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The social world of the Babylonian priest

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an investigation into Babylonian society, focusing on the priestly community of the city of Borsippa during Neo-Babylonian (ca. 620-539 BCE) and early Persian rule (ca. 538-484 BCE), a period known in the literature as the Neo-Babylonian period. The political changes affecting Babylonia – the area of present-day central and southern Iraq – during that time provide the backdrop for my study. I will investigate a complex of social interactions that took place among the priestly families of Borsippa in this period and attempt to reveal and dissect the underlying dynamics. I will draw on sociological theories and studies of anthropology, especially those concerned with historical and present-day Hindu society, which exhibits parallels with ancient Babylonia. In addition, a range of procedures taken from social network analysis will be applied in order to examine and interpret the mechanics of these social events. The aim of this thesis is to contribute towards a better understanding of the Babylonian priesthood as a distinct social group and to investigate how its members interacted among themselves and within society at large. At the same time, while my focus is primarily on the priest, this study will hopefully result in a more sophisticated appreciation of the organisation of ancient Babylonian society as a whole. It goes without saying that in order to fully unravel past societies, a social perspective is indispensable, yet, and this should be stressed, such an approach is still largely missing in Neo-Babylonian studies and related fields.

0.1. State of the art

With an estimated 50,000 archival documents surviving from the Neo-Babylonian period, conditions for studying Babylonian society at that time seem auspicious.¹ However, this potential has not yet been realised to its full extent. Existing studies on Neo-Babylonian

¹ For the estimated size of the Neo-Babylonian corpus, see Streck 2010: 48. Cf. Jursa 2005: 1.

society can be divided into three (not mutually exclusive) types, each with its own limitations.²

First, there are the so-called ‘archival studies’, like that of the Ea-ilūtu-bani archive by F. Joannès (1989) or those of the Egibi archive by C. Wunsch (1993, 2003) and K. Abraham (2004).³ These publications present close analyses of individual family archives and their protagonists. Their focus commonly lies on providing transliterations, translations, and commentaries of the archival texts and on studying the genealogies, property portfolios, investment strategies, inheritance practices, legal procedures etc. documented in these texts. The resulting micro-narratives of individual Babylonians and their families are indispensable for writing a social history of first millennium Babylonia from the bottom up, yet few authors have attempted to transcend the boundaries of the individual archive and situate its protagonists within their larger social fields.⁴

Second, there are the prosopographical studies that assemble data on the human resources of particular Babylonian institutions during the Neo-Babylonian period, such as the Ebabbar temple of Sippar and the Eanna temple of Uruk.⁵ These studies provide an invaluable pool of data on collective career trajectories, professional associations and social networks, yet their potential for structural analysis has remained untapped so far.⁶

² This overview does not include the large numbers of medico-ritual, religious, literary, and royal texts that can be added to the corpus and on which much research is being done. The following survey only pertains to studies of the legal administrative texts.

³ Other examples include Kessler 1991, Jursa 1999, Baker 2004, Frame 2013, Waerzeggers 2014, Abraham [forthcoming]. A number of articles can be added to this list, including Beaulieu 1991, Beaulieu 1993, and Beaulieu 2000 on archives from Larsa; Jursa 2005b for a text group from Nippur; Joannès 1980 and Wunsch 2005 for material from Babylon.

⁴ E.g. Waerzeggers 2014 studies the archive of Marduk-rēmanni in the conventional way, while linking this man’s biography into the Achaemenid imperial politics of that time. An early example is Jursa 1999: 111–125, where the credit partners of Bēl-rēmanni, a priest from Sippar, have been examined in light of their institutional affiliations to the temple and their professional contact with the protagonist. Cf. Abraham [forthcoming] for a study of the Atkuppū archive from Borsippa, which makes an effort to examine the social background of the family’s contacts.

⁵ Kümmel 1979, Jursa 1995, Bongenaar 1997, Da Riva 2002, Janković 2004, Zawadzki 2006, Kleber 2008, Waerzeggers 2010, Zawadzki 2013, and Kozuh 2014 some of which put particular effort in reconstructing the cultic organisation.

⁶ The study by J. P. Nielsen 2011 presents an exception, although the focus is not on a particular institution but on the formation and distribution of kin-groups in the early Neo-Babylonian period in general. Taking a look at the available sources from various cities, this study provides much information on the

Third, there are studies that approach Neo-Babylonian society from a functional-economic perspective.⁷ Tracing the development of the fiscal, monetary, and agricultural systems during the Neo-Babylonian period, these works are generally interested in larger economic trends. Another major concern is with the operation and development of Babylonia's major institutions – the palace and the temple⁸ – and their economic and juridical impact on society. Making use of a much larger and more diverse set of primary sources compared to the archive studies, these works have developed useful typologies and arrived at significant generalisations.⁹ However, in my opinion, these typologies are often too static, as they focus on the object or content of social interactions and disregard the identities of those brought together by these encounters. In recent years, interest in these matters has risen, but these efforts remain on a small scale.¹⁰

Apart from the limitations of each of these approaches to Babylonian society, current scholarship suffers from insufficient awareness of the emic value of the labels used to describe historical actors and social groups. Individuals, families, and entire segments of society are described as lower class, upper class, bourgeoisie, nobility, urban elite, nouveaux riches, citizens, burghers, aristocrats, patricians, rentiers or entrepreneurs.¹¹

professional affiliations and careers of individual Babylonians and the social standing of their families. While he uses a much larger (and geographically diverse) section of the available data, and presents a much more structural analysis compared to other publications of this type, it is still predominantly descriptive.

⁷ E.g. Jursa 1995, Da Riva 2002, van Driel 2002, Kleber 2008, and Jursa *et al.* 2010 among others.

⁸ The publications listed in note 5 should be mentioned again as they have provided much of the groundwork.

⁹ The works by Govert van Driel (2002) and Michael Jursa (*et al.* 2010) in particular deserve to be mentioned here. Among their multiple insights one could mention the reconstruction of the fiscal apparatus by van Driel (2002, part III), or the typologies of private archives and the generalising remarks on the business profiles of their owners found in Jursa *et al.* 2010, chapter 3. Of particular importance here has been the application of two contrasting socioeconomic ideal types known as 'rentier' and 'entrepreneur' to our sources (e.g. Jursa *et al.* 2010: 282-195; see for these typologies and their implications Ch. 5.3). Important generalisations have also been formulated for Babylonia's agriculture and economy, in terms of regional and diachronic agricultural trends (e.g. Jursa *et al.* 2010, chapter 4), the development and monetisation of the Neo-Babylonian economy (e.g. Jursa *et al.* 2010, chapter 5) and the role of the 'market' therein (van Driel 2002).

¹⁰ See notes 4 and 6, above.

