



SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ — MUSEO DELLE ORIGINI

Estratto

ORIGINI

PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY
OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

PREISTORIA E PROTOSTORIA
DELLE CIVILTÀ ANTICHE

XLVIII - 2024



EDIZIONI QUASAR

ORIGINI

Rivista di Preistoria e Protostoria delle Civiltà Antiche
Review of Prehistory and Protohistory of Ancient Civilizations

Fondata da / Review Founder

SALVATORE M. PUGLISI

Estratto

© Roma 2024, Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon S.r.l.
via Ajaccio 41-43, 00198 Roma - tel +39 0685358444
email: info@edizioniquasar.it

Finito di stampare nel mese di dicembre 2024

ISBN 978-88-5491-592-3
ISSN 0474-6805

Thompson Reuters, Master Journal List, Arts & Humanities Citation Index.
ERIH-PLUS Journal list.



SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ — MUSEO DELLE ORIGINI

Estratto

ORIGINI

PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY
OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

PREISTORIA E PROTOSTORIA
DELLE CIVILTÀ ANTICHE

XLVIII – 2024



Edizioni Quasar

Origini è una rivista annuale soggetta a processo di peer-review ed è pubblicata da /
Origini is subject to a peer-review process and is published yearly by:

“SAPIENZA” UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA
Dipartimento di Scienze dell’Antichità

Direttore Responsabile / Editor in chief: Cecilia Conati Barbaro

Curatori Associati / Associate Editors:

Francesca Balossi Restelli, Cristina Lemorini, Lucia Mori, Giulia Recchia, Enza Elena Spinapolice,
Alessandro Vanzetti

Comitato scientifico / Scientific Board:

Peter M.M.G. Akkermans (Leiden), Barbara Barich (Roma), M. Giovanna Biga (Roma),
Andrea Cardarelli (Roma), Alberto Cazzella (Roma), Mireille David-Elbiali (Genève),
Savino Di Lernia (Roma), Nick Drake (London), Marcella Frangipane (Roma), Marina Gallinaro
(Roma), Adria LaViolette (Charlottesville-Virginia), Mario Liverani (Roma), Alessandra Manfredini
(Roma), Joseph Maran (Heidelberg), Peter Mitchell (Oxford), Margherita Mussi (Roma), Paola
Piana Agostinetti (Roma), Mark Pearce (Nottingham), Catherine Perlès (Paris), Susan Pollock
(Berlin), Giulia Recchia (Roma), John Robb (Cambridge), Manuel Santonja (Burgos), Jiri Svoboda
(Brno), Norman Yoffee (Santa Fe, New Mexico), Daniela Zampetti (Roma).

Redazione/Editing

Melissa Vilmercati

Per i cambi rivolgersi a / For exchanges please contact:

Rivista Origini, Museo delle Origini, Sapienza Università di Roma,
P.le Aldo Moro 5 - 00185 Roma
origini@uniroma1.it

*I manoscritti da sottoporre per la pubblicazione vanno inviati a / Submission of papers to be considered for
publication should be addressed to:*

Rivista Origini, Museo delle Origini, Dip. di Scienze dell’Antichità, Sapienza Università di Roma,
P.le Aldo Moro 5 - 00185 Roma
e-mail: origini@uniroma1.it

Ordinativi e Abbonamenti vanno indirizzati a / Orders and subscriptions should be addressed to:

Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon S.r.l.
via Ajaccio 41-43, 00198 Roma
email: info@edizioniquasar.it

Registrazione al Tribunale di Roma n. 35/2000 (già registrata al n. 11810/1967)

La Rivista è stata stampata con il contributo dell’Ateneo

Estratto

INDICE

Estratto

- 7 *PREFAZIONE/PREFACE*
- 9 *METALWORKING AT ARSLANTEPE VILLAGE VI B2 (EBA):
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE USE-WEAR AND RESIDUES ANALYSES APPLIED TO THE MACRO-LITHIC TOOLS*
Antonella De Angelis, Cristina Lemorini
- 41 *DOUBLE-PERFORATED SHARK TEETH ARROWHEADS IN PREHISTORIC OMAN:
MORPHOLOGICAL, EXPERIMENTAL AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS*
Eleonora Fortini, Elena Maini, Massimo Vidale, Maria Pia Maiorano, Vincent Charpentier,
Alfredo Coppa, Maurizio Tosi†
- 75 *THE WARRIOR ELITE OF THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE IN SOUTHEASTERN ITALY:
TOPPO DAGUZZO TOMB THREE REVISITED*
Mirella Cipolloni Sampò, Alessandro Canci
- 103 *INFANT BURIALS FROM EARLY TO FINAL BRONZE AGE (2200-950 BCE) IN THE CENTRAL PO PLAIN
(NORTHERN ITALY) AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RITUALS,
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CYCLES*
Elisabetta Capecci, Taylor Danielle Mateyka, Viola Cecconi, Claudio Cavazzuti
- 133 *UNVEILING BRONZE AGE PRACTICES: USE-WEAR ANALYSIS OF FLAKED STONE TOOLS FROM
THE COPPA NEVIGATA SETTLEMENT, SOUTHEASTERN ITALY*
Melissa Vilmercati
- THEMATIC SECTION
- FAMILY MATTERS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: SOURCES, METHODS, PERSPECTIVES
(L. Mori ed.)
- 159 “FAMILY MATTERS” IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SESSION
Lucia Mori
- 161 “NO ELDER OR YOUNGER SON.” FORMS OF INHERITANCE AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
Mario Liverani
- 171 *COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES IN THE NEOLITHIC AND CHALCOLITHIC PERIODS OF WESTERN ASIA*
Francesca Balossi Restelli
- 191 *THE FAMILY IN EARLY MESOPOTAMIA*
Lorenzo Verderame
- 207 *FROM FAMILIES TO RELATIVES: A BRIEF CONSIDERATION ABOUT SOCIAL SCENARIOS IN THE UR III RECORDS*
Andrea Rebecca Marrocchi Savoi
- 219 *ON THE POSSIBILITY OF STUDYING THE FAMILY IN MESOPOTAMIA FROM UR III ADMINISTRATIVE TEXTS:
REFLECTIONS FROM A GENDER STUDIES PERSPECTIVE*
Agnès Garcia-Ventura
- 231 *SOME NOTES ON HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES IN THE LAND OF AŠTATA DURING THE LATE BRONZE AGE*
Lucia Mori
- 249 *THE FAMILY IN NUZI: LEGAL ASPECTS AND PROPERTY ISSUES*
Paola Negri-Scafa

267 *FAMILY AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIOD*
Simonetta Ponchia

285 *FAMILY ORGANIZATION IN PRE-ISLAMIC SOUTH ARABIAN SOCIETY: SOME INSIGHT FROM TEXTS AND ARCHAEOLOGY*
Alessio Agostini

301 *RECENSIONI/REVIEWS*

Estratto

Estratto

FAMILY AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN PERIOD

Simonetta Ponchia^a

ABSTRACT – The article focuses on the interrelations between families, institutions, and administrative procedures in Neo-Assyrian society, considering both the state and private levels of regulations and transactions, starting from the court and examining the roles and conditions of families in rural and urban contexts. Terminology related to family is analyzed in administrative and legal documents. Various issues are considered, such as the impact of the imperial dimension and organization, the preservation of the family structure as functional to the administration of the territory and its exploitation, the economic function of households in production and trade, and the position of women as particularly indicative of social dynamics.

KEYWORDS – Neo-Assyrian history; family; administration; women.

