

Hired Labor in the Neo-Assyrian Empire

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1. Introductory Remarks

For the understanding of any state and any society it is vital to have a grasp of the key principles of its economic basis. Yet for the Neo-Assyrian Empire our knowledge is still severely limited, in contrast to the Neo-Babylonian Empire where the field of economic history has long enjoyed popularity among modern scholars.

At the root of this problem lies the extremely differential nature of the available primary documentation. The business records of temple households and private family firms from several major Babylonian cities, which constitute the vast majority of the known Neo-Babylonian sources and offer a wealth of information for the economic historian (see now Jursa 2010), have no parallel among the texts from the main Neo-Assyrian archival sources of Nineveh and Kalhu. These cities served as the centers of the Empire and were intimately linked to the Assyrian kings and their courts. They are certainly not representative of all of Assyria or even all of its urban environments. Most of the texts unearthed in Nineveh and Kalhu come from palace contexts. They have shaped the perception of Assyria in the first millennium BC more than any other bodies of texts, and their focus and limitations explain in part why key economic issues, such as the very nature of labor in Assyria's economy, have found relatively little attention.

To survey "labor in the Assyrian Empire" is beyond the scope of the present paper which limits itself to a discussion of labor for hire.¹ The

¹ I wish to thank the organizers of the 2005 symposium, Piotr Steinkeller and Michael Hudson, for the kind invitation and Cornelia Wunsch for hosting us in beautiful Hirschbach. An earlier version of this paper was published as Radner 2007a.

terminology that the Assyrians employed to refer to hired labor is derived from the verb *agāru* “to hire” which is used in the *G* stem and the *N* stem (passive). Attested forms include the terms *munnagru* “hired worker,” *nāgurtu* “labor as a hired worker” and, by far the most widely used, *igrē* “wages (for hired labor)”. The present paper draws on all known attestations for these terms.

2. Working for a salary, from the reign of Tiglath-pileser to Assurbanipal

The evidence for hired labor in the Neo-Assyrian period currently available to us covers a period of about 120 years. The earliest reference dates to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–725 BC). It is a legal document from the Governor’s Palace in Kalhu (738 BC; Postgate 1973: no. 98; Radner 2007a: no. 1) in the form of a receipt for a sum of copper which is described as compensation for the recipient’s wages. It is impossible to know from what kind of work arrangement the financial claim had resulted and who satisfied it but the phrasing of the text indicates a dispute that was resolved by this new arrangement.

Some letters from the state correspondence of Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC) provide more detailed information. Due to the nature of this correspondence there is a focus on military personnel for hire. A body-guard is mentioned in a dispatch of the governor of Arrapha: “Concerning the guard about whom the king, my lord, wrote to me and whom the servants of the king, my lord, have hired for me: He will set forth tomorrow.” (Fuchs and Parpola 2001: no. 2: 4–7). As the letter continues with information on a planned journey by boat, leading through dangerous territory to Babylonia, the guard is likely to have been hired as protection for this specific enterprise.

Scouts, too, are attested as hiring out their services to Sargon’s men. An official informs his king about the reaction of Ariyê and Arišâ, the co-regents of the small mountain kingdom of Kumme, Assyria’s northern neighbor and vassal state (Radner 2011), to a royal order to resettle those of their subjects residing in Assyria to locations elsewhere in the Empire: “The king, our lord, he is the master of all. What can we say (against his orders)? The king, our lord, may take the men from Kumme who hold houses in the countries (*i.e.*, who live in the provinces of the Assyrian Empire) to wherever is good (in the king’s opinion), but the scouts from Kumme who have gone away from Kumme in hired service have not yet come back. They are still there (*i.e.*, in Assyria). The king, our lord, should ask and investigate—maybe they are among those (*i.e.*, the men from Kumme living in Assyria) who are getting deported.” (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: no. 105: 11–23).

