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A Neo-Assyrian Legal Document from Tell Sitak

KAREN RADNER

Abstract

This contribution offers the publication of a fragmentary Neo-Assyrian private legal document, most likely a conveyance of land and people, from the fortified site of Tell Sitak in the province of Sulaymaniyah, Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq. The site is situated in the Assyrian province of Mazamua (or Zamua) and can perhaps be identified with the fortress of Larbusa. It offers further support for the identification of the ancient city of Arrakdi with Sulaymaniyah.

Introduction

Nicholas Postgate is one of the most prolific Ancient Near Eastern specialists and is famous for his far-ranging interests and expertise as an archaeologist, philologist and historian. Among his many works, one of my firm favourites is *Fifty Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents* (1976). Now nearly forty years after its publication, this volume has lost none of its value as a Vademecum for anyone wishing to access this rich text genre. I bought my copy at Foyles in Charing Cross Road in 1993 and it is arguably the most battered book in my possession, having travelled routinely with me to the field in Syria, Turkey and Iraq – as much an invaluable working aid as a talisman for the fledgling epigrapher. Another favourite is the article “The Assyrian army in Zamua” (2000), a classic study of the composition of the armed forces of the Assyrian Empire on the basis of a close reading of a letter from the state correspondence.

I am very pleased to offer to Nicholas, in gratitude and admiration, the edition of a text that is linked to both of these works. A legal document from Mazamua (or Zamua), it is the first Neo-Assyrian text to be excavated in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq whose archaeological exploration has recently begun again. Unearthed in 2010 at Tell Sitak, the small fragment offers information on the Assyrian presence in the province of Mazamua, which in the 9th to 7th centuries BC corresponded to the northern part of today’s province of Suleymaniyah (or Slemani).

The Find Context

Tell Sitak (35° 38′ 31″ N, 45° 30′ 10″ E) is situated within the town of Sitak in the district of the same name. It lies some 10 km northeast of the city of Sulaymaniyah as the crow flies but on the other side of the Azmir mountain range which delineates the valley of the Tanjero River,



Fig. 1. Hand copy of ST 47, by the author.

a tributary of the Diyala, to the northeast. The site has a size of 0.2 ha and is located at an elevation of 971 m above sea level on a ridge overlooking the Shar Bazher high plain. The site was discovered when building activities in a new part of the town of Sitak exposed rich ceramic finds and stone foundations. The Sulaymaniyah Department of Antiquities subsequently undertook salvage excavations in October 2010.

The results of these works were limited because of a lack of time but also because of the relatively poor state of preservation encountered. They have been published by the archaeologists who undertook these excavations, Saber Ahmed Saber and Hussein Hamza, and the following information on the tablet's find context draws on their report, which I was kindly allowed to use prior to its publication (now: Saber *et al.* 2014). I would like to thank Kamal Rasheed, director of the Board of Antiquities and Heritage in Sulaymaniyah, and Hashim Hama Abdulla, director of the Archaeological Museum of Sulaymaniyah, for the opportunity to work with the tablet in September 2012, when I made the hand copy (fig. 1) and took the photographs (fig. 2–3) published here. My thanks also to Simone Mühl (Munich) for generously sharing her views on the archaeology of the region. On 3 September 2016, I had the opportunity to visit the site which is now entirely covered by housing.

The fragmentary clay tablet from Tell Sitak was found in Level 2 during which the site was heavily fortified, with massive stone walls and watch towers. Although disturbed by the later Sassanian-period settlement of Level 1, the material remains of Level 2 allow its safe attribution to Iron Age III. Underneath the constructions of Level 2, remains of buildings of the earlier Level 3 have been exposed. The tablet fragment comes from a floor inside of the partially exposed building in Area C, which the excavators designated as Structure 2 (locus 1). It was given the find number ST 47 and is now kept in the Archaeological Museum of Sulaymaniyah.

The Tablet

ST 47 is only a small fragment. While the thickness of 2,5 cm represents the original dimensions of the tablet, its top and bottom are lost and the length is therefore incompletely preserved at 4,0 cm; also the right and left hand edges are broken off and the remaining width is 2,7 cm. Only a small amount of the left hand edge is lost, as is clear both from the curvature of the tablet and the text. It is less straight-forward to establish how much is missing from the right hand edge, as the lines of writing habitually continue onto this edge with Neo-Assyrian legal texts. But it seems that a little bit more is missing here than on the left hand side: enough so



Fig. 2. Photo of the obverse of ST 47, by the author.