RIASSUNTO – *L'articolo esamina le interrelazioni tra famiglie, istituzioni e procedure amministrative nella società neo-assira, considerando il funzionamento di regole e transazioni sia a livello dell'apparato statale, che nell'ambito privato, a partire dalla corte fino a analizzare i ruoli e le condizioni delle famiglie nei contesti urbano e rurale. La terminologia relativa alla famiglia è analizzata in documenti amministrativi e legali. Vengono presi in esame l'impatto sull'organizzazione della famiglia della dimensione e gestione imperiale, il mantenimento delle strutture familiari in quanto funzionali all'amministrazione e sfruttamento del territorio, la funzione economica delle casate nella produzione e nel commercio e la posizione delle donne, come particolarmente indicativa delle dinamiche sociali.*

PAROLE CHIAVE – *Storia neo-assira; famiglia; amministrazione; donne.*

INTRODUCTION

Neo-Assyrian sources, including inscriptions, governmental records, letters, and legal and administrative texts, provide valuable insights into family structures and the roles of their members from multiple perspectives and within diverse contexts, ranging from the royal household to the families of deportees. However,

given the predominantly administrative nature of these sources, it is not possible to reconstruct a comprehensive and evenly documented portrayal of family life, nor to fully elucidate the historical dynamics shaping the institution of the family during this period.¹ Consequently, this study focuses on selected issues concerning the interactions between these

^a Università di Verona, simonetta.ponchia@univr.it.

1 This study is framed in a broader research on Neo-Assyrian society and administration, which includes articles on slaves' and deportees' conditions and the administrative system (esp. Ponchia 2017, 2020a, 2020b) and an unpublished contribution to the conference GeMANE6 (2024). The reader is referred to these articles for bibliography in addition to the references provided in the following notes. Slaves and deportees as part of families are only cursorily mentioned here since they are the object of the articles quoted above. All ancient dates are BC.

two spheres of Assyrian society, family and administrative organization, tracing a trajectory from the royal family to households across different strata of the social and economic hierarchy.

1. KINGSHIP AND KINSHIP TRADITION

At the highest level of Assyrian society stood the royal family, whose members not only embodied the continuity of the kingdom through the dynastic line but also held key administrative functions, with prominent governmental roles assigned to them. Although the available evidence is fragmentary and uneven, it nonetheless attests to the roles of figures such as the queen, the queen mother, the king's children and brothers, and other royal relatives who exercised authority over various administrative departments

and had responsibilities in military and religious affairs.²

The *adê*, the loyalty oath imposed by Esarhaddon to his subjects, spreads the definition and image of the royal family and its members' position in the dynastic line. A paragraph of the text – which can be reconstructed from fragmentary exemplars from Nimrud – mandates loyalty to Assurbanipal, the heir apparent, and his brothers, children of the same mother, the queen who does therefore identify the royal dynasty (SAA 2 6: 92-100).³ The treaty further enjoins to promote a concurring attitude within the brothers' circle and prohibits any actions that might incite suspicion or enmity between them (ll. 269-282).⁴

The royal family and dynasty must be regarded as the object of absolute loyalty, and the family unit is recognized as the primary vehicle for instilling and perpetu-

2 Various studies focus on the Neo-Assyrian royal family, such as Novotny, Singletary 2009; Svärd 2015; Frahm 2014, all with previous bibliography. Frahm investigates especially Sennacherib's family and elaborates hypotheses concerning his wives (Frahm 2014: 213-217) and children (Frahm 2014: 218-220), and draws a comprehensive picture of royal genealogy starting from Tukulti-ninurta II (p. 174), providing various details on the kings of the imperial phase, Sargon in particular, and the queens (Frahm 2014: 177-189). For a general study on the institutional roles of the royal family, see Fales 2001; on selected aspects and members, see, e.g. Siddal 2013: 84-100 and Svärd 2015; on family's composition and related terminology Villard 2014. On the importance of the family model in representing royal ideology, which develops an "oikomorphic" rather than a "physiomorphic" image of the king's power, see Richardson 2016: 12.

3 The text is quoted after the edition, lining, and paragraphs division of SAA 2 6. For recent commentaries on texts and contexts with overviews of the large earlier bibliography and discussion on treaties in Assyria and the ancient Near East, also including the version of the text edited in Lauinger 2012, see Fales 2012 and Ponchia 2014. As to the role of the queen see the latter, p. 509, to be compared with the hypothesis in Frahm 2014: 180, according to which the reference to Assur or Habigal in the Babylonian King List might be related to the birthplace of the king's mother.

4 These clauses can be considered in the attempt to define the meaning of *aḫu talīmu*, a title used to designate the king's biological brother with whom high government responsibilities are entrusted, but whose descendants are not entitled to succession on the Assyrian throne. On *aḫu talīmu* see Bartelmus 2007 and May 2011-2012 with previous bibliography. May also hypothesizes that the hieroglyphs on a ceremonial macehead belonging to Sargon's brother Sin-aḫu-ušur (cf. PNA 3/I, 1128) and described as the sign omega (which represents the maternal womb) and a dromedary (whose image is related to Tiamat [*tamtu* for *tam.ma*] and therefore interpreted as a rebus script for *talīmu*), verily represent Sin-aḫu-ušur's status of *aḫu talīmu* (p. 169). Although not confirmed, this interpretation might be tentatively associated with institutionalising the roles within the royal family, similar to that in the *adê*. Sin-aḫu-ušur's title of *sukkallu rabū* is the same borne by Abi-rami during Esarhaddon's reign and seemingly associated with the government of Ḫanigalbat because the same official is also designated as LÚ.GAR.KUR KUR.Ḫal-ni-gal-bat (cf. RINAP 4, 11:12'; see also PNA 1/I, 12b). On this point, also see Fales 2014: 230. Sin-aḫu-ušur, Sargon's *aḫu talīmu*, might have the same position. With Esarhaddon's disposition for his succession, the scheme of parallel dynasties that was part of Assyrian tradition might have been shifted to the couple Assyria and Babylon.

ating sentiments of allegiance to the crown and the fundamental tenets of royal ideology. This principle is explicitly mandated in the treaty clauses: “(...) you shall speak to your sons and grandsons, your seed and your seed’s seed which shall be born in the future, and give them orders as follows: ‘Guard this treaty. (...)’.” (ll. 288-292).

The treaty’s final recommendation may be compared with attestations in letters that refer to the ceremony of the *adē* and its meaning. In letter SAA 18 162 Kabtiya informs the king that, for reasons connected to his service, he has not sworn the loyalty oath in Babylon – as he was supposed to do – but in Nippur and Uruk and says:

“And do I not rejoice in the treaty of the king, my lord, saying: ‘People, their sons, and their wives, together with their gods, should enter into the treaty of the king, my lord!’ And (as for me), in accordance with the order of the king, my lord, when the elders came, they entered into the treaty of the king, my lord, in Babylon” (r. 7-18). Kabtiya is eager to show that although he is far from Babylon, his people, presumably his whole clan organized in families, took part in the ceremony there.

In line with the ideological perspective of the *adē* is Adad-šumu-ušur’s homage to the king. In his letters, the chief exorcist draws a parallel between the human and the divine family and demonstrates that loyalty to the reigning household – an attitude which originates and is taught within the family circle and from it is disseminated outwards – constitutes the foundation of a prosperous kingdom which is blessed by the gods. Therefore, the families of the faithful royal servants are deemed worthy of the king’s attention and care.

The specific occasion of these letters was the exclusion of Adad-šumu-ušur’s

son, Urad-Gula, from the circle of the court experts.⁵ This episode can be understood in the broader context of the Assyrian aristocracy’s role in upholding the authority of the king and the designated heir – or, in this case, the heirs to the thrones of Assyria and Babylonia, Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin.

