

CLASSIFICATION, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND MONUMENTAL AUTHORITY: THE BABYLONIAN ENTITLEMENT *NARÛS* (*KUDURRUS*)

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I. *Kudurru*, Boundary Stone, *Grenzstein*

In 1788, Antoine Michaux, an amateur botanist traveling in Mesopotamia, found an intriguing stone object (fig. 1) on the west bank of the Tigris, just south of Baghdad. M. Michaux brought the object back with him to Paris, and in 1801 the object entered into the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Thus did the *Caillou Michaux*, the first significant monument and inscription from ancient Mesopotamia,¹ come to the attention of the modern world.²

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, a number of inscribed and sculpted stone objects exhibiting clear physical and textual similarities to the *Caillou Michaux* were discovered by French and British expeditions to Mesopotamia. Shortly after the objects made their westward way into the

collections of the Louvre and the British Museum, their inscriptions and reliefs appeared in the series *Mission de la Delegation en Perse (MDP)* and in L.W. King's *Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum (BBSt)*.³

Many of the objects commemorate a grant of agricultural land from the king to an individual, and their inscriptions open with a description of the land according to its borders. The prominence of these land descriptions and the occurrence of the Akkadian word *kudurru* "boundary" in the inscriptions led to the classification of the texts as "royal" or "feudal" land grants, and it was assumed that in antiquity the objects themselves stood upon the boundaries of granted land. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, early in the history of Assyriology, the objects entered into the Assyriological lexicon as *kudurrus*, English "boundary stones," German "*Grenzsteine*."

Classification plays a primary role in any research, and since the time of their publication, the

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1. S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), 10.

2. The object remains part of the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale and can still be viewed there today.

3. For the objects recovered by the French expedition to Susa, see especially *MDP* I (1900), II (1900), IV (1902), VI (1905), X (1908), 14 (1913), and XXIX (1943). For the objects in the British Museum, see L.W. King, *Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum (BBSt)* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1912).



Fig. 1. *Caillou Michaux*, dated to the reign of Marduk-nādin-ahhe (1099–1082 BC). (Photo courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale.)

objects have been almost uniformly accepted as boundary stones marking the limits of royal land grants. Yet there are features of the artifacts that cannot be reconciled with their alleged function as boundary markers. For example: one inscription relates that it is a copy of a text destroyed when a wall collapsed upon it.⁴ This statement

4. *narâ ša hašbi išturma ... ina muhhi narê šuātu igaru i' abitma ihhepi ... narâ ša abni ešša gabarê labiri išturma ukîn* (After PN) inscribed a *narû* of clay ... and a wall fell upon and broke that *narû* ... (PN₂) inscribed and set up a new *narû* of stone—a copy of the old one. [Nazi-Maruttaš, MDP II 86: Face III, (*médailon*)-Face IV (*médailon*)].

clearly points to an architectural rather than an agricultural provenance. Five initial observations can be marshaled against the designation *kudurru* “boundary marker” for the objects:⁵

1. While the Akkadian word *kudurru* does mean “boundary,” the inscriptions do not designate the objects with the word *kudurru*. Rather, the inscriptions of the objects themselves refer to the objects to as ^(na₃)*narû*,⁶ the regular Akkadian term for “(stone) stele” or “(stone) monument.”⁷
2. Some of the inscriptions refer to the objects having been erected “in the presence of the gods.” Combined with the passage cited above indicating architectural provenance, these references suggest that the original setting of the objects had been within temples.
3. Approximately one-third of the objects was found in Susa, capital of ancient Elam, where they had been taken in the aftermath of Elamite raids into Babylonia. It is inconceivable that the Elamite soldiers went scavenging in the fields to pick up boundary markers and carry them home. Moreover, the objects were set up in the main Elamite temple, alongside more spectacular monuments seized in Babylonia. Archaeological and epigraphical evidence indicates that these other trophy objects—such as the Law Stele of Hammurabi⁸ and the Stele of Naram-

5. An in-depth discussion can be found in the author’s PhD dissertation, *A Study in the Form and Function of the Babylonian kudurrus* (Harvard University, 1997), to be published in the ASOR Books series.

6. There are a very few (three) exceptions, in which the inscription does appear to refer to the object with the term *kudurru* rather than with the term *narû*. See Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 2.

7. Though usually translated as “stele,” the more neutral term “monument” is preferred here. Many objects designated as *narû* in Akkadian inscriptions—including the Sippar Šamaš Tablet discussed in detail below—do not have the form of stelae. See Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 4.

8. Note that the Law Stele of Hammurabi is also designated in its inscription as a (stone) *narû*.

Sin—were removed from Babylonian temples.⁹ The original Babylonian setting for the objects under discussion should be sought alongside these other artifacts taken from the temples of Babylonia.

4. Most of the objects have a highly polished, visually appealing surface. The objects do not have the appearance of stones left outside in the elements.
5. Recent systematic excavations, as well as re-interpretations of earlier, less systematic excavations, have indicated that find spots for some of these objects lie within the architectural remains of ancient temples.¹⁰

In short, these objects were not boundary markers. The Babylonians knew them by the term *narû*, “(stone) monument,” the same term they used to designate their royal monuments. In order to determine the true function of the *narûs* under discussion, we need to reject their classification as boundary markers and consider the objects anew. This essay will argue that these objects belong to the Mesopotamian genre of inscribed and sculpted royal stone monuments, and that by employing the physical, textual, and visual form established for royal monuments, their creators tapped into the authority generated by the monumental form. In particular, I will consider how the objects employ verbal and visual presentations of history to establish the authority of the events they commemorate.

II. *Tabula Rasa*

The *narûs* under discussion are a corpus of inscribed and sculpted stone objects dating from late second to mid-first millennium Babylonia; extant members of the corpus can be dated to between the fourteenth and the seventh centuries BCE. Ap-

proximately 160 members of the corpus are attested in various states of preservation.

Of all the members of the corpus, just over half were recovered in the course of controlled archaeological excavation. The rest have come from the antiquities market and consequently information about their provenance has been lost. Almost half of the objects were excavated in Susa. Of the twenty excavated in Babylonia, most were found in temples.¹¹

The objects found in Susa had been brought there and set up alongside other larger, more spectacular and better known Babylonian monuments such as the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, created toward the end of the third millennium, and the Law Stele of Hammurabi, dating from the eighteenth century. The inscriptions of some of these monuments indicate unambiguously that they originally were set up in Babylonian temples. Thanks to secondary Elamite inscriptions added to some of the monuments, we know that they were taken from Babylonia to Susa in the 12th century. There, the Elamite king dedicated them to his own god and set them up in the courtyard associated with the main temple.¹²

Thus the members of the corpus excavated in Susa, as well as the members of the corpus excavated in Babylonia, all point to the temple as the original locus of the objects. Moreover, the archaeological evidence correlates well with what we know about the interconnected functions of Babylonian temples, both as storehouses for community wealth and as public spaces where monuments were erected to be encountered by the public.

