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Epistolographic evidence for trips to Susa by Borsippean priests and for the crisis in Borsippa at the beginning of Xerxes' reign¹

The revolts against Xerxes in the second year of his reign (484 BC) are a major watershed in the history of Babylonia under Persian domination, according to the argument that was proposed by Waerzeggers 2003/4 and, independently and in a slightly different way, by Kessler 2004, and that was subsequently expanded by Baker 2008 (see, e.g., Waerzeggers 2010a: 9). However, a recent essay (Henkelman *et al.* 2011; quotes from p. 452²) that intends to counteract perceived tendencies to use the above studies to reaffirm the image of Xerxes the destroyer of temples that previously had been deconstructed as a product of partisan Greek historiography, concedes that the sources bear witness to “administrative and bureaucratic restructuring”, but it maintains that there is no evidence for “harsh repression or destruction”, and that “the situation has plainly been misunderstood” by studies such as Kleber 2008.³ Xerxes’ actions should be seen “as yet another transformation of the temple administration, not as a total disruption by a hostile outsider”; “Xerxes did not diminish the cult itself by his actions”, since “Xerxes wanted ... to fill posts in the temple administration with new incumbents”. While there can be no return to the

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² See also Heinsch *et al.* 2011.

³ Who, referring to the case of Uruk and basing herself on Kessler, claims that Eanna may have been destroyed under Xerxes, who “nach den Aufständen Strafmaßnahmen gegen babylonische Städte und deren Eliten verhängte” (Kleber 2008: 4).



superficial or even misleading reading of the classical sources that has been identified as such by Kuhrt, Rollinger and others (references in Henkelman *et al.* 2011), one might ask whether the position taken in the latter article in its turn might not be equally in danger of “misunderstanding the situation” by severely underestimating the necessary socio-economic implications of the changes that we see in the sources – the removal of the dominant (priestly) clans of Northern Babylonia from their positions of power. Given the nature of social relationships in this segment of the population with its strong focus on legitimation through patrilineal descent, a principle on which the organization of the cult was also based, it is inconceivable that this group as a whole was replaced by another without a major and disruptive interference of an outside power in cultic practice – in Babylonian self-perception, these priests were by definition irreplaceable; there was no group that legitimately could have taken their place – or that this could have been achieved without the use of force.⁴ The issue has been bedevilled by the fact that much of the discussion is based on potentially ambiguous arguments from silence (the deposition of archives, and the significance of this fact) and that positive evidence about the events leading up to the revolts is scarce.⁵ This paper discusses such a piece of positive evidence which may help to put on a more secure footing the re-evaluation of the entire issue, which remains a task for the future. The texts in question are a few letters, hitherto largely ignored or unpublished, that can be assigned to the Ilšu-abūšu family archive from Borsippa.

The Ilšu-abūšu archive (Ilšu-abūšu A according to Jursa 2005: 88-9) is divided into two parts: the dossier of Rēmūt-Bēl, son of Iddin-Nabû of the Ilšu-abūšu family, and that of Rēmūt-Bēl’s slave, Balātu. Together, the two dossiers span the period between the seventh year of Darius and the second year of Xerxes, when the Borsippean documentation breaks off as a consequence of the rebellions (Waerzeggers 2005: 362; 2010a: 437). Letters are only present in Rēmūt-Bēl’s dossier, texts of which are found in the following Museum collections: 1900-10-13 (London), the former Amherst collection, the Berlin group XIIIa and the A, AB and C groups of the Bodleian Library; scattered additional texts are at Harvard in the Harvard Semitic Museum. Most known male members of the family were prebendary brewers working in Ezida. An important sub-file within Rēmūt-Bēl’s dossier consists of administrative texts (and letters, as will be demonstrated) whose *Sitz-im-Leben* are the voyages to Susa of Borsippean priests and officials in the very last

⁴ When data on cultic organization in Northern Babylonian are again available in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BC, Esangila, quite significantly, turns out to have lost its traditional prebendary system of priestly service (the pertinent documentation can be found in Hackl 2013).