The author of the letter then counsels Sargon to take this request seriously as these scouts were valuable assets when stationed at home in Kumme, from where they braved the difficult mountain lands between Assyria and its northern arch enemy Urartu in order to gather intelligence on Assyria's behalf: "The king, my lord, should return them to Kumme. The king, my lord, knows how they are withdrawn from (their regular working environment in) Urartu and that they are in Assyria (only) in hired service." (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: no. 105:24–rev. 3). The scouts from Kumme were quite clearly compensated for their services with payment, and this highlights the important role of mercenaries in the Assyrian army in the 8th century BC.

As this example shows, when the subjects of a foreign ruler lived and worked in Assyria there was potential for conflict. People working under paid employment in Assyria were still considered subjects of the ruler of their country of origin, as a letter to Sargon by the distressed ruler of a northern vassal state, possibly Šubria, indicates. This ruler found himself the victim of Assyrian aggression directed against his people not only his own territories but also in Assyria. "They (*i.e.*, the Assyrians) attack my cities. They also capture my servants who work for hire in the countries (*i.e.*, in the provinces of the Assyrian Empire)!" (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: no. 46: 6'–8').

People working for hire could move far from their place of origin, as is the case with some individuals mentioned in another letter from Sargon's reign. These were Assyrian subjects living in Assyria, but not in their original home region, which caused confusion regarding their status. What kind of work the people from Šadikanni (mod. Tell Ağağa) on the Habur were doing is left unclear in a letter from an official of that region to Sargon. But the author took care to leave no doubt that they were good tax-paying citizens who should be treated accordingly: "The king, my lord, knows that the men from Šadikanni are hired workers; they work in the countries of the king (*i.e.*, in the provinces of the Assyrian Empire). They are no fugitives. They perform their tax obligations and supply king's men (*i.e.*, conscripts for the Assyrian army) from their midst." (Parpola 1987: no. 223:3–13). Hired workers, quite possibly the same group of people, are mentioned in a letter of another official from the Habur region to the king, too fragmentarily preserved to offer any further information (Parpola 1987: no. 207:4–5).

A source from the time of Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) shows that sailors worked for hire. This is clear from one of the stipulations found in the treaty with Ba'alu, king of Tyre, that grants the Tyrian ships access to the Mediterranean harbors under Assyrian control; it is specifically

stated that the ships and their crew should not be harmed: “Nobody will [cause] injustice [to those] who are hired (as the ship’s crew) nor impair their ships.” (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 5 iii 26’–28’). The treaty places the ships and their crews in a predominantly commercial context, but the sailors’ duties are in many ways comparable to the tasks of the scouts and bodyguards attested in the above-referenced Sargon letters. Long-distance trade, whether overland or aboard a ship, was always a risky enterprise.

Turning to the available evidence for hired labor during the reign of Assurbanipal (r. 668–ca. 627 BC), we leave the world of mercenaries, scouts and sailors operating at the border zones of the Empire behind. Two letters of the king’s correspondence with his scholarly advisors lead us instead into the world of the royal court and the cosmopolitan cities of the Assyrian heartland. That one could hire a tailor and pay him to sew one’s clothes we may gather from the letter of an unhappy scholar, who eloquently pleads with his king to rescue him from dire straits. One of the more graphic examples for his increasingly troublesome financial situation is: “(I swear) that I can afford neither shoes nor the wages for a tailor!” (Parpola 1993: no. 294 rev. 27–28). If the writer of this letter is correctly identified with the exorcist Urdu-Gula, then we find another reference to his lack of proper clothing and, more importantly for our purposes, to wages paid to an exorcist’s helper in a second letter of his correspondence. After listing various garments that a certain scholar had secured for himself as gifts from the king, Urdu-Gula contrasts these riches with his own poverty and that of his colleagues: “And we emerged with empty hands! How can we possibly mend our lack of clothing? When will we receive our wages, we who not even command wages as high as his assistant?” (Parpola 1993: no. 289 rev. 9’–13’).

