MAKING TABLETS OR TAKING TABLETS? *ṬUPPA/U ṢABĀTU* IN ASSYRIA

By NICHOLAS POSTGATE

Middle Assyrian texts have a phrase *ṭuppa ṣabātu*, which is usually understood to mean "to take (possession of) a tablet". There is a corresponding type of tablet called a *ṭuppu ṣabittu* (plural *ṭuppātu ṣabbutātu*). This article contends that *ṭuppa ṣabātu* is a technical term for drawing up a formal document, and that *ṭuppu ṣabittu* is a "formally drawn-up tablet", normally if not invariably involving at least one seal impression, used both in private commercial contexts and in public administration. It is further maintained that this usage survives into Neo-Assyrian times, when its most frequent (but not exclusive) usage is at the end of a legal document where a witness (often identified as a scribe) is described as *ṣābit ṭuppi*: this has been understood to mean that this scribe retained possession of the document, or that a third party "kept" the document. In the light of the fresh Middle Assyrian evidence, it is preferable to see it as referring to the scribe "who drew up the document".

In 1976, I suggested that the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi/egirti/danniti* should be translated as (the scribe) "who wrote the tablet" (Postgate 1976: 10), referring back for this translation to an earlier discussion of the matter (Postgate 1970: 147). There two reasons were given for this interpretation of *ṣabātu*: "first ... we cannot suppose that scribes retained in their possession copies of the tablets they prepared" and secondly, "an instance of the use of *ṣabātu* in Middle Assyrian proves that it can mean to 'make out' or 'execute' a tablet." The passage in question was from *KAJ* 83, but there are now plenty of other instances of this phrase in Middle Assyrian documents (see below). The Middle Assyrian usage was later discussed at length (in Postgate 1986: 18–21). This evidence still seems to me to justify the conclusion that the phrase means something like "to execute" or "draw up (a document formally)", and I believe fresh examples which have surfaced in the meantime will support this. However, in her characteristically thorough review of Neo-Assyrian attestations, in the context of a comprehensive listing of the mentions of scribes in legal texts, K. Radner has reached a different position. She sees the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi* as referring to a neutral third party who "kept" the tablet until both sides in a transaction had completed their part in it (1997: 92). Her precise wording is, "meines Erachtens gibt die Übersetzung von *ṣābit ṭuppi* mit 'Verwahrer der Tafel' die richtige Nuance wieder" (1997: 91). This leads her to conclude that the person so named, who very often was a scribe, physically took possession of the tablet after the two principal parties had formally concluded the transaction.

This seems to me inherently implausible. Conveyance tablets and contracts were normally retained by the purchaser or creditor respectively, and even if on occasion there were reasons why the scribe might retain a tablet it is hard to see why this would have happened so regularly. Can we really imagine a scribal office or home accommodating the documents of numerous clients? In addition, I doubt that *ṣabātu* could really have had the nuance of "to keep" or "verwahren" and will argue this point more fully below. If Radner is right, this would not only have implications for scribal practice in the Neo-Assyrian period but could also affect our understanding of the procedures of the Middle Assyrian bureaucracy. Hence, her presentation of the evidence needs to be fully evaluated. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to re-assert my belief that in Assyria *ṭuppa/u ṣabātu* was a technical term for the production of a formal document, to present fresh Middle Assyrian examples, to review the Neo-Assyrian evidence, and to consider what exactly this technical term may have implied.

Before looking at the evidence in detail, it is important to underline that in dealing with matters of usage, it is difficult to work with a simple English translation alone and it may be necessary to use clumsy circumlocutions or supplementary explanations. In contrast to the simple word "to write", for which Akkadian, including the Middle and Neo-Assyrian dialects, has the word *šaṭāru*, the language may have needed terms to describe the processes of mentally composing the correct

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

wording of the document, and/or giving it its correct physical format, which could include the application of seals and/or an envelope. Either or both of these concepts should be borne in mind as the discussion proceeds. For convenience, the word "seize" will often be used as a literal translation of *ṣabātu*; it is intended to be a neutral term simply denoting the presence of *ṣabātu* in the Akkadian text without pre-empting a decision as to its more precise nuance. There is no single obvious English term for the meaning I would like to attribute to it, but I have usually opted for the phrase "to draw up" rather than the less elegant "execute", although this may perhaps place too much emphasis on the more abstract concept of generating the text, rather than physically creating the tablet.

The Middle Assyrian evidence

First, it is necessary to revisit the Middle Assyrian evidence that was already briefly discussed in Postgate 1986: 19. The passages cited there clearly show that there was a procedure known as "to seize a tablet" (*ṭuppa ṣabātu*) that resulted in a class of tablet described as "seized" (*ṭuppu ṣabittu*). However, the evidence, which comes largely from commercial texts from Tell al-Rimah and administrative documents from Assur, has not appeared decisive to all observers. In the interim, though, we have new passages to be taken into consideration. First compare an example of *ṭuppu ṣabittu* from Tell el-Qiṭar in the Carchemish region of the Middle Euphrates (Snell 1983–84: 159–60), which came to my attention after the 1986 article was written. This was a sealed case-tablet, bearing a form of adoption conveyance, whose envelope was inscribed *ṭuppu ṣabittu ša mārutte ša* PN_1 PN_2 DUMU PN_3 *ēpušūni* "the 'seized tablet' of the filial status of PN_1, which PN_2 made". The Akkadian is distinctly "Randgebiete" but includes clear Assyrianisms. As a descriptive heading for the document, this phrase must refer to the abiding nature of the document as the scribe produced it rather than some secondary external circumstance. I suppose it is conceivable that for some reason, once it had been written, one party or another might have "taken" the tablet for safe-keeping or transferred it to another person, but it is hard to see how this could have been built into the description of it inscribed on the envelope. As in the other examples, the context clearly favours seeing the *ṭuppu ṣabittu* as a **class** of tablet, with *ṣabittu* defining an attribute inherent from the time it was created, not the reversible or temporary consequence of a future action. Here, as in the Assur texts to be discussed next, if *ṣabittu* meant "taken (away)" or "kept", it is strange that when it was used, no extra information was given as to who might have taken the tablet or where to. If the information that it had been "seized" in this way were relevant, such details would surely have been needed. Whereas if it simply referred to a class of document conforming to established conventions, the term would have been sufficient in itself.