¹¹ E.g. van Driel 2002, Abraham 2004, Kleber 2008, Zadok 2009, Jursa *et al.* 2010, Wacziargers 2010, Nielsen 2011. While the use of terms like 'urban elites', 'citizen', or 'upper class' is widespread in Neo-

While these labels can help us to get to grips with the wide social range and substantial economic inequality that existed within Babylonia's heterogeneous population, many of the above-mentioned classifications derive from scholarship on pre-modern and modern Europe. It remains far from clear what they imply in the specific context of the Neo-Babylonian period, or whether they can be applied at all. Moreover, in Neo-Babylonian studies these classifications have so far been primarily based on economic and/or legal criteria. Failing to offer a more socially informed underpinning is, in my opinion, to ignore the complexity of this ancient society. Did Babylonians also identify themselves as aristocrats or entrepreneurs, and did they organise in distinct groups? This issue raises the questions of where exactly different social groups or segments should be located within Babylonian society, to which extent they overlapped and were considered distinct from each other, and whether or not they can be distinguished and reconstructed on the basis of more than their economic profile and/or legal status.

The aim of this thesis is to begin to answer these questions by taking a particularly well-documented segment of Babylonian society as a case study.

0.2. Research questions

It would be far too ambitious to attempt a study of the entire Neo-Babylonian society. In this thesis I will focus on one particular group – the 'priests'. This does not mean that my investigation is not concerned with society as a whole. A better understanding of the internal dynamics of the priestly stratum and the interactions it maintained with the out-group will hopefully provide a perspective on the layout of Babylonian society at large and the social mechanics that were in operation at the time. Moreover, the priests are by far the best-represented group in our documentation and their occupational association to the temple will form a further frame of reference for understanding their motivations, relationships, and activities.

Much has been written about the Neo-Babylonian temple and its personnel.¹² This scholarship will serve as point of departure for the present investigation. Priests were responsible for the execution of the time-honoured worship of the gods inside the temple. As explained in more detail below, the Babylonian priesthood was a thoroughly

Babylonian studies, more objectionable labels such as 'burgher' (Jursa 2005: 8) or 'patrician' (Beaulieu 2006: 193) are found rarely and usually put within inverted commas.

¹² See e.g. Kümmel 1979, MacGinnis 1995, Bongenaar 1997, Da Riva 2002, Beaulieu 2003, Kozuh 2014, Zawadzki 2006, Kleber 2008, Zadok 2009, Waerzeggers 2010, Zawadzki 2013.

hierarchical institution, divided into multiple professional groups, including brewers, butchers, oxherds, reed-workers etc., each with its own time-, area-, and task-related concerns.¹³ Unexplored so far is the question how these priests interacted outside of the temple, within the larger Babylonian society.

In this thesis I will attempt to reconstruct the social world of the Babylonian priest, through a close analysis of their social interactions. In doing so, this study seeks to realise two principal research aims:

1. To assess the influence of the temple fabric on the behaviour of priests within the larger society. In other words, to examine to what extent the temple-based hierarchy and the professional organisation of the priests influenced or shaped their lives outside of their cultic activities.
2. To firmly locate the priests in Babylonian society. In other words, to investigate, by closely analysing the patterns of their interactions, whether priests can be identified as a distinctive social segment in society and how they related to, or interacted with, other social groups.

I will argue, firstly, that temple-based hierarchies informed the social interactions of the priesthood in daily life to a significant extent, and secondly, that the priesthood should be seen as a distinct group in a larger elite segment of society that shared a particular social identity.

0.3. Methodology

My investigation is built around four types of social relationships:

- Marriage
- Landholding
- Silver lending
- Friendship

The choice to investigate these spheres of interaction is based on the fact that they cover a good part of the priest's daily life, representing key and recurring events in which individuals, families and groups came into formal contact with each other. Moreover,

¹³ E.g. Kümmel 1979, Bongenaar 1997, Waerzeggers 2010.

while there are various domains that are left undocumented, these four types of interaction can be captured adequately in the available documentation.

I will analyse these four types of interaction in a two-pronged approach. The first step will be to examine the personal relationship and social background of the actors involved in the documented social interactions – in other words, how were the people involved in a transaction connected? Did a person interact with for example kin, colleagues or people from other social groups in society? By systematically asking this question I will generate comprehensive profiles of the individuals interacting in particular social events. Straightforward as it may seem, this procedure will inform us in descriptive and quantitative terms about the type of society we encounter in the Neo-Babylonian period. Was it for example an open society, in which different people interacted freely, or was it made up of closed, self-segregating groups and thus stratified?

These statistics will form the point of departure for the next phase of my investigation. On the basis of the quantitative results I will attempt to uncover more fundamental dynamics, norms or social customs that regulated these social events and thus patterned Babylonian society. I will also examine whether interaction was driven by more than just economic motivations, but was inspired by, for example, ideological or religious considerations. It is in this phase that complementary concepts of the social sciences will be introduced, concerned with, among others, kinship, tie strength, social boundaries, and identity. Studies of anthropology will provide a useful frame of reference and offer examples of how dynamics of interaction may have worked. Special attention will be given to ethnographies of Hindu society on the Indian subcontinent, which show parallels with our material from ancient Babylonia. Finally, by adopting a network approach and carrying out a range of procedures from the field of social network analysis, I will explore how some of these social mechanisms operated in practice, while reinforcing my interpretation with a methodologically sound foundation. The present investigation is among the first to apply social network analysis to ancient Babylonian society.¹⁴

0.4. Case study: the priestly community of Borsippa

I will take the priestly community of Borsippa as the principal level of analysis. While my investigation may therefore be classified as a meso-level analysis – located between

¹⁴ Other studies that have applied network analysis to cuneiform texts are Waerzeggers 2014b and Wagner *et al.* 2013.

the archival and functional-economic studies reviewed above – it will still be informed by individual archives (micro-level). Moreover, as my analysis becomes more abstract towards the end, I will be able to link my findings to larger trends in Babylonian society (macro-level).

The sources used in this thesis are the private archives of the priestly families that lived in the city of Borsippa during the Neo-Babylonian period.¹⁵ Located on the side-branch of the Euphrates River, not twelve miles southeast of the capital, Borsippa was the political and religious sister-city of Babylon at the time.¹⁶ Its tutelary deity was Nabû, the Babylonian god of writing and patron of scribes.¹⁷ He had taken up residence in the Ezida, the city's main temple, towards the end of the second millennium BCE when he was called 'king of Borsippa' for the first time.¹⁸ By then Nabû was commonly identified as the son of Marduk,¹⁹ the god of Babylon, who had been elevated as head of the Babylonian pantheon at around the same time. Together, father and son became the primary gods in Babylonia during the first millennium BCE; their temples, the Esagil and Ezida in Babylon and Borsippa respectively, became the most important cultic centres in the country. Throughout this period both native and foreign rulers made sure to show proper reverence towards these temples and acknowledge their privileged positions.²⁰

Nearly 3,500 cuneiform tablets have been excavated in the late nineteenth century at Birs-Nimrud, the ancient site of Borsippa – unfortunately without any documentation.²¹ As a consequence, the tablets appeared on the antiquities market from where they were bought by museums and private collectors all over the world; the lion's share can nowadays be found in the British Museum in London, the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin and the Musée du Louvre in Paris.²² Although the archaeological context of these tablets is lost, their original interconnections can be reconstructed on the basis of museum registers; this, together with prosopographical considerations, enabled scholars like G.

¹⁵ Zadok 1998, Jursa 2005: 76-94, Waerzeggers 2005, Zadok 2009 and Waerzeggers 2010.

