
THE BABYLONIAN UBĀRU AND HIS SLAVE-SALE DOCUMENTS FROM NINEVEH¹

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ABSTRACT

This article edits three Neo-Babylonian slave-sale documents found in Nineveh that form the dossier of Ubāru. The background of this Babylonian individual is uncertain, but we make some educated guesses about his identity.

KEYWORDS

Esarhaddon, Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, slave sale, Ubāru.

EL BABILONIO UBARU Y SUS DOCUMENTOS DE VENTAS DE ESCLAVOS DE NINEVEH

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta tres documentos neobabilónicos de venta de esclavos hallados en Nínive, que forman parte del dossier de Ubāru. El trasfondo de este personaje babilonio es incierto, pero podemos hacer algunas conjeturas acerca de su identidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Asarhaddon, Neo-asirio, Neo-babilonio, venta de esclavos, Ubāru.

At present, three slave-sale documents (K 3790, Rm 157, 162) written in Babylonian script and language form the dossier of Ubāru. This does not appear exceptional; however, these early seventh-century documents originate from the Neo-Assyrian capital city of Nineveh and are akin to Assyrian slave-sale documents. It is well known that the illustrious “Assurbanipal’s Library” included a vast number of tablets inscribed in Neo- and Standard Babylonian, but other legal documents in Babylonian are not known from this large collection of cuneiform tablets.²

Two of the three documents published here have, in fact, been published previously. Namely, already in 1896, Felix E. Peiser published a transliteration and translation of K 3790 and Rm 157 in *Keilinschriftliche Bibliothek* 4, pp. 122–27. His editions are quite good, although outdated by modern standards. Especially the sign values in his transliteration do not fully comply with today’s sign lists. Since these tablets have not received the attention they deserve and have been incorrectly quoted in the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (PNA), it makes sense to publish these documents anew. Moreover, we can now add the previously unpublished fragment Rm 162 to the small group of tablets consisting of K 3790 and Rm 157.

¹ It is our pleasure to dedicate this small contribution, which discusses documents mixing Assyrian and Babylonian conventions, to Karlheinz Kessler, who always made working on the various materials of different periods and regions look easier than it is. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Christopher Walker, who pointed out the Assyrian character of Rm 157 and Rm 162 to us, and to Heather D. Baker, Rocío Da Riva and Tuviah Kwasman, who read a draft of this article and made valuable suggestions for improvement. We also want to thank the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish these tablets.

² Babylonian slave-sale documents have been uncovered from the Assyrian capital cities of Kalḫu (Nimrud) and Dūr-Šarrukēn, but these documents were brought to those cities from Babylonia (on these tablets, see Fales 1988).

In the following, we give a transliteration, translation, notes and copies of the three documents.³ At the end of the article, we briefly discuss the possible identity of Ubāru to whose dossier these documents belonged.

