

Governors, Raids and Boats

The *šakin māti*, the Sealand and Uruk in the context of Neo-Babylonian to Persian continuity

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Abstract

This study investigates the *šakin māti* official, the Sealand region, and the city of Uruk in the context of administrative and ideological continuity associated with the late Neo-Babylonian period and the Persian conquest in 539 BC. These three elements, which have interesting connections within the Nabonidus Chronicle, are strongly interrelated and they shall be analysed to gain a greater understanding of the transition to Cyrus' rule. The *šakin māti*'s role is clarified both in relation to that of the Persian governor Gūbaru and the Sealand officials. The diachronic methodology needed to establish the roles of the Sealand and Urukean governors is discussed using both contextual evidence from archival documents and sign-reading approaches. Finally, the study re-evaluates existing scholarship on some passages of the Nabonidus Chronicle using the same continuity-focused angle, in particular reframing upheaval in Nabonidus' 16th year as associated with the Sealand and Uruk officials rather than due to a direct Persian incursion. The tripartite analysis sheds new light on many aspects of the regime, and offers a useful thematic starting-point for future localised conceptualisation of the Achaemenid Empire.

Stylistic Notes and Abbreviations

In transcriptions of Akkadian within this study, specific sign values or logograms are indicated in small caps (e.g. KUR not KUR). Many phrases used will have been quoted from other secondary literature. I have preserved the formatting of these so consequently the style may vary, e.g. using uppercase ^{KUR} and lowercase ^{kur} for the country/land determinative before a word. A *normalisation* means “a word or text put in the form that represents our closest approximation to the actual pronunciation” (Huehnergard 2011:72). I have also preserved transcription/transliteration conventions for original-language terms that are part of a quoted English translation. For instance, Gūbaru is also referred to as Gubaru or Gubāru in some secondary literature. Along similar lines, I have kept Hebrew month names where they appear in quotations of translations, but discuss them myself using the Babylonian terms. When quoting secondary literature not originally written in English, a translation is given in quotation marks and the original-language phrase is appended in brackets. All first-millennium dates are BC unless otherwise stated.

Below is a list of some tablet collection and primary source abbreviations. The ones for primary sources are included whether or not the context is obvious, for consistency and to avoid confusing external references with references to chapter sections within this study.

ABC – Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles
ANET – Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament
BIN – Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of J. B. Nies
BM – British Museum
CC – Cyrus Cylinder
CDLI – Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative
Cyr. – Cyropaedia
DB – Behistun Inscription
Hdt. – Herodotus
NBC – Nies Babylonian Collection
NC – Nabonidus Chronicle
NCBT – Newell Collection of Babylonian Tablets
PTS – Princeton Theological Seminary
VA – Verse Account of Nabonidus
YBC – Yale Babylonian Collection
YOS – Yale Oriental Series

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§1: The Persian conquest of Babylonia, and Gūbaru's takeover in ideological context

Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon from the last Neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus, in 539 BC.¹ Insight into the nature of the transition from Babylonian to Persian rule, as well as the role that the *šakin māti* official (literally a “governor of the land”) can and cannot be seen to have played, may be gained from examining the transfer of ideological and judicial legitimacy and power before and after the conquest. This discussion will be framed using the perspective of a major narrative source, the Nabonidus Chronicle, with supplementation from cuneiform sources and little reliance on the classical accounts. It is well-understood that Cyrus overall carried out a “smooth takeover, not only of the capital and the core but of the Babylonian Empire as a whole”.² This is very unsurprising, and in general conquerors would not want to uproot functioning structure in their new provinces unprompted, thus garnering opposition from the locals. In the prologue to his major study, Briant draws attention to the question of how Cyrus’ forces relatively rapidly “conquered the Median, Lydian, and Neo-Babylonian kingdoms in succession and prepared the ground for Persian domination of the Iranian Plateau and Central Asia”.³ These were certainly momentous years in laying the foundation for the world-hegemony of the Achaemenid Empire, and it is worth understanding by what means this came to be the case.

Cyrus held authority over a vast realm, and it may well be asked how much direct influence the Persian king had over the historically significant, yet ultimately relatively localised, region of Babylonia. Jursa’s discussion of the “occasional references to the Great King” in the Babylonian administrative documents outside of dating formulas (which still provide useful information about the royal titulary) characterises his presence as limited to being “always a distant and shadowy figure”.⁴ While this is the case in the administrative documents, it is still important to keep in mind the utmost centrality of the king’s judicial rule in Persian imperial ideology. This is firstly made very clear in Cyrus’ own propaganda, which

¹ Heller 2023, p. 662.

² Kleber 2021b, p. 909.

³ Briant 2002, p. 13.

⁴ Jursa 2021, p. 112.

sees him set up “the seat of lordship in the palace of the ruler” according to the Cyrus Cylinder (CC §23), and protect his subjects “in justice and righteousness” (CC §14).⁵ The same themes are present in the promulgations of his Achaemenid successors when for instance, Darius I states of his countries that “what was said to them by me, that they did; my law – that held them (firm)” in the DNa inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam (DNa §3).⁶ Consequently, the lack of relevance that the Great King has directly to transactions or agreements being made on a micro-scale in the province must be understood as being not at all contradictory with the fact that all the judicial power in the province is ultimately supposed to derive from him on an ideological level.

To acquire further understanding of the nature of the conquest, it is firstly useful to discuss the takeover of Gūbaru, the first governor of Babylonia under Persian rule. Subsequently, this will be contextualised in relation to the *šakin māti*. Gūbaru is attested from the fourth year of Cyrus’ reign (March 535) with the title of *bēl pīhāt bābili u ebir nāri*, or “Governor of Babylon and Across-the-River”.⁷ He is last attested with this office in August 525.⁸ The Nabonidus Chronicle is the primary narrative source for the actual accession of Gūbaru to the position of governor. In older historiography, there was some confusion over the identities of various Persian officials mentioned in the Chronicle. Using the translation in Kuhrt 2007, lines 15-16 of Column III of the Chronicle refer to how “On the sixteenth day (12th October) Ug/Gubaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus without a battle entered Babylon”. Line 20 states that Cyrus “appointed Gubaru, his governor, over the local governors of Babylon”. Finally, line 22 states that “On the night of the eleventh of the month Arahsamnu (6 November 539) Ug/Gubaru died”.⁹ There has previously been some conflation between these officials, which was not made any less complicated by their sometime identification with the Gobryas described by Xenophon in his highly-fictionalised *Cyropaedia*. At least as early as 1975, Grayson dismissed Smith’s identification of either Ugbaru or Gubaru from the Nabonidus Chronicle with the figure of “Gobryas, governor of

⁵ Kuhrt 2007, p. 71.

⁶ Kuhrt 2007, p. 502.

⁷ Kleber 2008, p. 311.

⁸ Stolper 1989, p. 290; Kleber 2021b, p. 911.

⁹ Kuhrt 2007, p. 51.

Babylonia”.¹⁰ In contrast to this, Briant later claimed that Ugbaru was “probably” a turncoat named Gobryas who defects to Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* (Cyr. §4.6) on the grounds of avenging the killing of his own son, and takes the city of Babylon with the Persians later (Cyr. §7.5).¹¹ Such an identification with Gobryas has thus not been upheld consistently in modern scholarship, and is also not particularly relevant here.¹²

It is a well-established historiographical trope that in Greek sources, the Persian conquest of Babylonia is portrayed as a rapid process and it is suggested that the city fell via some sort of deception. This is certainly the case in Herodotus’ account (Hdt. §1.191), in which Cyrus redirects the Euphrates in order to capture Babylon.¹³ This is also the case in Xenophon’s account involving Gobryas, in which the Persians take advantage of the Babylonians’ drunken reveling during a festival to dig ditches and lower the level of the river (Cyr. §7.5.15).¹⁴ The “rapidity of the conquest” is also a motif present, not necessarily overtly, in the Nabonidus Chronicle as a Babylonian narrative source.¹⁵ Waerzeggers cautions against what is supposedly a surprisingly common surface-level stance among some Achaemenid scholars that the Nabonidus Chronicle is almost incontrovertibly objective in contrast to either the Greek sources or the Persian Babylonian sources such as the Verse Account of Nabonidus or the Cyrus Cylinder.¹⁶ However, such problems of interpretation are unlikely to have much bearing on the use of the source merely to distinguish the names of officials. It is therefore eminently reasonable not to need to draw heavily on Xenophon’s highly-fictionalised account or comparable classical sources, either to obtain an accurate narrative or to distinguish officials’ names that when rendered into Greek will likely become more confused. The evidence of the Nabonidus Chronicle actually leaves little to be desired in terms of identifying the officials on the Persian side involved in the takeover of Babylon.

The attestation of the governor Gūbaru in other Babylonian administrative sources from several years into the reign of Cyrus demonstrates conclusively that he cannot be

¹⁰ Grayson 1975, p. 109.

¹¹ Briant 2002, pp. 41-42.

¹² Kleber 2021b, p. 918.

¹³ Kuhrt 2007, p. 86.

¹⁴ Miller 1914, pp. 265-269.

¹⁵ Briant 2002, p. 42.

¹⁶ Waerzeggers 2015, pp. 95-98.

identified with the official from the Nabonidus Chronicle who died in November 539. This reconstruction, in which Gūbaru the “Governor of Babylon and Across-the-River” is equated with the Gūbaru from Column III line 20 of the Chronicle, has already been established by Kleber in 2021.¹⁷ The interpretation of the cuneiform in the relevant line of the Nabonidus Chronicle provides non-contradictory corroboration of this; Grayson has noted that in the Akkadian text for column III line 15 and by extension line 22, “the sign UG is faint but the reading is certain”.¹⁸ Ugbaru of Gutium must therefore be a distinct individual who entered Babylon on 12th October 539 and died on 6th November 539. The Gūbaru mentioned in line 20 is a different individual to Ugbaru; this Gūbaru was appointed Cyrus’ (“his”) governor (^{LÚ}NAM-šú) immediately after Cyrus conquered Babylon, and the fact that he is not attested in any other extant Babylonian documents until the fourth year of Cyrus is probably merely a result of “accidents of discovery” where relevant texts have simply just not been found.¹⁹ This establishes a definitive disambiguation between the two officials in the Nabonidus Chronicle, and makes it clear which official is meant by “Gūbaru” in subsequent discussion.

The aforementioned evaluations serve both to define a coherent image of the ideological capacity in which “Cyrus, King of Babylon, King of the Lands” assumed rulership over his new domain, and to clarify the nature of the sources on the governorship held by Gūbaru that allow conclusions about his administration to be drawn. With such a preliminary understanding established, it is now possible to move onto discussing how, specifically, judicial power in Babylonia was transferred in the conquest. It turns out that several years after the Persian conquest, the governor Gūbaru can be seen to be acting as a stand-in for the king, and in fact, if the phrasing in the cuneiform sources is anything to go by, then Gūbaru’s governance actually seems to remain aligned in accordance with a certain Neo-Babylonian model of authority.

Sandowicz has discussed administrative offences that are referred to using the clause *ḫītu ša Gūbari*, meaning “the penalty of Gūbaru”, attested in documents from the early Persian period. The phrasing of this formula matches the “former and contemporary” phrase

¹⁷ Kleber 2021b, p. 918.

¹⁸ Grayson 1975, pp. 109-110.

¹⁹ Kleber 2021b, pp. 909-911.

hītu ša šarri used throughout both Neo-Babylonian and Persian rule; this phrase means “penalty of the king”.²⁰ Magdalene et al. have argued that the *hītu* clause represents a “conditional finding of guilt” rather than a penalty; in either case, the fundamentally judicial nature of the phrase is clear.²¹ Another notable piece of evidence regarding Gūbaru’s governance is a document (YOS 7, 128) which records how a priest who was accused of stealing sheep subsequently choked his accuser. To form an analogy between his treatment of his accuser and the Persian regime’s supposed harsh treatment of their subjects, the priest states “This [i.e. the choking] is how Gubāru and Parnaka break the backs of people”.²² Gūbaru’s jurisdictional capacity also extends to seemingly low-stakes situations, such as in a late instance (BM 47479, from the fifth year of Cambyses) where he rules on a case concerning a single mule.²³ From this evidence, it can be seen that Gūbaru rules in a heavy-handed and wide-ranging way, both with respect to how he takes the judicial role of the king upon himself locally by having his name in the *hītu*-clause, and to the broad nature of the purview of situations with which he is concerned. Such a manner of administration is emblematic of a kind of overlapping transfer of judicial power from the Neo-Babylonian ruler to the Persian ruler, who has Gūbaru as his vice-regent. This is how the Persian takeover is conducted first and foremost. The harshness of Gūbaru’s governorship does not detract from the generally smooth transition that the Persians must have intended. Instead, the weight of his authority mirrors that of his king.

This conception of the roles of Cyrus and Gūbaru after the conquest provides a suitable framework in which to situate the role of the *šakin māti* and his subordinate officials. The last attested *šakin māti* was an official named Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit, who is attested in administrative documents from year 8 of Nabonidus to year 3 of Cyrus.²⁴ Therefore, following Kleber’s reconstruction, the term in office of this *šakin māti* overlapped for a few years with that of Gūbaru. In continuing with a discussion of judicial power, it is useful to consider the role played by the judges of the *šakin māti*, which are attested at the beginning of

²⁰ Sandowicz 2018, p. 37.

²¹ Magdalene et al. 2019, p. 27.

²² Briant 2002, pp. 810-811.

²³ Sandowicz 2018, pp. 44, 48.

²⁴ Kleber 2008, pp. 316-317.

the Persian period. Previously, royal judges had been assigned solely by the Neo-Babylonian king, who was the “only person who had the authority” to do so.²⁵ In accordance, the judges were designated *dayyānū ša šarri* (“judges of the king”), or *dayyānū ša* [a named king].²⁶ Sandowicz has drawn attention to the “unusual appearance of the judges of the *šakin māti*” (i.e. rather than the expected “judges of the king”) in the early documents from Cyrus’ reign.²⁷ At face value, this may appear to provide evidence for the *šakin māti* somehow taking the place of the king in the judges’ titles. However, this is a rather different context to Gūbaru’s *hītu*-clause. In substituting for the king in a phrase that pronounces what is ultimately an abstract judicial concept, an *active* transfer of power to Gūbaru is indicated. Conversely, the *lack* of an active transfer from the Babylonians (either their king or their *šakin māti*) to the Persians in the titles of the judges is merely a case of leaving things as how they were, which carries far less ideological meaning. The Babylonian king is gone, but his judges are still there.

In addition, Sandowicz has also stated in particular that the judges of the *šakin māti* provide evidence that “from the very outset part of the [Persian] king’s juridical duties were delegated to local [Babylonian] officials and consequently to their Persian successors”.²⁸ Such an argument suggests that the judges of the *šakin māti* may have operated in a *transitional* step before Gūbaru, the foremost of said Babylonian elites’ Persian successors, was able to assume full authority in his new province. This is entirely consistent with collaborationist characterisation of early Persian conquests in other contexts; for instance, Cambyses’ conquest and assimilation of Egypt has been viewed as part of a “policy of co-operation” with the former Egyptian Admiral of the Fleet, Udjahorresnet.²⁹ This is not a problematic concept in itself for the overall argument here. Indeed, the *šakin māti* himself, rather than just his judges, could act in a judicial capacity; to take an example from earlier in the Neo-Babylonian period, Lalê-Esangila-lušbi appears as the “first-named judge” (*erstgenannter Richter*, according to Kleber) in a Larsa court document from year 41 of

²⁵ Sandowicz 2018, pp. 52-53.

²⁶ Holtz 2014, p. 8.

²⁷ Sandowicz 2018, pp. 52-53.

²⁸ Sandowicz 2018, p. 53.

²⁹ Lloyd 1982, p. 166.

Nebuchadnezzar (AfO 50: 265f).³⁰ Some attestations of Nabû-ahhē-bullit, discussed later in §3, record judicial contexts. However, there is still no reason to extrapolate the judges' role beyond a transitional practicality. While the judges were attached to the *šakin māti* because he was a governor who was appointed under Neo-Babylonian rule and was still around after the conquest, they did not act as stand-ins for the king in the same way that Gūbaru did according to his *hītu*-clause. Perhaps it was merely expedient for the Persians to make use of the judges of the *šakin māti* in the earliest days of their rule over Babylonia, but the transfer of power would not have passed through the *šakin māti* or his subordinates on an ideological level. This places a necessary limitation on the extent of that official's jurisdiction.

It should again be reiterated that there is nothing inherently surprising about such an administrative system that retains some of the old officials, which would naturally minimise disruption under a change of regime. As has already been established, the Gūbaru who is instituted immediately after the conquest in the Nabonidus Chronicle is the one who continues in his governmental capacity well into the reign of Cambyses, and so he and the *šakin māti* were around simultaneously. There is a clear concentration of power in the hands of Gūbaru, who was appointed directly by the new king, Cyrus; this is the primary source of his ideological legitimacy. Such a concentration of power was present while the *šakin māti* was still around. The range of jurisdiction exerted by Gūbaru is indisputable and not easily surpassed by other officials. This all means that the old interpretation of the *šakin māti* as a general governor of Babylonia whose tenure is effectively terminated by a Persian successor who subsequently replaces him, as was put forward by San Nicolò in 1941 and has continued to be upheld as late as by Sandowicz in 2018, is very untenable.³¹

In summary, the strength of the ideological legitimacy acquired by the Persians in their conquest of Babylonia from Nabonidus is precisely what leads to the sidelining of the *šakin māti*'s importance when it comes to evaluating the years following Cyrus' conquest. The *šakin māti* and officials associated with him were appointed under Neo-Babylonian rule, and consequently were inherently tied to them to a substantial degree. In fact, it is even

³⁰ Kleber 2008, p. 321.