Fig. 3. Photo of the reverse of ST 47, by the author.

that, in lines 2' and 6' of the obverse, the personal names could have been recorded, of which presently only the first wedges of the first sign survive. Seemingly the best indication of how much is lost is offered by line 5', where is virtually certain that only two signs are missing. But although it is reasonable, due to the spelling of the professional titles on the reverse, to restore LÚ*.MEŠ (with the short version of only five wedges for the first sign) one cannot exclude that the much longer, full version of the sign was used instead.

The fragment is inscribed with well formed Neo-Assyrian cuneiform characters. It is sealed not with the impressions of a seal but of fingernails, a practice that is attested throughout the Neo-Assyrian period for private legal texts (Radner 1997: 38 with n. 177). The remainders of three such imprints are preserved on the top left corner of the obverse, just above the horizontal line that separates the sealing space from the text.

Already the sealing suggests that this is a legal document, and the remaining text confirms this. It concerns a field and seven men. The document is most likely to have recorded their sale, as the tablet format is of the typical format for the conveyance type (Postgate 1976: 4, 11–28) but unfortunately, the text breaks off before the characteristic clauses start. Although it is less probable it cannot be excluded that the transaction documented here was an inheritance division (see commentary on line 1'), for which the same tablet format was used. The very badly

worn reverse of the fragment preserves part of the witness list. The text breaks off just above the date, which would have been inscribed below the empty space underneath the witness list.

Obverse:

Beginning lost

Traces of three fingernail impressions

1'	[P]AP ² É 20 ANŠE A.ŠÀ.[GA ²]	In total, an estate of twenty hom-
2'	[^{PN} Di ²]-a-ra-a-a-ú ^{PNrd1} [x x (x)]	ers of field, (and) [Di]arayau,
3'	[^{PN} B]i-su-nu ^{PN} Di-i-[x x (x)]	[PN ₂], Bissunu, Di[. . .], [. . .]
4'	[^{PN} x x]x-me-nu ^{PN} Ku-x[x x (x)]	menu, Ku[. . .] (and) [Na]mārī,
5'	[^{PN} Na ² -m]a-ri PAB 7 [LÚ*.MEŠ]	a total of seven men, the people
6'	[Z]I.MEŠ ša ^{PN} PAP-[x x]	of Ahu-[. . .], a son of the city of
7'	A URU.A ^r rak ¹ -[di]	Arrak[di], [. . .]

Remainder lost

Reverse:

Beginning lost

1'	Parts of three wedges	[. . .].
2'	[IGI ^{PNdx}]-KUR-LAL L[Ú*.x x x]	[Witness . . .]-mātu-taqqin, [. . .].
3'	[IGI ^{PNx x}]-GIŠ LÚ*.[x x x]	[Witness . . .]-lēšir, [. . .].
4'	[IGI ^{PN} ŠU.2]-Aš-šur-ša-bat	[Witness Qāt]-Aššūr-šabat.

Empty space

Remainder lost

Obv. 1': The first part of the line could be restored as [HA.L]A = *zittu* "share", in which case the text would document an inheritance division. The identification of the owner of the seven men in lines 6'–7' does not seem to fit the expected pattern of such a document, however. For examples see Postgate 1976: no. 18 and 19.

Obv. 2': The first personal name contains very likely the element *d/tiara* which is attested several times in names of an unknown language affiliation among the limited onomasticon known for the region of Mazamua (Zadok 2002: 93). The element forms part of the names of three regional rulers: ^{PN}Ki-ir-ti-a-ra // ^{PN}Ki-ir-te-a-ra of Larbusa, a contemporary of Assurnasirpal II (r. 883–859 BC; PNA 2/I, 620); ^{PN}Ni-ik-di-a-ra // ^{PN}Ni-ik-de-ra // ^{PN}Nik-de-(e)-ra of Idu, a contemporary of Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BC; PNA 2/II, 960); and ^{PN}Me-eq-di-a-ra, the father of a ruler contemporaneous with Šamši-Adad V (r. 823–811; PNA 2/II, 749).

