

PALACE NAMES AND EPITHETS, AND THE VAULTED BUILDING*

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The cuneiformist, when asked to talk on the vaulted building in the Southern Palace of the Chaldaean kings at Babylon, very quickly finds himself short of textual material. The documentation that he does have comprises two different kinds. First there are the inscriptions of the palace's royal builders, Nebuchadnezzar II and Neriglissar.¹ These describe the palace in terms of its location in the city quarter Ka-dingirra, bounded by the river, the procession street, the city wall and the eastern canal, but this topographical lay-out is already very well known from the archaeology. Few other descriptive details are given, and none that would help define the use to which the various parts of the palace – for example, the vaulted building – might be put. This of course is no surprise. Royal inscriptions exist to record the fact of the building, but not, other than in the most general terms, to describe its function. Texts that do describe buildings in great detail do exist for Babylon, it is true. But these are concerned with the temple of Marduk and other religious edifices,² and so far none mentions the palace. The clay map fragment described by Unger as an “Antike Karte des Stadtschlosses (of Babylon)” is not easily reconciled with the topography of the ruins of Qasr, and must depict some other location.³

The second kind of textual material bearing on the palace that is available to us is the cuneiform documents actually excavated in the palace chambers. The problem here is that work of the kind now published for the archives and libraries of Assur,⁴ which enables one to ascertain what tablet was found where, has yet to be done for Babylon. This means that there is very little information available regarding the find-spots of the cuneiform tablets retrieved from this palace by the German excavators, and what information there is harbours contradictions.⁵ So far the most significant detail that has emerged concerning tablets found in the southern palace is the discovery of an archive of 290 administrative tablets preserved in rubbish accumulated on the floor of the room housing the staircase leading down into the vaulted building.⁶ These tablets, which remain for the most part unpublished, are concerned with the delivery and issue of oil, grain, dates and spices during a period from the tenth to 35th years of Nebuchadnezzar II, but the most famous documents in the archive are the four oil-ration lists known as the Jehoiachin tablets, which mention the exiled former king of Judah.⁷ The likelihood is that these tablets were thrown or fell down the stairwell from an upper storey after the cellar was abandoned. Their presence points to the existence somewhere in the building of an office one of the functions of which was the issue of oil and barley rations to persons dependent on the palace.

The question then is whether the vaulted building itself stored these items. The general consensus of archaeologists and architects is that buildings with the kind of ground plan exhibited by the vaulted building – long, narrow chambers in parallel – were indeed magazines, and this is reiterated by many contributors to the conference.⁸ The immense thickness of the cellar walls – thicker than any others in the palace apart from the exterior wall and the monumental facades – would of course have provided excellent insulation. The lack of mul-

tiple entrances to the core building of the cellar, and its deep location, would add to the general coolness of the lowest storey. The suitability of the cellar itself for the storage of grain is still debated (some consider it too awkward of access and too damp; note also the lack of a proper floor). But this deep level may well have been used to store those more perishable food stuffs that today would usually be refrigerated, among them, no doubt, the many fine and fancy items supplied to the royal table.

This suggestion, that the cellar was a cold-store, does not exclude the possibility that the upper storey, or one above it, could have been a granary.⁹ But it should be mentioned that the archive from the vaulted building gives specific information on the location of the royal granaries, from which we learn that not all the grain was kept in the same place, or even within the palace walls: mentioned in this connection are “the great grain-heap (*karmu*) in the quarter Ka-dingirra next to the palace”, “the great grain-heap of the palace”, and grain-heaps “at the workshop gate between the moat wall and the rampart”, “next to the quay wall on the river”, “to the right of the Ishtar Gate” and “next to the house of Nabû-zēra-iddina”.¹⁰ Accordingly it does not follow that any grain at all was kept in the vaulted building. So much only can be conjectured about this building from the documentary evidence.

