

1 | Bureaucracy in the Bronze Age?

Assyria – “The Land of Aššur”¹ – was one of the few polities in the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean which survived the upheavals at the end of the Bronze Age to which the Hittite Empire, Ugarit and the palaces of Mycenaean Greece succumbed. Mesopotamian specialists call the period from 1500 to 1000 BC *Middle Assyrian*, using this term to refer to both the political history and the stage of the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian. In the 14th century, and especially in the 13th century, the kings of this first Assyrian territorial state participated in the palatial culture of the Late Bronze Age (sometimes known as the Amarna Age from the international correspondence of the pharaohs preserved on cuneiform tablets retrieved from El Amarna), and they joined the club of “Great Kings”, to which Egypt, Babylon, Mittani and the Hittite kings belonged.² Of all these great powers, and of all the minor states which were often subordinated to them, it is Assyria which has to this date yielded the greatest variety of written sources, both from the capital and from provincial centres, to illustrate how their power was exercised, and this is the main theme of this book, making it a case study of government in one of the Late Bronze Age states.

Assyria did not of course exist in isolation, and Assyria’s neighbours in time and space such as Nuzi, Alalah, Ugarit and the Mycenaean palaces all participated in the lively international scene in the era of Tutankhamun, and all used clay tablets which have survived to give us a glimpse of the administration of their lands. A comparison shows significant differences in the role of the written documents, and hence in the style of government, further west, although some of the parallels between Assyria and the Mycenaean world are intriguing. In many ways, though, these are all Bronze Age societies: there are distinct similarities between these Late Bronze Age states and between this part of the world in 1800 BC and in 1300 BC. Hence the broad-brush, traditional archaeological concept of the Bronze Age may help to underline these similarities and to point out the contrast with the very different Iron Age world into which Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt survived.

The land of Aššur in the Middle Assyrian period can thus be viewed as a Bronze Age society, but what of the term *bureaucracy*? One definition in my dictionary reads “a system of government or administration by officials, responsible only to their departmental chiefs,”³ thus giving full weight to the concept of a bureau as a government department, which is not inappropriate for the Middle Assyrian case. It will become clear that the bureaux of the Assyrian state were partly supplied by the elite households of the city of Aššur, which retained their

¹ Aššur is the name of both the capital city and its patron deity.

² For a readable, recent account of this diplomatic scene, see Podany 2010.

³ *The Chambers Dictionary* (1993).

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own separate existence as private enterprises. It also seems very likely that the state's administrative modes were modelled on long-standing merchant house traditions. The dictionary's second definition of *bureaucracy* reflects our more negatively loaded usage: "any system of administration in which matters are hindered by excessive adherence to minor rules and procedures". What was "excessive" can only be a matter of opinion, but it will become clear that, in the 13th century at least, the government of Assyria did have its rules and procedures, as reflected in its output of written documents, and that these were more elaborate than those of its close contemporaries or neighbours. In this sense too, therefore, it is not unreasonable to describe it as a bureaucracy.

In using this word, I am, however, conscious that it was applied in a more narrowly defined sense by Weber, who opposed *bureaucratic* to *patrimonial* states.⁴ Middle Assyrian government was organised around the concept of the *house* or *household*, and one might well be tempted to consider it a prime example of a patrimonial early state. However, I shy away from classifying the Middle Assyrian system of government as patrimonial, for there is every reason to think that the houses in question, while functioning in two sectors of society, were aware of the difference and observed the demarcation between them. Just as in many societies today the template of democracy is applied in many different contexts from electing a government to electing the chair of a choral society, without there being an organic relationship between the two, so in Assyria it would have been perfectly natural to borrow the ethos and procedures of the commercial world when establishing an administrative bureau, but this does not oblige us to assume that the two functions were fused. Similarity does not have to imply identity.

The Mesopotamian background

Assyria was of course a late-comer in the history of Mesopotamian bureaucracy. Pride of place will always go to the Third Dynasty of Ur (ca. 2100–2000 BC), whose obsessive documentation was surely never matched. There too the procedures and perhaps also the ethos of commercial life were adapted to the logistical administration of the state, and it may not be coincidental that both governments were seeking to apply a monolithic system across previously independent territories. Just as with Assyria, we are left wondering if Ur III scribal practice was driven by an exaggerated "audit culture" in which administrative duties were equated with commercial liabilities and the documentation was designed to prevent malfeasance while at the same time safeguarding each official from his colleagues. Addressing this issue, Van de Mieroop used the craft archive from the city of Ur and wrote of the individual receipt tablets that "their appearance in the summary account shows their original purpose. The procurement of goods had to be documented, so that the accountant could be absolved from the responsibility for any discrepancies in the available stock, in case of future disputes".⁵

⁴ For bureaucratic and patrimonial states in an Ur III context, see the helpful account of Garfinkle 2008.