Obv. 3': Bissunu "Their house", a well attested Assyrian name, is a reasonably certain restoration here (PNA 1/II, 348).

Obv. 5': Namārī "My brightness" is a feasible restoration for an Assyrian name, albeit one that is so far only attested in composite Neo-Assyrian names; cf. Namārī-Dādi "My brightness is Dādi" (PNA 2/II, 923).

Obv. 7': The spelling URU.A^rrak¹-[di] for the city of Arrakdi in Mazamua, with the sign MUNUS in second position, has close parallels in a text from Kalhu (Postgate 1973: no. 157: 3': URU.Ar-rak-[di]) and in an inscription of Assurnasirpal II (Grayson 1991: A.0.101.17 iii 102: KUR.Ár-rak-di-a; parallel passage in A.0.101.1 ii 77: URU.A-ra-ak-di). The toponym is also at-

tested in a letter of the Sargon correspondence (SAA 5 227: 20, r. 9: URU.A-*ra-ak-di*) and in the so-called Mazamua Itinerary (Levine 1989: 77–78: 19: [URU.A]*r-ra-ak-di*; 21: [URU.A-*ra*]-*ak-d[i]*; rev. 4: U[RU].*Ar-ra-ak-di*). – When denoting a man from a particular city, the use of the logogram DUMU for *māru* “son” is more common than the spelling with A. Note e.g., for a man from Nineveh in SAA 1 204: 5 and SAA 7 115 rev. i 4: DUMU URU.Ni-*nu-a*; SAA 11 160: 8, SAA 11 222 rev. 6 and SAA 14 215 rev. 10: DUMU URU.NINA; SAA 6 121 rev. 3′: DUMU URU.NINA-*a*; from Arbail in SAA 13 186 rev. 10′ and SAA 14 425 rev. 24: DUMU URU.A-*rba-ìl*; and from Babylon in SAA 7 34: 5′: DUMU URU.KÁ.DIN[GIR.KI].

Rev. 2′–4′: These are all typical Assyrian names, albeit partly broken. The professional titles of the first two witnesses are unfortunately broken away after the determinative.

Historical and Geographical Considerations

Without its find context, this tablet fragment would not have much to offer. But as we know that it comes from Tell Sitak, it constituted upon its discovery in 2010 the first Neo-Assyrian archival document to have been found in the eastern regions of the Assyrian Empire. As chance has it, another Neo-Assyrian legal document has since been found in Qalat-i Dinka in the Peshdar Plain in 2013, a slave sale dated to 725 BC (Radner 2015; Radner 2016: 17–18). Until then, all of the private legal documents discovered outside of the Assyrian heartland had originated in the western provinces, most importantly the sites in modern Syria. After the supposed Neo-Assyrian tablets found in 1970 at Choga Gavaneh, the settlement mound of Islamabad-e Gharb (formerly Shahabad) in Kermanshah Province in Iran (Kordevani 1971) turned out to date to the early second millennium BC (Abdi & Beckman 2007; correct the distribution map given in Radner 2011: 305), the tablet from Tell Sitak offered the first concrete evidence that Assyrian writing and legal conventions were practiced also in the eastern parts of the empire for purposes other than those directly linked to the state (state correspondence, official inscriptions). This is not surprising, of course, but given that materials from the substantial Assyrian holdings in the Zagros and beyond (cf. Radner 2013) are still severely limited, this tablet and the text from the Peshdar Plain are very welcome additions and moreover raises hope that more, and more substantial, cuneiform documents will be unearthed as archaeological exploration in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq intensifies.

The tablet from Tell Sitak comes from the Assyrian province of Mazamua. When several small principalities were incorporated into the empire in 842 BC they were combined into one province called Mazamua (Radner in Altaweel et al. 2012: 12–15). The resultant Assyrian administrative unit encompassed the Shahrizor plain and some of the high plains in the mountains to its northeast (Shar Bazher) as well as the nearby lands along the Lesser Zab. The province remained part of the Empire until its disintegration in the late 7th century BC. Our tablet dates to the time of Assyrian control and although it is difficult to be more specific, the appearance of the tablet and the script suggest a dating to the later part of that period, in the late 8th or 7th century, as the earlier legal texts tend to be bulkier in format, with a larger script.

