

# EXPERIENCING POWER, GENERATING AUTHORITY

Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of  
Kingship in Ancient Egypt and  
Mesopotamia

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## *The Management of Royal Treasure*

### *Palace Archives and Palatial Economy in the Ancient Near East*

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The argument of this contribution starts with a methodological consideration of “palace archives,” administrative archives found in palaces, which by their specific composition reflect the political, social, economic, and religious role of the ruler. Palace archives of the ancient Near East, such as those from Early Dynastic Ebla, Ur III Puzrish-Dagan, Old Babylonian Mari, Hittite Hattusa, and Neo-Assyrian Nimrud as well as many others, deal with specific goods, namely silver and other metals, textiles, and delicacies; furthermore, these goods are not handled in the same way by any other organization, including the temples. Therefore the complex of production, exchange, and distribution of these prestigious goods may be labeled a “palatial economy.” The kinds of goods, the ways of acquisition, and the procedures for distribution remained basically constant during the two millennia documented in cuneiform archives. The following discussions always begin by using the evidence from Ebla and include examples from the Ur III empire or the Old Babylonian period, but the basic principles detected can easily be applied to other palace archives, as surveys of similar texts reveal.

#### **PALACE ARCHIVES**

Archaeological undertakings have unearthed not only architectural vestiges of ancient Near Eastern palaces and fragments of their original inventories,

but also the remains of the originally rich holdings of inscribed clay tablets stored in these palaces. As it is to be expected in the cuneiform world, most of these are administrative texts documenting the economic resources handled by the palace. The first question to be asked is which kinds of administrative documents are to be expected in an ancient Near Eastern palace. Though most documents can be described as registrations of transactions (incomes and deliveries) and as inventories, the objects treated deserve closer attention.

### **The Archive from Palace G at Ebla**

The point of departure is the oldest, and probably the most complete, palace archive ever discovered, the main archive of the Early Dynastic Palace G at Ebla, dating to the 24th century BC. Palace G was destroyed in the great wars that eventually paved the way for the rise of Sargon of Akkade (Archi and Biga 2003). In the court of reception, close to the staircase leading to the inner parts of the palace, the Italian archaeologists led by Paola Matthiae discovered several archives in 1975–76. The location near the entrance characterizes administrative archives, since this is the place where the palace interacted with the outside world and it was here the transactions took place that were documented in administrative texts.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously the administrative archives of a palace directly reflect its economy. In this regard a palace can first be viewed as a large household, an *oikos*. Its personnel had to be maintained, and here especially the production, distribution, and consumption of grain was of crucial importance. A series of texts was found in a separate small room at Ebla (L. 2712; see Milano 1990) documenting the expenditure of cereals and beer to the inhabitants and guests of the palace. This text group can be compared to the Sargonic so-called beer and bread texts or the Ur III “messenger texts” and many other similar administrative texts, all dealing with an exact report of the food and beer given out to permanent and temporary members of the household. The “beer and bread texts” of the palace of Ebla thus provide a detailed account of the persons present at the palace at a given time, including the women of the court, messengers, artists, and craftsmen.<sup>3</sup>

The main archive room (L. 2769) with its thousands of tablets was likewise situated in the so-called court of reception. According to the overview of the archive by Ebla’s epigrapher Alfonso Archi (Archi 2003a) it housed the following groups of tablets.

**Table 7.1 Overview of the Main Archive (L.2769) from Palace G at Ebla (24th c. BC)**

1. Correspondence (including correspondence with other city states, see Fronzaroli 2003; partly in vestibule L. 2875)
2. International and internal legal regulations (selection; see Fronzaroli 2003)
3. Management of the holdings of the palace and of the state (mostly early texts, incomplete)
  - 3.1. Management of agricultural land, products and personnel (see Milano 1996)
  - 3.2. Management of animal herds (see Archi 1984)
4. Administration of palace goods
  - 4.1. Annual collective accounts\* concerning the delivery of metals (especially silver) and textiles (mu-du texts)
  - 4.2. Annual collective accounts concerning the expenditure of metals (especially silver) (= AAM)
  - 4.3. Monthly collective accounts concerning the expenditure of textiles and metals (especially silver) (= MAT)
  - 4.4. Accounts concerning single transactions of metals or textiles
  - 4.5. Monthly collective accounts concerning the expenditure of meat for consumption (see Pettinato 1979)
5. Religious practice:
  - 5.1. Incantations (e.g. ARET 5, 8–19)
  - 5.2. Rituals of the ruler (ARET 11)
6. Education and literature:
  - 6.1. Literary texts including texts in Sumerian (ARET 5, 20f. etc.)
  - 6.2. Lexical lists of the Mesopotamian tradition, Eblaite lists, school texts (MEE 3 and 4 etc.; see Archi 1992)

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\* Since the annual and monthly administrative texts of Ebla repeat the full contents of various single transactions, they are labeled "collective" instead of "summary" accounts. Monthly or annual "summary" accounts, on the other hand, present totals of the various categories (as e.g. in the Ur III animal texts from Puzrish-Dagan).

The presence of the chancery documents (nos. 1 and 2 in Table 7.1) proves that this archive is *directly* linked with the center of political power. Comparable palace archives (e.g., Old Babylonian Mari) also included documents concerning the administration of labor, conscriptions, and levies. But since administrative tablets were also found in other sectors of the Ebla

palace, the main archive did not contain the complete documentation.

Within the main archive L.2769 of Ebla the documentation of the “luxury goods” metals and textiles takes by far the most space. Almost 600 large tablets list the monthly expenditure of textiles with or without objects in silver or other metals (MAT). The expenditure of objects of silver and gold, as well as those of tin and copper, was recorded in some 35 large annual documents (AAM), among these the largest administrative texts with thirty columns on each side, each containing several hundred text boxes. The annual income in gold, silver, and textiles was documented in another group of more than 30 large tablets. Several hundred smaller tablets concern individual expenditures or deliveries or special accounts of metals and textiles (Archi 2003a:35–36). To these groups, one has to add some 20 texts about animals for slaughter (*ibid.*, 28–29).

The documentation of “luxury” goods constitutes not only the largest group of administrative documents by far within the central archive of the palace of Ebla, but it can also be singled out by the size of its documentary coverage. The term “documentary coverage refers to the extent to which the network of administrative transactions is matched by the creation of written records” (Postgate 2001:184). This pertains to the amount of information about the objects and the participants of a transaction that was considered relevant for the ancient tablet scribes; sometimes it sufficed to note a total of objects (e.g., animals) and the entrepreneurs involved, in other cases the scribe described each object and identified each person delivering or receiving the commodities. This documentary coverage is closely related to the “administrative reach,” namely “the extent to which the central administration controlled the economic transactions in which it was involved,” as defined by Postgate (2001:183–84). With regard to silver and textiles in the Ebla documentation each single transaction was carefully noted. The texts indicate the exact weight of metal objects or the number and quality of textiles, they identify recipients by name and/or profession, and they describe the exact place and the circumstances of the delivery.

The fact that the administration noted each single detail in these texts becomes more relevant as in other sectors the Ebla administration adopted a different perspective. In the management of animals (Archi 1984), to cite just one example, no texts deal with the actual control of single herds and their herdsmen,<sup>4</sup> but instead the documents list high numbers of animals with various persons. Thus sometimes officials were listed as the persons

responsible for the animal herds; in other cases herding controllers,<sup>5</sup> who organized the distribution and composition of the herds and the collection of wool, were employed. This internal distribution of tasks, however, was not recorded in the documents of the palace.

The “luxury goods” of the palace archives include all that is rare and expensive: gold and silver, and the rings, cups, or bowls made from such metals; precious clothes; or fine delicacies such as fresh fruit, meat, wine, or flour made from wheat instead of barley. Obviously, it is not always possible to draw a clear-cut distinction between these palace luxury goods and goods in everyday use. Textiles, for example, were used by everyone and silver served as currency in economic transactions and so it was not exclusively a luxury good.