⁵ Van de Mieroop 1997, 14.

Steinkeller summarises this as “documents were an instrument of administrative control, which enabled a superior official to audit the performance of his subordinates”, but in his opinion such considerations would have been a secondary factor, “since for the purposes of accountability unwritten forms of reporting would have been quite sufficient”.⁶ However this does not seem to explain why seals were so routinely impressed on tablets which recorded the shifting liabilities within the administration. Members of the literate sector of society may well have operated simultaneously in state and private spheres, and although it has been suggested that “a number of practices developed in the sector of public administration were diffused throughout the private sector as well, and adapted to suit new purposes” (Larsen 1989, 138), it seems entirely possible that the flow was in the opposite direction and that in Ur III times too the administrative system adopted and adapted concepts and practices from commerce.

Nevertheless, the Ur III scribal output can also be seen in a more positive light as providing policymakers and planners with an array of data forming a solid basis for their decisions, and enabling the scribes to create forward-looking estimates.⁷ Undoubtedly some of their account tablets were drawn up to serve the internal purposes of the bureaux concerned, rather than acting as bilateral instruments regulating the responsibilities of the officials. No doubt both were important, but we are left guessing most of the time, because in Ur III times, as in the Middle Assyrian state, the bald administrative texts greatly outnumber the occasional examples of correspondence between officials which might expose more of their attitudes to their work. Remarks like “He must not argue because no seal was rolled (on this tablet)” (Sollberger 1966 no. 302) are as rare in the Ur III corpus as the Assyrian instruction “If within one month you have not brought (and) converted (it), they will not encase (it) for you” (Jakob 2009 Nos. 22–6). Coming closer in time and space, the plethora of state correspondence from Mari under its Amorite rulers in the early second millennium also has relatively little to say about the practices and ethos of administrative recording. Here too the records themselves tend to constitute our best evidence, but the occasional remark in letters can provide a useful corrective, as in the case of two passages cited by Fissore, which led Palaima to comment that “both examples show us that writing enters the routine administrative process in anomalous situations, but is not used in regular circumstances”, a comment which may be valid for Mari and elsewhere, but will not apply in some Middle Assyrian contexts, as should become clear.⁸

The structure of this book

From the outset the aim of this book has been to explore how governments in the Late Bronze Age, and especially the Assyrian state, made use of written instruments, and what effect this may have had on how they governed. This remains the underlying theme, but it may seem

⁶ Steinkeller 2004, 79.

⁷ As set out in Steinkeller 2004.

⁸ Palaima 2004, 358 referring to the sealing practices attested in ARMT 10.12 and ARMT 13.22.

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unlikely that there is enough to say about documentary practice to fill a book of this size, and the truth is that much of what follows is not so much about the documents themselves as the organisations which produced them. To appreciate the role of the written documents we need to understand the social and administrative context in which they were written. There is no recent study of the Middle Assyrian sources which meets this need, largely because over half the documentary sources now available were only published in the past decade or two. As it happens, the different Middle Assyrian archives derive from a variety of government activities,⁹ and when assembled they form a mosaic which presents a coherent picture of the functioning of the state in a level of detail we cannot otherwise match in any of the Late Bronze Age palatial states.

Consequently, after a general survey of the social and economic scene in Chapter 2 and an account of scribal practices and terminology in Chapter 3, the five archives from Aššur described in Chapter 4 and the five from the provinces highlighted in Chapter 5 have been selected not only to provide case studies of Middle Assyrian scribal practice, but also to build up a rounded picture of the variety of state and private administrative enterprises known to us.¹⁰ Inevitably there is much detail in some of these cases which may seem superfluous for the specific objectives of the study of documentary practice, but it is my belief that taken together these snapshots of Assyrian administration offer a wealth of information which will be of interest to all students of the ancient world, whether they read cuneiform or not, and regardless of whether they are interested in the minutiae of documentary practices. Nevertheless, some readers may find the level of detail excessive and with this in mind I have adopted a suggestion from one of the publisher's reviewers – providing each archive with a short synopsis, which may be enough to explain how it contributes to the overall picture and so enable the reader to bypass the full account without losing the thread. These synopses are placed at the beginning of each archive, and set in italic font to distinguish them from the main text which follows.

