru-usur and Yāhû-sharru-usur; Alstola 2020).
22 See generally on rights and obligations of widows, Stol (2016, 275–295).
23 Note that the identification of individuals through the mother is very rare in Neo-Babylonian legal administrative documents, but it was used, for example, to identify slaves or temple dependents (sīrkuš) of unknown fathers (e. g., Dandamayev 1984, 403). A more exceptional example is found in Nbk 109, a record of court proceedings involving various notables from southern Babylonia. One of the litigants is identified as Balāṭu son of fNasīkatu, which is either a female personal name or a loanword based on the masculine nasīku, ‘chieftain’. In the latter case, Balāṭu was presumably the son of an (Aramaic) tribal chiefess (Kleber 2008, 319–321).
24 An interesting example is BE 8, 116 (35 Dar I, 487 BCE), a promissory note for barley written in the same entrepreneurial circles. This contract has two women as principal parties, the creditor who went by the West-Semitic name fAqubā and the debtor called fSipāya. Note that, while the latter was accompanied by a male companion according to the Akkadian text, she is the only one referred to in the Aramaic epigraph.
25 See Stol (2012, 223–226, 232 f.) for the role of Babylonian women in these lines of work.
Evidence for the mercantile production of textiles can be found in the business file of Iššar-tarībi and the Šaḫit-ginē (B) archive of Marduk-rēmanni’s cousins. One text in particular reveals that their enterprise was organized as a cottage industry in which female weavers, supervised by the business partner’s wife, carried out their spinning duties at home (see NBC 6189; Jursa 2010, 221; Waerzeggers 2014, 85).

There were thus various opportunities for a woman like (f)Amtia to make a living in and around Sippar’s harbour, in the very circles in which her son and his business associates were also active. It is unlikely that we will ever find out whether her skillset or occupation was indeed the reason for her appearance in the Aramaic note of text no. 1. But if so, this ordinary looking promissory note might well have been part of the administration of a beer or textile enterprise. Considering the contract that will be edited next, it is hard not to entertain the idea that Bēl-id-din’s mother was enlisted in Dummuqu’s textile firm or worked in a tavern managed by him.

Text no. 2

LB 1719
Sippar, 18-VI-01 Xerxes (485 BCE)
laundry contract
5.7 × 4.1 × 2.1 cm

Translation

(1–4) Paṭ-Esu, slave of Ku/Ki’nāya, voluntarily did the laundry-work of Dummuqu/Bēlšunu for four shekels of white silver. (5–6) He whitened the ‘whites’ (and) cleaned the laundry. (6–7) Paṭ-Esu has received the silver for his year from Dummuqu. (8) He did the work from the first day of the month Du’ūzu (IV) onwards. (10–14) Witnesses: Gimil-Šamaš/[…], Nabû-ittannu and Bēlšu[nu, sons of Bēl-na’id, Bēl-uballit/Šamaš-uballiṭ, Na’id-Bēl/Iddinā. (14–17) Scribe: Nidinti-Bēl/Šamaš-kāṣir. Sippar, 18-VI-01 Xerxes, king of Persia and Media, king of Babylon and the lands.
Aramaic: Regarding Paṭ-Esi, ‘pertaining to[shekels].

Commentary

1: Paṭ-Esu is the Akkadian form of the Egyptian name Pꜣ-di-Is.t, meaning ‘The one given by Isis’ (see Bongenaar/Haring 1994, 68ff.). Other spellings include: 1pa-ṭ-š-e, 1pa-ṭ-š-e, and 1pa-ṭ-e-si. Interestingly, the Aramaic spelling of the name ‘pṭsy’ seems to follow more closely the ē/i sounds found in the other Akkadian spellings.