### Archives of the Crown or Excavated in Palaces

Ebla's is the earliest of a series of palace archives in the cuneiform cultures. In the 3rd millennium, relevant documents in larger quantities stem mainly from the Third Dynasty of Ur (2110–2003 BC). In this relatively federalist state important parts of the administration of the crown sector were not situated in the capital Ur, but in the center of Puzrish-Dagan, situated close to Nippur; most of the documents from this site deal with the administration of animals kept for meat (Sallaberger 2003–04), but there is also a small royal archive dealing with gold and silver and objects made of precious metal (Sallaberger 1999:240–52; Paoletti 2010).

Among the palace archives from the Old Babylonian period or Middle Bronze Age, those from Mari are without doubt the most important ones. There the royal correspondence was found in rooms between the two main courts; the administrative documents stem from rooms around the Court of the Date Palm, near the entrance to the inner quarters, and near secondary entrances (Durand 1985). Again, a large part of the administrative documentation deals with textiles, with precious metals, or a variety of foodstuffs and delicacies destined for the royal table.<sup>6</sup>

The same luxury goods appear also in texts from other Old Babylonian palaces: the administrative documents from the palace of Sin-kashid in Uruk include a significant group of metal texts;<sup>7</sup> some texts about textiles were discovered in the palace of Shusharra (modern Shemshara) in Northern Mesopotamia (Lower Zab);<sup>8</sup> an archive dealing with oil was found at Shubat-Enlil (Tell Lailan), the capital of the empire of Upper Mesopota-

**Table 7.2** Luxury goods in the archives of Ebla, Puzrish-Dagan (Ur III), and Mari

| <i>Early Dynastic Ebla</i><br>(24th century BC) | <i>Ur III Puzrish-Dagan</i><br>(21st century BC) | <i>Old Babylonian Mari</i><br>(18th century BC)                          |
|---|--|--|
| silver and other metals<br>(full documentation) | silver and other metals<br>(treasure archive)    | silver, metals (single<br>documents, inventories)                        |
| textiles (full<br>documentation)                |  | textiles   |
| animals for slaughter                           | central bookkeeping of<br>animals                | animals for slaughter  |
| (wine)  |  | delicacies for the royal<br>table ( <i>naptan šarrim</i> ),<br>wine, oil |

mia;<sup>9</sup> and among the documents from the palace at the site of Tell ar-Rimah one notes an archive dealing with wine.<sup>10</sup> The same holds true for palace archives of the Late Bronze Age (second half of the 2nd millennium), such as those from Alalakh, Nuzi,<sup>11</sup> and Hattusa,<sup>12</sup> and of the 1st millennium, like the Neo-Assyrian archives of Nineveh and Nimrud<sup>13</sup> and the lists of oil expenditure from Nebuchadnezzar's Southern Palace in Babylon (Pedersén 2005a, 2005b).

The documentation itself may differ. For example, texts about the production of luxury goods like those for which Mukannishum was responsible at Mari or the craft archives from Ur (time of Ibbi-Suen of Ur) or Isin (time of Ishbi-Erra and Shu-ilishu of Isin) have not been stored in the main archive of Ebla, whereas the detailed summary tablets are unique to Ebla.

A basic type of account which appears in most palace archives records the expenditure of palace goods, always including the relevant details about the goods, identifying the persons involved, and often naming the circumstances of the transaction. The full administrative reach underlines the direct participation of the palace in these transactions and shows that no other organization was involved.

### **The Exclusive Documentation of Precious Goods in Palace Archives**

Archival texts of every kind—administrative, juridical, or epistolary—obviously reflect the economic transactions and other activities of the organization in whose realm they were written, so an archive as a whole can



be regarded as a written documentation of the respective organization.<sup>14</sup> The composition, the thematic orientation, and the administrative reach of archives found in palaces lead to the following conclusion: the administration of the above-mentioned “luxury goods,” above all non-perishable and storable textiles and precious metals, but also oil and delicacies, formed a central task of the royal palace. The prototypical palace texts are the detailed documents of expenditure of palace goods. This continuously and constantly holds true for the ancient Near East, independent of possible political differences and independent of the natural resources occurring either in the southern alluvial plain dependent on irrigation agriculture or in the northern rainfall zone. This evidence of the palace archives alone demands an investigation of the phenomenon.

Although the analysis presented here will be based on administrative documents, these luxury goods are dealt with in other texts as well, namely in the correspondence of the rulers<sup>15</sup> and in royal inscriptions. As examples one may cite on the one hand the international political correspondence found at Amarna, which deals with the exchange of valuables such as lapis lazuli, horses, or gold between rulers of different countries, and on the other hand the textual and pictorial representation of the tribute delivered to Assyrian kings.

The documentation concerning the distribution of silver, textiles, and other precious goods is not only found in royal palaces through the ages, but, more importantly, such documentation can only be found there. Of course silver or textiles may appear in any archive. But only the palace and no other organization was able to handle such expensive items on such a scale that they regularly had to be documented in administrative texts. Throughout history, this distinguished the palace from the temples, which did not distribute these goods; the temples as economic organizations managed the agriculture and they received valuable donations from the ruler including gold and silver objects and thus served as a kind of treasure house.

### *Temples*

Unfortunately, no major temple archive of the Early Dynastic period has been found that might provide a direct comparison. The so-called Bawu temple archive of Girsu is the documentation of the  $e_2-mi_2$ , the “female quarter,” the household of the lady of Girsu, the ruler’s wife (Bauer 1998).

Its more than 1600 Old Sumerian administrative texts deal mainly with subsistence economy, the management of persons and agriculture. Jewelry does appear in the context of care for the temples: the lady of Girsu dedicated bronze vessels, necklaces, and other metal objects to the goddesses of the state of Lagash during their festivals, as she did for the statues of her predecessors.<sup>16</sup> This is the prototypical situation: the ruler, his family, and to a lesser extent other members of the society dedicated votive gifts, among these jewelry and other valuables, to the temples. In those transactions the ruler played the active part, whereas the temples only served as repositories.

Evidence especially from later periods demonstrates how the temples handled their treasures; instructive examples include Assur, the Ebabbar of Sippar, and Uruk's Eanna. In these temples craftsmen were employed to produce or to repair the valuable clothes, jewellery, and other utensils for the cult. But despite the internal handling of the valuable materials, expenditure lists like those from the palace archives seem to be missing in temples. The importance of temples in the control of people and of agricultural labor cannot be disputed; however, they did not actively control the politically important treasures.

#### *Tell Beydar, a Second Rank Town of the Ebla Period*

Other organizations also did not handle the "palace goods," as we defined them above, in the same way the palace did, even if the respective administration encompassed a whole town or province. It may suffice to point to a few contrasting examples from the 3rd millennium.

The texts from Nabada/Tell Beydar stem from the central administration of the town and its surroundings and thus illustrate the case of a second-rank town at the time of the Ebla archives. The administration deals with agricultural production and the management of persons, but does not deal with palace goods. Wool is collected from the community's sheep flocks, but the texts do not treat textile production. A good case in point is the distribution of animals: equids were stationed near Tell Beydar but actually belonged to the economic realm of the ruler. This is even reflected in the popular imagery of animal terracottas, since sheep dominate the finds from Tell Beydar, whereas in the capital Nagar/Tell Brak equids, the animals of the ruler, were much more common (see Pruß and Sallaberger 2003–2004).

*The Early Dynastic Household of the Lady of Girsu (e<sub>2</sub>-mi<sub>2</sub>)*

The already mentioned Early Dynastic e<sub>2</sub>-mi<sub>2</sub> archive of the lady of Girsu includes only a handful of documents that deal with silver and bronze. Silver was invested in foreign trade and entrusted to merchants,<sup>17</sup> but even here the silver was sometimes provided by the ruler himself (e.g., DP 513, 516). Gift exchange of palace goods between the ladies of various city-states is documented in a few cases (e.g., RTC 19: Adab; VS 27 98: Dilmun; DP 511: aromatic resins for the lady's mother), but for these single transactions no standardized text format was developed as it was for more common procedures of the household like the distribution of rations or of offerings. Perhaps the most impressive list of prestige goods among the e<sub>2</sub>-mi<sub>2</sub> texts—personal gifts for a prince at his marriage—states that the source of the wealth was the sovereign Lugalanda himself (DP 75).

There is no doubt where the texts pertaining to silver and other metals were kept: in the archive of the “palace” (e<sub>2</sub>-gal) of the ruler, the ensi<sub>2</sub>, or lugal of Girsu. So, for example, copper and oil were delivered to the palace (DP 343), here the weighing of the copper from Dilmun<sup>18</sup> took place, and the lady of Girsu Sasa gave metals to the merchant from the palace (VS 14 43).