¹⁶ See for the history of Borsippa during the second and first millennia BCE, Unger 1932 and more recently Waerzeggers 2010: 4-10.

¹⁷ See for the history of the god Nabû in Babylonia, Pomponio 1978 and Pomponio 2001.

¹⁸ Pomponio 1978: 61.

¹⁹ In the early second millennium BCE Nabû was classified as minister and scribe of Marduk, and only venerated in the Esagil temple in Babylon. Cf. Pomponio 2001.

²⁰ Waerzeggers 2011.

²¹ E.g. Waerzeggers 2010: 15-16.

²² Waerzeggers 2005.

van Driel, C. Waerzeggers and R. Zadok to reconstruct more than twenty individual family archives.²³ This corpus has remained largely unpublished.

Most of these archives belonged to the families who owned priestly titles in the Ezida temple or one of Borsippa's secondary sanctuaries dedicated to Nabû's consort Nanāya and minor gods of the local pantheon.²⁴ They include the archives of the following families: Ahiya'ūtu (16), Atkuppu (133), Bēliya'u (375), Ea-ilūtu-bani (325), Ibnāya A (41), Ibnāya B (22), Ibnāya C (4), Ibnāya D (3), Iddin-Papsukkal B (6), Ilia A (269), Ilia D (57), Ilšu-abūšu A (25) (+ the slave Balātu (18)), Ilšu-abūšu B (15), Kudurrānu A (38), Lā-kuppuru (30), Mannu-gērūšu (30), and Rē'i-alpi (400+).²⁵ Large parts of these archives are concerned with the management of cultic duties in Ezida and other local temples. These affairs have been the subject of an extensive study by C. Waerzeggers (2010). But the archives also contain ample information on everyday affairs outside of the temple. An important preoccupation of these families was the management of urban and landed real estate, such as the acquisition of new property (including slaves), harvest estimates and house rent collections. Liquid capital was often used in silver lending or invested in small-scale business enterprises such as, for example, beer brewing. Besides letters, memoranda, and lists of various sorts, these archives also contain information on more momentous and exceptional (family) affairs such as marriage, adoption or legal disputes. The archives from Borsippa can in these respects be compared with other priestly archives from Babylonia.²⁶

But the corpus also has its drawbacks. Particularly frustrating is the fact that it sheds light almost exclusively on the group of priests. Babylonian priests were an integral part of a larger segment of urban society, yet the study of this larger segment is problematic, as families with different professional profiles have remained largely outside of the documentation. There are thus far only three archives from Borsippa that lack a priestly

²³ Van Driel 1989, van Driel 1992, Waerzeggers 2005, Jursa 2005: 76-94, Zadok 2009, and Waerzeggers 2010: 15-16.

²⁴ See Waerzeggers 2010: 20-32 for the local pantheon of Borsippa.

²⁵ This list is taken from Waerzeggers 2010: 16. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of texts attributed to the archive. See for an overview of these archives, Jursa 2005: 77-94.

²⁶ E.g. The archive of Bēl-rēmanni (Jursa 1999), the archive of Marduk-rēmanni (Waerzeggers 2000/2001, now Waerzeggers 2014) and the Nappāhu archive (Baker 2004).

or temple background: Banê-ša-ilia (11), Gallābu (59), and Iddin-Papsukkal A (22).²⁷ Even if the protagonists of the latter two archives belonged to families that performed cultic functions in the Ezida temple, the evidence suggests that these particular members engaged in different lines of work and were – unlike their relatives – not enrolled in the local priesthood.²⁸ Still, we should be aware that they belonged to a similar, if not the same, social circle as the priestly families under investigation. Moreover, the fact that texts from these archives entered museum collections together with other priestly archives, with which they also share prosopographical connections, further suggests that these individuals belonged to the same milieu and perhaps lived in the same neighbourhoods, as did the priests.²⁹ It remains unclear, therefore, how far the protagonists of these three archives were actually removed from the priestly group. Various methods and abstractions have to be made in order to delineate the priestly core in the larger urban elite population more comprehensively (see, Ch. 0.5.).

The priestly families documented in this corpus occupied the highest echelons of local society during Neo-Babylonian and early Persian rule.³⁰ Not only did these men occupy lower/mid-ranking positions, such as judge, notary scribe or tax collector,³¹ but the two most senior posts in Borsippa, that of chief temple administrator, or, ‘bishop’³² (*šatammu*) and city governor (*šākin-ṭēmi*), were customarily drawn from among the members of the city’s most prominent priestly families too.³³ The latter often managed to

²⁷ Waerzeggers 2010: 16. However, one has to maintain the possibility that their temple affiliations are lacking due to accidents of recovery rather than due to a historical absence, seeing that the archives in question are relatively small.

²⁸ Jursa 2005: 82-85, Waerzeggers 2010: 79. The Gallābu family in Borsippa is known to have performed the homonymous barber’s service (*gallābūtu*) in the Ezida temple; the Iddin-Papsukkal is a well-known temple-enterer’s family in Borsippa. The Banê-ša-ilia family can so far not be connected to the local temple institution at all.

²⁹ Waerzeggers 2005.

³⁰ In the new order that came into existence after the failed revolts of 484 BCE, these priestly families had lost their privileged standing in society to a group of people whose loyalty to Persian rule was warranted, see e.g. Waerzeggers 2003/2004, Kessler 2004, Pirngruber [forthcoming].

³¹ E.g. Wunsch 2000, Baker & Wunsch 2001, Jursa & Waerzeggers 2009.

³² Based on the *šatammu*’s religious authority as head of the priesthood or his administrative and judicial powers, scholars have proposed the translation ‘bishop’ or ‘chief temple administrator’ respectively. Cf. Bongenaar 1997: 12⁺²⁵ and Waerzeggers 2010: 43⁺²²² for references.

³³ See Waerzeggers 2010: 65-73 for a prosopography of the *šatammu* of Ezida and *šākin-ṭēmi* of Borsippa. For their role in the temple and civic administration, see Waerzeggers 2010: 42-45. Note that the office of

maintain their positions in religious as well as civic institutions over multiple generations and clearly played a leading role in the government of their town.³⁴

Recent study has demonstrated that the average income range of these families was between three and thirty times the minimum household subsistence requirement.³⁵ Even if the majority of the local families will have fallen between five to nine times minimum subsistence level, and only few will actually have generated a thirty times subsistence income, it is important to realise that in this thesis we are dealing with well-to-do families. With their middling to high income these families generally belonged to the urban upper stratum. Moreover, affiliation to this stratum was expressed through the use of three-tier genealogies ('PN, son of PN, descendant of FN'), i.e. the use of family or clan names.³⁶ These functioned as indisputable markers of descent and qualified their bearers as the traditional and native Babylonians par excellence. It should be realised that individuals lacking this nominal affiliation presumably constituted the greater part of the Babylonian population.