"Seized tablets" are not infrequently referred to in the Aššur Temple offerings archive, many texts from which are published in Freydank, *MARV* 5–9. Account texts list amounts issued or received, e.g. "in accordance with a 'seized' tablet of PN, the governor" (*ša pi-i ṭup-pí ṣa-bi-it-te* [*ša* P]N EN *pa-ḫi-ti*, *MARV* 7.93: 4; cf. 6.85: 4, 7), or "the deficit which is included in their seized tablet" (*mu-ṭa-ú ša* ŠÀ *ṭup-pi-šu-nu ṣa-bi-it-te*, *MARV* 6.86: 7). In *MARV* 4.5: 16′, which is concerned with the performance of army service, it seems that a "seized tablet" is being kept (*ka'ulu*) by the palace, or perhaps a palace official ([*ṭu*]*p-pu-šu ṣa-bi-it-t*[*a*] [*i+na*?/GAL?] É.GAL-*lim ú-kal-lu-ni*). Where more than one such tablet is mentioned Assyrian uses the D-stem adjective,[1] so we find for instance amounts "in accordance with the seized tablets recording debts of Assyrians"[2] (*ša pi-i ṭup-pa-a-te ṣa-ab-bu-ta-te i+na* UGU DUMU.MEŠ *áš-šu-ra-*IA*-e*, *MARV* 6.42 rev. 38; cf 6.54: 9′). *MARV* 8.60: 12–16 has "they shall remove (this amount) from the seized tablets recording debts of PN . . ." (*i+na ṭup-pa-a-te ṣa-bu-ta-te ša* UGU PN . . .*ru ú-še-lu-ú*). *MARV* 7.88: 22 has the phrase *ṭup-pa-tu-šu ṣa-bu-t*[*a-tu* x (x x)] immediately after "which he took out as loans" (*a-na pu-ḫa-a-te iš-*[*ši-ú-ni*], cf. for this phrase *MARV* 5.37: 10), but we have no parallel to suggest the restoration of the end of the line. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, in the important Tukulti-Ninurta edict discussed in Freydank 1997 we find that if a creditor fails to present his tablets at the palace "he will forfeit his debts, and

[1] For the pluralizing D-stem of *ṣabātu* in Middle Assyrian see Hall 1983, where the D-stem is used when someone says "I seized (*uṣ-ṣa-bi-it*) a donkey mare with her three foals", but later on the G-stem when the claimant declares that "I seized (*aṣ-ṣa-bat*) one donkey mare".

[2] For tablets "on" (*ina muḫḫi*) persons, meaning tablets recording their debts, cf. *KAJ* 310 (Postgate 1988 no. 50: 11 ff.).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

his 'seized' tablets are annulled (and) fit for breaking" (*i+na ḫu-bu-ul-li-šu qa-a[s-su] e-el-li* [*ṭ*]*up-pa-a-tu-šu ṣa-ab-b*[*u-t*]*a-tu* [*na*]-*aḫ-r*[*a*] *a-na ḫi-pi* [*n*]*a-aṭ-ṭa*, *MARV* 4.151: 40–41). This really only makes sense if the "seized tablets" are the documents recording the debts the creditor is seeking to recover.

In a few instances the process of "seizing" a tablet is recorded. *MARV* 5.8 lists debts to the Offerings House in oil and sesame, the entry in ll. 20–21 states "five *qû* oil instead of the oil-presser, the (man) who poured it out instead of him did not give (any) sesame, (and) his tablet has been 'seized' (*ṭup-pu-šu ṣa-ab-ta-at*)" — indicating that a debt-note had been made out recording the amount of sesame he still owed.[3] The final section of *MARV* 4.78 records that "a tablet of four minas of silver ... has been seized" (ll. 44–47: *ṭup-pu ša* 4 MA.NA *ṣar-pi ... ṣa-ab-ta*-[*at*]), but the context is too broken for the precise role of the persons mentioned to be reconstructed. *MARV* 4.65 lists incoming cattle: col. iii 3′–5′ reads "45 entering (*ša eribte*) oxen, which have periodically entered from Katmuḫu, (for) which a tablet of Milki-Ea-rabi has been seized" (*ša ṭup-pu ša* PN *ṣa-ab-tu-tu-ni*), presumably telling us that a tablet recording this had been drawn up, though it is not clear if Milki-Ea-rabi would have been the "owner" or the debtor.[4] In *KAV* 102 we have the following instructions from Babu-aḫa-iddina to two of his subordinates: "Let Mušallim-Aššur (and) Ma'nayu enter my bedroom, and you should be present with them. Get out the tablets of Abu-ṭab's house which are deposited in my bedroom, and give them to Ma'nayu. 'Seize' his tablet (*ṭup-pu-šu ṣa-ab-ta*), and let Mušallim-Aššur take (*li*-[*il-qe*]-*a*) the tablet which you 'seize' (*ṭup-pa ša ta-ṣa-ba-ta-ni*) and bring it to me." Here "his tablet" has not previously been mentioned, and it must mean that a tablet is newly prepared to document the procedure: we can see what it would have said — something like "Seal of Ma'nayu. N tablets of the purchase of Abu-ṭab's house, belonging to Babu-aḫa-iddina, Ma'nayu has received." Evidently the two addressees are expected to draft the document, to get Ma'nayu to seal it in acknowledgement that he has taken possession of the house deeds, and then to deliver this tablet to Babu-aḫa-iddina. Understanding *ṣabātu* as merely another word for "taking" would bleach the meaning from this passage. Currently unique is the use of *ṣabātu* with *kiṣirta* instead of *ṭuppa*, in a Tell Chuera letter: sesame is being transported to Nineveh and, when the officials reach there, "they will deliver it where they instruct them to, they will 'seize' a *kiṣirtu* document (*ki-ṣir-ta i-ṣa-bu-tu-ni*), and (then may) break their tablet". This *kiṣirtu* will have been a receipt tablet in a sealed envelope, drawn up and sealed by another member of the administration to ratify the document and provide proof that the required delivery had been made (see Jakob 2009: 111–12 on no. 83).