5–6: See Waerzeggers (2006a, 92f.) for the meaning and use of the key phrases ḫāštu ḫāru and zikūtu zukkan. While in the previously published laundry contracts the verbs are usually found in the present tense (Waerzeggers 2006, 92), the scribe of text no. 2, seems to have used the preterite. Even if the exact form of zukkan (l. 6: ú-za-ku) remains open to interpretation, the spelling of the verb ḫāru (l. 7: i-ḫi-ir) can only be a simple past form.

6: The phrase šá mu-šū, ‘for his year’, is somewhat unusual. Based on the discussion of the salary found below one would expect to find something like šá mu-l(.kam), ‘for one year’. The scribe might then have mistakenly written šū, ‘his’, instead of the simple vertical wedge.

9: The epigraph is located on the reverse in between the operative part and the witness list and is written in an extremely cursive script upside down vis-à-vis the cunei-
form text. The particle ‘zy’ in l. b, seems to have been added after the epigraph was incised, as it is written just below the space separating the personal name and the subsequent grapheme(s) in a slanting manner. The proposed reading of shin ϒ and four vertical lines referring to ‘four shekels of silver’ for the second half of the inscrip-
tion that is mostly broken away, is based on the follow-
C44ing considerations: 1) Aramaic epigraphs on promissory notes and contracts from Sippar’s entrepreneurial milieu tend to single out the indebted or obligated party, which goes together with the mention of the amount of silver in various instances (e.g., MR 186, CIS 2, 65; Stevenson 1902, no. 34); 2) the lines of the first grapheme that are still visible could well be the right part of the shin ϒ; 3) Following the size and forms of the other graphemes, the lacuna could contain a shin ϒ and four vertical graphemes.

12: The name of Na’id-Bēl’s father is written 1MU-na-a, which we assume is an odd spelling of the name Iddînā, resulting from a conflation of the variants 1MU and 1SUM-as-a.

14: Note that a certain Nidinti-Bēl/Šamaš-kāšir/Isin-
nāya is attested as scribe in Dar. 431 written in Babylon in the 16th year of Darius I (506 BCE).

This text belongs to a somewhat rare type of contract studied by Waerzeggers (2006 a) – the so-called ‘laundry contract’. Thus far, only nine such arrangements have been recovered for the Neo-Babylonian period: two from Babylon, five from Borsippa, and two from Uruk. Her study revealed that this employment was settled in fairly stand-

16: The name of Paṭ-Esu in the first line read: lūg[a[l …
x. We suggest the reading lūga[l-lù Šá-kÍ]i/u-na-a, ‘Paṭ-Esu the slave of KI/unāya’. Two points in favour of this interpretation can be advanced here. Firstly, there is evidence that besides Egyptian temple oblates (širkus), who are reason-
amly well documented in the Ebabbar archive (Bongenaar/Haring 1994), Sippar also accommodated privately owned slaves of Egyptian origin (see NBC 6156; Hackl/Jursa 2015, 160 f.). In fact, the available evidence for the latter comes from the Šā[iit-ginê (B) archive, whose protagonists might have been closely involved with Dummuqu, as their doc-

ments were probably found together. Secondly, it fits well with the known set-ups of Babylonian laundry businesses, which were often undertaken and organized by slaves in a seemingly independent fashion, like Paṭ-Esu in text no. 2 (Waerzeggers 2006 a, 93 f.).

The next issue concerns the scale of pay and the duration of employment. According to text no. 2, Paṭ-Esu obtained four shekels of white silver for his laundry ser-

26 That is if, as we believe, personal names can indeed be used as markers of the ethnic origin and identity of their bearings. For the presence of Egyptians and the nature of the Egyptian diaspora in Babylonia in the first millennium BCE, see Hackl/Jursa (2015). For references to individuals designated as “Egyptian” in early Neo-Bab-

ylian documents see Nielsen (2015, 210 f.).