The Borsippa corpus covers the entire so-called 'long sixth century',³⁷ between the rise of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty under Nabopolassar in circa 620 BCE and the failed revolts against the Persian king Xerxes in 484 BCE, when the majority of archives from northern Babylonia, including Borsippa, abruptly break off.³⁸ It offers the largest collection of (medium to large) private archives from Babylonia during the first millennium BCE. While direct contact between the individual archive holders is documented rarely, there are clear prosopographical links between the archives, as protagonists share a fair amount of direct and indirect contacts. With circa 7,000 individuals mentioned in the course of the Neo-Babylonian period in the above-listed private archives alone, this corpus offers a unique insight into the functioning of a

šākin-tēmi was being curtailed in the reign of Xerxes, and presumably abolished later, cf. Joannès 1990a: 180, Waerzeggers 2004: 161-162, Jursa 2005: 50⁺²⁹⁶, Kessler 2006: 40.

³⁴ Note, however, that this local authority was checked to some extent by the appointment of royal officials inside the temple administration. The most common titles are the *qīpu* ('royal resident') and the *ša rēš šarri bēl piqitti* ('royal courtiers'), which were brought in from outside the community. See on these royal officials, Jursa 2005: 49-51. Cf. Kleber 2008 (Uruk) and Bongenaar 1997 (Sippar).

³⁵ Jursa *et al.* 2010: 296-305.

³⁶ Nielsen 2011.

³⁷ This term was coined by M. Jursa in Jursa *et al.* 2010: 5.

³⁸ Waerzeggers 2004

community in first millennium BCE Babylonia.³⁹ Moreover, this corpus further differs from corpora of other cities in that it pertains to a much wider section of temple personnel. In Borsippa, like in other cities, the temple's middle stratum – made up of brewers, bakers and butchers – is best represented, but a number of archives pertain to families of the very highest and lower priesthoods (see below). This corpus thus presents us with an opportunity to investigate the social interactions of a local community of priests in relatively complete terms.

0.5. The Babylonian priest

In this thesis, I will use the term 'priest' to denote a person who actively participated in temple worship; however, I will often use the term 'priestly' in an extended meaning, to include inactive members of a priest's paternal family or clan. This usage is warranted by the particular workings of the prebendary system that underpinned the division of cultic labour in Babylonian temples.

Assyriologists have defined the term 'priest' in two different ways. On the one hand there are scholars who apply it to ritual specialists functioning as mediators between human and divine realms.⁴⁰ This definition is based on a modern, western perception of the priest as a privileged interlocutor of the divine. According to this definition, the Mesopotamian priesthood includes ritualists such as diviners, exorcists, and prophets, while it excludes more mundane cultic workers such as temple brewers or gate-keepers. On the other hand, a more inclusive use of the term priest has been advocated by C. Waerzeggers (2010: 34ff.), who defines a priest as 'a person who enjoyed the right to partake in the temple worship on account of his possession of the required legal title and on account of his ritual qualifications'. This definition – which I follow in this thesis – emphasises two dimensions, a legal and a practical one. The legal dimension refers to the

³⁹ This number is based on an on-going project to assign each individual in the Borsippa corpus a unique number. This is a crucial step towards the creation of a prosopographical database and will facilitate the application of modern research methods, such as social network analysis. Thus far the Gallābu, Ea-ilūtu-bani, Ilia A, Ilia C, Ilia D, and the Rē'i-alpi archive have been submitted to this ID processing. These archive amount to some 2881 texts in which ca. 4642 unique individuals are mentioned. This gives an average of 3,95 unique individual per text. The archives listed above amount to some 1,899 texts and thus give an estimation of 7,501.05 unique individuals. If the various temple files, the smaller archives or dossiers and the large number of unassigned texts are included in this analysis, this number of individuals that are mentioned in the Neo-Babylonian corpus of Borsippa can be raised to well over 11,000.

⁴⁰ Sallaberger & Huber Vulliet 2005 and Löhnert 2007.

ownership of a so-called *isqu* ('share, lot'), a term customarily translated in the literature as 'prebend'.⁴¹ A prebend gave its owner the rights to enjoy an income from the temple – usually in the form of sacrificial remainders and other raw materials – in exchange for the performance of a time-, task- and area-specific cultic service, such as baking bread, gate-keeping, basket-weaving, fishing, cultic singing, etc.⁴² Passed down from father to son, prebendary titles forged long-lasting connections between families and certain priestly tasks. However, possession of a legal title did not automatically mean that a person was able to participate in temple worship. In order to be initiated to the active priesthood, strict rules of purity had to be observed relating to all aspects of the person, including descent, mind and body.⁴³ As a result of these regulations, prebend-ownership and active priesthood could be dissociated in practice, as ritually unfit prebend-owners were allowed to hire suitable substitutes to perform the temple service attached to their prebend. However, the heritability of prebends, the recruitment of substitutes within the circle of prebend-owners, and the general reluctance to sell prebends outside of the paternal clan were all factors that worked together to ensure a far-reaching association between the prebend-owning family and the actual performance of the priestly task.

This mechanism allows me to make a delicate but crucial simplification of the data, which involves taking families as the principal object of analysis, rather than individual persons, and using clan names as indicators of particular priestly identities. In particular, this procedure is based on the following two observations.

Firstly, it is a valid simplification to connect families with specific priestly professions (e.g. considering the Ilia family as a clan of brewers, the Ibnāya family as a clan of butchers, etc.). The recent prosopographical study of Borsippa's main temple by C. Waerzeggers has shown that most priestly families in this city specialised in one particular profession (2010: 78-80). This stands in sharp contrast to smaller Babylonian temples such as the Ebabbar temple in Sippar, where priests were often engaged in more than one trade.⁴⁴ While in Borsippa the traditional relationship between priestly offices

⁴¹ See Cocquerillat 1955: 39, van Driel 2002: 33 and Waerzeggers 2010: 34⁺¹⁹⁰ for the background of the term in Ancient Near Eastern studies.

⁴² Recent studies on the Babylonian prebendary system include MacGinnis 1991, Bongenaar 1997, MacGinnis 1999, Jursa 1999 van Driel 2002, van Driel 2005, Corò 2005 and Waerzeggers 2010.

⁴³ On the requirements and procedures to enter the Mesopotamian priesthood see Sallaberger & Hubert Vulliet 2005, Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008, Löhnert 2007 and Löhnert 2010.

⁴⁴ Bongenaar 1997.

and families is thus generally well established, there are some families for which this relationship is more ambiguous or poorly expressed, if not lacking altogether.⁴⁵ In these cases I will make artificial simplifications. The evidence for each ‘ambiguous’ family (or family branch) will be considered individually in the following analysis whenever possible, but there are only two possible outcomes: either the family is classified as temple-based and attributed to a specific priestly group, or it is perceived as a non-member of the priesthood, hence as an outsider.⁴⁶

Secondly, it is a valid simplification to attribute an individual’s documented priestly profession and the correlating (priestly) status to all members of his family, even if for these members no positive evidence of their involvement in temple worship or in the prebendary system is present. As the prebend system of the sixth century BCE was established in the early part of the first millennium, and given the reluctance to alienate prebends outside of the paternal family, it follows that most prebends existed within a community of heirs.⁴⁷

0.6. The temple hierarchy

The various priesthoods of a Babylonian temple were ordered in a rigid hierarchy along an all-embracing axis of relative purity and physical proximity to the gods.⁴⁸ This meant that priests who worked in close contact with divine statues had to comply with more stringent purity rules than those working in more peripheral areas of the temple. In the abstract sense we could imagine the hierarchy in the temple assuming the form of a ladder (Fig. 1, next page).