In addition to silver and gold, textiles feature prominently in the palace archives. A large number of female personnel of the lady's household at Girsu were employed in textile production. Rations of wool and occasionally textiles were distributed to the employees (e.g., DP 171, 192–194; VS 14 181; VS 27 9), whereas the expenditure of more elaborate clothes was basically restricted to dedications to (the statues of) ancestors at festivals (e.g., DP 73, 77, 78; VS 14 163, 164). The production of textiles thus did not entail the right to control their distribution.

Whereas the Ur III royal archives from Puzrish-Dagan deal with the luxury goods of meat and silver, the provincial archives of Girsu and Umma concentrate on the subsistence economy. It is therefore no coincidence that the Shara-isa archive from Girsu of the time of Gudea treats palace goods, since this was a period when the ruler of Girsu was politically independent.

*Umma, Provincial Capital under the Third Dynasty of Ur*

The substantial differences between the royal palace and the provincial center can most clearly be demonstrated for Umma, capital of a core province of the state of the Third Dynasty of Ur. The thousands of archival texts

from Umma stem clearly from the center of the province, the seat of its governor (*ensi*<sub>2</sub>). An Ur III governor enjoyed relatively large independence in the internal organization of his province, whether it concerned agriculture and economy, the cult in the local sanctuaries, or judicial matters. A province was, however, obliged to deliver goods to the crown and to fulfill compulsory service in state organizations (cf. Sharlach 2004), and the provincial governor was not integrated into the army, which was completely under royal control.

The sector of animal husbandry and the expenditure of animals for slaughter clearly show the difference between the provincial and the state economy. At Umma, animals were offered in the local cults and they were delivered to the state as contributions, but no gifts to persons such as those recorded in Puzrish-Dagan are known from Umma (see Sallaberger 2003–2004:60 with reference to the evidence collected by Stępień 1996).

The rare example of expenditures of textiles or silver to messengers at Umma (e.g., MVN 16 960; Santag 6 127) in the same way as it was practiced at a royal court is indicative for our purpose. The habit of gift-giving was not restricted to the palace and therefore such a document at Umma does not come as a surprise; but only the royal court deals with these presents on a large scale, so that the relevant documents from Umma can easily be recognized as exceptions among the standard documentation on basic goods.

Concerning silver, the most prominent commodity handled by the palace, two recently published large documents from Umma are especially instructive. They deal with the annual income and expenditure of silver for two consecutive years (D'Agostino and Pomponio 2005). The first part of each text lists the sources of silver in the provincial treasury. The central office of the province of Umma received silver from the sale of local products, from numerous persons as taxes for the usufruct of agricultural products, and as payment of outstanding obligations. The sources for silver of Umma's "fiscal office" (cf. Steinkeller 2003:42 and *passim*) are also enumerated in the balanced accounts on the merchants' activities (Snell 1982). Another example is the balanced account of silver by Ur-E'e, the administrator of the district of Apishal (TCL 5 6045): silver came from the irrigation tax on fields (*maš a-ša<sub>3</sub>-ga*), from repaid debts of the shepherds, and from (the sale of) bird wings, wool, dates, apples, and bran.

Similarly at Puzrish-Dagan the shepherds had to deliver silver to the royal treasury as balance of payment for their outstanding debts in cattle

(cf. Paoletti, 2008). Such a payment in silver for obligations in commodities is already well attested in the Early Dynastic e<sub>2</sub>-mi<sub>2</sub> archive of the lady of Girsu. Silver came from the shepherds (e.g., RTC 27, VS 14 65) and was delivered instead of a lost cow (DP 103) or instead of outstanding fish deliveries (VS 14 20). Land rents were also paid in silver (e.g., VS 14 175) as was, as a rule, the irrigation tax on fields (*maš a-ša<sub>3</sub>-ga*) (RTC 75, VS 14 170; see Steinkeller 1981:130–33).

The two Umma texts for Šu-Suen year 9 (BdI E-1) and the following year Ibbi-Suen 1 (BM 106050) list not only the income, but also the expenditure of the total of silver that was collected during these years (see Table 7.3).

Only a minor part of the silver collected in many tiny sums from within the province was actually used there. Much of this silver (12.2% and 31.4%,

**Table 7.3 Silver at Ur III Umma: the situation in the province (amounts given in minas, shekels, and grains; e.g., 23, 43, 105 = 23 minas [*ma-na*] and 43 shekels [*giġ<sub>4</sub>*] and 105 grains [*še*]). Texts published by D’Agostino and Pomponio 2005**

|  | BdI E-1 (Šu-Suen 9)* | BM 106050 (Ibbi-Suen 1) |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Total income                             | 22, 28, 110.5        | 21, 16, 146             |
| Total expenditure (calculated)           | 23, 43, 105 = 100%   | 20, 54, 122 = 100%      |
| <i>mašdaria</i> -tax for royal festivals | 18, 45, 000          | 14, 15, 000             |
| statue of Šu-Suen, royal messenger       | 2, 00, 000           |                         |
| sub-total royal sector                   | 20, 45, 000 = 87.4%  | 14, 15, 000 = 68.1%     |
| cultic standards in Umma province        | 0, 05, 090 = 0.4%    | 0, 05, 090 = 0.4%       |
| at disposal of merchants                 | 2, 53, 015 = 12.2%   | 6, 34, 032 = 31.4%      |

\* Apparently, the account is correct as far as the minas and shekels are concerned, however there is slight difference of grains. Expenditure total = 23, 43, 105, whereas income (*saġ-niġ<sub>2</sub>-gur<sub>11</sub>-ra*) 22, 28, 110.5 + overdraft (*diri*) 1, 15, 42.5 = 23, 43, 153. The account for Šu-Suen 9 includes some special expenditures at the death of Šu-Suen and the coronation of Ibbi-Suen.

respectively) was then handed over to merchants. This sector is amply documented by the balanced accounts concerning the merchants' activities, which brought gold and other metals, resins, and various other exotic materials to Umma (see Snell 1982). A fixed sum, effectively less than half of a percent of the annual silver income, was stored in the form of "standards" in the main temples of the city-state.

The major part, namely 87.4% and 68.1% of the province's silver income, was delivered to the royal state cult and thus ultimately destined for the crown. At the time of the coronation of Ibbi-Suen in the tenth month of the year Shu-Suen 9, the province had to pay an extraordinary donation for a royal statue and a gift to the royal messenger, who brought the news of the new king's coronation. But most silver was converted into gold for nose rings which decorated the oxen at the state festivals at Ur (Sallaberger 1993, 1:167–69); perhaps the gold rings entered the temple of Nanna at Ur during the ceremony called "the opening of the house of silver and lapis lazuli" (Sallaberger 1993, 1:185–86). In the case of Ur under its Third Dynasty it is actually known that the treasures stored in the temples could ultimately serve the state, since Ibbi-Suen a few years later spent the treasures from the temples of Ur to buy grain from Isin for his starving population. UET 3 702 (xii. month, year Ibbi-Suen 13) lists more than 36 minas of gold of various qualities, ca. 74 minas of silver, 620 minas of bronze, and 587 minas of copper for "the purchase from Isin."

This perspective from Umma, the capital of an important province of the state of Ur, clearly underlines the central role of the treasure archive of Puzrish-Dagan as the written documentation of a royal organization.<sup>19</sup>

This survey could also be extended to later periods. In the Old Babylonian period, for example, one could point to the silver delivered by the entrepreneurs, who managed the enterprise of the palace in various economic branches (cf. Renger 2000; Stol 2004:919–44). Here again the palace dealt with the silver, gold, and other luxury items.

#### 1.4. "Great Household Archive" vs. "Palace Archive"

The simple question about the goods treated in cuneiform texts from palaces thus leads to a categorization of archives and organizations. A label like "Great Household archive," which Benjamin R. Foster used for Sargonic Girsu (1982) and which may apply to the Pre-Sargonic  $e_2$ -mi<sub>2</sub> as well, is not precise enough to describe the archive of a royal palace. According to

Foster, the “great household” differs from the “household” in “degree and scope”; its archive would include “the ‘agricultural circle’ . . . and industrial, husbandry, commercial, and military records as well. Such archives can have a wider horizon, including not only a city and its hinterland . . .”; furthermore “a political ruler can appear as principal in the records” (1982:10–11).