The work of goldsmiths, too, was performed on a hired basis. A 7th century administrative text from Kalhu lists various expenses, mostly for foodstuffs such as bread, wine and meat; the last item listed, however, is of a different nature: “One shekel (of silver): wages of the goldsmith.” (ND 2310: 22’; Postgate 1979: 100–101). This reference illustrates our difficulty to distinguish full-time employment from occasional services provided for a fee. It is likely that the latter was the case here and that the goldsmith in question was a member of a palace or temple household. Nabû-balassu-iqbi from Assur was such a goldsmith. As one of the goldsmiths of the Aššur temple, he had to look for work elsewhere when he needed money to settle an outstanding debt. We learn this from a letter to Nabû-zeru-iddina, a high-ranking goldsmith of the Aššur temple during Assurbanipal’s reign who is informed about Nabû-balassu-iqbi’s

activities by one of his subordinates: “I said to Nabû-balassu-iqbi: ‘Where do you work for hire?’ He answered: ‘[...] I will pay off the old debts.’” (Radner 1999a: no. 52:9–15). This last reference makes it clear that working for hire could be the result of financial difficulties and was then surely meant to supplement the basic income drawn from working one’s own land or from the expected sustenance of other regular employment. Given the patchy documentation it would be rash to take this one reference as an indication for the emergence of an impoverished urban proletariat in the Assyrian centers of the 7th century. And yet, it is important to be aware of the fact that working for hire was seen a possible way of supplementing and even replacing one’s income.

A legal text from the archive of Šamaš-šarru-ušur of Kalhu documents another scenario for hired labor in the reign of Assurbanipal. This man was a royal eunuch with business activities that focused on poultry, raised presumably for their meat, eggs and feathers (ND 3433; Radner 2007a: no. 2). The city overseer of Kalhu (rev. 13–14: “Witnessed by Ribaya, the city overseer who has passed this verdict”) settled a dispute with one Mannu-ki-Arbail by establishing a work relationship between the eunuch and an individual under the other man’s authority. For his services, the man was to receive wages, payable to his superior: “Eight shekels of silver, being the wages of Ahu-edi which Šamaš-šarru-ušur has given to Mannu-ki-Arbail on behalf of Ahu-edi, the apprentice (LÚ.TUR) under his authority. [*x months*] is the (agreed) term. He (*i.e.* Ahu-edi) will serve him (*i.e.* Šamaš-šarru-ušur) during this term. As soon as his term has been completed he shall go and leave.” These “wages”, however, were a legal fiction that in reality constituted the contested sum.

After a certain predetermined period, the work relationship was to end and the man was free to leave. This illustrates the main difference between such an arrangement and the very common institution of pledge (Radner 2001: 269–271). A pledged person was placed with the creditor in order to cover the debtor’s interest, and that person’s discharge could only be brought about by paying back the debt sum. Nevertheless, the relationship between employer and employee can hardly be described as voluntary in this case.

3. The best known context: The hiring of caravan staff in late seventh-century Assur

The survey of sources from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III to Assurbanipal has given us an indication of the ubiquity of employment for hire in the Assyrian Empire. However, by far the most detailed documentation comes from the city of Assur during the two decades prior to

the fall of Assyria, *i.e.* the reigns of Assurbanipal's successors, Aššur-etel-ilani and Sîn-šarru-iškun. Twenty-one legal contracts document the hiring of men — never women — for periods between one month and a year (designated by the term *tuppišu*, for which see Baker in press). The relevant sources have been collected and edited in an earlier version of this paper (Radner 2007a: nos. 3–23) and will not be repeated here.

These texts are the most informative source material presently available to us, as they provide us with data about both employers and employees, the length of the employment and the amount of the wages. The tables in the appendix provide an overview of the archival context (a), the length of employment (b), the monthly salary and any special circumstances that might explain the considerable variations (c), as well as the distribution of the contracts over the seasons (d) and the years (e).

Wages are paid in silver, for which it is currently impossible to establish a link with the value of grain in the late 7th century BC. The only reference to regular grain prices from the Neo-Assyrian period dates to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–725 BC) when the metal standard was copper rather than silver: “The land of the king is well. The royal sustenance fields have been harvested. The market rate is extremely favorable in the land. One homer of barley goes for one mina of copper in Nineveh, one homer and five seahs in Halahhu, two homers in the steppe.” (NL 52 = Luukko 2012: no. 19). While this document does not indicate a price for Assur, the city's location requires us to take the price given for “the steppe” as the most likely approximation.

