



THE KING'S MAGNATES

*A Study of the Highest Officials of the
Neo-Assyrian Empire*

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The man who is at the head of the state would certainly not be able to govern without the support of a numerous class to enforce respect for his orders and to have them carried out; and granting that he can make one individual, or indeed many individuals, in the ruling class feel the weight of his power, he certainly cannot be at odds with the class as a whole or do away with it. Even if that were possible, he would at once be forced to create another class, without the support of which action on his part would be completely paralyzed.

Gaetano Mosca¹

Having reached its full imperial form, the Assyrian empire had a highly centralised political structure. All power was in the hands of the king, who exercised his rule with the assistance of a minority, the ruling class. The nature and origin of an essential element of this ruling class — the highest officials — provide a key to understanding the administrative structure of the empire.

The present study concerns the following seven highest-ranking officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire:

masennu
nāgir ekalli
rab šāqê
rab ša-rēši
sartinnu
sukkallu
turtānu

Previous studies

The importance and central position of these high officials have long been recognised, but their exact administrative relationship to the central government and to the provincial system, their social background and their economic and military resources and duties have not been the subject of systematic research.

General studies

Several studies of the administration of Assyria and several important text editions have touched upon this topic but a comprehensive treatment has not been within their scope.

¹ G. Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York 1939) 51. English translation of *Elementi di scienza politica* (Roma 1923).

The classic work on the highest officials is Ernst Klauber's *Assyrisches Beamtentum* (1910), to date the only monograph on the subject. Klauber was able to use a fairly wide range of Neo-Assyrian sources,² and as a result his observations are multi-faceted and still astonishingly accurate. Klauber recognised the diverse duties of the high officials as military commanders and heads of large provinces, as well as their judicial responsibilities.

Despite its merits, the work is understandably in need of revision in the light of our present knowledge of Neo-Assyrian sources. Klauber relied only on the well-preserved material, and his use of the sources is thus very selective. The correct readings for *rab*-BI-LUB (modern *rab*-KAŠ.LUL) and *rab*-SAG were not yet established, and *rab*-SAG was seen by Klauber as a form of *rab šāqê*, and thus as another cupbearer, distinct from *rab*-BI-LUB.³

In *The Nimrud Wine Lists. A study of men and administration at the Assyrian capital in the eighth century B.C.* (1972) J.V. Kinnier Wilson introduced the concept of 'the king's mess' which included the highest officials. However, the Nimrud Wine Lists do not provide much support for this idea, plausible in itself, and the highest officials do not play a major role in the Wine Lists. In his introduction Kinnier Wilson collected evidence for the Assyrian administrative system, including the highest dignitaries. The crucial questions of the background of the highest officials and of the position of eunuchs were approached with the unwarranted assumption that the provincial governors were divided in two groups: the *šaknu* appointed from the *rahāni*, and the *bēl pāhiti* appointed from the eunuchs.

Paul Garelli's views on the position of the highest officials in the imperial administration are most fully presented in his contribution to P. Garelli and V. Nikiprowetzky, *Le Proche-Orient Asiatique. Les Empires Mésopotamiens* (1974),⁴ where he discussed in particular the early officials and their political power.

The lack of an overall analysis of the Neo-Assyrian administrative system has made it very difficult to assess the role of the highest officials. A.K. Grayson, in his article "The Bureaucracy" in chapter 26 "Assyrian Civilization" of *The Cambridge Ancient History* III Part 2 (1991), saw the whole administration as one pyramidal structure without in any way distinguishing between the different branches of the administration. This inevitably leads to a distortion of the hierarchy.

At the top of the pyramid sat the king and immediately under him was a trio of officials, the major domo (*akil/rab/ša muhhi ekalli*), the vice-chancellor (*ummānu*), and the field-marshal (*turtānu*) ...

A second group of three which, if not equal in rank to the aforementioned trio, was a close second, consisted of the palace herald (*nāgir ekalli*), the chief cup-bearer (*rab šāqê*), and the steward (*abarakku*) ...

² Including Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters* (1892-1914); Johns, *Assyrian Deeds and Documents* (1898-1923), and Johns, *An Assyrian Doomsday Book* (1901); Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons I-II* (1889); Rost, *Die Keilschrifttexte Tiglat-Pileasers III* (1893); and Knudtzon, *Assyrische Gebete an den Sonnengott* (1893).