Within the Offerings Archive there is one separate assemblage of tablets (Ass. 18764) which was found all together in one of the inscribed jars and has been edited by Freydank (1992). This assemblage is principally composed of debt-notes recording liabilities of individuals to the Offerings House, and in the majority of cases they are sealed, which is exceptional for the Offerings House archive in general. These liabilities consist of amounts of the commodities which are owed as regular offerings (*ginā'u*), such as grain, honey or sesame, and they are precisely the sort of liability which is recorded in the administrative accounts as being "in accordance with the seized tablets recording debts of Assyrians". Within the context of the Offerings Archive therefore, we may be reasonably certain that a "seized tablet" is a sealed debt-note. Whether it also needed to be witnessed is another matter: most of the group edited in Freydank 1992 are not witnessed in the normal way, although among the later examples there are a number which were "witnessed" by, or "in the presence of" (IGI) the divine bison, the *kusarikku*, written ^{d}GU$_4$ DUMU ^{d}UTU, who evidently had a symbolic role in sanctioning the transaction.[5] By contrast in secular commercial debt-notes, such as those known

[3] Note that here in the phrase *ṭuppušu ṣabtat* (and in other occurrences) the suffix *-šu* refers to the person on whom an obligation is being imposed, whereas in *ṭuppātušu ṣabbutātu* in the preceding passage from *MARV* 4.151 the same suffix refers to the creditor who holds the debt note. In each case the context rules out any ambiguity. I am grateful to the journal's reviewer for drawing my attention to this difference, and referring to Blau 1979 for the usage of such suffixes on other Semitic languages to convey a virtual dative.

[4] The correct reading and translation of the line *MARV* 4.42: 34, *ṭup-pu-šu ṣa-a*[*b*$^{?}$]-*tú na*-[, remain obscure to me.

[5] For a text very similar to the sealed debt-notes in Ass. 18764 (Freydank 1992) see now also *MARV* 8.60 (Ass. 18773m), a liability of three homers of sesame withdrawn by Siyutu the oil-presser from the Offerings Overseer, authenticated not by Siyutu's seal but by his nail-mark, and witnessed solely by the divine *kusarikku* (on whom see Wiggermann 1992).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from Tell al-Rimah, witnesses are required, and both they and the debtor regularly seal the tablet. Hence, while it is safest perhaps to define the *ṭuppu ṣabittu* as a "formally executed tablet", in practice it probably implies a sealed, but not necessarily witnessed, tablet. In general then, it is clear that this type of document, the *ṭuppu ṣabittu*, may be used to record obligations between two individuals in the private commercial world, but also between an institution and an individual acting in either a private or an official capacity.

However, this view has not (yet!) prevailed, and the nature of the evidence is such that mathematical proof of one interpretation or another is very hard to deliver. Where there are divergent opinions the texts in question may need to be cited *in extenso*, and in her discussion of the Neo-Assyrian evidence Radner (1997: 89–90) addressed at some length one of the Middle Assyrian passages cited by me, *KAJ* 83 (later edited as Postgate 1988 no. 22), which accordingly needs to be revisited. The text begins like a normal debt-note for twenty homers of grain, in which Assur-aḫa-iddina is the "creditor" and Ištar-kidinni the "debtor". However, it is not a normal loan; instead, Ištar-kidinni's liability is simply to deliver the grain to a third party, Lulayu: "this grain is handed over to him in order to hand over" (ŠE *annû ana Lulaye . . . ana tadāni tadnaššu*). So far we agree. Then the text reads: ŠE *ana Lulaye iddan ṭuppa ša Lulaye iṣabbata ina pî ṭuppi akia išakkan qaqqad* ŠE *ina adrāte ana madādi* "He shall hand over the grain to Lulayu and shall 'seize' a/the tablet of Lulayu. He shall put in the wording of the tablet thus: to measure out the capital of the grain at the threshing-floors". Plainly, as Radner agrees, a new tablet needed to be drawn up when the delivery was made: "muß eine neue Tafel ausgestellt werden". We certainly need to assume that after this new tablet was created, it would have been brought back by Ištar-kidinni to Aššur-aḫa-iddina (as explained in Postgate 1988: 43) and obviously, to do this, he would have needed to have the tablet in his possession. According to Radner, "die neue Tafel soll Ištar-kidinni, . . . entgegennehmen und nicht etwa schreiben (was außerdem wohl die Aufgabe eines Schreibers war)", and in isolation, it would be reasonable to translate "he shall take the tablet of Lulayu". However, the phrase is not in isolation: Ištar-kidinni's duties involve not only delivering the grain and bringing back a tablet but also overseeing the creation of that tablet, because *he*, Ištar-kidinni, has to ensure that the correct provisions about repayment are included in it. I agree that he may not have written the tablet with his own fair hand, though this is not ruled out, but his job was to oversee its production, which would have involved ensuring that the right provisions were included, and that the tablet was duly sealed by Lulayu, and, perhaps, arranging for witnesses. Hence, the clauses about the provisions are introduced by the phrase *ṭuppa ša Lulaye iṣabbata*. Translating "he shall take", while it can admittedly be reconciled with the same transaction, is less satisfactory, since if it was thought necessary to explain that Ištar-kidinni had to bring back a tablet, one would have expected the text to say so, e.g. "he shall bring (back) the tablet and give it to Aššur-aḫa-iddina". The Middle Assyrian system was such that all parties concerned would have understood that Ištar-kidinni would be bringing back a tablet to show that he had acquitted his obligation by delivering the grain, and this simply would not require mentioning.

In any case, whether one prefers to translate "he shall take" or "he shall draw up", under either interpretation Ištar-kidinni was responsible for both the creation of Lulayu's tablet and its delivery back to the original creditor. Hence this passage does not disprove the meaning "he shall formally draw up" any more than it proves "he shall take".[6] To sum up, my view remains that the Middle Assyrian usage strongly favours seeing the procedure of "seizing" a tablet as one that involves the creation of a document in accordance with formal procedures and/or format so that it is recognizable as legally valid. That so common a verb as *ṣabātu* should have been used idiomatically with such a technical value should not be too surprising since Middle Assyrian usage also knows the phrase *nikkassē ṣabātu* "to do the accounts" (see Postgate 1986: 34–35). Clearly, we cannot rule out that the verb *ṣabātu* may, on occasion, have been used together with a word for tablet in its more general meaning of "take (into one's) possession", but if this were to occur, it would not undermine the force

[6] In passing, *KAJ* 39, which is also cited by Radner in support of her position, should be mentioned. The context and content of l. 16, in particular the first sign, which may or may not be DUB (collated; KIŠIB looks also a possibility), are too uncertain to base an argument on without parallels.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the idiomatic phrase, and context would normally have ruled out any serious ambiguity (for the Assyrians, at least).[7]