Rm 157

Transliteration

Obverse

1 NA₄.KIŠIB ^mgi-ru-^dIM be-lí LÚ SUM-nu

2 ^mú-PA-ru it-ti ^mgi-ru-^dIM

3 ma-ḫi-ru i-pu-uš-ma 5/6 MA.NA KUG.UD

4 i-ḫi-iṭ-ma ŠÁM ^ma-a-i-da-a

5 a-na ^mgi-ru-^dIM id-din KUG.UD na-din

6 ^ma-a-i-da-^ra za^r-rip tur-ru u da-ba-bu

7 ia-a-a^r-nu man-nu šá ina EGIR.MÉŠ UD.MÉŠ

8 lu-u ŠEŠ-šú lu-u LÚ.mam-ma-nu-šú

9 ^rlu^r-u LÚ.šá-kin^{[i]n}-šú šá DUL[?].DU-ma

Lower edge

10 a-na UGU ^mr a^r-a-i-da-a i-da-bu-bu

11 ^rsa[?]-ri-it^r 1 MA.NA 1/3 GÍN KUG.UD

Reverse

1 ^ra-na^r ^mú-PA-ru i-nam-din

2 IGI ^mam-bi-ia^{md+} AG-ú-še-^rzib^r

3 IGI ^mSUM-i[á] ^mza-ba-a-a

4 IGI ^mbi-^rbé^r-e-a ^mna-bu-ut-^rte[?]

5 IGI ^msu[?]-li-ia^{md}IM-DÙ-^ruš^r

6 IGI ^{md}EN-DÙ-uš LÚ.A.BA

7 ITL.APIN UD-6-KÁM* MU-2

8 ^daš-šur(-PAB-AŠ) LUGAL KUR-aš-šur

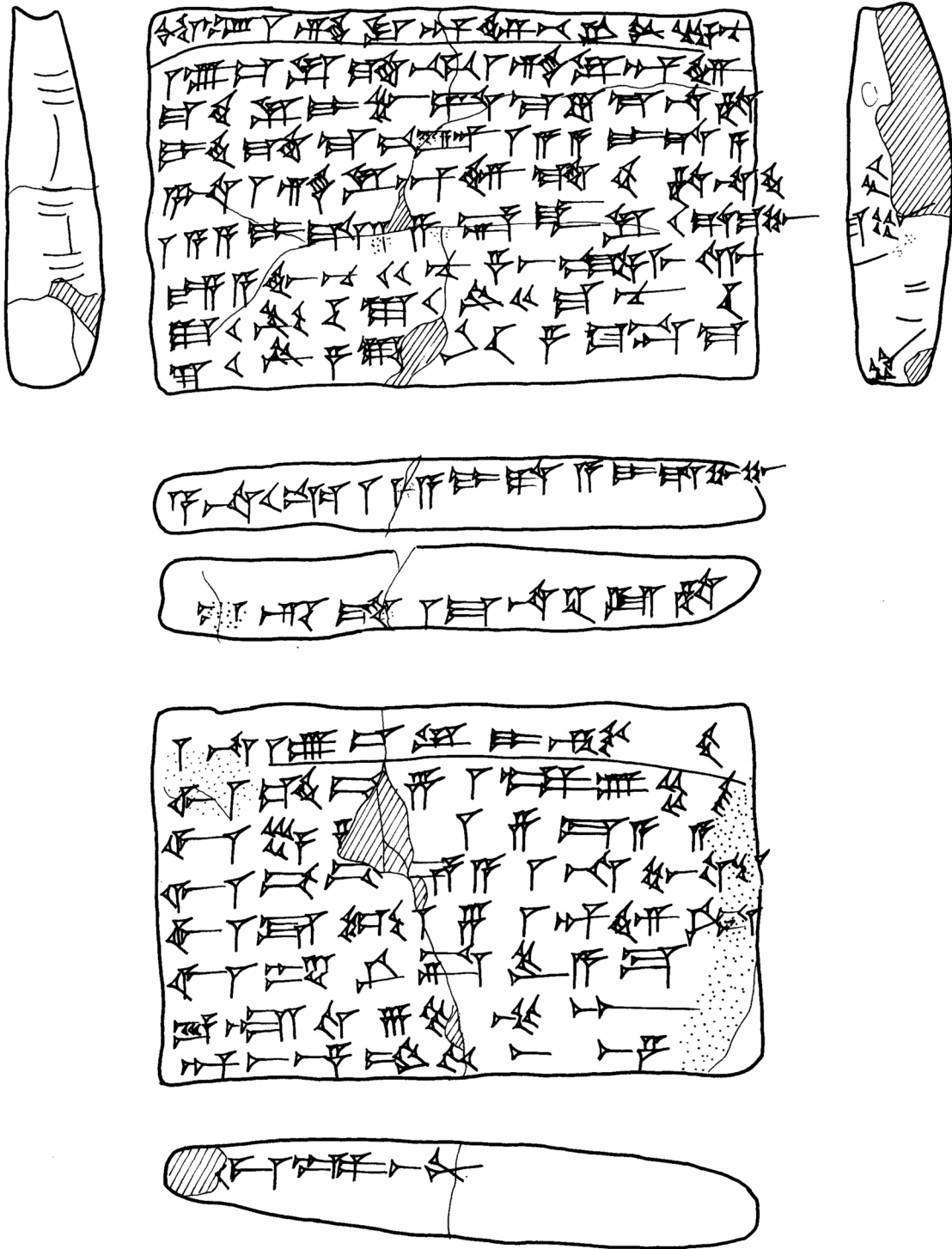
Upper edge

9 IGI ^{md+}AG-AŠ-PAB

Left side

eleven fingernail impressions

³ For photos of these tablets, see CDLI (P238294 = K 3790; P240135 = Rm 157; P240136 = Rm 162).



1 cm.

Fig. 1. Copy of Rm 157

Translation

¹ Seal of Gīr-Adda, owner of the man being sold.

² Ubāru settled the purchase price with Gīr-Adda and weighed out 5/6 minas of silver, the price of Aya-idâ, and gave it to Gīr-Adda. The *money* is paid. Aya-idâ is purchased. Any revocation or litigation is void.

⁷ Whoever in the future, whether his (= Gīr-Adda's) brother or a relative of his or his prefect, comes forward and speaks against (the sale of) Aya-idâ, shall pay a *fine* of one mina and 1/3 shekels of silver to Ubāru.

^{rev.2} Witness(es) Ambīya, Nabû-ušēzib,

³ Witness(es) Iddin-Ay[a], Zabāya,

⁴ Witness(es) Bibīya, Nabūtu,

⁵ Witness(es) Sulīya, Adad-ēpuš,

⁶ Witness Bēl-ēpuš, scribe.

⁷ Month Marchesvan (VIII), 6th day, year 2 of Esar(haddon), the king of Assyria.

⁹ Witness Nabû-nādin-aḫi.