Adad-šumu-ušur’s entreaty to obtain that his family could see its offspring being admitted into the royal entourage (SAA 10 226) – as did other families of Nineveh – was seemingly successful, and the expert thanked the king, praising him with an elaborate speech. In SAA 10 227, the concepts of family and descentance are variously expressed in a discourse that simultaneously displays the expert’s loyalty and the doctrine he can put at the service of the king, who is also equated with a father (l. 22):

“As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: ‘I have gathered you, your nephews and your cousins, to stay before me (in my entourage)’ likewise may Aššur together with his family, Bel and Nabû with their families, and the great gods of heaven and earth together with their families gather the name (*šumu*), and seed (*zēru*), offspring (*pir’u*), descendants (*lillidu*) and progeny (*nannabu*) of the king my lord, and let them stay in their entourage!” (SAA 10 227: r. 15-20).⁶ And furthermore: “As to what the king, [my lord], wrote to me: ‘I heard from the mouth of my father that you are a loyal family (*qinnu kentū*), but now I know it from my own experience’, the father of the king, my lord, was the very image of Bel/the god, and the king, my lord, is likewise the very image of Bel/the lord” (SAA 10 228: 14-19).

The words quoted by Adad-šumu-ušur from the royal response explicitly under-

⁵ On the vicissitudes of Urad-Gula see Parpola 1987.

⁶ We wonder if the insistence of Adad-šumu-ušur on the vertical dimension of the family is a covered polemic with the king’s choice of nephews and cousins or whether this simply means that the whole family of Adad-šumu-ušur and his brothers have been confirmed in royal service.

score the significance of the aristocracy, which supplied high-ranking military and administrative officials, court dignitaries—including expert advisors—and prominent figures within the temple hierarchy, particularly in the major sanctuaries where religious tradition and Assyrian culture were preserved and cultivated. In rare instances, direct connections with the royal family are documented, as exemplified by Mullissu-mukannišat-Ninua, daughter of the *rab šaqê* of Assurnasirpal II, who married the king.

In the case of the court experts, the significance of family tradition has been illustrated by S. Parpola, who reconstructed the family tree of the chief scribe of the royal chancery. This lineage encompassed specialists in various disciplines, all grounded in scribal expertise, highlighting the hereditary transmission of knowledge and professional roles within the Assyrian scholarly elite: Gabbu-ilani-ereš was chief scribe during Tukulti-Ninurta II's and Assurnasirpal II's reigns, his descendants Marduk-šumu-iqiša and Nabû-zuqup-kenu⁷ are attested as scribes, and the sons of the latter, Nabû-zeru-lešir and Adad-šumu-ušur, had the roles of chief scribe and chief exorcist respectively during Esarhaddon's reign. Issar-šumu-ereš, son of Nabû-zeru-lešir, was his successor in the role of chief scribe, whereas his brother Sumaya worked as exorcist and astrologer, and his cousin Urad-Gula, son of Esarhaddon's exorcist Adad-šumu-ušur, was physician and exorcist (Parpola 1983: xix; Luukko 2007: 229-230). Another instance of familial continuity in the expert role is provided by the colophon of the letter sent to the god Aššur and recounting Sargon's eighth military campaign, probably within a ritual framework. The colophon thus states the ownership of the tablet, and

likely the authorship of the text: "Tablet of Nabû-šallimšunu, the chief royal scribe, chief tablet-writer (and) scholar of Sargon (II) king of Assyria, (and) son of Ḫarmakki, the royal scribe, from Assur" (RINAP 2 65, 428f.).⁸

Significant changes did, however, occur, not only during dramatic events such as the purge of high-ranking officials carried out by Esarhaddon in 670 BCE, but also during a reorganization of the court experts likely operated under Assurbani-pal. Urad-Gula appears to have been a prominent, and perhaps not the only, victim of this latter restructuring.

The author of letter SAA 13 152 – unfortunately incompletely preserved – laments the ascension of *homines novi*, perhaps considering reasons of adherence to ritual correctness, or more probably as dissatisfaction for a changing trend that has put aside the Niniveh aristocracy: "The day when Ištar went up (in procession?) on the w[all](?), the bearers came up, and I saw them in the temple: they are all common men (*saklūte*). There is not one from the Nineveh's old families (*qinnāte labirūte*). Those who served your father are all in Kalhu".

2. FAMILIES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION

While Adad-šumu-ušur employs a diverse literary lexicon to describe family relations, particularly emphasizing the vertical dimension of the family – i.e., father-son descent – the administrative lexicon utilizes various terms to designate family and household. These terms reflect the institutional role of the family, although the distinction between the socio-anthropological concept of family and its technical usage within the administrative code remains somewhat ambiguous

⁷ On the possibility that this scribe was the author of royal inscriptions of Sargon and Sennacherib, see Frahm 2014: 170f (with previous bibliography).

⁸ For a commentary, see also Pongratz-Leisten 2013: 300.

for the modern interpreter.⁹ The words *bītu*, *qinnu*, *niše*, are variously employed to designate extended families, tribes, or guilds, and also for administrative departments. Within these departments, relations of dependence partly mimic family relationships, although bureaucratic procedures are also implemented. The interpretation of these relationships remains unclear, and while Weberian and patrimonial models offer some explanatory value, they do not fully resolve the issue. Nevertheless, these models are useful in highlighting the interconnections between family and administrative structures and their respective functions.¹⁰

The term *niše* appears to have a broader and more generic value and can be used to designate a group of varying dimensions, ranging from the inhabitants of a country and subjects of a kingdom to tribal and gentilic groups or working teams under the responsibility of a supervisor.

Qinnu is used for family groups which identify themselves for a common ancestor, emphasizing their paternal line of descent; in some cases, the term appears to indicate a guild or brotherhood determined by the same profession and/or eth-

nic affiliation, although seemingly – or even when – not institutionalized.

Sometimes, *qinnu* appears in connection with or as a synonym of *bītu* which, in turn, can be variously referred to the social (*bīt abi*) or the administrative (*bīt bēli*) sector. Either when referring to a family or an administrative context, the designation of a *bītu* identifies the dependency links that allow and regulate the exercise of authority over members of the group so designated.¹¹

The foundation of the legal system rests on the recognition of family authority and rights, yet families are also integrated into the administrative framework. The clauses of legal documents illustrate the system into which an individual is embedded and how he (rarely she) can dispose of his personal and family assets and property. Witness lists further contribute to completing this picture.¹² In its most comprehensive form, the legal formula that forbids claims against a contract and the revocation of a ceded property extends to the seller's children, grandchildren, siblings and their children, the family (*qinnu*), or any other relatives.¹³ In its more common form, the formula is shorter and

9 For discussion on the meaning of *bīt bēli* see lastly Ponchia, Lanfranchi 2024: 414-417, with previous bibliography.

10 For discussion and applicability of these models to ancient Near Eastern documentation see Schloen 2001 and McGeough 2007.

11 The administrative lists from Nineveh SAA 11 153-156 record members of Babylonian families according to a scheme seemingly consistent with a Babylonian system, that Assyrian scribes appear to adopt. It consists of the identification of individuals through: name, patronym, paternal ancestor, apurtenance to a *qinnu ša bīt PN* (see particularly SAA 11 153, in which 5 men so identified are dedicated to Bel). In some texts, their families are also identified by indicating the location of their houses in the vicinity of temples or gates. The names of the *bītu* (Gahal, Šumu-lubši, Bel-eṭiru, Malahu, Egibi) are to be interpreted as gens or clan, since at least some of the names are known from contemporary and later documents for their political and economic role in Babylonia. Nielsen 2011: 1f and 255-258 (with previous bibliography), observes that the use of the term *qinnu* varies on the long period and in the Assyrian texts especially: “it is apparent that *qinnu* could be applied to a broad range of people and social classes including families in bondage, families of low status, urban gentry, foreign royalty, the Assyrian royal family, and even divine families. (...) it is reasonable to believe that a term such as *qinnu* varied in meaning depending on the writer of the text in spite of the common language in which they were written”.