Some of the contracts indicate the nature of the work. One text (Radner 2007a: no. 4; Radner forthcoming: no. I.13) states explicitly that the hired worker was to bring in his employer's harvest. The contract is for only one month and was made in December, at a time when bringing in the crops was a good half year in the future; December was rather the season to think about planting the seed. As the text also explicitly mentions the unusual fact that the hired worker had already received his complete wages, the man in all probability had found himself short of cash and resolved this problem by pledging his labor for the busiest time of the agricultural year to somebody who was willing to help him out right now. According to the evidence of Neo-Assyrian debt notes, the debtor's obligation to provide harvesters during harvest time often replaces the provision of interest (Radner 2004: 68–69, 73), taking advantage of the debtor's financial situation to secure additional workers at harvest time. We can therefore safely assume that the hired worker's decision to pledge his labor months before the next harvest was to his

employer's advantage. Indeed, the wage of one shekel of silver for a month's work is at the bottom scale of the wages attested in the Assur material (table c).

Four other Assur contracts contain the stipulation *alaktu ušēša ušērab* "He will make the caravan leave and enter", *alaktu ušērab ušēša* "He will make the caravan enter and leave" or *alaktu ušērab* "He will make the caravan enter" (Radner 2007a: nos. 12, 13, 15 and 22). *Alaktu* here certainly means "caravan; trading mission" as is clear from a group of private letters from a contemporary archive in Assur that deal with commercial activities conducted further up the Tigris in the "mountains" and feature a characteristic introduction formula. After the usual greeting formula the sender assures the addressee about the good state of their joint business: "The whole caravan (*alaktu*) is well. You may be happy!" (Radner forthcoming: nos. I.2, I.3, I.4). The point of reference for the clauses in our labor contracts is certainly the city of Assur. Whether we should take the variants as an indication of the specific itinerary of the employee, or whether these differences in phrasing should be disregarded, is difficult to decide at present. It is of course quite possible that staff members were hired at various stages of the trading mission, some when the trek was leaving Assur, others when setting out to return to the city. That all texts were found in Assur where they had in all likelihood been written makes it seem more likely, however, that they should be seen as variants of one and the same legal clause.

The men hired according to the four Assur contracts would seem to have been part of trade caravans leaving from Assur, and their duties can be easily compared with the bodyguards, scouts and sailors that we found attested in the Sargon letters and the Esarhaddon treaty. The men employed to go on long-distance trading missions would have been expected to find their way from Assur to their destination and back again and at all times guard merchandise and money with their lives. Their wages are among the top salaries of the Assur wage scale (table c), and it seems likely that the other contracts with similar arrangements for the length of the appointment (7–12 months) and its salary (2–3,25 shekels of silver per month) also deal with caravan staff members, the difference in payment probably reflecting the level of responsibility and experience. Traveling always meant putting one's life in danger, and the generally high wages attested in this group of documents indicate that the employees were thus compensated with payments that are at least twice the going rate for harvesting work.

The caravan contracts are all dated between late September/early October and late December/early January, *i.e.* the quiet season of the agricultural year when the fields had already been harvested but were not yet cultivated again. This would have allowed the employee to tend to his fields before accepting paid work. As evidence for the organization of trading missions is currently available only from Assur for the period in question, it is important to note that Assur's population was traditionally exempt from military service and corvee duty and hence had the option to use the part of the year normally reserved for state service for other activities. Assur's inhabitants were also exempt from taxation, and as trading enterprises were otherwise subject to heavy dues (Radner 2007b: 225–226; exact amounts unknown) the tax-exempt citizens of Assur may have been more likely than other inhabitants of the Assyrian Empire to engage in caravan trade.

