

**Iron « Stars » in the Neo-Babylonian Period** – The cuneiform text WHM 1536<sup>1</sup> mentions « 3 *kak-kab-ti* AN.BAR, » which Sack translates as « 3 star-shaped iron objects », but does not identify. These objects are received, along with 2 iron sickles, by Nabu-zēr-iddin, the smith. While star-shaped ornaments are frequently mentioned as decorations for cult images<sup>2</sup>, they are typically fashioned out of malleable metals, i.e. gold, silver, and copper. To my knowledge, they are not fashioned out of iron. In light of the practice of marking the hands of temple oblates with the symbol of the deity to whom they were dedicated<sup>3</sup>, and of branding animals belonging to temple herds<sup>4</sup>, the iron objects mentioned in WHM 1536 must be the star-shaped branding irons used to mark individuals dedicated to Ištar or animals belonging to the herds of the Eanna in Uruk.

The branding tool, *simtu*, is known to have been made out of iron<sup>5</sup>. Humans and animals branded with the « star of the Lady of Uruk » are attested<sup>6</sup>. The tool described as the « branding iron of the Lady of Uruk » is mentioned in connection with the marking of oblates' hands<sup>7</sup>. As the star was the well-known symbol of Ištar, scribes did not have to specify that the brand was « of the Lady of Uruk ». But the branding tool itself is nowhere described as having a star-shaped end. Thus, the mention of these star-shaped iron in WHM 1536 completes the description of tools employed related to this practice.

The identity of the smith also helps to date WHM 1536 and WHM 1610<sup>8</sup>. Both are dated only by day, month, and year number ; the name of the reigning king is not recorded in either text. However, it is possible to identify the reign from which these texts come by the name of the smith, Nabu-zēr-iddin, recipient of the iron tools. In the Yale Babylonian Collection, there are 23 unpublished Eanna texts from the reign of Nabopolassar which deal with iron and iron tools<sup>9</sup>. All of them name Nabu-zēr-iddin as the iron-smith. The Yale texts show that Nabu-zēr-iddin served as iron-smith from years 9-18 of Nabopolassar. Both WHM 1536 and 1610 were written in the ninth year of their unnamed kings, and are therefore to be considered part of this group of texts.

1. The siglum WHM identifies cuneiform texts in the collection of the World Heritage Museum of the University of Illinois. WHM 1536 is published as text

10 in : Ronald H. Sack. *Cuneiform Documents from the Chaldean and Persian Periods*. Selinsgrove, Pa. : Susquehanna Univ. Press, 1994.

2. See *CAD K*, p. 49, *kakkabu* 3a.

3. R. Dougherty discussed the practice of marking the hand of temple oblates in *The Shirkātu of Babylonian Deities*. YOSR 5/2. (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1923). See also D. Arnaud, « Un document juridique concernant les oblats », *RA* 67 (1973) 147-156.

4. For references to the branding of animals with the marks of various deities, see *CAD Š/3*, p. 11, sub *šimtu* 3.

5. The following texts mention *šimtu parzillu* : Durand, *Textes babyloniens* pl. 64 : 14 (and Joannès, *Textes économiques*, p. 137) = duplicate of *YOS* 6 11 : 14 ; 150 : 20 ; *GCCI* 194 : 1.

6. For individuals branded with the « star of the Lady of Uruk », see *CAD Š/2* 307, sub *šamātu*. Animals branded with the « star of the Lady of Uruk » are mentioned in *AnOr* 8 38 : 17 *TCL* 13 125 : 5 ; 147 : 1 ; 159 : 4 ; 192 : 4 ; *YOS* 6 120 ; *YOS* 7 : 7 ; 9 ; 14 ; 15 ; 30 ; 41 ; 111 ; 125 ; 128 ; 132 ; 140 ; 161 ; 192.

7. For mention of people marked with this tool, see : Durand, *Textes babyloniens*, p. 64 : 14 ; *AfK* 2 107 ; *YOS* 6 11 : 14 ; 150 : 20.

8. Sack, *Cuneiform Documents from the Chaldean and Persian Periods*, text 9.

9. The text numbers are : NCBT 201, 202, 229, 248, 259, 268, 290, 299, 307, 311, 312, 314, 334, 349, 376, 383, 498, 1125, 2287. In addition, the following Nabopolassar texts containing references to receipts of iron and iron tools : NBC 1174 ; YBC 7382, 11273, 11323. Professor William Hallo, Curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, kindly permitted me to cite these text numbers here. Dr. Paul-Alain Beaulieu confirmed that Nabu-zēr-iddin is the ironsmith mentioned in the four NBC and YBC texts which I have not yet examined.

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