

ARTICLE

# “Don’t Let the Boats Pass!” Neo-Elamite Grain Procurement in Times of Famine and Drought

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## Abstract

This article is concerned with interregional trade dynamics between Elam and Mesopotamia in the early to mid-first millennium BC. During the seventh century BC, two great famines in the Neo-Elamite kingdom, of which climatological changes were a major cause, were documented in the textual records. An era of megadrought made grain procurement from the neighboring regions essential to feed the Neo-Elamite lowland population. This article further explores the impact of the two Neo-Elamite famines and “drought of the century” on the commercial and political mechanisms in the Upper Persian Gulf region.

**Keywords:** drought; Elam; famine; grain transport; Mesopotamia; seventh century BC; Upper Persian Gulf trade

In Elam, as in most ancient Near Eastern states, grain was essential to feeding the population. During the seventh century BC, a shortage of grain due to harvest failures in the Susiana lowlands regularly resulted in famines that paralyzed the country. In the Assyrian records on the Neo-Elamite kingdom, there are two instances in which the Akkadian texts refer to great famines in Elam. The first documented famine in the Neo-Elamite kingdom is recorded during the late reign of King Urtak (675–664 BC), and the second occurred during the tumultuous political period of the Babylonian šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt (652–648 BC). During these times, Elamites sought various means of support—political, diplomatic, and economic—from neighboring states.

## The First Elamite Famine

Assurbanipal (668–627 BC) accounts in his Annals that he aided Elam by sending grain during the famine and returning the starving Elamites to whom he had given temporary shelter in Assyria.<sup>1</sup>

On my sixth campaign, I marched against Urtaku, the king of the land Elam, who did not remember the kindness of my creating father (nor) did he keep my friendship.

<sup>1</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 119; Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 212.

After famine occurred in the land Elam (and) hunger had set in, I sent to him grain, (which) sustains the live(s) of people, and I took him by his two hands. (As for) his people, who had fled on account of the famine and settled in Assyria until it rained (again) in his land (and) harvests grew—I sent those people who had stayed alive in my land (back) to him.<sup>2</sup>

In a royal Assyrian letter, dated during the second Elamite famine (c. 648/7 BC), King Assurbanipal reminds the people of Raši of the famine during Urtak's reign.<sup>3</sup> To them, he complains that “despite his love for Elam and his kindness to everyone, they (the Elamites) have done evil to him.”<sup>4</sup> During the seventh century BC, the people of Raši were considered, from the Neo-Assyrian perspective, a tribal group belonging to or living within the borders of the Neo-Elamite kingdom. The territory in which they lived, in the vicinity of Der, was often the focus of territorial disputes.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the people of Raši were the exclusive addressees of Assurbanipal's letters regarding the first famine, rather than the Elamites themselves, implies the Rašians must have belonged to the group of people relocated during the first Elamite famine, who predominantly came from the area at the Elamite-Babylonian border.<sup>6</sup>

The two measures taken to save (a part of) the Elamite population were temporary (re)settlement in Assyria and Assyrian export of grain to Elam.

#### *Political-Diplomatic Measures: Temporary (Re)settlement*

Temporary (re)settlement arrangements were made possible by a friendship treaty King Urtak negotiated with King Esarhaddon of Assyria (681–669 BC).<sup>7</sup> Esarhaddon's son and

<sup>2</sup> Borger, *Beiträge*, B iv 18–26; Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions*, 5, 3 iv 15–26, 6 v 24–35.

<sup>3</sup> The dating of the Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 53 is connected to the extradition request of Sealand Prince Nabû-bel-šumati, who received asylum in Elam after his uprising against Assurbanipal. The letter indicates that, at that point, Tammaritu was residing at the Nineveh court: “let him come and stay with Tammaritu” (lines r.5–6). Assurbanipal and Tammaritu, the former king of Elam, conducted a military campaign in the month Simanu (III) of 648 or 647 BC against Elamite King Huban-haltaš III. A fragmentary letter of the governor of Nippur Illil-bani to King Assurbanipal confirms a direct confrontation between Elamite King Tammaritu and the people of Raši: “The report on Elam which I sent [to the king, my lord, is] *reliab*[e] information. Tammaritu, [king of Elam], who withdrew from the land of Ar[aši. . .] when it revolted [against him]” (Parpola et al., *Babylonian Correspondence*, 193: 5–10). Assuming that Assurbanipal did not launch a major military campaign against Huban-haltaš III before the fall of Babylon (V-648 BC), the Raši campaign must have occurred in the third month of the upcoming year, 647 BC (Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 56–57). As Tammaritu's second tenure as king of Elam started shortly after the military campaign (III-647 BC), the letter must have been written between VI-648 BC (the earliest date for the end of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt) and III-647 BC.

<sup>4</sup> Only the first part of the famine phrase in Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 53 (lines 10–12) is preserved. Several restorations have been attempted with slightly differing outcomes. Malbran-Labat (*L'armée*, 250 n. 332, followed by Potts, *Archaeology*, 296) translates “*au temps d'Urtakku, lors que, du fait de la famine, il n'y avait plus même un chien à manger*” based on Waterman's early transliteration (Royal *Correspondence*, 204–5: *kalbu ibašūni ana akāli*). Dietrich (*Die Aramäer*, 170–71) translates the same phrase as “Früher, als zur Zeit Urtak ist eine Hungersnot in Elam ausgebrochen war (?), sind sie zu mir nach Assyrien gekommen’ (*ittalkūni ana māṭ Aššur*),” which is a restoration that aligns with the idea expressed in a passage of the Assyrian Annals. The Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 53 follows the restoration of Dietrich (*Die Aramäer*, 170–71).

This type of “victim” rhetoric is a recurring theme in Assurbanipal's communication with high-ranking Elamite officials and noblemen. Assurbanipal used a similar letter introduction in a contemporary royal letter to the Elders of Elam; see Waters, “Letter,” 79–86, for a detailed analysis.

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive analysis on the people of (A)raši, see Balatti, *Mountain Peoples*, 138–43. An inscription of King Assurbanipal (Borger, *Beiträge*, 46–47, A IV 123-V 10; F III 46–61), which mentions the destruction of (A)raši (648/7 BC) and his conquest of neighboring territories during his campaigns against Elam, suggests that soon after Sennacherib's conquest (693 BC; Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions*, 3 22, iv 54–81a), (A)raši must have again come under Elamite control.

<sup>6</sup> See Parpola, *Correspondence*, letters 53 and 55.

<sup>7</sup> Luukko and Van Buylaere, *Correspondence*, 1: *tābtu*; Parpola et al., *Babylonian Correspondence*, 7, 202; Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 40, 121.

successor, Assurbanipal honored this agreement in the early years of his reign, until the Elamite raid on Babylon in 664 BC.<sup>8</sup> The Raši people, who were likely beneficiaries of this peace treaty, lived in the Pušt-e Kūh region (Luristan), the lower intermontane plains and valleys of the Kabir Kūh mountain ridge northwest of the Elamite capital, Susa, and east of the Assyrian provincial capital, Der, in northeastern Babylonia.<sup>9</sup> Due to the climatic difference between Pušt-e Kūh and Piš-e Kūh, people in this region had a traditionally seminomadic, pastoral way of life.<sup>10</sup> They combined small-scale agricultural activities in villages with seasonal migration between the lower winter and higher summer pastures for husbandry.<sup>11</sup> With an average annual precipitation of 400 to 500 mm in the Piš-e Kūh highland and a much lower precipitation in the interior plains and valleys of the Pušt-e Kūh, dry farming was still a common form of agriculture.<sup>12</sup> In some valleys with direct river access, irrigation-based farming was performed. The extent of seasonal farming in the broader Kabir Kūh region depended on the annual precipitation and river accessibility in each valley. The entire Kabir Kūh region was located in the outer zone of dry farming.