Ebla has taught us a different lesson: the treasures of the state, the palace goods, could *only* be managed actively by the political ruler. Their collection as taxes, gifts, and booty and their distribution as gifts and donations may be regarded as a true “materialization” of the political duties of a ruler, including both domestic and foreign politics. This is definitely a difference in quality, not quantity, and it should warn us against stressing the household metaphor beyond its limits. Although the palace of the ruler is *also* a household (see above 1.1., the example of Ebla), its archives reflect its unique function within the state.

The differentiation of archives proves to be essential for an evaluation of the institutions active in Mesopotamia. Without the documentation of a palace archive it is almost impossible to detect the central economic and political activities of a ruler. Another example from the secondary literature may be cited in this regard: “Mesopotamian kingship contrasts strongly with that of Egypt . . . It seems that kings were at first elite landowners, perhaps important figures in community assemblies, who progressively assumed more power as war leaders and who bought land from corporate landholding groups . . . In pre-Sargonic land-sale documents . . . the buyer of the land is often a ruler or high official . . . These documents show the strong difference from Egypt in how early Mesopotamian kings were able to gain power, labor, and resources. The Mesopotamian king was a local lord whose acquisition of power was internal and unrelated to conquest outside his own state” (Baines and Yoffee 1998:207). Yoffee bases his interpretation of kingship on royal inscriptions and on the evidence of land-sale documents, without elucidating the proper place of these documents in the economy and politics of the period. The presence of archives like the one from the e<sub>2</sub>-mi<sub>2</sub> of Girsu and the role of temples in the management of agricultural land then leads to the following statement: “In the earlier Mesopotamian states . . . the major economic units were palace estates and temple estates . . . The economic history of Mesopotamia must be written in terms of the dynamic forces of struggle among these economic sectors, and of degrees of intersection and cooperation among them” (Baines and

Yoffee 1998:225). The management of the agricultural resources and the interaction between temple, palace, and other institutions in this realm is a central topic of Mesopotamian economic history; but after the detection of the specific palatial economy this interaction is set into a different perspective: since the ruler alone disposed of the valuable treasures of the state, the struggle for primary resources must have seemed less threatening for him.

To sum up, the management of silver and gold and of other precious or “luxury” goods is largely dominated by the royal palace; this is reflected in the palace archives. The royal treasure can thus be seen as a defining feature of kingship in the same way as the army or control of the land was. This clear-cut distribution of resources also negates the assertion that early Mesopotamian temples should be regarded as politically leading institutions.

## VALUE OF THE PALACE GOODS

The precious palace goods did not serve the basic needs of food and clothing and were not used as everyday tools, but they stand out both for their value and their “uselessness.” The cuneiform documents provide a complete overview of the composition and extent of royal treasures, in a way that archaeological remains will never be able to convey. Textiles are completely lost and precious metals to a large part, from the archaeological record, although pictorial representations can compensate for this loss to a modest degree. But even the most detailed representations of clothes and the most beautiful gold vases do not reveal how such objects were valued in their original setting. Precisely this information is given by the documents as the next section will show.

### Indications of Value

The value of a commodity is attributed to it in its social setting. There is extensive literature on the topic of value (e.g., Appadurai 1986, Graeber 2001, Myers 2001). For the ancient Near East, Pollock (1983) has presented a strictly archaeological point of view. Unfortunately, the unrivalled wealth of cuneiform sources for a discussion of “value” in an ancient culture has been hitherto neglected and this section intends to identify and to present a few relevant aspects.

The documentation of the palace goods serves as a copious and infor-



mative source both for the enumeration of the valued goods and for the commodity value of the goods. Concerning the first point, the detailed treatment of, for example, meat for consumption in royal archives is already a first and important indicator for its high value in the contemporary world. Concerning the commodity value, the best indicators are the price equivalents in silver, which are available for most commodities in the extensive administrative archives of the 3rd millennium. (In the treatment below these silver prices are sometimes transformed into other equivalents like work days of hired men in order to allow a better evaluation.)

According to the textual evidence various factors determined the value of these palace goods:

- the “material” itself, a value based on convention, restricted access, and rarity (examples: meat, silver, wine)
- the foreign provenience indicating a special quality (examples: clothes from Mari at Ebla, equids from Nagar)
- the expense of labor (examples: gold and silver jewels, daggers, or vessels; textiles).

The character of meat as a luxury good becomes clear from the fact that meat is missing from rations lists or the composition of meals in the messenger stations of Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, documents from royal and state archives list up to thousands of cattle and tens of thousands of sheep (Sallaberger 2003–2004:48). We know the prices of some delicacies. At Ebla, a liter of wine cost 0.6 shekel (ca. 4.8 gr) of silver (Archi 1993:32); one and a half liters could have been exchanged for a sheep. This role of wine as a luxury good—against the more common beer—has been well known in modern research and is treated in depth in several contributions (e.g., Milano 1994).

Not only food but also the draught animals at the royal court had to be of exquisite quality. At Ebla, much favored were special equids (*KUNGA<sub>2</sub>*), probably a cross-breeding of domesticated donkeys and wild onagers, which were acquired at Nagar in Upper Mesopotamia (modern Tell Brak) at a distance of almost 400 km as the crow flies. These hybrids were infertile, and thus such an expensive animal could only be used during its lifetime and not for breeding. Still, for one head, 5 minas of silver were paid, five times the usual price of an equid of the same breed (*KUNGA<sub>2</sub>*) at Ebla, and enough to obtain about one hundred sheep (assuming an average price of 3 shekels; 1 sheep is 1 to 7 shekels each). A gift for the travel itself (*NIG<sub>2</sub>.KASKAL*) was not

included in the price, since it was listed separately in the documents. More than once, the palace of Ebla sent out for these most expensive equids; the remote place of origin increased their value and prestige (see e.g., Sallaberger 2000:394 and note 7).

Concerning objects of silver and gold, the value of the material itself is more relevant. The treasury texts of the Third Dynasty of Ur from Puzrish-Dagan deal largely with gifts of silver rings to dignitaries or envoys. The number and weight of the rings varies, but a typical gift may consist of two silver rings of 8 shekels each, i.e., 16 shekels.<sup>20</sup> If this amount is converted according to the exchange rates of everyday business, well known from the sale documents of the period, it corresponds to the average purchase price of two slaves (cf. Steinkeller 1989:135–38) or the hire of a worker for more than two years,<sup>21</sup> or the grain and wool rations for five adult male workers for a whole year.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 7.4 Royal gift of silver rings converted to everyday values**

| Royal gift of                                       | Corresponds to  |
|---|---|
| 2 silver rings weighing 8 shekels each = 16 shekels | price of 1 male slave (ca. 10 shekels) plus 1 ox (ca. 6 shekels)                            |
|   | or: 1 hired worker for more than 2 years (annual rate 7.6 shekels)                          |
|   | or: grain and wool rations for 5 grown-up male workers for a year (annual rate 2.8 shekels) |

In the context of the treasure archive, the rings appear to be a modest good, but a closer look reveals that they were indeed royal gifts of enormous value.

Textiles are, for us, the goods which are most difficult to evaluate. The documents, from Ebla, Mari, or other places, feature rich and subtly differentiated descriptions of textiles; at least the kind of cloth, its color, and quality were noted (cf. Sallaberger 2009). Using a diversified vocabulary, these subtle variations reveal immediately the actual importance of this differentiation and of the hierarchic ranking of textiles. Textiles were especially esteemed when they came from foreign places—for example, clothing from Mari at Ebla or from Yamkhad in Old Babylonian Mari.

## 2.2. Labor as a Factor of Value

The value of the textiles was partly determined by the quality of the wool, but to a greater extent by the expense of labor. Administrative texts record the time spent by female weavers. A few examples may suffice to illustrate this (from Waetzoldt 1972:138–40):

90 to 360 work days for flouncy cloth (<sup>tu</sup>guz-za)

150 to 355 work days for niĝ<sub>2</sub>-lim<sub>4</sub>-cloth

780, 960, 1080, or 1200 work days for special cloths

In the production of textiles two women worked at the same loom. So for the most elaborate textiles two women worked for about two years and they could produce only two niĝ<sub>2</sub>-lim<sub>4</sub>-cloths per year. Regarding the long time required for their production, the most elaborate textiles must have been richly decorated and covered with ornaments.