27 This involved, perhaps most famously, the Egypto-Carian mer-

28 One may be tempted to identify Paṭ-Esu as a rab-x-official (see Hackl/Jursa 2015, 165–172 for Egyptians functioning as officials in the local state administration; for a prosopography of rab-x-officials ac-

29 active in and around Sippar, see Bongenaar 1997, 128–139). However, the question that imposes itself inevitably with this explanation is why an official would commit himself to do someone else’s dirty laundry. An alternative reading is therefore desirable.
tract at face value, he is said to have started his employment on the first day of month IV and to have obtained his wages by the 18th of month VI, when this document was written. However, it is unlikely that Paṭ-Esu received the silver for not even two months of work, as a washerman would make one shekel of silver per contract per annum, on average, throughout Babylonia at that time, according to the texts gathered by Waerzeggers (2006 a, 94 f.). This is also supported by the phrase, however unusual, ‘for his year’ in line 6. Paṭ-Esu was presumably employed for the entire year and text no. 2 records the pre-payment of four shekels for this term, a relatively profitable deal compared to his peers. We know of only one Borsippean washerman who earned more, presumably for an exceptionally large contract,29 but nothing in our text suggests that Paṭ-Esu was a particularly certified sanitary specialist or that the dimensions of his job and the technical procedures required from him were such that justified being paid four times as much as most artisans in this line of work.

However, in the light of text no. 1 discussed above, it is not unthinkable that Paṭ-Esu was charged with more than Dummuqu’s personal laundry alone. We have demonstrated earlier that Dummuqu/Bēlšunu operated in the harbour community of Sippar, where he came into contact with craftsmen, entrepreneurs and merchants involved in all kinds of business ventures. Moreover, it is likely that Dummuqu was in charge of, or, at least involved in a commercial enterprise as well – a company geared towards the production and sale of beer or textiles; even the running of a quay-side tavern cannot be excluded. Is it possible that rather than being responsible for Dummuqu’s own dirty laundry, Paṭ-Esu had in fact pledged his services to his employer’s company on a more commercial scale? At least, the washerman’s relatively high wages would be compatible with this scenario.

Text no. 3

LB 1743

Babylon, 05-II-28 Darius I (494 BCE)

promissory note for vats

6.0 × 4.6 × 2.2 cm

obv. 1. [x ( x ) ] da[n-†u-r] ti ri-qu-ú-tu
2. la-bir-ru-tu šá baṭ-qa u gur-ru-ru
3. ina lìb-bi ia-a-na šá ʼišKUR-NUMUN-MU
4. A-šú šá liš-*šur ina muḫ-ḫi ʼAŠ-[š]-[š]-t-tan-nu
5. A-šú šá 10AG-URûš-šú UD 16.KAM šá
6. 10GU₄ i-nam-din e-lat ū-š-š-š
7. šá ʼišMA šá ina IG1 10AG-U[RÛ]-šú

l.o.e. 8. AD-šú
b. (Aramaic) zy nbw²šrš

rev. 9. ʼmu-kin, 10UTU-MU A-šú šá
10. ʼi-š-š-[š]-š-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[š]-š-[sh]
Commentary

10–11: Ina-ṣilli-Bēl/Niqūdu is attested as scribe of MR 122, a debt note belonging to the archive of Marduk-rēmanni//Šāḥit-ginē (A) (Waerzeggers 2014, 298 ff.).

11–12: Nabû-uṣuršu/Bēl-ibni could be identified as the debtor’s father, but the fact that he is already mentioned in the transaction (in both the Akkadian and Aramaic text) in relation to the rental of a boat makes it less likely for him to show up among the witnesses as well.

