

New visions on kingship in Late Babylonian Priestly Literature

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RAI 66, Mainz



Eulogy on the Elder Brother

1' [...]

2' May they call you Elder Brother of Eumuša.

3' May you know my secret knowledge; may my *asaru* be familiar to you.

4' May you know my rituals.

5' I have determined a great fate for you; day and night perform [...]

6' May the king humbly revere you.

7' May all the priests speak favourably of you.

8' Without you no regular offerings should be established for me.

9' May you know my secret knowledge and my purification rites.

10' May you be pure as heaven; may you be clean as the earth.

11' May your aura be as (bright as) the day; may your fate be a fate like the heavens.

12' May your name be great like the king's.

13' Let no one treat you deceptively.

14' Let neither king nor governor strike your cheek.

15' May your fate be a fate (lasting) for eternity.

16' The king or the governor who strikes your cheek,

17' may a king who is their enemy defeat them.

lo.e. Thirty lines which are (written) on the tablet and/of *elmešu*-stone of the Elder Brother of Eumuša.

A distinct corpus of writings

- identification/dating based on technical-objective grounds
 - paleography
 - orthography, grammar, lexicon
 - museum archeology
 - single manuscripts, no precursors
- distinct place and time / social setting

Hellenistic Esagil libraries (4th-2nd c BCE)



MEŠ (BRM 2 46)
<https://labasi.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/tablets/glyph/detail/4872>

Historical background

539 BCE	Persian conquest	→	heavy taxation
484 BCE	revolts End of Archives		disruption of traditional Babylonian temple life
331 BCE	Graeco-Macedonian conquest		renewed royal interest
ca. 220 BCE	poliadisation		dwindling royal interest
141 BCE	Parthian conquest		war and political chaos
→ traditional priesthood under foreign rule			

Corpora

- Past

- historical-literary
- pseudepigraphical letters
- historical chronicles
- Berossus

- Present

- contemporary chronicles
- historical sections
ADART

- Future

- “prophecy”
- ritual texts

Themes

- centrality of Babylon and Esagil
- priestly prominence
 - heroes/martyrs
 - exclusive knowledge of cuneiform lore

Until the end of the month, the shield-(bearing troops) from Gutium surrounded the gates of Esagil. (But) interruption (of the rites) in Esagil or the (other) temples there was not, and **no date (for a performance) was missed.**

Nabonidus Chronicle (BM 34062)

The enemy approached the Great Gate; he tore out the gate of Ištar-of-acceptance and toppled it over. Like Erra the unsparing he entered into the Great Court; he stood in the Great Court gazing at Ekur. He spoke, addressing (his) followers; he spat a blasphemous command to all his warriors: ‘bring out the booty of Ekur, take its possessions; disrupt its order, interrupt its rites.’ (...)

[The prie]st had no fear and was not mindful of (his own) life, [he did not] approach Ennundagalla, he did not remove (the god’s) diadems. [(Therefore)] the Elamite enemy spoke what he thought necessary. The Elamite, a vile man, ordered torture.

Kedorlamoer text (BM 34062)

Themes

- exempla of kingship
 - good kingship

For the sake of due process (the king) **did not neglect truth and justice**, nor did he rest day or night! He was always drawing up, with reasoned deliberation, cases and decisions pleasing to the great lord Marduk (and) framed for the benefit of all the people and the stability of **Babylonia**.

King of Justice

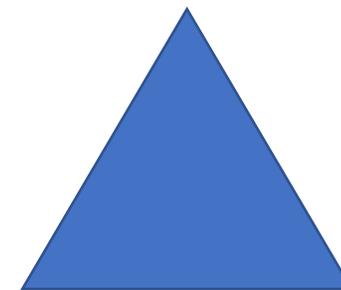
- bad kingship

There will arise a reb[el] prince (Nabonidus). [He will establish] the dynasty of Harran. For 17 years [he will exercise kingship]. He will oppress the land and cancel the festival of Esagil. [He will build] awall in **Babylon**. He will plot evil against **Babylonia**.

Dynastic Prophecy

The sinning and repenting king

Marduk



king

priests

When (the king) arrives [at the temple of B]ēl, the Elder Brother goes out and **lifts up the scepter, ring, (and) mace. He lifts up the crown of his kingship.** He brings them [into the presence of Bēl]. In front of Bēl he places them [on] the seat. **He goes out and strikes the cheek of the king.** He places [the king] behind him. In the presence of Bēl he makes him enter. [...] and his ears he pulls. He makes him kneel to the ground. The king says this once [to Bēl]:

