

**126) YOS 3, 26 – A letter from the early reign of Nebuchadnezzar II from the temple of Amurru in the Sealand** — Letters from the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian empire have recently been edited as a coherent group by Levavi (2018). Here, we present a small addition to this corpus. The protagonists of YOS 3, 26 (YBC 3585) bear names well-known in the Eanna archive, Nabû-mukîn-zēri and Nādin. At first glance, one would be tempted to identify this letter as being exchanged within the temple, between the šatammu Nabû-mukîn-zēri, attested from 17 Nbn-1 Cyr (Kümmel 1979: 143) and his colleague Nādin, a temple scribe attested from 12 Nbn-6 Camb (Kleber 2008: 35, Kümmel 1979: 122, Schmidl 2019: 11<sup>45</sup>). Alternatively, letters addressed to a Nādin have been assigned to the city governor of Uruk of that name (Beaulieu 1991: 78), attested from 13 Nbn-1 Cyr (Kleber 2008: 39). In the latter case, however, it is unclear how these letters could have become part of the Eanna archive.<sup>1)</sup> Early Achaemenid letters of the Eanna archive which were incoming to the temple and addressed to a Nādin usually address the temple scribe (Schmidl 2019: 188), or can be re-dated, as I propose for YOS 3, 26. In the present case, the phrasing of the request is unlike all other instances of interaction between the šatammu of the late Neo-Babylonian or early Achaemenid period and one of the temple scribes, his subordinates, from both an interpersonal and a chronological perspective (Schmidl 2019: 179-194; a full edition of the letter is given below). This opens up new avenues of identification.

I identify the sender of this letter as a different *šatammu*, the *šatammu* of the temple of Amurru in the Sealand,<sup>2)</sup> also called Nabû-mukîn-zēri. This official is attested in PTS 3245 (Beaulieu 2003: 329). PTS 3245 pertains to Nebuchadnezzar II's construction of the north palace, and can be roughly dated to 24-28 Nbk through prosopography, as it mentions the *šatammu* of the Eanna temple during this time, Marduk- bēšunu (Kleber 2008: 33; see Beaulieu 2003: 329 and Beaulieu 2005: 48<sup>8</sup>, 68 on this text). The deities invoked in the greeting formula of the letter, Marduk and Nabû, do not help to identify the letter's place of origin.<sup>3)</sup> This new time frame opens up a new possibility for the recipient of this letter. I identify him as Nādin, šatammu of Eanna attested from 15 Npl-3 Nbk (Kleber 2008: 33). This leads us to a dating of this letter to the early years of Nebuchadnezzar II. This dating is roughly congruent regarding our suggested sender – a period of office of twenty years is possible for temple officials. The letter may provide additional – though weaker – hints supporting this dating: the audience gift mentioned could fit a dating to the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, and the rhetoric of the letter also advocates for an earlier dating (see commentary to l. 22).

A previous edition of the text was provided by Ebeling (1930-34: 24-26). A translation of most of the letter (ll. 5-25) is given by Olmstead (1948: 71).

1	im <sup>id</sup> +ag-du-n[umun] a-na <sup>1</sup> na-din šeš-ia <sup>d</sup> +ag u <sup>d</sup> amar.utu a-na šeš-ia lik-ru-ub	rev	ḫa-áš-šá-ak a-dī <sup>16</sup> ra-šip-ti a <sub>4</sub>
5	a-ga-a-ia ki-i <sup>1</sup> šeš-ú-tu <sup>1</sup> u en-mun- <sup>1</sup> tu <sup>1</sup> -tu mi-nu-ú taq-ba-a' lu-ú ma-a-du lu-ú mi-i-ši	15	it-taḫ-ú a.ab.ba kù.babbar a <sub>4</sub> ina muḫ-ḫi-šú-nu lu-us-su-uk-kám-ma udu.nitá <sup>mes</sup> a-na na-mu-uš-ti-ia <sup>4</sup> lu-um-ḫur-áš-šú-nu-tú
10	al-te-me ti-i-de 4 udu.nitá a-na na-mu-uš- <sup>1</sup> ti <sup>1</sup> -ia <sup>4</sup>	20	at-ta a-na ar-rak-a-a-tú ta-šak-kan ul kaskal <sup>11</sup> šá en-mun-tú-tú šu-ú nu-bat-tú la i-ba-a-t[u <sub>4</sub> ]*
		uE	šu-bi-la

<sup>1-4</sup> Letter from Nabû-mukîn-zēri to Nādin, my brother. May Nabû and Marduk bless my brother. <sup>5-10</sup> Is this like brotherhood and benefaction? Whatever you asked (from me in the past), be it a lot or a little, I have heard it (and complied). <sup>10-13</sup> You should know, I need four sheep for my (audience) gift. <sup>14-19</sup> I will impose this silver on them, (on everybody) down to these *Rašiptu*-people at the edge of the sea and I will receive the sheep for my (audience) gift from them. <sup>20-25</sup> You just keep putting off (my request); this is not the way of benefaction! He (a messenger) should not waste time, have (the sheep) delivered!