12 On witnesses the dependency relation in the administrative context and their functioning in legal practice see also Ponchia 2009: 150-156 and, more in general, Bellotto, Ponchia 2017.

13 The clauses of the adoption contract StAT 2 81 forbid claims from the purchaser, his sons, his family (*qinnu*), and the *bēl ilki* (responsible for taxation/corvées). Another example is StAT 2 181 and its duplicate

limited to the mention of the seller's closer male relatives who may assert rights over the inheritance. On the other hand, since the individual is also integrated into an administrative structure, it is occasionally necessary to include clauses that restrict the authority of the administrative hierarchy, especially in cases involving the ownership of people.¹⁴

Administrative documents that register peoples and legal texts – with their clauses referring to familial relations and the rights acknowledged within family groups – reveal the existence of family units of varying sizes and positions. The so-dubbed Harran census (SAA 11 201-220) records rather small family units under the authority of the father, listing their members – typically the wife, children and sometimes the father's junior siblings – according to their relationship to the head of the family, as well as their sex and age. Usually, the names of male children are recorded as well, likely because they could potentially succeed their fathers or be assigned to other administrative roles and services. These lists have been interpreted as cadastral records accompanying debt remissions dispositions for the owners of *latifundia*, where the individuals recorded in the registers resided and worked as servants (Fales 1973; Fales 2001: 174; Galil 2007). Assuming the approximate contemporaneity of the various preserved fragments of rosters, some statistical analyses have been conducted to quantify key characteristics of the families and demographic trends. Although these evaluations are partial, given the nature of the sources,

the data suggest a modest growth, which could be interpreted within the broader context of a general demographic scarcity or even a decline in central Assyria.¹⁵ The nature of these documents, however, warrants significant caution when attempting to reconstruct general trends.

People registered in the Harran census were perhaps deported families involved in agrarian colonization programs, separated from their original context and incorporated in a new system where the administration referred to the head of the nuclear family. This head likely retained authority over family members and their assets, however limited, even in their state of dependence. This can be inferred through comparisons with sale contracts and marriage agreements concerning family members. These transactions needed to be registered and the contracts preserved as they could potentially alter the composition of the workforce available to state officials.

The preservation of the family structure coincides with administrative needs and with the fundament of the ideology of justice, as expressed in one of its long-living images, i.e. that of the king protecting orphans and widows, that circumstances have bereft of the one who has authority. Sargon II complies with this role of the king and sends a clear order to an official of his (SAA 1 21):

“[...] [enqui]re and investigate, [and write down] and dispatch to me [the names] of the [sol]diers killed and their [sons and d]aughters. Perhaps there is a man who has subjugated a widow as a slave or has

182. A letter from Nineveh (SAA 1 190) illustrates the intervention of an official in a dispute between cousins; one of them, with the title of *bēl alāni*, took the property of his relatives, perhaps, we might hypothesize, taking advantage of his position. The palace is informed about the issue.

14 It is worth noticing that, whereas usually, superiors in rank are those entitled to claim rights on their dependents' properties, hierarchical links also function the other way around and allow officials of the lower level to share their superiors' authority, insofar as they are members of the same administrative apparatus. In SAA 6 91, claims against the contract are forbidden not only to the governor who signed it, but also to his vice, his village manager, and the *hazannu*, in addition to the governor's children and grandchildren.

15 This is the conclusion of Fales 2001: 176-178. He also notes the low percentage of females and hypothesizes that families sold them as domestic servants.

subjugated a son or a daughter to servitude. Enquire and investigate, and bring (him/them) forth. Perhaps there is a son who has gone into conscription in place of his father; this alone do not write down, but be sure to enquire and find out all the widows, write them down, define (their status) and send them to me.”¹⁶

The Harran census records additional significant data, such as the patronymic of some farmers associated with a particular tract of land and that of the landowners. These details were primarily functional for identifying individuals and properties for fiscal purposes, but they also suggest that the continuity of the system through family lines contributed to administrative stability. They also might indicate new land allocations to recently arrived deportees or to members of families that had, over time, expanded and been divided to form new units. Unfortunately, the available data are insufficient for a comprehensive reconstruction, including an understanding of how new connections between households and territory were established and solidified. Nevertheless, comparisons can still be made with the more broadly attested system of population mobilization, whether through the displacement of conquered peoples or more selective movements of manpower for specific needs. In both instances, the family functions as the smallest administrative unit for territorial control, even in peripheral areas. In the letter to the king SAA 1 177, the governor of the western province of Šupat¹⁷ requests to the king 30 families (*bīlāte*) to garrison the post station

(*bīl mardīte*) of Hesa. A royal disposition should order an administrative reorganization, including the settlement of villages, assignation of fields and orchards, and the placing of village managers (*bēl alāni*) over them. The governor also suggests entrusting the responsibility of the operation with a member of the cohort (*kīṣru*) of Hesa, who should receive the royal order and act as prefect (*šaknu*). This operation – coordinated by the centre and periphery together – probably resulted in a situation quite like that registered in the Harran census or in the schedules of estates, probably connected with royal grants,¹⁸ suggesting that administrative records might concern not only fiscal revenues, but also territorial control.

Additional evidence regarding the role of families in peripheral contexts, particularly in agrarian colonization programs where deportees served as labor, is found in the texts from Ma'allanate. These texts illustrate the preservation of family and community structures within the new environment, as well as the interactions between administrators and representatives of communities that mirror those of their origins in the Babylonian region, as indicated by anthroponyms and toponyms. Members of these communities were, in turn, incorporated into the administrative ranks.¹⁹

From various attestations, it thus appears that families were functional to the organization of the territory and its exploitation. A difficult question concerns the relation between administrative procedures and movements of people regulated by sale conveyances attested in the dossiers

16 A parallel may perhaps be found in SAA 17 102, a letter from the southern region of Gambulu. In it, it is stated that the king has assigned the dead fathers' houses to their sons, and it is requested that the faithful servants of the king may be entitled to receive a house even though a father is missing, i.e. without a family tradition.

17 See Radner 2006: 62 for a localization on the Beqa' valley.

18 On these documents edited in SAA 11, see comments and bibliography in Ponchia 2017: 169f.

19 The texts in cuneiform are edited in Homès-Fredericq, Garelli (†) 2018; those in Aramaic in Lipiński 2010. For a commentary on administrative procedures, communities' structures and economic relations see Ponchia 2020a: 118-124.

of some important officials from Nineveh, i.e. whether legal contracts also could function as a ductile instrument for recording the settlement of people and their dependence ties both in administrative procedures and in transactions aimed at private profit. In fact, legal texts also show that the property of families and entire villages or farmsteads could be transferred or pledged and pose the problem of the economic organization of the country, especially in the provinces, and the social impact of managerial management in which members of higher levels of administrative, military and temple hierarchy invested in productive and commercial activities.

3. TOWNS AND FAMILIES

The demographic situation varied between rural areas, particularly those involved in recent colonization, where families formed the basic unit of the territorial agrarian organization managed by royal officials, and urban centres, especially in the core Assyrian regions. In the latter context, connections between nuclear or extended families and the administration can be investigated in greater detail, focusing on specific situations and activities involving individual family members and small communities engaged in various activities.

