

Protecting the King in Mesopotamia in the First Millennium BCE: Perspectives from the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires

Shana Zaia

1 Introduction

The Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires (c.1000–610 and 626–539, respectively) dominated Mesopotamia and the surrounding territories for much of the first millennium BCE.¹ Both empires were headed by kings who were divinely chosen and sanctioned, with their successes and longevity indicating the gods' endorsement of their reign. While the ultimate protection of the king was the responsibility of the gods, it was necessary to ensure the king's wellbeing on the mortal plane, and the sources reveal a number of officials close to the king who may have had a protective role. However, there was no single office that corresponded to what we might think of as a "bodyguard" in the modern sense of the word. Instead, the duty of protecting the king fell to different military and/or administrative units depending on the context: in the palace, on the battlefield, or during travels of a military or political nature. Some offices that have been interpreted as "bodyguards" are known, but the extant written corpora in which they appear – largely administrative and archival texts – are related to their roles as part of the court structure and describe their political and administrative duties rather than military ones. This paper provides a survey of these officials and the relevant Akkadian terminology, based primarily on the more abundant evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period but with some comment on the Neo-Babylonian sources.

2 Neo-Assyrian Empire

The most important sources for Neo-Assyrian military history are traditionally the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, ideological texts commissioned by the king that describe his martial and civic accomplishments. Assyrian kings

¹ All dates in this chapter are BCE.

claimed in these inscriptions to have campaigned annually, leading a massive army across treacherous terrain and defeating even the most resilient enemies as they devastated entire cities and regions.² The royal inscriptions do not describe the logistical realities of campaigning, however, nor do they describe the army in detail. Indeed, the army often reads as an afterthought as the primary actors on the battlefield were the king and his gods. It was the gods who were central to the imperial ideology communicated in royal inscriptions, and military campaigns were no exception: the gods commanded the king to go out on campaign, accompanied him on the battlefield, and ensured his success, sometimes inflicting defeat on enemies themselves.³ In fact, the gods were ultimately responsible for the life and death of the king, on and off the battlefield. Before important military undertakings, the king's specialists, such as astronomers, diviners, and exorcists, conducted prophylactic rituals, including determining the will of the gods, reading astronomical omens, and driving away evil omens to ensure the safety of the king.⁴ When it went on campaign, the army was preceded by the divine standards, emblematic representations of the war gods riding in their own chariots, and the royal inscriptions are rife with descriptions of the gods marching alongside the king.⁵ Kings also made offerings to the gods to ensure their longevity and legacy, whether in the form of sacrifices, dedicated objects, or building projects. These offerings would typically end with a statement that the king did this deed in order to ensure his long life and successful reign.⁶ Palaces and city walls were similarly secured by the divine, for example by the protective *lamassu* figures that guarded doorways

2 See Liverani (1979).

3 Many works are dedicated to the topic of kingship and religion, including Maul (2017); Pongratz-Leisten (2015); Trimm (2017); and Holloway (2001).

4 See, for instance, SAA 4 and reports from astronomers such as SAA 8 4, which describes omens related to eclipses and the moon. On the substitute king ritual, which was meant to ward off evil omens predicted for the king by installing someone else as "king" and then executing him, see Radner (2003) 171–72. Furthermore, Schwemer (2012) discusses a Babylonian text from Nineveh with rituals to protect the king in the palace and on campaign that would have been recited by an exorcist.

5 Fuchs (2011) 386; Hundley (2013) 235; Dalley and Postgate (1984, 40) suggest that Adad and Nergal marched with the units ahead of the king on the left and right, respectively, while Ištar was the patron goddess of the king's bodyguard units.

6 For example, Esarhaddon writes regarding his rebuilding of the Aššur temple that, "I built (it) for my life, the prolongation of my days, the securing of my reign, the well-being of my seed, the safeguarding of the throne [of] my priestly office, the overthrowing of my enemies, the prospering of the harvest of Assyria, (and) the well-being of As[syria]" (RINAP 4 59: ii 13–ii 22).

or with names, particularly of the gates, that acted as prayers to the gods.⁷ As a result, the primary protection of the king was depicted in royal inscriptions as the purview of the divine. A king's death in battle, during a revolt, or by assassination was a traumatic event, having not only political but also ideological and theological ramifications for the empire, as it was perceived that the gods had turned away from the king and abandoned him to this fate.

Kings did not rely exclusively upon divine protection, however; Assyrian kings employed a variety of protective measures whether at home or on campaign. Within their palaces, the Assyrian kings had dedicated officials to keep the premises safe, including the *atu'u* "gatekeeper," the *ša maššarti* "watchman," *ša pān nērebi* "the entrance overseer," and *rab sikkāte* "the lock master."⁸ It was quite difficult to gain entrance into the palace or to have an audience with the king.⁹ However, kings were not fully cloistered, and most kings would leave the palace for political excursions, for festivals, and for other exceptional events, during which they would need to be carefully guarded.¹⁰ Military campaigns were the most common reason for kings to leave the palace and were also the most fraught with danger, necessitating a higher level of security. The first line of defense in these cases was the military.

As mentioned, the royal inscriptions do not contain much information about the military or individual officers in favor of promoting an ideological message that the king and his gods were the primary actors in war, while his army was invoked only generically as the supporting cast, despite the emphasis on military campaigns in these texts.¹¹ For instance, Ashurbanipal (r. 668–c.627),

7 For instance, one gate in Nineveh was called "O Ištar, bless the one who provides for you!" and the other gates had similarly theologically-motivated names as well (RINAP 3 16, among other examples). The inner city wall in Dūr-Šarrukīn was called "Aššur extends the reign of the king who built it and protects his troops," (CAD N II s.v. *našāru* s. 7 c'). For Assyrian city walls, their names, and their ideological meanings, see Pongratz-Leisten (1994) 24, 31–34.

8 Radner (2010) 271. On the *ša šēpē ša ēkalli* "personal guard of the palace" see below.

9 Radner (2010); Barjamovic (2011).

10 A comparative example comes from the Hittite material; namely, the "Hittite Instruction for the Royal Guard," which regulates the behavior and actions of the guards, including how the palace guards assemble in the palace courtyard, open various door bolts, and take their places for the king's procession out of the palace, accompanied by several groups of guards who keep various levels of proximity to the king as he exits, passing from the protection of the palace staff to the chief of guards and soldiers; see Miller (2013); Güterbock and van den Hout (1991); and Trimm (2017) 170–73.

11 The royal inscriptions use general terms for military forces or auxiliary troops, including *ummānu*, *šābu*, *kitru*, *emūqu*, *urbu*. High officials are mentioned more rarely, such as the *turtānu* Dayyān-Aššur leading the army on behalf of Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3 A.o.102.14); on powerful officials see Siddall (2013).

who did not generally lead campaigns, famously claimed that the war goddess Ištar of Arbela spoke directly to him, beseeching him to remain in the safety of his palace and enjoy food and drink while she destroyed the Elamite king, only for Ashurbanipal to take credit several lines later for leading the army into the fray and beheading the enemy king in battle himself.¹² A fragmentary letter to a king, perhaps Esarhaddon (r. 681–669), gives a possibly more realistic perspective of the king's participation in battle: "The king, my lord, should not advance [to the b]attle. [J]ust a[s] your royal fathers have done, st[ay] on the hill, and [let] your [ma]gnates [do] the bat[tle]."¹³ Presumably the kings were surrounded by their loyal bodyguard as they watched the fray from their safer vantage point. Exceptional cases are found late in Assyrian history: Sargon II (r. 722–705) mentions *qurādu* ("warriors") marching at his side in his campaigns against Ashdod and Muṣaṣir.¹⁴ The accounts of Sennacherib's (r. 705–681) fifth campaign feature the king describing his approach as "like a fierce wild bull, with my select bodyguard (*qurbūte šēpīya našqūti*) and my merciless combat troops, I took the lead of them (the soldiers in my camp)."¹⁵ Another inscription details Sennacherib's sixth campaign and mentions the king provisioning his "perfect" bodyguards (*qurbūte šēpīya gītālūti*) and troops as well as their horses before they sailed down the Euphrates River.¹⁶ Esarhaddon mentions selecting charioteers (*narkabti qurubti*) and cavalry (*pēthāl qurubti*) from Šubrian deportees.¹⁷ Otherwise, there are no other attestations of bodyguards in the royal inscriptions.