Given the unhelpfulness of the cuneiform sources in determining the practical functions of the various parts of Nebuchadnezzar’s Southern Palace, I hope you will forgive me going on an excursion. My intention, in the time remaining to me, is to give a brief survey of the names and epithets of the palace in Babylonia and Assyria, which will shed some light on the cosmological function of the palace – its place in the ancient Mesopotamian world-view.

To begin in the Middle Babylonian period, the Kassite king Kurigalzu named his new palace at Dūr-Kurigalzu Egal-kišarra, “Palace of the Whole World”.¹¹ There is also a jewellers’ archive from the same city, dating to the reign of Kashtiliash, that makes repeated reference to a Palace of the Stag and a Palace of the Mountain Sheep.¹² In the Middle Assyrian period one finds two palaces of Tukultī-Ninurta I mentioned by name: at Assur E-lugal-umun-kurkurra, “House of the King, Lord of All Lands”,¹³ and at Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta Egal-me-šarra, “Palace of the Myriad *Me’s*”.¹⁴ In later Assyria Tiglath-pileser III built a complex of four palaces at Nimrud, ancient Kalah, called the Palace of Joy, Palace which Bears Abundance, Palace which Pays Homage to the King, and Palace which Prolongs the Life of their Builder.¹⁵ In Sargonid times there are named Sargon II’s palace at Dūr-Šarru-kēn, Egal-gabari-nutuka, “Palace without an Equal”,¹⁶ Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh, Egal-zagsa-nutuka, “Palace without a Rival”,¹⁷ and Esarhaddon’s palace at Nineveh, Ešgal-šiddu-dua, “Palace which Administers All”.¹⁸

No Sumerian ceremonial name like those of these Assyrian palaces is yet known to us for the palaces of Nabopolassar and his successors at Babylon. But two inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar II heap on the Southern Palace an abundance of epithets, and these are equally of interest. First, in the Grotefend cylinder, it is called “palace, abode of my kingship, bond of the great people, seat of pleasure and joy, where the savage are tamed”.¹⁹ To this one may add the East India House inscription and parallel texts, in which the same palace is described as “palace, house of the people’s wonder, bond of the land, pure chamber, sanctum

of kingship”.²⁰ Koldewey imagined the eight epithets of these inscriptions as each referring to one of four divisions of the palace, so equating the two sets of four epithets,²¹ but such an interpretation is not borne out by the texts, and the division of the palace, with its five great courtyards, into four units is in itself unconvincing. Anyone familiar with the language of Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions will recognise in these passages the literary device of an accumulation of epithets that is a common feature of the genre. Several of these or very similar epithets occur singly in apposition to palaces in earlier royal inscriptions,²² and this demonstrates that the composer of Nebuchadnezzar’s inscription was simply collecting and expanding on traditional terminology rather than making distinctions between the component architectural units of the palace.

If these palace names and epithets are organized not historically but semantically, it can be seen that they fall into five groups, each of which has something particular to say about the nature and function of the ancient Mesopotamian palace.²³

First and foremost the palace is the royal seat. In this regard note the name of Tukultī-Ninurta I’s palace “House of the King, Lord of All Lands”, the common palace epithet “abode of kingship”, and the use by Nebuchadnezzar II of the two words *atmānu* and *kummu*, both of which signify private chambers.

Second the palace is the seat of the government, the administrative centre of the state. Here fit the names of the palace of Kurigalzu, “Palace of the Whole World”, and those of Tukultī-Ninurta I and Esarhaddon, “Palace of the Myriad *Me’s*” (where the *me’s* are the regulations which govern the universe) and “Palace which Administers All”. Here also belongs the term “bond” (*markasu*) used by Ashurbanipal and Nebuchadnezzar. *markasu* has a cosmological significance, denoting that which binds together and thus controls things which would otherwise drift apart – sometimes the component parts of the universe or the nations of the world, but in Nebuchadnezzar’s epithets the diverse elements of the Chaldaean kingdom.²⁴

Next the palace is a huge and imposing building: compare the names of Sargon’s and Sennacherib’s palaces, “Palace without an Equal”, “Palace without a Rival”, and Nebuchadnezzar’s phrase “house of the people’s wonder”.