³ The reading of *rab*-SAG was however corrected to *rab rēšē* by Klauber in the addenda on p. 117, but he rejected its connection with "eunuch" as unlikely.

⁴ The book has now been republished, with only minor alterations in Garelli's contribution, as P. Garelli and A. Lemaire, *Le Proche-Orient Asiatique. Tome 2. Les Empires Mésopotamiens* (3rd. updated edition, 1997).

the remaining provincial governors come immediately after them in rank ...

Next in seniority was a series of officials with diverse functions. There were the viziers (*sukallu*), of which one was called the grand vizier (*sukallu rabû*), and whose position was so prestigious that occasionally one of their number served as an eponym, and they commonly occur high in lists of witnesses in legal documents. In view of the name of the office, one suspects that they were advisers to the king. There was a chief eunuch (*rab ša rēši*) attached to the king's court and also to the court of the crown prince; the title implies that they had control over the eunuchs who permeated the Assyrian court and bureaucracy. The chief justice (*sartennu*) (an official whose duties included acting as a judge on occasion), who might serve as an eponym, belongs at this level as well as, probably, the high priests (*šangû*) of the many temples and the mayors (*hazannu*) of Assyrian cities.⁵

Studies of the provincial system

Emil Forrer studied the provinces of the Assyrian empire, including those of the highest officials, in *Die Provinzeinteilung des assyrischen Reiches* (1920) and laid the basis for understanding the provincial system. Forrer's *Provinzeinteilung* has been widely quoted for decades, but often without much criticism, and his own clearly expressed doubts about some of his suggestions have even been ignored.

Forrer's work was not seriously re-examined until K. Kessler published *Untersuchungen zur historischen Topographie Nordmesopotamiens* (1980). Of special interest for the present study is the section where Kessler discusses the location of the province of the *rab šaqê* (op. cit. 159-182) and its position relative to other provinces, specifically that of the *masennu*.

The most recent evaluation of the evidence relating to the provinces of the high officials was published by J.N. Postgate in his article "Assyria: The Home Provinces" in M. Liverani (ed.), *Neo-Assyrian Geography* (1995), where he re-examines the geographical data on what he calls the "*ex officio* governorates, provinces which were habitually attached to the major offices of the state".

Studies of the army

An article on the Assyrian army by W. Manitius, "Das stehende Heer der Assyrikerkönige und seine Organisation" (1910), appeared soon after the publication of Klauber's pioneering study of the officials. In this work which laid the basis of current understanding of the army, Manitius established the role of the *rab ša-rēši*⁶ as the head of the standing army and the role of the *turtānu* as the commander-in-chief of the provincial troops.

⁵ Grayson, *CAH* 3/2 (1991) 200-201.

⁶ Despite the fact that his assessment of *rab-šaqê* included references to both *rab ša-rēši* and *rab šaqê*, because unlike Klauber he did not keep the different writings separate.

F. Malbran-Labat, *L'armée et l'organisation militaire de l'Assyrie d'après les lettres des Sargonides trouvées à Ninive* (1982), made use of evidence from the Sargonid letter corpus. Her assessment of the role of the top officials as high commanding officers is valuable but the overall organisation of the book does not convey a coherent view of the structure of the army.

Important new evidence for the role of the *rab ša-rēši* as commander of the equestrian units of the home army (*kišir šarri*) was provided by the Horse Lists, tablets of the military administration based in the Review Palace in Calah during the reign of Sargon. The texts were published, with an extensive introduction on the organisation of the army, by S. Dalley and J.N. Postgate in *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud III, 1984).

Studies of the eponyms

In his study of the eponym lists and the eponym chronicles, "Eponymen" in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* II (1938), A. Ungnad presented the prosopographical evidence of the office-holders that could be extracted from the eponym sources but made only selective use of other material.

The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910-612 BC (SAAS 2) by A. Millard (1994) provides an updated edition of the eponym lists and chronicles, and also records all the eponym dates known at that time. The study is an extremely useful tool when establishing the eponymates and titles of the highest officials.

Millard's work has revived the interest in eponyms, and I.L. Finkel and J.E. Reade in their article "Lots of Eponyms" (1995) have studied the strict order in which the *turtānu*, *rab šāqê*, *nāgir ekalli*, and *masennu* are attested as eponyms in the 9th and 8th centuries. Their detailed analysis of minor changes in the eponym order and their interesting idea of the prerogative of newly appointed officials have resulted in several corrections to earlier listings of eponyms.