12–13: Nidintu/Nabû-uṣuršu is possibly the brother of the debtor.

l.h.e.: The first part of this epigraph written on the left edge – which forms an uninterrupted line with its sequence incised upon the lower edge, in between the operative part and the witness list – is somewhat damaged. The initial word starts with an aleph א, of which the upper part is still recognisable. Then, the onset of one or two graphemes are visible, followed by a clear taw ת. The grapheme immediately following the aleph א seems to be the slanting top of a waw ו. Perhaps, the waw is followed by the onset of a lamed ל, which could have been incised with a curve toward the right beneath the preceding letters, as is the case in the underscored Aramaic
text found on the left edge of ROMCT 2, 26 (28-V-14 Dar I’, 521 BCE):

This would yield the alphabetic equivalent of the Akkadian term \( u^\text{šr} {/} u^\text{šr} \), which is generally used for economic documents recording obligations (promissory notes). It also appears in clauses distinguishing the recorded debts from other outstanding arrears, usually introduced by a clause such as \( elat u^\text{šr} {/} mahrīti \), ‘except for the previous debt note’. Otherwise it may refer to the cancellation of debts recorded on documents that have gone missing (CAD U/W, 51–54). In Aramaic the term \( štr \) means document in a general sense, denoting both administrative as well as (various sorts of) legal texts, while the alphabetic attestations of \( u^\text{šr} u^\text{šr} \) tend to appear on tablets that make mention of outstanding arrears or the annulment of debts recorded on a lost tablet (Sonnevelt forthcoming).

Text no. 3 is a case in point for pinpointing outstanding arrears: the \( elat \)-clause (ll. 6–8) clarifies that the obligation of vats to be delivered by Nabû-aḫu-ittannu is separate from the outstanding rent for a boat to be paid by his father Nabû-uṣuršu. In the Aramaic epigraph this information is singled out, to which the information is added that the fee needs to be paid in silver. This implies that the rent was owed to the same creditor, Adad-zēru-iddin/Issûr, and/or that father and son were business partners.

Finally, regarding the layout of the Aramaic epigraph: if the left edge is seen as the starting point, the text organically continues onto the lower edge (as indicated by the drawing). Moreover, this follows the pattern of other attestations of the term ‘\( wily \)’, in which it appears in primary position. However, content-wise, swapping the phrases is defendable too: ‘pertaining to Nabû-uṣuršu – outstanding debt (\( u^\text{šr} u^\text{šr} \) [of (?)] silver’.

As in most documents belonging to the genre of promissory notes, very little is said explicitly about the background of the transaction. However, notwithstanding the terse and stereotyped formulae, two important keywords can be found that shed at least some light on the economic setting of text no. 3, namely vats and boats. In Neo-Babylonian legal administrative documents the mention of boats (\( eleppu \)) usually indicates transport and/or trade. The reference to vats, and in particular vats of the \( dammu \)-type appearing in this text, signals the involvement of beer (see Stol 1994, 167–170). Putting two and two together, this document can thus be interpreted as belonging to the proceedings of a business enterprise involving the transportation and presumably marketing of beer. Unfortunately, little can be said about the dimensions of this enterprise as the number of vats concerned is lost in the break.

The production and vending of beer is one of the most commonly found purposes of business companies in the Neo-Babylonian period. They were recorded – like ventures for other commodities traded in Babylonia – in so-called \( harrānu \)-partnerships contracts, which in their most basic form, required two people to operate: a person who invested the surplus of his harvest in the business – typically a land-owning city dweller or rent farmer – and an agent responsible for processing the raw material in the brewing workshop. But more complex arrangements, involving larger numbers of people, money and goods can also be found. A case in point is the business company of Bēl-uballiṭ/Šāḥit-ginê (A) from Sippar mentioned earlier. Besides Bēl-uballiṭ and his partner, who both invested silver and (\( dammu \)) vats, the company also availed itself of the labour of the partner’s family members and household retinue, while a third associate provided a property, which was to accommodate the enterprise (Waerzeggers 2014, 76 f.).