Precious vessels of bronze, silver, and gold were described in the administrative records in even greater detail than the textiles, thus providing relevant information besides the simple weight of the objects. Here, we find references to figurative decoration, inlays in other materials, or granulation. The descriptions of the bronze vessels in administrative texts from Mari are remarkable for their detail; they have been treated in an exemplary study by Guichard (2005). So the value of a good was determined not only by the material and its place of origin, but, in the case of textiles and metal vessels, also by its design and by the time and workmanship invested in its manufacture.

With these observations the economic dimension pertaining to the palace goods becomes obvious. It is the enormous expense of labor invested in their production that adds to their value. Without doubt labor was probably the most important (and most underestimated) factor of the economy of the ancient world. Concerning the role of labor in what he called prestige economy (*“Prestigewirtschaft”*) in ancient Egypt, Morenz 1969 wrote: “Since labor together with the corresponding factor ‘time,’ which was wastefully exploited according to modern conceptions, was the most important economic power in the pharaonic empire,”<sup>23</sup> and in connection with the use of personnel in the cult, “Therefore personnel has to be extricated from the total workforce (we repeat: the most important economic factor in ancient Egypt), which wholly or partially takes charge of the society’s duties vis-à-vis the deities.”<sup>24</sup>

The economic documents of the ancient Near East also allow quantification in this regard. A striking example is provided by the personnel

**Table 7.5** Number of personnel in the palace at Ebla after Archi 1988:135–36; here listed in decreasing order of the average number of persons. (The right-hand column gives the actual figures with the number of attestations other than one in brackets.)

| Profession  | Average | Attested Numbers                  |
|---|---------|-----------------------------------|
| "metal workers," SIMUG  | 491.4   | 460, 480, 500 (5×)                |
| "carpenters," NAGAR   | 155.4   | 140 (6×), 142, 152, 160, 260      |
| "slaves", DUMU.NITA-DUMU.NITA URDU <sub>2</sub> -URDU <sub>2</sub>        | 135     | 120 (2×), 140, 160                |
| "(of) possessions," ZA <sub>x</sub> , "of Ibbizikir"                      | 80      | 80 (4×)                           |
| "personal attendants of the lord," PA <sub>4</sub> -ŠEŠ EN                | 66.7    | 42 (3×), 56 (2×), 78, 80 (4×), 98 |
| "producer of arrows," (LU <sub>2</sub> ġešTI)-ġešTI                       | 63.1    | 60 (3×), 65 (5×)                  |
| "agents of Ibdulu"  | 56.8    | 40 (2×), 60 (7×), 68              |
| "(of) possessions of the king," ZA <sub>x</sub> EN                        | 55.1    | 16, 40 (2×), 60 (3×), 66 (5×)     |
| "overseers of teams of equids," UGULA SUR <sub>x</sub> KUNGA <sub>2</sub> | 55      | 43, 47, 60 (4×)                   |
| "agents," MAŠKIM  | 44.5    | 29, 60                            |
| "agents of (vizier) Ibbizikir"  | 42.2    | 40 (7×), 50 (2×)                  |
| "agents of Dubuhu-Hadda (the son of vizier Ibbi-zikir)"                   | 40      | 40                                |
| "doctors," <sup>a</sup> AZU   | 38.7    | 30, 40 (4×), 42                   |
| "dancers," NE.DI  | 28      | 28 (2×)                           |
| "musicians," NAR  | 27      | 26 (5×), 27, 29, 30               |
| "couriers," (LU <sub>2</sub> ) KAŠ <sub>4</sub> -KAŠ <sub>4</sub>         | 24.6    | 16, 20 (4×), 26, 29 (3×), 37      |
| "agents of HaguLum (overseer of the palace)"                              | 18.8    | 10, 20 (7×)                       |
| "barbers," KINDA  | 14      | 14                                |
| "dirge singers," BALAG-DI   | 9       | 9 (4×)                            |

working in the palace of Ebla. These people appear as recipients of their annual cloth or wool ration in the monthly expenditure documents of textiles (MAT, cf. above).

According to the lists of workers, on average almost five hundred metal workers were employed by the palace of Ebla. This was by far the largest group of its male working personnel; the groups following in size were much smaller, the carpenters comprising 140–160 men, the “slaves” about 140 men. Even if some of the smiths were employed in the production of work tools and weapons, the majority of them were probably devoted to diligent and artistic work on objects made from precious metals. It also has to be kept in mind that this army of specialized craftsmen, producing “useless” luxury goods, had to be supported by the national economy.

At Ebla an exact quantification of the personnel employed directly by the palace is possible. The evidence from other palace archives does not contradict this concentration of artisans at the royal court. A well-known example is the workshops of the royal palace of Mari under the command of Mukannishum (Rouault 1977; cf. Durand 1997:221–82).

## ACQUISITION OF PALACE GOODS

### Production, Tax, Tribute, Gift, and Booty

Palace goods could be produced at the palace itself, as is indicated at Ebla by the metal workers in the palace (see above and Table 7.5) and by the weavers engaged in textile production (e.g., Milano 1990:338). A large part of the goods arrived at the palace as taxes, tribute, and gifts from dependent organizations, cities, or provinces: examples are the annual accounts of the delivery of metals and textiles from Ebla (see Table 7.1, no. 4.1) and the delivery of silver from the province of Umma in the form of donations for the cult (see above, Table 7.3). Acquisition by trade will be treated below, whereas the reciprocal exchange of gifts with other rulers will not be considered here but will form the subject of a separate article to be published elsewhere (see note 1). Finally, royal treasures were always a target of military expeditions, as is impressively testified not only by the enumerations in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions but as is already documented for the time of Zimri-Lim of Mari with the hunt for the treasure of Shamshi-Adad (Eidem 1994). But any successful military

campaign could increase the crown's possessions through the spoils of war, including movable property, cattle and other livestock, and prisoners of war for whom sizable ransoms might be paid: the high sums recorded may indicate that this was a major goal of ancient Near Eastern warfare (cf. Waetzoldt 2003 for Old Babylonian Mari and Shehna, Archi 2003b for Ebla).

For the various ways that prestigious objects were acquired, it may suffice to refer to a passage from the Broken Obelisk of Ashur-bel-kala (1073–1056) dealing with rare and exotic animals (Grayson 1991:A.0.89.7): the king himself hunted wild bulls, elephants, and other animals, catching some animals alive for breeding in Assyria; he had merchants acquire exotic animals (iv 26–27); and finally the king of Egypt sent a crocodile, a monkey, and other beasts as diplomatic gifts (iv 29–30).

The flow of goods to the palace has not yet been studied adequately. For the early periods, which are the focus of this contribution, one would think of the delivery lists of Ebla (MU.DU texts), the transfer of animals to Puzrish-Dagan (for which a quantitative evaluation of the sources has not been carried out; cf. e.g., Sallaberger 1999:267), or the deliveries (*šūrubtum*) of textiles and metals to the Mari palace. The study of the relative importance of the various ways of acquisition such as production, confiscation, tax, tribute, gift, or booty would contribute to a better understanding of the palatial economy.

Paola Paoletti (2008) has studied the deliveries of silver to the crown as documented in the treasure archive of Puzrish-Dagan:

The high amount of silver from the herdsmen as compensation for outstanding debts of animals certainly resulted from the function of Puzrish-Dagan as the administrative center for the royal cattle. More silver was transferred from the workshops or from the palace, but the documents of

**Table 7.6 Specified income of silver in the Drehem treasure archive after Paoletti 2008; amounts given in talents, minas, and shekels; e.g., 2, 18, 15 = 2 talents (*gun*<sub>2</sub>), 18 minas (*ma-na*), and 15 shekels (*giġ*<sub>4</sub>)**

|                                 |          |                         |
|---------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| payment for arrears on animals  | 11 texts | 1, 26, 37 (ca. 43.6 kg) |
| income for the sale of gold     | 4 texts  | 2, 18, 15 (ca. 69.1 kg) |
| booty, tribute, retrieved goods | 8 texts  | 14, 58, 15 (ca. 8 kg)   |

this archive hardly ever mention the supplier's name without identifying the kind of income, a text type not treated by Paoletti (2008).