It seems that family groups were linked by economic, professional, and kinship ties, also created through marriages,²⁰ in an overall system of relations, which, though impossible to be fully reconstructed, has, however, left some interesting traces in the documentation. In Assur, the presence and activity of people identified as Egyptians, or with Egyptian names are attested by

several legal texts, which show their integration into the Assyrian urban context, interrelations with other groups sometimes acting as a collective, as well as the persistence of some original cultural elements.

The contract FNALD 18 (CTNMC 68) concerns the inheritance division between the two sons of La-turammanni-Aššur, perhaps while the father was still living. The sons' names, Ḫuṭ-naḫti e Puṭi-munu, suggest that Egyptian cultural heritage could still resurface. Names and patronyms of some of the witnesses attest that other Egyptians validated the transaction, and it cannot be excluded that the document was the issue of a judicial or a conciliatory procedure conducted within this community. Contract StAT 2 167 can be interpreted as a real estate cession stipulated within a group with kinship or economic ties. Tapnaḫte is given a house from 10 men – some of them with Egyptian names – “in lieu of his share”. It is not specified whether the agreement pertains to a financial or commercial venture, as might be inferred from the presence of multiple sellers. The document is witnessed by other members of the Egyptian groups, thereby indicating a collective involvement, at least in the oversight or control of the operation.²¹

The function of family and the acknowledgement of hereditary rights also appear in other situations. Urdu-Aššur, son of Puṭi-ḫutapiša sells a family property he had inherited. The contract, StAT 2 207, is stipulated “in the year when one homer and three seahs of barley (cost one silver shekel)” and is dated to 618*. The list of those for whom claims are forbid-

20 On marriage as a means to create social relations and networks, see the example of SAA 18 56 concerning the temple elite.

21 On his point cf. the court decision StAT 2 173 (636/625) and the possible implications of responsibilities towards foreigners. It states that Hakubaya has to testify before the magnates in the case against 5 people, guilty of harassment against some Egyptian merchants who were staying in his house as foreign guests, *ana ubarātu*. Interestingly the names of the document's witnesses suggest a population with various linguistic background, since they are both west Semitic and Egyptian. On the circulation of persons and the case of the Egyptians especially, see Wasmuth 2016.

den includes relatives and members of the administrative hierarchy; a large group of witnesses includes men with Egyptian names.²² Urdu-Aššur, the seller, might be identified with the *rab hašše* attested in a text dated 650, but papyponymics or homonyms within the family cannot be excluded. His name is attested in a verdict (*dēnu*), StAT 2 165, imposed by an official (a *rab nuḫatimmi*) concerning commercial activity, which might constitute Urdu-Aššur's main activity, as also suggested by other legal texts.²³

The title of *rab hašše*, lit. "head of 50", can seemingly relate to responsibility in the *qinnu* context – as may be observed in the case of the Goldsmiths²⁴ – and in its relationships with other urban and administrative magistratures and offices. La-turammanni-Aššur, perhaps the same mentioned above, is *rab hašše* as well and might have taken this position after Urdu-Aššur, as inferred from StAT 2 167 (dated to 646), where both men are mentioned as witnesses, and the latter bears the title; moreover, in StAT 2 184 (date not preserved) La-turammanni-Aššur witnesses with the title of *urad rab hašše* and it can be questioned whether this position was that of an earlier step of his career. He also stipulates a contract (StAT 1 10) with the member of the *qinnu* of the Goldsmiths, but his position of *rab hašše* is not mentioned, and it

is therefore impossible to say whether he acted for his own private interest or for his *qinnu*. A man with the same name appears as a witness, together with Huru, in the sale of a slave girl by Kišir-Aššur (StAT 2 178, dated 629); in StAT 2 183, he witnesses together with Kišir-Aššur the sale of four people who jointly belonged to three owners, with different patronyms. In this case, the ownership seems more probably connected with a business activity rather than family property.²⁵ Huru, who has a transparent Egyptian name, has the role of *rab kišri* (StAT 2 213), which is interpreted as a military rank; in StAT 2 168, he lends an amount of silver to Mannu-ki-Arbail, son of Puḫutana.

Another frequently attested official is the *atû* Nergal-iddina, who is often in contact with the Egyptians in the role of witness, although it is impossible to state whether these contacts are due to his apurtenance to a *qinnu*, or to his role in the administration.²⁶

The evidence of internal cohesion within the Egyptian group, demonstrated by their participation in legal procedures reflecting shared interests, the preservation of certain traditions as indicated by their personal names, and their connections with administrative offices and other groups, suggests that the system of extended families or small communities

22 It is unclear if the clause concerning the cereals' price indicates unfavourable economic circumstances, but the formula that frees the purchaser from any responsibility towards possible creditors of Urdu-Aššur suggests that he might have been in dire economic conditions.

23 In the contract StAT 2 171 (635?) he, together with Kišir-Aššur, lends money to three individuals, but the goal of the loan is not known due to the text's difficult reading; similarly, in StAT 2 177 (617) the two of them concede an interest bearing loan; in StAT 2 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 203 Urdu-Aššur lends silver; in StAT 2 208 and 209 silver is borrowed by La-turammanni-Aššur and others probably in the framework of commercial activities; in StAT 2 198 Urdu-Aššur seems to be the claimant in a text concerning the imposition of a fine, among the witnesses there are Egyptians and Nergal-iddina; a verdict in favour of Urdu-Aššur is seemingly StAT 2 199-200; in StAT 2 202 he signs a work-contract.

24 On the Goldsmiths' archive and the role of *rab hašše*, see StAT 1.

25 A Kišir-Aššur is also known as *rab hašše* (StAT 2 214, where [Urdu]-Aššur acts as a creditor, dated 615), but the identification is not straightforward since there is clearly more than one individual with this name.

26 StAT 2, 198, a *sartu*-document, StAT 2 207, sale, StAT 2 209, loan, StAT 3 88, slave sale, StAT 2 184, marriage, StAT 3 78, loan, StAT 2 181, purchase of a maid.

with common professional interests was not dismantled. Instead, it appears to have been harnessed and utilized by the administrative organization.

Belonging to a community or an (extended) family likely enhanced the opportunity to develop private business, leveraging relationships both within and outside the administrative ranks. Reconstructing the spacial distribution of people connected by ethnic and professional ties in the town could offer valuable insights into the nature of their relationships. In the case of the Egyptians, M. Wasmuth (2021) has reconstructed that the documents related to them originate from six different contexts across four residential quarters of Assur,²⁷ thus posing questions concerning the community's cohesion.

Another group of texts from Assur provides further details on these matters. Letters and administrative documents discovered in private houses shed light on the commercial activities of a certain Duri-Aššur, who conducted trade with the region of the Jebel Sinjar and likely beyond. He engaged in textile trade with his partners and acquired agricultural products, particularly wine (Radner 2016). Several individuals were involved in these trading ventures as investors. Duri-Aššur had businesses with members of the administrative ranks, with Egyptian peoples, and with other groups in Assur, such as the Hundurayu and the Goldsmiths; he kept the records listing investors in trade caravans and managed silver of Nabû and Ištar of Arbela. Thus, he operated as a middleman or a broker, engaging in business transactions with various members of Assur society and institutions, also managing financial resources. From these texts, one can figure out an extensive network of relations, although identifying specific individuals is challenging due to the possible presence of homonyms, the lim-

ited number of attestations, and the lack of distinguishing qualifications. However, two interrelated points stand out and warrant further investigation: the general scenario of relations between towns and countryside and the role of families within this economic framework.