³¹ San Nicolò 1941, pp. 61-62; Sandowicz 2018, p. 35.

reasonable to conclude that the judges attached themselves to the *šakin māti* in their titulature *because* their old king was no longer around but there was still a native governor for them to be associated with. However, this does not mean said governor was especially important, and it was clearly Gūbaru who bridged the ideological and judicial gap between the Neo-Babylonian and Persian kings during the change in regime. Gūbaru's authority comes from his being a direct appointee of Cyrus, who claims legitimacy both in his own right as "eternal seed of kingship" (CC §22), and (although he of course vilified Nabonidus) from his predecessors as kings of Babylon, having naturally adopted an extensive list of Mesopotamian titles upon his conquest.³² The active transfer of power to Gūbaru exemplified by the *hītu*-clause, which was also an earlier feature of Neo-Babylonian governance, is what sets his role apart from other institutions that appeared at least partially continuous, such as that of the judges of the *šakin māti*. The authority fundamentally passed seamlessly from the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire and was exerted by Gūbaru locally. He did not simply usurp control from some far-reaching Babylonian *šakin māti* in a linear fashion by terminating a predecessor official's position and replacing that official with himself; as will be expanded on in §2 and §3, the *šakin māti* did not have that level of importance. Gūbaru governed his province heavy-handedly, but this was simply a feature of executing the power of Cyrus within his appointed domain while the territory adjusted to Persian rule.

³² Kuhrt 2007, p. 71.

§2: Historical evidence for connections between the *šakin māti* and the Sealand

The available evidence pertaining to judicial and ideological power does not point to the existence of a *šakin māti* that exercised a great degree of wide-ranging governmental authority. This leads to the question of what role that official actually did play at the tail end of Neo-Babylonian rule, and further, what this means for the nature of Persian continuity. The association in particular between the role of the *šakin māti* and of the *šakin (māt) tāmti*, the “governor of the Sealand”, has been most notably espoused in Kleber’s 2008 study *Tempel und Palast*, which focuses on the links between the king and the Eanna temple at Uruk in this period, and also draws on attestations from multiple other cities such as Sippar and Babylon.³³ Kleber’s work notes how *šakin māti* officials from the Neo-Babylonian period are attested somewhat frequently in cuneiform sources from the sixth year of Nebuchadnezzar all the way until the third year of Cyrus; other Sealand-related officials are also discussed.³⁴ Now, the next steps in this study will involve evaluating the strength of the arguments that tie the *šakin māti* to the Sealand. Independently of sources that directly reference the *šakin māti*, there is also evidence attesting to the level of importance of the various explicitly Sealand-associated officials, which provides a useful starting-point for comparing the two domains of governance. Before moving onto other methodology in the subsequent §3 discussion, it will be useful first to discuss the deductions about the *šakin māti* and the officials of the *māt tāmti* that can be made from the historical context of the cuneiform sources.

In order to disprove the existence of a hypothetical *šakin māti* official who was independent of the Sealand and would have held some sort of supreme governorship during the Neo-Babylonian period, Kleber begins by drawing on the case of Nebuchadnezzar II’s so-called *Hofkalender* or “Court Calendar”, from the seventh year of his reign. This document sets out a number of important officials denoted ^{lú}GAL.MEŠ *ša ma-at ak-ka-ṛdi-im*¹

³³ Kleber 2008.

³⁴ Kleber 2008, pp. 313-317.

(normalised: *rabûti ša māt Akkadi*), meaning “Great Ones of the Land of Akkad”.³⁵ The list of dignitaries begins with the Sealand official Ea-dayān, who is denoted there with a title written as ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-ti*.³⁶ This title is read as *šakin tâmti* in normalised form (see further discussion of sign readings for the titles in §3, and also note that Ea-dayān is referred to as *šakin māt tâmti* by Kleber, though this makes no difference to the historical context of the argument; *šakin tâmti* will be used in this section).³⁷ In the *Hofkalender*, the name of Ea-dayān is followed by a list of heads of “regions” (*Regionen* in Kleber’s original), after which appear a list of the heads of “cities” (*Städten*), followed by a list of vassal kings of the Levant.³⁸ Besides the fact that their names simply appear after his in the inscription, there is no explicit indication that the other officials were at all subject to Ea-dayān. Since there is no *šakin māt* mentioned on this list of high officials, Kleber concludes that there was no such foremost governor of the heartland of Babylonia as would act as a clear intermediary between the king and the officials, who governed the regions and cities on a more local level.³⁹

Counter to some prior interpretations, it is actually not valid to conclude that the *šakin tâmti* held a governmental position of exceptional significance just because his name appears above the rest of the officials. The *šakin tâmti* can clearly be seen to appear at the beginning of the list on the *Hofkalender*. This apparent precedence was commented on in the initial publication of the text by Unger, who also drew on Nabopolassar’s, and consequently the Neo-Babylonian dynasty’s, connections to the Sealand in noting this; however, that interpretation “found no echo in subsequent literature”, although e.g. Beaulieu affirmed it.⁴⁰ This is not a convincing extrapolation, because the regions whose governors are subsequently listed are not necessarily areas that would be clearly subordinate to the Sealand governor. The officials listed are the *simmāgir* official and the governors (or tribal leaders in some cases) of Tupliaš, Puqūdu, Dakkūru, Gambulu, Sumandar, Bit-Amukānu, Zamê and Japtīru (using Kleber’s transcriptions).⁴¹ To outline a number of examples, the *simmāgir* official clearly held

³⁵ Kleber 2008, p. 312; Beaulieu 2002, p. 101.

³⁶ Beaulieu 2002, p. 101.

³⁷ Kleber 2008, p. 312.

³⁸ Beaulieu 2002, p. 101.

³⁹ Kleber 2008, p. 312.

⁴⁰ Beaulieu 2002, p. 115.

⁴¹ Kleber 2008, p. 312; Beaulieu 2002, p. 101.

an important position, being responsible for a “large province east of the Tigris”.⁴² In particular, the holder of that position on the *Hofkalender*, Nergal-šarru-ušur, has in fact been identified (in part utilising a Biblical connection in Jeremiah 39:3) as the future Neo-Babylonian king usually called Neriglissar.⁴³ The dignitaries corresponding to Dakkūru and the Bīt-Amukānu were leaders of Chaldean tribes, and the ones corresponding to Puqūdu and Gambulu were leaders of Aramaean tribes.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Bīt-Amukānu likely occupied “an extensive territory between Babylon and Uruk”.⁴⁵ The Puqūdu were likely located in the environs of the Uqnû river, “west of Elam and directly north of the Bīt Yakīn”.⁴⁶

The Bīt Yakīn is of particular interest with respect to the geographical scope of this study. They had territory that “more or less corresponded with the area known as the Sealand”, and were “the most important Chaldean tribe during the preceding [seventh] century”, as discussed by Beaulieu. It is actually possible that the Sealand region’s status could have been akin to that of a successor tribal unit to the Bīt Yakīn, though this again “remains speculative”.⁴⁷ On territorial grounds, there is insufficient evidence to argue that the regions or tribal units mentioned directly after the *šakin tâmti* were subject to him, because although the precise extent of the domain of particular tribes is difficult to pin down, there were certainly several, as with the Puqūdu, that are either external to and locatable in relation to the Bīt Yakīn’s heartland, or are demonstrably *not confined to* (though they may have had some presence inside of, as well as outside of) the historical Sealand region. There was still some degree of interregional mixing within Babylonia, and one should not assume territorial boundaries were static over time; members of the Puqūdu tribe do seem to have at some point been active around Uruk, and a “large number of Puqudians” had actually been dedicated by Sargon II and Sennacherib to the goddess Ishtar of Uruk (as well as to Nanāya) earlier.⁴⁸ That said, the Puqūdu heartland was definitely not a subdivision of the Sealand, and especially

⁴² Jursa 2023, p. 114.

⁴³ Beaulieu 2013, p. 35.

⁴⁴ Beaulieu 2013, pp. 34-35.

⁴⁵ Beaulieu 2013, p. 41.

⁴⁶ Beaulieu 2002, p. 121.

⁴⁷ Beaulieu 2013, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Wunsch 2004, p. 2; Frame 1992, p. 46.

cannot be conceived of as such during the Neo-Assyrian period. That connection seems more to have been with the city of Uruk in particular, to the extent it can be framed concretely at all. This analysis illustrates that at least some of the groups whose leaders appear on the *Hofkalender* can be pinned down as not interior to the Sealand, either through direct observation, or through relating their domain to that of the Bīt Yakīn.

The Bīt Yakīn also appears to have suffered a significant decline relative to its previous status during Neo-Assyrian rule; the tribe seems to have been “decimated” by unrest in the seventh century to the point that they were almost unattested in the Neo-Assyrian period and actually completely unattested in the Neo-Babylonian period.⁴⁹ Consequently, it cannot at all be concluded that the pre-eminence of the tribe that formerly occupied the Sealand territory in the seventh century could have had the effect of inflating the role of the governor of the same geographical territory in the sixth century. In light of the evidence for the significance of the Sealand in Neo-Babylonian history, particularly in relation to Nabopolassar’s origins, Beaulieu continued to promulgate Unger’s conclusion about the *šakin tâmti*’s importance, but only extended this to calling that governor a “primus inter pares”.⁵⁰ On the basis of the text, it is not refutable that the Sealand governor could have been seen as such a first-among-equals. However, the *Hofkalender* itself very much does not suggest that he dominated them all.

The overall conclusion of this preliminary discussion is that the appearance of the *šakin tâmti* at the beginning of the list on the *Hofkalender* is not evidence for his precedence over the other governors of the regions mentioned; here, the other dignitaries cannot just be assumed to be subject to Ea-dayān. This is not all; furthermore, care needs to be taken with the methodology. It may be recalled that the *Hofkalender* lists a group of city officials after the group of regional governors. Jursa has noted that as a direct result of being listed *after* those aforementioned regional governors, the officials of cities must be “clearly holding a less prominent position within the overall hierarchy”.⁵¹ This is a valid point, but it fundamentally only works because administrative units such as smaller cities governed by a

⁴⁹ Beaulieu 2002, p. 115; Levavi 2021, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Beaulieu 2002, p. 115.

⁵¹ Jursa 2023, p. 114.

šangû can be distinguished as being smaller and more localised than the governorship of more extensive territorial regions. This means a clear distinction between the reach of regional governors and city governors has been established, which may seem obvious but is actually a notable methodological observation that will also be relevant when discussing the role of Uruk in §5. Reasoning that revolves around the ordering of officials on the list cannot be applied indiscriminately to distinguish between the importance of more comparably-sized units, such as the regions that appear in the first grouping.

It is also important to avoid making fallacious inferences that may arise when seeking to disprove a prior assumption from elsewhere that there might have been a pre-eminent *šakin māti* occupying an intermediary position between the Neo-Babylonian king and local governors of smaller regions. One could approach refuting the *šakin māti*'s significance by trying to demonstrate that references to a *šakin māti* are actually references to a *šakin tâmti*, and therefore that the *šakin māti* was not a distinct official in his own right at all. Such a line of reasoning would in fact be valid if it had also been shown independently that the *šakin tâmti* had limited importance. However, it would not be valid to interpret the supposed pre-eminence of an attested *šakin tâmti* as evidence *in itself* that he might have filled a role corresponding to the “important *šakin māti*” archetype, since further external evidence for the corroboration of the two roles would be required. In the case of the *Hofkalender*, it would make no sense to do this anyway, because the *šakin tâmti* listed on there is not even clearly pre-eminent. Yet establishing this chain of inferences, it becomes clear that even if one followed Unger's (highly suspect) interpretation and viewed Ea-dayān as some sort of overlord over the other regions, it would still not be evidence in favour of the existence of a powerful *šakin māti*.

An additional methodological point is that if the *šakin māti* were shown conclusively, using other evidence than the *Hofkalender*, to be equivalent to the *šakin tâmti*, then one would have to reckon with competing claims: either that the supposed significance of the *šakin māti* contributes to an elevated status of the *šakin tâmti* compared to what was previously thought, or that the modest status of the *šakin tâmti* diminishes the formerly

pre-eminent status that the *šakin māti* was thought to have. Since the *šakin māti*'s importance has been dismissed on ideological grounds, only the latter is valid. Arguments that rest on the *šakin māti* being important are also not epistemically necessary to draw conclusions about the Sealand officials. The way the logic here should actually run is to recognise the *šakin māti* is relatively ideologically unimportant, then to realise the *šakin māti* title was closely linked to that of the *šakin tâmti*, and then finally to realise this subsequently also corroborates, but does not prove in itself, the limited importance of the *šakin tâmti*.

With the aforementioned caveats in mind, it is possible to return to the proposal that since a *šakin māti* does not appear on the list of “Great Ones of the Land of Akkad”, if this official was at all significant, then he must be equatable with some other official rather than existing independently. In a strict sense, this seems to be valid. There was no supremely powerful *šakin māti* who had influence over all of Babylonia, and as an inference from the *Hofkalender*, this aligns with but is not derived from the conclusion established about that official's ideological power from §1. If the *šakin māti* can indeed be identified with the *šakin tâmti* (a statement which has not yet been demonstrated, but will be discussed further in the rest of §2 and §3) then without being proof in itself, the limited evidence for the significance of the Sealand official may be transferred to also apply to evaluation of the *šakin māti*. Since the *šakin tâmti* must have held a locally important, yet overall limited status that did not loom above that of the other regional officials, the evidence for the degree of Ea-dayān's importance would indeed corroborate this. The *Hofkalender* in itself does not suggest that Ea-dayān was a *šakin māti* and it does not suggest that the *šakin tâmti* held a particularly pre-eminent position. Furthermore, there are no known explicit attestations of a *šakin tâmti* from after year 34 of Nebuchadnezzar, which is when the last known holder of the title, Nabû-šumu-iddin, is mentioned (YBC 9446892).⁵² Officials of the Sealand continue to be attested as late as the reign of Cambyses; in the first year of that king's reign, Madān-šarru-ušur is attested with the title *šanû ša tâmti* (YOS 7, 106).⁵³ It is quite possible that the range of influence of the regional Sealand officials could have diminished after the

⁵² Kleber 2008, p. 315.

⁵³ Kleber 2008, p. 317.

Neo-Babylonian Empire had passed its high point. At any rate, neither a *šakin māti* or a *šakin tâmti* exerted power in a clear state of wide-ranging hegemonic governance as the Persian period began.

In establishing the role of the *šakin māti*, the next step to take will be to deal with the evidence for the equation of that title with the *šakin tâmti* in other cuneiform sources. In a discussion of Uruk in particular, Kleber comes to a conclusion that the two titles can be equated on the basis of the tablets from the Eanna archive, but acknowledges that it has not been shown definitively that the two titles necessarily correspond in general throughout Babylonia, asserting that such a general statement “cannot be proven” (*ist nicht zu beweisen*) in every case, i.e. outside of Uruk.⁵⁴ However, she also notes that at least there are no known instances where a *šakin māti* and a *šakin (māt) tâmti* are attested contemporaneously with different names, so there is also no clear evidence to refute such a connection.⁵⁵ A more positive justification is certainly necessary, and the evidence from different cities varies in its usefulness; for instance, the Ebabbar archive from Sippar provides little that is conclusive to draw upon in answering this question.⁵⁶ A number of documents from Uruk indeed appear to connect the *šakin māti* with the Sealand officials in some capacity. A sampling of these documents will now be evaluated in further detail.

The relationship between a Sealand vice-governor and the *šakin māti* is alluded to in YOS 17, 360, a tablet from Uruk which dates to the fourteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. The document mentions an official named Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti, who is called *šanû ša tâmti* (“vice-governor of the Sealand”) in it. It is not entirely clear at what point he was appointed to this position; Beaulieu has commented on how a man named Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti, who is probably the same person, was *qīpu ša tâmti* “between the 9th and 17th years of Nebuchadnezzar II” and therefore he must have become *šanû ša tâmti* at a later point than the events of YOS 17, 360, which names him with the title before he actually held it.⁵⁷ More recently, Levavi has argued that the *qīpu ša tâmti* and the *šanû ša tâmti* “refer to the same

⁵⁴ Kleber 2008, p. 322.

⁵⁵ Kleber 2008, p. 322.

⁵⁶ Kleber 2008, p. 324.

⁵⁷ Beaulieu 2002, p. 110.

official” in the Eanna archive, though this is not consequential for this study.⁵⁸ YOS 17, 360 records how an official named Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti, who is there given the title of *šanû ša tâmti*, had earlier deposited some silver in the Eanna temple. At a later point, the *šatammu* official of the temple, Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin, received a letter from an unnamed *šakin māti*, which asked that he transport some gold to Opis. The *šatammu* accordingly took gold from the temple to Opis, and the silver that had been deposited by the *šanû ša tâmti* in the temple was credited as part of the “purchase-price” of the gold.⁵⁹

Kleber stated that the equation of *šakin māti* and *šakin (māt) tâmti* is “clear” (*deutlich*) in YOS 17, 360, which is a deduction drawn entirely from the internal context of the document.⁶⁰ Drawing the conclusion that the *šakin māti* who sent the letter was actually a *šakin tâmti* derives logically from the connection made between the silver of the *šanû ša tâmti* and the gold requested by the *šakin māti*. There is no direct equation being made between the *šanû ša tâmti* Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti himself and the *šakin māti*. Nor is it extrapolated that the *šanû ša tâmti* would necessarily have been on track to progress to holding the *šakin māti* position; indeed, while a negative cannot be proven, there are also no recorded cases of both positions being held by officials with the same name, even at different times.⁶¹ In the particular context of this situation with the silver and gold, the *šakin māti*’s duties had a probable, but not definitive, close link to the Sealand. Without having further primary evidence available, it is very conceivable that, for instance, the *šanû ša tâmti* could have acted on behalf of a *šakin tâmti* in carrying out a superior’s duties and depositing silver in the temple to be credited at a later date. This is a reasonable conclusion to draw given the title of the *šanû ša tâmti*; the term *šanû* itself, when applied to officials, denotes a “deputy”.⁶² Drawing this all together, using the combination of the official’s title and actions in YOS 17, 360, it can be established reasonably that in this particular case the *šakin māti*’s duties had some close ties to the Sealand, and that the *šanû ša tâmti* could have been his subordinate.