Whatever the specific arrangements, Neo-Babylonian brewing partnerships usually involved the production of a kind of beer made of dates, which was manifestly the preferred drink among Babylonians at the time. The brewing process does not seem to have been particularly complicated, but still required specialised equipment and a suitable facility (Stol 1994, 170–175). Once turned

\[ 30 \] A quick look at CAD D, 98 (\( dammu \) b) shows that the liquid most frequently found in these vats was beer.

\[ 31 \] See Jursa (2010, 221–224) for more details on brewing enterprises and the archives in which they can be found.

\[ 32 \] Lanz (1976) studied the legal implications of \( harrānu \)-contracts, and Jursa (2009) their embeddedness in the local economy. Note that these formal agreements are usually silent on the purpose of the business enterprise; often this information can only be gathered from circumstantial evidence retained in the archives at large.

\[ 33 \] Stol (1994) gave a general overview of Neo-Babylonian beer. Barley beer, popular in earlier times, was almost exclusively used for offerings to the gods in the Neo-Babylonian Period; see e.g., Waerzeggers (2010, 165 f.) for the beer served in the Ezida temple of Borsippa.
into a finished brew, companies had various options to market their goods, depending to some extent on the size of the enterprise and the targeted clientele. For instance, they could choose to retail the product in local hostels or taverns, which were found aplenty on the quayside and other mercantile hubs, or sell the beer wholesale to larger institutions where it would be redistributed as sustenance rations among the workforce.

The transaction in text no. 3 should presumably be located at the tail end of such a business sequence. Nabû-aḫu-ittannu has to supply a number of empty vats to Adad-zēru-iddin. The fact that the contract specifies that the vats should be delivered empty and in an undamaged state implies that they were used for the storage of beer. It is uncertain whether Nabû-aḫu-ittannu was personally involved in the brewing process, but the reference in both the cuneiform and the Aramaic text to the outstanding debt for a boat due from his father Nabû-uṣuršu, suggests that the two were in charge of transporting the vats by waterway.

Their destination might well have been the city of Babylon or its immediate surroundings. The capital, which served as the seat of government as well as supra-regional cultic centre, also embodied the country’s most important mercantile hub, making it an obvious place to market their goods and find suitable (private or institutional) buyers. Alternatively, and for reasons explained further below, Nabû-aḫu-ittannu & Co. might have shipped their merchandise north and disposed of the beer in the burgeoning provincial town of Sippar, after which they had to return to the capital where Adad-zēru-iddin was expecting to reclaim his vats within ten days, emptied and in sound condition.

So far none of the protagonists are attested elsewhere in the available documentation. This diminishes the possibility of situating the transaction in its archival context and of learning more about the specific lay-out and design of the business Adad-zēru-iddin and Nabû-aḫu-ittannu were involved in.

Luckily, one of the witnesses does make a potentially relevant appearance elsewhere. Ina-ṣilli-Bēl/Niqūdu is the scribe of a tablet belonging to the archive of Marduk-rēmanni//Ṣāḥit-ginē (A): MR 122, dated to the 25th year of Darius I (497 BCE), is a promissory note written in Babylon three years prior to text no. 3 and concerns a debt of silver and dates to be repaid by Marduk-rēmanni at the harbour in Sippar. The latter had to pledge one of his quayside properties as security (Waerzeggers 2014, 298f.). The appearance of Ina-ṣilli-Bēl points to a connection between text no. 3 and Marduk-rēmanni’s orbit of activity. Although, as far as we can judge, the enterprise of Adad-zēru-iddin and Nabû-aḫu-ittannu did not intertwine directly with Marduk-rēmanni’s affairs – he inherited the brewing company of Bēl-uballit, described above – there can be no doubt that text no. 3 arose in the proliferating mercantile milieu that linked the provincial town of Sippar and the capital of Babylon, in which Marduk-rēmanni, various members of his family and numerous other entrepreneurs, merchants and foreign traders operated.