12 RINAP 5 Ashurbanipal 3: v 51–72, v 87–96.

13 SAA 16 77: r. 3–8, see also discussion in Fuchs (2011) 382–83. One should note that there is some ambiguity in this letter, as it could also be read as the king "should not advance to the battle like your royal fathers have done. You (should instead) stay on the hill." The marching and battle orders of the Assyrian army are not yet well understood, though it is known that there were left and right wings. The king was certainly not the first one on the battlefield, if he entered it at all. One might turn to Sennacherib's description of the god Aššur embarking on a campaign against Tīāmat, in which a number of gods are said march in the battle line before Aššur, who rides a chariot, while others follow behind him, the groups comprising both gods on foot as well as those who ride in vehicles (RINAP 3 160). If this is meant to be taken as a parallel to Assyrian battle configurations, then the king "led" his army not at the frontlines but in the middle of his troops, protected from all sides.

14 Deszö (2012a) 64, 212; Fuchs (1994) *Prunk* ll. 97–101; Mayer (2013) (Sargon's eighth campaign). Note, however, that the title of these soldiers is not *qurbūtu*.

15 RINAP 3 16: iv 79–iv 84; 17: iv 25–iv 27; 18: iii 6'–iii 9'; 22: iii 81–iv 2; 23: iii 72–iii 74.

16 RINAP 3 46: 62–70.

17 RINAP 4 33: iii 8'–iii 22'.

More information comes from the state archives (administrative and economic texts that were found in palaces and temples) and the palace reliefs.¹⁸ These sources show that there was not one uniform, permanent military force, but rather that several branches with different demographics and specialties joined with the *kišir šarri* “royal contingent” (the elite, standing unit), and that the combination of forces depended upon the type of military mission at hand.¹⁹ The army was divided into three primary branches: the infantry, which was the largest; cavalry; and chariotry.²⁰ Each of these branches had an auxiliary group, which was probably populated with conquered people and deportees and may have been semi-professional; a regular group, which was recruited seasonally from Assyrians and conquered peoples alike; and the heavy group, which was an elite force and likely comprised full-time professional soldiers.²¹ While the army was formally under the aegis of the king, the different units were delegated to more immediate commanders including royal family members, provincial governors, high officials, and vassal kings as part of an expansive official bureaucracy.²² Since the army was rather decentralized, commanders were responsible for assembling and bringing their branches to the meeting points from which they would embark on the campaign.²³ The crown often provided weapons and rations, but the provinces were also obligated to send travel provisions, especially grain, for the soldiers and animals (horses and pack animals, in particular) that they sent, and the army would have planned their campaign so that they could stop in Assyrian-controlled areas and seize enemy storehouses in foreign territories for further provisions along the way.²⁴

18 The most comprehensive treatment of the Assyrian army is Deszö (2012a–b, 2016), and a recent treatment of warfare in Assyria is found in Dalley (2017). See also Fuchs (2011); Dubovský (2014); Postgate (2007); and Lewy (1956).

19 Dalley (2017) 526, this core contingent was joined by units supplied by the various cities and officials; see Fuchs (2011) 387–91, including an overview of types of campaigns.

20 Deszö (2012a) 23. Deszö (2012b, 13) notes that the cavalry is not attested under the early Neo-Assyrian kings (before Ashurnasirpal II), though it eventually replaced the chariotry. On the difficulty of understanding the army’s structure and numbers, see Fuchs (2011) 388.

21 Deszö (2012a) 20–23.

22 Fuchs (2011) 387.

23 Marriott and Radner (2015) 129; Fuchs (2011) 390.

24 Marriott and Radner (2015) 129–33; Fuchs (2011) 390. According to Deszö (2016, 17–18), the bodyguard cavalry would receive state-sponsored supplies in the Assyrian capitals or nearby.

One contingent that was presumably a constant presence is the bodyguards, who may have belonged to the *kišir šarri*.²⁵ After all, the protection of the king was of the utmost importance no matter what type of mission was planned. In particular, the palace reliefs consistently show armored individuals with round shields and spears keeping close company with the king as he traveled in his chariot, in siege scenes, in lion hunts, and even in triumphal marches.²⁶ These scenes, displayed on the interiors of the kings' monumental palaces in the capitals Calah, Nineveh, and Dūr-Šarrukīn, present an idealized image of the Assyrian army – lower-ranking troops are not often depicted, the king is portrayed as dominant in the fray, and defeat is something that only befalls the enemy.²⁷ It has been suggested that the horsemen, armored spearmen, and shield-bearers standing near or marching before the king may have been official bodyguards.²⁸

Unfortunately, the reliefs do not correlate conclusively with military offices known from the archival texts, and whether these soldiers were dedicated bodyguards or simply an elite guard is subject to interpretation. Thus, as with the army in general, we must turn to archival texts for information about bodyguards. This corpus primarily comprises letters to and from the king and economic, legal, and administrative documents. The extant sources come largely from the Sargonid kings (722–c.627), so the available information is skewed towards the last (but most powerful) phase of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and it is difficult to say whether the offices of bodyguards known from these texts show continuity with earlier periods. Nonetheless, from these texts, scholars have identified two main groups of officials whose titles have been traditionally translated as “bodyguard” or similarly: the *qurbūtu* and *ša šēpē*, though

25 For the structure of the *kišir šarri*, see Mattila (2000) 153. Dalley (2017, 526) suggests that the heavy infantry would have also acted as royal bodyguards.

26 Marriott and Radner (2015) 138–39; Deszö (2012a) 115–20; Dalley (2017) 525; Radner (2015b) 63; Fuchs (2011) 385, 394. The guards generally precede the king, except when the king is on horseback, and the guards are also shown accompanying prisoners (Nadali 2005). The palace reliefs are dated to the ninth to mid-seventh centuries.

27 Deszö (2012b, 208–209) has calculated tentative percentages for the composition of the troops depicted on the palace reliefs, determining that cavalry bodyguards, for instance, made up about 8% and 3% of the soldiers on the reliefs of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, respectively. One should note that this approach is rather subjective, however, and does not indicate what percentage of the army was made up of *kišir šarri* versus conscripted troops. The text evidence unfortunately does not clarify the situation.