⁵⁸ Levavi 2021, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Kleber 2008, p. 322.

⁶⁰ Kleber 2008, p. 322.

⁶¹ Kleber 2008, pp. 313-317.

⁶² Black, George, and Postgate 2000, p. 355.

One of the other archival sources in which Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti is also attested is YBC 9221, from year 16 of Nebuchadnezzar's reign; this text concerns the matter of irrigated land. In this document, Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti holds the title of *qīpu ša tāmti*.⁶³ The title of *qīpu* has been interpreted as that of a "royal resident".⁶⁴ More generally, the term *qīpu* can denote a "representative", particularly of the king.⁶⁵ Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti is the only attested holder of the title *qīpu ša tāmti* from the Neo-Babylonian period proper; the next holder to be attested is Šamaš-šarru-bullit, from the fourth year of Cyrus.⁶⁶ The tablet also mentions another individual named "Marduk" who has the patronymic Amurru-ušēzib, but the relationship between the officials is not totally clear. The text refers to something "of the canal-inspectors [*gugallu*] of the *šakin māti* in the presence of Marduk/Amurru-ušēzib"; the text directly preceding this phrase is unreadable. The Akkadian phrase is *ša gugallūtu ša šakin māti ina pān* [Marduk/Amurru-ušēzib].⁶⁷ Note that Marduk/Amurru-ušēzib himself is not called a *gugallu* of the *šakin māti* in this text; he is just definitely mentioned in the context of being associated with said *gugallu*-related duties. The document mentions the "irrigated land" (Kleber: *Bewässerungsland*) being "at the disposal" (*zur Verfügung steht*) of Marduk/Amurru-ušēzib and one other person.⁶⁸ The role played by Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti is not stated, and all that can really be said is that he is named elsewhere in the text.⁶⁹ Similarly to with YOS 17, 360, Kleber is using Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti's presence in a document that also mentions the *šakin māti* as evidence for a Sealand connection. This is also not definitive, but it does not appear that significantly better evidence is available. What can be said for certain is that the *šakin māti* must have had as subordinates the *gugallūtu ša šakin māti*, who have a contextual link to the *qīpu ša tāmti* by way of association in YBC 9221.

Furthermore, another undated document (NBC 4575) mentions a person named Marduk who actually held the title of *gugallu ša šakin māti*, rather than merely being

⁶³ Beaulieu 2002, p. 112.

⁶⁴ Levavi 2021, p. 22.

⁶⁵ Black, George, and Postgate 2000, p. 289.

⁶⁶ Kleber 2008, p. 317.

⁶⁷ Janković 2013, p. 120.

⁶⁸ Kleber 2008, p. 322.

⁶⁹ Kleber 2008, p. 322.

associated with such an official.⁷⁰ Janković has equated this Marduk with the Marduk/Amurru-ušēzib mentioned in YBC 9221, and this connection is made essentially only on the basis that both documents pertain to the *gugallūtu ša šakin māti*.⁷¹ Kleber has asserted that the *gugallu ša šakin māti* can be “in all the evidence indirectly connected to the Sealand” (*in allen Belegen indirekt mit dem Meerland verbunden*).⁷² The actual reasoning behind this is because of how the study of these texts shows that a *gugallu ša šakin māti* is attested, more than once, in the same document as the individual Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti who held more than one title pertaining to the Sealand. The line of thought runs similarly to the one used for YOS 17, 360; there appears to be a contextual link between the *šakin māti* and Sealand officials, although the documents mentioning Marduk/Amurru-ušēzib have the additional factor of needing an extra connecting step via the *gugallu* officials.

This discussion of a sampling of archival material from Uruk establishes that in certain situations, the *šakin māti* is directly or indirectly involved in some undertaking in conjunction with officials of the Sealand. In fact, the appearance of both the *šakin māti* and Sealand officials in such records is, perhaps surprisingly, rather strong evidence for drawing a link between the two. This is actually because of the fact that they are administrative records, which contain contracts, transactions, or judicial pronouncements. This means that the overwhelming majority of the time there should be no superfluous mentions of officials. If both types of officials appear in the same text, there must be some connection between their capacities, at least in the specific context of that document. The officials are not merely appearing in a component of a larger text, and happening to have their names near each other. The fact that administrative documents are so compartmentalised rather means that often a fair degree of co-operation can be deduced. The nature of this collaboration is sometimes more clear, as in YOS 17, 360, and sometimes less, as in NBC 9221; this will be expanded on further in §5. Another point to note is that such an analysis of the Eanna documents constitutes a study necessarily limited in scope, and does not provide information on activity that the *šakin māti* may potentially have had further afield. As far as the Sealand is

⁷⁰ Janković 2013, p. 120.

⁷¹ Janković 2013, p. 120.

⁷² Kleber 2008, p. 322.

concerned, there is still a clear link between its officials and the *šakin māti* in a localised sense.

The archival evidence points to a close connection between the *šakin māti* and the Sealand, but a slightly different line of enquiry is necessary to discern whether the title can actually be equated, rather than just associated, with the *šakin tâmti*. As useful as the administrative documents are for establishing the links between the officials, what is actually being shown is the relationship between titles that are still technically distinct entities. To go further, it is useful to turn to epistolary evidence, i.e. correspondence actually written by and in the name of the officials concerned. Levavi has noted that the governor of the Sealand introduces himself in letters as the *šakin (māt) tâmti*, but that other officials refer to him as *šakin māti* in similar contexts, possibly implying that the latter title is a “colloquial term” used only when it was clear from the situation what governor was supposed to be referenced.⁷³ Since the occurrences that were recorded in other administrative records tend to be self-contained, and there are not many direct attestations of any one particular official, it is more difficult to use an argument centring around exchanging one official’s title for another in such records than it is in epistolary sources. This observation is an important step when it comes to equating the two titles. The key point to note is the methodological significance of being able to substitute one title directly for another in a clearly comparable sense. Recognising that multiple related officials are mentioned in the same archival record is also crucial, but fundamentally it is the job of the archival sources to establish the historical connection and of the epistolary sources to establish interchangeability.

Another close connection between the *šakin māti* and the Sealand can be drawn with the use of onomastics. There are several documents that specify officials who have a theophoric name referencing the god Amurru, such as the aforementioned Amurru-ušēzib in YBC 9221. Other roughly contemporary examples also from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar include the *gugallu ša šakin māti* Amurru-šar-ušur (NCBT 647), and the *gugallu ša šakin māti* Amurru-mukīn-apli (YBC 9448).⁷⁴ Beaulieu has discussed how in earlier periods,

⁷³ Levavi 2021, p. 23.

⁷⁴ Janković 2013, p. 120.

Amurru was a “divine personification of the Amorites”, but his association with the Amorites was projected onto them from a position of “purely Mesopotamian origin”.⁷⁵ By the Neo-Babylonian period, it appears that Amurru had become connected to southern Babylonian towns in the Sealand, and this had been the case from at least as early as some point in the Neo-Assyrian period.⁷⁶ Janković has further commented on how the “entourage” of the *šakin māti* of YBC 9448, also identified as a Sealand governor, had “some connections to the sanctuary of Amurru”, again based on onomastic evidence.⁷⁷ More recently, a letter dating to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (YOS 3, 26), written by Nabû-mukin-zēri, has received a re-evaluation by Schmidl identifying its author as a *šatammu* of the temple of Amurru that has been located in the Sealand.⁷⁸ The letter, previously thought to have been addressed from an Eanna temple *šatammu* to a scribe, is now considered to have been written by that *šatammu* of Amurru’s temple and addressed to an earlier *šatammu* of the Eanna temple of Uruk in the Sealand, on the basis of the document having a style inconsistent with the former possibility. This evidence continues to illustrate an inextricable link between the Sealand and the god Amurru.

Slightly expanding the discussion geographically, links involving the *šakin māti* and the Sealand also emerge based on evidence such as Nbk. 109, a court document from Babylon.⁷⁹ A Sealand governor (*šakin tâmti*) is present for a legal dispute that is also witnessed by Nabû-ēter-napšāti, the *qīpu ša tâmti*, and Nabû-šuzzizanni, a *šanû ša tâmti*.⁸⁰ The list of witnesses also includes the scribe and the *šangû* of the temple of Amurru.⁸¹ All this evidence further serves to consolidate the close ties between Amurru and the Sealand. The line of argument by which Nbk. 109 supports the identification of *šakin māti* with *šakin (māt) tâmti* makes use of the logical connecting step that theophoric names in other texts that mention the *šakin māti* also incorporate Amurru.

⁷⁵ Beaulieu 2005, pp. 33-34.

⁷⁶ Beaulieu 2003, p. 327.

⁷⁷ Janković 2013, p. 120.

⁷⁸ Schmidl 2020, pp. 262-263.

⁷⁹ Kleber 2008, p. 319.

⁸⁰ Kleber 2008, p. 320.

⁸¹ Beaulieu 2003, p. 329.

Overall, this analysis has established that the *šakin māti* had close connections with the officials of the Sealand in the texts from the Eanna archive at Uruk. These connections take the form of the officials being attested in close conjunction within individual documents, and this provides strong evidence for the intrinsic levels of collaboration involved with a far higher level of certainty than there may appear at face value, precisely because of the nature of administrative texts reflecting compartmentalised pronouncements without redundancy. The interchangeability of the titles in epistolary documents, as well as the total absence of the *šakin māti* from the *Hofkalender* and the fact that different *šakin māti* and *šakin tâmti* officials are never attested simultaneously, all serve to show the contextual links seen within archival documents point not only to cooperation but in fact to *šakin māti* and *šakin tâmti* interchangeability. The close examination of the regions governed by the first-named officials on the *Hofkalender* makes it clear the *šakin tâmti* was not an all-important governor, and cannot be seen as more than, at best, a first among equals.

The *šakin māti*'s importance seemed very limited in comparison to Gūbaru in the §1 discussion, but now his equation with the *šakin tâmti* on the basis of §2 actively provides a useful benchmark for his significance that continues to be a useful branching-point for conceptualising Persian continuity. This former Neo-Babylonian official has had his importance overstated, and the fact Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit remained for a few years into Cyrus' reign does not mean he had influence over an expansive geographical domain. Indeed, it is still worth keeping in mind matters of locality; any particular temple archive would not be *a priori* generalisable to the rest of Babylonia nor reflect administrative responsibilities further afield. An additional notable methodological observation does emerge from this discussion. On the *Hofkalender*, a clear distinction between officials in the list of regional governors and officials in the list of city governors has been established; it certainly makes sense that city governors have a more localised sphere of influence, and the city governors do indeed appear after the regional governors, but this does not prove that ordering within the list of governors of regions with size comparable to each other indicates importance. The assumption that the *šakin tâmti* appearing first carried an automatic indication of pre-eminence has been

widespread (also espoused e.g. by Levavi), but there is in fact far less evidence for this than has been taken for granted.⁸² If any, there is more of a case for the *Hofkalender* ordering to reflect extent of domination rather than a hierarchy proper. This distinction will be important when analysing the roles of the Urukean and the Sealand officials in §5. These are the conclusions regarding the historical strength of the arguments tying the *šakin māti* to the Sealand. It will be illustrative to expand on other sorts of methodology before linking back to the Nabonidus Chronicle.

⁸² Levavi 2021, p. 23.

§3: Sign-reading and diachronic approaches on the titles of the Sealand officials

To round out the investigation of the *šakin māti* during the transition to Persian rule, there are a few more methodological lines of enquiry that should be explored. In §2, historical inferences from archival sources was used to understand the link between the *šakin māti* and the Sealand officials. Before returning to discussing the Nabonidus Chronicle's narrative in more detail, it is useful to expand the scope of the study beyond contextualising individual archival documents. The first area to discuss will be what information can be obtained from different possible sign-readings of the title *šakin tâmti*, which can be written in more than one way. This establishes the utility of trying to extract information not only from the context of the titles but also how they are written. As will be shown, it also more importantly makes it possible to conclude that a title like *šakin māt tâmti* cannot be merely abbreviated to *šakin māti* (the occasional use of the form *šakin (māt) tâmti* in previous sections is only a matter of convention aligning with some other secondary literature). Another line of argument expanded in this section will involve focusing on the continuity of the Sealand-associated individuals through the entire Neo-Babylonian period and beyond. The last attested *šakin māti*, Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit, is mentioned in several documents, including instances from year 8 of Nabonidus (YOS 6, 145), year 16 of Nabonidus (BM 114631), and year 3 of Cyrus (BM 114449; YOS 7, 33), as listed in Kleber's table of attestations.⁸³ Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit is attested further with the title *šakin māti* in another text from the reign of Nabonidus (PTS 2291) and a text that has been dated to year 4 of Cyrus (BIN 2, 134), in which a judicial case is brought before him.⁸⁴ The fact that the Sealand officials derive their legitimacy from the Babylonian king will be used to augment the conception of the transfer of ideological power already established in the previous sections.

It is important to note that thus far, arguments for the equation of the titles *šakin māti* and *šakin māt tâmti* rest on inferences from context, already expanded on in §2 of this study and earlier discussed in Kleber 2008, and not on alternate readings of the signs. This is made

⁸³ Kleber 2008, pp. 316-317.

⁸⁴ Kleber 2008, p. 226; Sandowicz 2018, p. 52; Fried 2004, p. 12.

clearer in a closer examination of the titles attested for the aforementioned Sealand official Ea-dayān, active during the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II. Beaulieu's discussion of Ea-dayān also mentions a number of dignitaries of the Sealand, such as the *šakin tâmti*, the *šanû ša tâmti*, and the *qīpu ša tâmti*.⁸⁵ The latter two of these Neo-Babylonian titles are written respectively as ^{lú}MIN-ú šá KUR tam-tì and as ^{lú}qí-(i)-pi šá KUR tam-tì, and their normalisations will be revisited after first outlining the issues with the interpretation of *šakin tâmti*.⁸⁶ Ea-dayān's title of *šakin tâmti* is written alternately as ^{lú}GAR.KIN tam-tì and as ^{lú}GAR.KUR tam-tì.⁸⁷ In the reading of GAR.KIN tam-tì, the logogram GAR has the value šá and KIN is read syllabically as kin. The potential point of contention lies with the second form GAR.KUR tam-tì. This can be read straightforwardly with GAR as šá again and with KUR taking the syllabic value kìn (see e.g. Labat's sign list), yielding ša-kìn tam-tì.⁸⁸ However, in general the sign KUR may also simply be interpreted as a determinative ^{kur} or as a syllabic *māt*, which means it is a necessary condition that the ^{lú}GAR component be readable in a way that normalises to *šakin* in order for a reading with *māt* to make sense syllabically.

According to Black, George and Postgate, both the logogram writings LÚ.GAR (where LÚ or equivalently ^{lú} is again just a standard determinative that also already precedes Ea-dayān's titles) and GAR.KUR may indeed be used for *šaknu*, the substantivised free form meaning "appointee" or "governor". The entry for *šaknûtu* "governorate" makes it clear that the determinative LÚ may also optionally be written before GAR.KUR. In particular, these writings of *šaknu* (or construct state *šakin*) can occur independently of any word for *mātu(m)*, and denote solely a governor while specifying nothing about the governor's domain.⁸⁹ This is clear from how the writing LÚ.GAR-nu-ti can be used for the plural *šaknûti* alone. Following Schramm, the writing ^{lú}GAR.KUR on its own as a whole can also denote *šakin māt*.⁹⁰ With ^{lú}GAR as *šakin* and KUR as a syllabogram, ^{lú}GAR.KUR can also be broken down as simply the construct state form *šakin māt* that precedes the word for what the official is governor of.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Beaulieu 2002, p. 101.

⁸⁶ Beaulieu 2002, p. 110, 112.

⁸⁷ Beaulieu 2002, p. 102.

⁸⁸ Labat 1995, pp. 167-169.

⁸⁹ Black, George, and Postgate 2000, p. 349.

⁹⁰ Schramm 2010, p. 51.

⁹¹ Schramm 2010, p. 51.

The two alternate readings of Ea-dayān’s title ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-tì* are hence the two normalised forms *šakin māt tâmti* and *šakin tâmti*. As just outlined, the first of these normalisations arises from taking ^{lú}GAR for *šakin* and KUR for *māt*, and the second arises from taking ^{lú}GAR.KUR for *šakin*.

Beaulieu has argued that *šakin tâmti*, rather than *šakin māt tâmti*, is how the title ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-tì* should be read. This line of thought rests on the fact that ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-tì* and ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-tì* are used in “alternation” to denote the same person.⁹² The title ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-tì* is unambiguously read as *šakin tâmti* and the two titles are clearly both supposed to refer to Ea-dayān in his attestations. Both of the attested titles may be read *šakin tâmti*, while only one can be read *šakin māt tâmti*. Explicating it more specifically, the reasoning is that the ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-tì* title, which stands on its own, is indicative of the intrinsic way that the position held by Ea-dayān should be read, and so when an ambiguous reading arises, as with ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-tì*, one should expect it to align with the unambiguous title. This holds more weight than a hypothetical alternative interpretation in which the reading of ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-tì* would be taken as *šakin māt tâmti*, with the form ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-tì* being *šakin tâmti* as an abbreviated form of a longer title. This is because as discussed above, ^{lú}GAR itself can be used to write *šaknu* or its construct state *šakin*, and so “abbreviating” the title by adding KIN would be unnecessary.