Babylonia

In discussing the Middle Assyrian evidence, reference was made to a similar usage of *ṣabātu* in Middle Babylonian documents (Postgate 1986: 20–21). The usage is discussed succinctly by Gurney (1983: 27 on rev. 17), where the text has the phrase NA_4.KIŠIB-*šu ṣabtū*. He points out that here, as elsewhere, the writing NA_4.KIŠIB strangely has to stand for a plural noun. This is confirmed by his text No. 75, which has the phrase NA_4.KIŠIB-*šu iḫḫepû* "his document was broken". It is generally agreed that in these contexts NA_4.KIŠIB must refer to a "sealed document" rather than just a "seal". Which Akkadian word it represents is less certain, but there is good evidence that it can stand for the Babylonian *kanku/kangu* as well as for *kunukku*. This is not recognized in *CAD* (K 153b s.v. *kanku*) but Borger (2003: 341 no. 486) refers to Owen and Watanabe (1983: 44–47), where parallel passages in Neo-Babylonian documents are shown to give us the equivalent NA_4.KIŠIB = *kan/mgu* "sealed document", though as a singular noun.

The meaning of NA_4.KIŠIB *ṣabātu* here is as difficult to decide as is the meaning of the *ṭuppa ṣabātu* in contemporary Assyria. The common opinion, adopted by Gurney and in *CAD*, is that the document was "taken into safekeeping", but for the instances in his edition (for example, in texts 2, 6, 15, 16 and 18), the translation "draw up" would be equally plausible. Likewise, the passage he mentions from Brinkman (1976 no. 24: 20–22) reading *a-na* IGI PN ... NA_4.KIŠIB-*šu ṣa-ab-t*[*u*], and translated by Brinkman, "his sealed tablet was deposited in the custody of PN", is indecisive. As Radner points out (1997: 90 n. 497), the usage also crops up in two forms on Babylonian *kudurru*s: *ṣābit kan/mgi* on *BBSt* 27 (for this passage, see *CAD* K 153b s.v. *kanku* 2c, referring to *ṣabātu* mng. 3i-1′ and 2′) and possibly as *ṣābit ṭuppi* on *YOS* 1.37 (although one may wonder whether the apparent NA_4.DUB here should, in fact, be NA_4.KIŠIB and thus also be read *ṣābit kan/mgi)*. In these contexts, too, the same uncertainty prevails; in my opinion, the probability is that the phrase refers to the drawing up of the document, not to its subsequent removal and deposition, but it is not possible to discuss here each of the Babylonian occurrences in the light of their varied contexts and once again, none of them will deliver "mathematical proof" of one view or the other.

The Neo-Assyrian evidence

The phrase *ṭuppu ṣabātu* survives into Neo-Assyrian, but here the great majority of cases are found in the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi/egirti/danniti* usually placed after the name of a witness at the end of a legal document. As in the Middle Assyrian instances, my interpretation of the term as "writer of the tablet" has been most recently discussed, and rejected, by Radner (1997: 89–91, citing also the authority of *CAD*, Fales, Zaccagnini and *SAA* 6!). She is right that it cannot just mean "writer" pure and simple, but despite her detailed arguments, I remain convinced that the Neo-Assyrian usage refers to someone who had a hand in the production of the tablet, in accordance with Middle Assyrian usage, so it is necessary to review the evidence and the arguments.

First, it would not be surprising if in Assyria, the scribe who wrote or "drew up" the tablet identified himself as such, since the phrase "the scribe, writer of the contract" is well attested in Neo-Babylonian legal texts: *šāṭir u'ilti* etc., see *CAD* Š/ii 227–28. Note also the parallelism between the two phrases cited in *CAD* K 153b: *u ṭupšarru* PN *ṣābit kan-gi* (*BBSt* 27 edge 2) and *u ṭupšarru šāṭir kan-gi* PN (from Speleers 1925: 278). This does not prove that this was also the meaning of the Neo-Assyrian phrase, but at least it provides a parallel.

Turning now to the phrase *ṭuppu ṣabātu* itself, Radner's first argument is that examples of *ṭuppu ṣabātu* elsewhere in Neo-Assyrian texts "zeigen deutlich, daß die Tafel ergriffen wird, nicht beschrieben" (1997: 90). These are the four passages cited to show this:

[7] Colleagues working with Middle Assyrian texts have opted for a rendering "archiviert" (Freydank, e.g. *MARV* 6 p. 10 on no. 42 "archivierter Schuldurkunden" as rendering of *ṭuppāte ṣabbutāte*) or "hinterlegt" (Jakob). Cf. "eine beim Auftraggeber hinterlegte Werkpflichtung (< *ṭuppu ṣabittu*)", Jakob 2003: 103 on *MARV* 2.22; *ana pî ṭuppi ṣabitte ša* É *ṭuppāte ētašrū* "haben gemäß der hinterlegten Tafel des Tafelhauses geprüft", Jakob 2003: 256 on *MARV* 2.6 rev. 88″–91″; or *MARV* 1.1 i 7′–8′ where one amount owed by Ekur-reṣussu is *ša pî ṭuppi-šu ṣabitte*, but for another *ṭuppu-šu la ṣabtat*, rendered by Jakob (2003: 255 n. 21) as "gemäß seiner hinterlegten Tafel" and "seine Tafel ist nicht hinterlegt".

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1. *ABL* 1262: 7 *e-gír-tú aṣ* x x: the two signs at the end of the line are damaged and the traces lend themselves more to a restoration *as-sa-ṭar* than to a form of *ṣabātu*.

2. *KAV* 198: 3–6 *e-gír-tú ša* ^{uru}*i-na-gi-bi ta-ṣa-bat-ú-ni ina* ŠU.2*-ka ṣa-ab-ta al-ka*. I confess I do not understand the construction of ll. 3–4. *ta-ṣa-bat-ú-ni* in l. 4 must be subjunctive and therefore introduced by *ša*, making it look as though the town is construed as the fem. sing. subject of the verb. Conceivably, the scribe misplaced the URU sign and we should emend to *ša i-na* ^{uru}*gi-bi* and then translate "the tablet which you 'seized' in Gibi" or "the tablet which was 'seized' in Gibi". In any case, I concur entirely that *ṣabta* in l. 5 means "take", since this is made explicit by "in your hand".