Located at the very top of the temple hierarchy was the group of so-called *ērib-bītis*, literally ‘temple-enterers’. Both the chief temple administrator (*šatammu*) and the city governor (*šākin-ṭēmi*) – the foremost positions in the local religious and civic institutions – were traditionally recruited from this group.⁴⁹ The temple-enterers enjoyed a

⁴⁵ See Waerzeggers 2010: 16 for a list of archives from Borsippa with the professional affiliation of their protagonists.

⁴⁶ See, for example, p. 183 concerning the protagonists of the Gallābu archive.

⁴⁷ Van Driel 2002: 67-75, Waerzeggers 2010: 8, Jursa 2010: 162 and Nielsen 2011: *passim*.

⁴⁸ Sallaberger & Hubert Vulliet 2005: 620-621, Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008, and Waerzeggers 2010: 42-49.

⁴⁹ Waerzeggers 2010: 46.

particularly privileged position in the temple and were allowed access to the most sacred areas, in particular the cellae of the gods.⁵⁰

The temple-enterers embodied the gods' most intimate servants who took care of their primary needs. Their individual tasks could vary considerably, as singers, exorcists, and artisans such as goldsmiths or jewellers could all have *ērib-bīti* status.⁵¹ It stands beyond dispute that these men, due to their intense contact with the divine, had to observe the strictest rules of purity; they were therefore submitted to consecration and ritually shaved, probably each day when on duty.

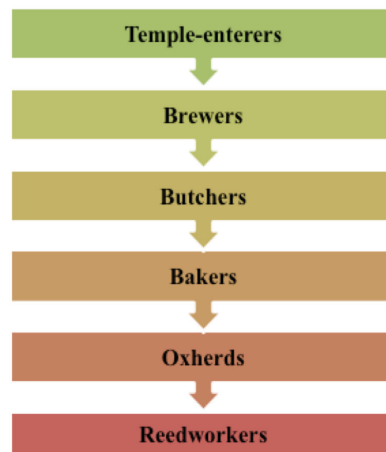


Figure 1: abstract representation of temple hierarchy

Below the temple-enterers we find the purveying priesthoods. Brewers, butchers, bakers, oil-pressers, fishermen and oxherds belonged to this group, which had a dual assignment in the temple service.⁵² On the one hand they were responsible for the production of specific sacrificial commodities such as beer, milk, or bread, which usually happened in the temple workshops. On the other hand they assumed a more ceremonial role when they presented the finished products in the temple courtyard (*kisallu*) during a

⁵⁰ E.g. Kümmel 1979: 163, Bongenaar 1997: 147-148, van Driel 2002: 88, Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 14-15 and Waerzeggers 2010: 46.

⁵¹ Van Driel 2002: 89, 123-124. See also Lambert 1957 for an edition of VS 1 15, a text from Hellenistic Uruk that informs us about the traditionally perceived composition of the *ērib-bītis*.

⁵² Van Driel 2002: 117-123.

daily ceremony.⁵³ The courtyard has been identified as an area of restricted access and only the consecrated, ritually shaved priesthoods could participate in this ritual.⁵⁴ It is clear that among the food purveyors the brewers took precedence. They are mentioned first in lists of cultic personnel, before the butchers and the bakers.⁵⁵ After these three professions no strict hierarchy can be established, although the oxherds seem to have ranked below the brewers, bakers and butchers. While purveying priests thus belonged to the consecrated priesthoods, they were denied access beyond the inner courtyard into the living quarters of the gods, which was the prerogative of the temple-enterers alone.⁵⁶

The next group is made up of service personnel. This group consisted of prebendaries that had a supportive role in the daily management of the liturgy, like measurers, doorkeepers, scribes and barbers. I follow C. Waerzeggers' interpretation that this group was not so much ranked above or below the food purveyors but rather in a parallel hierarchy.⁵⁷ It is not clear whether all the priests in this group were consecrated and shaved. However, it stands to reason that this depended on the specific duty determined by their prebend. A doorkeeper on duty at the entrance of the divine cella must have been obliged to meet high standards of purity and was presumably submitted to shaving whereas a measurer active in the temple storerooms did not have to fulfil these criteria.

The final group is made up of 'minor' craftsmen, including potters, builders, and reed-workers.⁵⁸ In contrast to the previous groups, these priests were not engaged in the sacrificial system; instead they were responsible for its maintenance and protection, by for instance baking earthenware containers, repairing brick walls, fixing reed structures, etc. There is no evidence that these craftsmen were consecrated or had to comply with any rules of purity beyond a minimum degree of hygiene. However, as we have seen, artisans belonging to the more important crafts like the goldsmiths were consecrated and had to meet standards of purity, especially when their tasks brought them in close contact to the gods, in which case they belonged to the section of the temple-enterers.⁵⁹

⁵³ Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 14-17, Waerzeggers 2010: 113-118.

⁵⁴ Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 15-17.

⁵⁵ See Waerzeggers 2010: 48⁺²⁵² for various examples. It should be noted that the relative status between bakers and butchers is not always clear.

⁵⁶ Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 14-17.

⁵⁷ Waerzeggers 2010: 49.

⁵⁸ Waerzeggers 2010: 49.

⁵⁹ Van Driel 2002: 123.

0.7. Main protagonists of this study

In the following pages I will introduce the most important priests who will feature in this study. Starting with the top ranking prebendaries of Ezida, the temple-enterers, I will subsequently address their lower-ranking colleagues, viz. the brewers, the bakers, the oxherds and the reed-workers, thereby following the Babylonian temple hierarchy as outlined above. The same order of discussion will be adopted in the analyses in ensuing chapters. After listing the local families known to have been enrolled in the individual priesthoods, I will give a brief overview of the most relevant archives and pay special attention to the business activities, family position and major life events of the principal protagonists. While many more archives and texts will be used throughout this study, the following individuals and families form the cornerstones upon which this book is built.

0.7.1. Temple-enterers

In Borsippa temple-enterers (*ērib-bīti*) came from the following families: Ahiya'ūtu, Aqar-Nabû, Arad-Ea, Arkāt-ilāni-damqā, Ēdu-ētir, Iddin-Papsukkal, Ilī-bāni, (Ea-)ilūtu-bani, Kidin-Nanāya, Naggāru, Nappāhu, Nūr-Papsukkal.⁶⁰ Our main source is the cluster of archives of the Ea-ilūtu-bani family, which was the subject of a study by F. Joannès in 1989. I refer to it as a cluster because this text group, consisting of some 325 documents, is made up of the independent archives of three families: Ea-ilūtu-bani, Ilī-bāni and Nanāhu. Their archives merged as a consequence of intermarriage and they were eventually deposited together.⁶¹ Covering an unusually long period of time (ca. 687-486 BCE), this archive cluster informs us on six successive generations. The texts are distributed evenly and often report on the activities of siblings and in-laws. While it thus provides us with a relatively broad account of the families, it lacks the density of information found in some of the other archives discussed below. Here, I will only introduce the main representatives of the three families in the briefest of terms. For a more detailed account, the reader is referred to the study of Joannès 1989.