This reasoning can be expanded on with an argument that involves referring back to the titles of the other Sealand officials, proceeding as follows. As discussed above, the *šanû* and the *qīpu* officials’ titles contain *šá KUR tam-tì*. It may be asked whether the presence of the KUR sign in those titles undermines the reading of ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-tì* as solely *šakin tâmti*, though this question must be approached carefully considering how it is not typographically possible to distinguish between a determinative ^{kur} and a syllabic *māt* reading of KUR. Firstly, the writing ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-tì* exists, so it is definitely possible not to have a word equivalent to KUR in the normalised title. This is also the title Ea-dayān holds on the *Hofkalender*, so while

⁹² Beaulieu 2002, p. 102.

this is not definitive, it is possible that due to the importance of that document the ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-ti* writing may be indicative of the primary normalised form.

As noted in the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary's (*CAD Š/I*) entry for *šaknu*, from the Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian periods onwards, "the sign sequence GAR.KUR, which originally stood for *šakin māti*, could be (and in fact, usually was) used for writing simple *šaknu* as well".⁹³ This entry also notes the importance of alternation between writings of clearly the same words in deriving such an equivalence. Using those arguments from alternation, both specified in *CAD Š/I* and discussed when comparing to ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-ti*, *šakin tâmti* can be taken as the primary normalisation and correspondingly ^{lú}GAR.KUR *tam-ti* can be taken to be read in that way. As a result, it is not necessary that the "standard" reading of the titles must contain a component denoting ^{kur} or *māt*. Returning to the Sealand titles ^{lú}MIN-ú *šá KUR tam-ti* and as ^{lú}qí-(i)-pi *šá KUR tam-ti*, the presence of KUR should instead be explained as merely a determinative. The writing of determinatives is optional, as they would not have been pronounced and "are not a necessary part of the writing of any word".⁹⁴ Indeed, there is also precedent for the determinative ^{kur} to be used on *tâmti* references from earlier periods, which confirms the validity of their usage for the Sealand. When referenced in general documents as opposed to in earlier king-lists, the name *māt tâmti* was used for the Sealand region as early as the late second millennium, and continued to be used throughout the first millennium "more or less independently of changes in [the Sealand's] political status", which allows for valid extrapolation of the evidence to the Neo-Babylonian period.⁹⁵

In a study of the First Sealand Dynasty, Boivin has discussed the determinative KUR/^{kur} in reference to the Sealand in *ABC* 20B, although that analysis questions the one tentative attestation of the Sealand without a determinative in that chronicle, considering the possibility that it may not refer to the Sealand polity but rather just to a body of water.⁹⁶ However, the reading of ^{lú}GAR.KIN *tam-ti* in the present analysis assuages any doubts that it might not be valid to refer to the Sealand without KUR. This means the other Sealand

⁹³ Gelb et al. 1956-2010, *CAD Š/I*, p. 191.

⁹⁴ Huehnergard 2011, p. 112.

⁹⁵ Boivin 2016, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Boivin 2018, pp. 22-23.

officials' titles can reasonably be read like *šanû ša^{kur} tâmti*, or just *šanû ša tâmti* in normalised form. This consequently provides a more consistent collective interpretation of the various Sealand titles from the Neo-Babylonian period, and in fact even leads further. It is clear that when describing a Sealand governor, there is no linguistic ambiguity regarding the presence of the sea-related element of the title: unlike with KUR, there is no way to subsume *tâmti* into another word that is present via an alternate sign-reading, and so the *tâmti* component must be present in order to denote an official of the Sealand unquestionably. If one wishes to abbreviate a rendering of a Sealand official's title, the only room in which to do so without changing the meaning of the sign-readings is to omit an optional KUR/^{kur} determinative. It follows from this that one cannot conclude that a *šakin mātī* could be a governor of the Sealand without external non-linguistic evidence, and historical context is ultimately needed. This means it is invalid *a priori* to assume there is some title *šakin mātī tâmti* that could be abbreviated to *šakin mātī*. This concludes the discussion of the sign-readings.

In moving towards discussing a more in-depth analysis of the Nabonidus Chronicle, the next methodological consideration will be how the evidence from the late Babylonian period, especially in relation to the Sealand officials, can be drawn upon in order to understand the Persian takeover, since the preceding discussion has after all utilised evidence from as comparably early as Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II. To establish the necessary continuity to be able to draw such inferences, it will first be useful to evaluate the proceedings in which the last attested *šakin mātī*, Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit, was involved. There is evidence that the actions of Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit had close links to Uruk, though the administrative texts concerning those do not explicitly reference the Sealand. For instance, BIN 2, 134 from year 4 of Cyrus records Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit sending three cousins to be tried before his judges and the *šakin tēmi* (city-official) of Uruk.⁹⁷ YOS 7, 33 from year 3 of Cyrus makes two people liable to pay the same *šakin mātī* ten minas of silver if they do not bring a man to the Eanna administrators.⁹⁸ Thirdly, BM 114631 from year 16 of Nabonidus concerns

⁹⁷ Fried 2004, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Tolini 2011, p. 28.

individuals holding the position of *musahḫiru* that were associated with the Lady of Uruk and were at the disposal of Nabû-aḫḫē-bullit.⁹⁹ PTS 2991 also concerns the transfer of those *musahḫiru* delegates to Nabû-aḫḫē-bullit, and records an individual swearing by “Nabû, the Lady of Uruk [Ishtar], Nanāya, and [by the *adû*] of Nabonidus” to be cursed if he has kept secret anyone he should have transferred to the *šakin māti*.¹⁰⁰

In alignment with the earlier discussion of the *šakin māti*, there is again insufficient evidence from these texts to conclude that Nabû-aḫḫē-bullit exercised power across a broader domain that was less localised than certain Sealand cities such as Uruk. However, it is still noteworthy, though of course unsurprising, how his jurisdiction is tied to the Neo-Babylonian regime. As outlined by Jursa, the *adû* (gen./acc. *adê*), also exercised during the Neo-Assyrian period, was a “loyalty oath” that was “the principal articulation of the royal administration’s need to control the activities and the power of local elites”.¹⁰¹ The *adû*-oath in PTS 2991 contains a direct reference to the king Nabonidus, and is an example of a so-called “weakened assertory oath” in Babylonian history that, unlike a contrastive “formal oath”, would not “automatically resolve the suit” but merely would add weight to a testimony.¹⁰² Wells, Magdalene and Wunsch have discussed how the weakened oath was far less common than the formal oath in the Old Babylonian period, but by Neo-Babylonian times, the weakened oath predominated.¹⁰³ This means that *adû*-proclamation associated with the last *šakin māti* is situated in a historical context where such legitimacy-based ties to the Babylonian king were very common and illustrated a degree of ideological connectedness with the royal regime. This regime would indirectly grant greater strength, perhaps more in theory than in practice, to the oath-taker’s testimony. Assertory oaths also continued into the Persian period, and could, for instance, use the name of Cyrus in similar formulas.¹⁰⁴

This discussion establishes that close ideological links between officials and the king, especially in contexts adjacent to the affairs of the *šakin māti*, remained in existence to the

⁹⁹ Kleber 2008, pp. 226-227.

¹⁰⁰ Kleber 2008, p. 226.

¹⁰¹ Jursa 2023, p. 118.

¹⁰² Wells, Magdalene, and Wunsch 2010, pp. 17, 28.

¹⁰³ Wells, Magdalene, and Wunsch 2010, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Wells, Magdalene, and Wunsch 2010, p. 23.

very end of the Neo-Babylonian period. The fact that the *adû*-oaths continued to be used under the Persians does not undermine this, since unlike other officials who used the oaths later, the *šakin māti* officials did disappear very early into Cyrus' reign, and it is only their continuity that is currently under discussion. For a more diachronic perspective, it is also important to examine a relevant text from earlier in this period, dating to the reign of Nabopolassar. The document BIN 1, 34 is a letter written by Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti, the aforementioned *qīpu ša tâmti* and *šanû ša tâmti* (though his title does not appear in the text), to the *šatammu* of the Eanna temple.¹⁰⁵ In this letter, Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti records his distribution of a particular field, and contrasts the manner in which he would expect the people of the Sealand to react to his actions with how he would expect the people of Uruk to react. He expects the people of the Sealand to ask whether he or the Eanna administrator had distributed the land. By contrast, he expects the people of Uruk to ask whether he had distributed the land as a “(personal) favor”, or if it was “the [word] of the king”.¹⁰⁶ While this is a pure hypothetical coming from Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti himself, the Urukean question still illustrates a connection between the actions of a Sealand official and the corresponding will of the (early) Neo-Babylonian king. This provides further evidence in favour of there being a rather inextricable link between the king and the Babylonian officials, and specifically those associated with the Sealand. Indeed, the king's governors are of course his subordinates, so this is not surprising.

These case-studies of representative evidence, stretching from the time of Nabopolassar all the way to Cyrus, consequently indicate that extrapolation from the Neo-Babylonian period is eminently reasonable when interpreting how governance changed during the takeover of the Persians. It has already been made clear in §1 that ideological power did not rest with the *šakin māti* during the transition between regimes, nor would it have rested on the other Sealand-associated officials for effectively the same reasons. The example of the aforementioned Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti thus corroborates the strong evidence that links the Neo-Babylonian dynasty closely to the Sealand. As Beaulieu has noted, there is

¹⁰⁵ Levavi 2021, p. 22; Jursa 2015b, p. 190.

¹⁰⁶ Levavi 2021, p. 22.

good reason to conclude that “the Sealand played an important role in the formative years of the resurrected Babylonian state under Nabopolassar”.¹⁰⁷ In addition to this, the offices of *qīpu ša tâmti* and, at the very least, *šanû ša tâmti* were already very well-established under Babylonian rule by the beginning of the Persian period. The aforementioned Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti was attested without his title during the reign of Nabopolassar, was around in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar as *šanû ša tâmti*, and held either that title or *qīpu ša tâmti* in various attestations up to year 17 of Nebuchadnezzar. There are further attestations of the title *šanû ša tâmti* between years 26 and 37 of Nebuchadnezzar, as well as through the reigns of Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar, and into year 10 of the reign of Nabonidus.¹⁰⁸ It is precisely the fact that the office was so ingrained within the Neo-Babylonian regime that means it can be concluded that the Sealand officials had a particular connection to the Neo-Babylonian rulers specifically, and not simply, by circumstance, to whoever the officials’ overlords happened to be. The titles originated under Babylonian rule, and were phased out in the early Persian period. When the last few of those officials were around in the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses, this was as an artefact of the previous Neo-Babylonian regime rather than as independent agents who were properly subordinate to whoever was king at the time. This is once again a case of the passive retention of offices during a regime change that was discussed in §1.

Deputy-officials of the Sealand that continue to be attested into the Persian period include the *qīpu ša tâmti* Šamaš-šarru-bullit, attested in the fourth year of Cyrus, and the *šanû ša tâmti* Madān-šarru-ušur, attested as late as the first year of Cambyses.¹⁰⁹ In light of having considered the Sealand officials’ close ideological ties to the Neo-Babylonian kings in particular, the fact that these officials remain for a length of time after the end of Nabonidus’ reign provides evidence in favour of there being a significant overlapping element in how the way parts of the territory were governed. Indeed, overlapping transition between regimes should be seen as the norm rather than the exception. This testifies further to how the beginning of Persian rule should not be seen ideologically as a major upheaval, and as has

¹⁰⁷ Beaulieu 2002, p. 115.

¹⁰⁸ Kleber 2008, pp. 314-316.

¹⁰⁹ Kleber 2008, p. 316.

already been made clear, Gūbaru should not be viewed as having supplanted the *šakin māti* in a way that caused significant disturbance. If he had done so, there would still have been an overlap consisting of the approximately three years between Cyrus' capture of Babylon and the last attestation of Nabû-aḥḫē-bullīṭ in BIN 2, 134. Even though such a three-year overlap is significantly shorter than the nine-year overlap from 539 to 530, and may hence superficially appear more compatible with a catastrophic interpretation of the Persian takeover, it is still a nontrivial amount of time. Therefore, in alignment with the outcome of §1, it would still not have made sense to consider Gūbaru to have merely terminated Nabû-aḥḫē-bullīṭ's governorship and installed himself directly in his stead.

Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti was a deputy or vice-governor of the Sealand, though not a *šakin tāmti* or *šakin māti* himself; yet he was clearly tied to the Neo-Babylonian king. Specifically, he derived his legitimacy from the king, but as an official he was not himself essential for the propagation of the royal ideology. The officials of the Sealand who came after him continued to hold the same intrinsic allegiances. Years later, following the defeat of Nabonidus by Cyrus and the commencement of the first few years of Persian rule, the *šakin māti* no longer had a true Neo-Babylonian ruler from whose kingship he necessarily must derive his legitimacy, although the practicalities of administration that he faced would continue with little change and not be terminated immediately. An overlapping transition into the period of Gūbaru's government of the province on behalf of his Great King was observed as expected. With the ultimate source of his legitimacy gone, the *šakin māti* would hold on to his role for a few more years. However, there was nothing unusually abrupt or catastrophic about the takeover of the Persians in comparison to the precedents set by other Ancient Near Eastern conquerors. The replacement of native officials with Persian ones who retained the same titles also did not necessitate a profound ideological shift. The need for conceptual continuity and a certain level of maintenance of the *status quo* is not undermined by the relegation of offices whose importance should never have been overstated in the first place.

In this section, the examination of the sign-readings for the different forms of *šakin tāmti* has led to the overall conclusion that it is not possible for the word-components of the

title *šakin māt tâmti* to provide a basis for abbreviating it to *šakin māti*. This is methodologically important because it is an easy face-value assumption to make. When the §2 discussion established that there was interchangeability between the Sealand governor's title and the *šakin māti* in the epistolary evidence, which was a framework in which the *šakin māti* title could be construed as an "abbreviation", this was specifically as a contextual one, not as a linguistic one, and this is fundamentally an important distinction. While this exact scenario does not arise in studying the Nabonidus Chronicle, it both establishes useful information about the *šakin māti* title in its own right and highlights what sort of inferences can be drawn when expecting a governor to be referred to differently on a local level. The deductions above have also now clarified previously unclear sign-reading by establishing that *šakin tâmti*, *qīpu ša^{kur}tâmti* and *šanû ša^{kur}tâmti* are how the titles should be read by default, with optional determinatives, and the *māt* component is not an intrinsic part of the Sealand titles in this period. Regarding the second area of discussion in the past §3, the disappearance of the *šakin māti* and the aforementioned Sealand officials a few years into Persian rule is what cements their close ties to the Neo-Babylonian period, and this is corroborated further by how from Nabopolassar to Nabonidus they have definitive ideological links to the Neo-Babylonian king. What this tells us about continuity after the Persian conquest is that the officials definitively continued in their roles for a relatively small number of years, but this was in a passive rather than active capacity. This and the preceding two sections provide a holistic assessment of the *šakin māti* in the context of the official's connections to the Sealand and continuity after the takeover of Cyrus. The following section will head in a slightly different direction and discuss a relevant passage of the Nabonidus Chronicle that provides another strand to bring together.

§4: The Nabonidus Chronicle and the historical plausibility of a reference to Persia

Attention shall now turn to analysing certain narrative aspects of the Nabonidus Chronicle. The previous three sections have been focused around deriving insights about the role of the *šakin māti* from a viewpoint of context and continuity. It will be illustrative to apply similar perspectives in understanding events during the Persian conquest that have previously been seen as highly uncertain. While for instance, the last attested *šakin māti* Nabû-aḥḫē-bullit is not explicitly attested in the Nabonidus Chronicle, it still remains interesting to revisit this source to discuss how interpretations of excerpts from it fit in historically with what is known from elsewhere about the role of the Sealand and its officials from earlier Neo-Babylonian rule. There is one extant copy of the Nabonidus Chronicle (BM 35382), which forms part of a series of Babylonian chronicles that are otherwise rather interrupted going into the Persian period; after this chronicle, the series has a subsequent lengthy gap in events covered until the reign of Artaxerxes III.¹¹⁰ Much of the text from the first few lines is lost, but the Nabonidus Chronicle seems to begin by covering the accession and first regnal years of Nabonidus.¹¹¹ The second column begins by recording Cyrus' Median campaign, followed by his conquest of a land of uncertain identity. Whether the land is Lydia or Urartu has been heavily debated for "more than 100 years"; a 2019 evaluation by Rollinger and Kellner draws on context to interpret the land as Urartu, while van der Spek has argued more recently in favour of Lydia.¹¹² These events form the main prior context for the passage that will be discussed subsequently.

The first excerpt of note is a heavily damaged passage at the beginning of the third column of the Nabonidus Chronicle. In addition to the narrative events just mentioned, to gain understanding of the context for this passage, it is also worth taking note of a repetitive formula pertaining to Neo-Babylonian affairs that appears throughout the first two columns. Before the third column, the last readable part of the Chronicle is in the second column,

¹¹⁰ Heller 2023, p. 653.

¹¹¹ Grayson 1975, p. 105.

¹¹² Rollinger and Kellner 2019, p. 153; van der Spek 2021, p. 419.

whose final three legible lines (NC §2.23-25) cover the eleventh year of Nabonidus' reign. That part of the second column only repeats a standard formula that includes describing Nabonidus being in Tema, the prince (Belshazzar) being in Akkad, the king not coming to Babylon in the month of Nisānu, the inaction of the gods Nabû and Bēl, and the non-occurrence of the Akitu festival. The phrase “The of[ferings] were presented [(to) the gods of Bab]ylon and Borsippa [*as in normal times in Esagil and Ezida*]” (NC §2.25-26; the precise meaning of *ki šalmu* is uncertain, and van der Spek translates as “properly”)¹¹³ is restored by comparison with earlier occurrences of the same phrase in the Chronicle. Having established this context, focus may now be shifted to the third column, whose beginning is also extremely lacunose.