### Purchase and Trade

Trade as a means to acquire precious goods was based on the investment of silver and so has left its traces in the administrative documents. The annual expenditure documents for metals from Ebla (AAM, see Archi 1996) provide a unique source to investigate the use of royal treasures in great detail. These Ebla documents list every expenditure of silver and the silver equivalents of expenditures of gold, tin, and copper of the palace of Ebla during one year. Of the few texts published so far, two are fairly well preserved so that they can be analyzed in this context: the annual accounts of the years Ibbi-zikir 5, MEE 10, 29 (75.1918), and Ibbi-zikir 10, MEE 12, 36 (75.2429), according to the relative chronology established by Archi and Biga (2003:9). Each of these has more than 170 individual entries. In this context we are only interested in the relative amount of silver spent for "purchase" ( $NIG_2, SAM_2$ ) during a year:

According to the accounting system used by the administrative texts, all silver and gold objects whatever their form and decoration were weighed and the only thing that counted for the administration was the pure weight of metal. Silver might be disbursed as a gift, as a votive donation to the deities, or as payment in a purchase, and all these transactions are noted in substantially the same format and in the same context in the administrative texts. Although silver was perceived as a weighed material by the administration, the objects themselves differed according to their

**Table 7.7 Amounts of silver expended for trade by the palace of Ebla during the years Ibbi-zikir 5 and 10. The silver is rounded to minas (1 mina corresponds to ca. 0.47 kg)**

|                               | Total of silver distributed (as far as text is preserved) | Total of silver according to the total given in the text | Silver for purchase |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| MEE 10 29, year Ibbi-zikir 5  | 434 minas   | (449 minas)  | 108 minas = 25%     |
| MEE 12 36, year Ibbi-zikir 10 | 351 minas   | (362 minas)  | 66 minas = 19%      |

actual use. For purchase, simply the weight is indicated and thus silver coils or other forms of silver were used (cf. Paoletti 2008 for the Ur III evidence).

A considerable part of the silver of Ebla, a fifth or even a fourth of the total silver expenditures of the palace, was used for purchases (see Table 7.6). Perhaps one would expect that the treasures of the country collected in the palace would be used to acquire *necessary* materials and for investments in economic production. The following goods were purchased according to the two selected annual accounts:

a) MEE 10, 29, Ibbi-zikir 5: 108 minas spent for purchase, i.e., 24% of total expenditures

**Table 7.8a Expenditure of silver for purchases for one year according to the selected annual accounts of Ebla, measured in minas and shekels (e.g., 3, 10 = 3 minas 10 shekels)**

|                       |         |   |
|-----------------------|---------|---|
| Agricultural products | 0, 35   | "straw" (ŠE IN.BUL <sub>5</sub> )   |
|                       | 1, 18   | "straw" (ŠE IN, etc.)   |
|                       | 0, 05   | goats   |
| Delicacies            | 0, 40   | a vegetable (9 <sup>a</sup> GARAŠ <sub>3</sub> <sup>sar</sup> KUR <sup>ki</sup> ) |
| Equids                | 3, 04   | donkeys (IGI NITA)  |
|                       | 30, 00  | KUNGA <sub>2</sub> equids   |
| Stones                | 4, 00   | lapis lazuli  |
| Textiles              | 0, 06   | clothes for apprentice scribes  |
|                       | 0, 34.5 | 128 white belts for the "slaves"  |
|                       | 65, 12  | textiles from the markets   |
| Unclear               | 2, 00   | A-A   |

b) MEE 12, 36, Ibbi-zikir 10: 66,16.8 minas spent for purchase, i.e., 19% of total expenditures

Small sums were disbursed for agricultural products such as straw and for livestock such as goats and donkeys which might have been used for transport. But large amounts were spent on delicacies, lapis lazuli (4 minas in Ibbi-zikir 5), the expensive KUNGA<sub>2</sub> equids of the royal wagons (30 and 15



**Table 7.8b Expenditure of silver for purchases for one year according to the selected annual accounts of Ebla, measured in minas and shekels (e.g., 3, 10 = 3 minas 10 shekels)**

|            |         |  |
|------------|---------|--|
| Delicacies | 1, 00   | a vegetable ( <sup>9a</sup> GARAŠ <sub>3</sub> <sup>sar</sup> KUR) |
|            | 0, 05.5 | wine (ĜEŠTIN)  |
|            | 0, 01   | fish (KU <sub>6</sub> .KU <sub>6</sub> )                           |
| Equids     | 15, 00  | KUNGA <sub>2</sub> equids (hybrids)                                |
| Textiles   | 0, 25   | 100 white belts for the 'new slaves'                               |
|            | 45, 02  | textiles from the markets  |
| Wool       | 1, 33.3 | 280 "stones" of wool from Mari                                     |
|            | 3, 10   | 440 "stones" of wool from the markets                              |

minas), and above all, textiles (65 and 45 minas), thus corresponding exactly to the usual well-known luxury goods. Especially considering the large-scale production of textiles at the palace of Ebla itself (see above) and its control of enormous flocks of sheep, the extensive purchase of clothing and even wool on the market may come as a surprise.<sup>25</sup>

Other archives largely confirm this picture from Ebla. Within the Ur III treasure archive the purchased goods were gold and cedar resin, but also copper and tin.<sup>26</sup> Mari matches our expectations closely: silver was exchanged for gold and for the metals used to produce bronze, namely copper and tin, as well as for lead, but in addition resins, wool, and lapis lazuli were purchased.<sup>27</sup>

The merchants acquired the materials that were not found in Mesopotamia, namely wood and resins, precious stones and metals, in the surrounding mountain ranges. A large part of overland trade was thus linked with the prestige economy of the palace. It may be added that the sub-centers also participated in a similar way in this trade of prestige goods. According to the annual silver accounts of Umma (discussed above with Table 7.3), 12% to 30% of the silver delivered to the provincial capital was handed over to the merchants in order for them to acquire materials in the eastern mountain regions, in particular resins, which were used mainly for scented oil (Snell 1982).

The administrative texts from the ancient Near Eastern palaces thus indicate the context and the extent of the acquisition of "exotic" materi-

als and also the exchange of such materials as diplomatic gifts. At Ebla as well as in the other archives, the same commodities appear in the same contexts—both as gifts and as objects of trade. Therefore a substantial distinction between a trade in commodities and a transfer of goods through gift-giving is not appropriate for the understanding of ancient (and other) socio-economic systems, as has already been argued by scholars like Wagner-Hasel (2000, especially chapter 1) and by Reden (2003:2–4).

The cuneiform texts do, however, make a sharp terminological distinction between “purchases” (at Ebla  $NI\hat{G}_2.SAM_2$ ) and the “giving” of gifts ( $NI\hat{G}_2.BA$ )—including votive offerings to deities, which were sometimes explicitly called “gifts.” The legal act of *purchase* is carried out by merchants, working on behalf of the palace; it is always focused on the goods, there is a fixed relation between the values of the exchanged goods, and this exchange takes place without delay. These features stand in clear contrast to *gifts* which are focused on the person, have no fixed relation of values, and where the delay in the exchange is an essential part of the procedure.