The order and precise dating of the post-canonical eponyms still remain questions of debate. The provisional dates assigned by M. Falkner, "Die Eponymen der spätassyrischen Zeit", have been used widely. New evidence was presented by R.M. Whiting in his chapter "The Post-canonical and Extra-canonical Eponyms" in Millard, SAAS 2 (1994) 72-78. Two new lists of the post-canonical eponyms have been published recently: J.E. Reade, "Assyrian eponyms, kings and pretenders, 648-605 BC", *Or* 67 (1998) 255-265, and S. Parpola in the introduction in K. Radner, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (1998-) xviii-xx.

Studies of individual high offices

The position of the *sartinu* in the Assyrian empire, and particularly in its judicial system, was discussed by K. Deller in his article "Die Rolle des Richters im neuassyrischen Prozessrecht" (1971). Deller questioned the alleged etymological connections between *sartinu* and *sartu*, "judicial fine", and challenged the widely accepted translation of *sartinu* as 'chief judge'. He emphasised the *sartinu*'s role as a high administrative official.

L. Sassmannshausen's "Funktion und Stellung der Herolde (Nigir/Nāgīru) im alten Orient" (1995) is useful in itself and gives important background information on the Neo-Assyrian *nāgīr ekalli*, but, even after careful analysis of the Neo-Assyrian sources (ibid. 169-178) the exact functions of this official cannot be determined.

The Ph.Lic. dissertation of the current author *The King's Magnates: Prolegomena to the Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, presented in 1992 at the University of Helsinki, collected all known evidence of the seven highest officials using the database of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project but the analysis of this material needed further development.

A.K. Grayson's article "Assyrian Officials and Power in the Ninth and Eighth Centuries" (1993) concentrates on the careers of four powerful men: the *turtānu* Daian-Aššur and Šamši-ilu, the *nāgīr ekalli* Bel-Harran-bel-ušur, and Nergal-ereš, governor of Rašappa, and gives updated biographies of these officials based on new evidence from inscriptions. Grayson studies the careers and social background, especially connections with the royal family, and relation to provincial governors, of four high offices: *turtānu*, *nāgīr ekalli*, *rab šāqê*, and *masennu*. However, Grayson's assumption that the same name mentioned over a period of 40 years always refers to the same person leads to some very hypothetical identifications that diminish the usability of his observations in further research.

Studies of the highest officials as a group

Although the prominent status of the high officials treated in the present study has been recognised by most scholars, determining the place of these officials in the power structure of the Empire has proved very difficult. In particular, the exact nature of their offices is still largely an open question and there is no consensus regarding their relative rank in the governmental hierarchy.⁷ An interesting solution of these and several other problems has recently been proposed by S. Parpola in his article "The Assyrian Cabinet" (1995).

According to Parpola, the Assyrians understood the earthly administration as a projection of the divine.⁸ The king was the sole representative of the supreme God (Aššur) upon earth but in practice he ruled through a state council composed of his "great men", just as God ruled over the universe through a divine council composed of his primary manifestations, "the great gods", each of whom represented a particular aspect or power of God. These powers were believed to exercise their functions both individually and in unison, like members of a single body. Accordingly their functional relationships were defined in terms of a hierarchical model based on the analogy of the human body, where each "great god" was associated with a particular

⁷ In his "Hofstaat. B. Assyrisch", in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* IV (1975) Garelli discussed the role of the magnates (Les "Grands") at the court. Garelli counted the *turtānu*, *nāgīr ekalli*, *rab šāqê*, and *masennu* amongst the "great" but was hesitant about the *sartinnu* and *sukkallu*; he did not include the *rab ša-rēši* among them.

⁸ For the following cf. also Parpola, SAA 9 (1997) xxif., and his forthcoming article "Monotheism in Ancient Assyria", in Barbara N. Porter (ed.), *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World* (Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, Vol. 1). I wish to thank Professor Parpola for discussing his reconstruction of the Assyrian cabinet with me and for making sure that his current views correspond to the summary presented here.

"limb" or "body-part" of God. The underlying esoteric model found an exoteric expression in the so-called sacred tree, the most important visual symbol of the Empire: the tree was occasionally represented in anthropomorphic form.