Notes

General: Rm 157 is a small, horizontally inscribed pillow-like tablet.⁴ It is complete and almost intact (measuring ca. 40 x 67 x 20 mm), and, even though some of the signs are slightly damaged, its state of preservation is excellent. The tablet is a rarity among the tablets found in the Assyrian capital not because it was written in Neo-Babylonian script, but because it and the other two documents edited here use the structure of a Neo-Assyrian slave-sale document, with typical Neo-Assyrian phrases of the genre. However, the language of this document is Neo-Babylonian and the Neo-Assyrian phrases are provided with their Babylonian equivalents.⁵ Thus, the result is an odd mixture of both Assyrian and Babylonian features (cf. already Brinkman – Kennedy 1983: 20: In.5) with Assyrian legal clauses translated into Babylonian.⁶

Structure of the tablet: Two horizontal rulings divide the surface of the fully-written tablet into three sections: [1] Despite the fingernail impressions on the left side of the tablet, line 1 introduces the seal of the owner selling a person and the topic of the tablet. [2] Lines 2–r.1 comprise the entire operative section with the price, the purchase agreement between the parties and a penalty clause. [3] Reverse 2–6 contains a list of witnesses, followed by the date of the sale in r.7–9.

Line 1: The customary Neo-Assyrian practice is to use the logogram *EN* for *bēl*, but here and in K 3790: 2 (below) the spelling *be-li* is attested. This seems to be a Neo-Babylonian trait where it can stand for the singular construct state (cf. Woodington 1982: 34); see, e.g., *be-lí* LUGAL.MEŠ SAA 10 164 r. 13; SAA 18 62 r. 3 and 133 r. 4'.

Lines 2–3: On *itti* PN *maḫīru epēšu*, see CAD M/1 97 s.v. *maḫīru* 4d) 1', which prefers a slightly different interpretation. Alternatively, one might translate this phrase as “agreed the sale with PN”.

⁴ The contents of the tablet were already summarized by Pinches 1883: 178, no. 64 and then later registered by Bezold 1896: 1588.

⁵ The wording of genuine Babylonian clauses is different; see, e.g., an example from the time of Darius I (Jursa 2005: 36).

⁶ Because Babylonian slave-sale documents mainly originate from after the seventh century BCE (cf., e.g., Baker 2001: 19), their thorough comparison with contemporary Assyrian legal conventions is not that easy. On the available Babylonian tablets from 747 to 626 BCE, see Nielsen 2011: 5–7.

2, r.1: The name of the buyer is inscribed in a manner that looks like ^mú-IZ-ru, but such a reading can hardly be correct. Even if erroneously taken as the second seller, the name was already interpreted as Ubāru by Pinches 1883: 178, no. 64. In PNA, p. 46b, the name of our protagonist is obscurely found s.v. Adda-idrī, no. 4. However, we are probably dealing with the same person as in K 3790 and Rm 162 (below). In fact, the signs GIŠ (iz) and PA often look similar in Neo-Assyrian texts. Thus, reading PA is not a problem. However, it is unclear why the scribe chose to write the name exceptionally with PA, which can be read as *bá* (CAD U&W 11a provides only one example from Nuzi where the personal name is written as *Ú-bá-ru*), instead of the normal BA or BAR (some Neo-Assyrian examples in which <p> appears instead of the etymological are given in Luukko 2004: 73). In the Neo-Assyrian corpus, the only instance known to us where PA is to be read BĀ comes from the Tell Tayinat version of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, § 95 o 627–628 T viii 21: *ú-bá-ti-qu-u-ni* (Lauinger 2012: 109). In any case, the rarity of legal documents written in Babylonian from Nineveh certainly favours interpreting them as coming from a single dossier, especially as Nabû-ušēzib seems to be the second witness in two of the slave sales (r.2 and K 3790 r.5'). Moreover, both documents are dated to Esarhaddon's early reign using the same dating system (see below).

4: Despite the use of the verb *hīātu* in Middle Assyrian contracts (CAD H 161), it only appears exceptionally in Neo-Assyrian legal transactions (cf., e.g., VAT 20374, briefly discussed in PNA 3/II, p. 1339 s.v. Ṭab-Bēl, no. 7), although the verb is generally used for weighing metals in NA. Thus, in this context, it appears to be a Neo-Babylonian trait (cf. CAD H 161b). Alternatively, if following the examples given in CAD (loc. cit.), one might translate “Ubāru ... paid 5/6 minas of silver, the (full) price of Aya-idā, to Gīr-Adda”.

5: Here KUG.UD may stand for *šarpu* “silver” as usually in Neo-Assyrian (Deller 1987: 3) and not for *kaspu*.

6–7: The phrase *zarip turru u dabābu ia'nu* is a slightly abbreviated version of the usual Neo-Assyrian clause *zarip laqe tuāru dēnu dabābu laššu* “(the person) is purchased (and) acquired. Any revocation, lawsuit, or litigation is void” (for a discussion of the clause with many examples, see Radner 1997: 316–37, 350–56).

7: The Babylonian phrase *mannu ša ina arkāt ūmī* corresponds to the common Neo-Assyrian phrase *mannu ša ina urkiš ana/ina matēma* “whoever in the future, at any time”. The choice of the plural marker MĒŠ (= ME) instead of MEŠ is worth noting.