Following Grayson's version of the Nabonidus Chronicle, the first line of Column III features the logogram GAZ, indicating “killed/defeated”, followed by the determinative ^{id} which indicates the name of a river; these signs precede a broken section of text, and Smith has posited that the river that follows is *Idiqlat*, the Tigris, though that name is not legible and the Euphrates seems much more likely in the context of Uruk in the next line.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the second line contains a reference to the goddess Ishtar of Uruk. The third readable line of the third column is transcribed as [...] x^{mes} šá māt ta[m-tim(?)]... and Grayson makes an initial statement that the sign after *māt* is “almost certainly” TAM.¹¹⁵ Such a reading and extrapolation would mean that this line refers to a plural noun “of the Sealand”. In an addendum, Grayson has noted instead, without additional commentary on the reasoning, that “at the end of the line a reading ^{kur}Pa[r-su(?)]... is preferable”.¹¹⁶ Grayson's addendum credits such an interpretation to von Voigtlander, who earlier in 1963 had suggested a reading of ^{KUR}par-[su] instead of *māt tam*-[tim].¹¹⁷ A reconstruction of the line as referring to Persia has been made use of elsewhere; for instance, in Kuhrt's 2007 compilation of parts of the Nabonidus Chronicle, which overall uses the translations from ANET 305-7 (also cited by von Voigtlander), Glasser 1993, Tavernier 2003, and Brosius 2000. In translation, Kuhrt's

¹¹³ Grayson 1975, p. 108; van der Spek 2015, p. 456.

¹¹⁴ Grayson 1975, p. 108; Huehnergard 2011, p. 569; Fried 2004, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ Grayson 1975, p. 108.

¹¹⁶ Grayson 1975, p. 282.

¹¹⁷ von Voigtlander 1963, p. 206.

version gives the line as “[...] of Per[sia(?)]...”.¹¹⁸ The rest of the third line and the entire fourth line are unreadable before the Chronicle picks back up with the events of the seventeenth year of Nabonidus in line 5.¹¹⁹

Considering the third line, it is firstly important to realise just how uncertain the face-value readings of the signs are. In and of itself, the cuneiform sign with syllabic value *tam* can also have the syllabic value *par*, which means that a definitive conclusion can epistemically not be drawn from looking at the writing alone.¹²⁰ In a 1989 study of Nabonidus’ reign, Beaulieu drew further attention to Grayson’s aforementioned addendum regarding the reading of either ^{kur}*tam-tim* or ^{kur}*par-su* (here reading KUR as a determinative) and also noted the possibility that there may have been “Persian incursions into southern Babylonia in the sixteenth year” to set the latter possibility in a plausible historical context.¹²¹ The level of uncertainty is also apparent in Mitchell’s 2023 evaluation, which refers back to the acceptance of such a reading of *par* in Grayson 1975 and Glassner 2004 when stating that “there may also be a reference to Parsu at ABC 7 iii.3 [...] although the text is fragmentary at this point and the toponym has to be almost completely restored”.¹²² In light of this fact, it is certain that the reading of the text cannot be asserted anywhere near as definitively as suggested by e.g. Zawadzki, who extrapolates from von Voigtlander’s interpretation that line 3 refers to Persia when asserting that “direct Persian-Babylonian conflict occurred in the penultimate year (540 BCE) of the reign of Nabonidus”.¹²³ As will be discussed subsequently, interpreting the word as Persia is actually a key part of what leads to this conclusion being drawn, rather than the other way round. It is also worth noting that even in the case that this line of the Chronicle does *not* mention Persia, it would still not be an argument in itself against the existence of such conflict. Conversely, the sign after KUR is to be read with the value *tam*, then an interpretation of this as a Sealand reference would be practically indisputable.

¹¹⁸ Kuhrt 2007, pp. 50-51.

¹¹⁹ Grayson 1975, p. 109.

¹²⁰ Labat 1995, p. 175.

¹²¹ Beaulieu 1989, p. 220.

¹²² Mitchell 2023, p. 47.

¹²³ Zawadzki 2010, p. 147.

Since the signs at the end of the “badly damaged”¹²⁴ third line of Column III are completely illegible, looking at the remaining cuneiform writing is not a possible method for obtaining necessary information to reconstruct the narrative. However, the historical context sheds more light on the question. There are three main strands of argument to consider: the possibility of anachronisms in the text, the related possibility of later scribal emendations altering the narrative, and the context for the passage in relation to other sections in the Nabonidus Chronicle. The first point of consideration will be potential anachronisms, particularly in relation to mentions of the land of Persia in the text. Earlier in the Chronicle, the second column (NC §2.15) contains a reference to Cyrus as ^m*Ku-raš šār* ^{kur}*Par-su*, or “Cyrus, king of Parsu”.¹²⁵ At first glance, this title appears out-of-place. Contemporary Babylonian sources rather tended to refer to Cyrus and his predecessors as “king of Anshan”, and this “Parsu” occurrence constitutes an “exception”.¹²⁶ Cyrus refers to himself as “king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad” in the Cyrus Cylinder, and to his predecessors Cambyses (I), Cyrus (I) and Teispes each as “great king, king of Anshan” (CC §21).¹²⁷ Cyrus’ own titulary here is less relevant in determining anachronisms, as the titles are a result of his conquest of Babylon; had he not achieved this, he would have continued to be “king of Anshan” in writing, though the possibility should also be considered that this itself could be an archaism. After the conquest, Cyrus is also still referred to as solely “king of Anshan” in, for instance, a brick inscription from the Ekišnugal enclosure wall in Ur.¹²⁸ This is the title that would be expected.

Anachronisms in the titulary may be identified by noting stylistic aberrations. Kuhrt has deemed the phrase “king of Parsu” in the Nabonidus Chronicle to be “of course not contemporary”.¹²⁹ This judgement rests on the fact that a title of this sort was not used until the reign of Darius I,¹³⁰ who referred to himself as “king in Persia” in the opening lines of the

¹²⁴ Heller 2023, p. 661.

¹²⁵ Grayson 1975, p. 107.

¹²⁶ Kuhrt 2007, pp. 47, 50.

¹²⁷ Kuhrt 2007, p. 71.

¹²⁸ Kuhrt 2007, p. 75.

¹²⁹ Kuhrt 2007, p. 50.

¹³⁰ Waerzeggers 2015, p. 96.

Behistun inscription (DB §1).¹³¹ Another notable example of a similar phenomenon elsewhere is the so-called Cyrus inscriptions at Pasargadae, which describe Cyrus as an “Achaemenid” in the first person.¹³² However, their obvious and jarring departure from the other titularies of Cyrus, as well as their alignment instead with the style of the royal inscriptions of Darius I and his successors, point to the well-accepted conclusion that they were in fact added during the reign of Darius.¹³³ If a title does not match what is considered standard for a particular ruler during a given period, it may reasonably be considered an anachronism. This said, it should still be granted that if a later scribe uses an out-of-place term when writing a chronicle of earlier events, this does not necessarily carry the same ideological stature as Darius’ inscriptions (including the Pasargadae additions) which through the “Achaemenid” connection co-opt Darius directly into Cyrus’ lineage and thus make a direct statement regarding his legitimacy to rule. Not all stylistic variations are directly comparable, but they still clearly illustrate how important it is not to assume that titles are contemporary at face value.

Understanding the historical provenance of the Nabonidus Chronicle poses some difficulties. Waerzeggers notes how the “only surviving manuscript... dates from the Hellenistic or perhaps even Parthian period”.¹³⁴ Van der Spek has discussed Waerzeggers’ re-evaluation of the Chronicle, namely as having been assembled from other more propagandistic Babylonian texts contemporary to Cyrus and also having been influenced by Hellenistic literary culture; the main evaluatory points of van der Spek are that not all the cuneiform signs are Hellenistic, and that the text cannot have been a new composition centuries after the events, due to the specificity of the dates of the events mentioned.¹³⁵ The tablet must consequently be a copy of a lost version that would have recorded the Persian conquest relatively contemporaneously to the time it occurred, as would have had to be the case for the dates of its events to align so well with archival evidence.¹³⁶ The title “king of

¹³¹ Kuhrt 2007, p. 141.

¹³² Stronach 1997, pp. 323, 328.

¹³³ Kuhrt 2007, p. 177.

¹³⁴ Waerzeggers 2015, p. 96.

¹³⁵ van der Spek 2015, p. 455.

¹³⁶ Waerzeggers 2015, p. 98.

Parsu” must be an anachronism, but only on the order of decades, not centuries. On the grounds of there being references to Persia in royal inscriptions from Darius I’s reign onwards, the transition between the Teispid and Achaemenid regimes is likely the place for a watershed regarding whether “Parsu” fits in historically or not. If somehow being king of Persia in particular had been ideologically important for Cyrus, one would expect to find it in his Cylinder, for instance. This means it is possible that the term was either introduced in a near- but not-quite contemporary earlier version of the Nabonidus Chronicle that would have been copied and passed down until the Hellenistic period, or at some later indeterminate point during the process of transmission. The anachronistic nature of the “king in Parsu” title from Column II means that it cannot be used as a precedent for a genuine attestation of Persia in the Nabonidus Chronicle. Moreover, there would not have been any need to augment Cyrus’ legitimacy by modifying his titles in an artificial way.

The possibility of scribal alterations or emendations (that may not necessarily carry much meaning) is still also present, and is a related but slightly different issue to the anachronism consideration. For instance, Waerzeggers has also discussed how the “king of Parsu” title may be a result of “change and adaptation in the copyist’s work”.¹³⁷ As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, Waerzeggers conducted an investigation that uses the Nabonidus Chronicle as a case study for understanding the provenance of Babylonian chronicles in general, and she has also cited the likely-Hellenistic “cultural context” of the surviving manuscript as a possible reason for why there may have been “more occasion for scribal agency in the period when the manuscript was produced than usually assumed”.¹³⁸ This lends credence to a viewpoint whereby the Chronicle can be regarded as potentially riddled with various unpredictable changes, meaning terminology within the text cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Specifically, there is a distinction to be made between two possibilities: one is that the earliest version of a chronicle contains an anachronism due to a temporal separation between the events and the time of writing, and the other possibility is that originally, terms that made sense temporally were used, and these terms were replaced by

¹³⁷ Waerzeggers 2015, p. 104.

¹³⁸ Waerzeggers 2018, p. 343.

neologisms during the process of transmission. A later scribe *could* have substituted a reference to Cyrus' land of origin for a rendering of the land of Persia in particular in Akkadian. Without having older versions of the Chronicle to compare, it is of course not possible to prove this conclusively, and importantly for this to be plausible, it would be necessary for a geographical reference to Persia under some other name to have originally been near the start of the third column. This would provide the basis for a later scribe to substitute the earlier name for a direct reference to Persia. If such a geographical reference would not make sense in context, then the possibility can be effectively dismissed.

Next to be addressed is the contextualisation of a possible reference to Persia relative to the rest of the Nabonidus Chronicle. Since the beginning of Column III is four heavily-damaged lines prior to Nabonidus' seventeenth year being recorded from line 5, this means the events recorded in the broken passage are from the Babylonian king's sixteenth year, and likely near its end. Due to the extensive lacuna between the last legible lines of Column II, there are about five years missing from the record, and therefore geographical setting or context cannot be extrapolated from the passage about the eleventh year. There is furthermore no clear pattern incorporated within the writing style that distinguishes when Persian attestations occur rather than internal Babylonian ones. One point to note is that the reading of the plural determinative MEŠ before the šà in line 3 of Column III,¹³⁹ while impossible to understand fully without knowing the sign that precedes it, indicates definitively that a royal title was not written there. In contrast, the earlier certain mentions of Anshan (NC §2.1) and Parsu (NC §2.15) were both in the context of calling Cyrus king of each place, so this is noted as unusual. As will be expanded on in §6 after gaining more perspective on the situation around Uruk, the main problems revolve around chronology. This part of the Chronicle indicates activity that was likely only a few months before the battle at Opis. At such a late point in Nabonidus' reign, the Persians would not be far away from preparing for their final offensive, and consequently if Persia is indeed mentioned in Column III line 3, it would be reasonable to expect the events of this point in time to be far more

¹³⁹ Grayson 1975, p. 108.

closely associated with the conquest and consequently have ideological links to Cyrus himself. This means a conceivable interpolation one may posit, in which line 3 refers to merely an army from the land of Persia, is out of place in this context. A primary identification of the army with their region of origin rather than the king who commanded them either personally or through his officials would be at odds with this situation on the grounds of temporality.

Furthermore, as discussed by Briant, the Chronicle's purpose as a text was "not to describe military campaigns in detail",¹⁴⁰ and therefore one does not expect to see minutiae of troop movements that are divorced from a strong thematic connection to a corresponding ruler. This is a stylistic observation, and not necessarily evidence that the Chronicle was definitely composed with particular intention to be a certain type of literary narrative text (cf. van der Spek, contra Waerzeggers).¹⁴¹ This point adds more teleological weight to what has already been established about the context of military activity in the Chronicle; the previous discussion solely derives the expectation that the king be connected directly to major military activity from the other attestations in the text. Having a stronger, less internally-dependent apprehension of the ideological force carried by the Chronicle's narratives serves to cement this understanding further. One further note is that Zawadzki argues that the lack of any "positive action" by Nabonidus being mentioned in the Chronicle after 550 suggests that "all military data are connected exclusively with Cyrus".¹⁴² This cannot be accepted as a blanket statement; for instance, it does not make much sense to exclude the summoning of the gods' statues to Babylon from such an assessment (discussed specifically in §6). In addition, just because after his departure for Tema there are no passages clearly referring to Nabonidus engaging in military offensives that are not responses to the Persians, it is still not reasonable to start seeing references in the Chronicle to campaigns by Cyrus that might not even exist, given the relevant passages may well be explicable by other means than such campaigns. This will also be addressed further in §6.

¹⁴⁰ Briant 2002, p. 42.

¹⁴¹ van der Spek 2015, p. 455.

¹⁴² Zawadzki 2012, p. 48.

Other proposed interpolations referring to the “gods of Parsu”, as set out by Arnold and Michalowski, are even more implausible in context.¹⁴³ Their restoration of the line as saying “[the gods] of Pa[rsu returned to their former places(?)]” is decidedly speculative and unsupported. There is absolutely no reason to link the mention of the deity Ishtar of Uruk from line 2 of Column III in the Chronicle to any deities of the Persians that would be attested from the very earliest days of the empire. Needless to say, even very old historiography that claims Ishtar of Uruk to be a personal protector of Nabonidus and the Babylonians, as put forth in Olmstead’s 1948 history of the Persian Empire, is also entirely speculative despite still making more surface-level sense than presenting her inexplicably as a goddess of the Persians during this period, and it is not worth dedicating too much time to this possibility when there will be much better explanations.¹⁴⁴

The reference to Ishtar of Uruk, and by extension the content of the following line 3, is rather connected with the Babylonians’ actions around the Eanna temple, as well as Nabonidus’ active orders regarding the cult statues that will be discussed further in §6 once more background on Uruk is established. Though he takes the reading of “Parsu” in Column III as a given, Zawadzki highlights the chronological issues with Fried’s narrative that posits that the statue of Ishtar effectively flees Uruk after a Persian military victory in the vicinity of that city; Opis, the site of the decisive battle that is outlined in lines 12-13, lies well to the north of Babylon while Uruk lies to its south.¹⁴⁵ If Column III’s first lines refer to such a campaign by the Persians, then had there been much momentum to follow through on, they would likely have approached Babylon from the other direction to what is recorded. While evidenced in other documents, the readable portions of the Chronicle directly surrounding Column III line 2 do not explicitly mention the event in which Ishtar’s statue is evacuated to Babylon. If this passage does indeed refer to the removal of the statue, the framing of it could equally well be as an active decision (though an ultimately futile one) by the Babylonians, rather than just a forced local response to a Persian incursion. The Ishtar of Uruk attestation fits into the general context of Nabonidus’ broader summons of the deities to Babylon, and

¹⁴³ Arnold and Michalowski 2006, p. 417.

¹⁴⁴ Olmstead 1948, p. 49.

¹⁴⁵ Zawadzki 2012, p. 47.

the GAZ inclusion is alternatively explicable in the context of there being some violent unrest and turnover of officials present in Uruk that year. For instance, the *bēl piqitti* of the Eanna temple suffered an assassination attempt in Nabonidus' year 16.¹⁴⁶ No claim at all is made that this official in particular is referenced in the Chronicle; this is rather just illustrative of the state of affairs during such a turbulent time.

This evaluation establishes that the third line of Column III still has a strong possibility of containing a reference to the Sealand rather than a reference to Persia, as there are problems with the latter case and it cannot be taken for granted from decades-long historiographical legacy. Allowing the possibility of "Parsu" as a scribal emendation is only pertinent if the original version contained a reference to Cyrus' land of origin under any other name, be that Anshan or even Elam. This is questionable from context because of the issues around connections to the king, as well as the problem of how the Persian army would have approached Babylon in their final assault, and therefore such an argument is unsupported. Since the reason for deliberately embellishing Cyrus' title as an unusual neologism seems unclear, there is not a good enough reason to assume, without it being actually observed for certain, that a deliberate change was made. Therefore emendations cannot be assumed without proper evidence, and it is difficult to explain the existing "Parsu" past being some unspecified mix of mild anachronism and inscrutable emendation.