Complete members of the corpus range in size from about 10 cm to almost one meter in height. Complete or restorable inscriptions range from 39 to 390 lines of text. Regardless of length, the texts

9. For a detailed discussion of the evidence, see Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 2.

10. Although it should be noted that several of these may come from secondary contexts.

11. See n. 10 and Slanski, *Form and Function*, Table 3.

12. See most recently P. O. Harper, “Mesopotamian Monuments Found at Susa,” in *The Royal City of Susa*, P. O. Harper, J. Aruz, and F. Tallon, eds (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 159–82.

adhere to a uniform structure.¹³ Each inscription consists of two main divisions. The first part, the operative division, provides concrete information about the events commemorated by the *narû*, such as a royal grant of land. The second part, the imprecative division, consists of a series of prohibitions against a would-be evil do-er, followed by a series of divine curses calling the wrath of gods upon the transgressor. The relief sculptures depict primarily divine symbols, deployed along one side or at the top of the *narû*, arranged randomly or in ordered rows. According to the inscriptions, the divine symbols function in tandem with the divine curses to protect the object, and that which it commemorates, from harm.¹⁴ A small percentage of the corpus bears scenes in relief; the function of these scenes will be taken up in section III, below.

As noted above the majority of inscriptions commemorate royal land grants. However, some inscriptions document not a gift but a purchase of land, others the acquisition of a temple prebend, still others the resolution of a legal case. In the royal land grants the king plays a primary role, as he does in resolving the legal disputes. Yet, in other inscriptions there is no mention of the king whatsoever. Thus, the label “royal land grant” must also be rejected as a designation for the corpus as a whole.

13. Examples and discussion can be found in Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 3: “Structure of the Inscriptions.”

14. Attempts have been made to connect the divine symbols on the *narûs* with the symbols of the zodiac (see, e.g., W. J. Hinke, *A New Boundary Stone of Nebuchadnezzar I from Nippur*. The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series D: Researches and Treatises 4 [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1907], 71–115) or with a projection of the night sky and thus a date for the monument (see, e.g., V. S. Tuman, “Astronomical Dating of the Nebuchadnezzar *kudurru* found in Nippur in February, 1896,” in *Nippur at the Centennial: Papers Read at the 35e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*. [Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1988], 281–85). As none of these theories has yet been demonstrated convincingly, my understanding of the function of the divine symbols is based on (a) references to the symbols made in the inscriptions, and (b) the function of

What every inscription does commemorate is the acquisition of a source of perpetual income. In most of the corpus, the source of income is agricultural land, acquired through grant or purchase. In some cases, the land is extensive, encompassing whole villages as well as the labor of the people living there.¹⁵ In part of the corpus, the source of income is a temple prebend: the recipient is entitled to a certain amount of food, clothing and other consumable goods from the temple. A few of the *narûs* commemorate release from traditional obligations of taxes and labor. In this way, the labor of those residents and their productivity could be redirected toward the recipient’s own local holdings, resulting in an increase in his “real income.” Remaining members of the corpus commemorate acquisition of land in combination with a prebend or exemptions.

I have expanded on a concept proposed by Brinkman and Dalley¹⁶ and termed this right to a source of income an *entitlement*. The designation *Babylonian Entitlement narû* is therefore an accurate descriptive term for each and every member of the corpus, and communicates what the monuments actually do commemorate as well as their correct native Babylonian designation.

In addition to commemorating acquisition of an entitlement, the imprecations and curses that close each inscription, as well as the formulary used to record the transfer of the entitlement, indicate that the monuments were intended to ensure that the entitlement’s acquisition be permanent, that the

divine symbols in other Babylonian cultural contexts, specifically, the role of divine symbols in legal process. For textual references to the symbols, see the discussion in Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 3. The thesis on the relationship between divine symbols on these artifacts and in the legal realm was presented in a paper delivered at the 46th RAI (Paris, July 2000) and is currently in preparation for publication.

15. For example, Meli-šipak, *MDP II* 99.

16. J. A. Brinkman and S. M. Dalley, “A Royal *Kudurru* from the Reign of Aššur-nādin-šumi,” *ZA* 78 (1988) 76.

entitlement could be inherited by succeeding generations and remain in the recipient's family for all time.

III. Historiography in the Babylonian Entitlement *narûs*.

We turn now from the question of what the Entitlement *narûs* commemorate to how they commemorate. A few of the inscriptions of the corpus contain narratives that relate events bearing on Babylonian history, and these have been termed "historiographic." The most commonly cited in this regard is *Babylonian Boundary Stone 6* (*BBS* 6 or the Šitti-Marduk *kudurru*). Its inscription opens with stirring narrative of the decisive battle in which the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104 BCE)¹⁷ prevailed over his Elamite rival:

The king of the gods, Marduk, commanded him,
and
to avenge the crime against Akkad, had him
raise his weapons.
He launched the campaign from the city of Dēr,
cult seat of Anu—
he took the road at double speed in the month
of Tammuz.
The sky was burning like fire,
and the roadway was scorching like flame.
There was no water in the meadows and drink-
ing supplies were cut off;
the pick of the great ones, the horses, were at a
standstill.
As for the valiant youth, his legs kept giving
way.¹⁸

17. All regnal dates conform to J. A. Brinkman, "Mesopotamian Chronology of the Historical Period," appendix to A.L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, revised edition by E. Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 335–46.

18. Nebuchadnezzar, *BBS* 6, i 12–21. Translations in this essay are by the author.

Another member of the corpus also narrates events from Nebuchadnezzar's success against the Elamites: *BBS* 24 contains an account of the Babylonian king's recovery of the cult statue of the god Marduk (Bēl) from within Elamite territory:

Šamuyya, priest of (the god) URU-ia, and
Šamayya, his son ...,
fled ... from the presence of the king of the
land of Elam on behalf of Nebuchadnezzar,
king of Babylonia.
Nebuchadnezzar made an assault on their
behalf, and
(when) they went with him to the land of
Elam, the land of Elam he smote.
He took the hand of the god, Bēl, and then he
bore (the god) URU-ia together with Bēl
back to Babylon.¹⁹

These two inscriptions relate a version of historical events, and they have long been used to reconstruct the history of Nebuchadnezzar's victory over the Elamites and his recovery of the cult statue of Marduk. But why were these passages included in inscriptions about entitlement?

As stated above, the inscriptions of the Entitlement *narûs* adhere to a consistent structure. When we look at the textual corpus as a whole, we see that the historiographic passages of *BBS* 6 and *BBS* 24 fill a slot within the regular structure of the inscriptions. Other kinds of passages filling this slot include the legal history of an estate left without an heir, the circumstances behind land given as a marriage gift, or a description of how formerly barren land was prepared for cultivation before it was given to a recipient.

When we consider the historiographic passages of *BBS* 6 and *BBS* 24 in this context, we see that they perform a precise and regular function within their inscriptions: to justify acquisition of an en-

19. Nebuchadnezzar, *BBS* 24, obv. 1–12.



Fig. 2. *BBS* 9, dated to the reign of Nabû-mukîn-apli (979–944). British Museum. (*BBS*, pl. LXVII.)

titlement. The two historiographic episodes cited above are not so much about Nebuchadnezzar's military success against the Elamites as they are about the other people who figure in those episodes. In the case of the first text, *BBS* 6, the historiographic battle narrative also informs us about the quick-thinking and courageous field officer, Šitti-Marduk, who subsequently received an entitlement from the king. The second text, *BBS* 24, commemorates a temple prebend granted by Nebuchadnezzar to the Elamite priest and his son. The function of the historiographic episode is really to tell about these two Elamite priests who assisted Nebuchadnezzar behind enemy lines, enabling him to take Bēl by the hand and lead him back to Babylon. In both cases persons portrayed as having performed a valuable service to the king are the persons receiving a valuable entitlement.