9: The phonetic complement *in* is added to clarify the reading of the preceding CVC-sign. The verb *ellāni* is mostly written syllabically, but see SAA 14 297 r.1 (DUL.DU-[*an-ni*]).

11: At the beginning, we may have a form of *sartu*, “fine, penalty”. Alternatively, one might expect a word or phrase stressing the categorical failure of the person who should contest the validity of the sale in the future. Neo-Assyrian slave sales often contain the phrase *dēnu dabābu ... ba'ū*, but there is not enough space for this. Similarly, a form of *gerū*, *parāku* (GIL) or *nabalkutu* seems out of the question.

r.2–5: In contemporary Neo-Assyrian witness lists, it is unusual to have two separate witnesses on the same line without a repeated IGI (or a ditto) sign, but cf., e.g., SAA 6 32 r.12; 314 r.22 or SAA 12 94 r.16'.

r.3: PNA 2/I, p. 504f., reads the first name as ^mSUM-[*x x*], Iddin-[...], but Iddin-Aia is a common name (PNA 2/I, p. 503f.).

r.4: PNA 2/II, p. 788, quotes the second name of the line as Nabattu (^m*na-ba-ut-tu*). On Nabūtu, cf. PNA 2/II, p. 897b; the reading ^m*na-bu-ut-tu* is possible.

r.5: According to PNA, the first name on this line is ^m*su-li-ia* (3/I, p. 1157, s.v. Sūli), and the second name Adad-bāni (PNA 1/I, p. 23a), but we prefer to read the second name as Adad-epuš; this would only be the second attestation of the name in NA sources (cf. CTN

2 114 r.4). The problem with the first name is the first sign *su* with two verticals, the first of which is smaller than the second. When compared with the other signs on the tablet, it is not certain whether we should expect this type of variant (but cf. the sign E where, however, this is normal in NB). Perhaps the first vertical was an afterthought, i.e., a later addition by a hesitant scribe.

r.6: The name of the scribe, Bēl-ēpuš or Bēl-īpuš, appears more Babylonian than Assyrian.

r.7–8: This is not a typical Neo-Assyrian eponym date, but a date based on the Babylonian system of the ruling king's regnal years. However, a genuine Babylonian document would include here the name of the place where it was drafted.

r.8: The correct reading of the royal name can be restored from K 3790 r.11 (cf. Bezold 1891: 565); PNA 1/I 150b (s.v. Aššur-aḥu-iddina, n. 2') quotes it wrongly. The use of the name of the god Aššur (^d*aš-šur*) instead of Esarhaddon's full name is interesting.

r.9: Nabû-nādin-aḥi, whose name is erroneously read as ^{md}AG-SUM-ŠEŠ in PNA (2/II, p. 850, no. 5), is not the name of the scribe who wrote the tablet (cf. r.6 where the profession is explicitly mentioned), but an additional witness.

Left side: Despite the mention of Gīr-Adda's seal in line 1, the tablet itself is impressed by altogether eleven fingernail impressions (Bezold 1896: 1588), and "the seal of PN" should not be interpreted literally (cf. Radner 1997: 36–39 in Neo-Assyrian documents).

K 3790

Transliteration

Obverse

1 NA₄.KIŠIB ^m*man-nu-ki-šeš*
2 *be-lí* MÍ *a-mil-ti* SUM-*nu*

(four fingernail impressions)

3 ½ MA.NA KUG.UD ^m*ú-bar-ru*
4 *i-ḥi-iṭ-ma* ŠÁM MÍ.ŠI-*i-dan-na-ti*
5 *a-na* ^m*man-nu-ki-PAB* SUM-^r*in*
6 [KUG.U]D ^r*na-din* M[*i.ši-i-dan-na-ti*]
Rest broken away

Reverse

Beginning broken away

1' [x x] x [x x x x] x
2' [x x] x su [x] x [x x]

3' [*i-na*? *ka-n*]*ak*? DUB MU-^r*tim*?

4' [IGI ^m*am-bi-ia*? ^m] ^r*dPA* ^r*ú-še-zib*
5' I[GI ^mx x] x ^m*ab-da-ba-a-ni*
6' I[GI ^mx] x x x ^{md}30-*ia-a-bi*
7' ^rIGI ^r[^mx x] x ^r*mdPA*? ^r*da-la-a*
8' ^rIGI ^r[^m]x x x ^m*dan-na-a-a*
9' ^ù LÚ.A.BA *šá-tir ú-il-ti*