The book can therefore be seen as an attempt to kill two birds with one stone, and it also addresses two different audiences. In the belief that nothing is as illuminating as original documents, there are frequent verbatim citations: I have attempted to meet the expectations of specialist colleagues by citing passages in the original Akkadian and including justificatory philological comment where necessary, but also to make the material more accessible to non-Assyriologists by translating all but a few technical terms into English and banishing most of the philology to footnotes. The philology needs to be there, because so few of these archives have so far benefitted from a full textual edition, but for the general reader I have tried to keep it short, and on p. xi have provided a note explaining the conventions adopted for the transcription of Assyrian texts.

After the detailed description of the archives, Chapter 6 takes stock of the evidence which emerges for the social and economic organisation of the state, and examines how it might be reflected in the material archaeological record. This can apply on two levels: generally,

⁹ Spread over a couple of centuries, with all the opportunities for change that implies.

¹⁰ For the rationale of the selection, see pp. 82–3. In some instances, there already existed a study of an archive (e.g. by Weidner at Aššur, by Finkelstein at Tell Billa), but a fresh account was required to suit the purposes of this volume, while in others there is no previous overview and this has made it necessary to write a fairly extensive study.

evidence for the presence or absence of a centralised state structure, and more specifically, the detailed correlation of industrial or agricultural enterprises with the archaeological data. There are well-explored tensions in the coordination of archaeological and written sources, and in the way each can be outflanked by the other, but in the case of Assyria the quantity and variety and the geographical, and to some extent chronological, spread of the written documents means that they can deliver a significant body of coherent data, which stands some chance of permitting a convincing reconstruction within certain limits. In the Middle Assyrian context archaeology does of course have a role to play, complementing the textual sources in areas they cannot reach, but at present the written sources are usually more informative and tend to set the agenda.

Having observed the impact of writing in Assyria, to place this in its historical context it needs to be compared with scribal practice in other places and times. Like Aššur itself the cities of Nuzi and Alalah – just to the east of and far to the west of Aššur – were, for a while, under the hegemony of the Mittanian state and are obvious candidates for comparison. In Chapter 7, as with Assyria, so also at Nuzi in the absence of a substantial general account from one of our specialist “Nuzologists”, there was a need to sketch the political, social and economic background before considering the role of the mass of documentation recovered from the site. In Chapter 8, on the other hand, for Alalah, Ugarit and the Mycenaean world, I have confined myself to issues directly relating to the documentation, since in each case there is copious secondary literature and little consensus about some of the critical aspects of the social order.

Finally, Chapter 9 aims to pull together the evidence for the range and variety of documentation in the ten Middle Assyrian archives, which offer different facets of a single centralised system, and to identify the similarities and differences between Assyria and its neighbours in time and space, leading in the final section to some general reflections on government and the written word.

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Introduction

The starting point for this investigation is the discovery of a number of collections of cuneiform tablets left behind by the Assyrians at different places in the centuries from about 1400 to 1000 BC. This is conventionally referred to as the *Middle Assyrian* period, falling as it does between the *Old Assyrian* (roughly 2000–1500 BC) and the *Neo-Assyrian* (roughly 1000–600 BC) periods. These terms are used by philologists to refer to phases in the development of the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian, but they also correspond broadly to different stages in the existence of an Assyrian state, originating at the city of Aššur on the west bank of the Tigris, and governed from there throughout the second millennium BC, although in the first millennium the effective seat of government was transferred northwards, first to Kalḫu, subsequently to Dur-Šarrukin and finally to Nineveh.

Although in the early second millennium BC the city of Aššur was a significant player on the international scene, as a trading post with widespread interests across the Near East, it was not the capital of a major territorial state. Its citizens operated a long distance commercial enterprise, with branches reaching south to northern Babylonia, eastwards towards the Zagros, and then, most strikingly, northwestwards over the barrier of the Taurus mountains to the network of cities which dominated the Anatolian plateau at this time, primarily Kaneš (Kültepe in Cappadocia), but also others. This extensive commercial network did not survive disruptions in the 17th to 16th centuries BC, and in the 15th century BC Aššur itself was for a while under the hegemony of the recently formed Mittanian kingdom, along with cities like Arrapḫa (modern Kerkuk) and Nuzi across the Tigris to the east.¹ In a process for which we have very little direct evidence, Aššur gradually emerged from Mittanian and perhaps also Kassite domination, and asserted itself as a regional power: King Aššur-uballiṭ (1363–1328) famously sought and then claimed recognition from the pharaoh in two of the Amarna letters.² Assyrian documents from this time remain scarce, and are principally private legal transactions concerned with land acquisition in the vicinity of Aššur, and not until the 13th century BC do we see significant numbers of texts deriving from the practice of government. Assyria in the 13th century was ruled by just three kings, Adad-nirari I, Shalmaneser I and Tukulti-Ninurta I, under whom the territory directly administered from Aššur was greatly