The key factor that serves to make "Parsu" a less credible interpretation is the ideological connection to the king that would have been expected in such close conjunction with the final conquest. Furthermore, the beginning of Column III is also explicable as recording internal Babylonian events. These conclusions are drawn in no small part from understanding the historical context and continuity surrounding the Persian conquest. It should be made very clear that not reading a reference to Persia in Column III line 3 does not mean to imply the whole Babylonian takeover was just a sudden offensive in year 17, due to the large lacuna between years 11 and 16 of the Chronicle quite possibly obscuring the more gradual components of the conquest. It should be remembered once again that the sign after

¹⁴⁶ Beaulieu 1989, p. 220.

māt provides no additional information. With a plausible mention of the Sealand established, the *šakin māti*, *šakin tâmti* and vice-officials of the region also become situated in the context of the primary “narrative” source for the events around 539. This forms a link between two major historical strands: the role of the *šakin māti*, an important but not ideologically essential official, and the Sealand, his predominantly local zone of influence. The links to the city of Uruk shall be investigated further in the following section.

§5: Connecting the *šakin māti* and the Sealand to the city of Uruk

The third and final element to be investigated in this study will be the links between the *šakin māti*, the Sealand, and the city of Uruk under Neo-Babylonian and early Persian rule. Uruk certainly occupied a status of note during the long sixth century, and its relationship with the Sealand in particular warrants further investigation. Analysing these connections will be crucial for understanding the historical context for certain passages when it comes to returning to the Nabonidus Chronicle in §6. Perhaps the most important motivation is how the marginal status of the *šakin māti* as well as his connection to the Sealand has now been well-established in the discussions from earlier sections; since Uruk is located in the Sealand and turns out to have an interesting relationship with the region politically, it is also useful to consider the activity at Uruk in order to understand the continuity before and after the Persian conquest better. The Eanna temple in Uruk is also where most attestations of the Sealand in the Neo-Babylonian period originate from.¹⁴⁷ It will be shown that the disparities in influence arising from the face-value extent of their respective domains of responsibility will pale in comparison to the indisputably close collaborative connections between the Sealand governor and the various temple and city officials in Uruk. The dynamic nature of the relative amount of influence held by the local Uruk officials will also be highlighted, and approaching the subject using this framework leads to an appropriate emphasis on the need for flexibility and adaptation during regime changes. The following discussion will establish the relationships between the officials, once again in the context of links to the *šakin māti* and the Sealand.

The geographical Sealand region was situated in southern Babylonia, specifically “the delta region of the Euphrates and Tigris”, and contained Uruk as well as other major cities such as Ur and Larsa.¹⁴⁸ As has been briefly discussed earlier, the founder of the ruling dynasty, Nabopolassar, has been posited to have had very close links to the geographical Sealand region; Jursa asserts that he “can with some plausibility be identified as the Assyrian

¹⁴⁷ Beaulieu 2002, p. 112.

¹⁴⁸ Jursa 2023, p. 110.

governor of the southern city of Uruk”.¹⁴⁹ The status of the Sealand as a region in the “heartland” of Babylonia, together with Akkad, is further supported by how the inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar only “circumscribe” northern Mesopotamia when describing the regions that lie outside of said heartland, which has the effect of cementing the Sealand and Akkad as being core by contrast.¹⁵⁰ Levavi has discussed a change in the status of Uruk over the centuries, stating that the city was “considered part of the Sealand” in the “second and early first millennium BCE” but that Uruk no longer retained such a political status by the Neo-Babylonian period although it was still located in the historical Sealand.¹⁵¹ This assertion provides an illustrative starting-point for further analysis; to understand the role of both geopolitical units at the end of Neo-Babylonian rule, it is necessary to investigate precisely what it means for the city to be part of the Sealand, and if this concept can be distinguished on a geographical versus political level.

Since Uruk was one of the larger Babylonian cities, its organisation was divided between the temple administration and a local city governor, as discussed by Kleber. The *šatammu* was a “chief administrator” of the Eanna temple, which was also home to the *qīpu*, a royal resident, and a *ṭupšar bīti*, a temple scribe; meanwhile the *šakin ṭēmi* served as the city-governor, separate to the temple institution.¹⁵² For the period being studied here, a substantial amount of evidence is provided from the Eanna archive, whose output of texts only diminished in Darius I’s second year.¹⁵³ The roles of the temple officials throughout the Neo-Babylonian period were very much not static. For instance, the *qīpu* may have been pre-eminent shortly prior to Nabopolassar’s accession, but not after; the *šatammu* appears to have been absent from Uruk for 15 years during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign; and later, Nabonidus would also create new offices in addition to the ones already mentioned at the temple, undertaking a “detailed reorganization of the Eanna”.¹⁵⁴ As a generalisation, Pirngruber has discussed how the *šatammu* acted as the “highest representative of the local

¹⁴⁹ Jursa 2023, p. 98.

¹⁵⁰ Jursa 2023, pp. 107-108.

¹⁵¹ Levavi 2021, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵² Kleber 2013, pp. 171-172.

¹⁵³ Kessler 2018, p. 73.

¹⁵⁴ Magdalene et al. 2019, p. 17; Beaulieu 1989, p. 121.

community” in larger cities such as Uruk, and therefore in comparing the roles of local dignitaries with that of the Sealand governors, it will be instrumental to draw on evidence relating to this official.¹⁵⁵ The role of the *šakin tēmi* is also absolutely not to be understated; Fried has emphasised their precedence in witness lists after 850 BC (the limitations associated with the ordering in lists denoting importance should be kept in mind, cf. §2), and states that this official “stood above and outside the temple administration”.¹⁵⁶ Jursa has further highlighted the “liminal position” occupied by the *šakin tēmi* between the “royal administration” and the “city-based administrative institutions” that were centred on the temples.¹⁵⁷

Levavi’s aforementioned judgement asserts that Uruk, always located in the geographical Sealand, moved away from being a proper political component of the Sealand territory. Such a status should be understood as distinct from Kleber’s evaluation of officials in Uruk as being *subordinate* to the Sealand governor; indeed, the concept of political separation actually seems at first to imply steps towards independence rather than subordination. Kleber has noted that Uruk “may have been partially subordinate to the surrounding province [the Sealand], at least in the administration of military service”.¹⁵⁸ An earlier discussion, also by Kleber, espouses the idea that the temple officials and the *šakin tēmi* were “hierarchically subordinate” (*hierarchisch untergeordnet*) to the Sealand high officials.¹⁵⁹ This assessment is presented in conjunction with evidence such as YOS 7, 106 from year 1 of Cambyses; this tablet records the *šanû ša tâmti* “transfer[ring] responsibility” of a person detained in the prison of the “Lady of Uruk” to the Eanna *šatammu*.¹⁶⁰ Due to the dynamic nature of the roles of the temple officials, it is not possible to make a universal judgement about the relative importance of the temple officials, the city officials, and the Sealand governors. It is however illustrative to examine a sampling of the archival documents to understand the officials’ roles within particular, albeit limited, contexts. The reasoning

¹⁵⁵ Pirngruber 2018, p. 27.

¹⁵⁶ Fried 2004, pp. 11-12.

¹⁵⁷ Jursa 2015a, p. 603.

¹⁵⁸ Kleber 2021b, p. 10.

¹⁵⁹ Kleber 2008, p. 329.

¹⁶⁰ Kleber and Frahm 2006, p. 116.

behind Levavi's evaluation centres primarily around two aspects: the Urukian elites considering themselves separate from the Sealanders, and a "hierarchical distance" that stems from the presumed subordination of the Uruk officials to the Sealand.¹⁶¹ On the contrary, it will turn out that it does not actually make a lot of sense to consider Uruk as being particularly separate from the Sealand, as the level of bilateral collaboration testifies to a close relationship between the two entities that does not need to be conceived of in such a divisive way. This can be better understood by re-evaluating a number of previously-discussed documents.

The first document to return to is the YOS 17, 360 tablet from Nebuchadnezzar's reign, examined in §2. In the present discussion, this will now be viewed through a perspective that interprets the *šakin māti* as a Sealand-tied governor, which was not taken for granted earlier. Since the Uruk *šatammu* Nabû-aḥḥē-iddin takes gold to Opis at the behest of the *šakin māti*, it may appear to be indicative of the highest Uruk *temple* official behaving as a direct subordinate of the governor of the Sealand. However, this is not necessarily a clear-cut case of one official taking orders from another in a black-and-white manner. The *šatammu* acts upon (*ina*) a letter/message (*šipirti*) of the *šakin māti* and undertakes the action of taking the requisite gold to Opis (*ana* ^{uru}*upiya ittaši*).¹⁶² The verb *ittaši* used for transporting the gold to Opis is a perfect form of *našû(m)*, meaning "carry, transport" or "take away" in this context.¹⁶³ The language used to describe the *šakin māti*'s orders is thus neutral enough not to be particularly emblematic, in itself, of a clear hierarchy of power between Uruk and the Sealand. Furthermore, the fact that the action pertains to silver already deposited by the *šanû ša tâmti* in the temple storehouse implies that the *šatammu* may merely have been carrying out the orders of the *šakin māti* for primarily logistical reasons, rather than as part of an ideological subjection. The silver deposit is clearly material under the purview of the Sealand officials, and the *šatammu*'s actions make sense in practical context. It can be difficult to draw useful inferences about the motivations behind requests recorded in

¹⁶¹ Levavi 2021, pp. 21, 24.

¹⁶² Kleber 2008, p. 322.

¹⁶³ Black, George, and Postgate 2000, p. 246.

archival documents, but the conclusion of §2 can still be invoked here; the officials being mentioned as working in conjunction often just implies collaboration, and little more or less.

There are also other sources that have been used to support arguments that place the Uruk officials below those of the Sealand; for instance, Levavi's discussion of YOS 3, 179, which records a *qīpu* of the Eanna being (as Levavi describes) "somewhat anxious" about an obligation to give oxen to the Sealand governor, with the *qīpu* explicitly wanting the gift "not [to be] neglect[ed]".¹⁶⁴ The Sealand governor is clearly important, but these particular sources also do not indicate a necessary hierarchical subordination was firmly established in place. The *šatammu* was a pre-eminent local governor, "recruited from the ranks of the members of the northern clans resident in Uruk".¹⁶⁵ While acknowledging that the *šakin māti* or *šakin tāmti* did not project his power over all of Babylonia or have especially significant ideological importance, as shown already, it is still the case that his range extended over what was in theory a much larger geographical domain than a local official centred in Uruk. The roles are not comparable in scope, but there were still strong administrative links between the Uruk and Sealand officials, and therefore it is important not to dissociate them from each other too much. There is nothing surprising about how the *šatammu* is expected to answer to the *šakin māti* when the latter needs his gold from the Eanna temple. Obviously, more evidence is required to draw a general conclusion than just this document. However, this case also supports the opposite view to the general point Levavi makes in calling the "hierarchical distance" between Uruk and the Sealand a manifestation of their political separation.¹⁶⁶ The evidence (cf. YOS 7, 106) tends more strongly to support a collaborationist, though not equal, view of the relationship between the two types of officials. It also does not seem like the Uruk official would have any incentive to push for more local political independence. It should go without saying that the local governors in Uruk should project less influence than those of the Sealand, but this is not an indication of some sort of fundamental detachment between the two.

¹⁶⁴ Levavi 2021, p. 24.

¹⁶⁵ Pirngruber 2023, p. 79.

¹⁶⁶ Levavi 2021, p. 24.

A second point of consideration when dealing with the relationship between Uruk and the Sealand is what can be said about distinction of social groupings based on the tablets available. Another aforementioned document, BIN 1, 34, also provides points of comparison between the *šatammu* and a Sealand governor. The official Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti, as discussed, was a Sealand vice-governor who was attested as both the *qīpu ša tâmti* and *šanû ša tâmti* in different documents. When the land is distributed, the local Sealanders (hypothetically) ask whether the distribution was conducted at the behest of the “temple administrator” (*šatammu*) of Eanna, or personally by Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti.¹⁶⁷ This juxtaposition does nothing to undermine a reasonable default position that there is some level of equity between what can be expected of the Uruk and Sealand officials in terms of *solely local* jurisdiction. Levavi has interpreted the tablet as indicating rivalry “usually found between two closely-related but distinct groups”.¹⁶⁸ However, distinction between two groups is also not itself a sufficient condition for showing one is subordinated to the other. Since the roles of the officials are framed in terms of the Urukeans and Sealanders’ perceptions of them, this document provides a useful insight into how the officials’ power may have been perceived by the people.

In the (again hypothetical) comparison made by the Urukeans between Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti and the king, there is an incontrovertibly large difference in power level between the two possible land-distributors.¹⁶⁹ As discussed in §2, there are likely some ideological connections at play regarding the reference to the king. While it is difficult to be certain from the text, a reasonable interpretation of the two sets of comparisons is that the Sealanders’ contrast between the *šatammu*’s personal favour and Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti’s actions will mirror the Urukean reaction. Consequently, the tablet must be drawing an analogy between the first pairing distinction, between the *šatammu* and the Sealand official, and the second pairing distinction, between the Sealand official and the king. The possible interpretation that the two pairings each have two individuals of comparable authority is certainly untenable for a text from the reign of the powerful Nabopolassar. The other more

¹⁶⁷ Levavi 2021, p. 22.

¹⁶⁸ Levavi 2021, p. 22.

¹⁶⁹ Levavi 2021, p. 22.

likely interpretation is that the ideological relationship between the two individuals within one pairing is comparable to the relationship between those in the other pairing.

As discussed in §3, it is fair to take this source and consequently view the Sealand official as fundamentally deriving his legitimacy from the king, a stance already augmented by other evidence such as the continuity of the offices throughout the Neo-Babylonian period. It is similarly plausible that the Uruk officials (i.e. the *šatammu* here) acted similarly as representatives of the Sealand governor. This also does not prove an intrinsic disconnect between the Uruk and Sealand officials. The most consistent way to interpret this evidence is rather again to view the officials as intrinsically linked rather than jarringly separated. The document corroborates the close relationship between Uruk and the Sealand without actually indicating there was any proper separation. Once again, the variable nature of the officials' status should be emphasised; this means even less weight needs to be put upon a fixed hierarchy. Returning to the conceptualisation of the distinction in terms of social groupings, the speculation of Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti should not be taken as definitive. However, it is again unsurprising that the population originating from Uruk would view the Sealand official's broader purview as just meaning he has some degree of outside, less local influence, without this implying a separatist tendency. By analogy, Nabû-ēṭir-napšāti, whose legitimacy has fundamental ties to the Neo-Babylonian rule of law, would consider the king to be the corresponding individual that was in charge of a greater domain than his.

This understanding of the role of the Uruk officials in the context of the Sealand may be extended by evaluating two more cases. The first of these will be that of BIN 2, 134, dating to Cyrus' fourth year and briefly mentioned in §3, which concerns the last attested *šakin māti* Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit. This document records how the *šakin māti* sends three cousins along with the *šatammu*, the *ša rēši šarri bēl piqitti Eanna* ("royal commissioner of the temple"), and the temple scribes to stand before his judges and the *šakin ṭēmi* of Uruk, Imbiya, so that the cousins may undergo a trial.¹⁷⁰ More can be said than merely that the Sealand-linked *šakin māti* had influence pertaining to Uruk. The *šakin ṭēmi* operated in a

¹⁷⁰ Fried 2004, p. 12.

clearly judicial capacity, illustrating that the *šakin māti* was able to delegate what needed to be done to an important “genuine local” who on the basis of his role had “closer ties to the crown [than the *šatammu*]”.¹⁷¹ Jursa has indeed noted how Imbiya had earlier been a member of the “entourage of king Nabonidus”, according to YOS 3, 129.¹⁷² Although his role changes, there is a semblance of continuity into the post-conquest years. BIN 2, 134 provides evidence for the *šakin māti*, as an established Sealand-centred official, being able to assign duties to local officials in Uruk; officials of the Sealand do this for both the city-officials as in this case, and the temple-officials as in the case of the *šatammu* in YOS 7, 106. Furthermore, the title of *ša rēši šarri bēl piqitti Eanna* in its entirety also only emerged during the reign of Nabonidus.¹⁷³ The incorporation of this position among those of other well-established ones such as the *šatammu* attests further to the nature of the officials’ roles throughout the Neo-Babylonian and into the Persian period; dynamic, yet clearly adaptable to regime change.

A second document (CDLI P235704), this time from the second year of Cyrus’ reign, provides an interesting data point from the beginning of the Persian period, illustrating the inextricable connections between the officials both before and after the conquest. This administrative record mentions the slave of a person named Šillaya addressing the *šatammu* and the *ša-rēš-šarri bēl-piqitti* (this time referred to as a “royal supervisor” by Wunsch) of the Eanna temple.¹⁷⁴ The slave recounts having assisted his master Šillaya’s son in collecting some barley “[from the storehouse] of Our-Lady-of-Uruk in the Piqūdu region”.¹⁷⁵ Wunsch notes how Šillaya is also mentioned in TCL 13, 227 “where he is involved in official commodity deliveries from the Sealand during the time of Nabonidus”.¹⁷⁶ This latter document concerns the “agricultural income of Eanna”, and includes a record of sesame quantities cultivated in the fourth, fifth and sixth years of Nabonidus.¹⁷⁷ The tablet shows how there continued to be local connections between the Sealand and Uruk from the early reign of

¹⁷¹ Pirngruber 2023, p. 79.

¹⁷² Jursa 2015a, p. 604.

¹⁷³ Fried 2004, p. 13.

¹⁷⁴ Wunsch 2004, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Wunsch 2004, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Wunsch 2004, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ Kleber 2010, p. 552.