3. VAT 15460 (Radner 1999 text 54: 20–22) *e-gír-tú ina* ŠU.2*-i-ka ṣa-bat al-ka*. This passage is well compared by Radner to *KAV* 198 (1999: 182), though I prefer to take *egirtu* as the immediate object of *ṣabat* — "take the tablet in your hand and come" — not as part of a separate clause as she does (1999: 179). Again, the phrase "in your hand" indicates that the tablet is physically being "taken", but again, it may be needed precisely in order to confirm the literal, as opposed to the technical, idiomatic usage.

4. Tell Halaf no. 1 (Friedrich *et al.* 1940: 9–10) *ana muḫḫi* PN *ka-ni-ku ṣa-bat u bi-il a-ki ḫa-ni-ma šá-aṣ-bi-it ina libbi* URU.MEŠ*-ni-šu*. At first sight, it looks as if the king is saying "'seize' and carry a/the sealed tablet (*kanīku*) to PN", but on reflection, this makes less sense than it might. Are we talking about the tablet we have, on which the king's letter is written? If so, one might have expected *kanīku (ḫ)annītu*; in any case, why would he need to "take" that tablet since he presumably already had it in his hand to read? Without exploring every conceivable alternative, the phrase could equally well — and in my view should — be understood "draw up a sealed tablet for PN [which will include the instructions which follow] and convey it [to him], and similarly have [one] drawn up in his towns".

5. To these four passages we may add Nimrud Letter 64 (ND 2683; Saggs 1959: 175; now Saggs 2001: 291), ll. 16–17 *a-na šá-a-šú ṭè-e-mu a-sa-kan-šú ka-ni-ku a-ṣa-bat*^{at} "I gave him an instruction and 'seized' a tablet". The context is indecisive for determining the precise nuance, but it does not rule out translating "I drew up a sealed tablet" and does confirm that the usage remained current in the late eighth century BC outside the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi*.

That *ṣabātu* can mean "to take (into one's possession)" in Neo-Assyrian and that in this meaning the object could be a tablet (*egirtu* or *kanīku*) is uncontroversial; but with a verb as common as *ṣabātu*, it does not preclude the possibility that there was an idiomatic use of the same words with a different meaning. Indeed, my suspicion is that in examples 2 and 3 above, the phrase *ina qātī-ka* is there, at least in part, precisely to indicate that the different and more literal usage of *ṣabātu* is intended, in contrast to the idiomatic use present in the previous line of example 2 (*KAV* 198).

6. A different situation is found in a legal text from Assur dating to 657 BC (Fales and Rost 1991 no. 38). This is a contract-type document with inner tablet and envelope and a parallel text on each. It seems clear that Nergal-šarru-uṣur, who sealed the envelope, is required by this document to supply a tablet termed *dannutu* to Dada-aḫḫe in order to acquit an obligation of one mina two shekels of silver; if he fails to do this, he will be liable for a penalty of "two minas per mina". The background to the transaction is not explained, but the relevant phrase runs: UD*-mu ša dan-nu-tú* DIB*-bat-u-ni u-ba-la-ni e-gír-tú i-ma-ra-qa* "On the day he 'seizes' and brings the *dannutu* (tablet), he shall destroy the *egirtu* (tablet)". In other words, the debt he apparently owes will be cleared once he can produce a particular kind of tablet. This is the *dannutu*, the Neo-Assyrian equivalent of the Middle Assyrian *ṭuppu dannutu*, which the great majority of evidence indicates was the type of tablet used as the title deed for a piece of real estate or a slave (see excursus below). The background to this text would therefore be that although Nergal-šarru-uṣur had received payment for some item, he had not yet supplied the proper documentation that confirmed the new owner's title to it, which would be a sealed and witnessed tablet. Plainly, this passage does not prove that *ṣabātu* here refers to the formal execution of such a tablet, but it certainly does not disprove it. The phrase can be translated "On the day that he draws up the title deed and brings it", which seems no less plausible than "On the day that he takes [from whom?] the title deed and brings it".

Excursus on dannutu and egirtu. That *dannutu* was the formal term for a conveyance tablet, giving legal title to real estate or to a slave, is certain. This follows, for example, from the fact that the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dannutu of a house could be deposited as a pledge, just like the title deeds of a property for a modern mortgage (examples are well known from Assur; see Radner 1997: 73, now 1999 no. 9: 7–8; and *dannāte ša* É *šaknā*, ibid. no. 18: 9–10). The opposition between *dannutu* on the one hand, and *egirtu* on the other, found in passage 6 above, would suggest that *egirtu* would represent the other broad category of tablet used for temporary contractual relationships, which normally consisted of inner tablet with envelope.

I do not believe that either term refers primarily to a tablet shape (*pace* such suggestions for *egirtu*, on which see Radner 1997: 60–61). Like its Middle Assyrian forerunner, the term *dannutu* must refer to those attributes of the tablet that give it a specific role within the legal system, whereas the evidence suggests that in the late Middle Assyrian period, *egāru* could merely mean "to write", perhaps being the vernacular equivalent of *šaṭāru:* Freydank 1976 no. 4: 10 reads *ana lā mašā'e e-gi-ir* "written down so as not to forget" in place of the usual *šaṭir,* and another example from Tell Taban uses the D stem: *kanīka ú-ta-gi-i*[*r*] (Tab T05A-134: 24; courtesy D. Shibata).

That the contrast between these two different types of document could be conveyed by the two terms *dannutu* and *egirtu* can be illustrated by the passage: 2 *dan-na*^{meš} *šá* É PN *e-gír-tú šá* ⅔ MA.NA *ina šá-par-te šak-nu* "two title deeds of the house of PN (and) a contract-tablet for two-thirds of a mina are deposited as a pledge" (Donbaz and Parpola 2001 no. 288: 9–rev. 2; Faist 2007 no. 13 comparable). This is not to say that *egirtu* always meant a contract-tablet; there are examples where it plainly refers to other sorts of text. However, I still believe that, in principle, *dannutu* should imply a "title deed", whether for real estate (land or house; including the restricted conveyances recording land rentals and official land grants), or for persons (slaves and others). Some doubts on this score were introduced by Fales (Fales and Rost 1991: 21, 86, 123), and echoed by Radner (1997: 60) but despite this I am not aware of any case where *dannutu* refers to a "contract-type" document.