28 Different units can be observed in the palace reliefs according to Deszö (2012a) 17–18; see Deszö (2006) for a summary of the palace relief evidence.

these were often further qualified and subdivided.²⁹ The extant corpus contains information about 135 named individuals who served as *qurbūtu* (with over 100 further, unnamed entries), and over 50 named *ša šēpē* officials.³⁰ The *qurbūtu* (or *ša-qurbūte*) is not only the most frequently attested, but is also considered the royal bodyguard *par excellence*, constituting a high-ranking military-administrative office whose appointees worked closely with the king and as representatives of state power on his behalf.³¹ The term *qurbūtu* and the similar forms *qurrubūtu* (a variant found largely in Babylonian contexts) and *qurubtu* (associated with equestrians) are derived from the Akkadian verb *qerēbu*, “to be close, adjacent, in intimacy with,” underscoring the close proximity of these officials to the king.³² Some members of the royal bodyguard were assigned as personal guards for royal family members, particularly for the crown prince and the queen mother (*qurbūtu mār šarri* “bodyguard of the son of the king” and *qurbūtu ummi šarri* “bodyguard of the mother of the king”), though it is likely that they were individual members of larger royal entourages and that other royal family members had their own personal retinues as well.³³ The *qurbūtu* is furthermore a longstanding office, known from the eighth century but likely originating much earlier and remaining for a brief period after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, although the office seems to disappear in the Neo-Babylonian sources.³⁴

While the *qurbūtu*, as will be seen below, combined military and administrative roles, the *ša šēpē* (“of the feet”) acted as more of a personal guard.³⁵ They could belong to any branch of the army, but their primary role was to guard the king as part of the infantry, escorting him as he rode into battle on his chariot

29 The *qurbūtu*, in particular, appear to have been divided into units “to the right” and “to the left” of the king, see Dalley and Postgate (1984) 33. Of particular help in reconstructing the Neo-Assyrian army are the lists of court personnel and palace banquets (discussed below) and lists of professional groups and military personnel (SAA 7 21, SAA 11 126, 128, 130 for example).

30 Deszö (2012a) 122–24.

31 An overview of this office can be found in Postgate (2007).

32 CAD Q s.v. *qerēbu* s. 1, Deszö (2012a) 123–24, 139.

33 Mattila (2000) 154; Deszö (2012a) 124, 141–42, who dates the emergence of these other bodyguards to Esarhaddon’s reign due to the queen mother Zakūtu’s importance, but this is quite tentative. Personal bodyguards for royal family members are poorly attested and, while it is likely that other royal family members besides the queen mother and crown prince would have had bodyguards or a personal retinue, they may have been called by other titles.

34 Deszö (2012a) 123.

35 The office translates to “of the feet,” but the idea that these people were foot soldiers has been dismissed, see Dalley and Postgate (1984) 39.

and protecting him with their shields.³⁶ Texts found at Fort Shalmaneser in Calah and dated to Sargon II's reign mention a light chariot that may have been associated with the *ša šēpē*.³⁷ Administrative roles such as those of the *qurbūtu* are not known.³⁸ The two offices existed concurrently, but the creation of personal guards for the crown prince (*ša šēpē mār šarri*) seems to have been a later development than the corresponding *qurbūtu* office.³⁹ There were moreover separate offices for the bodyguards that formed the army's cavalry and the known branches were associated with the two main forms of bodyguards: *pēṭhalli* ("cavalryman") *ša qurbūte*, *pēṭhalli šēpē*, and *pēṭhal qurubte* ("cavalry bodyguard"). There is little information about the differences between these particular units and their duties besides escorting the king as he rode his chariot into battle.⁴⁰

Both main types of bodyguards were recruited largely from the population living in the Assyrian core (i.e., modern-day northern Iraq), especially in the early Neo-Assyrian period, but bodyguards of Judean/Israelite, Aramean, and Chaldean origins, among others, are attested under the Sargonids, who, following a precedent set by Tiglath-pileser III (r. 745–727), were energetic in deporting conquered peoples into the empire.⁴¹ For instance, in Dūr-Katlimmu (Tell Sheikh Hamad in Syria), which had an archive that contains many attestations of this office, bodyguards of Aramean and West Semitic origin seemed to have served alongside those dispatched from the Assyrian heartland.⁴² In both cases, these officials were selected and promoted by the king, generally by royal decree, and probably came from mid- or upper-strata families.⁴³ There is furthermore a possibility that, under Esarhaddon, Medes were enlisted to

36 Deszö (2012a) 122, who also identifies them in reliefs as "the shield-bearers who protected the king with their shields in siege scenes, and ... the armoured spearmen who stand guard in formation in the palace reliefs of Sennacherib and Assurbanipal."

37 Dalley and Postgate (1984) 34.

38 Deszö (2012a) 121.

39 Deszö (2012a) 120–23. After the seventh century, there was also a *qurbūtu ša šēpē*, though it is not clear what the duties of this position were (Deszö 2012a, 143).

40 Dalley and Postgate (1984) 33; Deszö (2012b) 24–31, 76; Deszö (2016) 17, one of these may have correlated to a unit in Sargon II's inscriptions that contained 1000 cavalrymen.

41 SAA 5 59 mentions a Chaldean bodyguard, for instance. See further discussion in Deszö (2012a) 23, 62 (Judean/Israelite bodyguards in Sennacherib's iconography), 117 (Judeans in Til Barsip wall paintings), 118 and 125 (deportees in bodyguard corps), 130 (ethnic groups). For mass deportation, see Oded (1969).

42 Deszö (2016) 20–23. The archive is published in Radner (2002).

43 Deszö (2012a) 123–33; Deller and Millard (1993). SAA 16 115 is an example of such a promotion, but the letter writer complains that men that the king had promoted to cohort commander, *tašlišu*, and *ša qurbūti* were persistently drunk and aggressive, perhaps implying that the king should censure or demote these men.

serve as palace guards, particularly for the crown prince Ashurbanipal.⁴⁴ The nature of Neo-Assyrian imperialism, however, is that conquered peoples were considered Assyrian, and so the ethnic origins of bodyguards should not be overstated.⁴⁵

2.1 *Roles Relating to State Matters*

Naturally, one would expect that the central role of a bodyguard was to protect the king or royal family member, whether on or off the battlefield.⁴⁶ The most important caveat with studying bodyguards in first-millennium Mesopotamia in general is that the texts do not show these officials performing traditional “bodyguard” duties, and it is likely that they are bodyguards in name only. Indeed, one must be cautious to distinguish between official titles and actual functions.⁴⁷ Instead, these sources show that bodyguards had powerful roles and critical responsibilities in the administration of the empire and as part of the royal court, counted amongst the court personnel.⁴⁸ The *qurbūtu* in particular was powerful and active in many non-military roles, some of which were protective in nature, and he was entitled to preferential treatment and socio-economic benefits.

Overall, the *qurbūtu* was a high-status representative of the crown and the king often sent these officials across the empire to act in his stead. For instance, Mār-Issār, Esarhaddon’s royal agent in Babylonia, wrote to the king that not only had the temple construction in Dēr come to a halt, but also the prince of Elam was starting to send his masons there, perhaps in a move to win over the border city. Mār-Issār thus requests that the king send a *ša qurbūte* and

44 Liverani (1995). It is not clear why Medes were chosen for this role, it may have been that there was a sentiment that outsiders were more trustworthy for protecting the crown prince, as they could not make any legitimate claims to the throne, and the Medes in particular may have had some special qualifications or characteristics that made them especially valuable as bodyguards within the Assyrian court.

45 On Assyrian imperialism and identity, see Postgate (1992) and Parpola (2004).

46 Deszö (2012a) 116, (2012b) 77, who claims that different royal family members and some officials (such as the chief eunuch) may have controlled their own bodyguard units, such as the prince Šin-aḫu-ušur, who led the cavalry bodyguard of the king. Kings, especially Esarhaddon, were anxious to ensure that those closest to them, whether family or officials in their entourage, were loyal and posed no threat to their kingship or lives; thus, there were queries that were asked to the sun-god Šamaš by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal’s diviners that inquired if not only foreign groups posed a threat to the king, but also members of the king’s own inner circle, including royal bodyguards. See SAA 4 139 and 142.

47 For other courtiers and their functions in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, see Groß and Pirngruber (2014) and Mattila (2000).