The palace is very naturally a place of pleasure, as demonstrated by the name of one of Tiglath-pileser’s palaces at Kalah, “Palace of Joy”, and Nebuchadnezzar’s epithet “seat of pleasure and joy”. The reference is not only to the delightful surroundings and lifestyle enjoyed by the royal court, but also to the use of the palace as a repository for the royal treasures and, in Chaldaean times, the booty of empire.²⁵

Finally, and on its own among the names and epithets collected here, is Nebuchadnezzar’s phrase “place where the savage are tamed”. The word *kunnušu* is literally “to force to bow” of course, and the allusion of the epithet is to the forced submission of captive enemies at the royal feet. This kind of ritual humiliation of newly subdued foreign potentates is often expressed by the term *ana šēpī šuknušu*, “to make bow at the feet”,²⁶ but an early and more informative attestation is the treatment meted out to the handcuffed and blindfolded Tiri-gan, defeated king of Gutium: “Utu-ḥengal made him lie prostrate at his feet in public, and

placed a foot on his neck”.²⁷ Nebuchadnezzar’s phrase recalls the name of one of the processional streets of Babylon, Kunuš-kadru, “Bow Down O Savage!”, which may well have been a traditional route for triumphal processions.²⁸

Such a procession and ritual humiliation may have marked the beginning of Jehoiachin’s exile. The oil ration texts indicate that he and the male relatives and fellow Judaeans who joined him in captivity were housed in the palace along with other foreigners: craftsmen and refugees from other subjugated or neighbouring countries. Whether any of these were prisoners of war like Jehoiachin is not immediately clear. There is ample evidence for the presence of foreign craftsmen in Babylonia in most periods, but the emphatic and repeated references in the Hebrew sources to the deportation of craftsmen and metalworkers to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar confirms that the price of resistance to Babylonian power was not only the usual spoils of war, the country’s material wealth, but also, in the special skills of its craftsmen, its human resources.²⁹ The detention of a few such people in the palace, where they were no doubt employed to good purpose, and the presence there of foreign nobles as, in effect, political prisoners, are facts which add a further insight into the description of the palace as “the place where the savage are tamed”.

Notes

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¹ As listed by Berger, *AOAT* 4/1, pp. 105, 108.

² The E-sagil Tablet, and other metrological texts: see my *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, chapter 3 (in press).

³ Unger, *Babylon*, p. 254, no. 5; in fact there is no mention of a palace on the fragment: the rectangular area bounded by the Arahtu (Euphrates), a fortification (AN.ZA.GÀR = *dimtu*) and the “King’s Ditch” (e.lugal = *iki šarri*) is not according to its label the “Grundstück des Palastes” (so Unger) but simply the “area of the interior” (*eqel(a.šà) bīta(é)-nu*).

⁴ O. Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur* (2 vols., Uppsala, 1985–86).

⁵ E.g. BE 14518, according to Koldewey, *WVDOG* 15, p. 31, from the temple of Ninurta, but when recently published, from Qasr (“S-Zimmer 2”: *VAS* 24, p. 18). Note also the litany published by Koldewey in photograph as BE 14427, from the temple of Ninurta (op. cit., p. 31 and figs. 43–44), but now in *VAS* 24 (no. 22) as BE 14487, from “(Kasr), NW Hof vor der Tür”.

⁶ BE 28097–28327, 28331–28379: Koldewey, *WVDOG* 54, p. 49. Note also that a legal and administrative archive from the 5th century BC, belonging to the satrap Bēlšunu, and deriving from Qasr (p/q 14/15, across the city wall from the Southern Palace: Koldewey, *WVDOG* 55, p. 24), is now being reconstructed by M. W. Stolper: see *Paléorient* 11/2 (1985), pp. 64 f.; *AJA* 92 (1988), pp. 587 f.; and literature there cited.