Upper edge

10' ^mLÚ-^dPA ITL.NE UD-26-KÁM*

11' MU-1 ^daš-šur-PAB-AŠ

12' LUGAL KUR-^daš-šur.KI

Left side

1 [x x x] 'x' x la

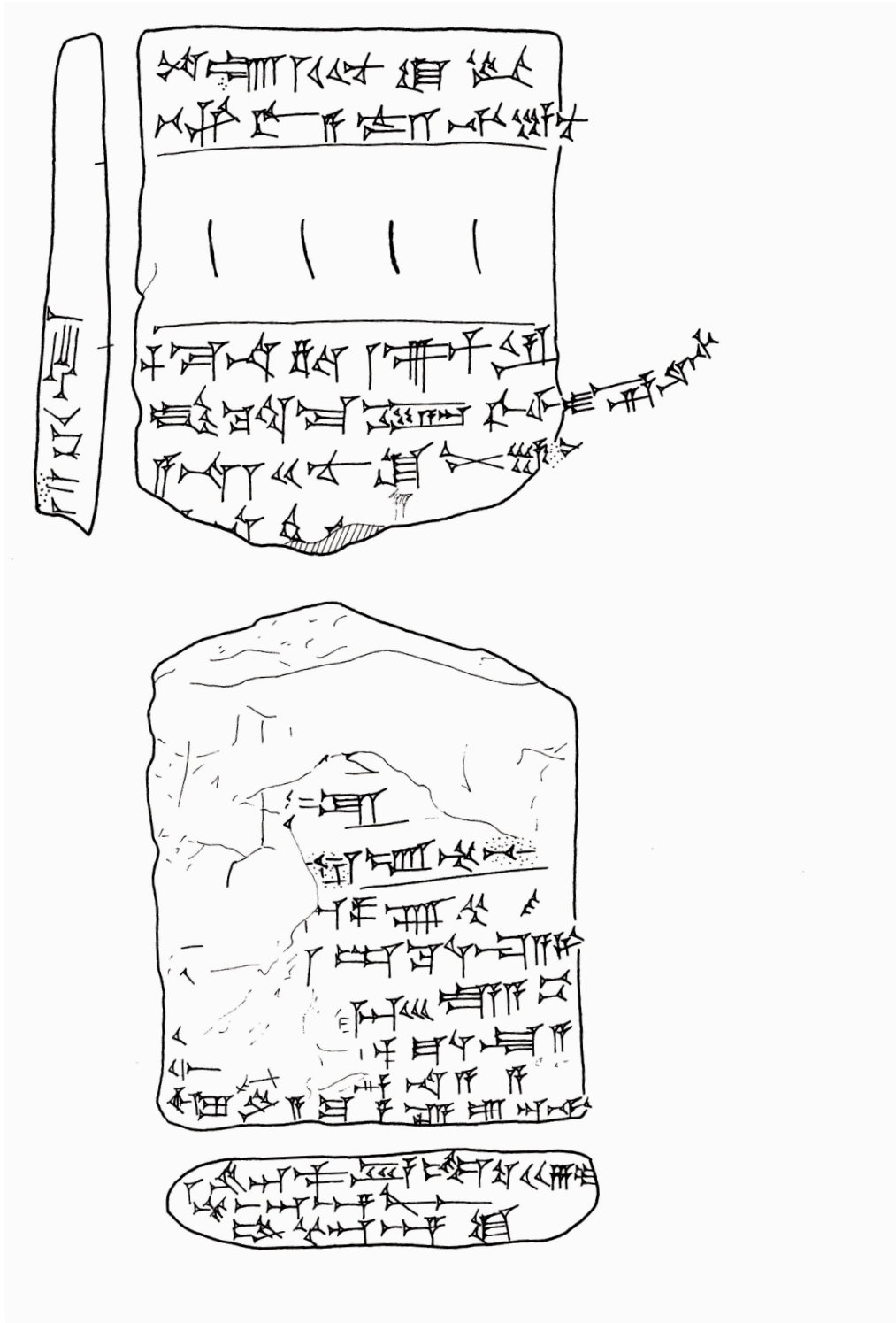


Fig. 2. Copy of K 3790

Translation

¹ Seal of Mannu-kī-aḫi, owner of the woman being sold.

(four fingernail impressions)

³ Ubāru weighed out half a mina of silver and gave the price of Šī-dannat to Mannu-kī-aḫi. [The *money*] is paid. [Šī-dannat *is purchased*.]

(Break)

rev.1'-2' (too fragmentary for translation)

^{3'} [(Present) at the sea]ling of this document:

^{4'} [Witness(es) *Ambīya*], Nabû-ušēzib,

^{5'} Wi[tness(es) ...], Abdabāni,

^{6'} Wi[tness(es) ...]..., Sîn-yābi,

^{7'} Witness(es) [...], *Nabû-dalâ*,

^{8'} Witness(es) ..., Dannaya and the scribe, writer of the document, Amēl-Nabû.

^{10'} Month Abu (V), 26th day, year 1 (680) of Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria.

s.¹ [...]

Notes

General: This partially broken portrait-format tablet measures 50 x 43 x 15 mm. Maximally, about two-thirds of the tablet is preserved. Most of the extant signs are well readable, but the surface of the reverse, especially at the beginning of lines, is damaged and the traces of signs appear illegible. The structure and conventions of this tablet closely follow those of Rm 157 (discussed above).