III.A. Babylonian Boundary Stone 9

Other passages in the Entitlement *narû* corpus narrate past events to illustrate a recipient's right to receive and hold an entitlement, and these can also be considered historiographic. These passages are not concerned with political history, and in some the king plays only a minor role, or no role at all. The history that they relate is not about battle heroics or of other events that bear on Babylonian history writ large. It is history on a local, or even on a household scale.

One such passage is contained in the text of *BBS* 9 (fig. 2) dated to the reign of Nabû-mukīn-apli (979–944). The historiographic portion of the inscription covers three generations, the reigns of two kings, and, in more than one-hundred lines of cuneiform text, approximately one-third of the monument's surface. The inscription opens by narrating that a female slave was shot with an arrow and killed. The killer, Arad-Šibitti, appeared before the king, customary legal procedure in cases concerning loss of life, and the king sentenced him to pay damages to the owner of the slave. But the defendant did not have the resources to pay, set-

ting off a series of legal relations between the plaintiff and the defendant and their respective families. According to the text, some eleven years after the wrongful death, the defendant, Arad-Šibitti, gave to his daughter a plot of agricultural land. The gift was made on the occasion of her marriage to a son of the plaintiff, the man whose slave had been killed. Land thus passed from the family of the defendant to the family of plaintiff. Eighteen years later, a descendant of the plaintiff seems to be bailing out of debt a descendent of the defendant, and an additional plot of land as well as other assets have passed from the family of the defendant to the family of the plaintiff.

The text presents a colorful account of ancient legal entanglements. But *BBS* 9 also has a visual component that we should take into account when considering how the monument presents history.

Past scholarship on the imagery of the Entitlement *narûs* has concentrated almost entirely on iconography—on identification of the divine symbols so characteristic of the corpus. Yet a percentage of the imagery of the corpus depicts scenes in place of or in addition to divine symbols. Study of the scenes, and of the relationship between the inscriptions and the imagery, suggests that the scenes of the corpus have a historiographic aim, that is, that they serve to present a “version,” a “telling” of the past connected to the entitlement event commemorated by the inscriptions.²⁰ The historiographic imagery of the scenes works together with the other aspects of the monuments to achieve one over-riding aim: to ensure the permanence and inviolability of the transactions commemorated by the monuments.

In general, the scenes of the Entitlement *narûs* depict the persons involved in the entitlement transaction. For example, *BBS* 28 (fig. 3), in the

20. This thesis was first presented by the author in a paper, “Verbal and Visual Historiography of the Babylonian *kudurrus*,” at the 49th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 1997.

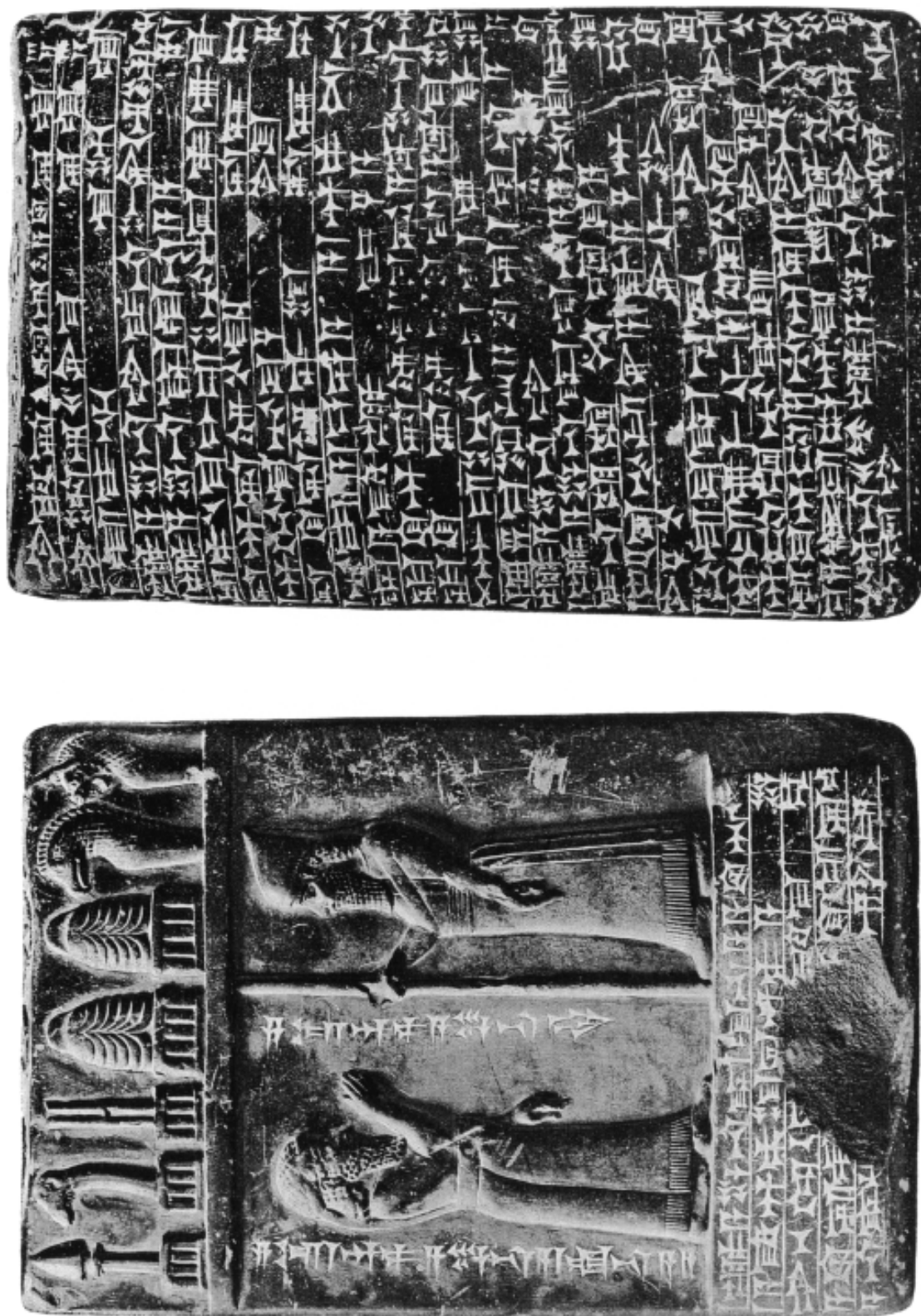


Fig. 3 *BBSr* 28, dated to the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina (mid-9th century). British Museum. (*BBSr*, pl. CIII.)

shape of a tablet, depicts an individual, Nabû-apla-iddina, son of Atnayya, in the presence of the Babylonian king, also named Nabû-apla-iddina (mid-ninth century). On the left, Nabû-apla-iddina, son of Atnayya, is shown making a gesture of greeting. He faces the king, who is depicted wearing long robes, royal headgear, and holding a staff. There can be no doubt about the identity of the two figures; they are openly labeled in cuneiform inscribed right on the relief field: “Image of Nabû-apla-iddina, son of Atnayya” and “Image of Nabû-apla-iddina, King.” The text of the main inscription relates that the king reaffirmed to Nabû-apla-iddina, son of Atnayya, the land holdings of his father.²¹

Similarly, scenes from other monuments in the corpus, while not always so conveniently labeled, evince demonstrable correspondence between the figures appearing in the inscription and the figures appearing in the relief.²² This high level of correspondence indicates that the relief scenes depict the recipient of the entitlement and, in many cases, the king who granted the entitlement.