According to the Annals of Assurbanipal, the first Elamite famine took place due to a harvest failure in Elam caused by a lack of rain in the region.<sup>13</sup> Prior to this famine, however, Assyrians were already well aware of this climatological phenomenon; it is described by the curse in King Esarhaddon's succession treaty:

May Adad, the canal inspector of heaven and earth, cut off sea[sonal flooding] from your land and deprive your fields of [grain], may he [submerge] your land with a great flood; may the locust who diminishes the land devour your harvest; may the sound of mill or oven be lacking from your houses, may the grain for grinding disappear from you; instead of grain may your sons and your daughters grind your bones.<sup>14</sup>

The curse forecasts two scenarios: no seasonal flooding with “drought” that prevents grain from growing, or severe flooding that prevents grain from being harvested. Both scenarios result in famine.

Assurbanipal's argument about aridity in the region appears accurate, particularly as it is supported by recent climate studies in the broader Tigris region.<sup>15</sup> The lower Luristan region

<sup>8</sup> Borger, *Beiträge*, 94–97, 222–23, B IV 18–86, C V 24–92.

<sup>9</sup> For the location, see Ito, “Royal Image,” 22; and Parpola, *Correspondence*, xxv–xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Mortensen, *Nomads of Luristan*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Alizadeh, who focuses on early nomadism in south-central and southwestern Iran, uses the term “mobile agropastoralists” to describe this way of life (“Rise,” 353). Potts, who uses Khazanov's definitions (*Nomads*, 19, 21–22), describes this group as practicing nomadic pastoralism or semi-sedentary pastoralism (*Nomadism in Iran*, 3–4). In *Nomadism in Iran*, Potts refutes this lifestyle in the third- to first-millennium BC due to the lack of conclusive archaeological evidence (40–46, 87). Indeed, I agree that “pastoral nomadism” in the Kabir Kūh area can be excluded for this reason. However, that same lack of archaeological (settlement) data excludes the argument for a “sedentary lifestyle” in Luristan for the early to mid-first millennium BC. Potts fails to include in his analysis the numerous dispersed textual sources, especially for the late eighth and seventh centuries BC, on the territorial movements of the myriad of tribal entities that lived in the Elamite-Mesopotamian borderlands, that is, the Lower Tigris, the Kabir Kūh (especially Pušt-e Kūh), and the head of the Persian Gulf region, which would have allowed him to come to less controversial conclusions. For a more detailed historical reconstruction on these “agropastoralist” groups with the inclusion of textual sources, see Balatti, *Mountain Peoples*, 141. For this reason, I follow Alizadeh's more anthropologically inspired model and analysis of the Elamite agropastoralist groups of Balatti.

<sup>12</sup> Mortensen, *Nomads of Luristan*, 33, 37; Alex and Wolfer, “Map.”

<sup>13</sup> Borger, *Beiträge*, B iv 18–26; Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions*, 3 iv 15–26, 6 v 24–35. Edelberg describes a similar situation during his 1964 ethnographical survey: “Many people from Huhllailān were interested in employment because the spring and summer of 1964 had been extremely dry in the whole Lurestan, and the harvest of wheat and barley that was cultivated as *dāimi* (i.e., without irrigation) had completely failed, the crops having not even come into ear. The farmers therefore needed money to buy seed to sow in the autumn” (Edelberg, “Seasonal Dwellings,” 378).

<sup>14</sup> Parpola and Watanabe, *Treaties*, 6: 440 § 47.

<sup>15</sup> Schneider and Adali, “No Harvest,” 435–46; Sinha et al., “Role of Climate.”

(Pušt-e Kūh), which was geographically connected to the eastern Mesopotamian Tigris plain, has always been susceptible to severe weather conditions. The variable hydroclimate, extending from seasonal droughts to heavy rainfall, has affected agricultural production over the last four millennia.<sup>16</sup> Drought in the Assyrian Tigris region, frequently historically asserted, usually occurred in the form of a four- to five-year dry period.<sup>17</sup> During the regnal years of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, these weather conditions have recently been identified as a “superdrought.” Adam Schneider and Selim Adali, based on paleoclimate proxy data of various Near East sites, have already established that “many parts of the Near East experienced a short but widespread dry phase during the mid- to late seventh century, which probably reached its greatest intensity during the mid-seventh century BC.”<sup>18</sup> More recent proxy data, obtained by using stable oxygen ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) and carbon ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) isotope analysis on two speleothem samples of the Kuna Ba Cave (near Sulaymaniyah, northeast Iraq), provided a more detailed climatological image of the Neo-Assyrian Tigris region near the Pušt-e Kūh.<sup>19</sup> According to Sinha et al., the highest  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values in the Kuna Ba Cave sample records are allocated to the interval between approximately 675 to 550 BC.<sup>20</sup> Within this 125-year period of aridity, referred to as the Assyrian megadrought, the proxy data show two clearly distinguishable peaks: the first major aridity peak occurred around 670 to 665 BC, and the second around 650 BC.<sup>21</sup>

This megadrought had a direct impact on crop cultivation in the region of interest. Sinha et al. further state:

cereal crop revenue over northern Iraq is highly sensitive to rainfall changes between 200 and 400 mm but is minimally sensitive to rainfall variations above 400 mm. Therefore, a northward displacement of 200 to 300 mm isohyets during the Assyrian megadrought can situate a large portion of the historical region of Assyrian heartland and hinterland under conditions where vegetation productivity would have plummeted.<sup>22</sup>

Since the regions of Der and Pušt-e Kūh were flirting with 400 mm of precipitation on average per year, that is, on the margin of rain-fed agriculture, this area must have become unsuitable for dry farming during the mid-seventh century megadrought.<sup>23</sup> Although the

<sup>16</sup> Al-Timimi and al-Jiboori, “Assessment,” 291–302.

<sup>17</sup> Reculeau, *Climate*, 14–16; Schneider and Adali, “No Harvest,” 436.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed study of the paleoclimate proxy data and the location of the sites, see Schneider and Adali, “No Harvest,” 436–37. An arid phase is recorded for Tecer Lake (Central Anatolian plateau) c. 670–630 BC; Eski Acıgöl (Central Anatolian plateau) during the mid-seventh century BC; Lake Iznik (northwest Anatolia) around 650 BC; the Jebleh plain (coastal Syria) around 600 BC; and Lake Zeribar (Central Zagros, western Iran) c. 750–650 BC.

<sup>19</sup> Despite a number of paleo-climatological studies in western Iran (for an overview, see Kehl, “Quaternary Climate Change,” 1–17), such as at Lake Almalou (Djamali et al., “Late Holocene,” 1364–75) and Lake Parishan (Djamali et al., “Olive Cultivation,” 255–69), only the proxy data from Lake Mirabad and Lake Zeribar contain relevant information—geographically and periodically—for our region of interest. However, these proxy data are less accurate for the early to mid-first millennium BC. In the pollen diagram for Lake Zeribar, zones 7b and 7c (the transition between the two phases has been dated to c. 2700 c. yr. BP, or c. 700 BC) show a high percentage of oak followed by pistachio (up to 2.5 percent) in the pollen assemblage. These two zones present a tendency toward a slight decrease of oak and an increase of grass-type pollen in zone 7b and *Plantago lanceolata*-type pollen (up to 4 percent) in 7c, which imply drier conditions than the previous zone 7a (Van Zeist and Bottema, “Palynological Investigations,” 58–59; Stevens et al. “Proposed Changes,” 744–55; Balatti, *Mountain Peoples*, 310–11). A similar pattern with a regime shift from wetter to drier conditions is recorded in the proxy data for Lake Mirabad. Due to the lower latitude and altitude of Lake Mirabad, this region was more arid than Lake Zeribar (Van Zeist and Bottema, “Palynological Investigations,” 77; Stevens et al., “Timing,” 494–500; Ballati, *Mountain Peoples*, 310–11). All these regional paleo-climatological data are integrated in the study of Sinha et al., “Role of Climate,” on which this article further builds.

<sup>20</sup> Sinha et al., “Role of Climate,” 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Figure 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Alex and Wolfer, “Map.”

