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The pots and potters of Assyria : technology and organization of production, ceramics sequence and vessel function at Late Bronze Age Tell Sabi Abyad, Syria

Duistermaat, K.

Citation

Duistermaat, K. (2007, March 21). *The pots and potters of Assyria : technology and organization of production, ceramics sequence and vessel function at Late Bronze Age Tell Sabi Abyad, Syria*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/11416>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

APPENDIX F
CUNEIFORM TEXTS FROM TELL SABI ABYAD RELATED TO POTTERY

By F.A.M. Wiggermann

Several cuneiform texts found at Tell Sabi Abyad contain information about pottery, or have been written on pottery vessels. This appendix presents a complete transcription, translation, illustration and discussion of these texts, compiled by Frans Wiggermann.

The Sabi Abyad texts presented in this Appendix are:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| T98-131 | an inventory list. |
| T93-3 | a letter concerning pots to be delivered for a meal. |
| T99-31 (=P99-21) | an inscribed fragment of a carinated bowl. |
| T98-46 (=H8 30-232:6) | an inscribed sign on a large storage pot. |
| P99-339 | an inscribed sign on a large storage pot. |

T98-131 (Inventory of cult utensils, Tell Sabi Abyad) compared with KAV 118 (MA, Aššur)
Figs. F.1, F.2

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. 10 DUG.ša-a[p]!/?-p[a-tu] | šapputu | [(x)] | “(a container)” ²⁴¹ |
| 3 DUG.ḫu-ru-[pu] | ḫuruppu | [(x)] | “(metal) dish” |
| 2 D[U]G.ma-ku-su | makkusu | 7 | “(a bowl)” |
| 2 D[U]G.ku-ku-ba-tu | kukkubu | 14 | “(a small container)” |
| 5. 1 DUG.a-ga-nu | agannu | 3 | “(a large bowl)” |
| 5 DUG.ka-lu | kallu | 10 | “bowl” |
| 1 DUG.ḫa-pa-al-tu | ḫapaltu | 3 | “(a container)” |
| 1 DUG.na-zi-tu | namzītu/nazzītu | [(x)] | “(fermenting vat)” |
| 5 DUG.pu-ur-s[i]-a-[t]u | pursītu | 7 | “(a bowl)” |
| 10. 5 DUG.sa-a-[ḫ]a-ra-tu | sahḫarru | [(x)] | “(a small bowl)” |
| | adds: | 14 laḫannu | “(a bottle)” |
| | and on rev.: | 14 large nignakku | “censer” |
| | | 14 small nignakku | |

The reverse of T98-131 is sealed with the seal of Tammitte, the steward of the *dunnu* at Tell Sabi Abyad. The tablet was found in square H8 in level 5, in the office in the north-west of the settlement.

Comments:

In line 1 the signs -a[p]!/?-p[a-tu] are epigraphically uncertain, but since ša- is beyond doubt, šappātu is the only available word (cf. the list of vessel names beginning with ša- in Sallaberger 1996: 116).

The Aššur text (KAV 118) parallels the text from Tell Sabi Abyad in as far as it is preserved (the upper part is lost), and stems from a library/archive in Aššur comprising texts dated to the MA and NA periods (Pedersén 1986: 13f., 21, N 1:28). Palaeographically the text is Middle Assyrian; CAD classifies it sometimes as MA (*kukkubu*, *laḫannu*, *pursītu*), and sometimes as NA (*agannu*, *ḫapālu*, *makkasu* B). The pottery names of the Aššur text are treated by Schroeder (1930/31).

Whereas the Sabi Abyad text is sealed, the Aššur text is not, but instead it has an additional line at the lower edge which may have served as the equivalent of a sealing. The reading of this line is not completely certain, but with a slight emendation of the first sign a PN may be recognized: Adad-da'iq (^dIŠKUR-SIG₅). Schroeder (1930/31: 112) read here “ten liters (BAN₂) of good clay (IM SIG₅)”, banal and out of tune, but not impossible unless clay was measured in mina's only; Saporetto (1970: 43/8) does not list this text under the PN in question, and thus either accepts Schroeder's interpretation, or classifies the text

²⁴¹ These translations have been taken from the dictionaries.

as NA. The two texts can be characterized as issues of pottery items under the responsibility of a high (state) official. Their existence implies that such items were inventoried periodically by a still higher authority, but there are no texts to confirm this kind of administrative action.