⁵ But note that in the case of Uruk, these changes are documented not only indirectly, through an argument *e silentio*, but through explicit data postdating the rebellions. The implications of this fact have perhaps not been recognized sufficiently.



years of the period spanned by the archive. The Borsippeans were in Susa to fulfil labour and tax duties and presumably for the purpose of representing their interests at the Achaemenid court.⁶

We begin with the letter **No. 1**, AfO 19, 82 No. 36.⁷

No. 1, AfO 19, 82 No. 36: “Letter of Bēl-iddin to Rēmūt-Bēl, my lord. May Bēl and Nabû ordain health and well-being of my lord. Under the protection of the gods I am well. Also ‘Rē’indu, my brothers, my sister(s) and the entire house are well. There is no need to inquire further, do not be anxious. On (every) fourth and seventeenth day I beg (the god) Mār-bīti for my lord’s continuing good health. May Bēl and Nabû let me see you return to Borsippa in good health.”

Bēl-iddin reports to the absent Rēmūt-Bēl the well-being of the members of his household, especially his own and that of ‘Rē’indu. He wishes to calm the anxious traveller and assures him of his regular prayer for his safe return. The sole purpose of the letter is that of establishing and maintaining contact with an absent member (and probable head) of the household. An unpublished and unfortunately damaged letter (**No. 2**, HSM 1899.2.262: Hackl *et al.* (forthcoming), No. 131) of ‘Rē’indu to Rēmūt-Bēl contains, as far as it is preserved, essentially the same formulae, in addition to one specific piece of information to which we will return below.

No. 2, HSM 1899.2.262: “Letter of ‘Rē’indu to Rēmūt-Bēl, my brother. May Nanāya and Sutītu ordain health and well-being of my brother. Under the protection of the gods I am well. Also Bēl-iddin, his brothers, his sisters and the entire house are well. On the fourth and seventeenth day of every month [I beg (or: Bēl-iddin begs) Mār-bīti for my brother’s] continuing good health. (Break) I cannot dispose of (the income resulting from) the sheep offered to Sutītu and the sheep offered to the pedestal of Marduk.” ([im^mre-e²]-in-du a-na / [re-mu]t^{-d}+en šeš-ia / [na]na-a u^dsu-ti-ti / šu-lum u tin šá šeš-ia liq-ba-a / ina giš.mi šá dingir šu-lum a-na-ku / šu-lum a-na^{id}+en-mu / šeš^{meš}-šú nin^{meš}-šú u šu-lum / a-na é gab-bi šá-ki-in ud.4.kam / ud.17.kam šá iti-us-su / [a.é a-na] [tin zi^{meš} šá] / [šeš-ía a-šá-al-la] / (break) / [x x x] [] / [udu.níta] igi^dsu-ti-ti / u udu.níta igi šu(text: SU[?])-bat^damar.utu / ul ú-ka^l-al-la)

⁶ See Hackl in Jursa 2010: 637 for the assignment of these texts to the Ilšu-abūšu archive (but note that the dating is imprecise in that it is based on the other attestations of Rēmūt-Bēl: 7-31 Dar). For the trips of Borsippean nobles to Susa in general see Waerzeggers 2010b.

⁷ Editions will be given only for the crucial published letters OECT 12 C 6 (No. 5) and 4 (No. 6) and for the unpublished letters. For the other texts, only translations are presented here. Full editions of the whole corpus are included in Hackl *et al.* (forthcoming). The present letter comes from the former Amherst collection (Ungnad 1959/60) which contained a number of Ilšu-abūšu texts (Waerzeggers 2005: 362).