The "great gods" were 60 in number but the divine council reflected by the sacred tree basically seems to have included only nine gods, who were associated with heavenly bodies and parts of the heavenly anthropos as follows:

	Left:	Middle:	Right:
Brain:		Anu (Heaven) Firstborn of Aššur Father of all gods Destiner of fates	
Ears:	Sîn (Moon) God of prudence		Ea (Abyss) God of wisdom
Hands:	Šamaš (Sun) God of justice		Marduk (Jupiter) Demiurge God of mercy
Heart:		Ištar (Venus) Goddess of love Divine mother of king	
Feet:	Adad (Saturn) God of thunder		Nabû/Ninurta (Mercury) Celestial saviour
Genitals:		Nergal (Mars) God of physical power and animal instincts	

Comparing the functions of the "great gods" with those of the most prominent "great men", Parpola reconstructed the Assyrian royal council and its hierarchical structure as follows:

	king	
<i>sukkallu</i>		<i>ummânu</i>
<i>sartinu</i>		<i>masennu</i>
	<i>rab ša-rēši</i>	
<i>nāgir ekalli</i>		<i>turtānu</i>
	<i>rab šāqê</i>	

According to this reconstruction, the individual high officials cannot be ranked according to a simple vertical hierarchy, since all of them represented complementary (and basically equally essential) government functions. The hierarchical structure of the council does, however, reflect a gradation of power, the two highest offices (king and his right hand, *ummânu*) being related to decision-making and intellectual authority, while the seven officials examined in the present study represent executive and military powers.

Parpola's reconstruction of the Assyrian Cabinet provides a valuable ideological framework for studying the highest officials, and its validity in relation to the detailed evidence presented below will be assessed in the concluding chapter of this book.

The present study

The aim of this study is to present an updated survey of the highest officials of the Neo-Assyrian empire based on a detailed examination of the sources. Facilitated by the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus compiled by the State Archives of Assyria Project (formerly the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project), the Neo-Assyrian sources are used extensively. More eclectic use is made of the Assyrian royal inscriptions and the corpus of Neo-Babylonian Sargonid letters. This study covers the Neo-Assyrian period from the beginning of the reign of Adad-nerari II in 911 to the fall of Nineveh in 612.

The high officials studied here all served as eponyms, although the *sartinnu* and *sukkallu* only did so in the 7th century, and they were all counted among "the great", Assyrian *rabūti* (written GAL.MEŠ), together with the most important governors of the empire.⁹

The seven high officials examined here were already selected for study in my Phil.Lic. dissertation. The *rab kāširi* and the *rab kāri* who appear in the list of eponyms during the reign of Assurbanipal were not included. One consideration was quantitative, references to them being fairly infrequent. The *rab kāširi* is attested 24 times and the *rab kāri* 20 times in the Neo-Assyrian corpus, while even the *sartinnu* has 42 attestations. Other officials, like the *rab mūgi* and the *rab nuhatimmē*, never served as eponyms and were therefore excluded. The selection of officials, although based only partially on hard facts, has proved warranted, as is shown by Parpola's research.

The first part of this book, The Evidence, presents the source material. For each of the seven offices the material is organised in the following categories:

1. Holders of the office
2. The province
3. Economic resources and duties
4. Military resources and activity
5. Judicial duties

1. Holders of the office: Although many of the office-holders have long been known as eponyms, there has been little systematic research into other sources concerning them. After a list of the holders of the office, a brief description is given of the individual office-holders, establishing their titles and details of their careers. Speculative identifications have been kept to a minimum. The eponym sources are quoted only to establish the title or to show significant variation. For a full listing of all the eponym sources, the reader is referred to the relevant entries both in Millard, SAAS 2 and in *The*

⁹ For the reading of GAL.MEŠ, see *ibid.* 379 note 1.

Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. The post-canonical eponyms are dated according to the list provided by Parpola in the introduction in K. Radner, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, A* (1998) xviii-xx, marked with the symbol *.

2. The province: This section surveys the evidence and the previous literature in order to update existing views on the locations of the provinces or, in some cases, even on their existence.

3. Economic resources and duties: The data on the economic resources of the highest officials are extremely fragmented. Their servants are mentioned mostly as witnesses in legal documents, often without any specifications. Their lands and households are referred to in laconic terms in legal and administrative texts. In the case of most of the administrative texts concerning various kinds of contributions, one often cannot tell whether the contributions are to or from the official. This section also lists certain duties, such as participation in public works and dues to temples.

4. Military resources and activity: The fourth section collects references to the troops under the authority of the highest officials and lists their military activity, with the aim of establishing its temporal and geographical scope.