Neo-Assyrian kings ordered large-scale canal and irrigation projects to counter these climatological conditions, the neighboring Pušt-e Kūh region under Elamite influence did not benefit from these hydrotechnical interventions.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, due to the mid-seventh century climatological change, the well-documented Babylonian and Elamite (fortified) towns and villages on Raši territory must have been unable to produce enough crop revenue to feed the population, encouraging these people to resume a seminomadic, pastoral way of life with a focus on husbandry.<sup>25</sup> Arkadiusz Sołtysiak noted that migrations of nomadic pastoralists to and within the Assyrian Empire related to climate changes, to periods of aridity in particular.<sup>26</sup> For herders, a year of significant drought might cause the death of entire flocks, and migration to more humid areas with grazing on arable fields would have been essential to survival.

In this case, one may wonder whether the so-called temporary resettlement of the Raši people in Assyria was a sedentary relocation or simply the result of seasonal migration. The reason for Assurbanipal's resettlement claim *within* Neo-Assyrian borders may have been the result of a change in the political status of the Der region.<sup>27</sup>

Assurbanipal's statement can be explained through closer analysis of the timeline of political events in the Der region. The peace treaty between Neo-Assyrian King Esarhaddon and Elamite King Urtak must have been concluded in Urtak's first regnal years (675–674 BC).<sup>28</sup> Der was not only an economically important area on the crossroads between Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam, but also a significant cultic center for Esarhaddon and a military base for monitoring the Zagros area and Elam.<sup>29</sup> Due to their economic, political, military, and religious importance, the Babylonian regions east of the Tigris, Der included, were officially incorporated within the boundaries of the Neo-Assyrian Empire by 671–670 BC. Therefore, at the end of Esarhaddon's reign, Der became a Neo-Assyrian province with a regional governor administration.<sup>30</sup> During the time of Esarhaddon, Raši people temporarily migrated with their flocks to winter pastures in the Babylonian region of Der, which was under Neo-Assyrian influence. These (semi)pastoral groups crossed a formal Neo-Assyrian state border under the reign of Assurbanipal, leading to Assurbanipal's claim of resettling the "Elamites" *within* Neo-Assyrian borders.

This authorized temporary settlement of predominantly Raši people was not merely an act of goodwill, as Assurbanipal would have us believe, but a keen act intended to strengthen political control over the Der region. In 668–667 BC, the citizens of Der appealed to

<sup>24</sup> Bagg, "Irrigation," 273–77.

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of the thirty-four Raši villages, see reference in Sennacherib's Annals (Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions*, 22, iv 54–81a): "On my seventh campaign, the god Aššur, my lord, encouraged me and I marched to the land Elam. In the course of my campaign, I conquered and plundered the cities Bīt-Ḫa'iri (and) Rašā, cities on the border of Assyria that the Elamites had taken away by force in the time of my ancestor(s). I had my garrisons stationed inside them. I brought (those cities) back inside the border of Assyria and placed (them) under the authority of the garrison commander of Dēr. The cities Bubê, Dunni-Šamaš, Bīt-Risiya, Bīt-Aḫlamê, Dūru, Dannat-Sulāya, Šilibtu, Bīt-Ašusi, Kār-Zēra-iqīša, Bīt-Gišši, Bīt-Katpalāni, Bīt-Imbiya, Ḫamānu, Bīt-Arrabi, Bu-ru-tu, Dim-tuša-Sulāya, Dimtu-ša-Mār-bīti-ētir, Ḫarri-ašlakê, Rabbāya, Rāsu, Akkabarina, Tīl-Uḫuri, Ḫamrānu, Nadītu, together with the cities of the passes, namely Bīt-Bunaki, Tīl-Ḫumbi, Dimtu-ša-Dume-ili, Bīt-Ubiya, Balti-lišir, Taqab-lišir, Ša-nāqīdāte, Masūtu-šapliti, Sarḫudēri, Ālum-ša-Bēlet-biti, Bīt-Aḫḫē-iddina, (and) Ilteuba—I surrounded, conquered, plundered, destroyed, devastated, (and) burned with fire (those) thirty-four fortified cities, together with the small (er) settlements in their environs, which were without number." Many of these toponyms contain elements such as *bīt* = house of (tribal marker), *dannatu* = *duru* = fortress, *dunnu* = fortified farm, *dimtu* = tower, *karu* = trading post, or even personal names (of the sheikh). We can question whether many of them were permanent settlements. As yet, there has never been a systematic survey of the Iron Age settlements in the Pušt-e Kūh region. See Overlaet, *Early Iron Age*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Sołtysiak, "Drought," 392–93; Kirleis and Herles, "Climatic Change," 7–37.

<sup>27</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 220–24.

<sup>28</sup> For more information on Urtak's political career, see Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Esarhaddon ordered major renovation works to the temple of Der (see Parpola, *Letters*, letter 349: r.11–29) and c. 680 BC returned the gods taken from the sanctuary by his predecessor, Sennacherib (Frame, *Babylonia*, 75–76).

<sup>30</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 274.

Assurbanipal due to unrest in the Der hinterland (the Pušt-i Kūh area).<sup>31</sup> Neo-Assyrian troops were sent to deal with the people of the town of Kirbitu, who plundered livestock and destroyed pasture lands in the Yamutbal district (the archaic name for the Der hinterland).<sup>32</sup> Kirbitu was captured and looted, and its ruler was deported.<sup>33</sup> Some of its people were resettled in Egypt, as people from “another land” were settled in Kirbitu.<sup>34</sup>

In particular, the final phrase in the passage of Assurbanipal’s Annals, in which he describes allowing other people to settle on the Kirbitu pastures, sheds a completely different light on the temporary relocation of the Raši people. Rather than a sincere concern for the people in Elam suffering from famine, Assurbanipal wanted to repopulate the area as fast as possible and create a loyal human buffer at his eastern border to avoid the political unrest of other mountain peoples and the Zagros vassal kingdoms.<sup>35</sup> Due to the impact of nature on their traditional pastoral grounds, the Raši people’s seasonal migration conveniently filled this need. Meanwhile, Assurbanipal turned Esarhaddon and Urtak’s old friendship agreement into a propaganda tool: supposedly demonstrating his kindness to a neighboring people, he tried to force allegiance on Elam. However, this generosity came to an end when the Neo-Elamite kings were found to be unreliable partners.<sup>36</sup> By the reign of Elamite King Tammarišu, the Raši people were ousted from the Assyrian territories and fled deep into the Zagros mountains.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Economic Measures: Grain Procurement*

Assurbanipal’s second measure was the export of Neo-Assyrian grain to Elam. However, an administrative letter from the Assyrian State Archives shows that even this claim can be approached from a different angle.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Officials Involved in Elamite Grain Procurement*

This letter was written by Babylonian ruler Šamaš-šumu-ukin to Assurbanipal and deals with a shipment of grain to Elam. Huban-nikaš, the Elamite crown prince and son of King Urtak, had come to Babylonia to buy grain and been permitted to sail away without Assurbanipal’s authorization.

Obv. 1	<i>a-na LUGAL ŠEŠ-ia</i>	11	01 02-šú <i>a-na ŠEŠ-ia áš-pur-an-ni</i>
2	IM 1 <sup>d</sup> GIŠ.NU <sub>11</sub> —MU—GI.NA	12	<i>gab-ri di-ib-bi la iš-pur-ni-ni</i>
3	<i>lu-u DI-mu a-na ŠEŠ-ia</i>	13	<i>a-na-ku ap-ta-làh <sup>1</sup>um-man-ni-gaš</i>
4	<sup>d</sup> AMAR.UTU <sup>d</sup> zar-pa-ni-tum <sup>d</sup> PA	14	<i>am-mi-i DUMU—MAN LUGAL ú-da</i>
5	<sup>d</sup> taš-me-tú <sup>d</sup> na-na-a <i>a-na</i>	15	<i>ra-as-mu šu-u mu-uk</i>
6	<i>ŠEŠ-ia lik-ru-bu</i>	16	<i>pi-ig-ta-a-te ina ŠÀ it-tu-sa-te</i>
7	<i>ina UGU <sup>GIŠ</sup>MÁ.MEŠ ša <sup>LÚ</sup>ši-i-ri</i>	17	<i>ša <sup>ŠE</sup>PAD.MEŠ an-ni-ti</i>
8	<i>am-mi-i ša áš-pur-an-ni</i>		
9	<i>a-na ŠEŠ-ia mu-uk a-sap-ra</i>	Rev. 1	<i>me-me-ni e-pa-šá</i>
10	<i>ú-ra-am-mu-u né-me-el</i>	2	<i>su-ma-me-tú i-kar-ra-ár*</i>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>32</sup> For Kirbitu, see Zadok, *Geographical Names*, 256. For the identification of Yamutbal with the Der hinterland, see Zadok, “Zur Geographie Babylonien,” 48.