An apparent exception seemed to be supplied by a text from Durkatlimmu, in which the editor suggests that a *dannutu* "was opened" (*peti*), and must therefore have been a case tablet with inner tablet and envelope. This may look at first sight convincing, but a more careful inspection raises doubts. The text (Radner 2002 no. 109) is a case tablet with both the inner tablet and envelope surviving, and Radner suggests that the *dannutu* mentioned in the text is this very document. The relevant passages, with Radner's translations (2002: 150), are as follows:

7. Envelope: TA* PN_1 *a-di da-na-a-su* PN_2 *ú-bal-a-ni pe-ti da-ni-te-šú* A.ŠÀ *e-kal* "Gegen Bel-šarru-uṣur hat Raḫimi-il mit seiner Urkunde (die Anklage) vorgebracht. Seine Urkunde ist geöffnet: Er zieht Nutzen aus dem Feld."

Tablet: TA* PN_1 LÚ *qur-bu-u-te da-na-su ú-bal-a pe-ti da-ni-te-šú* SUHUR.MEŠ *ú-še-la* A.ŠÀ *e-kal* "Gegen dem königlichen Vertrauten Bel-šarru-uṣur hat er seine Urkunde vorgebracht. Seine Urkunde ist geöffnet; er holte die Nachbarn herbei: Er zieht Nutzen aus dem Feld."

This cannot be right, however, for multiple reasons. On the envelope, the phrase *adi danassu* cannot be "mit seiner Urkunde" since this would need to be *adi danniti-šu*, and *adi* is needed to introduce the subordinate clause with its subjunctive verb *ubbalanni*. Nor does it seem likely that *pe-ti dannite-šu* could really mean "his document is opened": the word order is inverted, *dannite-šu* is genitive and so could not be the subject of the clause, and a feminine stative form, *pati'at*, would be expected. Instead, the translation of the envelope needs to be "As soon as PN_2 brings his title-deed he shall enjoy his field in accordance with (*pitti*) his title-deed". For *pitti* meaning "in accordance with", see *CAD* P 444a (*pitti lē'i ētašru* "they checked ... according to the writing-board"). The relevant lines on the tablet run: "he shall bring his title-deed. In accordance with his title-deed he shall remove his neighbours (and) enjoy his field." The phrase TA* PN_1 in both cases belongs to the introductory formula: "the lawsuit of a field of Raḫime-il against Bel-šarru-uṣur". Hence, this interesting text does not provide an example of *dannutu* referring to a contract-type document, but on the contrary confirms that it is the standard term for a title-deed (in this instance, for land).

While it would be naive to assume that Assyrian usage was entirely consistent, the evidence is still good that the term *dannutu* properly refers to conveyances or other documents, like royal edicts, which constituted legal proof of entitlement to ownership of land or person. Exceptions, if they materialize, will hardly undermine this usage.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ṣābit ṭuppi. This phrase, in the witness and date section of legal tablets, is by far the most frequent attestation of the usage in Neo-Assyrian times. Radner's comprehensive listing (1997: 94–106) has very helpfully established that in some cases, the person designated as *ṣābit ṭuppi* is mentioned alongside another witness designated as a scribe at the end of the text, who we might assume to be the person who physically inscribed the tablet. In sixty-six cases the *ṣābit ṭuppi / danniti / egirti / kanīki* himself is also explicitly designated as a scribe. In forty-two texts he is not (1997: 90), but the absence of the title is hardly decisive: given that the persons so described were scribes in the majority of cases, it may well have been tacitly assumed that they were scribes even when this is not stated explicitly.

However, Radner lists eight cases (1997: 90 n. 499) in which it is completely clear to her that the scribe who wrote the tablet and her "Verwahrer" were different persons. I will examine these in detail, beginning with four dating to the first half of the eighth century BC from Kalḫu.

8. *CTN* 2 51 (797 BC): here the last two names of a list of eleven witnesses to a sale document are:

PN_1 LÚ.A.BA
PN_2 *ṣa-bit ṭup-pi.*

9. *CTN* 2 23 (754 BC): here, by analogy with *CTN* 2 51, Radner is probably right to take the]x-*i* in l. 30 as the end of a PN in preference to my restoration of 2?-*i*. This then creates a similar situation: the last two names of a list of six witnesses to a land sale will be:

[P]N_1 LÚ.A.BA
[P]N_2 *ṣa-bit ṭup-pi.*

10. ND 685 = *Bagh. Mitt.* 24 no. 9 (790 BC): the last three of a list of nine or more witnesses to a slave sale are:

PN_1 LÚ.A.BA
PN_2 LÚ.A.BA
PN_3 *ṣa-bit ṭup-pi.*

11. ND 704 = *Bagh. Mitt.* 24 no. 16 (788 BC): the last two of a list of seven witnesses to a slave sale are:

PN_1 LÚ.A.BA
PN_2 *ṣa-bit ṭup-pi.*

12. *ADD* 54 = *ARU* 244 (date lost): little more than the witness list survives of this text, but I include it here since the two last witnesses before the date conform to the same pattern and it is quite possible that this is also a fragment from an eighth-century tablet:

IGI PN_1 LÚ.A.BA
[IGI P]N_2 *ṣa-bit da*[*n-ni-te*]

These five examples are encouragingly consistent. They all have a penultimate witness who is described explicitly as a scribe and a final witness who is not given the title "scribe" but designated *ṣābit ṭuppi / danniti*. There are two points to be made here. First, as mentioned above in the context of the forty-two examples assembled by Radner where the designation *ṣābit ṭuppi/danniti* is applied to someone who is not explicitly identified as a "scribe", this does not seem to indicate decisively that he was **not** a scribe. It is quite possible that the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi/danniti* inevitably implied scribal status, making the extra information superfluous. Secondly, although it may seem reasonable to assume that the penultimate witness who is stated to be a scribe was the person who physically wrote the tablet, this cannot be taken for granted, because in some cases there is more than one scribe listed in this position. Passage 10 above is a critical example here: two witnesses bearing the title "scribe" are listed before the *ṣābit ṭuppi* witness. Compare another eighth-century text from the North-West Palace:

13. Ahmad and Postgate 2007 no. 34: 31–33 (736 BC)

IGI PN_1 LÚ.A.BA
IGI PN_2 LÚ.A.BA
ṣa-[*bit*] *dan-ni-ti*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

There is an identical pattern in Ahmad and Postgate 2007 no. 8: 24–26 (780/770/752 BC).