The three protagonists are named together in the list of silver expenses OECT 12 A 182 (22.2.2 Xer)⁸ and appear also in other Ilšu-abūšu texts of this kind from the first two years of Xerxes' reign (VS 4, 193, VS 6, 191, VS 6, 311). The nature of the relationship of Bēl-iddin to Rēmūt-Bēl is not spelled out with certainty. He must be a close relative, either a younger brother or a son, of Rēmūt-Bēl, but hitherto no independent evidence for this assumption has been found (Waerzeggers 2010: 738). The way he speaks of “my brothers, my sister(s)” in **No. 1**, while ʿRēʾindu speaks of “Bēl-iddin, his brothers, his sisters” (**No. 2**) suggests that Bēl-iddin was in fact Rēmūt-Bēl's oldest son. ʿRēʾindu is to be identified as either the sister or, more probably, the wife of Rēmūt-Bēl. She addresses him as ‘brother,’ which can be understood either literally or metaphorically, but in any case excludes the possibility of taking ʿRēʾindu as Rēmūt-Bēl's mother.⁹ The affairs of Rēmūt-Bēl and ʿRēʾindu are demonstrably interconnected very closely. In VS 4, 193, a text similar to OECT 12 A 182 mentioned above, a payment is made by Nabû-erība to another man “on Rēmūt-Bēl's order (and) on behalf of ʿRēʾindu” (*ina qībi ša RB ina našparti ša ʿR*). In this text ʿRēʾindu is designated as “mother of Marduk-balāssu-iqbi and Nabû-nādin-aḫi”: children under her care for whom the payment in question is effected; they are probably the children referred to in **Nos. 1** and **2**. In Rēmūt-Bēl's absence, ʿRēʾindu manages the family's estate: VS 6, 191 (13.1.1 <Xer>) for instance is an account of silver expenses (*nikkassū epšū*) in her name; the text presupposes, and in fact explicitly mentions, the absence of a male head of the household.¹⁰ Texts of the archive show Rēmūt-Bēl present in Susa (VS 4, 194, 3.12.1 <Xer>) and contain evidence for the overall organization and financing of the trips of Borsippean notables to the Persian imperial city (VS 6, 194, 18.[x].2 <Xer>), prompting C. Waerzeggers to assume that Rēmūt-Bēl had indeed been in charge “of the organisation of one or several of these trips” including one in the spring season at the end of the first year and the beginning of the second year of Xerxes (Waerzeggers 2010a: 437, Waerzeggers 2010b: 784).¹¹ The present letter dossier must be placed in the context of this voyage or these voyages. The Iranian background and the official nature of the voyages emerges even more clearly from the next letter, **No. 3**, OECT 12 AB 252.¹²

- 8** ʿRēʾindu receives money from Nabû-erība “apart from the expenses of Rēmūt-Bēl and Bēl-iddin” – the former at least was in Susa at the time, see below.
- 9** She is unlikely to be ʿRēʾindu, daughter of Bazūzu, who is mentioned as a recipient of a silver payment in another silver account text of the archive, VS 6, 315 (no date), a text which deals with payments made by Bēl-iddin.
- 10** Rēmūt-Bēl had taken an important sum of money to Babylon (if not further).
- 11** On these texts see now also Tolini 2011: 341-348.
- 12** The text has been collated on the basis of photographs kindly provided by Klaus Wagensonner.



No. 3, OECT 12 AB 252: “Letter of Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin to Rēmūt-Bēl, my brother. May Bēl and Nabû ordain health and well-being of my brother. Bēl (text: Nabû) and Nabû certainly know: from the time you (last) saw me until now I have definitely not met anyone. To Bagadāta [...] (break) and if [...] not [...] write (a letter). The courtier is not supposed to stay with you for long. If it seems useful send word through Kuṣrāya. Under the protection of the gods, your house and your people are well. Give Kuṣrāya whatever he wants from you, and I will give you [silver] as a compensation.”

Again, Rēmūt-Bēl is abroad; here he receives a letter from a former travel companion who has recently returned home. The mention of an Iranian, certainly a royal official, and of a courtier places the letter in an official context, which in the light of the rest of the Ilšū-abūšu archive must be that of the Susa trips of the Borsippian notables. Prosopography bears this out: Bagadāta does not appear elsewhere in Borsippa texts,¹³ but Kuṣrāya is mentioned in VS 6, 312, a silver account belonging to the Ilšū-abūšu archive that is connected to the Susa trips of Rēmūt-Bēl. The sender Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin is to be identified as the governor of Borsippa of that name who is mentioned in **No. 4**, BM 87313 (no. 127 in Hackl *et al.* (forthcoming)), another letter belonging to the dossier referring to the Susa trips.

No. 4, BM 87313: “[Letter] of Aḥḥēmāya to Iddināya, my brother. May Bēl and Nabû ordain health and well-being of my brother. Why haven’t I received a report from you since you left? Note that the letters are in the clothes chest that I have had taken to Nergal-nāšir. Make sure that you yourself give to the governor Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin the letter (destined for him) and to Bēl-aplu-iddina the letter (that is meant for him). Send me a joint report together with them. As for the beer that I have given to Ḥašdāya the ointment maker, write to me to whom he has given it and have the empty vats brought back to me by boat.