48 See lists such as SAA 7 5, 6, 7 and the discussion of the Horse Lists in Dalley and Postgate (1984) 17–41. See also Fales (2017) 280–82.

an *etinnu* (“foreman”) to be stationed in Dēr in order to ensure that the temple construction would continue without threats to Assyria’s control of the region.⁴⁹ Moreover, the king could dispatch a bodyguard to investigate and settle disputes or issues with other Assyrian or even Babylonian officials.⁵⁰ There are instances in which the bodyguards themselves acted in a judicial capacity and were sent to verify the truth of testimonies even outside of their localities. For example, five men were convicted of theft, and the legal document records that they were taken before the royal bodyguards and deputy governor but refused to travel to the capital at Nineveh for judgment before a proper judge (*sartinu*) and the vizier (*šukallu*), choosing to declare themselves guilty; thus, judgment was imposed locally instead.⁵¹ Another letter informs the king that the governor of Dūr-Šarruku opened a temple treasury without royal authorization, and requests that the king send a bodyguard to investigate and enforce punishment for the crime.⁵²

This was not the only context in which a bodyguard could be deputized to carry out prerogatives of the king or other high officials. For example, a bodyguard arrived in Babylonia with a deputy, fired the *qīpu* officials of temples in several Babylonian cities, and appointed new ones, which was generally the purview of the king.⁵³ This prompted Mār-Issār to write to Esarhaddon to confirm that this was indeed the king’s command, as the bodyguard claimed.⁵⁴ There was another instance in which the provincial governor of Amidu wrote to Sargon II that he was shocked when a royal bodyguard arrived and commanded him to give up the land that the governor had cultivated and expanded into a town on behalf of the king (as he claims).⁵⁵ The letter ends with what may have been a request for the king to confirm what the governor portrays as a suspect command or possible miscommunication, perhaps purposefully doing so as a rhetorical strategy to suggest that the king reconsider his demands.

49 SAA 10 349. Similarly, SAA 5 78 reports that “the Ušhaeans and Qudaeans about whom the king, my lord, wrote me, have submitted to the king my lord’s command; (these) towns, which were not submissive in the days of Šamaš-ila’i, the royal bodyguard has now assembl[ed] and brought over to me.”

50 For instance, SAA 16 42, which petitions the king for a bodyguard to come and settle local lawsuits; similarly, SAA 18 8 and 9, which relate conflicts about the fields in Akkad that belong to the Ištar temple there. Deszö (2012a) 125–27.

51 SAA 6 133. Deszö (2012a) 133–34; Fales (2015) 93.

52 See also SAA 10 369.

53 For the installation of priests, for instance, see Löhnert (2007). The *qīpu* was the royal representative in the temple.

54 SAA 10 364.

55 SAA 5 15.

The king could also send a bodyguard to accompany important media and materials to ensure their protection. For one, they could bring confidential or urgent messages or orders from the king, which was considered as secure as the message bearing the royal seal, and, because they had access to the king, they were able to bring him important missives as well.⁵⁶ While the bodyguards' messages from the king were generally seen as authentic, there are some hints that the recipient of the message did not always trust that the bodyguard was not abusing his authority, which occasionally happened.⁵⁷ Furthermore, bodyguards could accompany foreign envoys and diplomats (or bring their messages),⁵⁸ conscripted laborers or soldiers (including deserters),⁵⁹ captives,⁶⁰ or persons who wrote to the king requesting secure transport.⁶¹ The king occasionally received petitions from people who felt as if their lives were in danger and requested a royal bodyguard for protection, as in a letter from the scribe of the palace supervisor, who informs the king that donkey-sellers were afraid to sell their donkeys in front of the palace in Nineveh because the governor threatened to kill them if he saw them there again; the scribe therefore requests a *qurbūtu* to accompany them and ensure their safety from the

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- 56 An illustrative example is SAA 5 105, in which a royal bodyguard was involved in conveying the content of a sealed order from the king to the Kummians. The letter SAA 21 114 shows how officials communicated back and forth to the Assyrian king via a bodyguard. SAA 19 161 further reveals that the bodyguards made use of mule express services, even at the expense of the service manager, if they needed to take a royal order somewhere quickly. Similarly, see SAA 5 227, which mentions a bodyguard stopping at a post station to pick up mules before continuing on his journey. See also Deszö (2012a) 127, 134.
- 57 Not just in the above letter, but also: SAA 15 168, in which a governor robbed and kidnapped another governor with the help of a force of Chaldeans and a bodyguard; SAA 15 54, in which a *ša qurbūte ša šarri* wrongfully appropriated oxen, sheep, and women; and SAA 13 182, in which a bodyguard, city overseer, and mayor plundered the possessions of a man who left for his *ilku*-duty in the temple.
- 58 For instance, Sargon II sent a royal bodyguard to accompany Urartian emissaries (SAA 1 10); Sennacherib (as crown prince) informed his father that he had sent his own bodyguard to warn the king of Ukku to not start a conflict with the ruler of Arzabia (SAA 1 29); a royal bodyguard accompanied foreign emissaries who arrived in Assur with a treaty into the temple courtyard, where the treaty-conclusion ceremony would take place (SAA 1 76); and a bodyguard traveled with the king of Karalla, who was due to arrive in Calah with his tribute gift (SAA 19 169).
- 59 See SAA 1 128, 240, 258; 15 105.
- 60 SAA 15 12, 232, and 236 show bodyguards receiving captives and resettling them.
- 61 SAA 5 215/19 189 records the collection of 1,430 men conscripted from the region Mazamua for military service, some number of which were brought by the royal bodyguards. These men were mostly Assyrians but also Gurreans and Itu'eans, further emphasizing the diversity of the military forces. For general discussion, see Deszö (2012a) 134–38.

governor.⁶² A letter from Babylonia indicates that an official refused to hand over possible deserters and troublesome officials, saying “I will not give them up to you without a sealed document from the king and without a bodyguard,” suggesting that this was the protocol for the capture and transport of such people.⁶³ A lamentation priest wrote to the king about the planned departure of the god Šin to the *akītu* temple for the ritual in Ḥarrān, ending his letter ominously with “a bodyguard [should be] sent with me because of [the tr]aitors.”⁶⁴ In addition, three high-status Kummeans (from the vassal state of Kumme, located in the Taurus mountains) approached the governor of Tamnuna (a provincial capital northwest of Nineveh) and the local *qurbūtu*, insisting that they had an important message they could only tell the king directly and that they thus required an escort to the palace for a royal audience.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the bodyguards could ensure the safe delivery of precious stones and metals, horses, or audience gifts from foreign rulers and officials.⁶⁶

While not their primary role, bodyguards could also enforce the delivery of taxes and raw materials the king requested, such as logs and reeds for building.⁶⁷ This also extended to the supervision of activities that the king

62 SAA 16 88.

63 SAA 18 56.

64 SAA 10 338.

65 SAA 5 104.

66 For instance, a bodyguard was responsible for delivering jewels and gold sealed with the king's stamp to Babylonia in order to be reworked into a tiara for the cult image of Nabū (SAA 10 348). See Deszö (2012a) 129, 134, 138; Deszö (2016) 177–78. There were some groups that were apparently tasked with protecting international trading and trade agreements, though these may have acted independently of the king (Dalley 2017, 523).