These points should be examined in the context of the urban growth in central Assyria, investments aimed at enhancing productivity through hydraulic works, and the expansion of cultivated land. The main question is whether these developments led to the creation of a surplus and the emergence of new needs, thus driving the intensification of commercial networks in which rural families might also participate and urban people could benefit even privately. The texts from Assur quoted above suggest this possibility, as the investors, women included (see below), are often identified by their affiliation with an institution and/or a household.

4. WOMEN AND FAMILY

In Neo-Assyrian contracts, women are mainly attested as slaves, but also wives, daughters and family members, being sold or offered as pledges for loans or sold for marriage, and rarely in the role of active actors and owners of properties or assets. It seems, however, interesting to attempt to evaluate the clues of their position and role, particularly concerning the changing potential of economic and social relations.

In ancient Near Eastern legal and social conventions, women's ownership and associated property rights were typically restricted to their dowries. It can be assumed that, usually, women retained the ownership of their dowry, which their children would later inherit, while the management of the assets rested with their husbands. This general framework, however, varied to some degree across different periods and

²⁷ Wasmuth thoroughly analyses the excavation reports and problems in museum cataloguing and recording with the ensuing difficulty of recognizing the original findspots of some groups of texts.

contexts, showing some flexibility in response to changing circumstances, as noted by Lyons and Westbrook: “Indeed, the spirit of pragmatism in the face of economic necessity extends not only to the dowry but to the role of women in relation to property overall. By various different devices, women may be allowed all the prerogatives of men in the ownership and management of property, albeit only in special circumstances and without changing the overall conception of gender roles.” (Lyons, Westbrook eds. 2005: 4).

The documentation from Neo-Assyrian times sheds light on the highest level of society and its female members to whom institutional roles were recognized. Extensive studies have been dedicated to these women, with in-depth analyses of their agency, particularly in the power hierarchy or heterarchy (Melville 2004; Svärd 2015). Their position is therefore not considered here, although, in order to attempt an evaluation of the female role in economic life, reference is made to women with special managerial capacity, such as the *šakintu*, who managed the queen’s households in various contexts. We might consider whether margins of freedom from patriarchal authority or independence from the father’s/husband’s position and condition did exist.

Marriage contracts are particularly informative concerning the possibility for women to dispose of their property. In ND 2307, the rich dowry (*mundane*) of Šubetu, daughter of the *šakintu* of the New Palace of Kalhu, Amat-Ištar, is listed and includes several objects of personal – including jewellery – and home use, mostly in metals, gold, silver and bronze. Moreover, the itemisation of the value of the high-quality garments can relate to the *šakintu*’s managerial activity in textile pro-

duction.²⁸ The aim of ND 2307 is to protect the rights of Šubetu on her property in case of divorce or of impossibility to bear children with the consequent taking of a slave by her husband for this purpose.

A similar dowry is listed in an earlier marriage contract from Assur StAT 2 164 (from N31, and dated to 675), perhaps in relation to the entering of the bride Mullissu-ḫammat in her husband’s house.

The bride’s family claims against the bridegroom are forbidden. On the other hand, it is stated that the bride, being an oblate (*šēlūtu*) of Ištar of Arbela, cannot be submitted to the authority (*šalāṭu*) of her husband’s family or administration. Her father is probably a member of the temple establishment, too, and priests of various temples are mentioned among the witnesses. The verb *šalāṭu* is also employed in ND 2316, referring to a *šēlūtu* of Mullissu whom the contract protects in case her husband runs into the position of debtor.²⁹ Again, in StAT 2 184 (date broken), it is made clear that the bride is a *šēlūtu*, and, after listing the dowry provided to her by her brother, it is forbidden to administrative officials having authority over the husband (i.e. his eunuch, *rab kišir*, and *rab ḫaššē*) to lead her away from Assur, perhaps moving with her husband. SAA 14 443 (date not preserved) is a marriage contract between Puṭu-(me)ḫeši (the bride’s father) and Puṭu-eši (bridegroom) concerning Al-Ḫapi-Mepi who is a *šēlūtu* of Ištar of [Arba]il.

These diverse provisions suggest that the position of these women had to be protected by contract, perhaps, we may hypothesize, when the *šēlūtu* entered the bridegroom’s household and, according to conventions, her property ended up in her husband’s, although it is not possible to distinguish clearly the cases in which

²⁸ For other texts concerning the *šakintu* see CTN 3 28-45.

²⁹ The question of the authority of women in special positions, such as those depending from the *šakintu* can be considered in a broader framework, see e.g. the letter SAA 10 194 and commentary in Svärd 2010: 255.

the husband entered his wife's household. As observed by S. Svärd (2010), there is seemingly a connection between the *ša-kintu* and the temple of Mullissu. In any case, *šēlūtu*, or members of the *šakintu*'s or queen's household, were in the position to protect their property and, as far as family is concerned, were warrantied certain independence from their husbands. This also seems to be due to the purpose of avoiding the interference of different administrative departments.

There are some other sparse attestations of women's legal and management capacity, such as a document showing a widow as a seller, although together with the deceased man's brother. She has a seal and might have acted as heir to her husband's property: NA₄.KIŠIB MÍ.ri-ša-AD-ša MÍ.NU.KÚŠ.Û ša ^mba-za-DINGIR, "seal of Riša-abiša, widow of Hazail" (SAA 6 257: 2). Another interesting case is the deed SAA 14 155 in which it is stated that a father gives the property of a house and 11 peoples with specific working competences and including married couples – i.e. probably servants' families – to his daughter.

Another woman's position is less clear: in SAA 6 142, dated to Sennacherib's reign, the Egyptian scribe Šilli-Aššur buys a house from two men and a woman, the wife of a third man. She might be her husband's heir in this position or act for him for unexplained reasons. She has, in any case, legal capacity. Among the witnesses is a certain Šušanqu, clearly an Egyptian name, also identified as the king's brother-in-law.

Thus, we observe that the people in question are associated with the queen's household, are members of the upper social class, of the temple sector, or are foreigners, in particular, Egyptians. We might even question whether the position of the *šēlūtus*

mentioned in the texts seen above derives from particular historical circumstances – i.e. the strengthening relations of lords of the Egyptian Delta with the Assyrian power. No attempt is made here to answer this difficult question, but we might rather add a last piece of evidence from the archive of Duri-Aššur, already quoted above. This case is particularly intriguing because women are listed together with men as investors in commercial enterprises, having assets at their disposal.

As investigated by M. Wasmuth in her study on social interconnections in Assur, several women are involved in financing trading activities and are identified as Egyptian by the title of *mušurtu* even when they bear an Akkadian name.³⁰ Other women are associated with various households (*bītu*), which are identified either by a personal name, or by a professional and institutional reference, e.g.: Ḫaliya of the household of the architect Sin-šarru-ušur, Banat-Esagil of the household of Keni, Arbail-ḫammat daughter of Bessu'a, Ašaja of the household of the priests, etc. (Radner 2016: I.33).

Male investors are often similarly identified either by patronymic, title, appurtenance to a household or to an administrative department, temples included. One of them is said to belong to the *bītu* of the *šakintu* (I.33: rev. 3). In a few cases, the formula "under the responsibility of (*ina qāta*)" is used (for both genders): the woman Aḫassunu is said to be under the responsibility of a man (Abu-eriba) in I.39, whereas in I.42 she is simply said to belong to Abu-eriba's household, and in I.48 her name appears without any specifications.