<sup>33</sup> Grayson, *Chronicles*, 1 iv 37’ and 14:4.

<sup>34</sup> Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions*, 2 v1’–vi 13’.

<sup>35</sup> During the reign of Assurbanipal, Bīt-Imbi, the most important Elamite fortress for protection against Assyrian raids, was located in the Raši region. Although the Assyrian Empire never officially annexed the region, several Assyrian legates are known, all bearing Elamite names. Most village names, on the other hand, had Babylonian names. Raši was a region with a mixed ethnic profile, typical of Elamite-Mesopotamian border regions that served as buffer zones. See also Ito, “Royal Image,” 218–20, on Raši as a buffer state.

<sup>36</sup> Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 37–60.

<sup>37</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, Letter 63: 5–11, written 16-VI-647 BC (?).

<sup>38</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 104.



3	ù LUGAL ú-da a-ni-nu	11	a-šap-par mu-uk <sup>GIŠ</sup> MÁ.MEŠ
4	am—mar ša a-ni-nu-ni	12	lu la e-te-qa
5	am—mar it-us-si am—mar	13	ki-il-a e-gír-tú
6	me-me-ni la ma-ša-an-ni	14	ša <sup>1</sup> EN—BA—šá a-na LUGAL
7	a-sap-ra mu-uk <sup>GIŠ</sup> MÁ.MEŠ	15	us-se-bi-la ki-i
8	ra-am-me-ia lu-še-ti-qu	16	ša MAN i-la- <sup>3</sup> u-u-ni
9	ú-ma-a e-gír-tú	17	le-pu-uš
10	ša <sup>1</sup> EN—BA—šá* a-ta-mar		

## TRANSLATION:

(1–6) A tablet of Šamaš-šumu-ukin to the king, my brother: Good health to my brother! May Marduk, Zarpanitu, Nabû, Tašmetu and Nanaya bless my brother.

(7–9) Concerning the ships of that **envoy** about which I wrote to my brother, saying, “I have ordered that they be released”—

(10–13) Since I had repeatedly written to my brother without getting an answer, I became afraid.

(14–r.2) The king knows that **Ummanigaš**, that **crown prince**, is hot-headed. I thought, “Perhaps he will put something in the *sacks* holding this grain and cause *poisoning*.”

(r.3–r.6) The king also knows that we—any of us—are not able to do anything at all about any *sack*.

(r.7–r.12) (So) I ordered: “Release the boats, let them pass!” Now, having seen a letter of **Bel-iqiša**, I’m giving the order: “Don’t let the boats pass, hold them back!”

(r.13–r.17) I am herewith sending the letter of **Bel-iqiša** to the king. May the king act as he deems best.<sup>39</sup>

The officials mentioned in this text provide a relatively accurate time frame for dating the letter. In line 1, Šamaš-šumu-ukin was the ruler of Babylon from 668 to 648 BC, until he was defeated and killed by his brother, Assurbanipal (669–627 BC). In line 13, Ummanigaš or Huban-nikaš (II) was the crown prince under the reign of Urtak, who ruled between 675 and 664 BC.<sup>40</sup> Huban-nikaš is a well-known figure in Assyrian state correspondence and can be connected to multiple upheavals in the Assyrian borderlands and Babylonia. An Assyrian letter concerning the construction of a temple at Der informed Esarhaddon of an Elamite crown prince (Huban-nikaš) making trouble in the border region in 671 BC, that is, during or shortly after the annexation of Der by the Neo-Assyrian Empire.<sup>41</sup> Around the same time as the Elamite grain procurement trip to Babylonia, Ummanigaš also traveled to the city of Uruk, probably to prepare for the Elamite attack on Babylon in 664 BC.<sup>42</sup>

In the above letter, Šamaš-šumu-ukin describes Huban-nikaš as an Elamite envoy with an aggressive personality.<sup>43</sup> The term <sup>LÚ</sup>šī-i-ri (LÚ.MAH) is translated as “envoy” in the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* series and “chieftain” in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*.<sup>44</sup> Based on these two sources, all references to LÚ šīri point to foreign officials representing their state in Assyria.<sup>45</sup> The use of LÚ šīri makes it clear that Huban-nikaš had become an Elamite high official, actively involved in Elamite foreign politics.

<sup>39</sup> The translation follows Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 104.

<sup>40</sup> Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 39–40.

<sup>41</sup> Parpola, *Letters*, letter 349: r.19–21.

<sup>42</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 998: 5–6; Dietrich, *Die Aramäer*, 166n71; Frame, “Correspondence,” 261; Parpola, *Letters*, letter 367.

<sup>43</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 104: 13’–15’; Frame, *Babylonia*, 110–11, 129 n. 150; Ito, “Royal Image,” 154–55.

<sup>44</sup> Baker, *Specialists*, 145; Streck and Roth, *Dictionary*, §, 213 s.v. šīru A.

<sup>45</sup> Gorris, “Perilous Journeys,” 129–32.

On the reverse of the tablet, in line 10, a third person is mentioned: Bel-iqiša, the sheikh of the Gambulu tribe (‘EN-BA šá KUR.gam-bu-la-a-a’).<sup>46</sup> According to Assurbanipal’s account of his sixth campaign, Bel-iqiša—formerly a loyal servant of the Assyrian king—went over to the Elamite side, the side of King Urtak, and actively supported their raid on Uruk.<sup>47</sup>

Based on the offices held by the persons mentioned, the letter was written between 668 and 665 BC. Šamaš-šumu-ukin was appointed King of Babylon in 668 BC, and Bel-iqiša must have given up his loyalty to the Assyrians in 665 BC to join the Elamite attack on Babylon by King Urtak.<sup>48</sup> This time frame of about three years coincides with the climatological proxy data of the first major aridity peak (670–665 BC) and the political unrest in the Der region (668–667 BC) during Assurbanipal’s early regnal years. Therefore, the letter can be linked directly to the economic measures taken by the Elamite government to cope with the grain shortage during the first Neo-Elamite famine.

The involvement of the Neo-Elamite government in securing grain provisions for its population may have been a necessary step in sustaining both the kingdom’s economy and military system. At least a part of the Neo-Elamite economy was based on a grain redistribution system to which cities, towns, and tribal communities contributed.<sup>49</sup> A severe drought in one of the Elamite regions, such as Pušt-e Kūh, could have affected the broader redistribution network. The Neo-Elamite government also needed a well-stocked granary as leverage for the defense of its territory. In times of political tension between Assyria and Elam, the strategic position and military capacity of the tribal configurations and ethnic groups in the Elamite-Mesopotamian borderlands were often crucial to the Neo-Elamite state’s survival. The composition of the Elamite army consisted (partly) of a “coalition of the willing.” Under the leadership of the Elamite king, a confederate army was formed with tribal contingents who agreed to engage in battle.<sup>50</sup> The Elamite king, along with his diplomatic staff, was a master of tribal cherry-picking when it came to military strategy, and commodities were often the stakes in negotiations. In return for their military service, sheikhs mastered the art of negotiating their own political agenda (tribute or economic advantages). Especially in an era of drought, tribal groups were inclined to offer military services in exchange for grain provisions, including borderland tribes considered Neo-Assyrian clients.<sup>51</sup> The fates of the Neo-Elamite government and the (Elamite) tribal confederations were in this way intertwined, benefiting mutually from each other’s presence and strengths.

### *Elamite Methods for Grain Procurement*

The above-mentioned administrative letter provides information about the commodity supply chain between Elam and the Neo-Assyrian Empire.<sup>52</sup> It yields several interesting clues

<sup>46</sup> Radner, *Prosopography*, II, 315–316 s.v. Bel-iqiša, no. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Borger, *Beiträge*, 95 B iv 28/C v 40; Harper, *Letters*, letter 269: 10–15; Frame, *Babylonia*, 120. Although Neo-Assyrian sources focus on the malicious character of the Elamite officials and tribal leaders who made King Urtak abort his friendship agreement with Assurbanipal, economic motives may have actually been key in Urtak’s raid of Southern Mesopotamia.