5. Judicial duties: The fifth section presents the evidence for the judicial duties of each official. A general discussion of their role as judges in legal cases can be found at the end of the *sartinnu* chapter.

In the case of the *masennu* there is a special section (6) on his duties as treasurer.

All references are arranged chronologically within each category, so that any historical development can be observed. The references are presented in a form that enables the reader versed in cuneiform and Akkadian to check the readings easily, while the translations will make the book accessible to readers from other fields. The translations make use of the latest editions but do not necessarily follow them verbatim. Presenting the evidence under the individual offices inevitably leads to some of the texts being cut up into sections and placed under different offices. This is not a major consideration, because most of the texts are now readily available in modern editions.

While the evidence is presented for each office individually, the Discussion summarises the evidence and addresses questions relevant to the group of officials as a whole. The discussion seeks to deal with some of the central problems, concerning social, economic and military aspects, that arise from the source material.

The chapter Conclusions establishes definitions and translations of the offices and assesses their combined role as the royal council.

The two appendices give an overview of the known office-holders and list the canonical eponyms. The book concludes with a full bibliography and indices. General conventions are those of the State Archives of Assyria series. Personal names follow the principles used in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*. Vowel lengths are marked only in transcription (in italics), with the exception of the lists of office-holders given at the beginning of each chapter in the Evidence.

turtānu

1. Holders of the office

ep. 856	Aššūr-bēlu-ka''in	<i>turtānu</i>
ep. 853	Daiān-Aššūr	<i>turtānu</i>
832	-"	<i>turtānu</i>
831	-"	<i>turtānu</i>
829	-"	<i>turtānu</i>
828	-"	<i>turtānu, rab ummāni rapši</i>
ep. 826	-"	-
ep. 824	Aia-hālu	-
ep. 821	-"	-
820	-"	<i>turtānu rabiū</i>
ep. 814	Bēlu-(lū)-balaṭ	<i>turtānu, nāgīru rabiū, šatam ekurrāti, rab ummāni rapši</i> and governor of Tabitu, Harran, Huzirina, Duru, Qipani, Zallu, and Balihu
ep. 808	Nergal-ilā'i	<i>turtānu</i>
c. 800	Šamši-ilu	<i>turtānu</i>
ep. 780	-"	-"
773	-"	-"
ep. 770	-"	-"
ep. 752	-"	<i>turtānu, nāgīru rabiū, šatam ekurrāti, rab ummāni rapši</i>
* ep. 742	Nabû-da''inanni	<i>turtānu</i>
Sg	-	<i>turtān bēt šumēli</i>
ep. 686	Bēl-ēmuranni	<i>turtān imitti</i>
ep. 668	Mār-larīm	<i>turtān Kummuhi</i>
ep. 663	Bēl-na'di	<i>turtānu</i>
Asb	Aššūr- [...]	<i>turtānu</i>
Asb	Nabû-ēṭir	<i>turtānu</i>
ep. *630	Šalam-šarri-iqbi	<i>turtān šumēli/Kummuhi</i>
ep. *612	Šamaš-šarru-ibni	<i>turtānu</i>
ep. *611	Nabû-mar-šarri-ušur	<i>turtānu</i>
?	Aplāia	<i>turtānu</i>

The high offices

One of the objectives of the present study has been to establish definitions of the highest offices in the Neo-Assyrian empire, and to suggest suitable translations for the Assyrian terms. The following translations and definitions for the offices are proposed:

<i>masennu</i>	treasurer
<i>nāgir ekalli</i>	palace herald, commander of the northeastern army?
<i>rab šāqê</i>	chief cupbearer, commander of the northern army
<i>rab ša-rēši</i>	chief eunuch, commander of the royal army
<i>sartinu</i>	chief judge
<i>sukkallu</i>	grand vizier
<i>turtānu</i>	commander-in-chief

The *turtānu* is the most widely and frequently attested high official and his role as the commander of a strong standing army in the West and as the supreme commander of the Assyrian army is well documented. The commander-in-chief is first attested in 881 during the reign of Assurnasirpal, and was eponym as early as 856. The latest known commander-in-chief is provisionally dated to *611. The office was divided in two in 708, when Sargon II established the office of the left commander-in-chief and assigned him Kummuhi. The centre of the province of the right commander-in-chief presumably remained in Til-Barsip.

The commander-in-chief led the provincial governors and other magnates on campaigns, especially in the absence of the king. Thus he represented the military aspects of royal power.