An intriguing case is that of the woman Arbail-ḫammat, daughter of Bessu'a. She repeatedly acts as an investor, as illustrated in the following table (Tab. 1):

30 For a table with attestation of Egyptians both male and female, see Wasmuth 2016. Women are recorded, together with the amount of money they invest, in texts I.35, 38, 41, 43, 57. The appellation *mušurtu* presumably applies both to a woman of Egyptian origin, or one entered into an Egyptian family by marriage.

I.33	Arbail-ḥammat, daughter of Bessu'a	invests 6 shekel in the second expedition of Ḥabil-kenu
I.35	Arbail-ḥammat, daughter of Bessu'a	invests 3 shekels in the first expedition of Kišir-Nabū
I.36	Arbail-ḥammat, daughter of Bessu'a	invests 6 ¾ shekels in the second expedition of Kišir-Nabū
I.38	Arbail-ḥammat, daughter of Bessu'a	invests 2 shekels in the second expedition of Muqallil-kabti
I.39	Arbail-ḥammat	invests 13 shekels in the third expedition of Muqallil-kabti
I.43	[PN] daughter of Bessu'a	fragmentary
I.48	the daughter of Bessu'a	receives 8 shekels
I.59	Arbail-ḥammat []	investment? - fragmentary

Tab. 1 – Arbail-ḥammat in archive Assur 52a.

Bessu'a, if indeed the same person, is variously attested, and might be involved in various economic relations with members of the Assur society. He also witnesses an inheritance division found in the dossier of Duri-Aššur (I.9 dated 654) and is possibly connected with the guilds of the Goldsmiths and Hundurayyu.³¹ A son of his, i.e. Arbail-ḥammat's brother, is also involved in the business and appears to participate in financial accounts concerning textile production in I.47.³² He is listed separately from his sister, suggesting the possibility that this woman had assets of her own that she could manage independently from other family members. This hypothesis raises further questions. The first is whether a connection can be established between this situation and some of the protective clauses mentioned earlier, which imply that women continued to operate within their paternal or administrative households independently of their husband's authority, and in these contexts, played an active role in business management. Moreover, the substantial number of women attested as investors in this group of texts suggests the possibility that the cases of female properties were not so rare as could be suspected on the basis of the surviving legal documents, or that this was the peculiar situation of a specific context. On the other hand, the focus on private documents available for

Assur reveals that families and guilds played a significant role in the urban economy, functioning as artisanal, commercial, and financial enterprises that fostered trade networks and profit-driven operations. Legal instruments were therefore necessary to safeguard their assets and activities, especially in relation to the connections of their members with administrative departments.

5. CONCLUSIVE NOTES

Family, as a central vehicle for power and social dynamics, is referred to in various ways in Neo-Assyrian documents. While the royal family is not frequently attested, some crucial information can be gleaned regarding regulations designed to ensure interrelations that supported the exercise and preservation of monarchical power. The continuity of family lines within the court personnel and officialdom seems to have been valued and maintained, although, in certain cases, it was kept in check or opposed by the kings. Nonetheless, especially within circles of experts and intellectuals, the importance of family education and tradition could not be overlooked. The influence of the aristocracy and its family traditions in supplying the governing elite becomes particularly apparent during critical moments when loyalty to the crown wavers. In contrast,

³¹ See PNA s.v. and StAT 1: 98. Further comparisons within these various groups of texts are necessary to propose any sound conclusion.

³² See also I.27, 33, 34, 36, 41.

the decision to appoint eunuchs – who were biologically or institutionally detached from family contexts – into the highest or most delicate positions reflects an attempt to bolster the bureaucratic nature of the state.

As an administrative category, families are documented in lists and rosters, particularly in relation to agrarian colonization programs and territorial control. These records often include forcibly displaced peoples, who may have moved together with their original community and, in some cases, retained a degree of negotiation power with administrative authorities. On the other hand, specific situations – such as the placement of family members within administrative sectors or the position of dependents of an official – can affect family cohesion and, at times, undermine the efficiency of administrative functions. An example of this is perhaps provided by the letter SAA 15 121, in which the sender conveys a request from some workers to be reunited with their people, as their separation prevents them from being effectively put to work.

In towns, especially the affluent towns of central Assyria, families and communities organized around kinship, ethnic, and professional ties are protagonists of the economic life and variously participate in and interact with the local administration and temple institutions. Taking

Assur as an example, this involvement can be viewed as part of an entrepreneurial tradition with deep historical roots. On the other hand, even Middle Assyrian documents provide models for the role of families in administrative sectors, raising questions about their relationships with the administration, similar to those we encounter analysing the later documents.³³ The importance of the interconnected fabric of Assyrian society and administration is a factor that must be considered in its continuity.

While a more thorough assessment is not feasible, other key issues merit attention. First, there is the role of the patriarchal family and guilds in preserving properties and their members' statuses through exercising their rights in legal and judiciary procedures. Another issue is the family's role in shaping imperial culture, particularly because families and guilds maintained their identity while interacting with Assyrian and local populations. These structures might have fostered the dynamics of cultural exchange and dissemination. Lastly, the potential for women to have a certain degree of agency in business within the patriarchal family context could be seen as a reflection of a dynamic society. Alongside the presence and activities of peoples of foreign origin, a consequence of the empire's expansion, this may indicate a degree of openness to change.

³³ See most recently Gaspa 2024, who in his study of archive M4 from Assur and river-transport of offerings, observes: "The relationship of trust between Ḫimsātēya's family and the *ginā'u* administration and the consolidated collaboration that he and his relatives enjoyed with the state sector over the years may have facilitated the expansion of this family's river business to other areas of the state's territory or for work in the service of high-ranking officials".

ABBREVIATIONS

- CTN 3 = DALLEY S., POSTGATE J. N. 1984 – *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser*, Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud III.
- CTN 6 = HERBORDT S., MATTILA R., PARKER B. (†), POSTGATE J. N., WISEMAN D. J. (†) 2019 – *Documents from the Nabû Temple and from Private Houses on the Citadel*, Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud VI.
- FNALD = POSTGATE J. N. 1976 – *Fifty Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents*.
- PNA = *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*.
- RINAP 2 = FRAME G. 2021 – *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721-705 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period Volume 2.
- RINAP 4 = LEICHTY E. (with a contribution by FRAME G.) 2011 – *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period, Volume 4.
- SAA 1 = PARPOLA S. 1987 – *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I. Letters from Assyria and the West*, State Archives of Assyria I.
- SAA 2 = PARPOLA S., WATANABE K. 1988 – *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, State Archives of Assyria II.
- SAA 6 = KWASMAN T., PARPOLA S. 1991 – *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I: Tiglath-pileser III through Esarhaddon*, State Archives of Assyria VI.
- SAA 10 = PARPOLA S. 1993 – *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, State Archives of Assyria X.
- SAA 11 = FALES F. M., POSTGATE J. N. 1995 – *Imperial Administrative Records, Part II: Provincial and Military Administration*, State Archives of Assyria XI.
- SAA 13 = COLE S.W., MACHINIST P. 1998 – *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Priests to Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, State Archives of Assyria XIII.
- SAA 14 = MATTILA R. 2002 – *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part II. Assurbanipal through Sin-šarru-iškun*, State Archives of Assyria XIV.
- SAA 15 = FUCHS A., PARPOLA S. 2002 – *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III. Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces*, State Archives of Assyria XV.
- SAA 17 = DIETRICH M. 2003 – *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, State Archives of Assyria XVII.
- SAA 18 = REYNOLDS F. 2003 – *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, State Archives of Assyria XVIII.
- Stat 1 = RADNER K. 1999 – *Ein neuassyrisches Privatarhiv der Tempelgoldschmiede von Assur*, Studien zu den Assur-Texten I.
- Stat 2 = DONBAZ V., PARPOLA S. 2001 – *Neo-Assyrian Legal Texts in Istanbul*, Studien zu den Assur-Texten II.
- Stat 3 = FAIST B., 2007 – *Alltagstexte aus neuassyrischen Archiven und Bibliotheken der Stadt Assur*, Studien zu den Assur-Texten III.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BARTELMUS A. 2007 – *Talīmu* and the Relationship between Assurbanipal and Šamaš-umu-ukīn”, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 16: 287-302.
- BELLOTTO N., PONCHIA S. 2017 – Zeuge. A., *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, Bd. XV Lfg. 5/6: 254-258.
- FALES F. M. 1973 – *Censimenti e catasti di epoca neoassira*, Edizioni Aseq, Roma.
- 2001 – *L'impero assiro*, Laterza, Roma, Bari.
- 2012 – After Ta'yinat: The New Status of Esarhaddon's Adê for Assyrian Political History, *Revue d'Assyriologie* 106: 133-158.
- 2014 – The Two Dynasties of Assyria, in *From Source to History Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on June 23, 2014*, S. Gaspa, A. Gre-