Let us conclude this study by trying to pinpoint the archival context of text no. 3, as well as the text nos. 1 and 2 discussed above. Purely based on the prosopographical connections one might be inclined to assign them to the archive of Marduk-rēmanni//Ṣāḥit-ginē (A). There is a crucial flaw in this view, however. None of the texts from Marduk-rēmanni or from the associated “satellite” archives are found in the Bōhl Collection. In fact, the private records from Sippar that are present in Leiden all belong to a different cluster of archives referred to as the “Maštuk group”. Both this group and the “Marduk-rēmanni group” have well-understood dispersal histories and clear-cut museum distributions, and their texts are never found together in the same collections (Waerzeggers 2014, 143–149). This suggests that the three records with Aramaic inscriptions published above should not be assigned to the cluster of archives found together with the documents of Marduk-rēmanni, presumably in the Ebabbar temple itself, but are part of the Maštuk group.
that seems to have been unearthed outside of the temple precinct in a residential area. Documents in the Böhl Collection belonging to the latter group stem from the Maštuk and Bālihu archives (e. g., LB 2043), as well as the Šāḥit-ginê (B) archive of Marduk-rēmanni’s cousins (e. g., LB 1708, LB 1709) and the interrelated dossier of the tradesman Bēl-aplu-iddin/liddinā (e. g., LB 1707, LB 1710, LB 1716). Particularly worthy of note in this respect are the endeavours of the Šāḥit-ginê (B) cousins. It has been shown recently that this branch of the family was in control of a veritable business conglomerate operating from Sippar’s quay. This involved various interconnected harrānu-enterprises, dealing with agricultural staples, slaves, and textiles, at least one of which appears to have revolved around the interregional trade to and from the capital (Waerzeggers 2014, 83–86). It is therefore very likely that the activities of Adad-zēru-iddin and Nabû-āšu-itannu, and his father, recorded in text no. 3, as well as those of Dummuqu in text no. 1 and text no. 2 were closely connected to the endeavours of the Šāḥit-ginê (B) businessmen.

Dummuqu, however, seems to have played a more versatile role in this community. While the three documents published above stem from the “Maštuk group”, Dummuqu’s kettle rental contract (CIS 2, 65) is found in the British Museum in a collection mixed with texts of Marduk-rēmanni. Moreover, as we have shown above, his tablets contain (indirect) prosopographical connections with members of the Šāḥit-ginê (A) family and their business partners. This indicates that he was firmly embedded in this entrepreneurial community. The subject matter of Dummuqu’s documents as well as the business profiles of the people he was involved with, suggest that he occupied a central role in the beer and/or textile industries operating from Sippar’s harbour.

Conclusion

Although the three cuneiform tablets published in this article deal with varying issues — text no. 1 is a promissory note for silver, text no. 2 is a laundry contract, and text no. 3 stipulates the return of vats for beer — and can only be assigned to a particular archival background indirectly, a careful contextualization of the transactions and the participants involved has shown that all stem from the same social setting: the bustling trading community that revolved around the quay (kāru) of Sippar. Here the activities of our protagonists were — in all likelihood — intertwined with those of the entrepreneurs attested in the Šāḥit-ginê (B) archive.

Located at the northern edge of Babylonia, this gateway-harbour constituted an important trading hub that connected the country’s capital and heartland to the south with the rest of the Near East – northwest into Syria and east across the Zagros Mountains. By virtue of these characteristics, ethnic and social diversity prove to be salient features of Sippar’s harbour community. The actors found in cuneiform texts written on the quayside include Judean royal agents, Iranian officials, Syrian merchants, Egyptian launderers as well as Babylonian sailors, businessmen, brewers and priests, all giving this community its distinct cosmopolitan character.

The texts from the Böhl collection studied here originate from Babylonia during the early fifth century (494–485 BCE). In this period, Aramaic was used in the most remote parts of the Achaemenid Empire, from Bactria in the east to Egypt in the west, as a result of centuries of organic spread and its adoption as the standardised chancellery language by the Achaemenid rulers (Folmer 2011, 587–593; Gzella 2015, 167 f.). But how precisely do Aramaic attestations from Sippar fit in with this grander narrative regarding the use and spread of the Aramaic language in the region?