Nabonidus to the early reign of Cyrus. In the absence of exceptional circumstances such as the apparent famine in Uruk in Nabonidus' eleventh year, the nature of administration was expected to remain largely unaltered during such a regime change.¹⁷⁸ As the Nabonidus Chronicle and contemporary sources indicate, there indeed seems to have been some upheaval in Uruk during Nabonidus' reign (that will subsequently be discussed in §6), but this can primarily be explained as a step inherent in the reality of the conquest process itself without necessarily implying that said upheaval was ideologically desirable. In the case of Şillaya, there was close administrative collaboration as far as Uruk and the Sealand were concerned early in Nabonidus' reign, and that local administration continued on a similar level into the beginning of the Persian period.

There are a number of conclusions that can be synthesised from these analyses. Acknowledging that the roles of the local Urukean officials were not fixed over the course of several decades is of primary importance. While their ideological significance is again not to be overstated and their influence cannot be extrapolated beyond the geographical confines of the Sealand region, as made clear in §1-§3, the Sealand governors very naturally held authority across a wider-ranging domain than that which was held by the local officials of Uruk. It is by this definition that a hierarchy between the officials can be established in a proper sense. However, the interpretation of this power disparity as creating "hierarchical distance" between the two political entities, as espoused by Levavi, neglects some considerations. The relative incomparability of the Sealand governors' and the local Uruk officials' scope of authority is not a reason to assume there was a concrete separation between the two domains, and the idea that Uruk was both geographically in the Sealand and simultaneous somehow detached from the Sealand at this time politically arises from an incoherent view of their relationship. The Sealand official delegated certain matters to Urukean officials, because they were *local* matters (BIN 2, 134; YOS 7, 106). In terms of social groupings, the distinction made in BIN 1, 34 between the Urukeans and the Sealander is specifically also a matter of the unsurprising local versus generalised scope of domain

¹⁷⁸ Zawadzki 2012, p. 48.

exercised by their governors. There was continual bilateral collaboration, to the extent that seeing there to be a major rift between the Sealand and Uruk officials would be baselessly incongruous with the bigger picture of the Persian takeover of Babylonia. Evidence from later in the period attests to how the same particular individuals continued to hold high offices during the reigns of both Nabonidus and Cyrus. These deductions provide important context prior to a final return to discussing the connections seen in the Nabonidus Chronicle.

§6: Incursions and upheaval in the Nabonidus Chronicle

The final main strand in the combined analysis of the *šakin māti*, the Sealand officials, and the affairs of Uruk in the context of the Nabonidus Chronicle will involve returning to two excerpts from the text and exploring what sort of upheaval occurred there during the Persian conquest. These excerpts (lines 21-22 of Column II, and line 2 of Column III) both pertain to situations where it is possible to interpret the Chronicle as indicating a Persian incursion took place. However, on examining the contextual and archival evidence, it turns out that the correlation between the likelihood of a minor incursion and the internal upheaval observed does not align with what would be expected if raids did indeed lead to cataclysmic change. This provides a strong argument in favour of conceptualising localised unrest as being primarily a reaction to the particular situations in which the officials found themselves, and lessens the extent to which external perturbations that were not of an all-encompassing nature can be seen to have any great impact.

In the Nabonidus Chronicle, the title *šakin māti* appears for the only time towards the end of the second column, where line 22 refers to a *šakin māti ina Uruk*. This instance appears within the Chronicle's record of the tenth year of Nabonidus, and lines 21 and 22 are only preceded in this year by the standard formula that mentions the king being in Tema. Grayson's 1975 translation of lines 21 and 22 is the following: "On the twenty-first day of the month Sivan [...] / of Elammya in Akkad ... [...] the district governor in Uru[k ...]".¹⁷⁹ The version given by Zawadzki in 2012 is "On the twenty-first day of the month Simanu, [the army] of the country Elammiya x [entered] Akkad [and x x], the district governor in Uruk [...]".¹⁸⁰ This latter version interpolates the Sumerogram ERÍN, corresponding to Akkadian *šābu(m)* "army, troops", as a complete reconstruction in the phrase ITL.SIG₄ U₄.21.K[AM^{lú}ERÍN.MEŠ] *šá*^{kur} *E-lam-mi-ia*... (this is the "On the twenty-first day of the month Simanu, [...] of the country Elammiya..." part). The sign ERÍN is not actually visible in the text. The reference to "Elammiya" is a curious inclusion and prompts questions about its context in the

¹⁷⁹ Grayson 1975, p. 108.

¹⁸⁰ Zawadzki 2012, p. 48.

Chronicle's account. Furthermore, Zawadzki's suggestion that an army of a foreign country may have been active in Babylonia at this time warrants additional discussion. The task of reconstructing the broken narrative here bears some notable differences to the approach that was taken in analysing line 3 of Column III in §4.

The first point to discuss will be the identity of the land of Elammiya in the excerpt from Column II, followed by what that means for inferring the presence of military activity at this point in time. Zawadzki has identified this as being a reference to Elam for two primary reasons. One of these is how as already noted in §4, there was no "positive action" undertaken by Nabonidus after 550 in the Chronicle, and thus he infers that any military activity mentioned after Nabonidus' sixth year must be connected with the Persians instead.¹⁸¹ This is not a watertight argument: the passages of the Chronicle covering years 11 to 16 of Nabonidus are largely missing, and such a conclusion about the presence or absence of certain types of events cannot be drawn with such limited information. The events of lines 21-22 are interpreted as military activity due to the juxtaposition of a possibly-foreign territory named Elammiya with Akkad, though the reading of "entered" is also entirely an interpolation for a broken section of the tablet. The second reason is that if Elammiya is not identified as Elam, then the only alternative proposal is to identify it as a city named Elammu, near Carchemish.¹⁸² This is also dismissed by Zawadzki on the grounds of how the ^{kur} determinative would probably not have been used for a city, as well as how there is no other evidence for notable events having happened in that region at the time, and how one would not expect the *šakin māti* of Uruk to have been active there.¹⁸³ Evaluating this, on the grounds of the determinative and of the irrelevance of the Carchemish region (but not on the grounds of considering Nabonidus' and Cyrus' actions), it is reasonable to take this as a reference to Elam.

This interpretation poses some challenges. Firstly, before addressing what once again seems to be an unusual term in the Chronicle for Cyrus' homeland, it is necessary to establish what was going on historically. If one of the parties concerned was a Persian army, then the

¹⁸¹ Zawadzki 2012, p. 48.

¹⁸² Beaulieu 1989, p. 201.

¹⁸³ Zawadzki 2012, p. 48.

nature of the engagement and the practical and ideological role played by Cyrus must both be determined in the context of this narrative. The lacuna-filled Chronicle provides almost no information about the precise events that occurred. Briant notes how following Cyrus' conquest (of Lydia), "in the spring of 546 the king had left Asia Minor, called back by more pressing dangers: Babylon, the Saka and Bactrians, and Egypt, according to Herodotus".¹⁸⁴ Cyrus' campaigns in Central Asia are extremely poorly documented, and the king's movements in particular years between 546 and 539 are all but impossible to determine. Beaulieu has discussed the possibility of "sporadic armed encounters" between the Babylonians and Persians before the final conquest, and while regarding the affairs of the sixteenth year Zawadzki still espouses the interpretation that reads "Parsu" in Column III line 3 with far more certainty than actually exists, he also declares strongly in favour of active military clashes having occurred in Nabonidus' tenth year, on the basis of the Elammiya reference being an incursion by Cyrus' forces.¹⁸⁵ The events of year 10 in the Chronicle shall be interpreted as a minor incursion by the Persians into Babylonia that did not result in any significant territorial gain. This needs to be established as consistent both with the other parts of the Chronicle that have any possibility of referring to Persian military activity, and with the sometimes anachronistic manner by which Cyrus and the Persians are referred to in the Chronicle.

First to deal with is the context within the Chronicle. The chronology that shall be demonstrated is that there was a minor Persian raid into Babylonia in year 10; it is unclear what was going on between years 11 and 16, but the Chronicle very plausibly could have recorded a mixture of activity internal and external to Babylonia; that there was some upheaval around Uruk in year 16 and also possibly Persian incursions, but the two are not necessarily directly connected in the Chronicle; and that the final conquest took place in year 17, as is undisputed. Having established "Elammiya" as referring to Elam, there is nothing else this can refer to in context besides the Persians: van der Spek has noted how scribes may have wanted to "use archaic terms to make a connection with omens", and that this may be

¹⁸⁴ Briant 2002, p. 38.

¹⁸⁵ Beaulieu 1989, p. 201; Zawadzki 2012, pp. 47-48.

behind the reference to Cyrus' realm as Elam.¹⁸⁶ While Cyrus was indeed called "king of Elam" in, for instance, the Dynastic Prophecy from the Hellenistic period, as van der Spek also says, it is not necessarily the case that this term was some sort of later literary invention to refer to Persia. Anshan was the default term one would expect to see; Parsu was a slight anachronism, but was only out of place for as long as the temporal separation between Cyrus and Darius I; and Elam or Elammiya would have appeared somewhat unusual in a chronicle context from this period, but can only be interpreted as Cyrus' realm here. There were no other major powers whose origins could be tied to this region. Indeed, as is well-established, there did continue to be significant Elamite influence in the Teispids' kingdom even well after the Median conquest.¹⁸⁷

Some important methodological differences between Column II, lines 21-22 in comparison to the analysis of the TAM reading from Column III discussed in §4 will now be addressed. The first is that the name of ^{kur}*E-lam-mi-ia* appears unambiguously in Column II. There is a clear determinative denoting a country or land, followed by a place name that recognisably corresponds to Cyrus' domain. This is very different to a reading of ^{kur}*tam-[tim]* versus ^{kur}*par-[su]*, since as discussed already, there is not even a foregone conclusion that the latter reading is present; indeed the name of Persia or a synonym would need to be established as being present before any inferences could be conclusively drawn from it. The next question is of how the presence of an army can justifiably be interpolated into the lacuna in the text, since there is definitely not a legible sign corresponding to that word. Zawadzki's conclusion that an army is referenced there is essentially grounded in context: a reference to Cyrus' land can surely only be a military incursion. This prompts the question of why in the §4 analysis, it was not analogously possible to conclude that an army from the land of Persia was also present. In answer to that, the key point here is how Cyrus' country is referenced for certain in Column II, which makes the consideration of military activity at that time far less speculative than the Column III case. There is also the matter that a campaign in Nabonidus'

¹⁸⁶ van der Spek 2021, p. 417.

¹⁸⁷ Briant 2002, p. 82.

tenth year would not have represented an outright conquest, and thus would carry less ideological significance.

Building on this, in the discussion in §4, the fact that one would not expect to see the Chronicle focus heavily on military affairs not directly tied to the kings Nabonidus or Cyrus was used as evidence against there being a reference to a Persian army near the start of Column III. The difference between this case and the attestation of Elammiya is that the former took place in year 16 of Nabonidus, not long before the showdown at Opis and the actual conquest of Babylon, while the latter took place in year 10 and clearly did not result in significant territorial gains, which would have been evidenced if they had been present. Previously in the Chronicle, mentions of Cyrus are always associated with his conquest of other kingdoms. Cyrus first appears in the context of his Median campaign where he “marched to Ecbatana” and “carried off as booty” loot from the city (NC §2.1-4).¹⁸⁸ The other prior mention is his likely conquest of Lydia (NC §2.15-17), where the Chronicle records how he “defeated its king, took its possessions, (and) stationed his own garrison (there)”.¹⁸⁹ It was expected and necessary that Cyrus’ presence should be mentioned and emphasised when he conquers other kingdoms. To repeat what was said in §4, in year 16, even though there would have been several months between the events recorded at the end of the entry and the clash at Opis, any military activity on the part of the Persians would be far more closely connected with the final campaign than would comparable activity from year 10. In such a context within the Chronicle directly before the account of the seventeenth year, it would be surprising for the Persians to be mentioned not in connection with Cyrus, and his royal title is not present, which therefore diminishes the credence lent to the “Parsu” reading. By contrast, the events of year 10 are not at all close temporally to when the final conquest took place. If there were raids by the Persians, perhaps of limited success, it would not be strictly necessary to emphasise the role of the king there.

In the Nabonidus Chronicle, Cyrus’ actions are mentioned precisely in conjunction with his major conquests of Media, (probably) Lydia, and Babylonia. It would make no sense

¹⁸⁸ Grayson 1975, p. 106.

¹⁸⁹ Grayson 1975, p. 107.

for accounts of significant military successes, at which the king was present, not to mention that this was the case. Indeed, Cyrus' leadership was clearly ideologically important; tangentially, drawing on a classical account by Justin on the conquest of Ecbatana, Briant has emphasised how "to impose his own authority [...] [Cyrus] had to appear in person at the head of his armies".¹⁹⁰ This is also a consistent viewpoint with that of Kratz's discussion, which espouses the Nabonidus Chronicle as, like the Cyrus Cylinder and the Verse Account of Nabonidus, having some features characteristic of a propagandistic text that favours the Persian regime.¹⁹¹ The "Elammiya" raid would not have fallen into such a category, and it is therefore not so far-fetched to interpret this as a military incursion unattributed to a particular ruler. The role of the particular *šakin māti* mentioned is still not explained, and there are still questions left open regarding this. Since there are now attestations of the *šakin māti* Nabû-aḥḥē-bullit in texts from both Nabonidus' eighth and sixteenth years, von Voigtlander's original suggestion that something like the "death of a prominent individual" could have been recorded there does not hold much weight.¹⁹² Additionally, major upheaval in Uruk in year 10 is "unrecorded in archival texts".¹⁹³ The precise role of the *šakin māti* in this situation is effectively indeterminate. Beaulieu has noted how "at Uruk, all the main offices of the city and the temple were held by the same incumbents from the beginning of the reign until Nabonidus' return", prior to a wave of dismissals in his thirteenth year.¹⁹⁴ This is attributed to Belshazzar seemingly not being permitted to replace said incumbents. Furthermore, the fact no lasting gains were made by the Persians means one would expect the degree of disturbance caused directly by a raid in this year to be limited.

This discussion of the Elammiya reference addresses a point in time during Nabonidus' reign when it seems at face value that upheaval was possible, due to the presence of a Persian incursion, yet did not actually seem to materialise. A final concluding remark is that the possibility of this also being a scribal emendation should still be kept open; it is possible, but unprovable and not strictly necessary, that there had previously been a reference

¹⁹⁰ Briant 2002, p. 39.

¹⁹¹ Kratz 2002, p. 150.

¹⁹² von Voigtlander 1963, p. 196; Kleber 2008, pp. 316-317.

¹⁹³ Beaulieu 1989, p. 201.

¹⁹⁴ Beaulieu 1989, p. 187.

to Anshan and that the usage of Elam was either a deliberately archaic term or a rogue Hellenistic stylisation. Furthermore, the word for Elammiya in the Nabonidus Chronicle is also preceded by *šá* and this makes it clear the term was not part of a royal title.¹⁹⁵ As the best possible comparison, Cyrus' title in the Dynastic Prophecy as "king of Elam" was written LUGAL KUR NIM.MA.KI normalising to *šar elamti*.¹⁹⁶ This was part of the reasoning that allowed for the consideration of the passage as referring to a minor raid that was not ideologically important, as it does not mention Cyrus directly. The fact that the only other information about year 10 legible in the Chronicle is the formula about the Akitu festival is not, in this case, evidence that lines 21-22 are contextually likely to be confined to internal Babylonian affairs. On the contrary, the assertion made in §4 about the matters in Column III line 3 was that the events were *explicable* as internal Babylonian, while the events of the Elammiya passage are not. This is a difference of primary importance in the interpretation of the two passages.

Having gained additional perspectives on the events of the Chronicle, the role played by Ishtar of Uruk at the end of Nabonidus' reign will finally be revisited, as there is evidence for some disturbance relating to the Eanna that must also be situated in the context of post-conquest continuity. Nabonidus ordered the statues of the gods from several cities to be transported to Babylon in his seventeenth year. Lines 9 to 12 of Column III of the Chronicle mention three groupings of gods. The first of these groupings consists of the gods of Marad, Kish and Hursagkalamma, which entered Babylon in an unspecified month. Secondly, there are the gods of Akkad, which enter Babylon "until the end of the month Elul" (Ulūlu; the sixth month). Thirdly, there are the gods of Borsippa, Cuthah and Sippar, which do not enter Babylon.¹⁹⁷ Sandowicz has noted the "extraordinary" decision that must have been made by the king in making this order, on account of how significant logistical arrangements had to be made to maintain the appropriate cultic rituals away from the gods' home sanctuaries.¹⁹⁸ Such a great undertaking would not have been done lightly, and is emblematic of the level of

¹⁹⁵ Grayson 1975, p. 108.

¹⁹⁶ Vlaardingerbroek 2014, p. 181.

¹⁹⁷ Grayson 1975, p. 109.

¹⁹⁸ Sandowicz 2015, p. 198.

external threat of which Nabonidus must have been aware. The activity regarding Ishtar of Uruk aligns precisely within this framework. In fact, the need for evacuation, and to keep the goddess supplied with material for the necessary offerings further afield in Babylon, would have been the axis around which revolved most of the disruption to the usual proceedings at the Eanna temple in Uruk.