If we ask what directed the choice of individuals depicted in the relief, the answer seems self-evident. The function of the Entitlement *narûs* is to commemorate acquisition of entitlement and to preserve that entitlement for all time. The scene on the monument depicts the relationship between the entitlement recipient and the king. The scene on *BBS* 28 presents in lasting pictorial form the notion that the entitlement detailed in the inscription was, in fact, sanctioned by the Babylonian king. It calls upon the audience to witness the relationship between the entitlement recipient and his king, perhaps even evoking the moment in time when the entitlement was conferred. Thus, very much like the verbal historiographic passages cited above, this visual relief scene validates the recipient’s right to the entitlement. It depicts him in a way that provides justification from the historical past for a situation in the historical present that is intended to endure into the distant historical future.

Returning to the discussion of *BBS* 9, with its lengthy passage about the history of legal relationships between two families, we can now take an informed look at its reliefs. Knowing what we know about relief scenes in the corpus—that persons receiving entitlement are depicted visually in the relief—we expect to view the recipients of the entitlement, in this case the plaintiff and his family into whose holdings land has passed, first as a marriage gift and then in exchange for payment of debts.

As in *BBS* 28, the figures in the reliefs of *BBS* 9 are also labeled. On the left face of the monument, the first of the two figures bears the legend, “Image of Arad-Šibitti, [son of Atrattaš]” (fig. 4)—i.e., the man charged with killing the slave in the first place. Behind him stands a woman who is labeled, “[PN], daughter of Atrattaš” (fig. 4). On the right, we see the figure of the king, labeled “Image of Nabû-mukîn-apli, King of the Universe, King of Babylon” (fig. 5). Contrary to our expectations, it is *not* individuals from the family that has received land that are depicted with the king, but rather individuals from the family that has given up the land.

This raises a new set of questions—foremost, why are these individuals pictured in the relief? As has been demonstrated in Mesopotamian art history,²³ it is an oversimplification and a mistake to assume that imagery occurring in the same venue as text serves as an illustration for the text, or that the text serves to explain the imagery. But what end is served by depicting persons from the house of Atrattaš?

21. Nabû-apla-iddina, *BBS* 28.

22. For example, Meli-Šipak, *MDP* X 88. See Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 3.2: “Relationships between the Inscriptions and the Reliefs.”

23. E.g., I. J. Winter, “After the Battle is Over: *The Stele of the Vultures* and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East,” in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, eds. H. L. Kessler and M. S. Simpson. *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 11–32; by the same author,



Fig. 5 *BBSt* 9. (*BBSt*, pl. LXXIV)



Fig. 4. *BBSt* 9. (*BBSt*, pl. LXXII)

In the relief scene, the two persons from the House of Atrattaš appear to approach the king each holding an object: the woman perhaps a bowl or cup, the man a bow in his left hand and an arrow in his right (figs. 2 and 4). I would suggest that the pictured members of the House of Atrattaš are represented as bringing offerings to the king, and he receiving them. The depiction of Arad-Šibitti with bow and arrow also recalls the crucial event with which the inscription opened, his shooting of another man's slave. It should be noted as well that, according to the inscription, when the monument was executed, the defendant, Arad-Šibitti, had been dead for many years.

It is, of course, the House of Atrattaš that benefits from being memorialized here, shown in good standing while being received by the king. Yet, it is the second family, the family of the plaintiff, who, according to the inscription, had acquired entitlement to income-producing lands, and whom we expect to find memorialized visually by the monument. To understand the overall verbal and visual composition of this monument, we must determine what circumstance could have led to the favorable memorialization of the family who had given up the entitlement.

At one point in the dealings between the two families, a daughter of the defendant was married to a son of the plaintiff, and on that occasion she received land from her father, land to which her male relatives publicly gave up any claim. The significance of this gift and of the public renunciation made by her male relatives lies in the fact that in Mesopotamia, the customary path of inheritance of family property is from father to son. But children of this union of the family of the defendant and the family of the plaintiff would stand to inherit lands through their father and also through

their mother—that is, lands formerly belonging to the house of the defendant. Could these children be responsible for commissioning the monument? The message of the relief is that the House of Atrattaš exists in a relationship of good standing with the king. By depicting visually the good standing of his maternal grandfather vis-a-vis the king, the hypothetical heir would have reinforced his claim to lands traditionally belonging to his mother's family—freely, and by the grace of the king, passing to him through his mother's line. None of this is conveyed by the inscription. But it seems to be the only way to understand the relief and the inscription of the monument, knowing what we know about the intent of the monuments' composers in presenting a version of the past.

III.B. The Sippar Šamaš Tablet, BBS 36.

We are now in a position to take up the verbal and visual messages presented by the Sippar Šamaš Tablet, *BBS* 36.

The Sippar Šamaš Tablet, *BBS* 36 (fig. 6), was discovered in 1881.²⁴ Full publication of the artifact with an edition of its text and photographs of its inscription and relief is found in King's *Babylonian Boundary Stones*. The artifact was discovered at Sippar (Tel Abu Hiba) in the remains of the Ebabbar, temple of Šamaš, sun-god and god of justice. The object has been featured in various studies, chiefly in the context of Mesopotamian cultic practice.²⁵ Yet the function of the Šamaš Tablet in its native cultural setting remains to be ex-

²⁴ "Eannatum and the 'King of Kiš'? Another Look at the Stela of the Vultures and 'Cartouches' in Early Sumerian Art," *ZA* 76 (1986) 205–12.

²⁴ See C. B. F. Walker and D. Collon, "Hormuzd Rassam's Excavations for the British Museum at Sippar in 1881–1882," in *Tel Ed-Der III*, ed. L. De Meyer (Leuven: Peeters, 1980), 93–112.

²⁵ See especially T. Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. P. D. Miller, *et al.* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 15–32; S. Rashid, "Zur Sonnentafel von Sippar," *BJVF* 7 (1972) 297–309, pls. 4–7; J. A. Brinkman, "A Note on the Shamash Cult at Sippar in the Eleventh Century B.C.," *RA* 70 (1976) 183–84.

plained, and without such a fundamental understanding of the artifact, our ability to study the piece is necessarily limited.

The Šamaš Tablet dates from the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina and originates in the city of Sippar. The artifact is made of stone, and bears both inscription and relief. The stone is carved in the shape of a tablet, obverse flat and reverse slightly convex, and it is inscribed to be turned end-to-end, sharing characteristics of both plaque- and tablet-shaped members of the entitlement *narû* corpus.²⁶ The edge of the stone is ridged all the way around, a feature encountered in the entitlement *narû* corpus on an unpublished entitlement *narû* of Adad-apla-iddina, an artifact that also exhibits characteristics of both the tablet- and plaque-shaped Entitlement *narûs*.