¹ See Chapter 7. These are probably the two most important Mittanian cities in the trans-Tigris region between the Lower Zab and the Diyala, but few texts have come from Kerkuk, and a large archive was found at a third site excavated by an Iraqi team at Tell al-Faḫḫar, probably a *dimtu* in the territory of Kurruḫanni (see Kolinski 2001).

² An excellent summary of the evidence for the early years of the Middle Assyrian state is given in Tenu 2009.

expanded.³ Thus it is that not only at the capital of Aššur, but also at a number of towns within the newly established boundaries of the “land of Aššur”, archaeologists have unearthed collections of cuneiform tablets, some small and some very numerous, which were produced by, and so bear witness to, the activities of the Assyrian administration.

The Royal Palace

To appreciate how the scribes, or perhaps we should say the literate administrators,⁴ of the Assyrian state ran their country, we need to have an idea of the society as a whole and of the fundamental economic conditions under which they operated. The government itself was centred on the royal palace, both as a building and as an institution, and the palace, *ēkallu*, makes its appearance in the documentation owning, distributing and receiving people and commodities, so it is there that our survey of the land of Aššur will start. The palace was by definition a residence of the king, and at any time in the second millennium, except for a brief episode when Tukulti-Ninurta moved to his new foundation at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, the king’s primary residence was at the traditional capital, Aššur. It was not always on the same site. Andrea’s team recovered the Middle Assyrian plan of the “Old Palace” constructed above its early second-millennium predecessor, more or less immediately west of the Aššur Temple. This may have been the “palace of Aššur-nadin-aḥḥe”, presumably built by the king of that name who ruled at the beginning of the 14th century. When in 13th- to 12th-century texts we meet the “New Palace” this presumably refers to the large structure erected by Tukulti-Ninurta in the north-west corner of the old city, of which only the platform survived.⁵ And this may not be all, since one of Tukulti-Ninurta’s palace edicts refers to “palaces in the environs of the Inner City” (*ša li[bīt] Libbi-āli*).⁶

The Palace as a Residence

With the construction of new palaces, the older ones may have ceased to function as the king’s primary residence, although they would surely have remained as part of the royal establishment. Despite the absence of any documentation excavated in one of the palaces at Aššur, it seems likely that an extensive royal family would also have been housed in the same building or complex. The first queen herself was referred to as “the woman of the palace” or even just “the palace”,⁷ while the Court and Harem Edicts (discussed later in this chapter) mention “women of the palace”, who presumably include other “wives of the king” (*aššāt šarri*)⁸ and

³ For their approximate dates see Appendix 1.

⁴ For the difficulties of defining the precise role of the scribes within the administration see pp. 50–1.

⁵ Weidner 1954–6, 259.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 274, l. 42.

⁷ Cf. Postgate 2001c.

⁸ See Weidner 1954–6, 261.

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“concubines”⁹ In addition we know these ladies were served by slave women (*amtū*). In the 12th century Archive of Mutta, we meet some of the royal women of differing status and some of the royal children (although in this particular instance perhaps they were not strictly in the king’s harem but that of his regent, Ninurta-tukul-Aššur).

The Court and Harem Edicts confirm the obvious assumption that access to the palace, especially the domestic sector, was tightly controlled. The concept of the “palace precincts” seems to be expressed with the phrase *kalzi ēkalli*, using a word so far only encountered in this context in both Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian times, but without obvious Akkadian etymology.¹⁰ The gatekeepers (*etū*, *utū*, Weidner 1954–6, 265) no doubt admitted or excluded visitors, while the official called the *rab sikkāti* was probably the “key-holder” for doors kept locked,¹¹ but these will normally have been storerooms of one kind or another, as doors through which human traffic regularly passed would not have been sealed with the peg-and-clay sealing system. Fulfilling their duties effectively was evidently important, as the edicts show.