<sup>48</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 111.

<sup>49</sup> For more information on the grain redistribution system, see the below section “Multilayered Factors Contributing to the Second Elamite Famine.”

<sup>50</sup> One such descriptive example of the Neo-Elamite army is found in the Annals of Sennacherib (Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions*, 22 v 43b–v 52 a), written during his campaign in the Yadburu region (692 BC): “The lands Parsuaš, Anzan, Pašeru, (and) Ellipi [Elamite regions]; the people of Yasil, Lakab(e)ra, Hjarzunu, Dummuqu, Sulāya, (and) Sam’una, (who was) a son of Merodach-baladan II [the Elamite borderland tribe]; the lands Bīt-Adini, Bīt-Amukāni, Bīt-Šilāni, Bīt-Sāla (Bīt-Sa’alli), Larak, the city Laḥīru [occupied tribes on the Assyrian side of the border]; the people (of the tribes of the) Puqudu, Gambulu, Hjalatu, Ru’u’a, Ubulu, Malaḥu, Rapiqu, Hīndaru, (and) Damunu [Assyrian client tribes that switched sides with the help of Elamite diplomacy] formed a confederation with him [the Elamite king: personification of the state].”

<sup>51</sup> For example, Harper, *Letters*, letter 1000: 11–16.

<sup>52</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 104.



about how the Elamites assured grain deliveries from Babylonia and the development of an interregional trade policy between Elam, Babylonia, and Assyria.

With a clever mix of regional diplomacy and trade, Elamite officials developed some inventive solutions for procuring grain from Babylonia. Grant Frame has expressed doubts about the loyalty of the Babylonian king, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, to Assurbanipal in this matter.<sup>53</sup> Frame wonders whether Šamaš-šumu-ukin conspired with Huban-nikaš, allowing him to depart with the grain before notifying Assurbanipal. Only when the Gambulu tribal leader, Bel-iqiša, sent out reports of the event did Šamaš-šumu-ukin hasten to write his brother, blaming Huban-nikaš's aggressive character for his own decision to let the Elamite boats pass. The Elamite royals' notoriously bad temper is a recurring theme in Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian sources.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Huban-nikaš's bad reputation and a fear of retribution would have been reasonable excuses for Šamaš-šumu-ukin to side with the Elamites unnoticed, while retaining his brother's trust. On the other hand, this proactive Elamite approach to the newly appointed Babylonian ruler may have enabled them to quickly strike a deal for grain and loading the cargo on ships. When Šamaš-šumu-ukin implies, "if Huban-nikaš had been detained, he might have retaliated by spoiling the sacks of grain already loaded on board," he is pointing out that the situation was now irreversible. Regardless of their actions, the grain would be lost. So, Assurbanipal did what was necessary to upholding his own reputation and turned this unfortunate event into a propaganda opportunity by stating in his Annals that he had sent the grain to Elam to assuage its humanitarian crisis.

However, rather than Neo-Assyrian grain export to Elam, as the title "Shipping grain to Elam" from the letter in Parpola's *Correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part I: Letters from Assyria, Babylonia, and Vassal State* suggests, the above analysis indicates the need to reformulate this historical event as "Elam's import of Babylonian/Neo-Assyrian grain." By reversing the parties' actions, Elam becomes an active player in the Southern Mesopotamia–Upper Persian Gulf commercial space, allowing historians to reevaluate Elam's role in this trade zone.

The Šamaš-šumu-ukin letter also reveals some mechanisms of Neo-Elamite trade with Babylonia. For the procurement of grain, the Elamites clearly possessed a fleet of vessels equipped for riverine trade and, in all likelihood, also maritime trade. We have numerous private archives from Babylonia describing how, during the Achaemenid period, merchants made their way from Babylonia to Susa via the canal system, following a fixed itinerary using the nar-Kabari river/canal.<sup>55</sup> The town of Bab-nar-Kabari served as a waterway station where travelers changed boats to continue their seasonal journey to Susa.<sup>56</sup> The Babylonians also paid contributions for the construction of the Royal Canal of Elam and were charged for its maintenance.<sup>57</sup>

Now, there remains a question of whether this fluvial route was among the transport options in the early to mid-first millennium BC. Due to the diverse political landscape and lack of a coordinated workforce to execute the extraordinary maintenance necessary for the canals to remain navigable, it seems highly unlikely that a canal route was operational in the early to mid-first millennium BC. At least, we have no sources to support the existence of such a fluvial route.

Trade by waterways in the early to mid-first millennium BC between Elam and Babylonia was far more likely a combined riverine and maritime venture, as Sennacherib describes in

<sup>53</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> Neo-Elamite kings and royalty accused of having a bad temper or an evil or malicious character included Huban-menanu (r. 692–688 BC), Tepti-Huban-Inšušinak I (r. 664–653 BC), Huban-nikaš II (r. 653–652/1 BC), and Tammaritu (r. 651–650 BC); see Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 36, 40–41, 52. Those who had a political career as crown prince before ascending to the Elamite throne were particularly subject to this negative character profiling. Since they often headed diplomatic delegations and interregional missions for Neo-Elamite kings, the crown princes were generally involved in anti-Assyrian operations—thus, the negative depictions.

<sup>55</sup> Waerzeggers, "Babylonians in Susa," 804; Henkelman, "Imperial Signature," 60–61.

<sup>56</sup> Abraham, *Business and Politics under the Persian Empire*, 251–255, n27.

<sup>57</sup> Waerzeggers, "Babylonians in Susa," 805–7.

his sixth campaign (694 BC).<sup>58</sup> Via the Euphrates, Mesopotamian travelers made their way to the Sealand region where they gathered at southern harbors such as Bab-salimenti to embark on seaworthy ships. When the ships reached the marshy area of the Euphrates delta, they entered the Persian Gulf (roiling sea: *tamtim gallati*) presumably via Bab-marrati, the southernmost point of Sealand. Whether or not these boats crossed the open sea at the head of the Persian Gulf or moved through the northern lagoon to reach the Elamite shore remains debatable. A river journey along the Karun River guided ships from the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf to the Elamite heartland of Susiana. The Bel-ibni archive mentions several coastal harbors at Karun River outlets, such as Mahmiti and Nagitu, which provided access to the Susiana hinterland through which travelers could complete the last stage of the Elam-Sealand waterway.<sup>59</sup>

## The Second Elamite Famine

This Elam-Sealand waterway, alongside overland routes, played an important role during the second Neo-Elamite famine (652–645 BC). Whereas the first famine was caused by harvest failure due to a lack of rain, and probably had a more local impact in the Elamite lowlands and the northernmost region, the second Neo-Elamite famine occurred in an era of political instability affecting the entire Upper Persian Gulf region. There was no monocausal explanation for the second Neo-Elamite famine. Instead, a complex combination of political, economic, and climatological factors caused a shortage of commodities beyond territorial boundaries. The second famine in the Neo-Elamite kingdom was embedded in this broad-scale humanitarian crisis in the Upper Persian Gulf area between 652 and 645 BC.

### *Multilayered Factors Contributing to the Second Elamite Famine*

The Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt (652–648 BC) in Babylonia and the Hubanid dynasty's internal struggle over political power in Elam created opportunities for Assurbanipal to strengthen his grip on Southern Mesopotamia. This display of power involved large-scale Neo-Assyrian military campaigns that destroyed most of the harvest in Southern Babylonia and the Susiana lowlands of Elam.<sup>60</sup> In addition to the disruption of agricultural lands and the Hubanid dynastic succession war, a second extended period of megadrought is recorded in the Kuna Ba Cave proxy data around 650 BC.<sup>61</sup> During these droughts, rainfall could not soak into the ground because the soil was too arid. Under such climatological conditions, a lot of rain in a short timespan or a large, sudden water increase in the river level due to melting snow in the Zagros mountains could cause floods and inundations of the coastal flatlands in the Upper Persian Gulf region, destroying seasonal crops, especially barley and wheat.