Aramaic primary sources that attest to official correspondence and state administration from Babylonia in this era are non-extant. For the situation on the ground in the central, Babylonian province of the Empire we have to turn to the only textual witnesses that survived the climatic conditions of the area: cuneiform clay tablets. Since these were mainly produced by urban elites – most notably, those affiliated to temples – the spotlight falls on this community. The Sippar documentation similarly documents priestly endeavours in cultic and personal contexts through thousands of tablets, while it is usually only through interaction with these priests that we meet protagonists from other social groups and economic domains.

The tablets from the Böhl collection published here are special in the sense that they stem from a distinct milieu and offer us a micro-perspective on the entrepreneurial community operating from a separate quarter of this northern Babylonian town. There are various reasons to conclude that — contrary to the situation in the temple sphere — the use of Aramaic was prevalent in this social setting.

41 Folmer (2011, 588) suggests that during the reigns of Darius I and Xerxes — the exact period our tablets date to — the use of Aramaic as the chancellery language had been firmly established throughout the Achaemenid empire.
42 The commercial contexts are largely visible via Marduk-rēmanni’s documentation and the satellite archives of his business relations that ended up with the Ebabbar documentation as well as in text groups that have been dug up elsewhere.
First of all, the distribution of the cuneiform documents with Aramaic epigraphs from Sippar show that only a tiny fraction of the huge administrative documentation created by cuneiform scribes can be directly related to the use of Aramaic: ca. forty out of roughly 35,000, while the much smaller text groups of entrepreneurs contain at least fourteen. Moreover, Aramaic tends to appear on distinct text types in these settings. In the temple administration, Aramaic epigraphs mainly appear on ephemeral notes that record flows of commodities; only a few documents are of legal nature. Secondly, epigraphs are notably absent from witnessed legal documents recording “private matters” of the priestly personnel, even though they may have been stored within the temple walls, perhaps even together with the temple’s administrative files.

We believe that the reason for the absence of Aramaic in the temple sphere can at least in part be explained by group-specific norms and customs. It should be borne in mind that priests belonged to an exclusive social stratum that prided itself – most probably through the use of family names – upon genteel descent and whose members interacted predominantly with their social peers, all of which adhered to a distinct collective Babylonian identity (Still 2019). They also shared very similar business profiles that were generally characterised by the careful preservation of the existing patrimony rather than its aggressive expansion through speculative, entrepreneurial enterprises. The fact that the archives of these priestly families cannot be or are rarely linked with Aramaic appears thus to be in line with their conservative socioeconomic outlook and suggests that the use of this language for recording processes was not part of this group’s social repertoire.

The idea that the usage of Aramaic had specific socioeconomic dimensions finds further support when we turn our attention to the formally witnessed cuneiform documents that bear Aramaic epigraphs. These are almost exclusively rooted within the city’s mercantile harbour community, which seems to have operated very differently from the priestly temple community. The social world of the quay – rather than representing a self-contained, exclusive unit – was characterised by an outward-looking mind-set that was driven by a collective sense of business and entre-

---

43 Part of this identity was formed by being educated: they were literate and keepers of the cultural canon (Still 2019, 213–218). Their mastery of Akkadian cuneiform may have rendered the addition of Aramaic notes not only undesirable, but also unnecessary.

44 Alphabet scribes did have a role in the temple administration. For example, a text from the Eanna temple in Uruk, published by Pirngruber (2017), shows that alphabetic documents could even serve as the basis of cuneiform account.