67 SAA 5 82 is a letter in which the letter writer apparently protests to the king that he does not have enough barley to send to the palace as taxes because something has happened to it (this portion of the text is unfortunately broken), and he beseeches the king to verify that this is the case by asking the *ša qurbūte* Mannu-ki-aḥḥē, who had been responsible for collecting the corn tax. Another letter from an official reveals that the king sent a bodyguard with the command “raise 400 door-beams and haul a threshold stone from Yasubu [a region near Dēr in northeastern Babylonia] on your own,” presumably for construction purposes (SAA 15 123). Similarly, an official from Kār-Šarrukīn writes to the king that there are no logs, protesting that “I did the king's work there. [...] the king, my lord, watched me and sent a [body]guard, saying: ‘Let him go and get the logs.’ Yet there are no logs there! By the gods of the king, my lord, there are no logs, I am not hiding any from the king, my lord!” Shalmaneser V (as crown prince) also wrote to his father King Tiglath-pileser III that he was sending the king 36 bales of reed under the protection of a bodyguard (SAA 19 9). Deszö (2012a) 136–37.

required, for instance certain rituals or crafts production.⁶⁸ Kings also utilized bodyguards to organize and accompany troops, as well as to transport weaponry.⁶⁹ Bodyguards were not always sent by the king's initiative: requests to the king to send bodyguards came from all across the Assyrian controlled-areas.⁷⁰ The bodyguards that were dispatched to various parts of the empire and returned to the king with messages also acted as part of the empire-wide intelligence network, often reporting their firsthand accounts of conflicts.⁷¹ Like other officials, bodyguards may have been assigned to visit or live in different cities and areas of the empire, including outposts and harbors, to assist in this network of decentralized royal authority.⁷²

As mentioned above, kings not only needed protection on campaign but also at home, where they were vulnerable to internal assassination plots, conspiracies, and native uprisings.⁷³ Thus, many *qurbūtus* were associated with the royal palaces or with the capital cities, and there is evidence of a unit called the *ša šēpē ša ēkalli* (*ša šēpē* “of the palace”) that was presumably stationed in the palace full time.⁷⁴ The palace was secured with a system of locks and guards, and the role of bodyguard seems to have been taken up within its confines primarily by the *ša maššarti*. The *ša maššarti* “watchman” (lit. “of the guard”) was lower status than the *qurbūtu* and seemingly dedicated palace staff, guarding individuals and occasionally assigned to protect high-status officials such as governors on a temporary basis.⁷⁵ While they did not have the administrative

68 See SAA 16 83 for the king's commands to the weavers through his bodyguard, and see also Deszö (2012a) 136. The king also sent a bodyguard to the Nabû temple in Borsippa to demand the proper accounting of bulls and sheep that belonged to the temple and to ensure that the regular offerings were taking place (SAA 10 353).

69 Deszö (2012a) 140.

70 See SAA 1 99 and 224, which are both requests for the king to send royal bodyguards to enforce required labor obligations.

71 A letter from either Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon II reassures the people of Babylon that he has been made aware of their fraught political situation and fear by a bodyguard who reported to him (SAA 19 1). The letter SAA 18 89 may be related, as it mentions the same bodyguard Na'id-Marduk being active in the Sealand area. The intelligence network included spies, informants, and provincial governors who would alert the king to possible conspiracies, rebellions, or mobilization by enemy forces, see Dubovský (2006); Fuchs (2011) 392–93.

72 Deszö (2012a) 130, 140. See also Fales (2015) 94; Fuchs (2011) 392.

73 For instance, the conspiracy of Sasî against Esarhaddon (whose father Sennacherib was assassinated in a plot orchestrated by his own sons) that resulted in the execution of a number of state officials (Radner 2003).

74 Deszö (2012a) 129–30, SAA 14 425.

75 Radner (2010) 273–74.

powers that the *qurbūtu* had, there are some indications that the *ša maššarti* could similarly be sent by the king to protect or accompany particular individuals and materials outside of the palace context, albeit more rarely.⁷⁶

2.2 *Benefits and Privileges*

As high-ranking court personnel, *qurbūtu* and *ša šēpē* were entitled to certain privileges. For instance, they were sometimes invited to palace banquets and received regular rations from the crown, including grain, wine, and travel provisions.⁷⁷ The king could also decree these officials as tax exempt, and several individuals, including some *ša šēpē* officials, were granted estates and fields in the countryside, likely as part of assigning these officials to different parts of the empires.⁷⁸ Property ownership can be seen in the archives from Dūr-Katlimmu, which show that the *qurbūtus* owned homes and land in the area, though it is not clear whether these properties were granted by the king or not.⁷⁹ Those bodyguards who were associated with the palaces in the capital cities, at least, seem to have been granted lodging on or near the royal premises.⁸⁰ The *qurbūtus* were also powerful and influential enough in their communities that they appeared as witnesses in sales and legal records, especially when one or more of the people active in the text were members of the military personnel, although acting as a witness was not a privilege exclusive

76 Radner (2010) 273–74.

77 See the accounts of ceremonial palace banquets, including SAA 7 149, 150, 152, 154. For further discussion, see Deszö (2012a) 126, 129.

78 SAA 11 211 records a list of estates of officials, including a bodyguard, that were then assigned to their sons or brothers. This was not automatic, however, and sometimes led to problems; for instance, the deputy governor of Isana wrote to the king that a local bodyguard refused to pay his corn taxes, chasing away the delegates who collect the taxes, on the grounds that he is a *ša qurbūte*. The letter writer claims that, while bodyguards may be exempt, the bodyguard in question has not proven his special status: “he who (owns a field) by the king’s sealed order must prove the exemption of the field. Those who were bought are (subject to) our corn taxes, but he refuses to pay them” (SAA 19 39). See also Deszö (2012a) 121, 125, (2016) 19, 23. Fuchs (2011, 387) suggests that “most soldiers probably received a piece of land in return for their services, but there must have been some forms of payment in cash for mercenaries and for auxiliaries of nomadic origin. As in most armies, the main incentive to fight at all must have been the soldier’s share of the expected spoils of war ... the king was also expected to take care of those who lost their health in their service.”

79 Deszö (2012a) 130.

80 See SAA 7 9 and 10, which list lodging arrangements for a number of important officials, including several *ša qurbūte* and *ša šēpē*, particularly the *qurbūte* who were associated with the queen mother and crown prince, who must have lived near the royal family’s quarters.

to this office.⁸¹ There are some hints that the *qurbūtu* themselves had staff, in particular horse trainers, chariot men, and perhaps also deputies.⁸²

Finally, while not considered strictly speaking a bodyguard, one must note the nature and responsibilities of the *tašlišu* “third man,” whose primary duty was to ride in the chariot as a shield-bearer and protect the driver and archer, though not all seem to have been dedicated to this role: there were *tašlišus* who belonged to the military and ones who served as personal assistants to royal family members and some high officials.⁸³ This included the *tašlišu ša šarri* “third man of the king,” *tašlišu mār šarri* “third man of the crown prince,” and *tašlišu ekalli* “third man of the palace,” which were separate from the *tašlišu kišir šarri* “third man of the royal corps.”⁸⁴

Like the *qurbūtu*, the *tašlišus* that were connected to the king may have had a combined military-administrative role, riding in the king’s chariot and acting as both a personal guard and a messenger.⁸⁵ Indeed, there are many parallels between the *tašlišu* and the bodyguards in terms of a close relationship to the king and an ability to act as his agent, most importantly their abilities to act

81 The sale and loan documents included purchases of lands, estates, slaves, vineyards, buildings, and even entire villages, as well as loans of silver or barley (see for example SAA 6 11, 28, 43, 185, 221, 240, SAA 14 27, 69). When the purchaser or seller was associated with the military, bodyguards and other military personnel often appeared in the witness lists. For instance, a recruitment officer’s purchase of an estate (SAA 6 19); Ashurbanipal’s charioteer purchasing an entire village, a vineyard, and loaning silver and livestock (SAA 6 323, 325, 329); a series of purchases of lands, buildings, and slaves by the cohort commander of the crown prince (SAA 14 35, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 48, 49); the sale of a girl by a chariot driver (SAA 14 153); the loan of silver from a smith to a chariot maker (SAA 14 169); a loan of silver to a charioteer (SAA 6 36); and the purchase of land by the cohort commander of the *ša šēpē* of the palace from a prefect, which was moreover sealed by an archer (SAA 14 425). This was occasionally also true of purchases by other high officials, such as the purchase of a village by the queen’s eunuch (SAA 14 1, 2), of a large estate by the scribe of the queen (SAA 6 253), and of slaves by a governess (SAA 6 89). The bodyguards could even seal these documents, see SAA 14 70 (loan of silver), which was sealed by a *qurbūtu*. In some cases, the bodyguards who witnessed these documents may have been brought in as a local authority, such as in a loan of barley and an ox by the governor of the crown prince, witnessed by the local *ša qurbūte* (SAA 14 23). To a lesser extent, bodyguards acted as witnesses in court decisions and lawsuits, see SAA 6 238, 265, SAA 14 123. For discussion, see Deszö (2012a) 131.