Lines 1–2: As in comparable Neo-Assyrian slave sales, the name of the sold person appears in the next section. Therefore, *a-mil-ti* is a simple gloss that clarifies the interpretation of *mī*, “woman”, and is not, e.g., a personal name. On *be-lī*, see the note on Rm 157: 1 (above).

3–6: This is a shorter variant of the formula specifying the sale than that of Rm 157. For Ubāru in this document, cf. PNA 3/II, p. 1357, no. 4.

4: As in Rm 157 and Neo-Assyrian documents in general, the sold slave’s personal name appears at this point, after the seller and the purchaser have been named. According to PNA, thus far only the following personal names ending in the element *dannat* are attested in Neo-Assyrian sources: Bānītu-dannat, Issār-dannat, Nanāya-dannat, and most importantly Šīti-dannat, “She is strong” (PNA 3/II: 1267–68).

r.1'–2': These badly broken lines may represent the end of a penalty clause.

r.3': For the restoration of this line, we are indebted to Heather Baker (personal communication; see CAD K 139). According to Baker, this introduction of the witnesses is a feature normally found only in formal Neo-Babylonian conveyances (not in slave sales).

r.4': In addition to Ubāru, Nabû-ušēzib is the only individual to appear with certainty in more than one of the documents edited here. He acts as a witness in this sale and in Rm 157. For the restored but uncertain first witness, cf. Rm 157 r.2.

r.6': Sîn-yābi; in PNA (2/I, p. 517b), the name is to be found s.v. Ilī-iābi.

r.7': Or read Ilu-dalâ instead of Nabû-dalâ.

r.9'–10': The clause *tupšarru šātīr u'ilti* PN should probably be understood as an equivalent to the Neo-Assyrian PN *šābit dannite*, approximately “PN, scribe, who drew up the document” (discussed by Postgate 2011 and, with a somewhat different interpretation, by

Radner 1997: 52 and passim), which regularly appears at the end of a document. CTN 3 no. 62 r.14 includes another *šātir u'ilti* PN in a Babylonian document found in Assyria, namely in Kalḫu (Nimrud), but the document was drawn up in the northern Babylonian Kār-Aššur⁷. The most interesting detail here, however, may be the use of the word *u'iltu*, which is rare in NA archival texts, where it regularly stands for “(astrological) report”, “tablet in horizontal format”.⁸ The word is more frequent in Neo- and Late Babylonian (cf. CAD U&W 51–54), where it is the most common term for a written document, “normally with the sense of ‘promissory note’, ‘obligation’, though it was also used for other types of contract” (Baker 2003: 255).⁹ In the present context, the word *u'iltu* cannot refer to the horizontal format of the tablet (Neo-Assyrian definition), but the word is used in the Neo-Babylonian way. The name Amēl-Nabû appears more typical of Babylonian than Assyrian.

r.10': KĀM* as read in SAA (=KAM in Borger's MZL); similarly in Rm 157 r.7.

r.11': Here Esarhaddon's name is conspicuously written with the determinative ^{d(ingir)}, cf. Rm 157 r.8 with only the beginning of the name, reserved for the god Aššur, but without the expected mister-sign. This detail appears, however, too insignificant for maintaining that the Assyrian king was really deified – except symbolically.

s.1: Peiser read this line as a ḫa la; ḪA.LA = *zittu* “share” is possible. Here one might expect a PN, i.e., an additional witness as in Rm 157, a verbal form or an afterthought. According to Bezold (1891: 565), there are two lines written on the left-hand edge of the tablet, but this is not correct.

Rm 162¹⁰

Transliteration

Obverse

1 [NA₄.KIŠI]B² m^la-tu-ba-áš-^ršá^r-n[i (x x)]

2 [be-li²] LÚ a-me-lu SUM-nu

(six fingernail impressions)

3 [x x x m^rém²]-^ra^r-ni-DINGIR.MEŠ a-na m^rú^r-bar-ru

4 [x x x x x] x-erⁱ-ba KUG.UD ^rx x x^r

5 [x x x x x]x ur^m[ú²-bar²]-^rru^r

6 [x x x x x] ^rx x x^r [x x x x]

Rest broken away

Reverse

Beginning broken away

1' [x x x x x] ^rx x^r [x x x]