- co, D. Morandi Bonacossi, S. Ponchia, R. Rollinger eds., AOAT 412, Ugarit-Verlag, Münster: 211-237.
- FRAHM E. 2014 – Family Matters: Psychohistorical Reflections on Sennacherib and His Times, in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*, I. Kalimi, S. Richardson eds., CHANE 71: 163-222.
- GALIL G. 2007 – *The Lower Stratum Families in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, CHANE 27, Brill, Leiden.
- GASPA S. 2024 – Ferrying Goods for the Gods: A Family Affair. A Middle Assyrian Boatman's Family in the Evidence of the Texts from Archive M4, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 30: 1-58.
- HOMÈS-FREDERICQ D., GARELLI P. (†) (avec la collaboration de DURAND J.M., JOANNES F., HAMEEUW H., NIEDERREITER Z.) 2018 – *Ma'allānāte, archives d'un centre provincial de l'empire assyrien*, Akkadica Supplementum 13, Centre Assyriologique Georges Dossin, Bruxelles.
- LAUINGER J. 2012 – Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 64: 87-123.
- LIPINSKI E. 2010 – *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics III, Ma'lānā*, OLA 200, Leuven, Paris, Walpole.
- LUUKKO M. 2007 – The administrative roles of the "Chief Scribe" and the "Palace Scribe" in the Neo-Assyrian Period, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 16: 227-256.
- LYONS D., WESTBROOK R. eds. 2005 – *Women and Property in Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean Societies*, Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington.
- MAY N. N. 2011-2012 – The Comeback of *Talim*: A Case of the Invention of a Word-Meaning by Neo-Assyrian Scribes, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 19: 153-174.
- MCGEOUGH K. M. 2007 – *Exchange Relationships at Ugarit*, ANES Suppl. 26, Peeters, Leuven.
- MELVILLE S. C. 2004 – Neo-Assyrian royal women and male identity: Status as a social tool, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124: 37-57.
- NIELSEN J. P. 2011 – *Sons and Descendants A Social History of Kin Groups and Family Names in the Early Neo-Babylonian Period, 747-626 BC*, Brill, Leiden.
- NOVOTNY J., SINGLETARY J. 2009 – Family Ties: Assurbanipal's Family Revisited, in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars. Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, M. Luukko, S. Svärd, R. Mattila eds., Finnish Oriental Soc., Helsinki: 167-177.
- PARPOLA S. 1983 – *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. 2. Commentary and Appendices*, AOAT 5/2, Eisenbrauns, Ann Arbor.
- 1987 – The Forlorn Scholar, in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, F. Rothberg-Halton ed., American Oriental Society, New Haven: 257-278.
- PONCHIA S. 2009 – On the Witnessing Procedure in Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents, in *Witnessing in the Ancient Near East*, N. Belotto, S. Ponchia eds., Proceedings of the Round Table, Verona 2008: 131-174.
- 2012 – Administrators and Administrated in Neo-Assyrian Times, in *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East*, G. Wilhelm ed., Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Würzburg 2008: 213-224.
- 2014 – The Neo-Assyrian *adē* protocol and the administration of the empire, in *From Source to History: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on June 23 2014*, S. Gaspa, A. Greco, D. Morandi Bonacossi, S. Ponchia, R. Rollinger eds., AOAT 412, Ugarit-Verlag, Münster: 501-525.
- 2017 – Slaves, serfs, and prisoners in imperial Assyria. A review of written sources, *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 23: 157-179.
- 2020a – Foreigners, deportees and slaves as agents of change and cultural transfer: some reflections on the Neo-Assyrian period, in *The Ancient Near East and the Foundations of Europe*, M. Krebern timer, S. Ponchia eds., Proceedings of the Melammu Workshop, Jena 2017: 109-141.
- 2020b – *Arba'il(-)lāmur!* On people from and to Arbela, in *ARBELA ANTIQUA*, F. Alpi, Z. Bradosty, J. Giraud, J. MacGinnis, R. Mattila eds., Actes du colloque international d'Erbil tenu sous la présidence de Zidan Bradosty: Arbèles antique – Histoire d'Erbil pré-islamique, Erbil 2014: 165-179.
- PONCHIA S., LANFRANCHI G.B. 2014 – *The Neo-Assyrian Empire. A Handbook*, De Gruyter, Boston, Berlin.
- PONGRATZ-LEISTEN B. 2013 – All the King's Men. Authority, Kingship, and the Rise of Elites in Assyria, in *Experiencing*

- Power, Generating Authority. Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, J. A. Hill, Ph. H. Jones, A. J. Morales eds., University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia: 286-307.
- RADNER K. 2006 – Provinz C. Assyrien, *Realexicon der Assyriologie* 11: 42-68.
- 2016 – Die Beiden neuassyrischen Privatarhive, in *Ausgrabungen in Assur. Wohnquartiere in der Weststadt*, P. A. Miglus, K. Radner, F. M. Stępniewski eds., Harrassowitz verlag, Wiesbaden: 79-133.
- RICHARDSON S. 2016 – Getting Confident. The Assyrian Development of Elite Recognition Ethics, in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, M. Lavan, R. E. Payne, J. Weisweiler eds., Oxford Academics, Oxford: 29-64.
- SCHLOEN J. D. 2001 – *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, Brill, Leiden.
- SIDDAL L. R. 2013 – *The Reign of Adad-nīrārī III. An Historical and Ideological Analysis of an Assyrian King and his Times*, CM 45, Brill, Leiden.
- SVÄRD S. 2010 – Maid of the King* (Gēme ša šarri) in the Neo-Assyrian Texts, in *Veysel Donbaz'a Sunulan Yazılar DUB.SAR É.DUB. BA.A. Studies Presented in Honour of Veysel Donbaz*, Ş. Dönmez ed, Ege Yayınları, Istanbul: 251-260.
- 2015 – *Women and Power in Neo-Assyrian Palaces*, SAAS 23, Eisenbrauns, Ann Arbor.
- VILLARD P. 2014 – La notion de famille royale à l'époque néo-assyrienne, in *La famille dans le Proche-Orient ancien: réalités, symbolismes, et images*, L. Marti ed., Proceedings of the 55e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Paris 2009: 515-523.
- WASMUTH M. 2016 – Cross-Regional Mobility in ca. 700 BCE: The case of Ass. 8642 A/IstM A 1924, *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 12: 89-112.
- 2021 – Das sogenannte Ägypter-Ärchiv (N31): Archäologische Bemerkungen zum Komplex N31 A+D, *AABNER* 1: 31-79.

Estratto