Letter of Balātu to Iddināya, my brother. May Bēl and Nabû ordain health and well-being of my brother. Tell Nergal-nāšir: Bulluṭāya will come in the month of Nisānu; he has not achieved anything. Now send me urgently the written report of Nergal-nāšir, of Nabû-bullissu, of Rēmūt-Bēl and your own report. Why did I not receive a letter from you since I left? Speak [to ...] a son of Nabû-ittannu [...] May Bēl and Nabû let me see you return to Ezida in good health.” ([im¹]šēš^{meš}-ma-a] / [a-na] mu-a šēš-ia / ^d+en u ^d+ag šu-lum u tin / šá šēš-ia liq-bu-ú / mi-na-a ul-tu u₄-mu / šá tal-li-ka ṭè-en-ka / ul áš-me a-mur ši-pir-tu₄^{meš} / ina é ki-tin-né-e šá a-na / ^{ld}u.gur-pab ú-še-bi-lu / šak-ka-an at-ta / ši-pir-tu₄ a-na ^{ld}+ag-šēš^{meš}-mu / ^{li}gar umuš ù [ši-pir-tu₄] / [a] na ^{ld}+en-a-s[um-na] / [i]l-di-in / [i]t-ti-š[ú-nu] / [ṭè]-en-ka š[u-pur] / [a-mur] a-na ugu [kaš.sag] / [šá a-na] ḥaš-da-a-a mu-raq²-qu

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Tavernier 2007: 132f., Zadok 2009: 140 Nr. 182. Note the Bagadāta who witnesses a taxation-related text of the Egibi archive dated to 35 Dar (Abraham 2004: No. 16).



/ ad-di-nu a-na mam-ma id-di-nu-šú / [šú-pur^{ur}] u dan-nu-tu ri-qu-tu / [ina^{giš} má^{meš} šu-bi°-lu° / [im
1]ba-la-tu a-na 1mu-a / [šeš-ía^{d+en}] u ^d+ag šu-[lum] u tin šá / šeš-ía / [liq]-bu-ú a-na 1du.gur-pab
qí-[i]-bi / 1[bul]-lu-ṭa-a ina [iti].bár il-[la]-ka / [ù mim-ma ul [i]-pu-uš / en-na kap-du [ṭè]-e-mu šá
1du.gur pab / šá ^d+ag-bul-liṭ-[su 1re-mut]-^{d+en} / u ṭè-e-ka [šú-pu-ur] / mi-na-a ši-pir-ta-[ka ki-i] [al]-
[li+ku] ul ma-ar^{sic} / [a-na 1x x]-[a] dumu šá ^d+ag-it-tan-nu / [x x x] [x] [x x x x x] / [break] / [qí]-i-bi
[^{d+en} u ^d+ag ina šu-lum pa-ni-ku-nu] / ina [é.zi.da] lu-ú-kal-<lim>-u²-in-ni)

The assignment of this letter to the Ilšū-abūšu letter dossier follows from the appearance of Rēmūt-Bēl in the body of the letter and from the numerous prosopographical and contextual links to the archive; also the museum context supports this assumption.¹⁴ The date of the letter to the end of Darius' reign or to the beginning of the reign of Xerxes follows from the archival background and from the context, especially from the mention of the *šākin tēmi* Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin (Waerzeggers 2010a: 70). An obviously lengthy voyage of the addressee, clearly a priest of Ezida, in the company of the *šākin tēmi* and several colleagues, among them Rēmūt-Bēl, cannot but have had Susa as a destination. The sender Aḥḥēmāya can be identified as Aḥḥēmāya/Nabû-rēmāni who appears several times in administrative texts of the Ilšū-abūšu archive in connection with trips to Susa (VS 6, 307, 309, 312). The addressee Iddināya is possibly identical with the man of that name who appears in VS 6, 312, in a text that names also Aḥḥēmāya. He may be identical with Iddināya/Nādin, who can be seen paying silver that is intended for the “sustenance of the Borsippeans” to Rēmūt-Bēl in VS 6, 193 (4.9.1 <Xer>). Another(?) Iddināya who may be a candidate for an identification with the sender appears in VS 6, 303 next to ^rRē²indu as the recipient of a silver payment intended for the messenger of an unnamed governor (*pāḥātu*). Balātu, the sender of the ‘piggy-back letter’ addressed to Iddināya, cannot be identified, given the extremely common name. Also the other men mentioned in the letter probably appear in the administrative documentation that is related to the Susa trips: Nergal-nāšir is found in BM 87435, a list of silver payments that names also a Ḥašdāya who may be the craftsman mentioned in the present letter. A Ḥašdāya is attested also in VS 6, 312, a list of silver payments from the Ilšū-abūšu archive which refers to the Susa trips and which probably also mentions the addressee and the sender of the present letter. Finally, the Nabû-bullissu mentioned here will be one of the men of that name who appear in the Ilšū-abūšu texts VS 6, 307, 309 and 312 jointly with Aḥḥēmāya in Susa-related contexts.