All four contracts with the trading mission clause and eighteen of the twenty-one known labor contracts from Assur come from the same two archives, or rather one big archive that was stored in two parts. The archives N9 and N10 of the Hundureans (*Hundurāyê*) were found in the houses built in the so-called “Außenhaken” area in the northwest of the city of Assur (Pedersén 1986: 85–96). Hundur (also known as Hundir) is a region in Western Iran, the hinterland of the Median city of Kišessim that became the capital of a new Assyrian province founded by Sargon II in 716 (Radner 2003: 50, 57). In its primary meaning, the term *Hundurāyê* is the designation for the inhabitants of Hundur. They are attested in the city of Assur from the reign of Sargon onwards, and we can safely assume that the *Hundurāyê* of Assur were the deportees from the Hundur area, and later their offspring (Radner 2003: 62–63).

Additional evidence for the trading activities of the Hundureans is provided by a number of contracts found in their archive which serve to set up partnerships for financing a caravan (Radner 1999b: nos. 3, 6, 9, 20; nos. 21 and 22 can be linked to no. 6). But other than that, the archive of the Hundureans offers little information that would allow us to reconstruct the nature of their trading ventures. However, the contemporary archive of the wine importer Duri-Aššur allows us to provide some useful context to compare and contrast with, as it includes a number of letters and lists detailing the financing of individual missions (Radner in press).

Duri-Aššur organized trading ventures into the northern regions of Assyria together with three partners (“brothers”) in the period of 651–614 BC, that is, until the Medes under Cyaxares conquered the city

of Assur: some of his letters had not yet been opened when Duri-Aššur's house went up in flames. The ensuing wars certainly terminated the firm's activities—and we can of course assume that trade in general, on a large geographical scale, was badly affected during the next decade while the spoils of the Assyrian Empire were gradually divided up between the marauding Babylonian, Median and Egyptian armies. But while his business still flourished, Duri-Aššur seems to have stayed in the city of Assur while his partners did the traveling necessary to arrange and oversee their joint business activities. In addition to their own funds, the firm accepted investments from other inhabitants of Assur. Although some contributed substantial sums of money, most of the amounts invested were small, sometimes just a fraction of a shekel of silver. Duri-Aššur's firm had a loyal customer base and most investors invested in several trading missions.

Duri-Aššur and partners employed four agents as caravan leaders and these men each conducted three trips a year, leading a group of donkeys upstream along the Tigris with merchandise from Assur, including exclusive garments like hats and shoes, and textiles which also served as packing material for the supplies and the silver funds. One letter (Radner forthcoming: no. I.4) names Zamahu in the Jebel Sinjar as a destination, famous for its wines, and this may have been the usual goal of Duri-Aššur's caravans. Why vary the route if one had a reliable network of suppliers and business partners in one place? Once the caravan had reached its destination, everything was sold, including the donkeys. From the proceeds and the funds they had brought with them, Duri-Aššur's agents bought wine. The wine was filled into animal skins (mostly of sheep and goats, only exceptionally cattle hides) that were bound together with wooden beams in order to create rafts for the return journey to Assur on the Tigris. This was the best possible approach to the transport of wine: on the one hand, the river water kept the wine cool and prevented it from spoiling, on the other hand, all components of this means of transport constituted valuable merchandise back at Assur and could be sold off: the wineskins, of course, but also the logs which were much needed as building timber in forestless Assur.

At present, labor contracts for hiring caravan staff are exclusively found in the archive of the Hundureans. While Duri-Aššur's firm seems to have dispatched the same men as caravan leaders repeatedly (and, one assumes, employed them on a permanent basis), the Hundureans each time hired different people, none of whom is attested more than once. While it was the norm for Duri-Aššur's caravan leaders to set out from

Assur three times a year, the Hundureans' labor contracts are for periods of 7–12 months. This would seem to indicate that the traders had a more remote destination than those sent by Duri-Aššur.

But we can only speculate about the destination and nature of the trading missions organized by the Hundureans. Did their caravans go to Hundur, taking advantage of old family connections? While this would seem a likely destination we must bear in mind that we know next to nothing about Assyria's relationship with Western Iran in the second half of the 7th century. It is even unclear whether the provinces established there in the 8th century were still under Assyrian control. As soon as we assume regular trading contacts between private entrepreneurs from Assur with the Median heartland in the period immediately prior to the Median attack on Assur in 614 we must consider the role of these contacts in triggering Cyaxares' raid.