⁷ See further Weidner, “Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten” in *Mélanges Dussaud*, pp. 923–35. Tablets which mention “Jehoiachin king of Judah” (*Ya’u(ya)kīn šar māt Yahūdu/Yakūdu*) by name are the oil ration lists BE 28122, 28178, 28186 (dated Nebuchadnezzar 13) and 28232. Also in the lists are at least five “sons of the king of Judah” and eight other “Judeans” (*Yahūdāyū*), as well as craftsmen and refugees from Phoenicia, Palestine, Egypt, Persia, Media, Ionia and Lydia. As has long been known, the Jehoiachin tablets confirm the Hebrew sources, which state that Jehoiachin went into exile to preserve the independence of Judah, being taken to Babylon along with his mother, wives, members of his court and other hostages in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 24 10–16; but the last month of the seventh in the Babylonian Chronicle: Grayson, *Chronicles*, p. 102, 12).

After 37 years, in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, Awēl-Marduk, Jehoiachin was released from prison and given elevated rank in the royal court at Babylon (II Kings 25 27–30; Jeremiah 52 31–34). The oil ration texts come from the period of imprisonment, but as D. Winton Thomas has remarked, “the [Hebrew] term ‘prison’ [*bēt kele’*] may not of course imply anything more than house-arrest” (*Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 85). One significant point to be made is that Jehoiachin appears to have been allocated twenty times the usual ration of $\frac{1}{2}$ *qū* of oil found in the documents of this archive. As Weidner suggested (*op. cit.*, p. 927), the explanation is most probably that his ration covered the needs of his dependents, namely his wives and perhaps a young family, as well as his own.

⁸ Note that Koldewey’s conclusion was also that the vaults were a magazine, though he thought it most likely that valuables were kept there: *WVDOG* 54, p. 58.

⁹ The missing ground floor (i.e. the storey above the cellar) of the vaulted building was itself about $1\frac{1}{2}$ metres below the level of the palace floors and corridors (Koldewey, *WVDOG* 54, p. 46), like a sirdab, perhaps also for reasons of temperature control. Might this storey, sealed as it apparently was with a floor of stone blocks, have made a better granary than the cellar itself?

¹⁰ Weidner, *Mélanges Dussaud*, p. 924⁵.

¹¹ Brinkman, *Materials for the Study of Kassite History* I, p. 221, Q.2.50.

¹² Gurney, *Sumer* 9 (1953), pp. 21 ff.

¹³ Weidner, *Tn* 5, 79; 32, 3: *é.lugal.umun.kur.kur.ra*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 51: *é.gal.me.šár.ra bīt kiš-ša-ti*.

¹⁵ II R 67, 84: *ekallāt(é.gal.meš)^{at} hi-da-a-ti na-šá-a hé-gál-li ka-ri-ba šarri(lugal) mu-lab-[bi-r]a e-pi-ši-šin a-na šu-me-ši-in ab-bi*.

¹⁶ Lie, *Sar.*, p. 76, 14; Winckler, *Sar.*, pl. 36, 159: *é.gal.gaba.ri.nu.tuk.a*.

¹⁷ Luckenbill, *OIP* 2, pp. 100, 56; 126, b 3: *é.gal.zag.sá.nu.tuk.a*; 96, 79: *é.gal.zag.ša₄.nu.tuk.a*; 111, 51; 124, 40: *ekal(lu ša) šá-ni-na la i-šu-u*.

¹⁸ Borger, *Esarh.*, p. 62, 42–43: *ěš.gal.šid.dù.dù.a ekallu pa-qi-da-at ka-la-mu*.

¹⁹ I R 66 = *VAB* IV, Nbk 9, iii 27–30: *ekallu mu-ša-ab šar-ru₄-ti-ia ma-ar-ka-às ni-šim ra-bí-a-tim šu-ba-at ri-ša-a-ti ù hi-da-a-tim a-šar ka-ad-ru-tim uk-ta-an-na-šu*.