In this letter, the addressee Iddināya is asked for information about himself and his companions, Borsippean priests and notables travelling on official business. He is also charged with delivering letters that are hidden in a chest to their respective recipients, and is supposed to organize the return of empty beer vats to Borsippa. The context must again be the Susa trips of

¹⁴ The letter belongs to the British Museum's 1900-10-13 collection in which other Ilšū-abūšu texts have been identified (Waerzeggers 2005: 362).



the Borsippeans. Foodstuffs were taken to the Persian capital, and it is no surprise that letters intended for different members of the Borsippean delegation were sent together. Incidentally, this explains also the fact that this letter, which was not intended for Rēmūt-Bēl, ended up in his archive – it was taken back to Babylonia together with other letters that had been sent to him while he was in Susa, probably in the first year or early in the second year of Xerxes.¹⁵

The foregoing sets the scene for the following two letters, **No. 5**, OECT 12, C 6, and **No. 6**, OECT 12, C 4. Both texts have been collated on the basis of photographs kindly provided by Klaus Wagensonner.

No. 5, OECT 12, C 6: “Letter of Rē²indu to Rēmūt-Bēl, my brother. May Nanāya and Sutītu ordain health and well-being of my brother. Under the protection of the gods I am well. Also Bēl-iddin, his brothers, his sisters and the entire house are well. You should know: all prebendary income of the Borsippeans has been withheld and (people say): ‘Let’s see whether I can get even one third of one [...]’. However, no one has withheld the *takkassū* income and people say: ‘had you talked to the ...(-official),¹⁶ (people) would have had one third of the income of ... meat. (*break; disconnected words on the reverse*)” ([im^mre-e²-in-du] a-[na] / re-mut-^d+en šeš-ia^dna-na-a / u^dsu-ti-ti šu-lum u tin šá šeš-ia / liq-ba-a i-na giš.mi šá dingir šu-lum / a-na-ku šu-lum a-na^{id}+en-mu šeš^{meš}-šú / u nin^{meš}-šú u šu-lum a-na é gab-bi / šá-ki-in a-mu-ur giš.šub.ba^{meš} / šá bár.sipa^{ki.meš} gab-bi ka-la-a² / um-ma a-mu-ur a-na šal-šú 1+en [x]¹⁷ [x]¹⁷ / a-ku-lu-u²¹⁸ u tak-ka-su-[ú] / ma-am-ma ul ik-lu u qa*- [bu] / um^e-ma^o lí^o a-mu-ra ta-an-[da²]-[har²] / gab-bi a-na šal-šú 1+en uz[u (x x)] / [li]^o-ku-lu-u²¹⁹ [...

¹⁵ The receipt VS 4, 194, which was written in Susa and in which Rēmūt-Bēl appears as a witness, must have come into the archive in the same fashion (Waerzeggers 2010b: 784).

¹⁶ *a-mu-ra* in *lú a-mu-ra* cannot be taken as a preterit of *amāru* here, and the introductory imperative *amur* is never spelled that way. The word must be the designation of a profession. It appears in the plural (^{lu}*am-ma-ra-ni*) in VS 6, 223, a short account of the Išū-abūšu archive listing silver expenses incurred by Rēmūt-Bēl for foodstuffs given to officials (in Susa). (Other recipients are “the son of the *qīpu*” and one (or more) “Aramaic scribe(s),” *sēpiru*). In the given context one might think of a colloquially abbreviated form of the Iranian *am(m)arakarra* “(royal) accountant” (Stolper 2006: 229, 242), as was also suggested by Tolini 2011: 340 in his discussion of VS 6, 223, but this must remain a hypothesis. In any case the word should indicate a functionary to whom Rēmūt-Bēl could have turned in Susa and who must have had some influence regarding the issuing of institutional goods.