What should be deduced from the inclusion of more than one scribe at the end of the witnesses? Did one of them write part of the text and another the rest? Surely not. It has to be assumed that both scribes were present and witnessed the transaction but one was not physically involved in the writing of the tablet. In some cases, the second scribe might have been present because each contracting party had brought their own literate witness to ensure that the tablet was correctly drafted, but other, more general reasons could be considered. In any case, these passages show that it cannot automatically be assumed that any scribe listed at the end of the witnesses was the scribe who actually wrote the tablet. In the majority of cases this will have been the case, but if there is more than one candidate, which of them actually wrote the tablet must remain uncertain. If one were to decide that "seizing" the tablet implied writing it, then even a witness who was not given the title of scribe but was the *ṣābit ṭuppi* might have been the actual scribe. On this basis, it is not safe to conclude that when the final witness is described as the *ṣābit ṭuppi* without the specific title of "scribe" he was **not** in fact a scribe, nor that he did not write the tablet himself.

The passages quoted above are mostly from Kalḫu in the eighth century. Radner's other examples are later:

14. ND 5463 = *SAA* 12.95 (655 BC): the final witness before the date (rev. 19) is probably designated:

[PN_1 LÚ.A].BA ditto (where ditto = É.DINGIR *ša* ^{d}PA)

then follows the date and another (probably final) line, which ends:

[. . . *-n*]*i*$^{?}$*-te*

The restoration [IGI PN_2 *ṣa-bit dan-n*]*i-te* is possible, but its position after the date, though not unique (see example 16 below), would be unusual and without good parallels, so this instance can hardly be accepted as certain.

15. VAT 9315 = *KAJ* 287 = *SAAB* 9.72 (date unknown)

P]N LÚ.A.BA
ṣa]*-bit ṭup-pi*

Here it is impossible to be certain if a second PN was given in the second line; the spacing of Ebeling's copy leaves open the possibility that the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi* refers to the scribe in l. 5. Like example 13 above, *CTN* 2 78 provides a clear example where the spacing of the signs on the tablet only allows the final title to be associated with the PN in the preceding line:

IGI PN LÚ.A.BA
[*ṣa*]*-bit ṭup-pi*

However, since these two lines do not appear to follow, or to be followed by, a date, it may be risky to assume that they form the end of an ordinary witness list.

16. ADD 60 = *SAA* 6.317 (666 BC): on this rather unusual tablet that is called an *egirtu,* with space left for seal impressions on both obverse and reverse, the closing lines run:

[IGI P]N_1 *ṣa-bit e-gír-*[*tí*]
Date
IGI PN_2 LÚ.A.BA *ša* LU[GAL]

Since PN_2 is singled out by being placed after the date, it might be concluded that he was the scribe who physically wrote the tablet, which would mean that PN_1 was not, but other explanations, such as a role for PN_2 as a neutral party, seem equally plausible, so this instance must remain inconclusive.

Despite the uncertainties, it is conceivable that in at least some of these cases, the scribe who actually wrote the tablet was not the person designated as *ṣābit ṭuppi/egirti/danniti*. However, in the majority of cases where this phrase is found, the designation *ṣābit ṭuppi* follows straight on from

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"PN, the scribe" (based on sixty-six examples in Radner 1997 and eight more in Ahmad and Postgate 2007). Moreover, while not all scribes are *ṣābit ṭuppi,* we know of no *ṣābit ṭuppi* who can be shown **not** to have been a scribe: they are not given other professions. It is therefore clear that this action was something that was normally done by a scribe, for whatever reason. What then was it that was done to the tablet? The conventional translation, accepted by Radner and others, is that he "took" it, by which it is understood that he kept it in his possession. This is reflected in the rendering "keeper of the tablet" used in the *State Archives of Assyria* volumes. I have various difficulties with this. One is purely philological. I question whether *ṣabātu* can really mean "to keep" in such a context. The ordinary Akkadian verb that would be used to express the action of "retaining in one's possession" is *kullu.* Although *ṣabātu* has a range of meaning and idiomatic usages, it expresses the idea of taking into one's possession, with emphasis on the act of taking rather than the subsequent retention. Compare two verbs used in a single context to express the two different concepts: *līṭī-šunu aṣbat pānātūya uktillū* "I took from them hostages (and) they were kept in my presence" (translation of Grayson 1991: 217 iii 70). True, *CAD* Ṣ (18–19 under meaning 3 i) gives "to take into safe-keeping (said of documents)", with *ṣābit ṭuppi* cited under paragraph 1′. Some of the passages from Old Assyrian and Middle Babylonian may perhaps mean this, but at this juncture I will only say (1) that none of the Middle or Neo-Assyrian references necessitates this meaning, and (2), as it is only in connection with tablets that the verb apparently has this specific meaning, it would seem to be a specialized and perhaps idiomatic usage.

Philological arguments relating to usage are rarely black and white, and these may not appear decisive. My other objections are of a more practical nature. As I have said before, I think it improbable that scribes regularly retained possession of the legal documents they had written. All we know of the procedures indicates that the purchaser or the creditor normally kept the tablet either permanently, in the case of conveyances, or in the case of contracts, until the debt was repaid. There is no obvious reason why the scribe should have kept it. There is also no justification for supposing that the scribe might have kept a copy: the phrase *ṣābit ṭuppi* specifies just one tablet and the texts give no indication that more than one copy of each tablet was written, except in special cases like exchange conveyances. Moreover, a scenario in which a scribe stored in his office all the legal documents he had ever written is mind-boggling. I am happy that Radner concurs: "die These, der *ṣābit ṭuppi* archiviere Kopien von Rechsturkunden, unhaltbar ist" (1997: 89). Since, however, she adheres to the meaning "hold", she has had to propose a different explanation of what is meant. Her solution is that the scribe was the person who, in some but not all cases, "kept" the tablet as a neutral party while the transaction described in the document was, in fact, carried out (1997: 91–92). This seems an elaborate theory without much to support it. Most sales state firmly that the money had been paid and the property transferred, and there were ways of documenting an uncompleted transaction if needed.