While our evidence for the organization of trade missions stems exclusively from the last two decades of the Assyrian Empire it is difficult to establish whether this is at all significant. We have to bear in mind that debt notes, labor contracts, partnership agreements and the like were, in contrast to purchase texts, not meant to be kept forever. Hence, the documentary record for these Neo-Assyrian types of documents typically date to the last decades before the destruction of the urban centers at the end of the 7th century BC. Due to the city's favorable tax status, it is far more likely that trading missions were dispatched from Assur also in the decades, and centuries, before. But the absence of relevant evidence from other Assyrian sites calls into question how common the organization of such trade enterprises may have been elsewhere.

Conclusions

Although relatively limited in number, the nature of the available sources for hired labor in the Assyrian Empire is diverse. We can make use of legal contracts, letters both private and royal, administrative notes and an international treaty dating to the period from 738 to 615 BC.

The wide range of sources elucidates a variety of different contexts and we find a range of occupations attested: the craftsmen (goldsmiths, tailors), specialized soldiers (bodyguards, scouts), scholars' assistants, sailors, caravan staff and harvesters represented in the available evidence indicate that hired labor was a widespread phenomenon that underpinned the Assyrian economy, albeit in a range of different circumstances. Some hirelings, such as sailors and mercenaries, were in full-time service while others, such as goldsmiths and tailors, were attached to a

palace or temple household and hired out their work on the side, charging for their services.

To quantify the phenomenon of hired workers and salaried employment within the Neo-Assyrian labor market is currently not viable. But all attempts to reconstruct the workings of the society and economy of Assyria Empire must accommodate the fact that there was labor available for hire.²

Appendix: 7th-century wages according to the Assur documentation

The numbers given in the first column of the following tables refers to the texts as edited in Radner 2007a.

a. Archival contexts:

N9 and N10 = archive of the Hundureans.

| | Assur archive | Contract date | Length | Total salary (in shekels) | Monthly salary (in shekels) | Nature of employment |
|----|---------------|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3 | 1979–80 | ix. 616 | 12 months | 10 | 0,833 | |
| 4 | 1990 | iv. 631 | 1 month | 1 | 1,000 | To harvest |
| 5 | N2 | vi. 620 | 12 months | 15 | 1,250 | |
| 6 | N9 | viii. 631 | 9 months | 20 | 2,250 | |
| 7 | N9 | viii. 629 | 10 months | 17,5 | 1,750 | |
| 8 | N9 | viii. 625 | 8 months | 30 | 3,750 | |
| 9 | N9 | ix. 625 | 9 months | [...] | [...] | |
| 10 | N9 | vii. 624 | 10 months | 12,5 | 1,250 | |
| 11 | N9 | viii. 623 | 10 months | not given | not given | |
| 12 | N9 | vi. 623 | 7 months | 14 | 2,000 | To go on trading mission |
| 13 | N9 | vii. 621 | 10 months | 32,5 | 3,250 | To go on trading mission |
| 14 | N9 | vii. 621 ² | 10 months | 38,666 | 3,866 | |
| 15 | N10 | x. 628 | 7 months | 14 | 2,000 | To go on trading mission |
| 16 | N10 | viii. 625 | [...] | 4 | [...] | |
| 17 | N10 | vii. 624 | 8 months | 15 | 1 7/8 | |
| 18 | N10 | vii. 621 | 10 months | 35 | 3,500 | |
| 19 | N10 | viii. 621 | [...] | 15 | [...] | |
| 20 | N10 | vii. 619 | 10 months | 11,666 | 1,166 | |
| 21 | N10 | viii. 619 | 10 months | 35 | 3,500 | |
| 22 | N10 | ix. 616 | 12 months | >30 | >2,500 | To go on trading mission |
| 23 | N31 | x. 622 | 2 months | 4,666 | 2,333 | |

² Note that previous studies tended to ignore or actively reject the existence of labor for hire in the Assyrian Empire, see Radner 2007a: 186–188 for a discussion.

b. Length of work contract: mostly seven to twelve months.