From an Edict of Tiglath-pileser I

*šum-ma lu-ú GAL É.GAL-lim [š]a URU ŠĀ URU
lu-ú NIMGIR É.GAL-lim lu-ú GAL za-ri-qi^{mes}
ša hu-ú-li lu-ú a-su-ú ša be-ta-[a]-nu ù lu-ú
šá UGU É.GAL.MEŠ-te [š]a šid-di KUR-ti gab-bu
ma-zi-iz pa-ni la-a mar-ru-ra a-na É.GAL-lim
ul-te-ri-bu ur-ki-[i]š e-ta-am-ru [š]a¹⁰qe-pu-te^{mes}
an-nu-ú-te 1.TA.ĀM GĪR.MEŠ-šu-nu ú-ba-at-tu-qu*

If either the Palace Overseer of the Inner City or the Palace Herald or the Chief Usher of the road, or the Privy Doctor, or a Supervisor of all the Palaces across the extent of the land, has allowed an uncastrated courtier to enter a palace and later they have found (him), they shall sever one foot of (each of) these representatives.

Weidner 1954–6, No. 20, Tafel XI, 23–6.

Some of the edicts refer to behaviour while the royal court is on the road: in this situation the palace overseer obviously is not present, and the responsibility for the conduct of the court is in the hands of the “chief usher of the road” (*rab zāriqī ša hūli*, Edict No. 20, just quoted). That the court did move around the country is vividly demonstrated by letters found at Durkatlimmu dealing with the arrangements for the arrival of King Tukulti-Ninurta. The party includes six wagons transporting a variety of female members of his household, including the queen, two of her sisters, thirteen other women who are either “our own ladies” (DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ SIG₅ *ni-a-tu*) or Kassite ladies, two flour-processers (*alahhinātu*) and another woman of obscure function. The king himself and his party, including the Kassite king and his wife, are apparently still en route at Apku.¹²

⁹ Using the word *esirâte*, probably meaning “enclosed women”, which is also found in texts from Nuzi and Ḫattusa; Landsberger 1935–6, 144–5. Note how in the Šattiwaza treaty the ruler is allowed to take only one principal wife (the daughter of the Hittite king), but as many concubines (*esirâte*) as he chooses (Landsberger 1935–6, 145; Beckman 1996, 40).

¹⁰ For Neo-Assyrian see CAD K, 108b; the Middle Assyrian occurrence is in an edict of Aššur-uballit (Weidner 1954–6, 268; *Satzung* 1:4).

¹¹ For the “pegs” and the *rab sikkāti*, see Radner 2010.

¹² Cancik-Kirschbaum 1996, No. 10.

The Palace as the Seat of Government

The palace, while serving as a residence, also accommodated a variety of the activities of government. It was the forum for the reception of individuals and delegations from home and abroad, provided storage for valuable items and offered some kind of work or living space for administrative personnel. Unfortunately, despite the recovery of the impressive plan of the “Old Palace”,¹³ the remains do not betray many clues to the use made of different sectors of the building, in particular, no palace administrative archives have been recovered from there, so this can only be an assumption, although the Archive of Mutta gives a snapshot of some of the visitors received at the site over the course of a year. There is no doubt, though, that institutionally the central state administration was carried out in the name of “the palace”. Thus state-owned commodities which are the subject of transactions are described as *ša ēkalli*, “belonging to the palace”, where in other commercial documents we would read the name of the owner or creditor. The “palace” is therefore an authority, a legal persona or abstract entity, as well as a physical establishment.¹⁴ Often this phrase is followed by *ša qāt* PN, “in the charge (lit. hand) of PN”, which gives us the name of the responsible official, who is thus acting as an employee of the palace. Some such employees have this role explicitly recognised in their titles: “palace scribe”, “palace overseer” (*rab ēkalli*), “Palace Herald” or “slave of the palace”, and some of them certainly were active on the premises of one or more palaces. Others, like the courtiers (*mazzaz pāni*), undoubtedly functioned in the palace, but they did not have this role regularly expressed in their titles. Moreover, other officials worked for the palace but not actually inside it: in the cases of the Chief Steward and of Mutta, who undoubtedly both handled palace business, there is reason to think neither of these officials actually operated within the four walls of an official palace, although their archives were found in adjacent areas. It is therefore very difficult to be sure how much of the palace’s business was transacted within the confines of the palace, if defined as a single building complex, and how many of the palace’s staff members or indeed how much of the palace’s property we should expect to find within its four walls.