82 Deszö (2012a) 126, (2012b) 11.

83 Deszö (2012b) 104.

84 Deszö (2012b) 102–108.

85 Deszö (2012b) 102–108. These officials, like the *qurbūtu*, can also be found in legal documents and sales as witnesses, especially when other military officials are involved; see, for example, SAA 14 40.

as escorts for important people and objects and as royal message-bearers.⁸⁶ For instance, a *tašlišu* was responsible for transporting objects belonging to an Elamite trader by boat, after which the objects were checked and a report sent to the king, suggesting that, whatever these objects were, they were important enough to inform the king about their delivery.⁸⁷ Another was authorized by the king to release gold, a highly controlled material, from the treasury to the goldsmiths.⁸⁸ The *tašlišus* were promoted by the king himself and were often associated with a specific city or region or dispatched to fortresses in the provinces on the king's behalf to ensure that the security of these fortresses was adequate.⁸⁹ The demographics of these officials were likely quite diverse and one text mentions some *tašlišus* of Elamite origin.⁹⁰

3 Neo-Babylonian Empire

After the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in c.610, the Neo-Babylonian Empire, based in modern-day southern Iraq, became the dominant force in the region. While there are similarities between the two empires in terms of ideology and administrative structures, the Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions portray royal ideology markedly differently from those of the Neo-Assyrian kings, almost entirely omitting military conquests in favor of construction projects and beneficent works that depict the king as a wise, pious, and benevolent leader.⁹¹ It is thus not surprising that there are no attestations of bodyguards in the royal inscriptions at all and that even references to the army are rare.⁹² This was essentially an ideological fiction, based on a long tradition of how the Babylonian kingship was characterized and portrayed starting from the second millennium,⁹³ and Neo-Babylonian military campaigns are known instead from the Chronicle texts. There must have been contingents or officials

86 Deszö (2012b) 102–108.

87 SAA 16 139.

88 SAA 13 7.

89 For an example of the king promoting people to the position of “permanent” *tašlišu*, see SAA 16 115, Deszö (2012b) 102–108, SAA 5 21.

90 SAA 16 136, Deszö (2012b) 104.

91 Da Riva (2008); Jursa (2017); Eph'al (2003); Betlyon (2003).

92 The army is predominantly mentioned within the context of ominous predictions taken through extispicy (the examination of entrails). See for example RIBo Nabonidus 3: ix 8'–11' “If the ‘Weapon’-Mark (*kakku*) of ‘Increment’ (*šibtu*) is raised on the left side, (then) my army will enjoy (a share) of the plundered goods of the army of the enemy.”

93 This can be seen already in the royal inscriptions of Hammurabi, the first ruler in Babylon to leave royal inscriptions; while military endeavors are not completely omitted, there are

tasked with protecting the king on the campaign trail, but the Chronicles (like the royal inscriptions) simply mention the army generally or high officials on occasion.⁹⁴ Like their Neo-Assyrian counterparts, the Neo-Babylonian kings describe themselves as being under the protection of their gods, who marched alongside them and granted the kings their successes.⁹⁵

As with the Neo-Assyrian period, the archival texts are the main source of information for bodyguards, especially letters and economic or administrative records. A major challenge in understanding the Neo-Babylonian military structure and the role of bodyguards, however, is the nature of the extant material from this period; unlike the Assyrian archival texts, which come from royal contexts, the Neo-Babylonian material originates largely from temple records and private archives, with only one (thus far unpublished) administrative archive deriving from the South Palace in Babylon's storerooms.⁹⁶ It is precisely in the royal archives that we would expect to see the activities of bodyguards and their relationship to the king, and that may in part explain their absence. Therefore, it is even more difficult to derive information about the officials who worked closely with the king or to find Babylonian parallels to the Assyrian *qurbūtu* or *ša šēpē*.⁹⁷ One would imagine that the palaces and their environs in Babylon had security in place and processes by which the king would be protected. The people tasked with this responsibility may have also dwelled in the palace. Moreover, while the temples and local elites had to supply men, supplies, and weaponry, little is known about the king and his army on campaign, whether in text or iconography.⁹⁸

no lists of campaigns as in the later Neo-Assyrian equivalents, and building projects were clearly the priority. For the relevant texts, see RIME 4.

- 94 Glassner (2004) 193–239, and note that the Chronicles were written sometimes long after the fact. For more on the chronicles and Neo-Babylonian history, see Waerzeggers (2012, 2015, 2018).
- 95 For instance, Nabonidus writes “to carry basket(s), I gave to Bēl (Marduk), Nabû, and Nergal, the gods who march at my side, 2,850 (people) from an (enemy) army, booty from the land Ḫumē, which the lord, the god Marduk, had placed in my hands (and thereby) made me surpass the kings who came before me” (RIBo: Nabonidus 3). For Nebuchadnezzar II's self-presentation, see Da Riva (2010).
- 96 A few texts were published in Weidner (1939). For an overview of the sources, see Beaulieu (2018) 221–22; Jursa (2005, 2014a). Many of the positions attested in the other Babylonian cities may have had more overtly military roles in Babylon, for instance the *šākin tēmi* (Kleber 2008, 233).
- 97 For a discussion about Achaemenid-period court officials, see Pirngruber (2011) and Charles (this volume).
- 98 The case of Sippar reveals that some officials lived outside of the palace in Babylon – and, indeed, away from Babylon itself – though few officials known to have been part of the

Nonetheless, there is some evidence for the composition of the Neo-Babylonian army, which had different units for specific purposes (such as the *madāktu* “expeditionary force” or “military camp”), a similar recruitment process, and a composite makeup comprising peoples from all across the empire.⁹⁹ As in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the Neo-Babylonian army had infantry, cavalry, and chariotry forces. It is unclear to what extent there were professional units like in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, except for the presence of mercenaries, but it is known that many soldiers served as part of tax or civic obligations or were recruited by their temples or tribal groups.¹⁰⁰ The king commanded the temples and local leadership to provide certain numbers of each contingent, and these might have been quite high: it is known that Uruk, for instance, raised 500 to 600 archers for Šamaš-šuma-ukīn’s (r. 667–648) war against his brother Ashurbanipal when Babylonia was under Assyrian control.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, a Neo-Babylonian letter from the (then) crown prince Nebuchadnezzar to the highest officials of the Eanna temple in Uruk shows the prince requesting troops for King Nabopolassar’s (r. c.658–605) army. The letter states that the king is fighting in Ḫarrān, where he has taken a force of Median soldiers, but the crown prince insists that Uruk must send as many men as it can provide to assist him.¹⁰² The temple archives also show the logistics of furnishing the conscripted troops with food rations and weaponry, and suggest that soldiers may have served anywhere between three months to one year at a time.¹⁰³ In addition, it has been argued that the Neo-Babylonian Empire shows some continuity with the Neo-Assyrian in terms of the administrative apparatus, and this may have been true for the military as well, as a number of the same official titles are known in the Neo-Babylonian period and the recruitment and provisioning processes seem to have been largely similar, though power was relatively more decentralized within the framework of imperial authority until the second half of Nebuchadnezzar II’s reign, at which point there was an increase in state control.¹⁰⁴

Neo-Babylonian army are attested there, see MacGinnis (2012). For the military obligations of temples in general, see Levavi (2018) 186–88.