Beaulieu has demonstrated that the statue of Ishtar of Uruk must have arrived at Babylon by around the end of the fourth month (Dûzu/Dumuzu) of year 17 of Nabonidus; this is based on NCBT 535 from early in the fifth month (Abu) of year 17, which records making provision for barley offerings for the cult of the “Lady of Uruk” to be taken to Babylon.¹⁹⁹ This is consistent with being part of the second grouping of gods of “Akkad”, which continue to enter Babylon until the sixth month. The transportation of supplies for the goddess necessitated “a high frequency of boat rentals” that was “unparalleled in the Eanna archive”.²⁰⁰ At least four contracts (BM 114453, BM 114465, BM 114473, BM 114486) indicate boat rentals taking effect from some time in the fifth month of year 17.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the YOS 3, 145 tablet from Uruk, whose date is inconveniently not preserved, was written by an official named Rīmūt to the *šatammu* and the *bēl piqitti* of the Eanna temple, requesting a leather mat and five goatskins for the “Lady of the Eanna” to “go to Babylon on the Euphrates” by boat.²⁰² Rīmūt is also attested as a *zazakku* who “confirmed [Nabonidus’] words” (that spurn the god Marduk in favour of Sin) in the Verse Account of Nabonidus (VA §5.24-25).²⁰³ Kuhrt notes how the role of the *zazakku* has been “clarified recently [...] and can be rendered approximately as ‘royal secretary’”.²⁰⁴ While Rīmūt does not explicitly mention having the goddess’ statue with him personally, Fried interprets this document as precisely denoting the transportation of Ishtar of Uruk to Babylon.²⁰⁵ This is consistent with his carrying out of Nabonidus’ orders to relocate statues of the gods to his capital.

¹⁹⁹ Beaulieu 1989, p. 222.

²⁰⁰ Beaulieu 1989, p. 222.

²⁰¹ Sandowicz 2015, pp. 198-201.

²⁰² Beaulieu 1989, pp. 220-221.

²⁰³ Kuhrt 2007, p. 78.

²⁰⁴ Kuhrt 2007, p. 80.

²⁰⁵ Fried 2004, p. 27.

The proceedings relating to Ishtar of Uruk's transportation to Babylon fit together chronologically with the replacement of some officials at the Eanna in late year 16 or early year 17. The assassination attempt on the *bēl piqitti*, mentioned briefly in §4, took place in the tenth month of year 16 (as recorded in TCL XII: 117). As also discussed by Beaulieu, this *bēl piqitti*, Ilī-rēmanni, remained in office until at earliest the end of year 16, but seems to have shortly afterwards been dismissed along with the incumbent *šatammu*, Kurbanni-Marduk. The new *bēl piqitti*, Nabû-aḥa-iddina, and the new *šatammu*, Nabû-mukīn-zēri, were both first attested in their new roles on day 14 of the "fourth month of the seventeenth year".²⁰⁶ It cannot actually be assumed that the new officials took up their roles from the very end of year 16 or the very beginning of year 17. There is ample precedent for there to be gaps of several months in the attestations of likely-consecutive office-holders, simply due to how much evidence is available; for instance, Kurbanni-Marduk was only attested as *šatammu* from month 12 of year 13, but his predecessor was last attested in month 5 of that year.²⁰⁷ This means the possible time-range for the turnover spans several months, and the precise event cannot be dated exactly. In the undated YOS 3, 145 tablet, Rīmūt addresses both the *new* officials and names them explicitly as holders of their new titles. Travelling from Uruk to Babylon by boat would have taken roughly three weeks.²⁰⁸ Consequently, the *terminus ante quem* for the actual appointment of Nabû-aḥa-iddina and Nabû-mukīn-zēri was more likely a date near the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth month of year 17, and there is no good reason to think they were necessarily appointed much earlier than this.

This means that a chronology in which the turnover of the Eanna officials was associated with the preparations to send Ishtar of Uruk to Babylon is entirely consistent. It may further be noted that Nādinu, the *šakin tēmi* of Uruk, was not replaced, and is attested from year 13 of Nabonidus to year 1 of Cyrus.²⁰⁹ While this is not a definitive extrapolation, the fact that it was only (some) Eanna temple officials who were replaced, rather than city

²⁰⁶ Beaulieu 1989, pp. 220; 161.

²⁰⁷ Beaulieu 1989, p. 161.

²⁰⁸ Sadowicz 2015, p. 204.

²⁰⁹ Beaulieu 1989, p. 161.

officials, would seem to indicate the disruption had some connection to the Eanna in particular, and thus corroborates that theory. The alternative explanation for the disruption, posited by Fried, is implausible and warrants some discussion. Fried goes so far as to suggest the Persians had entirely captured Uruk in 540 BC, and that the new officials would have been appointed by Cyrus rather than Nabonidus.²¹⁰ This hypothesis effectively rests only on the presumption that line 3 of Column III referred to a Persian incursion, and has been countered by Zawadzki on the grounds that “regular contact with Babylon” could not have been maintained between the supposed conquest of Uruk and the actual conquest of Babylon if they were controlled by different parties, and further on the grounds that the Persians would have approached Babylon from the southern Uruk direction rather than the northern Opis direction during their final offensive if they had indeed been so successful in southern Babylonia.²¹¹ As has already been discussed, the hypothesis of the Persian incursion is far from certain, and alternative explanations exist. This also serves to counter Fried’s other theory that the Persian invasion was rather a “pincer attack”, because that is again contingent on being certain there was a major Persian success to the south in the first place.²¹²

The reasoning may be expanded on slightly more. If one draws the conclusion that there was definitely a major Persian incursion in 540 BC, and that it was referenced in Column III line 3 of the Nabonidus Chronicle, then formulating that is partially contingent on interpreting the turnover of officials at the Eanna as prompted by external disturbances. Beaulieu posited that the rivalry of supposed “conflicting parties at Uruk” may have “been stirred up if there were Persian incursions into southern Babylonia in the sixteenth year”, but this is still very speculative in comparison to the explanation that major logistical upheaval was definitely occurring around the Eanna, and thus a more direct connection between the preparations and the turnover can be drawn.²¹³ In order for the Eanna officials to have been overhauled by Cyrus, nothing less than a full conquest of the city would have been necessary. The “pincer attack” hypothesis is unsupported unless one already takes the existence of the

²¹⁰ Fried 2004, p. 25.

²¹¹ Zawadzki 2012, p. 47.

²¹² Fried 2004, p. 28.

²¹³ Beaulieu 1989, p. 220.

year 16 Persian incursion for granted. Since the total capture of Uruk is not plausible in the face of the geography of the Opis campaign, the upheaval must have centred around other predominantly local matters, even if said local matters, i.e. the Ishtar transportation, were prompted by a command issued by Nabonidus from Babylon.

The two aspects of the Nabonidus Chronicle discussed in this section, namely the references to Elammiya in year 10 and Ishtar of Uruk in year 16, both appear to give rise to counterintuitive conclusions within the established framework of this study. In year 10, there was a Persian incursion that resulted in no observable local disruption among the officials at Uruk. In year 16, there was probably no Persian incursion of such great magnitude as to result in the amount of upheaval often assumed, yet there was definitely some disturbance at the Eanna. This therefore means that direct causative inferences between Persian military activity and internal Babylonian disturbances cannot be drawn, even though this is a viewpoint that some existing historiography has tended towards. The existing Neo-Babylonian institutions were well-established, and it would have taken a significant change, such as a complete Persian takeover of Uruk, for an *external* agent to force through an overhaul. This does not mean that discontinuity was a fundamental feature of regime change. The evidence rather points to structural adaptation being particularly situation-dependent, and the change in Eanna officials associated with the Ishtar preparations should be conceived of more as a local response to specific practicalities with limited ideological implications. As mentioned in §4, the attempted assassination of the *bēl piqitti* is indicative of some violent unrest in Uruk, and is the only real evidence that the turnover should be characterised as “upheaval” at all; however, this is also not inexplicable as a feature of internal turbulence. Finally, there is the question of where the *šakin māti* or the Sealand governor was in all this. Unfortunately, the archival evidence falls short in this regard, with there being no information on the *šakin māti* in year 10, and BM 114631 from month 6 of year 16 quite possibly predating turmoil relating to the Sealand in that year.²¹⁴ It is not possible to be certain what was going on, but the

²¹⁴ Kleber 2008, pp. 226-227.

relationship between the Sealand officials and the local officials of Uruk established in §5 should still be considered to have held.

§7: Conclusions

This study has discussed a broad range of aspects of the end of the Neo-Babylonian period and the first few years after the Persian conquest, approached primarily through considerations of ideological legitimacy, the connections that can be established within individual archival documents, and analyses of the plausibility of various possible interpretations of the narrative in the Nabonidus Chronicle. The framing of an entire work around the theme of the links between the *šakin māti* official, the Sealand, and the city of Uruk is not remotely a surprising one. Uruk is located in the historical Sealand, and as earlier discussed in Kleber 2008 and expanded on in §2 and §3, historical contextual evidence from the Eanna documents points to the *šakin māti* effectively playing the role of a Sealand official, specifically in the texts from Uruk. These three elements are therefore very closely connected already, and it would also be possible to structure a discussion around any individual one of them and necessarily end up having to do a treatment of the remaining two in conjunction.

However, this three-stranded formulation is not, at face value, such an obvious angle of approach for investigating Persian continuity in particular. The original intention for this study was to write a general summary of various administrative institutions in Babylonia, involving discussing the temple officials as well as changes brought on by the Persian regime. While also a matter of scope, the primary motivation behind switching to this particular three-part formulation came from reading the Nabonidus Chronicle and noticing broken passages (Column II lines 21-22; Column III lines 1-3) that firstly had a possibility of referencing Cyrus' domain, secondly had a possibility of referencing military activity, and thirdly mentioned Uruk. The mention of the official in Column II, as well as encountering Kleber's proposal that the *šakin māti* may only have governed the Sealand, led to the incorporation of the *šakin māti* consideration in the framework.²¹⁵ The Chronicle may have been intended as a work of "historical literature" as proposed by Waerzeggers, a

²¹⁵ Kleber 2021a, p. 6.

non-narrative with “no story, no plot, no introduction or conclusion” as counter-argued by van der Spek, or something in between the two.²¹⁶ Being able to pattern-match different sections of the Chronicle that share arbitrary characteristics is not in itself a necessarily valid method of inference. However, analysing various aspects of continuity before and after 539 with these elements as a starting-point has in fact turned out to yield several surprising results.

The study began with an expository overview of the Persian conquest in §1, followed by an evaluation of the ideological and judicial role of Gūbaru as a vice-regent of Cyrus. The discussion in this section has established conclusively the degree of ideological legitimacy inherited by the Persians, both on the basis of Cyrus’ own self-proclaimed eternal right to rule (cf. CC §22) and the way they succeeded the well-established native Babylonian regime. By considering the distinction between active and passive transfers of power, it became clear that the takeover of Gūbaru created an all-encompassing position in which he acted in the stead of the king, while the *šakin māti* was of marginal ideological importance. In order to analyse the archival documents mentioning the *šakin māti* and the Sealand officials in their proper context, it was first necessary to recognise in §1 exactly what institutions under the early Persian regime held the greatest weight. Since Gūbaru’s takeover was treated as the starting-point for discussing the *šakin māti* in §1, it was not possible at the time to discuss the *šakin māti*’s broader significance immediately. The exploration of the official’s role in §2 and §3, being related to the Sealand, situates the *šakin māti* in context within the broader picture of the Persian conquest, and leads to findings entirely consistent with the presumption from §1 that his significance was highly limited.

In §2, the *Hofkalender* and various archival sources were used to establish the links between the *šakin māti* and the Sealand, refuting an existing, unsubstantiated assumption that the *šakin tāmti* Ea-dayān’s position at the beginning of the list was an indication of his pre-eminence. The conclusions from this section have intrinsic links to the content of §5. The reasoning behind separating out the regional and the city governors in the *Hofkalender* was

²¹⁶ Waerzeggers 2015, p. 96; van der Spek 2015, p. 455.

consistent with the later conclusion that the domain of the Sealand officials was naturally much broader in geographical scope, but there was no actual separatism on the part of the local Uruk officials. It ought to be obvious that city governors would have had less reach than the Sealand dignitaries, but this distinction was amplified beyond reason in Levavi's discussion. The collaborationist nature of the relationship between the Uruk and Sealand officials was of utmost importance throughout the entire Neo-Babylonian period and into the early Persian regime. §3 correspondingly illustrated the diachronic nature of the Sealand officials' responsibilities, and demonstrated that if a title *šakin māṭ tāmti* existed, then it could not be shortened to *šakin māṭi* on the basis of the signs. This was useful to highlight methodologically before diving into slightly different types of ambiguities in sign-readings from the Nabonidus Chronicle. The discussion furthermore established the most logical readings for the titles of the Sealand officials, which have been previously referred to inconsistently in discussions of the same texts from other scholarship.

The analysis in §4 heavily challenges a widespread interpretation, following von Voigtlander's proposal in 1963, that the third line of Column III must have contained a direct reference to Persia. This is not at all merely a contrived way to incorporate the Sealand into the discussion without evidence. There are rather several problems with circular reasoning and chronology that arise from the Persia interpretation, as well as the issue of how it is methodologically strange to assume there may have been an adapted anachronism or scribal emendation without even knowing what the original text was supposed to be. Since it is impossible to tell from the signs, a Sealand reference is in fact reasonably likely, and not disprovable. This also provides a well-contextualised transition into the final discussion in §6, which addresses the two excerpts from the Nabonidus Chronicle that inspired the entire theming of this study in the first place. Most noteworthy is the counterintuitive conclusion that a Persian raid occurred in year 10 of Nabonidus but did not cause much disturbance, while the Chronicle provides no evidence for one in year 16, which did see noticeable disruption. The upheaval around Uruk is characterised as associated with the arrangements being made for the Ishtar of Uruk statue's transportation to Babylon. On a local level, this

illustrates the manner of upheaval that could be expected in liminal situations on the edge of a regime change, before a total conquest occurred.

The findings of this study are consistent with the modern understanding of the nature of the Persian takeover. For instance, Briant has discussed how Cyrus' propaganda aimed to "attract the cooperation of the local elite".²¹⁷ The anachronistic and ahistorical promotion in the 20th century AD of the Cyrus Cylinder as a charter of human rights was in fact a significant misinterpretation of a source that was an "(only to a very limited degree exceptional) part of ancient Near Eastern legitimization strategies".²¹⁸ The human-rights narrative hardly needs refuting again; it has been known for a long time that it would have made little sense for conquerors of Cyrus' day not to aim to preserve the *status quo ante*, and to claim their legitimacy from the years of old. The more localised angle of approach centred around the Sealand and Uruk encouragingly yields results that align with what is indisputably known. This study still does not intend to paint a picture of the conquest as perfectly smooth. For instance, in a study of Nippur, Schneider has analysed what appears to be "hitherto overlooked changes among the higher-ranking officials" there.²¹⁹ This said, it is not particularly helpful to categorise the replacement of officials as intrinsically emblematic of an ideologically catastrophic regime change. As discussed in §1, there are some aspects in which power is transferred actively (e.g. Gūbaru's takeover), but this is also often accompanied by the passive retention of other officials for a few more years.

Next to discuss will be some potential directions for further exploration. The tripartite *šakin māti*, Sealand, and Uruk structure seems to be the only one of its kind that can be readily observed in the text of the Nabonidus Chronicle. This study has illustrated how taking a more localised approach, and considering the subject from the perspective of overall Persian continuity, leads to specific and enlightening conclusions about the nature of the collaboration between officials, and how this fits into a broader context. Uruk is unique in the Chronicle in seemingly having been associated with more than one possibility of a Persian incursion in the narrative, and therefore stood out as a particular possibility for investigation.

²¹⁷ Briant 2002, p. 43.

²¹⁸ Wiesehöfer 2021, pp. 1649-1650.

²¹⁹ Schneider 2022, p. 115.

In theory, searching the Chronicle's narrative for something else thematically similar could well yield a similar result with a different geographical centre. Also beyond the scope of this study is the upheaval at Uruk that led to the decline of the Eanna archive after the second year of Darius, which also would provide an interesting comparison point in terms of regime change.²²⁰ The archival evidence discussed has also been focused on the limited selection of texts, mostly identified by Kleber in 2008, that have explicit attestations of the *šakin māti* and Sealand officials. In §5, taking the administrative documents and trying to draw conclusions about social groupings was a line of enquiry that lent itself well to being indicative of the nature of regime change. Further studies could pursue this further in texts centred more around different officials. Finally, the conclusion of §6 established some initially counterintuitive ideas regarding when incursions could be expected to lead to upheaval. This provides a better understanding of the nature of systems on the verge of regime change, and would be well served as comparisons to other situations.

Throughout all sections, the viewpoint centred on the *šakin māti*, the Sealand, and Uruk has provided a consistent and mostly self-contained localised approach to understanding the nature of continuity before and after the Persian conquest of Babylonia. Various analyses in this study have challenged elements of pre-existing scholarship on the topic, notably reappraising the use of the *Hofkalender* as a source to evaluate the importance of officials, clarifying the sign-readings for the titles of the Sealand governors, establishing the events of year 16 in the Nabonidus Chronicle as centred around disruption at Uruk associated with the transportation of the Ishtar statue to Babylon, and fitting this and the events of year 10 into a surprising but consistent interpretation of the chronology which sheds light on when exactly upheaval would have been expected during a regime change at Uruk. Furthermore, the repeated contextualisation of all these aspects in terms of ideological continuity throughout a regime change has been essential in deriving many inferences. The discussions have also highlighted the historiographical utility of the archival documents as individual texts in themselves, and led to a greater understanding of the collaborationist

²²⁰ Kessler 2018, p. 73.

relationships between the Sealand and Uruk, whose officials' responsibilities naturally differ in scope. On a local level, the logistical arrangements at Uruk, the city's intrinsic links to the *šakin māti* and the Sealand, and the adaptability plainly evident in the regime change within Babylonia combine to form but one possible microcosm of the inner workings of the vastly interconnected and similarly adaptable Achaemenid Empire. Accordingly, there is still much more to be done.

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