²⁰ I R 57 = Nbk 15, vii 36-39: *ekallu bīt ta-ab-ra-a-ti ni-ši ma-ar-ka-sa māti*(ma.da) *kum-mu el-lam at-ma-ni-7 šar-ru-ti*; cf. VAS I 38, ii 8-9 // Ball, *PSBA* 11 (1889), pp. 160 f. = Nbk 14, ii 2-3; Zablocka-Berger, *Or NS* 38 (1969), p. 123 = Nbk 46, i 20-21.

²¹ *WVDOG* 54, p. 31.

²² “Abode of kingship” (*mūšab šarrūti*) occurs as a palace epithet in Assyrian royal inscriptions very commonly from the time of Tiglath-pileser III on (see *CAD M/2*, p. 251). “Bond” is an epithet also given to Ashurbanipal’s House of Succession, the residence of the crown prince (Streck, *VAB VII*, 4, i 24: *mar-kas šarru-u-ti*, “bond of kingship”). “Chamber” is used by Sennacherib to describe the old palace at Nineveh (Luckenbill, *OIP* 2, pp. 95, 68; 103, 43: *kum-mu ri-mit be-lu-tú*, “chamber, lordly habitation”).

²³ Leaving aside the palaces at Dūr-Kurigalzu attested in the jewellers’ archive, the significance of whose names is likely to bear upon their respective decorative themes: note especially Gurney, *op. cit.* no. 20, recording the disbursement to the Palace of the Stag of carnelian and lapis lazuli for stags’ bodies and hooves.

²⁴ On *markasu*, literally a mooring rope, as a cosmological term see further *Iraq* 48 (1986), pp. 138 f. The meaning “centre” has been put forward for this word (see *CAD M/1*, p. 283), but this holds good only in a specialized and figurative sense, in that a cosmic bond can be the central node of the universe. Comparison with Merkes, the name of the central mound at Babylon, is philologically unsound, since this is properly Arabic *markaz* (√rkz), “centre, headquarters”, and so not cognate with Akkadian *markasu* (√rks).

²⁵ In this regard note Nebuchadnezzar’s comment on the Southern Palace in *VAS I* 38, ii 27-31: *kaspa ḫurāša ni-sì-iq-ti abni mi-im-ma šu-um-šu šu-qú-ru šu-un-du-lu bu-ša-a ma-ak-ku-ru sè-ma-at ta-na-da-a-tim ú-ga-ri-in qé-re-bu-uš-ša qu-ur-du ta-aš-ri-iḫ-ti ni-ši-ir-ti šar-ru-tim [ú]-na-[a]k-ki-mu li-ib-bu-uš-ša*, “silver, gold, gemstones, all kinds of valuable things in profusion, goods and valuables worthy of renown I heaped up inside it; (items) of splendour and royal treasures I stored within it” (cf. Ball, *PSBA* 11 (1889), pp. 160 f. = *VAB IV*, Nbk 14, ii 19-21).

²⁶ Passim in Assyrian royal inscriptions: see *CAD K*, p. 147.

²⁷ Composite text from Römer, *Or NS* 54 (1985), p. 282, 27-29: *ḏutu.ḫé.gál igi ḏutu.šè gír.ni.šè mu.ná gú.na gír bí.gub*.

²⁸ *Tintir V* 63 (*Babylonian Topographical Texts*); *Ludlul III o* (*BWL*, p. 56). Note also the existence of a divine Kunuš-kadru, who would perhaps be the agent of divine retribution against the king’s enemies (cf. the suggestion of *CAD K*, p. 32, where he is seen as a “deified exclamation [uttered] during the ritual procession”).

²⁹ Note that the deportation of craftsmen and other workers had been a long-established imperial policy of Assyria: see B. Oded, *Mass Deportation and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden, 1979), pp. 54-59, 99-104.