With forty-six and sixty-five attestations, Zēru-Bābili (fourth generation, ca. 580-545 BCE) and his son Mušēzib-Bēl (ca. 561-509 BCE) are the best-attested individuals of the Ea-ilūtu-bani family branch. Of particular importance for the formation of this text group

⁶⁰ See Waerzeggers 2010: 79, 73-76 for a prosopography of temple-enterers in Borsippa.

⁶¹ See Joannès 1989: 122 for a schematic representation of transmission.

was the marriage between Mušēzib-Bēl and ^fHubbušītu//Ilī-bāni,⁶² the sister of the two protagonists of the Ilī-bāni archive: Nādin (aka. Dadia, attested thirty-seven times between ca. 555-539 BCE) and Širīktu (attested thirty-five times between ca. 555-521 BCE). Besides being intermarried, the Ea-ilūtu-bani and the Ilī-bāni families were further connected through shared contacts and overlapping business interests. The Nanāhu family branch is almost exclusively represented by a man called Ahušunu (attested thirty-two times between ca. 522-492 BCE). His texts entered the archive cluster as a result of his marriage with ^fLurindu (sixth generation, ca. 494-492 BCE), the daughter of Mušēzib-Bēl//Ea-ilūtu-bani and his wife of the Ilī-bāni family.

There is only circumstantial evidence that the main family branches of this archive cluster were involved in the cult. First, both Mušēzib-Bēl and his father are attested as temple craftsmen, more specifically as goldsmiths.⁶³ Secondly, the archive contains various texts belonging to a certain Zēru-Bābili/Šumā/Ea-ilūtu-bani (ca. 587-550 BCE), who is commonly identified as temple-enterer of Nabû. Even though F. Joannès (1989: 37-38⁶⁴) has shown that, despite the onomastic similarities, he should not be equated with Mušēzib-Bēl's father, this Zēru-Bābili was obviously closely related to the archive-holding branch of the family. Finally, while the Ea-ilūtu-banis and the Ilī-bānis are well-known temple-enterer clans in Borsippa, the Nanāhu clan is thus far only attested as cultic 'entertainers' (*kurgarrû*), a prebendary profession whose status in the temple hierarchy is not entirely clear. Yet, the fact that this task was performed in close proximity to the gods and the additional fact that the Nanāhu family received a temple-enterer's daughter in marriage, suggest that this family was of comparable priestly status.⁶⁵ Hence, in the following study I will subsume the information of the Nanāhus under the category of temple-enterers.

⁶² She was previously married to Mušēzib-Bēl's older brother. After ^fHubbušītu's death, Mušēzib-Marduk preserved the alliance between the two families by marrying his late wife's niece, ^fAmat-Sutīti//Ilī-bāni. See Waerzeggers 2002 for other examples of affinal endogamy in the Neo-Babylonian period.

⁶³ See Waerzeggers 2010: 39 for the temple goldsmiths in Ezida. Cf. Bongenaar 1997: 363ff. for the same profession in the Ebabbar temple of Sippar. While there is so far no evidence that the service of the goldsmith was integrated into the prebendary organisation, it is very likely that these craftsmen working in close proximity of the statues of the gods were temple-enterers.

⁶⁴ Following an earlier observation by San Nicolò 1947: 155. Cf. van Driel 1992: 34.

⁶⁵ For the *kurgarrû*, see Maul 1992, George 2000: 270-271, Rollinger 2000: 73, Linssen 2004: 17, 120, and Peled 2014.

One has to realise that our knowledge about temple-enterer families from Borsippa is restricted. While references to individual temple-enterers – many of which were *šatammu* or *šākin-ṭēmi* – can be found in the documentation,⁶⁶ these give insight into the upper reaches of the temple administration and the circle of leading families but do not assist us in reconstructing (and contextualising) the functioning of these priestly families in their community. Besides the archive cluster discussed above, there is only one more archive in the corpus belonging to a temple-enterer, the Iddin-Papsukkal (B) archive.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this ‘archive’ consists of less than ten texts and does very little to alleviate the gap in our documentation.

0.7.2. Brewers

Families identified by C. Waerzeggers as belonging to the ranks of the brewers (*sirāšu*) include Ahiya’ūtu, Ardūtu, Hušābu, Ilia, Ilšu-abūšu, Kudurrānu, Lā-kuppuru, Mannu-gērūšu and Šikkūa.⁶⁸

With up to ten private archives the brewers are the best-represented priesthood in Borsippa.⁶⁹ Totalling nearly 300 texts, the so-called Ilia (A) archive is our foremost source on this prebendary group.⁷⁰ Not only does it provide a unique glimpse into the organisation of the prebendary brewers, it also informs us in great detail about the family’s marriage alliances and genealogy, indeed resulting in one of the largest and most complex family trees reconstructed for the Neo-Babylonian period so far.⁷¹

The archive spans 119 years (ca. 520-489 BCE) and covers five successive generations. However, the vast majority of the texts relate to Marduk-šumu-ibni (aka. Ardīa)/Šulā, who was active for no less than fifty-four years. As he was the first son of Šulā’s second marriage, Marduk-šumu-ibni (together with his two younger siblings) saw the paternal estate being divided in favour of his older (half-)brother, who received a 2/3-

⁶⁶ See note 49, above.

⁶⁷ Jursa 2005: 85, Waerzeggers 2005: 361.

⁶⁸ Waerzeggers 2010: 79. There are several more families that might have been affiliated to this priesthood, but the evidence remains weak so far: Aqar-Nabû, Allānu, Kinia, Naggāru, Ninurta-ušallim, Šēpē-ilia, and Zērūtu. See Waerzeggers 2010: 188-195 for a full prosopography of the brewers.

⁶⁹ Jursa 2005: 76-94.

⁷⁰ The following information on the Ilia (A) archive can be found in Jursa 2005: 85-87 and Waerzeggers 2010: 372ff.

⁷¹ Waerzeggers 2010: 735-737

share in accordance with the Neo-Babylonian law of inheritance.⁷² To some extent this disadvantageous position determined the course of Marduk-šumu-ibni's professional life.

Much of his energy went into the service of the gods. Besides the prebends inherited from his father, Marduk-šumu-ibni often helped other relatives discharging their prebendary obligations; this occasionally allowed him to assume ownership over additional service days. Marduk-šumu-ibni also owned various plots of land, but his shares were often fragmentary and much of the property was managed on a communal basis with his younger brothers. Rather than buying additional land, Marduk-šumu-ibni usually resorted to exchange in order to improve his inherited estates. That this may have been a result of a shortage of liquid assets is suggested by the fact that silver lending plays only a very minor role in his business affairs.