The non-pottery items that follow the PN in the Aššur text on the reverse are not duplicated by the Sabi Abyad text, and may be taken as an addition to the pottery core that both texts have in common: 14 large censers, 14 small censers. On the basis of the censers Schroeder rightly considers the whole text to be an inventory of “Material für eine kultische Handlung” (1930/31: 112), an opinion adopted by the CAD (*kukkubu*: list of cult utensils). As such the text is comparable to TMH 1-2 no. 250, a NB list of materials (foodstuffs, plants, wool) and utensils (pottery vessels, censers) for a ritual. The fact that the Aššur text and the Sabi Abyad text list the same set of pottery vessels, and that there are no other texts of this type with different sets of pottery vessels, makes it likely that in both cases this specific set served the same specific purpose, some sort of common ritual or ceremony. The narrow relation between the two texts is confirmed by the appearance in the Sabi Abyad text of a word previously known only from the Aššur text (**ḥapālu* in CAD and AHW, now shown to be *ḥapaltu*).

There are two indications as to the nature of the ritual or ceremony underlying the inventory of vessels in the two texts. The first is that the only other LBA attestation of one of the items, *ḥuruppu*, occurs in the MA Laws (Tablet A § 42, Schroeder 1920), where *ḥuruppu*-dishes are brought by the future husband as a token of engagement on the occasion of the (betrothal) banquet (*šākultu*); the passage shows that this dish might function in a private setting. All other pottery items occur in domestic as well as in unspecific ritual contexts, and do not give a clue as to the nature of the underlying ceremony. The quantity of the items varies irregularly between the two texts, which points to a setting with a variable and not very large number of attendants, be it private or public.

The second indication is the official administrative nature of the texts, evidenced not only by their presence in an archive, but also by the identification of the responsible officials (by a sealing in Tell Sabi Abyad, by a name in Aššur). It shows that the items were issued under state supervision, and hence that the underlying ceremony was public rather than private. The recurrence of the numbers 7 and 14 in the Aššur text suggests that the quantity of these items was fixed by standard liturgical requirements (such as the number of gods present), rather than by the contingencies of the occasion (such as the number of people present), and thus seems to confirm the public nature of the underlying ritual.

The two indications can be harmonized by postulating a ceremony involving: a fixed liturgical setting; a banquet (*šākultu* implied by *ḥuruppu*) organized by the authorities, with beer (implied by *nazzītu*) and fumigations (implied by *nignakku* in the Aššur text); and a variable number of attendants.

In fact there is evidence for such a banquet (*šākultu*) ceremony at Tell Sabi Abyad. In the letter T97-34, dated early in the reign of Aššur-nādin-apli (*līmu* Urad-Kūbe), when Buriya was still *abarakku*, Ilī-padā urges his steward to speed up the perfume makers (*mu-ra-qe-e*) for the “yearly occasion” (*ša ša-at-ti-šu*, cf. ¹²*ša šat-ti-šu*), since “during the banquet (ceremony) I will be pouring out (scented) oil on behalf of the king” (¹⁴*i-na ša-kūl-te* ¹⁵*I₃ a-na UGU LUGAL* ¹⁶*ū-tab-ba-ak*). A roughly contemporaneous text from Aššur suggests that day and month (8 *Ḥibur*) of the assignment are significant. The Aššur text in question (KAJ 92, cf. Postgate 1988: no. 65) records a delivery of sheep for the *tākultu* ceremony in Nineveh, and is dated to 10 *Ḥibur*. R. Frankena, who discussed the text in conjunction with other (later) evidence (1953: 53ff.), concluded that the *tākultu* ceremony was part of the Akītu festival, and that in Nineveh in the MA period it took place yearly not much after *Ḥibur* 10. Although the MA ritual calendar remains largely unclear, the significance of *Ḥibur* in the yearly cycle also jumps out in the texts from Dur Katlimmu, where the yearly muster of cattle, donkeys, and ovids took place on the 20th of that month (Röllig 1984: 192).

The little that is known of the Tell Sabi Abyad *šākultu* shows that it involved a ritual act (the pouring of scented oil) and the king. Among the very few literary texts from the site two are centred on the king, confirming the local execution of royal rituals. One (T96-31) addresses the king with good wishes, the other (T04-15) contains two prayers to Ištar on behalf of Aššur-nādin-apli. There were several “singers” (*zammāru*) on duty in the *dunnu* (T98-45 A ii 40', T9-93 rev. 2', 7', T01-3 rev. 19, 30), but it is not clear if they were responsible for the recitation of the liturgical texts.

The yearly occasion of the ceremony (*ša šattišu*), the date (*Ḥibur*), and the involvement of the king correlate the *šākultu* of T97-34 with the *tākultu* of other MA and NA texts. In connection with an inscription of Šamšī-Adad I it has been plausibly suggested that in the Middle Bronze Age *šākultu* was used for later *tākultu* (Grayson 1987: 58, following Charpin 1984: 49), and it is quite likely that the Tell Sabi Abyad usage is

a survival of the past. In any case, since the Tell Sabi Abyad *šākultu* took place at about the same time (Ḫibur) as the national *tākultu*, the provincial royal ritual must have been performed in the absence of the king. Possibly the king was represented by a statue on such occasions; actual royal statues of this period have not yet been found, but they must have existed (cf. *šalam šarri* “statue of the king” in MARV III 71:6, Grayson 1987: 301.24, 28, Aššur-nādin-apli).