99 A recent and comprehensive study of the Neo-Babylonian army can be found in Gombert (2018), see also MacGinnis (2012) (for Sippar). There is also a brief description of the Babylonian army in 2 Kings 24: 2, which mentions Babylonians, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites.

100 Kleber (2008) 229.

101 MacGinnis (2012) 9.

102 Levavi (2018) 297 (= no. 58). The battle of Ḫarrān took place in 610.

103 Kleber (2008) 198–235; MacGinnis (2012) 39–40.

104 Pirngruber (2018) 19–34; Kleber (2008) 231–37. For continuity between the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires, see Gombert (2018); Da Riva (2013); Jursa (2010); MacGinnis

The clearest evidence for the court and official hierarchy is Nebuchadnezzar II's "Hofkalender," a list of officials who contributed to the building of the palace in Babylon, and it does not contain any of the Assyrian offices known to have acted as bodyguards.¹⁰⁵ The terms *qurbūtu*/*ša-qurbūte*/*qurrubūtu*, despite being attested in Neo-Babylonian sources during the late Neo-Assyrian period (and thus known in Babylonia), essentially disappeared and were generally replaced by *tābiḫū* and by *bēl* or *rāb tābiḫī*.¹⁰⁶ These terms are derived from the Akkadian verb *ṭabāḫū* "to slaughter," which was not used for military officials in the Neo-Assyrian Empire.¹⁰⁷ The *tābiḫus* were one of a few officials who had regular access to the internal palace areas, which were otherwise restricted to the royal family.¹⁰⁸ They were overseen by the *bēl* or *rāb tābiḫī* "commander of the bodyguard," who had a clearly military function but, like his Neo-Assyrian counterpart, also had administrative roles.¹⁰⁹ The commander was associated with the officials *rāb ša rēši* and *rāb mungi* as some of the most closely linked to the king and the crown prince.¹¹⁰ The *rāb ša rēši* and *rāb mungi* were titles adopted from the Assyrians; the *rāb ša rēši* was a high official who had a prominent role in commanding the Babylonian troops and the other *ša rēši* officials, while the *rāb mungi* acted as the commander of the chariot troops.¹¹¹ In the Neo-Babylonian sources, *rāb tābiḫī* are attested in archives from several cities, including Uruk, Nippur, Sippar, and Larsa.¹¹² These texts, like those that mention bodyguards in the Neo-Assyrian period, mention the *rāb tābiḫī* in the

(2010); Sack (2003); and Betlyon (2003). On the push-pull of the Neo-Babylonian king's drive to centralize power within an imperial bureaucracy and the strong tradition of local, semi-autonomous city and temple administration, as well as the departure from the Neo-Assyrian methods of controlling the peripheries through provincial governors who were also court officials (thus disrupting the extensive communication networks that Assyrian bodyguards were able to move through), see Jursa (2017). For tensions between local and state officials, see Levavi (2018) 40–41 and Jursa (2014b).

- 105 Beaulieu (2018) 233–35; Da Riva (2013); Jursa (2010). An overview of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and its administrative structure can be found in Jursa (2014b).
- 106 Jursa (2010) 86 fn. 112. The office of *rāb tābiḫī* is attested in the late seventh and sixth centuries, the point at which the Assyrian offices such as *qurbūtu* essentially disappeared from the record. The office was also found in 2 Kings 25 and Jer 39:13, see Jursa (2010) 85–86 (*contra* De Jong 2011). One post-612 BCE attestation of *qurbūtu* was found in Dūr-Katlimmu, see Deszö (2012a) 123; Radner (2002) 199.
- 107 CAD Ṭ s.v. *ṭabāḫū* s. 1; in the Neo-Assyrian texts, these are butchers (CAD Ṭ s.v. *ṭabiḫū* s. 3'–4').
- 108 Jursa (2010) 71.
- 109 Jursa (2010) 86–87.
- 110 Jursa (2010) 85, 98.
- 111 Jursa (2010) 87. See Mattila (2000); Groß and Pirngruber (2014); and for the royal household, see Groß (2014).
- 112 Jursa (2010) 86.

capacity of witnessing transactions and legal cases with other high officials, and it appears that they had other officials working for them, owned property, and may have been quite wealthy, as one sent gold as a present to the Eanna temple in Uruk.¹¹³ One should note, however, that these are not unique features of this office, but rather something consistent with other high officials. The three aforementioned offices, along with the *simmagir* (a high official who worked closely with the king), essentially commanded the army, though many other officers are known who headed particular units or had specific jobs, including recruiters (*dēkû*), heads of archery units (*rab qašti*), personnel associated with the chariotry, and senior military officials such as the *rab sikkati* and the *rab ummu*.¹¹⁴

It may have been that, in the Neo-Babylonian period, the duty of guarding the king on campaign was distributed among these and other officials. Indeed, some of the military roles that the *qurbūtu* held during the Neo-Assyrian period may have been delegated, for instance, to the *rab sikkati* and *rab ummu*, who were responsible for the archers of shepherds that accompanied the king; the *rab kādāni*, who could task the city government or other military officials with duties to ensure that the garrison would be provided with supplies and manpower; and the *rab musaḥḥirē*, who was responsible for the transportation of goods and people and for recruitment.¹¹⁵

The administrative tasks and other responsibilities similar to those that the *qurbūtu* had held also seem to have fallen under the aegis of other offices, some of which were not attested in the Neo-Assyrian period. For instance, the infantry, which was made up primarily of archers (headed by a *rab qašti*), was not only the largest contingent of the army but also seems to have had many responsibilities that parallel the *qurbūtu*, just on a local scale: the archers were tasked with guarding the temple precinct and its holdings, including land and livestock, and with retrieving temple dependents who fled their duties.¹¹⁶ They were also responsible for ensuring the security of workers undertaking state construction projects in their city and nearby.¹¹⁷ Most importantly, however, the archers were dispatched to secure important deliveries, much like the *qurbūtus* were, especially the transport of royal dues and cultic implements to Babylon.¹¹⁸ They also acted as envoys for local merchants and caravans as they

113 Jursa (2010) 84–86. This office was attested in Babylonia during the early Achaemenid period as well.

114 Discussions of all of these officials can be found in Gombert (2018).

115 Gombert (2018) 113.

116 MacGinnis (2012) 10–11.

117 MacGinnis (2012) 10–11.

118 MacGinnis (2012) 10–11.

traveled to other cities, such as to Taymā' or to the trading port at Opis, or for carpenters who had to travel to Lebanon to acquire cedar trees, presumably for royal construction works.¹¹⁹ While speculative, the king may have had a contingent of royal archers to protect him and that he could personally dispatch for such administrative tasks. In general, however, the sources describe more localized forces, rather than royal bodyguards who were sent out by the king for particular purposes.