| | Length | Total salary (in shekels) | Monthly salary (in shekels) | Nature of employment | Contract date | Assur archive |
|----|-----------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 4 | 1 month | 1 | 1,000 | To harvest | iv. 631 | 1990 |
| 23 | 2 months | 4,666 | 2,333 | | x. 622 | N31 |
| 12 | 7 months | 14 | 2,000 | To go on trading mission | vi. 623 | N9 |
| 15 | 7 months | 14 | 2,000 | To go on trading mission | x. 628 | N10 |
| 8 | 8 months | 30 | 3,750 | | viii. 625 | N9 |
| 17 | 8 months | 15 | 1,875 | | vii. 624 | N10 |
| 6 | 9 months | 20 | 2,350 | | viii. 631 | N9 |
| 9 | 9 months | [...] | [...] | | ix. 625 | N9 |
| 11 | 10 months | not given | not given | | viii. 623 | N9 |
| 20 | 10 months | 11 2/3 | 1,166 | | vii. 619 | N10 |
| 10 | 10 months | 12 1/2 | 1,250 | | vii. 624 | N9 |
| 7 | 10 months | 17 1/2 | 1,750 | | viii. 629 | N9 |
| 13 | 10 months | 32 1/2 | 3,250 | To go on trading mission | vii. 621 | N9 |
| 18 | 10 months | 35 | 3,500 | | vii. 621 | N10 |
| 21 | 10 months | 35 | 3,500 | | viii. 619 | N10 |
| 14 | 10 months | 38,666 | 3,866 | | vii. 621 ² | N9 |
| 3 | 12 months | 10 | 0,833 | | ix. 616 | 1979/80 |
| 5 | 12 months | 15 | 1,250 | | vi. 620 | N2 |
| 22 | 12 months | >30 | >2,500 | To go on trading mission | ix. 616 | N10 |

c. Wages per month: being paid in advance cuts the wages, and working abroad pays better.

| | Monthly salary (in shekels) | Total salary (in shekels) | Length | Nature of employment and other special arrangements | Contract date | Assur archive |
|----|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|--|-----------------------|------------------|
| 3 | 0,833 | 10 | 12 months | Third party (father) takes wages Wages already received | ix. 616 | 1979-80 |
| 4 | 1,000 | 1 | 1 month | To harvest Wages already received | iv. 631 | 1990 |
| 20 | 1,166 | 11,666 | 10 months | Third party takes wages | vii. 619 | N10 |
| 5 | 1,250 | 15 | 12 months | Wages to pay off existing debt | vi. 620 | N2 |
| 10 | 1,250 | 12,5 | 10 months | Third party (father) takes wages | vii. 624 | N9 |
| 7 | 1,750 | 17,5 | 10 months | Guarantor appointed | viii. 629 | N9 |
| 17 | 1,875 | 15 | 8 months | | vii. 624 | N10 |
| 12 | 2,000 | 14 | 7 months | To go on trading mission Guarantor appointed | vii. 624 | N9 |
| 15 | 2,000 | 14 | 7 months | To go on trading mission Third party takes wages | x. 628 | N10 |
| 6 | 2,222 | 20 | 9 months | | viii. 631 | N9 |
| 23 | 2,333 | 4,666 | 2 months | | x. 622 | N31 |
| 22 | >2,500 | >30 | 12 months | To go on trading mission | ix. 616 | N10 |
| 13 | 3,250 | 32,5 | 10 months | To go on trading mission | vii. 621 | N9 |
| 18 | 3,500 | 35 | 10 months | | vii. 621 | N10 |
| 21 | 3,500 | 35 | 10 months | | viii. 619 | N10 |
| 8 | 3,750 | 30 | 8 months | | viii. 625 | N9 |
| 14 | 3,866 | 38,666 | 10 months | | vii. 621 ² | N9 |

d. Distribution of contracts over the seasons: mostly autumn and winter (September to January)