Special administrative attention to the pottery used in a *šākultu/tākultu* ceremony was deduced above from the existence of the records T98-131 and KAV 118. The special status of this kind of ritual objects is confirmed by the remains of inscribed MA pottery vessels from the Aššur temple in Aššur (Frankena, 1953: 51f., Grayson 1987: 161f. Adad-narari I; 213ff. Salmaneser I); the inscriptions suggest that the pottery was ordered by the king for a *tākultu* ceremony, and then became the property of the Aššur temple.

Another formal (but not ritual) occasion in Tell Sabi Abyad is the “dinner party (*naptunu*) of Ilī-padâ”. On one of these occasions the host served 40 *qû* of beer (T97-23), which implies between 20 and 40 guests. Among the people entertained by Ilī-padâ in the *dunnu* may have been (besides local worthies and regional functionaries) the “foreign delegates” (*ubrûtu*) travelling to and from his capital somewhere in the region (T97-10: 15-17: *i-na p[a-n]i* ^mDINGIR-*pa-da*, NINDA.MEŠ *e-ta-na-ku-lu*). Ilī-padâ’s guests must have been seated in the large Mittelsaal of the “palace”, the only space that had the capacity for this number of people. In Aššur such dinner parties were held by the king for his magnates (Müller 1937: 59ff., Harrak 1990: 71:14, Frankena, 1953: 54f., Van Driel 1969: 159ff.); some were apparently cultic (Weidner 1935/36:10, archive of Ninurta-tukul-Aššur, MA).

The steward hosted dinner parties as well (T01-2:2f., Buriya; T99-13:1, Tammitte); these presumably were an internal affair. One text records the issue of respectively 5 and 2 goats for two different (?) dinner parties (T93-9, the name of the host is broken).

T 93-3

Figs. F.3, F.4

1. *a-na* ^m[*m*]a-nu-ki-i-^dIŠKUR
qī-bi-ma
um-ma [^m]u-SIG₅-^da-šur-ma

mi-nu-ú-[m]a an-ni-ú

5. *ša am-mar a-qa-bi-a-ku-ni*
ki-i pi-[i]a la te-pu-šu-ni
a-na-i-ni L[U₂].BAḪAR₂
a-na ^{uru}du-n[i]-^da-šur
a-na UGU LU₂.[L]UNGA
10. *la t[a-á]š-pu-ur*
na-áš-pé[r-t]a-ka
a-na UGU L[U₂].LUNGA-ka
ša ^{uru}saḫ-la-li
lu tal-li-ka
15. KAŠ.MEŠ
^{duḡ}ta-ri-ḫa-te
um-ti s[u]-ti-ú
i-lu-ku-ni-n[i] NINDA.MEŠ
i-na pa-ni-ia e-ku-lu-ni
20. *li-di-in ma-an-na-ma*
le-r[i]-iš ma-nu-ma
li-di-na
ṭup(!)-pa-[t]e an(!)-ni(?) -a-te
ar-ḫiṣ še-bi-la

The text is not sealed. It was found in a pit in square K9.

Translation:

Speak to Mannu-kî-Adad, thus says Mudammeq-Aššur: what is this, that you do not execute any of my commands as I tell you? Why did you not give orders to (your) brewer (to send) a potter to Dunni-Aššur? Let a written order go out from you to your brewer in Saḫlalu, that he must give beer and *tariḫu*-vessels (for) when the Suteans come to have dinner with me. Whom (else) could I ask, who (else) could give it to me? Do send these(?) tablets (with orders) promptly.

Comments:

A preliminary edition of the text had been given at the XLith RAI in Berlin 1994, after which it was quoted by Jakob (2003: 474f). Meanwhile a new copy has been made.

Mannu-kî-Adad is the steward of the *dunnu* Tell Sabi Abyad during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, and Mudammeq-Aššur is a regional functionary in the service of the grand vizier Aššur-iddin.