#### Commentary

6, 22 The usage of *īābtu*, 'good deed, favour' for the purpose of persuasion is unevenly distributed in the administrative letter corpus: it is attested several times in the early letter corpus from the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian period, but is almost completely absent at the beginning of the Achaemenid empire. Only one instance can be found in the late letter corpus, YOS 3, 16 (no. 55 in Schmidl 2019), a letter by a West-Semite to Nabû-mukîn-zēri, the aforementioned *šatammu* of the Eanna, which could date either to the last year of Nabonidus or to the beginning of Cyrus' reign. By contrast, *īābtu* is attested eight times in the early letter corpus published by Levavi (2018, see the glossary on p. 594<sup>4)</sup>). It is also attested in royal contexts, for instance in a letter from later in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (BIN 1, 93: 4). When we look at the

interpersonal distribution of *tābtu* in the early letter corpus, it becomes clear that in inner-temple correspondence, i.e., correspondence between officials of the same temple, it is usually employed in letters from subordinates to their superiors, not the other way round (e.g., Levavi 2018, no. 15: 18<sup>3</sup>). The only exception is the rhetorically exceptional letter no. 30 in Levavi 2018 (BIN 1, 40). This letter was sent by the *qīpu* to the *šatammu* and the *tušsar bīti*,<sup>6</sup> but addresses these officials as ‘lords’ in the body of the letter, despite the superior rank of the *qīpu*. This means that within the framework of the letter, the *qīpu* is presenting himself as subordinate to express his dependence on these two officials (Levavi 2018: 264). The other letters which employ *tābtu* were sent to the temple by officials with a different institutional affiliation. This means that they were not included in the direct temple hierarchy even if they were of high status, lending more importance to the use of rhetoric to convince the recipient(s). Examples are no. 34 in Levavi 2018 (YOS 21, 159), by a *bēl piḫāti*, and no. 202 in Levavi 2018 (CT 22, 155), a letter by an Urukian to the scribes of the Ebabbar temple in Sippar. This pattern fits the new identification of the parties of our letter in question here.

13 I take *ḫa-āš-šá-ak* as a stative form of *ḫašāḫu*, cf. already Ebeling 1930-34: 25.

14 This designation of people is unclear. There is no suitable toponym listed in Zadok 1985. I take this to be a reference to an otherwise unattested tribal designation, possibly of an Aramean group. Less likely, we may be dealing with an occupational designation, i.e., derived from (possibly) *rašāpu*, ‘to erect, pile up’, (e.g., walls) and ‘to keep in good repair’, possibly meaning ‘maintenance workers?’. The form, however, is far from ideal for such a reading. One could think of a term expressing the notion that everybody will have to pay silver, no matter how small their task, but it could just as well be a simple reference to a tribal designation or a type of workers followed by their location.

15 This reference to the sea also supports a southern framework for our letter to some extent.

20-21 For a similar attestation of this phrase, cf. SAA 17, 152: 17-18, [*a-na ar-ra-ka-a-ti la it-[ta-na-āš]-kan*], translated as “It may not be postponed until later!” (Dietrich 2003: 134).

24 I take the third person form to refer to a messenger, as the imperative in l. 25 also implies a delivery through a third party. Less likely, the sender may have switched from the second to the third person to address the recipient. In this case, one would expect an appellation used in combination with the verbal form.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

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1. Outgoing letters from the temple should only be part of the archive if they were brought back to the temple or if they were copied for storage. Copies of outgoing letters are rare, and are often of a distinct format or epigraphical style (Levavi 2018: 37). For an example of a copy from the early Achaemenid period, see no. 13 in Farber with Jursa 2018 (pp. 74-80).

2. For the god Amurru and his cult in the Sealand according to texts from the Eanna archive, see Beaulieu 2003: 327-330. For the relationship of the Eanna temple with the Sealand in the formative phase of the Neo-Babylonian empire with an emphasis on letters, see Levavi in press.

3. They are, however, often attested with the type of greeting formula employed in YOS 3, 26, the blessing formula, see Levavi 2018: 49 and Schmidl 2019: 35.

4. Disregarding Levavi 2018, no. 156 (TCL 9, 117): 29, where we are dealing with *tābtu* ‘salt’, and no. 35 (BIN 1, 11): 21 and no. 177 (YOS 21, 27): 29, which refer to a form of *tābu* ‘to be good’. I thank Yuval Levavi for discussing the latter two texts as well as Levavi 2018, no. 30 (BIN 1, 40) with me.

5. Cf. also Levavi 2018, no. 29 (YOS 21, 172): 13, where a subordinate addresses a superior, using *tābtu* with rhetorical intent, which is actually given as a quotation of something the superior had said before.

6. From the time of Nabonidus onwards, the office of *tušsar bīti* was held by several officials at the same time, who all served as temple scribes, see Kleber 2008: 28. For changes at the top of the temple hierarchy of the Eanna temple in Uruk from Nabopolassar until Darius, see Kleber 2008: 26.

7. See Schmidl 2017 for a discussion of such changes and their possible meanings in letters by Eanna officials.

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