Assurbanipal dramatically describes the situation in Babylonia during the period of Elamite King Tamaritu's asylum in Nineveh (650/649–648 BC):

[a]t that time, (as for) the people of the land Akkad who had sided with Šamaš-šumu-ukin (and) plotted evil (deeds), hunger took hold of them. They ate the flesh of their sons (and) their daughters on account of their hunger.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions*, 46, 56–70.

<sup>59</sup> Gorris, "De Maritieme relaties," 9–20; Gorris, "Harbour(s)," 59–82.

<sup>60</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 181.

<sup>61</sup> Sinha et al., "Role of Climate," Figure 3.

<sup>62</sup> Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions*, 11 iv 41–45. A similar (metaphoric) phrasing is used in Assurbanipal's Annals to describe the famine of the Qedarite confederation (Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions*, ix 53–59) and the other Arab tribes (Novotny and Jeffers, *Inscriptions*, 3 viii 16–19 = 4 viii 19–22 = 194 ii 6–8) who did not honor their agreements or treaties with him and formed an alliance with Šamaš-šumu-ukin: "Famine broke out among them and they ate the flesh of their children on account of their hunger." The famines were described as a punishment from the gods for disobeying Assurbanipal.

Some contracts from Babylon, dated to the Assyrians' two-year siege (650–648 BC), noted prices of barley up to sixty times higher than the average during the Neo-Babylonian period.<sup>63</sup> Assurbanipal acknowledged in a royal letter to the governor of Ur, Sîn-tabni-ušur, that he was aware the latter had already suffered two years of famine.<sup>64</sup> Also Bel-ibni, the governor of the Sealand, reported to Assurbanipal on several occasions that the absence of a continuous food supply disrupted his operations and responsibilities. There was a lack of rations for the troops and a lack of provisions for initiating prisoner and refugee transport to the Assyrian capital.<sup>65</sup>

A similar harsh situation was documented in the Elamite Susiana region, as Bel-ibni describes the living conditions of the people there: “They grind the flour of the bitter plant, sift the seeds of the *sunġirtu* plant, that wild donkeys eat, they mix it together with their feces, they grind, sift and eat it. Hereby they live.”<sup>66</sup> Initially, the Elamite-Babylonian border region and Susiana were affected by the grain shortage, but as the interregional conflict escalated and Elam became more involved, internal political corruption in Elam contributed to the spread of the famine to the highland regions. Whereas the last Hubanid rulers could still count on grain provisions from the Elamite highland to support the lowlands, the Elamite rebel kings (650–645 BC) lacked the authority to control the grain redistribution system.

According to the partial reconstruction of Joop de Vaan's fragmentary Bel-ibni letter, several tribal groups refused to deliver their harvested revenue crops to Huban-haltaš III:

And now that the time is come for ploughing the field, and the day [for the harvest] has arrived, you will go to the military camp. We will go by no means. Ummaḥal[dašu] used to say to them: [...] “I am in charge of your harvest. [Why don't you] proceed.” (But) they say: “We ourselves will provide the food [...]. The people of our house must not di[e of hunger].”<sup>67</sup>

The refusal to contribute to the grain redistribution system was likely a reaction to corruption among the Elamite high officials overseeing the allocation of rations. The exiled Sealand prince, Nabu-bel-šumati, who understood the fragility of a system of centralized redistribution, managed to manipulate the Elamite high official in charge of grain redistribution, Umhuluma, to appropriate a part of the harvest for his entourage. On top of tribal groups' refusal to contribute to the redistribution system, King Huban-haltaš III also had to deal with the complaints of *šarnuppu* officials (“those who have been apportioned”).<sup>68</sup> The *šarnuppu* were supposed to receive the revenue crop of the highland people of Dašer (from Talah as far as Radê) and Šullake, but were left unpaid for their services by their superior:

When you (Nabu-bel-šumati) brought our rations to Umhuluma's attention, he gave our rations to you. You have killed the people of our house(s) with famine. Now you must get and give back to us every *qâ*, every *sûtu* of our rations which were expropriated.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Frame, *Babylonia*, 153.

<sup>64</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 37: 7–10; written c. 650 BC. Sîn-tabni-ušur was appointed right after the beginning of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt.

<sup>65</sup> For the troops' rations, see Harper, *Letters*, letter 1311+: r.1–22; Vaan, *Ich bin eine Schwertklinge des Königs*, 311–17. For prisoners' provisions, see Harper, *Letters*, letters 792: 8–11, and 794: r.15–16; Vaan, *Ich bin eine Schwertklinge*, 284–89.

<sup>66</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 1000: 7–11; Vaan, *Ich bin eine Schwertklinge*, 292–96.

<sup>67</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 1010: r. 6–12; Vaan, *Ich bin eine Schwertklinge*, 296–98.

<sup>68</sup> The first analysis of the *šarnuppu* was by Stolper, “šarnuppu,” 262–63. Henkelman's interpretation of the Neo-Elamite redistribution system, based on Harper, *Letters*, letter 281, was as follows: “grain was normally collected centrally and then redistributed by the crown, via its provisioners, to people who were dependent on such rations (they live on it) and who, in all likelihood, worked for the crown” (*Other Gods*, 18–19). See also Gorris, *Power and Politics*, 255.

<sup>69</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 281: r.18–25; Vaan, *Ich bin eine Schwertklinge*, 246–48.

Eventually, even the rebel kings were guilty of provisioning their own entourage with the revenue crop from the grain storages: “And when all Elam was hungry, [the king of Elam] entered the grain storage (É *bi-iš* ŠE). Revolt shall arise against him.”<sup>70</sup> The malfunctioning—perhaps even temporary collapse—of the grain redistribution system must have been a key factor contributing to the rapid spread of famine across all Elam.

Due to the lack of highland provisioning, the Elamites were forced to conduct raids on the Sealand region for grains, while the Sealand governor, Bel-ibni, responded in equal measure to provide for his own men.<sup>71</sup> Bel-ibni’s regular raids on the Elamite coast, out of economic necessity, could be seen as military actions. In one of Bel-ibni’s letters, he explains that his soldiers had captured 1500 exemplars of the king of Elam and the sheikh of Pillatu’s cattle.<sup>72</sup> The Assyrians loaded 500 cows onto boats and drowned the remaining 1000 in the Persian Gulf. Upon arrival in Sealand, Bel-ibni sent 100 well-fed oxen to the palace in Nineveh. However, because his men in Sealand were starving, he kept the rest of the cattle, distributing them as provisions.<sup>73</sup> As the Bel-ibni letters indicate, cattle and livestock comprised the majority of the goods confiscated from the Elamite coastal population.<sup>74</sup>

### Monitoring the Elam-Sealand Exchange of Commodities

As Sealand and the Elamite lowlands attempted to gain the upper hand in the food supply chain in order to feed their starving populations, several officials and tribal groups became heavily involved in commercial transport in the Upper Persian Gulf region and the exchange of goods for services. A text from the State Archives of Assyria dated to the era of the second Neo-Elamite famine mentions the journey of the *rab kāri* from Elam to Babylon.<sup>75</sup>

14' <sup>md</sup> AG.MU.BA-šá LÚ.GAL-ka-a-ru	r 7 [i-na] <sup>1</sup> KUR <sup>1</sup> .NIM.MA.KI ia-a- <sup>1</sup> nu <sup>1</sup>
b.e. 15' ul-tu KUR.NIM.MA.KI	r 8 [lu]- <sup>1</sup> ú <sup>1</sup> ú-šu-uz-zak*
b.e. 16' ki-i iḫ-ḫi-su	r 9 [LÚ].ma-aš-šar-ti ša URU 0*
b.e. 17' <sup>1</sup> še* <sup>1</sup> -du ina KUR	r 10 [x 1] <sup>1</sup> 42 <sup>1</sup> LÚ.GAL.ŠU.DU <sub>8</sub> .A.MEŠ
r 1 [x] <sup>1</sup> x x <sup>1</sup> um-ma	r 11 [šá TIN].TIR.KI 3-me GiŠ.BAN
r 2 [LÚ]. <sup>1</sup> NIM <sup>2</sup> .KI it-te-bu-nu	r 12 [ù x] <sup>1</sup> ANŠE <sup>1</sup> .KUR.RA-MEŠ
r 3 [pu]-ul-lu-ḫu	r 13 [x x x] <sup>m</sup> šu-la-a
r 4 [LÚ].EN.ḪAR.MEŠ ù a-na-ku	r 14 [x x x] <sup>1</sup> it* <sup>1</sup> -ti-šú-nu
r 5 [x a]- <sup>1</sup> na <sup>1</sup> KUR.NIM.MA.KI ki-i áš-pu-ra	r 15 [x x x] <sup>1</sup> x <sup>1</sup> -nu
r 6 [šá iḫ]-ru-šu-nu	