The dinner organized by Mudammeq-Aššur is probably the setting for a more or less formal meeting between representatives of the Assyrian imperial administration and the local Sutean pastoralists, an occasion on which the two parties could confirm their good relations and discuss current affairs. The dinner was to take place in Dunni-Aššur, an Assyrian centre somewhere to the north of Tell Sabi Abyad and Saḫlalu (see most recently Llop-Raduà 2002, Luciani 2001). Not long after the time of Aššur-iddin Ilī-padâ formalized (or reformed) the relations with the local Suteans (the Niḫsānu tribe) in a treaty (T04-37). There is no evidence for an earlier treaty, but T93-3 implies that such may well have existed, written or unwritten. In the treaty Ilī-padâ represented the Assyrians, while the Niḫsānu tribe was represented by GAL.MEŠ, “sheikhs”. It were probably such tribal “sheikhs” who were expected at the dinner party organized under supervision of Mudammeq-Aššur.

Mudammeq-Aššur planned to serve food (NINDA.MEŠ) and, more importantly, beer. The food was probably locally available, but the beer and the proper tableware were a problem. Mudammeq-Aššur had requested a brewer and a potter, but neither of them had arrived in Dunni-Aššur. At the time of the letter Mudammeq-Aššur was desperate and, since there was apparently no more time to prepare the pottery in Dunni-Aššur, he now requested just a brewer, who was to brew the beer on the spot and bring the proper tableware ready-made from Saḫlalu (probably Tell Saḫlan some 12 kilometers north of Tell Sabi Abyad on the Balikh, cf. Lyon 2000: 100, 120). That a brewer could serve more than one Assyrian settlement is known from nearby Tell Chuēra (Kühne 1995: 215, Jakob 2003: 32f.), and T 93-3 shows that the same goes for a potter. In that text it seems that the potter is somehow supervised by the brewer.

The *tariḫu*-vessels that Mudammeq-Aššur wanted must have been something special; the word is very rare, but attested elsewhere in connection with beer (among other things) (Jakob 2003: 407, Donbaz 1992: 119f. 17, 20). The context of T93-3 indicates that the *tariḫu*-vessels were to be used during the meal (rather than during the brewing process), while the rarity of the word shows that it did not denote one of the common storing, serving or drinking vessels. The word looks Semitic, but the most likely derivation (*tapris-* to *rāḫu* D “to leave”, “to spare”) does not readily supply a suitable meaning.

Beer is made of grain and thus a specialized product of the settled community. That the pastoralist Suteans appreciated this product appears from the above mentioned treaty, in which two of the six paragraphs regulate their drinking habits - clearly a source of interethnic tension: Suteans are not allowed to buy beer on tick, and they are not allowed to drink the beer that they bought in the pub (“at the brewer’s” *pāni sirāšê*), but have to take it back to their camp.

In the administrative texts T98-58 and T96-34 from Sabi Abyad a number of persons (among them Suteans) receive bronze *kappu*-bowls, perhaps distributed at a dinner party (such as the one of T93-3) as honorary gifts. In a MA text from Aššur (MARV VII 102:22) a Kassite messenger receives among other things a *kappu ša ildi* “bowl with a potstand” and a *kappu ša [kabli?]* “bowl with a [leg]” as *rēmūtu* “honorary gift” (the restoration *ša kabli* is based on MARV I 58:1f.).

In the NA period the king gives out *kāsu*-goblets as honorary gifts. They were meant for wine, not for beer (Cf. Radner 1999/01: a *kāsu* inscribed “Stadtherr von Zarātu”; the goblet type is typically NA, and used for drinking wine).

T99-31 (= P99-21)

Fig. F.5.

A rim fragment of a carinated bowl inscribed [...] x si x [...].

The fragment was found among large amounts of pottery sherds and other waste deposited in the open area in square H9, in level 5.

The reading can be anything: *[bu]r-si-x* is possible, but the fragmentary last sign is neither *-t[u]*, *-t[a]*, *-t[e]*, nor *-i[t]*, which does not favour *pursītu/e/a/* or *pursīt*; *-t[i]* instead of *-t[e]* is unlikely. The preserved signs exclude a capacity measure. The other possibility is a PN, which gives a good solution: *[šá^p]a-si-r[i]* (*a-* half preserved): “[of]Asīr[u]”. But why is this humble product singled out among its countless anonymous brethren to be honoured with an inscription? Was the owner among the guests at one of Ilī-padâ’s dinner parties, and did he forget his honorary gift? Or did he not show up at all?

T98-46 (= H8 30-232:6)**P99-339**

Fig. F.6 and F.7

Two rim fragments of large storage pots, inscribed with a single, very large sign.

T98-46 was found in the fill of a room in square H8, level 5. The rest of the vessel was found in fragments, but although the shape could be reconstructed, the vessel remains incomplete. The inside of the vessel is completely covered in a thick bitumen layer, perhaps in an attempt to make it impermeable.

P99-339 was found in square H12 (H12 8-42). No other fragments of the vessel were found in this context.

The inscription is “A”, possibly “water”, although the spelling A instead of A.MEŠ is unusual. The options are few, however, and another solution does not offer itself.