Certainly the imported goods were valued in various regards: “The colour of a semi-precious stone, its religious aura and associations with specific deities; the distance travelled by the material; the hardships involved in its procurement; the status of the bearer—these and other overtones were undoubtedly heard and understood by those who witnessed the conspicuous display of materials which came to Mesopotamia from, in many cases, great distances” (Potts 2007:124). Such a perspective on the palace goods, despite its undeniable merits, tends to obliterate the distinction between the economic value and the estimation of a good. The high esteem of certain materials in a specific cultural context was ultimately the driving force behind why merchants were sent to obtain these goods. But for the ancient Near Eastern administration prices in silver were determined for the palace goods, whether exotic, luxurious, or prestigious, and so they could and can be compared with basic commodities such as barley or with work days. The same object could be considered both as a valuable royal gift (with all the associated cultural overtones) and as a commodity (that could be included in the accounts of the administration or could be bought or sold).<sup>28</sup>

### Storage and Distribution

The silver and textiles brought to the palace were stored in its treasure chambers and thence distributed according to actual needs. At Ebla, the

**Table 7.9** Table 7.9 Silver “expended” ( $E_3$ ) and “stored/present” ( $AL_6 \cdot \hat{G}AL_2$ ) in the palace of Ebla (amounts per year in minas) after Archi 1996:73; dates according to Archi and Biga 2003:8–9; MEE 10 29 and MEE 12 36 added

| Year (counted after “vizier”) | Text                 | Silver expended ( $E_3$ ) | Silver present/ stored ( $AL_6 \cdot \hat{G}AL_2$ ) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Ibrium 15                     | 75.2502              | 273.46                    | 437   |
| Ibbi-zikir 1                  | 75.1860 = MEE 10, 20 | 573                       | 430   |
| Ibbi-zikir 5                  | 75.1918 = MEE 10, 29 | 449.20                    | 630   |
| Ibbi-zikir 10                 | 75.2429 = MEE 12, 36 | 369                       | 1109  |
| Ibbi-zikir 11                 | 75.2507              | 442                       | 1200  |

annual accounts of expenditure of metals (AAM) indicate the relation between stored and distributed goods.

At Ebla, the treasure was constantly growing. According to the tabulation of Archi (1991:217) 5561 kg of silver and 179 kg of gold were delivered to the palace during ten years when Ibbi-zikir was vizier. This is an average of 556.1 kg (ca. 1183 minas) of silver, whereas 17.9 kg of gold equal ca. 89.5 kg silver (standard ratio 1:5; ca. 190 minas), thus a total of ca. 1373 minas silver (value) per year. Accordingly, the “silver present” ( $AL_6 \cdot \hat{G}AL_2$ ) should correspond to the silver delivered ( $MU.DU$ ) the same year but not expended ( $E_3$ ). However, an exact calculation of the treasure of Ebla must be postponed until all the relevant texts are published.

A considerable portion of the expensive luxury goods, acquired with much effort from various sources, was distributed for various purposes. This agrees with the character of prestige goods, which have to be ostentatiously disbursed in order for them to produce the desired effect of excessive splendor and thereby to confer power and status. This principle of conspicuous consumption, the multiple presentations of the acquired goods, has become widely known since Th. Veblen’s brilliant analysis of the “Theory of the leisure class” (Veblen 1899; cf. the second part of this essay).

The amount of silver distributed as gifts from the treasure as documented by the administrative texts underlines the general tenor of this chapter: the royal treasure, the “king’s chest” (*pisan šarrim*) as it was called at Old Babylonian Mari, was not “dead” silver hidden in the palace, but was

itself an instrument of government, carefully managed and exploited according to the political and economic circumstances.

## **THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELEVANCE OF PALACE GOODS**

Luxury goods—textiles, silver and gold, meat, and special edible delicacies—are primarily found in one specific context, namely the palace. The management of royal treasure, which can hardly be seen as a static hoard, may be called the palatial economy.<sup>29</sup> This sector of the economy emerges most clearly from the perspective of consumption, which was dictated by the needs of the king and his court. As will be discussed elsewhere (see note 1), specific segments of the society participated in the consumption of the palace goods, which were distributed by the king according to actual political requirements.

### **The Reach of the Palace Economy**

The expenditure of palace goods, which was based on political considerations, ultimately determined the economy of the crown and thus the state. Documentation of deliveries to the palace show how revenues were collected from different economic organizations. As exemplified in the annual silver balances of Umma (Table 7.3) numerous branches converted their primary goods of every kind into tiny sums of silver, which were collected by the province and then delivered to the state in the form of donations to a religious festival. Furthermore, hundreds of workers were directly employed in the production of the palace goods. Palace goods were bought on the markets from other producers, and merchants were essential for the distribution of these goods over wide distances.

So when we focus on their production, it is clear that the palace goods did not remain restricted to an elite or to the court, but pertained to the economy and politics of the whole country: a considerable part of the labor force and of the surplus of goods of the country were used to obtain and produce the palace goods, commodities which were extremely valuable but not intended for daily use. One has to underline the fact that textiles were bought by the ruler in the markets, which directly attests to the production of prestige goods also by other organizations or even by private handicraft (see above, Sallaberger 2008). Furthermore, the purchase of products by the

palace represents one of the ways in which silver was distributed within the population.<sup>30</sup> Keeping this in mind, the high percentage of silver spent by the palace to acquire textiles at the markets (see Table 7.7) has to be evaluated not only as an expression of the ruler's insatiable desire for luxury, but also at the same time and perhaps no less significantly as a program to support de-centralized production.

### **Investigating Consumption as a Heuristic Principle**

Although the palatial economy is well documented in the cuneiform archives, this prominent sector of the economy has never been treated nor has its importance been recognized. The reason for this neglect can easily be identified in the traditional perspectives of the investigation of social and economic history, namely as a form of history "from below"—thus concentrating on subsistence economy, and on production (in Marx' tradition), and on exchange (mostly in the Polanyi school)—and the almost total neglect of consumption as a heuristic principle.

A contribution by Renger (2007), who generally bases his analysis on economic exchange, may serve as an example of a very recent summary of the economy of ancient Mesopotamia. In this view, all economic organizations in the empire of the Third Dynasty of Ur are seen as parts of the "household of the ruler" (Renger 2007:190) without attaching any importance to the patent differentiation between the palace and the province as is clearly indicated in the archives (see above). According to Renger the ruler's household encompassed "individual households of the ruler, members of the royal family, high priests and the highest officials of the realm for their personal support." Sectors of the economy produced a surplus which "served exclusively ostentatious and prestige purposes" (Renger 2007:195); this refers to the palatial economy, with the substantial difference that the collection and distribution served essential socio-political purposes of the state (support of the army, diplomatic gifts, purchases, etc.; see the second part of this study).

### **The Application of the Model of Palace Economy**

As noted above, the management of silver and gold, of textiles, and of other precious or "luxury" goods is largely dominated by the royal palace; this is reflected in the palace archives. Royal treasure thus can be seen as a defining feature of kingship in the same way as the army or the control of the land are. In the section above (Acquisition of Palace Goods), evidence

has been presented showing how the acquisition of goods destined for the palace treasure affected the economy of the whole state, if one considers first of all the collection of silver in various economic branches, the workforce employed in production, purchases in the local markets besides the merchants active in long-distance trade.

The model of the palatial economy presented here has been developed out of an analysis of palace archives of the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium. Other palace archives from later periods do not contradict the basic conclusions, but of course differences existed in the respective environments. Silver was definitely more widespread from the Old Babylonian period onwards, the relationship between palace and temple or between the royal palace and seats of governors may have varied, and also the political and economic roles of palaces did not remain the same. An Early Dynastic palace of a city-state certainly did not function at the same level as for example Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

The spread of silver, textiles, and other prestigious goods in the society is essential for the recognition of their value. The widespread circulation of silver in the society, as exemplified by its use in sales and loans already in the Early Dynastic period, is a precondition for collecting silver for the crown. Therefore it is hard to draw a sharp borderline between the specific handling of silver within the palatial economy, i.e., the management of royal treasure, and any other use of silver or textiles. A single document may be ambiguous in this regard, and only a larger group of texts may reveal their institutional origin. As repeatedly indicated above, the prototypical palace texts are the detailed documents of expenditure of palace goods with their total administrative coverage of the objects concerned, the recipients, occasion, and circumstances.

Elements of the royal management of treasure are not restricted to the palace, since the principles of prestige and of gift-giving are shared by the society. Thus some documents of the Old Babylonian period have been identified that register the expenditures for banquets by notables and donations to their clients.<sup>31</sup> The extent to which other institutions act similarly or differently from the crown may contribute to an analysis of their socio-political relationship with the ruler. A few examples in this direction have been given concerning the handling of palace goods by the lady of Girsu in Early Dynastic times or by the provincial government of Umma under the kings of Ur. Only the recognition of the idealizing model of the concentration of

palace goods at the crown leads to further questions, for example, about the goldsmiths of the god Ashur (cf. Radner 1999): were they simply employed for work at the Ashur temple commissioned by the king or should they be regarded as a “realization” of the ideological role of the god Ashur as the ruler of the Assyrian empire and his temple as his “palace”?