While his family maintained close marriage ties with the fellow brewer clan of the Ilšu-abūšu, Marduk-šumu-ibni himself was married to ^fInšabtu//Ša-nāšišu, a clan that would rise to considerable power in Babylon and Sippar in the course of the reign of Darius I.⁷³ The couple had three daughters and a son. Even if Marduk-šumu-ibni could not be counted among the richest individuals of Borsippa, he nevertheless enjoyed considerable prestige in the community. One of his daughters was married to the *šatammu* of Ezida, while the other wed the son of Šaddinnu//Bēliya'u, a former overseer (*šāpiru*) of the temple bakers (see below). Marduk-šumu-ibni was also closely associated to Nabû-zēru-ušabši//Ilia (D), the governor of Borsippa, with whom he held a prebend in joint ownership. Finally, towards the end of his career Marduk-šumu-ibni was also active as notary scribe, a responsibility that can only have further promoted his standing in his community.

0.7.3. Bakers

Not far below the temple brewers ranked the priesthood of the bakers (*nuhatimmu*). According to C. Waerzeggers' estimation, up to one hundred individual bakers might have been employed by the Ezida temple at any given moment. They were recruited from the following families: Bēliya'u, Esagil-mansum, Kidin-Sîn, Nabû-mukîn-apli, Šēpē-ilia.⁷⁴

⁷² Roth 1995: 148.

⁷³ E.g. Waerzeggers 2014 and Waerzeggers [forthcoming].

⁷⁴ See for the following Waerzeggers 2010: 207-208.

The oldest and most prominent among these families were the Kidin-Sîns and the Šēpê-īlias. Not only did their involvement in this trade go back to at least the eighth century, they still accounted for 55% and 29% of all known bakers towards the end of the long sixth century. By contrast, the Nabû-mukīn-apli clan did not achieve such stability: while this family still owned a considerable share of the baker's service in the seventh century, their patrimony was almost completely lost to the Bēliya'us in the course of the sixth century BCE. This last family is not attested until the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II and might only have settled in Borsippa around the 550s BCE. It has been argued that the Bēliya'us (perhaps together with the Esagil-mansum family⁷⁵) were part of a larger group of families that moved from the capital of Babylon to the burgeoning provincial towns during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II.⁷⁶ The old and native Kidin-Sîn and Šēpê-īlia families did not associate much with the immigrant families of the Bēliya'u and the Esagil-mansum, practically dividing the ranks of bakers in two contrasting camps (see Ch. 3.3. and Ch. 4.2.3.).

Today most of our attention goes to the Bēliya'u family, which has left the only baker's archive from Borsippa recovered so far.⁷⁷ It consists of circa 375 documents belonging to Šaddinnu/Bēliya'u, second son of Balassu and ^fQunabātu/Esagil-mansum, who can be followed for over fifty years (between ca. 536-484 BCE). Šaddinnu was married to ^fNanāya-Damqā/Šillāya, whose family had no obvious ties to the temple. The couple got at least one son, who was married to the daughter of the local brewer Marduk-šumu-ibni/Ilia (see above).

Even if his family lacked roots in the locale and could therefore not call on a particular family tradition as bakers of Nabû, Šaddinnu was nonetheless able to make a career in this line of business. Besides inheriting a number of service days from his father, he acquired additional prebends from various colleagues early on in his career. Moreover, from 518 BCE onwards, Šaddinnu assumed greater responsibility within the ranks of the bakers as supervisor of specific service units (*bēl-šapatti*), and more importantly, by occupying the position of overseer (*šāpiru*) of all the bakers of Nabû, a post traditionally held by the Kidin-Sîn family.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Zadok 2005b.

⁷⁶ See for more on this trend of immigrating families Waerzeggers 2014.

⁷⁷ The following information can be found in Jursa 2005: 81-82, Waerzeggers 2010: 475ff. The edition of this archive is in preparation by J. Wojciechowska.

⁷⁸ Waerzeggers 2010: 209-212.

Besides the substantial part that concerns Šaddinnu's activities as temple baker, the archive reflects the usual interest of first millennium priests in real estate, slave ownership and silver lending. Yet, in many ways Šaddinnu differed from his fellow priests as he more successfully engaged in entrepreneurial activities alongside his priestly functions. One of his particular enterprises involved the acquisition of vacant or dilapidated houses and urban plots, with the aim of subsequently renting them.⁷⁹ He invested a considerable amount of silver in this niche, as the archive contains evidence for over a dozen of such acquisitions, some from insolvent debtors. Even if other priestly families made money with similar activities too, their involvement was usually modest compared to Šaddinnu's. That his entrepreneurial aspirations could at least in part be understood against his immigrant background and lack of historical roots in Borsippa is suggested by the business profile of other migrant families in first millennium Babylonia, like for instance the Šāhit-ginês from Sippar, who were also able to gain a foothold and thrive both inside and outside of the temple institution, be it on a larger scale than Šaddinnu.⁸⁰

0.7.4. Oxherds

The prebendary oxherds (*rē'i-alpī*) stood on a lower echelon of the large and diverse subdivision of the purveying priesthoods.⁸¹ While these priests were in the first place cattle breeders who looked after the bulls destined for the offerings, they were also responsible for dairy production. In Borsippa, over the course of the long sixth century, the homonymous Oxherd, or, Rē'i-alpi family exercised a near-monopoly on this trade.

This at least can be drawn from the Rē'i-alpi family archive.⁸² With over 400 documents this is the largest archive from Borsippa, and the third largest private archive from first millennium Babylonia. While it attests to five consecutive generations (ca. 620-484 BCE) the majority of the documents concern Nabû-mukîn-zēri/Aplā (ca. 560-500 BCE) and his son Rēmût-Nabû (ca. 525-492 BCE) of the third and fourth generation respectively. Nabû-mukîn-zēri (aka. Murašû) was married to ^fNanāya-bulliṭiš/Mubannû, with whom he had two children: a daughter named ^fInbā, who married into the Šarrahu

⁷⁹ Jursa *et al.* 2010: 170f.

⁸⁰ Waerzeggers 2014.

⁸¹ Information on this prebend in Ezida can be found in Waerzeggers 2010, Ch. 7.

⁸² Jursa 2005: 93f. For a discussion of the prebend-related dossiers, see Waerzeggers 2010: 553ff. An edition of this archive is in preparation by R. Zadok.

family, and a son named Rēmūt-Nabû, the second protagonist of the archive. Rēmūt-Nabû was married twice: first to a woman of the Ardūtu family, a minor brewer clan, and later to ^fAhattu//Arad-Ea. The latter assumes an active role in the archive, especially when after her husband's death she temporarily took over the family's affairs.