The inscription of the Šamaš Tablet commemorates the grant of a significant prebend from King Nabû-apla-iddina to a priest of the Ebabbar. The inscription opens with a historiographic narrative centering on the fortunes, or misfortunes, of the cult of the sun-god. It begins by relating the loss of the cult statue and disruption of cult activities in the mid-eleventh century and culminates with the rediscovery, recreation, and re-installation of the cult image of Šamaš in the Ebabbar almost two-hundred years later. In the inscription, the god is characterized as having been angry with the land, its people and, presumably, its kings. The text implies that Šamaš allowed a model of his image to be found during the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina because he is a *worthy* king. According to the text, a valuable entitlement was given to the priest who was responsible for restoring the divine image to its place, and was given by the king whose reign the sun-god favored with his return. The historiographic message is that after centuries of chaos and strife, Šamaš returned to his city once Nabû-apla-iddina took the throne.

26. For discussion of the different shapes found in the corpus, see Slanski, *Form and Function*, Chapter 4, “Physical Characteristics.”

The relief (fig. 6) shows us, from left to right, three figures in procession: a priest leading a king, followed at the rear by a goddess. The center of the relief field is occupied by a sun-disc. To the right sits the anthropomorphic image of a god, enclosed within a space circumscribed by the long, snake-like lower body of a two-torsoed divinity and a horizontal pole. The two-torsoed divinity holds ropes attached to the table supporting the sun-disc. The elements of the relief yield a fairly straightforward interpretation, recognizable as a well-attested Mesopotamian composition: the presentation scene. Best known from the Ur III period, a presentation scene depicts a person being led by the hand of a minor deity into the presence of a major deity. The scene on the Šamaš Tablet lends itself to the interpretation that the king is led into the presence of Šamaš—represented in the scene both by the sun disk and by the seated anthropomorphic figure. He is led at the hand of a priest, presumably an *ērib bīti*, literally, “one who enters the temple,” a term designating the priests who perform cultic duties requiring them to enter the god’s sanctuary.²⁷ The scene is readily connected to the verbal narrative: the priest responsible for the rediscovery and reinstallation of the cult image, whom we know from the text to be a member of the *ērib bīti*, leads the king into the presence of the sun-god Šamaš.

In the century since its publication, scholars have yet to reach a consensus about the artifact’s status vis-a-vis the Entitlement *narû* corpus. In publishing the Šamaš Tablet in *Babylonian Boundary Stones*, King must have considered it part of, or at least related to, the Entitlement *narû* corpus. F. X. Steinmetzer included it in *Die babylonischen Kudurru (Grenzsteine) als Urkundenform*, published in 1922, the only full length treatment of the inscriptions.²⁸ In *A Political History of Post-*

27. See for example, v 20–27, in the inscription, in which food allotments granted to the *sangû*-priest are reckoned according to the allotments of the *ēribūt bīti*.

28. The piece is designated L 36 in Steinmetzer’s study.

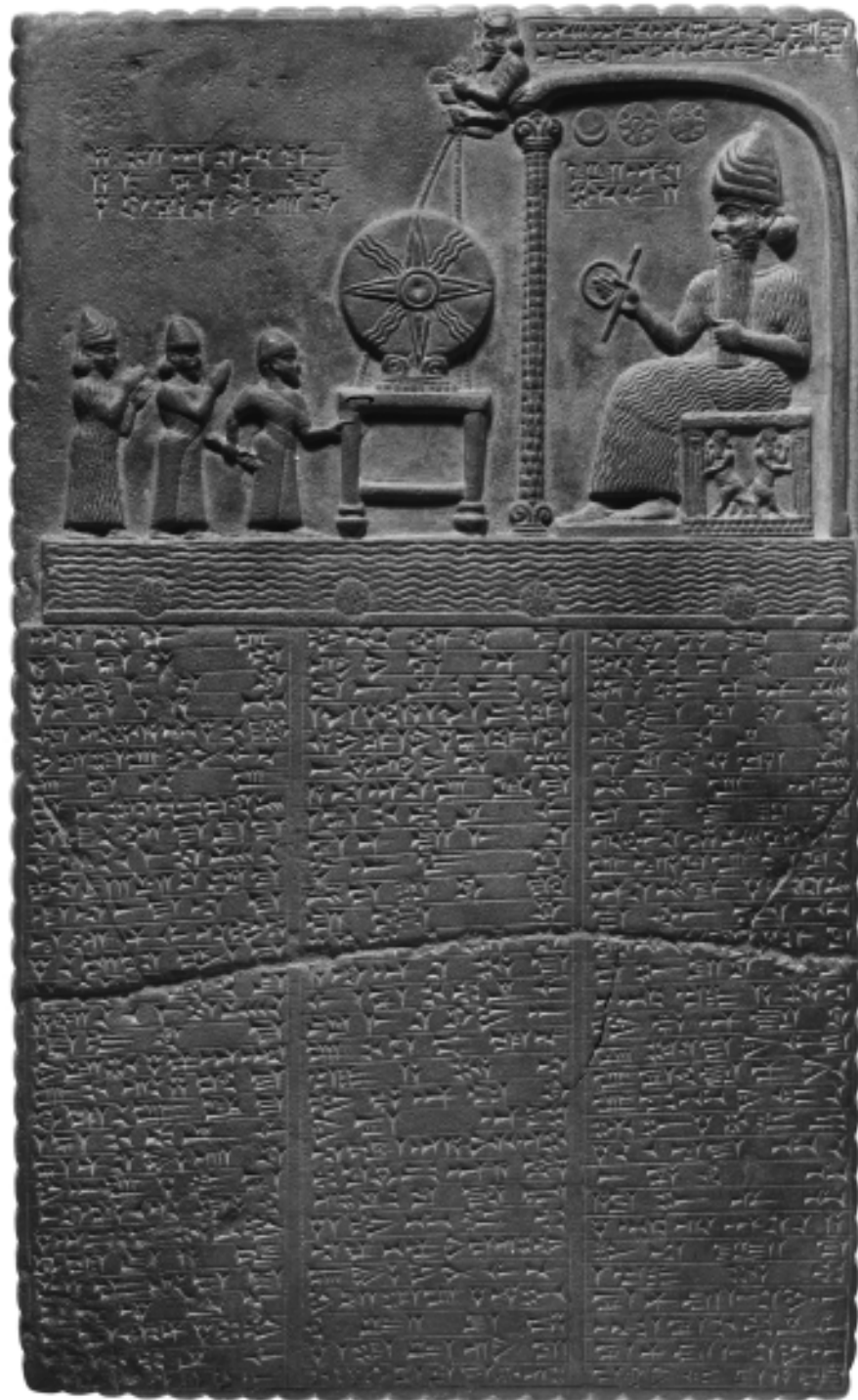


Fig. 6. *BBSt* 36, dated to the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina (mid-9th century). British Museum.

Kassite Babylonia, J. A. Brinkman refers to the piece as a “stone tablet,”²⁹ as he refers to other tablet-shaped members of the corpus, reserving the term *kudurru* for monuments in the shape of stelae. Similarly, Walker and Collon (see n. 24) include the artifact under the heading “Stone Tablets and Monuments” separately from the *narûs* listed under the heading “Boundary Stones.” U. Seidl, in her study of the Entitlement *narû* reliefs,³⁰ did not include the Šamaš Tablet.