¹⁷ *Ana* is the *nota accusativi* here, characteristically in direct (colloquial?) speech. For the construction of the fraction see Streck 1995: 68 § 60d.

¹⁸ *a-ku-lu-u²* < *akālu*, a preterit in modal usage with the stress on the final syllable marking the sentence as a question.

¹⁹ For the virtual conditional clause expressed by the sequence perfect – precativum see GAG § 160 b*.



] / [... (remainder of obverse lost)] / (reverse²⁰) ina u[gu ...] / ù 'r[x] [...] / řšu-pur x[...] / ul [...] / r[x x] a r[x] [...] / (traces) [...] / 're-m[ut-d'en ...] / u řá [...] / MAN [...] / ' [...] / (remainder of reverse lost)

No. 6, OECT 12, C 4: “[...] I am [...]. Look, who is the governor’s messenger? Why haven’t I received a letter from you since you left? Have you simply not posted one? Everyone is prepared to compensate you for your loss. The official in charge of the cash box has withheld the prebendary income of every single man (here), only yours he did not withhold. Later however he will take silver from you personally in compensation. The official in charge of the cash box has gone to you. According to how the encounter with him [... (break)].” ([... (beginning lost)] / r[a-na-ku a mur ma-an]-nu r[al-la]-[ku] / řá r[pi-ħa*-a]-tu₄ mi-na-a / ul-tu u₄-mu řá tal-li-ku / ři-pir-ta-ka ul a-mur / ù la ta-ad-da-su⁷ / a-na muħ-ħi mi-ti-ti-r[ku] / gab-bi a-na pu-ħi-ka / ġiš.řub.ba^{meš} řá lí-érin^{meš} / gab-bi řá muħ-ħi qu-up-pu / ik-te-lu u at-tu-ku / ul ik-r[lu] ma-r[al-ti]-tu₄²¹ {řú} / a-na ku-r[ú] a-na ka-a]-řú kù.babbar {x} / i-r[maħ-ħar-ka] a-mur r[řá] muħ-ħi {řú*} / qu-up-pu a-na r[ka]-řu {r[ú?]} / r[it]-tal-ka at-ta lib-r[bu]-ú / r[řá* ta*-mar*]-tu₄ it-ti-řú / [... (remainder of the reverse lost)]

In **No. 5**, we find the well-known protagonists of the Išū-abūšu archive: řRē’indu writes to Rēmūt-Bēl. She assures Rēmūt-Bēl of her and the family’s well-being, using a phrasing that can also be found in **No. 2**. She then begins the body of her missive with a piece of news that for a Borsippean priest must have been shocking: “all prebendary income of the Borsippeans has been withheld” (ġiš.řub.ba^{meš} / řá bár.sipa^{ki.meš} gab-bi ka-la-a[?]).²² This statement is elaborated on in the continuation of the letter, which is not entirely clear owing to the damaged state of the tablet. řRē’indu cites the obviously discontented *vox populi* complaining about a loss of income – apparently at least in part payments were curtailed rather than withheld completely, and the *takkassū* income had not been touched. She adds that according to common opinion Rēmūt-Bēl might have alleviated matters by turning to a certain official, perhaps a (royal) accountant, if the interpretation suggested in note 15 is correct. This is in fact not the only letter of řRē’indu in which she speaks about problems relating to prebendary payments: in **No. 2**, she states: “I cannot dispose of (the income resulting from) the sheep offered to Sutītu and the sheep offered to the pedestal of Marduk.” **No. 6** concerns the same topic as **No. 5**. The beginning of the letter

20 The reverse, which is mostly destroyed, has not been copied by Joannès in OECT 12.

21 For this word see Jursa 2012. From this line onwards, the right edge of the tablet retains un-erased traces of an earlier inscription.