2' [x x x x x m^u]-bar-ru ^rx x^r

3' [x x x x x] ú šad ^rx x^r

4' [i-na ka-nak²] DUB MU-a-ti

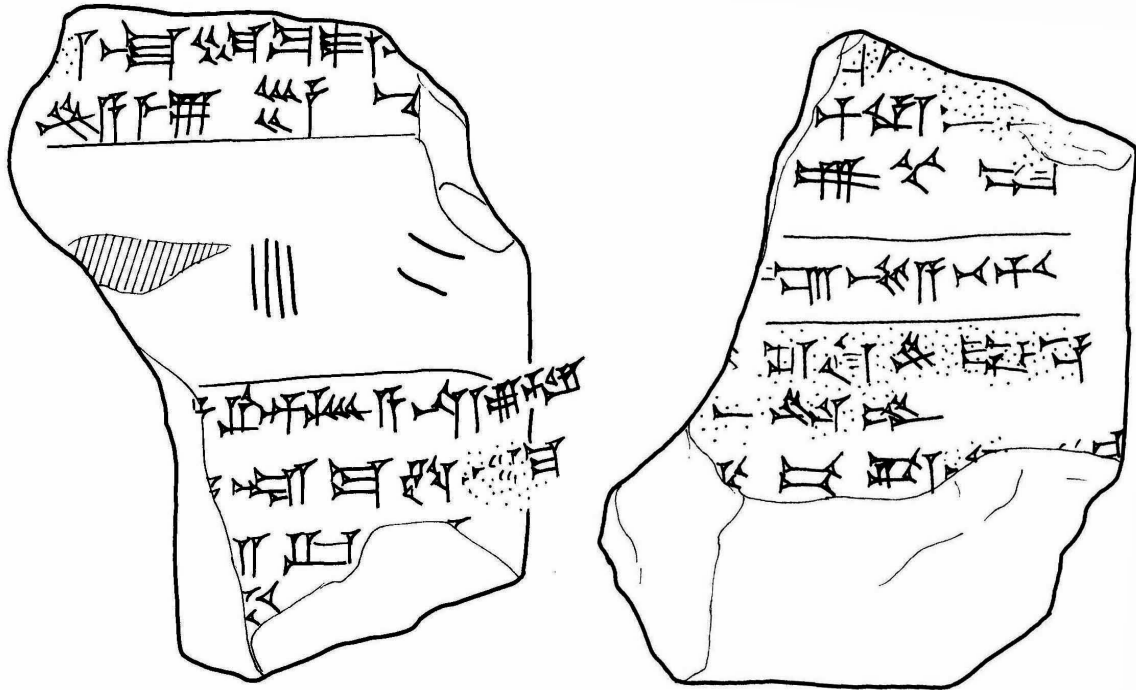
⁷For the origin and location of the Assyrian fortress Kār-Aššur in Babylonia, see Kessler 2013.

⁸On *u'iltu* in Neo-Assyrian, see, e.g., Parpola 1983a: 65 (note on no. 60, line 7), 1983b: 2, n.5), cf. Radner 1995: 72–73, 1997: 60–61, 66 (n. 340) In the colophons of Neo-Assyrian literary texts from Assur, *u'iltu* means “tablet” (for relevant passages, cf. Hunger 1968: 180).

⁹For a further, specifically defined type of *u'iltu*, see also the discussion of Adelhofer 2016.

¹⁰Cf. Bezold 1896: 1589.

5' [IGI² x x x x x]x lu ki² LÚ.DUMU-SIG₅
 6' [x x x x x x]—AS² LÚ ʿARAD² LUGAL
 7' [x x x x x i]q²-bi ta² ʿna x x is²?
 Rest broken away



1 cm

Fig. 3. Copy of Rm 162

Translation

¹ [Sea]l of Lā-tubāšan[ni], [owner] of the man being sold.

(six fingernail impressions)

³ [... Rēm]anni-ilāni to Ubāru

⁴ [...]-erība silver ...

(Break)

rev.² [...U]bāru ...

³ [.....]

⁴ [(Present) at the sealing of] this document:

⁵ [Witness(es) ...] ..., chariot fighter,

⁶ [.....]-iddina, *servant of the king*,

⁷ [.....]

(Rest destroyed)

Notes

General: The NB slave sale fragment Rm 162 measures 45 x 38 x 20 mm. The remaining signs are mainly clear and sharp on the obverse of the tablet, but damaged and much less legible on the reverse. The first two lines support the tablet's identification as a slave sale, but what follows is much less certain.

Line 1: On the name of the seller Lā-tubāšanni, cf. PNA 2/II, 656. The name may have been spelled as ^mla-tu-ba-áš-^ršá'-a[n-ni] or may stand for ^mla-tu-ba-áš-^ršá'-n[i-DN/DINGIR]. For the possible candidates, see PNA 2/II, 656–58. If the person is attested in other Neo-Assyrian documents, then consider especially Lā-tubāšanni-ilu (ibid. pp. 657–58, nos. 5–11) or Lā-tubāšanni-Issar (ibid. p. 658).

Line 2: Interestingly, here as in K 3790, the object of the sale is glossed syllabically after the common logogram for man (woman in K 3790). This may suggest that the same scribe wrote both contracts. Six fingernail impressions are extant after this line on the section specifically set out for this purpose, but the original number was probably higher. The restoration [*be-lī*] follows the writing in K 3790 and Rm 157.

Line 3: The broken name [...]anni-ilāni cannot be the same as that of the seller (line 1) whose final element, if anything at all follows *tubāšanni*, must be grammatically singular. Therefore, this is probably the name of the sold slave, but the clause itself must be different from K 3790 and Rm 157. As far as we know, Rēmāni-ilāni (PNA 3/I, p. 1042a) is the only personal name attested in Neo-Assyrian sources that ends in *ilāni* and is preceded by *-anni*.