These earlier discussions focused on the shape, material, and size of the so-called “*kudurrus*,” and omitted the Šamaš Tablet. But by seeing the corpus as genre with distinct textual and visual characteristics, it is clear that the Šamaš Tablet is an Entitlement *narû*.

The Šamaš Tablet conforms to the formal and functional definition of the entitlement *narûs*. It meets the chronological and geographical parameters set by the uncontested members of the corpus. Its size, shape and material conform to the physical characteristics evinced by the Entitlement *narûs*. It was found in the remains of a temple, a locus indicated by archaeological and textual evidence as the one in which the Babylonians erected their Entitlement *narûs*. Its inscription refers to itself as a (stone) *narû*, and commemorates a royal grant of a temple prebend. Moreover, the inscription adheres to the structure common to all members of the Entitlement *narû* corpus and features specific terminology not found outside of the corpus. The subject matter of the relief conforms to relief scenes found elsewhere in the corpus, that is, the major actors involved in the entitlement event are visually depicted. In every measurable aspect the Šamaš Tablet conforms to the functional and descriptive definition of the Entitlement *narûs*,

and henceforth the artifact should be considered a member of the corpus. Proper classification of the piece enables us to understand its function, and understanding its function enables us to appreciate and interpret details of its text and imagery that have up to now been overlooked.

III .C. Interpretation of the Sippar Šamaš Tablet: Text and Image

I. Text. The narrative portion of the inscription provides valuable information about the political history and religious cult practice of Babylonia at the beginning of the first millennium. In the eleventh and tenth centuries, semi-nomadic peoples, designated as Sutians by Babylonian sources, were responsible for disturbances throughout northern and eastern Babylonia.³¹ They are connected to the destruction of cult centers at Nippur, Sippar, and possibly also Dēr and Dūr-Kurigalzu during the reign of Adad-apla-iddina (1068–1047 BCE). One casualty of the Sutilian destruction was the Ebabbar temple in the city of Sippar, cult center of the god Šamaš. According to the Šamaš Tablet, the devastation of the Ebabbar resulted in the loss of the divine image of Šamaš—the focus of cult worship—and the discontinuation of the regular cultic rites.

Cultic rites served to guide and punctuate the life of the Mesopotamian temple and its community. Linked to the agriculturally based calendar, cultic rites featured offerings of consumable goods to the temples. In addition to the produce of lands held directly by the temple, these offerings provided the income of the temple—income that was then disbursed to cult personnel and other temple dependents. Prosperity and well-being in the land was reflected in the regularity and the richness of cultic rites and offerings; their cessation signaled large-scale collapse of community and of civilized rule. From their earliest to their latest royal inscriptions, Mesopotamian kings commemorated their

29. J. A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia*, AnOr 43 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968), 348.

30. U. Seidl, *Die babylonischen Kudurru-Reliefs*, OBO 87. (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989). Republished, with addendum, from *BaM* 4 (1967).

31. After Brinkman, *Political History*, 285–87.

giving of gifts to their gods. Establishment of regular offerings in sustenance of a temple and its personnel was an obligation of the king, and an ancient means of demonstrating both able rule and receipt of divine favor.

From the Šamaš Tablet we learn that king Simbar-Šipak (1025–1008 BCE), first king of the Second Dynasty of the Sealand, endeavored to recover the lost cult image and to restore cultic rites at the Ebabbar. When Šamaš, however, did not “reveal his face” to the king, Simbar-Šipak erected instead a sun disk,³² established regular offerings, and installed as *sangû*-priest one Ekur-šuma-ušabši. In the reign of a later king, Kaššû-nādin-ahhe, characterized as a time of hardship and famine, those offerings ceased. The aforementioned *sangû*-priest then petitioned a subsequent king, Eulmaš-šākin-šumi (1003–987), who allocated some of the income from the Esagila, temple of the god Marduk in Babylon, to Šamaš in Sippar.³³ Such was the state of the Šamaš cult at Sippar until the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina (ca. 887–855 BCE).³⁴

King Nabû-apla-iddina, having vanquished the Sutiāns from Babylonia, proceeded to rebuild the holy temples and restore the cultic rites. At this time, according to the Šamaš Tablet narrative, a model for the lost cult image of Šamaš was discovered alongside the Euphrates river. The text implies that Šamaš, having been angry with the land, relented in his anger and allowed the necessary design for his cult image to be found. Nabû-nādin-šumi, contemporary *sangû*-priest of Sippar and descendent of the aforementioned *sangû*-priest Ekur-šuma-šabši, then displayed the design to Nabû-apla-iddina. The king rejoiced and commis-

sioned the fashioning of a new cult image, which was duly consecrated and installed in the (presumably rebuilt) Ebabbar. Pleased with the new state of cultic affairs, King Nabû-apla-iddina assigned a rich prebend of food, garments, and oil to the *sangû*-priest.

The historiographic narrative of the Šamaš Tablet compares well with other narratives found in the Entitlement *narû* corpus. The basic plot, grounded in a larger history of recent fortunes of the Ebabbar, is that King Nabû-apla-iddina, pleased with the recreation and reinstallation of the cult image of Šamaš, granted a rich prebend to the priest responsible for rediscovery of the image and for presiding over its consecration and installation rites. The climactic event of the long narrative is the discovery and installation of a new cult image of Šamaš. Light and vision run inter-dependently throughout the narrative as a *Leitmotif*, apt for a monument profoundly connected to the temple of the now reappeared sun-god and all his manifestations as deity of sunlight, oracular vision, truth, and justice.

2. *Image*. At the center of the relief field is a large sun disk—larger than the human figures present in the scene—standing upright upon an altar. To the right of the altar sits the god Šamaš, facing left, iconographically marked as a god by his size, horned crown, seated position vis-à-vis the other figures in the relief, and signaled as Šamaš by the rays streaming out from his shoulders, the “bull-men” depicted on his throne, and the mountains beneath his feet. He holds in his hand and extends forward the “rod and ring,” iconographic insignia associated with rulership³⁵ and prominently associated with the god Šamaš on the Law Stele of Hammurabi (fig. 7).

As noted above, over the head of the anthropomorphic image, a two-torsoed divinity

32. Brinkman, “A Note on the Shamash Cult,” 183.

33. According to the text, the king established (*ukīnma*) income for Šamaš and granted it (*irīm*) to the priest (ii 4–10) and gave (*iddin*) the orchard to Šamaš and entrusted it (*pāni PN ušadgil*) to Ekur-šuma-ušabši (ii 11–17). This implies that a gift made to a god is understood to be at the use of a priest who serves that god.

34. Brinkman, *Political History*, 285.

35. There is no consensus among art historians about the significance—or even the identity—of these items. The most extensive discussion remains E. D. van Buren, “The Rod and the Ring,” *ArOr* 17 (1949) 434–50.



Fig. 7. Relief portion of the Hammurabi Law Stele (17th century). Louvre.

holds ropes attached to the table supporting the sun disk. Their torsos form the top and back of an enclosure within which the divine image, represented as larger than life, is seated. The front of the enclosure is marked by a pole carved with the texture of a palm tree(?), with volute capital and base. Jacobsen has suggested that this is a representation of the sanctuary of the god, viewed from the side, and that the two divine torsos are at opposite corners of the front of the shrine, which this perspective otherwise obscures from our view.³⁶

36. Jacobsen, "Graven Image," 19.

We know that a temple sanctuary was where the divine image was kept, and was the most sacred part of the temple.