Conclusion

Whether or not in some cases the *ṣābit ṭuppi* person is different from the scribe who physically wrote the tablet, I agree that it is inadequate to translate *ṣābit ṭuppi* simply as "writer of the tablet". Instead, the nuance of *ṣabātu* required here must express the notion "draw up (according to a formal procedure)". In Middle Assyrian usage, this procedure resulted in a class of document that was recognizable as formally "drawn up" (*ṭuppu ṣabittu*), and there seems to be no reason why the same meaning should not have survived in the Neo-Assyrian instances cited above.

What, then, were these formal procedures? Did they include the physical preparation and manufacture of the tablet, or the composition of its wording? Possibly one or both, but in addition, in Middle Assyrian times the most conspicuous attribute of a legally valid document would seem to have been the impression of the seals of one of the parties and of the various witnesses. This must certainly have constituted part of the formal requirements implied by *ṣabittu.* The Middle Assyrian contexts described above suggest that sealed debt-notes could be described with this term, and that this includes both witnessed documents, normal in commercial situations, and unwitnessed administrative instruments. Perhaps reinforcing a connection with sealing is comparison with the contemporary Babylonian usage of NA_4.KIŠIB + *ṣabātu,* enigmatic though it too is, but it is unlikely

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to have meant just "to seal" for which the verb *kanāku* with its derivatives *kanīku* (in Assyria) and *kanku* (in Babylonia) was in use.[8]

Bibliography

Ahmad, A. Y. and J. N. Postgate 2007. *Archives from the Domestic Wing of the North-West Place at Kalhu /Nimrud.* Edubba 10. London: Nabu.
Blau, J. 1979. Redundant pronominal suffixes denoting intrinsic possession. *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 11: 31–37.
Borger, R. 2003. *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon.* Alter Orient und Altes Testament 305. Münster: Ugarit Verlag.
Brinkman, J. A. 1976. *Materials and Studies for Kassite History* 1. Chicago: Oriental Institute.
Donbaz, V. and S. Parpola 2001. *Neo-Assyrian Legal Texts in Istanbul.* Studien zu den Assur-Texten 2. Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag.
Faist, B. 2007. *Alltagstexte aus neuassyrischen Archiven und Bibliotheken der Stadt Assur.* Studien zu den Assur-Texten 3. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
Fales, F. M. and L. Jakob-Rost 1991. Neo-Assyrian texts from Assur. Private archives in the Vorderasiatisches Museum of Berlin. Part I. *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 5: 1–155.
Freydank, H. F. 1976. *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte.* Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, NF III. Berlin: Akademie.
— 1992. Das Archiv 18764. *Altorientalische Forschungen* 19: 276–321.
— 1997. *bitqī batāqu* "Abschneidungen abschneiden". *Altorientalische Forschungen*: 105–14.
— 2001. *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte IV.* Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 99. Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag.
Friedrich, J., G. R. Meyer, A. Ungnad and E. F. Weidner 1940. *Die Inschriften vom Tell Halaf.* Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft 6. Berlin.
Grayson, A. K. 1991. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC, I (1114–859 BC).* Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 2. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto.
Gurney, O. R. 1983. *The Middle Babylonian Legal and Economic Texts from Ur.* London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
Hall, M. 1983. A Middle-Assyrian legal summons. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 73: 75–81.
Owen, D. I. and Watanabe, K. 1983. Eine neubabylonische Gartenkaufurkunde mit Fluchen. *Oriens Antiquus* 22: 37–48.
Postgate, J. N. 1970. More "Assyrian Deeds and Documents". *Iraq* 32: 129–64.
— 1976. *Fifty Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents.* Warminster: Aris and Phillips.
— 1986. Middle Assyrian tablets: the instruments of bureaucracy. *Altorientalische Forschungen* 13: 10–39.
— 1988. *The Archive of Urad-Šerua and his Family: A Middle Assyrian Household in Government Service.* Rome: Herder.
Radner, K. 1997. *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt.* State Archives of Assyria Studies 6. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
— 1999. *Ein neuassyrisches Privatarchiv der Tempelgoldschmiede von Assur.* Studien zu den Assur-Texten 1. Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag.
— 2002. *Die neuassyrischen Texte aus Tall Šēḫ Hamad.* Berichte der Ausgrabung Tall Šēḫ Hamad / Dūr-katlimmu, Band 6 Texte 2. Berlin: Reimer.
Saggs, H. W. F. 1959. The Nimrud Letters, 1952—Part V. *Iraq* 21: 158–79.
— 2001. *The Nimrud Letters, 1952.* Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 5. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
Snell, D. C. 1983–84. The cuneiform tablet from El-Qiṭār. *Abr-Nahrain* 22: 159–70.
Speleers, L. 1925. *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Asie Antérieure des Musées Royaux du Cinquantenaire à Bruxelles. Textes sumériens, babyloniens et assyriens.* Brussels.
Wiggermann, F. A. M. 1992. *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits. The Ritual Texts.* Groningen: Styx.

Abbreviations

ABL = R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum.* London, Chicago 1892–1914.
ADD = C. H. W. Johns, *Assyrian Deeds and Documents.* Cambridge 1898–1923.
ARU = J. Kohler and A. Ungnad, *Assyrische Rechtsurkunden.* Leipzig 1913.
Bagh. Mitt. = *Baghdader Mitteilungen.*

[8] One might consider whether the origin of the phrase could have been *ṣabātu* with two accusative objects — one being *ṭuppa*, the other, subsequently suffering ellipsis, a word for seal, such as *kunukka*, if that is the correct Middle Assyrian reading of NA_4.KIŠIB. The phrase would then have originated as "to apply a seal to a tablet / to impress a tablet with a seal", like e.g. *labāšu* "to clothe a person with a garment" (two accusatives) but this is mere speculation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press

BBSt = L. W. King, *Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum.* London 1912.
CAD = Oppenheim, A. L. *et al.* (eds.), *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.* Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2011.
CTN = Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud.
KAJ = E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur Juristischen Inhalts.* Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 50. Leipzig 1927.
KAV = O. Schroeder, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur Verschiedenen Inhalts.* Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 35. Leipzig 1920.
MARV = Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte.
ND = Siglum for Nimrud tablets.
SAA = State Archives of Assyria.
SAAB = *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin.*
VAT = Siglum for tablets from the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.
VS = Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler.
YOS = Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts.

J. N. Postgate
Trinity College
Cambridge
CB2 1TQ
jnp10@cam.ac.uk

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021088900000127 Published online by Cambridge University Press