Line 4: As suggested by Baker (personal communication), the traces at the beginning of this line may be the end of a personal name, e.g., Aššūr-erība, Aḫū'a-erība, Bēl-aplu-erība. Perhaps read ^ri²-SUM²-na² or a form of *rabû*, “to increase”, at the end of the line.

Lines 5–6: These two lines are too broken for interpretation, but they may specify the conditions of the sale.

Rev. 1'–3': The purpose of this section is not clear, but it could include a penalty clause or clauses.

Rev. 4': For the restoration, see the note on K 3790 r.3.

Rev. 5'–7': As the date of the transaction is missing, r.7' was not the final line of the document. The reverse had space for three more lines and we do not know whether the top and left side were inscribed or not. This section enumerates witnesses and their professions and was probably followed by the date of the document.

Ubāru

Who is Ubāru, the protagonist of the three legal transactions found in Nineveh? As Ubāru is a typical Babylonian name in Assyrian sources (PNA 3/II, 1356) and the language and script of all these exceptional documents is Babylonian, there is hardly any doubt that the man was Babylonian by origin.¹¹ Unfortunately, the three documents do not specify whether the slave sales took place in Nineveh or elsewhere. However, Nineveh as the find site of these documents suggests that they were probably drawn up there or at least in Assyria.¹²

¹¹ For the appearance of the name Ubāru in the contemporary Neo-Babylonian tablets, cf. Nielsen 2015: 390–91. Already Tallqvist (1914: 214) listed a lot of Babylonians with the name Ubāru.

¹² The lack of place names may strengthen this argument (at least no place name appears in Rm 157).

Had these slave sales taken place in Babylonia, it would be much more difficult to explain the underlying Assyrian character of the documents.

Speculatively, we may identify Ubāru with the governor (or “commandant”) of Babylon who played an important role in the restoration of Babylon in Esarhaddon’s reign.¹³ Even if our present knowledge is full of gaps and it is therefore uncertain whether the Ubāru of the three slave sales edited here really was the governor of Babylon, some indirect details could support such an assumption. The exceptional characteristics of these Assyrianized Babylonian documents may suggest that Ubāru was a protégé of Esarhaddon who enjoyed privileges, even if it may be worth stressing that each of the documents edited here only records the sale of a single slave (altogether two men and a woman). One may further note that the word *ubāru* means “stranger, foreign guest, resident alien, guest-friend”.¹⁴ Especially the nuance “foreign guest” fits the context of these legal documents well because they are the documents of a Babylonian guest in Assyria. Ubāru is the Babylonian form of the name, which is distinct from the Assyrian form, Ubru, widely attested in Assyrian contexts.¹⁵ A claim for favouritism may be strengthened by the importance of the early dates during Esarhaddon’s reign and the peculiar way these dates were written.

Indeed, in this respect, the dates of these documents are highly significant.¹⁶ Two of them can be dated to Esarhaddon’s early reign with certainty: K 3790 to 680-V-26 and Rm 157 to 679-VIII-6. All this would fit perfectly with what is known about the governor Ubāru, and be entirely in line with Esarhaddon’s well-known pro-Babylonian policy.¹⁷ Moreover, together with other textual evidence from his reign, the existence of these unusual documents may be considered further proof showing the various ways Esarhaddon initiated his pro-Babylonian policy already very early on in his reign.

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¹³ His title is given as *šakin tēmi* in SAA 10 169:5 (ABL 702), SAA 18 14:3 (ABL 418 sent to Esarhaddon by Ubāru) and SAA 18 70 r.11 (ABL 327). For a summary of this Ubāru, who had the honour to serve as a non-canonical eponym early in Esarhaddon’s reign, see PNA 3/II, 1356–57, no. 2, with previous bibliography, including Frame 1992: 73, 271, and especially p. 286; cf. also Frame 1982: 157–59 (n. 5) and Nielsen 2011: 133–34. On Ubāru rebuilding Babylon, see the discussion in Streck 2002: 212–14, 216, 229, 232.

¹⁴ CAD U & W 10. In PNA 3/II, pp. 1356–57 the name Ubāru is rendered “client”, but this definition, based on an article by Parpola 2008: 31 (n.55 “client, dependent seeking shelter in a temple”), 58, is less certain than maintained and should probably be subjected to further studies. It would be interesting to investigate the role of the people named Ubru/Uburtu (fem.)-DN (passim in PNA 3/II, pp. 1358–71) in the cult: were they insiders, outsiders, or something in between?

¹⁵ See CAD U & W 398 and PNA 3/II, pp. 1356–71.

¹⁶ On dating Esarhaddon’s restoration of Babylon and his closely related Babylon inscriptions, see Novotny 2015, especially pp. 161–62.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Frame 1992: 64–101; Porter 1993.

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