To the left of the sun disk, opposite and facing toward the seated Šamaš, are the three standing figures in procession. The first, i.e., closest to the sun disk and marked as a priest by his cap and shaven chin, grasps the leg of the table supporting the sun disk with his left hand and leads the figure behind him with his right. The second figure is designated as the king by his headgear, beard, and slightly taller stature. The third figure wears a horned crown and robe signaling divinity, appears to be female, and has both hands raised.

3. *Text and Image.* There are three epigraphs, short verbal texts directly connected to the visual imagery, in the relief field. The leading epigraph (A in fig. 6), "Image of Šamaš, great lord, resident of the Ebabbar, which is within (the city of) Sippar" refers to the seated deity at the right. The epigraph is echoed in the first line of the main inscription: "Šamaš, great lord resident of the Ebabbar, which is within Sippar." The fact that the word *šalmu*, "image," occupies a prominent position as the very first word encountered by a reader of the monument is significant, as is the deletion of the word "image" in the main text. The other two captions provide additional information about details of the relief. Epigraph B reads: "Šîn, Šamaš, and Ištar, set upon the face of the *apsû*, between Nirah (and) the support pole." The three named gods correspond to the three astral disks arranged in that order over the sun-god's head. Nirah, (^dMUŠ), the snake-god, has been interpreted by Poebel and Jacobsen as the two-torsoed figure arching over Šamaš, with the curved pole descending from the heads to the ground representing the body of the snake. The "support pole," Akkadian *timmu*, corresponds to the palm-pole before the god. The term *apsû* has been interpreted as a basin for fresh water, a feature of the sanctuary symbolizing the cosmic abzu (subterranean waters), possibly represented by the wavy lines

and stars at the lower portion of the relief field.³⁷ Epigraph C: “Herald of Šamaš, snake of two-faces” certainly refers to the twin torsos above Šamaš holding the ropes attached to the table of the sun disk.

Elements from the main inscription are reflected in the relief as well. Brinkman proposed that *nipha* in line 18 referred to the sun disk shown in the relief.³⁸ As part of his argument, he postulated that *šutrušu*, “a stem most commonly employed in passages concerned with the construction of roofs of buildings, would not be unexpected if one compares the mode of support for the disk shown in the picture on the tablet.” In other words, Brinkman suggested that the manner in which the sun disk was shown, “supported by what seem to be two ropes grasped in the hands of two divine protomes (wearing horned crowns) projecting from the front of the roof of the shrine” was comparable to the way roofs were erected in Babylonia. In the relief, though, the sun disk does not appear to be supported by as much as suspended from the ropes from up above, and the comparison to roof construction is not altogether satisfying, especially as *šutrušu* connotes the idea of extending something outward or upward, not downward.

Jacobsen offered the following interpretation for lines 18–19:

ni-ip-ha šá pa-an ^dUTU
ú-šat-ri-ša-am-ma

so he had the sun disc (that is) in front of Šamaš
roofed over.³⁹

But the use of *šutrušu* in this passage does not require the concept of roofing over or constructing a roof. It can be taken in its basic meaning, “to extend,” as it is attested with objects such as the

hand, finger, face, covering, sacrificial offering, and measuring line.⁴⁰ Brinkman and Jacobsen both interpret the larger context of these lines as telling the story about the king who set up a sun disk to serve as the focus for the temple cult until the lost (anthropomorphic) cult image could be reconstituted. This specific passage can be interpreted simply as: “he had the sun disk that (is) before Šamaš extended.”⁴¹

What is the role of the sun disk in the relief? On closer examination, this portion of the relief scene is dynamic: the left leg of the table is just raised off the ground, and the positions of the arms of the two deities above suggest motion, even strain. The angle of the two ropes fastened to the alter suggests that the table is not at rest, merely suspended from above, but in motion. I would suggest that the two deities holding the ropes from above are depicted as either raising the table up or lowering it into position. Below, the priest with his hand on the left table leg is depicted as guiding the table, either into place on the ground or toward the heavens above.

Thus, the textual passage about the sun disk refers to a time previous to the scene depicted in the relief. Whereas the text narrates the construction and emplacement of the sun disk under king Simbar-Šipak (1025–1008 BCE), the relief depicts the time after the installment of the newly conse-

40. *AHW*, 1326–1327. The verb *tarāšu* means “to extend” in the G-stem, and “to cause, allow, or let extend” in the š-stem. A specialized application of *šutrušu*, “to erect a roof,” is known, but in such usage, attested objects of the verb are *gušūru* “roof beam,” *tarānu* “protective roof,” or *ērēnu* “cedar-(wood).” Jacobsen’s interpretation of *šutrušu* with *niphu* as direct object is contra-indicated by other attestations of the verb that take roofing materials as the direct object.

41. As translated also by *CAD* N/II 245: “he had the sun disk which was(?) before Šamaš suspended.” Note that the same root *tarāšu* occurs later in 35–42. There, pleased with the newly consecrated image of Šamaš, the face of the king grows bright and he literally “extended his expression” *itruša būnīšu* upon the priest. The text thus draws a parallel between the glowing face of the generous king and the glowing face of the sun-god.

37. See E. Burrows, “Problems of the abzu,” *Or* I/2 (1932) 231–56 and *CAD* A/II, 194–97.

38. Brinkman, “A Note on the Shamash Cult,” 183–84.

39. Jacobsen, “Graven Image,” 20, n. 19.

crated anthropomorphic image during the reign of Nabû-apla-iddina (ca. 887–855). I suggest that we interpret the sun disk as being raised, and that this motion of the sun disk can be seen to reflect the new cultic reality: with the cult image restored to its proper place in the sanctuary, the sun disk is being removed from the center of cultic activity. This interpretation of the visual evidence is consonant with the hierarchy of divine representation implied by the text. According to the verbal narrative, the symbolic sun disk (*niphu*) was installed at a time when the anthropomorphic image (*šalmu*) was sought and could not be found. Now that the restored image (*šalmu*) of Šamaš can be reinstalled in the temple, the makeshift symbolic representation of the divine, the sun disk (*niphu*), can be removed.

Whatever the precise interpretation of the captions and this detail of the relief, it is clear that the relief depicts a cultic scene, one involving the major actors of the entitlement transaction: the king who granted the entitlement, the recipient of the entitlement, and the god Šamaš, in whose temple the prebend was granted. These three entities are also the main actors in the narrative portion of the inscription, a narrative that culminates in the reinstallation of the divine image of Šamaš in the Ebabbar. The relief figure of Šamaš on the right side of the relief, seated/resident⁴² within the sanctuary, represents not simply the god, but specifically the god manifest as the reinstalled divine cult image. On the left side of the relief, the *sangû*-priest of Sippar, Nabû-nādin-šumi, leads the king Nabû-apla-iddina into the presence of Šamaš, who has taken up his traditional residence in the Ebabbar sanctuary. In light of this understanding, the import of the first epigraph comes into focus: “Image of Šamaš, resident of the Ebabbar, which (is) within Sippar.” As members of the audience viewing the relief, we have become witness to King Nabû-apla-iddina being received by the enthroned

divinity, led at the hand of the dutiful and dutifully rewarded *sangû*-priest.