Apart from offering a possible new attestation for a personal name with the regionally typical element *d/tiara* (see commentary on line 2′), the most important piece of specific information in our text is the mention of the city of Arrakdi. The proprietor of the field and the

seven men, whose transfer of ownership is recorded by our document, is qualified as a “son of Arrakdi”. It is at present unclear where the Assyrian governor of Mazamua resided, but Arrakdi is a very good candidate as the city is arguable the most important site in the northern part of the province. According to the Assurnasirpal inscriptions, the city had the Assyrian name Tukultī-Aššūr-šabat (Grayson 1991: A.0.101.1 ii 77; A.0.101.17 iii 102–103). According to the so-called Mazamua Itinerary (Levine 1993), Arrakdi is the first city that the traveller coming from the direction of central Assyria reaches in Mazamua when travelling across the Qara Dagh mountains through the Bazyan Pass and the Tasluja Pass, the Assyrian “Passes of Bābīte”. When moving onwards from Arrakdi, so continues the Mazamua Itinerary, the traveller reached the city of Dūr-Aššūr which is most probably located at Yasin Tepe (where Neo-Assyrian ceramics, including Palace Ware, were found: S. Mühl in Altaweel et al. 2012: 26, 28 fig. 16 [SSP 2]), via the still unidentified cities of URU.*Ba-ar-zu-un-di* and URU.*Na-pi-gi*.

Based on the Mazamua Itinerary and other geographical information, Louis D. Levine (1993: 87) suggested that Arrakdi should be located “perhaps close to Suleimaniyeh” (cf. also Liverani 1992: 49). That this city is now attested in a text found at nearby Tell Sitak would seem to lend support to his reasoning although the precise location of Arrakdi remains unclear. The settlement mound of Mellikindi in what is today the old town of Sulaymaniyah is a very good candidate. It is no longer accessible today, as it was destroyed in 1784 when the city of Sulaymaniyah was founded as the new capital of the Baban dynasty (K. Radner in Altaweel et al. 2012: 17–18). James Claudius Rich (1836: I 119–120) describes this as follows:

There was an ancient mount [sic] here, which they pared away to suit the foundations of the palace, which was built in the time of Abdurrahman Pasha. Some coins were then found.

And in a footnote to this passage:

There was a village round this old mount [sic]. The village was called Mellikindi, *quasi* Mellik Hindi, or the village of the Indian king. The Pasha told me, that in cutting away the mount [sic] large urns, with fragments of bones in them, were discovered; also an inscription, which was thrown away, as nobody could read it. He also said that, not long ago, he himself, in digging down in the palace for some repairs, found fragments of urns and bones at great depth.

Although it is clear from this account that the now lost settlement mound at Mellikindi was substantial it does not emerge whether there were Neo-Assyrian layers. The mention of an illegible inscription could well refer to a cuneiform monument as anything inscribed in Aramaic, Greek, Pahlevi or Arabic script would have been easily recognized. The Baban palace does not exist anymore but Simone Mühl (pers. comm.) suggested to me as its most likely site the position now occupied by the elevated, substantial administrative building (35° 33′ 28″ N, 45° 26′ 36″ E) erected during the British Mandate period.

Tell Sitak itself is certainly too remote in its mountain location to make a viable candidate for identification with Arrakdi. Its position in the Shar Bazher high plain (Edmonds 1957) and the proximity to the Shakh-i Pir-a Magrun, ancient Mount Nimuš (Radner in Altaweel et al. 2012: 13), suggests rather a connection with the fortified city of URU.*La-ar-bu-sa*, the stronghold of Kirtiara, which, together with the “eight cities in its environs”, is mentioned in the annals of Assurnasirpal II (Grayson 1991: A.0.101.1 ii 39–40; A.0.101.17 iii 4–5) as situated “in the plain of Mount Nimuš which no-one had ever seen”. Tell Sitak is a good candidate for identification

with the fortress of Larbusa, as not only the geographical position fits but also as the fortifications of Level 2 excavated in 2010 can easily be reconciled with Assurnasirpal's descriptions.

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