22 Literally, the text says “the prebends (or: prebendary titles) ... have been withheld”, which would amount to a disruption of cultic service, an even more dramatic statement. However, the continuation *takkassū mamma ul ikli* “no one has withheld the *takkassū* income” shows that *isqātu* “prebends” stands here synecdochically for the income that is resulting from the prebends; a usage that reflects spoken language rather than the more precise terminology of legal documents.



is lost, but there cannot be any doubt that this letter also is addressed to Rēmūt-Bēl. The sender is a colleague, probably of higher rank, and the most likely identification for him is the *šākin tēmi* Nabû-ahhē-iddin, the sender of **No. 3**. The extant part of the letter begins with a complaint about a lack of communications. Rēmūt-Bēl is then assured that ‘losses’ he incurred, or may fear to incur, would be compensated. This is probably a reference to Rēmūt-Bēl’s role in the organization of the Borsippean priests’ voyages to Susa and of their residence there, of which the numerous silver account texts of the archive bear witness. Then the sender refers to what must be the same crisis that is mentioned in ‘Rē’indu’s letter **No. 5**: “The official in charge of the cash box has withheld the prebendary income of everyone (here), only yours he did not withhold.” (giš.šub.ba^{meš} šá^{lú} érin^{meš} / gab-bi šá muḥḥi qu-up-pu / ik-te-lu u at-tu-ku / ul ik-lu) **No. 6** is more specific than **No. 5**: rather than simply stating that prebendary income had been withheld (*kalā*), the letter names the official responsible: the *ša muḥḥi quppi*. This “official in charge of the cash box” is attested but rarely in Borsippa; in the present case, given his far-reaching intervention in the management of the cult, it is clear that he was a high-ranking royal official, as in Uruk and sometimes in Sippar (Bongenaar 1997: 104ff.; cf. Waerzeggers 2010a: 261 and 680). It is not made evident why alone of all priests only Rēmūt-Bēl’s prebendary income had not been curtailed or withheld in the first place – perhaps because he was abroad? In any case the sender adds that whatever payments would be made to Rēmūt-Bēl would later be reclaimed in money by the *ša muḥḥi quppi*. Rēmūt-Bēl is then urged to take advantage of the fact that the *ša muḥḥi quppi* had gone to him, i.e., to Susa: Rēmūt-Bēl was to meet with the royal official, obviously to plead the priests’ case with him, as is assumed also in ‘Rē’indu’s letter **No. 5**, where she states that Rēmūt-Bēl should have talked to an *accountant* with a view towards a limitation of the economic consequences of the curtailing of the prebendary payments.

The overall coherence of the Ilšu-abūšu letter dossier follows from the distribution of the texts in museum collections, which is typical of the Ilšu-abūšu archive in general, and from multiple points of contact in terms of prosopography and content between these letters themselves, and between the letters and the administrative texts, especially lists, that belong to the archive. The *Sitz-im-Leben* of the letters is the presence of Borsippean notables at the Persian court at Susa, where these men delivered their gifts and paid taxes, entertained (and bribed?) Persian notables and their dependants,²³ and were supposed to further the interests of their temple and their community.

The evidence – independent of the specific contents of **Nos. 5** and **6** – suggests that the letter dossier and the pertinent administrative texts originate from a brief period of time between the final years of Darius and the outbreak of the Babylonian rebellions against Xerxes in this king’s second year. It is even possible, but not provable, that the entire dossier is centred on the

23

As is shown by the silver lists. See, e.g., OECT 12 A 111 or Amherst 258 (Ungnad 1959: 79): 42 ½ gín a-na 7^{dug} kan-du geštin ina lib-bi 1 'uš-ta-nu / 1 'ar-ta-ba-nu 1 'ba-ga-zu-uš-tu, ...



one unequivocally documented voyage of Rēmūt-Bēl to Susa that lasted from the end of the first year of Xerxes to the first few months of the second year. In light of this, the information given by **Nos. 5 and 6** gains specific significance. We now know that at least at one point during the very last years leading up to the rebellions against Xerxes, perhaps just a few months before the outbreak of the uprisings, the payment of prebendary income in Ezida had been interrupted, or at least severely curtailed, on the order of a royal official. While details are unclear owing to the terseness of the sources and to their damaged state, it is certain that we are dealing here with a massive crisis in the organization of the temple cult – a crisis that had direct repercussions for the economic well-being of the priestly class. Even if the curtailment of payments was only a temporary episode – it is unlikely, but not impossible, that it might eventually be traced in the scantily surviving administrative record from Borsippa that dates to the years in question; for the time being, the issue of its duration and exact dating must remain open – it throws light on the overall background conditions of the period, when royal interference, which was certainly due to the wish to harness the wealth of the Ezida temple as efficiently as possible, undermined the very foundations of the economic system of the cult. Collectively, the priests and the Borsippean urban institutions will not have responded very favourably.

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