#### TRANSLATION:

(14'–r.2) When Nabû-šumu-iqīša, the **chief of trade**, returned from Elam, a person possessed by a demon [*appeared*] in the land, saying: “[The *Elamites*] have attacked!”  
 (r.3–8) The torc-owners were frightened. But when I sent [. . . to] Elam, there was nothing [to find] out [in] Elam. You may stand still.  
 (9–r.12) [The] garrison of the city: [1]42 (men of) the chief cupbearer of Ba]bylon, 300 archers, [and x] horses  
 (r.13–14) [. . . of] Šulaya [. . . w]ith them.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 521: r. 18–19; Vaan, *Ich bin eine Schwertklinge*, 271–75. This letter is not dated, but mentions a palace herald who killed the brother of the king and seized power (r.16–17), Indabibi (650/49–648 BC). The translation of this phrase follows the suggestion by Vaan (*Ich bin eine Schwertklinge*, 271–75), rather than reconstructions by Waterman (*Royal Correspondence*) or Harper (*Letters*).

<sup>71</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 1000: 12–r.12; also Frame, *Babylonia*, 181–82.

<sup>72</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 520, r.15–27.

<sup>73</sup> See also Bagg, “Unconquerable Country,” 261–75.

<sup>74</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letters 520 and 1000.

<sup>75</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 160.

<sup>76</sup> The translation follows Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 60.

The positioning of the Babylonian Nabû-šumu-iqīša as LÚ.GAL-*kāru* in connection with Elam is quite interesting. Heather Baker, followed by Simo Parpola, translates the office holder *rab kāri* as “chief of trade.”<sup>77</sup> However, the second element, *kāru*, actually means quay, bank, port, or harbor.<sup>78</sup> During the Neo-Assyrian period, the *rab kāri*’s office *bit kāre* (“the port house,” or custom/service station) was still a department of the state tax administration. It served as a collection point for taxes, duties, and customs and was often found in the harbor area, where a considerable number of trade goods were handled.

According to Stefan Jakob, the Neo-Assyrian *rab kāre* was “an official in charge of a custom station” or a “quay inspector.”<sup>79</sup> Kathleen Abraham defines the state official as “overseer of the quay” and the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* describes an “official in charge of a service station,” which seems far more accurate in this context.<sup>80</sup> Since most heavy trade between Elam and Babylonia ran along the waterways (sea, marshes, rivers, and canals) in the Neo-Assyrian period, the *rab kāri* in this region was also connected to water transportation.

In a detailed study on the Neo-Assyrian *rab kāri*, Shigeo Yamada defines the office as follows:

The *rab kāri* does not seem to have been a lower official placed directly under the influence of a provincial governor, but rather an independent royal deputy, directly responsible for the revenue of the royal house from the two main sources: (1) taxes imposed on merchandise and merchants passing through the trade centre(s) under his control, and (2) tribute exacted from countries of vassal status located outside the Assyrian provincial system. The *rab kāri*’s role seems to have been especially significant in connection with the exploitation of economic resources from areas outside Assyrian provincial government control. Perhaps the *rab kāris* were stationed mainly on the frontiers of the Assyrian Empire, areas open to foreign products and traders.<sup>81</sup>

This definition allows us a glimpse into the underexposed importance of the Upper Persian Gulf region to the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the broader context of interregional trade, and the impact Elam could have had on these commercial activities. A letter dated to the Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt, with a reference to the office of a “*rab kāri* of Sealand,” indicates that, in addition to the provincial governor of Sealand, an independent royal deputy was also appointed to protect Neo-Assyrian commercial interests and collect taxes at the Southern Mesopotamian gateways to and from the Persian Gulf.<sup>82</sup> Nabû-šumu-iqīša, the *rab kāri* mentioned in one of the State Archives of Assyria letters, must have held the office of *rab kāri* of Sealand.<sup>83</sup> This office may reflect increased Assyrian monitoring of Southern Mesopotamia and Elam as a result of political instability in Babylonia caused by the Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt (652–648 BC).

Despite limited information, one can compose a preliminary professional profile of the *rab kāri* of Sealand with the help of Yamada’s definition. As to imposing taxes on merchandise and merchants passing through trade centers, Akkadian sources describe at least four such settlements that must have been under the direct control of the *rab kāri* of Sealand. Based on their names, Kar-Nabû and Kar-Nanâ were both (fortified) trading posts located

<sup>77</sup> Baker, *Specialists*, 98; Parpola, *Correspondence*.

<sup>78</sup> Streck and Roth, *Dictionary*, K, 231–39.

<sup>79</sup> Jakob, *Mittelassyrische Verwaltung*, 174–75.

<sup>80</sup> Abraham, *Business and Politics*, 282 n. 44, 392 n. 102; Streck and Roth, *Dictionary*, K, 239.

<sup>81</sup> Yamada, “Kārus on the Frontiers,” 80.

<sup>82</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 1106 r. 20’: LÚ.GAL *kāru* šá KUR *tam-tim*. Based on the description of historical events, the letter was probably written before the siege of Babylon in IV-650 BC; see Frame, *Babylonia*, 158.

<sup>83</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 160.

in Sealand alongside or in the Southern Mesopotamia marshes.<sup>84</sup> Bab-(nar)-marrati and Bab-salimeti were the Persian Gulf harbors where the Neo-Assyrian fleet was stationed.<sup>85</sup> If the Neo-Assyrian king and Bel-ibni, the Sealand governor, could launch marine campaigns against Elam from these locations, then these settlements must have had docking and/or anchor facilities for commercial vessels as well. As Bab-(nar)-marrati and Bab-salimeti provided access to the Babylonian hinterland, these Babylonian gateways to and from the Persian Gulf might have been the responsibility of the *rab kārī* of Sealand.

Apart from collecting taxes from watercraft entering the Sealand province from the Persian Gulf area, the context of Parpola's letter 160 suggests that Nabû-šumu-iqiša was actively undertaking trips to Elam.<sup>86</sup> These trips might reflect the *rab kārī*'s second duty: extracting tribute from countries with a vassal status located outside the Assyrian provincial system. The Southern Mesopotamia marshes and Elamite coastal region were inhabited by a myriad of Aramean and Chaldean tribes allied with either Elam or the Neo-Assyrian Empire.<sup>87</sup> Those under the vassalage of the Neo-Assyrian king had to pay tribute of some sort, the collection of which must have been the responsibility of the *rab kārī* of Sealand.

The presence of both a governor (more precisely, a general or *turtānu* in Bel-ibni's case) and a *rab kārī* in the frontier province of Sealand, each assigned with specific duties, appears to be a well-designed Neo-Assyrian provincial administrative set up to optimize political stability in this hostile border region. However, the Bel-ibni archive shows the reality in Sealand as completely different.