The scene of the Sippar Šamaš Tablet evokes a moment after the recreated image has been installed in the temple. By portraying the priest leading the king into the presence of the deity, the scene chooses not to tell an episode from the narrative: not of the discovery of the image, for example, nor of its installation. Instead, the scene displays an image that conveys the idea of the priest’s service to the king. Simultaneously, the scene shows the dependence of the king upon this priest who played a vital role in the reinvigoration of the sun-god’s cult.

The king needs a fully functioning Šamaš-temple, and the temple requires the presence of the divine image, focal point of cult activity. The king needs the cult to be fully functioning if he is to receive divine sanction as a just king from Šamaš, the god of justice. The relief tells a slightly different version of history than history as told in the inscription. In the verbal narrative, the central, dynamic figure is the god Šamaš, who chooses to return to his temple, and the figure who receives the most verbal recognition and praise is the king. In the visual image, the central and dynamic figure is the priest. Shown leading the king into the presence of the god, it is the priest who mediates among the elements of the relief: the fully restored cult of Šamaš and the king who receives divine sanction from the god of justice. The relief thus tells the story of how the cult image of Šamaš came to be seated again in his sanctuary and focuses our attention on the role of the priest. By so doing, the relief recreates for every viewer the story of the priest’s service to god and to king, and consequently validates his right to the valuable entitlement detailed in the inscription.

IV. Monumentality, Memory, and Authority

The Babylonian Entitlement *narûs* look to past events and employ tellings of history to justify and validate events of their present—the acquisition

42. The Akkadian *āšib* conveys both meanings.

of an entitlement. They do so by presenting a combination of visual and textual historiographic elements that are received by an audience accustomed to encountering such a presentation on other, i.e., royal, Mesopotamian monuments.

Recall that, like the first Europeans to view the *Caillou Michaux*, very few of the Babylonians who formed the audience of these objects would have been able to read the inscriptions. Their encounter with these objects would have been primarily visual. Without the aid of a specialist, they would have had no access to the inscription. Even with such a specialist, the aural experience of the recited text would have been fleeting while the visual experience would have been steady and easily repeatable.

In this context it is worthwhile to consider how an ancient Mesopotamian monument construes the way in which it was meant to be encountered by its audience. The Law Stele of Hammurabi, one of the trophies removed to Susa alongside many of the Entitlement *narûs*, is probably the best known and readily recognizable of all the artifacts recovered from ancient Mesopotamia. The stele bears a long and sophisticated inscription as well as a sculpted relief image. The inscription consists of a prologue recounting Hammurabi's achievements and his selection by the gods to rule, a middle section recounting hundreds of Hammurabi's legal decisions, and an epilogue looking to the future. Whereas the prologue recounts Hammurabi's glorious past, the epilogue expresses concern about the future of the stele and the precepts of justice inscribed thereon. Written in the voice of Hammurabi, the text of the epilogue proclaims, "let any wronged man who has a lawsuit come before my image as a just king so that he may have my inscribed (stone) *narû* read out loud and that he may hear my precious words; so may my (stone) *narû* reveal the matter to him. May he see his case; may he soothe his heart, and may he speak (my praise)"⁴³—and here a short text about the goodness of Hammurabi is inserted.

This passage is a key for understanding a number of elements bearing on the setting and use of inscribed and sculpted stone monuments in Mesopotamia. Foremost is the indivisible juxtaposition between image and text. The intended audience—the "wronged man"—is explicitly called to come view the image of Hammurabi and there hear the text of the monument read to him out loud. The passage makes clear the public nature of the monument, and accounts for how the audience would have had access to the inscription *even though he could not read it*: he was to have had it read to him out loud. Finally, the visual viewing and aural hearing of the monument—the performance of the stele to its audience—was inextricably linked to a real-time invocation of Hammurabi, the speaking of his name in a short praise composition, even, and I would argue especially, after his death. For in Mesopotamian belief, one was assured of a good afterlife only if one's descendants performed the proper funerary rituals. These included making offerings of food and drink but relied principally on invoking the name and memory of the deceased.

When we consider the Entitlement *narûs* in the context of other Mesopotamian monuments, we see that the historiographic elements play an integral role in establishing the authority of the monument. The visual imagery and textual passages are historiographic to a specific end—to preserve immutably an account of the circumstances leading up to the acquisition of entitlement. Some of the circumstances have been recognized as key events in Babylonian history, but others were events from local or household history. In the verbal narrative and the visual relief, the monument preserved an eternal memorial to the persons depicted thereon.

M. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, WAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 134–35. *awilum hablum ša awātum irassu ana mahar šalmīya šar mišarim lillik-ma narî šaṭram lištassi-ma awātīya šuqūrtim lišmē-ma narî awātam likallimšu dīnšu limur libbašu linappiš-ma ... liqbī-ma* (author's translation).

43. xlviii 3–40, Akkadian text most recently edited in

By commissioning and setting up such a monument, the recipient of the entitlement ensured not only that his descendants could maintain their claim to the entitlement in the future, but simultaneously also ensured that he himself would be remembered and honored for all time to come. The entitlement beneficiary thus also inserted himself directly and unalterably into the historical continuum extending back from the moment in time evoked by the historiographic elements up through to infinite future readings and viewings of the monument. This insertion of a real-time figure concretized the historiographic presentation, which, in turn, enhanced the authority of the monument and the entitlement it commemorated.

With such a potential impact, it becomes clear why individuals would have monumentalized acquisition of entitlement in the first place, investing resources in the commissioning and execution of what must have been an expensive object—costly stone, a lapidary sculptor, someone to compose the text, and someone to carve it on the stone in archaizing cuneiform script. And, as demonstrated by the members of the corpus found in Susa, the resultant Entitlement *narûs* must have been impressive enough by contemporary cultural standards to merit an invader's taking them and transporting them back to his own capital, setting them up on public display along with the royal monuments taken from the raided kingdom.

In neither *BBS* 9 nor the Šamaš Tablet could we call the relief scene an illustration of events

narrated in the inscription, or the text an explanation of the relief. Both verbal and visual media operate in concert to relate history in the service of the historical present and future. That the two media do so by emphasizing different aspects of the history they relate would only enhance the authority the monuments must have commanded.

Recategorizing the *kudurrus* as monuments standing in association with the temple, rather than as boundary markers out in the fields, provides a context that makes these objects and their material, textual, and iconographic aspects intelligible in relation to their function. In this context we should not underestimate the impact of the medium of stone—even today, texts written in stone, reserved for monuments and memorials, are considered lasting and not subject to change. Rare and costly in Mesopotamia, stone was reserved for the commemoration of royal achievements or divine votive objects. Carved in stone in archaic script, partnered with divine images and curses, the version of history presented by the Entitlement *narû* inscriptions were imbued with an incontrovertible authority. The scenes of their relief sculptures likewise presented a version of history that conveyed at a glance the incontrovertible circumstances of the entitlement acquisition. Like the shelter of an over-arching canopy, the authority imbued in the form, text, and imagery of a Babylonian Entitlement *narû* was extended to the entitlement it commemorated and rendered it beyond challenge.