Besides a large number of title deeds, loans and some slave texts, the archive informs us in great detail about the management of the temple service and provides us with a unique insight into the organisation of the Oxherd clan at large. The clan managed its prebendary patrimony with great fluidity and ease, reflecting a general attitude of co-operation and solidarity that transpires equally in business affairs outside of the temple. It has been suggested that it was exactly this principle of solidarity that allowed Nabû-mukīn-zēri and Rēmūt-Nabû massively to expand their prebendary portfolio and acquire a highly influential position among the oxherds of Ezida.⁸³ Moreover, the family was very rich, as can be seen from the fact that the value of Rēmūt-Nabû's property portfolio amounted to well over a talent of silver by 502 BCE.⁸⁴

Even if the Rē'i-alpi family qualifies as a genuine priestly family, we will see throughout this study that the oxherds often did things their own way. They distort the overall picture and complicate attempts to generalise larger sets of data on more than one occasion. While according to the *communis opinio* the oxherds are to be situated on a medium-low rung of the temple hierarchy, the family manifests itself as a major player in the priestly community of Borsippa. Is this due to the efficient family organisation, their wealth, or was their status in the temple simply more significant than previously thought? The Oxherds had (ab)used their influence in the past, as can be seen in SAA 10 353,⁸⁵ a letter written to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE) by the royal agent Mār-issār reporting that the oxherds⁸⁶ of Borsippa had refused to draw up accounts of their live-stock, withheld various offerings and bribed the city governor and chief temple administrator, who are said to do the oxherds' bidding. Moreover, around the same time the oxherds seem to have forged a marriage alliance with the chieftain of the Gambūlu

⁸³ Waerzeggers 2010: 287.

⁸⁴ Although he might have been forced to sell much of his property by the end of that year, see Waerzeggers 2010: 646-649.

⁸⁵ Parpola 1993: 289-291.

⁸⁶ While the letter mostly refers to *rē'ū* (^{lū}sipa), lit. 'shepherd,' it uses at least once the full term *rē'i-alpē* (^{lū}sipa-gud.nita.meš, see l. 24). Moreover, that both terms were interchangeable has been shown by C. Waerzeggers 2010: 274⁺⁹⁴³.

tribe according to the reports in SAA 18 56,⁸⁷ which should further underline their prominent social standing in the community.

0.7.5. Reed-workers

Located at the lowest fringes of the temple hierarchy were the minor craftsmen, among which we find the reed-workers (*atkuppu*). Usually mentioned after the prebendary food preparers and the temple's support staff, the reed-workers were responsible for making cultic baskets and presumably keeping up the reed structures in and around the temple precinct. As I have said earlier, there is no evidence that reed-workers belonged to the consecrated priesthood, or participated in the daily ceremony on the temple courtyard, or had to comply with any rules of purity beyond a minimum degree of hygiene. As was the case with the previously discussed priesthood, the service of the reed-workers in Ezida was in the hands of the homonymous Reed-worker, or Atkuppu, family.

The Borsippa corpus is unique in that it offers us the possibility to study a family of minor temple craftsmen through the Atkuppu family archive.⁸⁸ It spans some 120 years (between ca. 608-485 BCE) and attests to five successive generations. However, with only 110 documents it is limited in size compared to the archives discussed above, and its textual coverage is rather shallow. To some extent this is mitigated by the fact that the majority of the texts pertain to the third and fourth generations. The third generation is represented by Marduk-šumu-ibni (aka. Sūqāya)/Nabû-ēṭir. He married ^fKāribtu//Adad-nāšir, whose family held no cultic occupation. The fourth and best-attested generation is represented by their four sons: Nabû-šumu-ušur (aka. Nabû-ušuršu), Nabû-iddin, Murānu and Iqīša. The four brothers worked in close co-operation and seem to have managed the archive in close succession between circa 534 and 494 BCE.

While property and family documents are largely missing, the available evidence indicates that the family had modest financial means compared to, for example, the Bēliya'u or Rē'i-alpi families. Besides a small share in the reed-worker's prebend, the Atkuppis owned not more than two small date gardens. Moreover, their business ventures were of relatively humble proportions, and while occasionally engaging in

⁸⁷ Reynolds 2003: 42-43. Note, however, that the father of the groom is referred to as 'chief shepherd of Nabû' (^{lu}gal-sipa.meš ša Nabû) and not as 'oxherd', but that this is meant seems likely in the light of the previous letter.

⁸⁸ Jursa 2005: 80. An edition of this archive is currently in preparation by K. Abraham, who kindly allowed me to use a preliminary edition of these texts.

moneylending, they were usually indebted for higher sums than they themselves extended – all of which points to limited cash reserves.

Even if there is no doubt that the Atkuppis were part of the priestly community of Borsippa, it will be demonstrated that the family represents the edge group in our data sample, located at the fringes of the social unit under investigation – not only in terms of temple status but also in social standing, social behaviour and interaction.

0.8. Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into two parts. In **PART ONE** (Ch. 1–4) I will investigate specific social events and interactions of the priesthood of the Ezida temple in Borsippa. **Chapter 1** is devoted to the marriage practices of the priests. With the help of social network analysis I will reconstruct the marriage alliances of the Borsippean priesthood, and reveal that this community observed a complex marriage system known as hypergamy. Functioning as a building block in society, marriage deeply affected the social organisation of participating families as well as the execution of their cultic duties. **Chapter 2** will explore various aspects of landownership. I will first look into the history and origins of so-called *hanšû* land, which had been granted to Borsippean families by early first millennium kings. Based on the naming patterns of these landed estates I will reconstruct the range of original beneficiaries. Finally, I will assess which value this land held for the descendants of the original beneficiaries, during the long sixth century BCE. The second part concerns the sales of property, which will be examined in the light of existing marriage ties and professional affiliations. An examination of the patterns of tenancy and agricultural collaboration will conclude this chapter. By taking a closer look at the background of tenants it will be possible to determine on whom the priests relied for the management of their landed property. **Chapter 3** investigates credit operations. By looking into the various prebendary groups individually, it can be shown that the patterns of silver lending, while depending on personal circumstances, were equally influenced by professional affiliation and faintly follow the temple-based hierarchy. **Chapter 4** reconstructs circles of trust and intimacy. In the first part I will subject the various archives to a quantitative examination. A comparison between the numbers of individuals mentioned only once in the archives and those attested more often will inform us about the structure of the personal networks of trust and intimacy on a general level. At the same time, it will be examined whether or not different social and economic attitudes of the protagonists are reflected in purely quantitative terms. Secondly, drawing

on the concept of tie strength developed in the social sciences it will be possible to complement this quantification with a more qualitative analysis. Focusing on the most frequently attested individuals, I will take a closer look at the personal networks of the priests, the kinds of individuals that may be classified as ‘friends’ and their role in the life of the protagonists.

In **PART TWO** (Ch. 5–6) I will take a step back and examine the interactional pattern of the Borsippean priests as a whole. It will be approached from a more theoretical perspective and linked up with broader social phenomena of Neo-Babylonian society. **Chapter 5** will start by evaluating possible causations behind the pattern of interaction reconstructed in PART ONE. Drawing on the concept of homophily, I will propose an interpretation that allows for a reasonable degree of agency and choice on the part of the priests, while leaving room for limiting factors of interaction, such as geographic space and demography. Moreover, by further developing the concept of homophily it will be shown that the interaction of the priests is in line with the economic motivations nurtured by this social group as so-called rentiers. At the same time it will be argued that classifications like rentiers and entrepreneurs are characterised by more than economic criteria. Finally **Chapter 6** is concerned with reconstructing the collective social identity of the Babylonian priest. The outlines of the interactional pattern points to the existence of a social boundary that separated the social group of the priests from the rest of society. I will try to reconstruct the symbolic and material resources on which Babylonian priests drew to create and maintain their social in-group by investigating a series of identity markers, including property ownership, historical consciousness, literacy, and language.

The study's principal findings are summarised in the conclusions.