| | Contract date | Length | Monthly salary (in shekels) | Nature of employment | Assur archive |
|----|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 4 | iv. 631 | 1 month | 1,000 | To harvest | 1990 |
| 12 | vi. 623 | 7 months | 2,000 | To go on trading mission | N9 |
| 5 | vi. 620 | 12 months | 1,250 | | N2 |
| 17 | vii. 624 | 8 months | 1,875 | | N10 |
| 10 | vii. 624 | 10 months | 1,250 | | N9 |
| 13 | vii. 621 | 10 months | 3,250 | To go on trading mission | N9 |
| 18 | vii. 621 | 10 months | 3,500 | | N10 |
| 14 | vii. 621 ² | 10 months | 3,866 | | N9 |
| 20 | vii. 619 | 10 months | 1,166 | | N10 |
| 6 | viii. 631 | 9 months | 2,250 | | N9 |
| 7 | viii. 629 | 10 months | 1,750 | | N9 |
| 8 | viii. 625 | 8 months | 3,750 | | N9 |
| 21 | viii. 619 | 10 months | 3,500 | | N10 |
| 16 | viii. 625 | [...] | [...] | | N10 |
| 11 | viii. 623 | 10 months | not given | | N9 |
| 19 | viii. 621 | [...] | [...] | | N10 |
| 9 | ix. 625 | 9 months | [...] | | N9 |
| 3 | ix. 616 | 12 months | 0,833 | | 1979-80 |
| 22 | ix. 616 | 12 months | >2,500 | To go on trading mission | N10 |
| 15 | x. 628 | 7 months | 2,000 | To go on trading mission | N10 |
| 23 | x. 622 | 2 months | 2,333 | | N31 |

e. Distribution of contracts over the years (NB: Year sequence after 648 is uncertain!)

| | Date | Length | Total salary (in shekels) | Monthly salary (in shekels) | Nature of employment | Assur archive |
|----|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 4 | iv. 631 | 1 month | 1 | 1 | To harvest | 1990 |
| 6 | viii. 631 | 9 months | 20 | 2,250 | | N9 |
| 7 | viii. 629 | 10 months | 17,5 | 1,750 | | N9 |
| 15 | x. 628 | 7 months | 14 | 2 | To go on trading mission | N10 |
| 8 | viii. 625 | 8 months | 30 | 3,750 | | N9 |
| 16 | viii. 625 | [...] | 4 | [...] | | N10 |
| 9 | ix. 625 | 9 months | [...] | [...] | | N9 |
| 17 | vii. 624 | 8 months | 15 | 1,875 | | N10 |
| 10 | vii. 624 | 10 months | 12,5 | 1,250 | | N9 |
| 12 | vi. 623 | 7 months | 14 | 2 | To go on trading mission | N9 |
| 11 | viii. 623 | 10 months | not given | not given | | N9 |
| 23 | x. 622 | 2 months | 4,666 | 2,333 | | N31 |
| 13 | vii. 621 | 10 months | 32,5 | 3,250 | To go on trading mission | N9 |
| 18 | vii. 621 | 10 months | 35 | 3,500 | | N10 |
| 14 | vii. 621 ² | 10 months | 38,666 | 3,866 | | N9 |
| 19 | viii. 621 | [...] | 15 | [...] | | N10 |
| 5 | vi. 620 | 12 months | 15 | 1,250 | | N2 |
| 20 | vii. 619 | 10 months | 11,666 | 1,166 | | N10 |
| 21 | viii. 619 | 10 months | 35 | 3,500 | | N10 |
| 3 | ix. 616 | 12 months | 10 | 0,833 | | 1979-80 |
| 22 | ix. 616 | 12 months | >30 | >2,500 | To go on trading mission | N10 |

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EDITED BY

Piotr Steinkeller
Michael Hudson



COVER ART: A stone relief of the Pre-Sargonic ruler of Lagash named Ur-Nanshe (ca. 2400 BC = ED IIIa). AO 2344.

The upper register of the relief shows the construction of a temple, with Ur-Nanshe carrying a corvée basket (*tupšikku*). In the lower register, a feast culminating the construction is depicted.

Photo by Philipp Bernard. Courtesy of the Louvre Museum.

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Hirschbach/Dresden, April 2005