This chapter has concentrated on the management of palace goods and has underlined their relevance for the state’s economy and for society as a whole. This does in no way negate the social and political importance of the subsistence economy. On the other hand, despite the dominant role of the temples in the management of agriculture in the 3rd millennium, it has become evident that the temples definitely do not exert a political power similar to that of a royal palace. This perspective allows us to differentiate more exactly between the various institutions and organizations in the ancient Near East instead of accepting them simply as various realizations of “households.” Some notes have been made above on the differences between palace and temple, capital and second-rank towns, royal and governor’s archives, and between prestige goods handled by the king and those handled by the governor.

Finally, one may ask if the palatial economy as described here characterizes a special type of state or kingship. The three examples chosen stem from different contexts: Early Dynastic Ebla may be described as a city-state, Puzrish-Dagan represents the royal administration of the empire of the Third Dynasty of Ur, which comprises a number of former city-states, and in the ideology of the kingship of Mari, tribal affiliation plays a central role. The management of royal treasure thus can be seen as a defining feature of kingship independent of the composition or scope of the state. The acquisition of the goods in the state and their strategic distribution according to the actual political situation are undisputed prerogatives of the king in the ancient Near East.

## **NOTES**

- 7.1 The text prepared for the meeting in Philadelphia under the title “Prestige and Loyalty: The Political Dimension of Palatial Economy in the Ancient Near East” turned out to be too long to be included in this volume. Therefore, it was decided to present here its first part on palace archives and palace goods in revised form and to publish the second part on the distribution of royal gifts elsewhere. The arguments of this contribution were first presented in a lecture on “Gifts of the Ruler” developed

between 2000 and 2003. The article has benefitted from discussions after lectures at Berlin, Munich, Venice, Oxford, the Johns Hopkins University, Yale University, later at Munich within the Graduate College “Formen von Prestige in Kulturen des Altertums,” especially with Sitta von Reden, and during the symposium at Philadelphia.

- 7.2 This topographic situation is not restricted to palace archives; note for example the scribal rooms near the entrance to the Ur III Inana temple at Nippur (Zettler 1992:67–86).
- 7.3 Milano 1990 published the texts as “ration lists,” but both the present writer (in April 2004 at a symposium celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the excavations of Ebla by Paolo Matthiae) and Lucio Milano himself (in May 2005 at a symposium on labor organized by Piotr Steinkeller and Michael Hudson) came to the conclusion that the Ebla texts cannot be labeled “ration lists,” which deal with grain distributed to the clients of an organization according to their respective rank and labor. In ancient Near Eastern studies the term “rations” is used instead of a more appropriate “salaries.” The correct identification of the Ebla beer and bread documentation invalidates the assumption of a difference in the system of labor between Ebla and Southern Mesopotamia (as it had been proposed by Milano 1989:90; for differences between Mesopotamian ration lists and Ebla see also Milano 1996:145: “le fait significatif est que l’on est en présence d’un système *sui generis*, tant du point de vue de l’enregistrement comptable, que dans sa substance”).
- 7.4 Such a documentation of the management of single herds and their herdsmen is found among the roughly contemporary texts from Tell Beydar (Sallaberger 2004), typically enough a second-rank city under the capital Nagar (which thus corresponds to Ebla).
- 7.5 *PA.MUNSUB*, corresponding to Ur III šuš<sub>3</sub> and later *NA.GADA*.
- 7.6 The comparisons for Mari are based on cursory readings of the administrative texts published in *ARM* 7, 9, 11, 12, 18, 21 to 25, 31, and articles published in *MARI* 3 and 7.
- 7.7 See the full list of the publications in Charpin 2004:410; for the metal texts see especially Sanati-Müller 1990: no. 87ff., and *ead.* 1993: nos. 202, 203; for textiles *ead.* 1994: no. 206 (textiles), see *ibid.* p. 325 on wool as rations, for production, but also as present (niĝ<sub>2</sub>.ba) especially for special services (*inūma* ...).
- 7.8 Eidem 1992, e.g., texts like nos. 109 (jewels, textiles, and oil for the royal court), 110 (textiles for the lady), 123–124 (textiles), 132 (textiles, shoes, and silver).
- 7.9 Van De Mieroop 1994.
- 7.10 Dalley, Walker, and Hawkins 1976: nos. 250–266.
- 7.11 See e.g., Mayer 1978.



- 7.12 Siegelová 1986:328ff., including the summary pp. 360–62: the administrative texts of Hattusha concern mostly textiles, but also jewels.
- 7.13 SAA 7 and 11, CTN 1–3.
- 7.14 This functional definition of an archive overcomes the problems of defining an archive either by find spot or by text types.
- 7.15 Starting with the correspondence of Ebla, for example the famous Hamazi letter *ARET* 13, 3 about the exchange of wood for equids.
- 7.16 Sumerian verb *a ru*; *DP* 69–72; *VS* 14 13; *BIN* 8 390; and *DP* 74; cf. Selz 1995:199–200.
- 7.17 E.g., *RTC* 25; *MVN* 3 10; *Nik* 1 292, 293, 300, 310, 313; *DP* 517.
- 7.18 *VS* 14 30, control of goods of Dimtur in the palace (“234 minas of copper, property of Dimtur, which the merchant Ur-Enki has brought from Dilmun. Prince Lugalanda weighed it in the palace.”); cf. *VS* 14 194.
- 7.19 The (imprecise) view that the Umma and Girsu archives belonged to the “state administration” of the Ur III economy is so deeply rooted in Assyriology that e.g., Postgate 2001 used the Umma documentation for a comparison of palace-centered systems.
- 7.20 A few examples: *AUCT* 1 176 (Ūta-mīšaram), 942 (one female singer and a dirge singer), *JCS* 10, 30 no. 10 and 31 no. 11 (an attendant, sugal<sub>7</sub>), *TrDr* 83 (a foreign messenger).
- 7.21 A hired worker received 6 liters (sila<sub>3</sub>) grain per day and he had to live on this income. One worker (ġuruš) received 2160 liters grain per year, worth 7.2 shekels (300 liters or 1 kor grain equals 1 shekel silver), plus wool of 4 minas, worth 0.4 shekels, thus an annual total value of 7.6 shekels (cf. Waetzoldt 1987:134).
- 7.22 Rations could be complemented by additional sources of income. Twelve monthly rations of a standard of 60 liters (sila<sub>3</sub>), thus 720 liters worth 2.4 shekels, plus the wool ration worth 0.4 shekels (cf. preceding note).
- 7.23 “Da diese [sc. die menschliche – W.S.] Arbeitskraft, zusammen mit dem ihr korrespondierenden und für moderne Begriffe im Raubbau verwirtschafteten Faktor ‘Zeit,’ die wichtigste ökonomische Potenz im Pharaonenreich gewesen ist” (Morenz 1969:21–22).
- 7.24 “Darum muß aus der Summe der Arbeitskräfte (wir wiederholen: des wichtigsten ökonomischen Faktors im alten Ägypten) ein Dienstpersonal freigesetzt werden, das ganz oder teilweise die Pflichten der Gesellschaft gegenüber den Göttern übernimmt” (Morenz 1969:31–32).
- 7.25 On the markets of Ebla see Biga 2002; see also Sallaberger 2008.
- 7.26 For (the purchase of) gold see Paoletti in print; copper: *AUCT* 1 661; tin: *AUCT* 2 289; stones: *CT* 32 25; cedar resin: *TCNY* 45.

- 7.27 Cf. the literature cited by Charpin 2004:471–72 and the overview by Michel 1996, which lists the objects of trade, but without an evaluation of the quantitative aspect.
- 7.28 Reden 2003:60 discusses the re-evaluation of objects according to their context, so that “singular” objects may become commodities for trade.
- 7.29 This is to be separated from the “enterprise of the palace” (German: *Palastgeschäft*), a specific form of entrepreneurship described for the Old Babylonian period.
- 7.30 See above on Ebla and note Wilcke 2007 on the governor of Umma buying goods in his province.
- 7.31 See the examples from Mari (especially the house of the diviner Asqudum), Sippar, and Larsa listed by Charpin 1996:222–23.

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