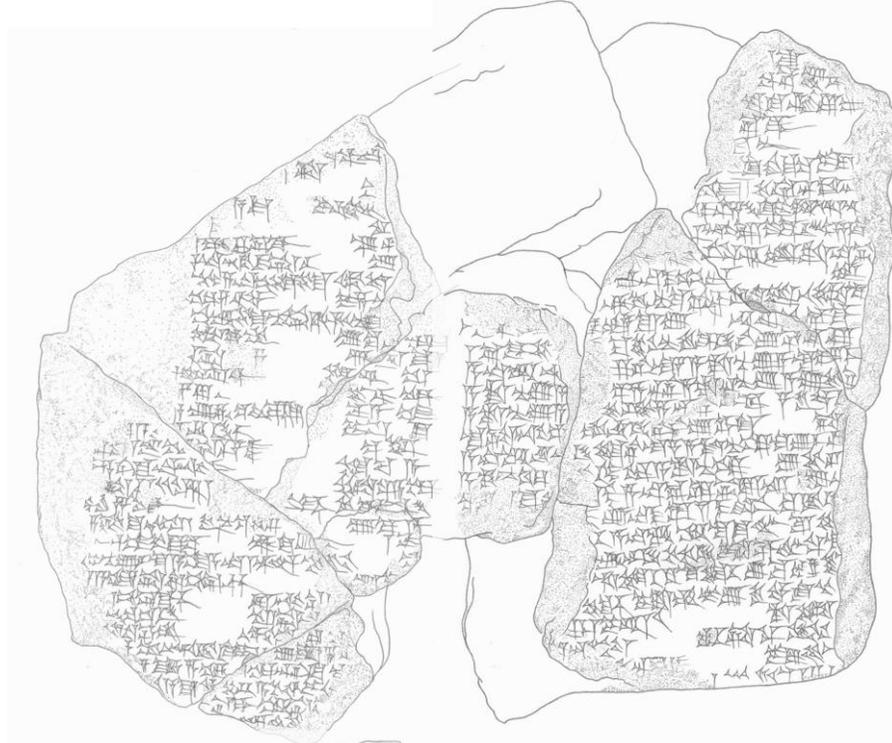
“[I have not sin]ned, lord of the lands, I have not neglected your divinity. [I have not rui]ned Babylon nor ordered its dissolution. [I have not] made Esagil tremble nor forgotten its rites. **[I have not stru]ck the cheek of the *privileged citizens*** [no]r brought about their humiliation. [I have taken care of] Babylon, I did not destroy its outer walls”

[20 line break] [The priest says:]

“Day and night may [...] of Babylon, his city [...] of Esagila, his temple [...] [of] the inhabitants of Babylon, the privileged citizens [...] Bēl will bless you ... forever [...] He will ruin your enemy, he will fell your adversary.” When he has spoken, the king will regain his normal dignity. He will bring out the sceptre, ring, mace, crown and [he will give (them)] to the king.

Adad-šuma-ušur Epic

- BM 34104+
 - About a third preserved
- AŠU journey to the throne
 - Context: rebellion against Tukulti-Ninurta I
- Product of LBPL
 - Historic kernel + contemporary LBPL take



Adad-šuma-ušur Epic

Column 1

Adad-šuma-ušur is sought out in the palace gardens by the rabbanê and exhorted to lead a rebellion, likely against Tukulti-Ninurta I.

Column 4

Badly preserved. Mention of some professions, neighbouring regions and landscapes, as well as an enemy (l. 7) and tribute (l. 26).

Perhaps reference to the establishment of the new king in outer-Babylon(ia).

Column 2

Coronation of AŠU as the new king and acceptance by the rabbanê. Exchange of vows between king and nobles; new king's appeal to Marduk.

Column 3

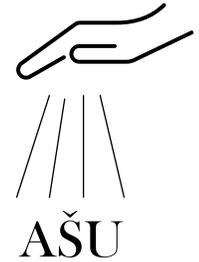
Mostly a, i. a. nested, direct speech, likely AŠU's, recounting the assignment to rebuild Babylon and increase its temple's treasury, which he then executes/d.

AŠU and the *rabbanê*



rabbanê

rabbanê



Good king	Bad king
AŠU	TNI
listens to priests, performs cult, takes care of city, lands, and people	does not listen to priests, disregards deities, neglects or destroys city, lands, and people

Note on the rab-banê

- *rab-banê* / rabbān

After the Akkadian officers [lúrabûti^{meš}] of Karduniash had rebelled and put Adad-shuma-usur on his father's throne [...].

Chronicle P/25, 8-9

- lúgal lúgal.dù^{meš}
- Aram. *rabbān*, redupl. pl. *rab-rabanē*

Note on the rab-banê

- In rituals: DLL
- In administration of Hellenistic times (ration lists)
 - *rab-banê ša muḫḫi āli* (Uptown) and *rab-banê ša šupal āli* (Downtown)
 - priestly occupation)
 - additional roles (*ṭupšar EAE*, *uppudetu ša bīt ilāni*)

Itti-Marduk-balāṭu, the *rab-banê* of Uptown, the overseer of the temples, the astrologer, son of Iddin-Bēl, whom we sent earlier to king Hyspaosines, (and) who drew supplies at the royal gate

BOR 4, 132

- importance cf. Juniper Garden (giš.kiri₆ šim.li)?

A mirror of princes -
a reflection of priests

Thank you!

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Of Priests and Kings:
The Babylonian New Year Festival
in the Last Age of Cuneiform Culture

By
Céline Debourse

CULTURE & HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

<https://lbplproject.com>

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Late Babylonian Priestly Literature

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Project Description

Late Babylonian Priestly Literature (LBPL) is a joint project headed by Michael Jursa of the University of Vienna and Nathan Wasserman of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The present project is a contribution to Ancient Mesopotamian literature and intellectual history. It defines a corpus of Late Babylonian Priestly Literature (LBPL) from the final centuries BCE and contextualizes it vis-à-vis its socio-economic, political and intellectual background. We argue that these specific circumstances not only transformed the way traditional texts were studied in Mesopotamia, but also brought about the creation of a body of new writings – writings that claim explicitly or implicitly traditional or ancient origins, although they were in fact products of a period contemporary with, or shortly preceding, the date of the manuscripts that are preserved.

LBPL studies texts transmitted in manuscripts recovered from Babylonian



MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

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