45 Only one family name is attested in the three texts published above.
Prosopography

Adad-zēru-iddin
– /Iṣṣūr No. 3: 3
(t)Amtia
– mother of Bēl-iddin/Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti
Balāṭu
– father of Šamaš-iddin
Bēl-ibni
– father of Nabû-uṣuršu
Bēl-iddin
– /Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti No. 1: 3
– /t)Amtia No. 1: a
Bēl-ittannu
– /Niqūdu No. 1: 8
Bēl-na’id
– father of Bēlšunu
– father of Nabû-ittannu
Bēlšunu
– /Bēl-na’id No. 2: 10
– father of Dummuqu
Bēl-uballiṭ
– /Šamaš-uballiṭ No. 2: 11
Dummuqu
– /Bēlšunu No. 1: 2; No. 2: 4, 7
Gimil-Šamaš
– /[..] No. 2: 9
Ḫabaṣīru
– /Ḫabaṣīru/Nūr-Papsukkal
Iddinā
– father of Na’id-Bēl
– father of Nergal-ušallim
Ina-ṣilli-Bēl
– /Niqūdu No. 3: 10
Iṣṣūr
– father of Adad-zēru-iddin
Itti-Nabû-balāṭu
– /Muṣezib No. 1: 11 (scribe)
Muṣezib
– father of Itti-Nabû-balāṭu
Nabû-āju-ittannu
– /Nabû-ūṣuršu No. 3: 4
Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti
– father of Bēl-iddin
Nabû-ittannu
– /Bēl-na’id No. 2: 10
Nabû-uṣuršu
– /Bēl-ibni No. 3: 11
– father of Nabû-āju-ittannu No. 3: 7, b
– father of Nidintu
Na’id-Bēl
– /Iddinā No. 2: 12
Nergal-ušallim
– /Iddinā No. 3: 13 (scribe)
Nidinti-Bēl
– /Šamaš-iddin No. 1: 7
– /Šamaš-kaṣīr No. 2: 13 (scribe)
Nidintu
– /Nabû-uṣuršu No. 3: 12

Bibliography

Alstola, T. E. (2020): Judeans in Babylonia. A study of deportees in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. CHANE 109. Leiden/Boston
Bloch, Y. (2014): Judeans in Sippar and Susa during the first century of the Babylonian exile. Assimilation and perseverance under Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid rule, JANEH 1, 119–172
Böhl, F. M. Th. (1936): Mededelingen uit de Leidsche verzameling van spijkerschrift-inscripties, III: Assyrische en Nieuw-Babylonische oorkonden (1100–91 v. Chr.). Mededelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, afdeeling letterkunde, deel 82, serie B, no. 2. Amsterdam, 65–145
– (1946): Een schuldvordering uit de regering van Darius I met een Arameesch bijschrift (492 v. Chr.), in: M. David [e. a.] (eds), Symbolae ad ius et historiam antiquitatis pertinentes Julio Christiano van Oven dedicatae. Leiden, 63–70. 62 (tabula)
Bongenaar, A. C. V. M. (1997): The Neo-Babylonian Eabbar temple at Sippar. Its administration and its prosopography. Istanbul
– (2000): Private archives in Neo-Babylonian Sippar and their institutional connections, in: A. C. V. M. Bongenaar (ed.) Interdependency of institutions and private entrepreneurs. MOS Studies 2. Istanbul, 73–94
Bongenaar, A. C. V. M./B. Haring. (1994): Egyptians in Neo-Babylonian Sippar, JCS 46, 59–72
Dandamayev, M. A. (1984): Slavery in Babylonia: from Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331 BC). Rev. ed. DeKalb
Delaporte, L. (1912): Épigraphes araméens. Étude des textes araméens gravés ou écrits sur des tablettes cunéiformes. Paris
Folmer, M. L. (2011): Imperial Aramaic as an administrative language of the Achaemenid period, in: S. Weninger et al. (eds), The Semitic languages: an international handbook. Berlin/Boston, 587–598.
Gzella, H. (2015): A cultural history of Aramaic. From the beginnings to the advent of Islam. HdO I 111. Leiden
Hakl, J./M. Jursa, (2015): Egyptians in Babylonia in the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, in: J. Stökl/C. Waerzeggers