By the mid-seventh century BC, the collection of tribute from the tribal groups living on the Elamite coast became problematic. Those who had formal loyalty (*adê*) agreements with Assurbanipal to pay tribute and provide military support were persuaded—through promises of life-saving provisions or rations, as they were at risk of starvation—to form alliances with Nabu-bel-šumati or an Elamite rebel king. For ten *gur* of dates, the tribes of Hilimu, Pillatu, and Nugu'u, the Yashians, and the Lakabru agreed to be Nabu-bel-šumati's mercenaries against Assyria.<sup>88</sup> Natan (sheikh of the Puqudu) and the Puqudu tribe also exchanged a loyalty promise (*temu*) with Nabu-bel-šumati in Elam, pledging to provide him with intelligence on the Assyrians. To seal this memorandum of understanding, "They led away 50 to 60 pieces of cattle for silver into his hand and said to him (Nabu-bel-šumati): 'Let our sheep come and graze in the midst of the Umayanat (tribal) pastures. In this you can trust us.'"<sup>89</sup>

The tribal groups, especially the Puqudu, played a crucial role in the overland exchange of food and provisions for both the Assyrians and Elamites. When Bel-ibni was preparing for his journey to Nineveh to hand over war captives and refugees who had arrived in Sealand, he notified Assurbanipal that he had no provision for these people due to the scarcity of food in the region: "The king, my lord, knows that there are no provisions in the land. I will purchase (*māru*) grain for dates and silver from the Puqudu and distribute it among them." This further demonstrates that Bel-ibni's grain procurement depended on the exchange of silver and dates with the Puqudu.<sup>90</sup>

Akkadian documentation shows a clear exchange pattern in the Upper Persian Gulf region: grain or livestock (mostly sheep) in exchange for dates and/or silver. Especially significant are the abundant date palms on Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs depicting battle scenes

<sup>84</sup> For Kar-Nabû, see Grayson and Novotny, *Inscriptions*, 1: 48–49. For Kar-Nanâ, see Harper, *Letters*, letter 795+: r. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Parpola et al., *Babylonian Correspondence*, letter 14; Harper, *Letters*, letters 462, 520, 1000; Borger, *Beiträge*, 40 A iii 96–100.

<sup>86</sup> Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 160; Yamada, "Kārus on the Frontiers," 77–78.

<sup>87</sup> Gorris, "Harbour(s)," 59–80.

<sup>88</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 1000: 11–16.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, letter 282: r.9–14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, letter 792: 8–11.



in Elam during the era of Assurbanipal.<sup>91</sup> Despite the peak in aridity around 650 BC, date palms seem to have flourished in the Elamite lowlands and coastal area, providing an important source of nutrition and income for the Elamites and tribal groups during the famine.

Assyrian state correspondence indicates that Assyrian officials in Southern Babylonia were anxious about the Puqudu's economic power in the Upper Persian Gulf region. Indeed, the Assyrian official Kudurru wrote to Assurbanipal with a message from Uruk that Bel-ibni told his nephew, Mušežib-Marduk (appointed as gatekeeper):

These men are not friends of the house of my lord. It is not good for them to pass over there. Through the news of the land of the king, my lord, they will open the ears of the land of Elam. If there be famine in the land of Elam, they will by this means supply them with provisions.<sup>92</sup>

It is difficult to determine exactly who “these men” in Harper's letter 277 were; however, as Kudurru's letters often dealt with the Puqudu tribe, this might be a reasonable assumption. Moreover, Puqudu shepherds were also hired to herd the Uruk temple's sheep and entrusted by Elamite King Tammarišu to deliver his offerings to the temple of Ištar of Uruk.<sup>93</sup> The fact that the Puqudu accepted herding assignments for the Uruk temple, delivered offerings from King Tammarišu to Ištar of Uruk, made a loyalty promise to Nabu-bel-šumati in Elam, and were the tribe Bel-ibni turned to for provisions shows that the Puqudu dealt with every party involved in the Šamaš-šumu-ukin revolt. As the Puqudu facilitated overland transport and communication between the Elamite kings and the Uruk region, and so held a certain level of control over the food supply chain in an era of food shortage, they were able to assume this position. To get more control over the supply chain, Bel-ibni requested that Assurbanipal send the Puqudu a clear warning:

Now let a messenger of the king, my lord, come and give Natan clearly to understand that “If you send anything to Elam for a price and if a single sheep gets over to the Elamite pasture, I will not let you live.”<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, Bel-ibni placed his nephew, Mušežib-Marduk, at the Zabdanu outpost to conduct raids against disloyal tribes, such as the Nug'u and Yashians.<sup>95</sup> His title as gatekeeper (*LÚ ša eli bâbi*) is likely linked to this outpost assignment, where Mušežib-Marduk monitored tribal groups' overland border crossings between Elam and Southern Babylonia.<sup>96</sup>

With the presence of the *rab kâri* of Sealand and a loyal trustee of Bel-ibni on a border post of Elam, Bel-ibni tried to optimize trade control over land and via waterways to reduce the food shortage in Southern Babylonia by preventing commodity flows to Elam and regulating the failing Neo-Assyrian tribute system in the Upper Persian Gulf region.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

Until now, climatological factors have been an underexplored component of historical reconstructions of the Neo-Elamite economic and political crises of the seventh century BC. The first aridity peak between 668 and 665 BC caused a major harvest failure in northeastern

<sup>91</sup> For example: Siege of Madaktu (British Museum, 135122); Battle of Til Tuba (653 BC; British Museum, 124801); Demolition of Hamanu (British Museum, 124919); Sack of Susa? (Reade, “Elam,” plates 24.2, 25, 26).

<sup>92</sup> Harper, *Letters*, letter 277: r.7–13.

<sup>93</sup> For herding of the Uruk temple flocks, see Harper, *Letters*, letter 268: 10–13; for the transport of Tammarišu's offerings, see *ibid.*, letter 268: 13–r.1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, letter 282: r.15–23.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, letter 280.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, letter 277: r.7.

<sup>97</sup> Dilmunite tribute, on the other hand, did arrive regularly in Sealand (Parpola, *Correspondence*, letter 47 [= Harper, *Letters*, letter 400]; Harper, *Letters*, letter 458, 792).

Elam (Lurestan, northern Khuzestan). This severe drought, combined with the incorporation of the northeastern Babylonian regions into the Neo-Assyrian Empire, disrupted long-standing overland trading and migratory networks. The new Neo-Assyrian territorial borders prevented the Elamite tribal configurations, such as the Raši people who lived off husbandry and agricultural exchange, from maintaining their economic model. The loss of crops in Raši villages could not be compensated for through husbandry, as the seasonal migration route was cut off by a new, well-guarded Neo-Assyrian state border, causing the first Neo-Elamite famine. Within the larger framework of the Neo-Elamite redistribution system and the lively commercial tribute relations the Elamites maintained with the mountain and marshland tribal groups (husbandry and agricultural exchange), the Susiana lowland was equally affected by the first Neo-Elamite famine on both an economic and military level.

The Neo-Elamite government countered the crop loss in the northeastern regions by importing grain from Babylonia through a variety of methods. The more precarious the situation was, the more compelling these methods became: extending from sailing to Babylonia to buy grain and pressuring Babylonian officials via aggressive threats, to violent raids on Southern Mesopotamia.

Unlike the impression Assurbanipal gives in his Annals, the Elamites were very actively involved in the exchange of goods and trading process in the Upper Persian Gulf commercial space. Although more research in this area is needed, the commercial pattern in the Upper Persian Gulf region mainly focused on the exchange of grain or livestock (mostly sheep) for dates and/or silver. Waterway transport played a crucial role in the shipment of grain from Mesopotamia to Elam, most likely comprised of a combined maritime and riverine venture, as the Neo-Elamite government had a fleet at its disposal. Regional diplomacy with Chaldean and Aramean tribes secured safe passage for Elamite boats and guaranteed a portion of the overland trade, in which the Puqudu tribe was a prominent player.

These long-term political and economic dynamics with Chaldean and Aramean tribes in the commercial network of the Upper Persian Gulf contributed to the survival of the Neo-Elamite kingdom during the second Neo-Elamite famine (650–645 BC). This famine can be described as part of a severe humanitarian crisis in the Upper Persian Gulf region, one factor for which was a megadrought, complicated by military destruction and political instability in Mesopotamia and Elam. Assyrian efforts to gain control over this interregional trade circuit by assigning prominent Neo-Assyrian officials, such as the general Bel-ibni, a “quay inspector of Sealand” and a “gatekeeper of the border outpost” in the Sealand province had limited impact. Instead, the food scarcity highlighted the Elamites’ ability to interact with tribal communities who were an integrated part of the Neo-Elamite economy and defense system, making it impossible for the Assyrians to implement their imperial agenda in the Upper Persian Gulf region.

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