Although, therefore, we have a number of administrative archives from Aššur at this time, these are in one sense or another “outliers” which illustrate branches of the state’s administration in action, such as the documents from the Chief Steward close to but not architecturally integrated with the palace building. The provenance of a variety of literary and scientific texts in the later debris in the north-eastern part of the city, from the Aššur temple westwards,¹⁵ suggests the palace(s) here may have housed a library, but because some of the state’s core administration was housed apart from the palace proper, it is hard to know which other sectors may also have been distributed elsewhere. It is conceivable that the bulk of administrative documentation was written in separate buildings, or, even if it was initially generated by scribes working in a palace, would have been transferred sooner or later to the “Tablet House”.¹⁶

¹³ See Miglus 1989; 2004.

¹⁴ Cf. Machinist 1982, 20, referring back to Garelli 1967.

¹⁵ See Pedersén 1986, 12–28 Archive N1.

¹⁶ See p. 49.

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Provincial Palaces

Outside Aššur, the administration of the state was delegated to the governors appointed by the king, and they resided in and carried out their administration from provincial palaces.¹⁷ These are sometimes referred to collectively as “palaces across the extent of the land” (*ša šiddi māti*), as illustrated by this account of Tiglath-pileser I’s:¹⁸

É.GAL.MEŠ-te šu-bat LUGAL-ti
 ša ma-ḥa-za-ni GAL.MEŠ-te
 ša ši-di KUR-ti-ia gab-be ša iš-tu
 tar-ši AD.MEŠ-ia i-na MU.MEŠ-te
 dan-na-te um-da-ši-ra-ma e-na-ḥa-ma
 i’-ab-ta DÛ-uš ú-šek-lil
 BĀD.MEŠ KUR-ti-ia an-šu-te
 ak-še-er GIŠ.APIN.MEŠ i-na nap-ḥar KUR^a-šur
 gab-be ú-šèr-ki-is ù ta-ab-ka
 ša ŠE-im^{mes} a-na ša AD.MEŠ-ia
 lu ú-ter lu at-bu-uk
 su-gul-lat ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ GU₃.MEŠ ANŠE.MEŠ
 ša i-na GIŠ.TUKUL-ti^a-šur EN-ia
 i-na KUR.KUR.MEŠ ša a-pe-lu-ši-na-ti
 ki-šit-ti qa-ti-ia
 šá al-qa-a ak-šur

I completed the (re)construction of the palaces, royal residences, of the great cities throughout the whole extent of my land, which from the time of my fathers in years of hardship had been abandoned, dilapidated and destroyed.

I repaired the weakened ramparts of my land. I had ploughs harnessed in the entire land of Aššur, and I stored up storage of grain in excess of that of my fathers.

I formed herds of horses, oxen and donkeys, which I had received as the spoil of my own hands with the support of Aššur my lord in the countries which I rule.

Grayson 1991, 26 Col. vi.94–vii.4

At Ḥarbu (Tell Chuera), Durkatlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad) and Šibaniba (Tell Billa), state ownership of a commodity was consistently expressed by the phrase “of the palace”, and in each case the state archives were found in the palace, high on the principal mound near its steeply sloping edge. This was presumably the governor’s official residence, and we may reasonably assume many of the officials and scribes worked on the premises, if they did not actually sleep and eat there. By contrast, on Ili-pada’s farmstead at Tell Sabi Abyad on the river Baliḥ at the western extremity of the land of Aššur, although there is no doubt that the settlement and its administrators occupied the top of the mound, the establishment is not referred to as “the palace”, maintaining its status as, nominally at least, discrete from the state’s enterprise. This agrees with usage in the first millennium, when “the palace” (*ēkallu*)

¹⁷ This is perhaps the place to correct a false impression conveyed by my phrase “the government was in the hands of a number of ‘houses’ which ... were run along commercial lines” (Postgate 1979c, 202); this has been taken by Machinist (1982, 29–33) to imply that the power was in the hands of these houses, whereas my meaning was rather that the administration was in their hands. So I would not maintain that as a general rule “the Aššur families controlled the provincial government in oligarchic fashion”, although we cannot be sure this was never the case.

¹⁸ Similar but rather less elaborate statements were often included in their annals by his successors down to and including Shalmaneser III in the later 9th century, for example Tukulti-Ninurta II: “I built palaces across the extent of my land, and hitched ploughs across the extent of my land; I stored up in greater quantities than previously stores of grain for the needs of my land, and I added land to the land of Aššur and people to its people” (Grayson 1991, 178).