Another possibility is the *tašlišu* "third man," an office attested already in the Neo-Assyrian period.¹²⁰ While the evidence does not exclude a separate contingent of bodyguards that would have accompanied the king on campaign, the *tašlišu* would have been critical in protecting the king as he drove his chariot into battle. But, it appears that, when not on campaign, the *tašlišu* acted in a bodyguard-like capacity for temple functionaries as their personal guards and oversaw workers and deliveries while also serving in administrative roles.¹²¹ For instance, a standard working group for construction projects was led by a *qīpu* and protected by ten *tašlišus*.¹²² These officials could also hold other titles, including occasionally *rab tābiḫī*, and other roles that required a watchful eye, for example as sailors sent to protect the transport of goods by boat.¹²³ Indeed, it has been suggested that, by this point, the *tašlišu* was not necessarily part of the chariot team or even an active military office, but that he acted as a personal assistant of sorts, and some *tašlišus* of the *šatammu* (temple administrator) and of the *qīpu* (the royal representative in the temple) as well as of the temple scribes are known.¹²⁴ There is also evidence for *tašlišus* in Sippar associated with the king, the prince, and the *simmagir*.¹²⁵

Furthermore, it was in sixth-century Babylonia that the office of *paqūdu* "police officer" is attested.¹²⁶ These officials were locally recruited in small towns and larger cities alike to protect not palaces, as was the emphasis in the

119 MacGinnis (2012) 10–11.

120 See above. On the identification between *tašlišu* and *kizū*, see Kleber (2008) 114.

121 Kleber (2008) 114; MacGinnis (2012) 16–17; and Sandowicz and Tarasewicz (2014), who mention this official appearing in court proceedings.

122 Kleber (2008) 115 n. 349.

123 Kleber (2008) 115; Jursa (2010). Temples often had to send and receive things from the palace or from other temples, and river transport was the most efficient and safe method (Jursa 2010, 71).

124 Levavi (2017); Kleber (2008) 114–15 (especially footnote 348), 155, 157. Sippar is exceptional in that the *šatammu* was the highest temple official during the Assyrian domination, but otherwise the *šangū* held this role (MacGinnis 1995).

125 MacGinnis (2012) 17. A *tašlišu* of the king is also attested in a lawsuit that took place in Abanu, Kleber (2008) 114 n. 438; Sandowicz and Tarasewicz (2014) 79.

126 The following paragraph is based on Pirngruber and Tost (2013) 70–74.

Neo-Assyrian texts, but the cities to which they were assigned. The *paqūdus* were responsible for dealing with crimes, but also worked closely with the temple authorities, protecting the temple's property and participating in the temple's administration of justice. Indeed, the *paqūdu* had some tasks that were similar to the Neo-Assyrian bodyguard offices; namely, that they could be requested to ensure the delivery of goods and people, although these cases concerned not precious goods but barley, and not visiting delegates but rather criminals heading for trial. Like the Assyrian *ša maššarti*, the *paqūdu* seem to have been largely restricted to a particular locale.¹²⁷ They may have worked in tandem with the *rab kišri*, an office that likely acted as the city watch (at least in Sippar where they are attested as porters of the gates) and with *širkus*, the temple dependents or serfs.¹²⁸ The royal palace at Babylon may have also had a staff of policemen and watchmen dedicated to the royal family and its residence, but there is no direct evidence for this.¹²⁹

While most information comes from Babylonian cities, there are some indications for how the provinces were secured. Unlike the network of temple and city government workers that managed the watch over the city and its most important institutions, the provinces appear to have had a largely military presence, equipped with garrisons and fortifications to which the kings would dispatch their soldiers.¹³⁰ The royal road, attested in the Neo-Assyrian and later Achaemenid period, may have been protected by archers and lined with military outposts in the countryside called *kādu*, which would have housed, among other official travelers, the king on campaign and his army and would have been staffed by guards and archers installed by the king.¹³¹ When the king was not traveling through the area, soldiers (particularly archers) would remain on duty to protect the shepherds and flocks.¹³² Moreover, a letter to the *šatammu* of the Eanna temple (YOS 3 139) suggests that the king sent a messenger to Uruk on a monthly basis to check on the *kādu*.¹³³

127 There was a *maššartu ša šarri* during the Neo-Babylonian period as well; this was not a specific office, however, but rather obligated service.

128 MacGinnis (2012) 34; Kleber (2008) 48, 94, 110, 124 (which mentions as many as 50 *širkus* that were promised for the posts in a text dated to the reign of Cyrus), 208–10, 212, 234.

129 See for instance a record of several Egyptians sent to act as *maššāru* “guards” in administrative buildings that were subunits of the palace at Babylon (Jursa 2010, 71–72).

130 Kleber (2008) 201–202.

131 Kleber (2008) 204–208, including mention of a *kādu ša šarri*. Much of the relevant information is not contemporary, however, but comes from Greek sources that describe fortified waystations along the royal roads, guarded by soldiers and prepared to house the king on campaign with his army (Kleber 2008, 203).

132 Kleber (2008) 213.

133 Kleber (2008) 207–208.

4 Evidence from Non-Akkadian Corpora

Some non-Akkadian inscriptions refer to Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian bodyguards, though these are not very informative. A few inscriptions written in Taymānitic North Arabian and found in Saudi Arabia seem to refer to a bodyguard of the king called *nds*, who some have argued is Greek in origin (with the name read as Endios/Enodios/Oineides/Oniades), but this is heavily disputed and it might represent an Anatolian name.¹³⁴ He is called the “bodyguard of the king,” although the translation “bodyguard” is likewise uncertain and has also been interpreted as “overseer” – the relevant term is written *sdn*, which has been interpreted as the Arabic participle *sādin*.¹³⁵ Unfortunately, there is no further information in the texts, no immediate parallels to a known Akkadian office, and these texts are useful only for noting that there may have been royal bodyguards in Taymā’. Furthermore, there are passages in the Hebrew Bible, namely, in 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39, that mention the Babylonian *rab t̄ābiḥi* in the context of Nebuchadnezzar II’s campaigns against Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile.¹³⁶ Ezekiel 23:56 also contains an attestation of *qurbu*, followed by *pīḫatu*, *šaknu*, and a cavalry.¹³⁷ Lastly, Xenophon’s *Κύρου παιδεία* tells the story of an Assyrian official, Gobryas, who may have been the commander of the royal bodyguard before serving under Cyrus.¹³⁸

5 Conclusion

Overall, the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kings were protected by a large and complex network of government officials, military units, intelligence networks, and ritual specialists. Nonetheless, there were some officials that seem to have acted as bodyguards, both on and off the campaign trail. For the Neo-Assyrian period, this role was largely filled by the *qurbūtu* and *ša šēpē* officials, while the Neo-Babylonian period is more difficult to assess, though the *t̄ābiḫus* (including the *rab* or *bēl t̄ābiḫī*) appear to be the closest equivalent. However, there are few indications that any of these officials acted as

¹³⁴ Fantalkin and Lytle (2016) 108–10.

¹³⁵ Müller and Al-Said (2002) 112–13, who suggest that *sādin* is the early North Arabian version of *sarīs*, loaned from Akkadian. See also Fantalkin and Lytle (2016) 108–10; Lemaire (2003) 289.

¹³⁶ For discussion see Jursa (2010) 85–88. Fragment 18 from the 4Q Apocryphon of Jeremiah CA (4Q385a) also makes reference to Nabû-zēru-iddin as the *rab t̄ābiḫī* (Davis 2014, 132).

¹³⁷ I thank Yuval Levavi for bringing this passage to my attention.

¹³⁸ Deszö (2012a) 27 fn. 107.

bodyguards in the modern sense, as most, particularly the *qurbūtu*, had many other critical and powerful administrative roles within the imperial apparatus and as deputies of the king. In general, we must be cautious in distinguishing between the royal ideology and the reality of the archival texts.¹³⁹

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