

King's Direct Control: Neo-Assyrian Qēpu Officials

Peter Dubovsky

ROME

The office of *qēpu* officials has been known in Assyrian and Babylonian administration for a long time.¹ This paper intends to examine the role of *qēpu* officials in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, taking into consideration the Neo-Assyrian letters and inscriptions.

The spelling of the term *qēpu* has been preserved in various forms. The first group of spellings represents the variants of the Neo-Assyrian contraction in the form of *qēpu*, such as *qē-e-pu* (SAA VII 128: 6) or *qe-pu* (SAA V 38: 9). Besides the Neo-Assyrian form the term has been also preserved in a Neo-Babylonian form *qīpu*, written *qī-pi* (plural; SAA XVII 43: r.1) or the term is written in the form of logograms such as LÚ.TIL.LA.GÍD.DA (SAA XVII 22: 8)². The term itself is an adjective derived from the verb *qiāpu* (*qāpu*) and means “trustworthy, trusted.”³

The translation of this term also varies:

<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>
Royal deputy (SAA II 5: r. iii 6)	<i>Kommissar</i> (Ashurb. Prism A I: 110; A IV: 104; B I: 57.68; B II: 23)
Legate (SAA I 84: 6–7)	<i>Staatskommissar</i> (San Nicolò, <i>Prosopographie</i> , 24)
Delegate (<i>Prosopography 2/II</i> , 810)	<i>Vorsteher</i> (Borger, R. <i>Die Inschriften Asarhaddons</i> , 99 r.47)
Inspector (Tiglath-pileser III Summ. 4:26')	<i>Statthalter</i> (Borger, R. <i>Die Inschriften Asarhaddons</i> , 108 r. iii:13); in the previous passage the term <i>Statthalter</i> was used for ^{l₀} <i>pāḫāti</i> ^{mes} , 99 r.47).
Officials (SAA XVI 96:14)	
Overseer (Sack 1995, 427)	

The variety of translations indicates that Assyrologists, in their translations, prefer to underline specific responsibilities of *qēpu* officials to translating the term mechanically by using the same word.

The final remark of our introduction regards the occurrences of this term in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian letters and inscriptions. The texts mentioning

1. CAD Š, 263–8.

2. For other combinations of logograms see *ibid.*, 264.

3. *Ibid.*, 263.

qēpu officials are listed in Table 1. The *qēpu* officials were active in all parts and in all the periods of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

In order to clarify at least partly this uncertainty in the Neo-Assyrian administrative system, first, I will study the role of *qēpu* officials. The data given here are organized geographically moving from Egypt to Mesopotamia. Within a given geographical area the occurrences of the term *qēpu* will be studied chronologically. At the end I will draw some conclusions, pointing out the role of *qēpu* officials in Neo-Assyrian administration.

Qēpu Officials Active in Egypt

Esarhaddon after his conquest of Memphis imposed the Assyrian administrative system on Egypt. The *qēpu* officials are, thus, listed among the Neo-Assyrian officials administrating Egypt (Borger Esarh. 65: r.47). Ashurbanipal's annals confirm that Esarhaddon, after having conquered Egypt, appointed, besides the kings and the governors, the *qēpu* officials over Egypt. Ashurbanipal's annals also add that Taharqa revolted against Assyria after Esarhaddon's death and took possession of Memphis. The pro-Assyrian rulers and Assyrian officials, *qēpu* officials included, had to escape, otherwise they faced execution. Ashurbanipal was informed about Taharqa's revolt and immediately intervened. After his conquest of Egypt he reestablished the kings, governors and *qēpu* officials to their office (Prism A I: 58–116). A few years later Tantamani orchestrated another insurrection against Assyria. Ashurbanipal once again intervened. On his arrival the kings, governors as well as *qēpu* officials⁴ of Egypt went to meet the king. By kissing his feet they recognized Ashurbanipal's suzerainty and continued to exercise their office (Prism A II: 28–48).

The *qēpu* officials active in Egypt were listed together with the top provincial officials and thus it can be concluded that the *qēpu* officials were of the same rank as local kings and Assyrian governors. As the top Neo-Assyrian officials of Egypt they were exposed to the same attacks during the anti-Assyrian revolt as the pro-Assyrian kings and Assyrian governors.

Qēpu Officials Active in the Levant

The first known Neo-Assyrian *qēpu* official was established in the Levant by Tiglath-pileser III. Tiglath-pileser III invaded Syria and Israel in 734–732 B.C. in response to the insurrection led by Damascus and Samaria. The Arabian queen Samsi joined the anti-Assyrian coalition. In the second phase of the Assyrian campaign her camp was devastated and Tiglath-pileser III appointed a *qēpu* official to supervise it. The authority of the *qēpu* official was backed up by 10,000 soldiers (TP III Summ. 4: 26').

The next *qēpu* official, Nabû-ahhe-eriba, was appointed in Tyre during Sennacherib's reign or later. His name figures in the Niniveh list of donors and contributors (SAA VII 128:6). His contribution was one linen head-cloth and it is listed after the contribution of Ilu-tatlak, the governor of Parsua. The gift of the *qēpu* officials is also mentioned in a fragmentary letter SAA XI 32 which lists the gifts of various top officials. In the preserved part of this the *qēpu* official's name is Šamaš-[xxx] (SAA XI 32: r.3–4).⁵

4. Prism F I 41–42 adds that the *qēpu* officials were those still appointed by Esarhaddon.

5. The location of the official is unknown.

The tradition of Tyrian *qēpu* officials continued and a later *qēpu* official active in Tyre is mentioned in a treaty concluded between Esarhaddon and Baal, the king of Tyre (SAA II 5). The treaty was concluded sometimes after the destruction of Sidon in 676 B.C. (Borger Esarh. p. 49, 86).⁶ In this treaty the Tyrian king Baal was appointed to oversee the Phoenician harbors along the Mediterranean coast. The authority entrusted to Baal was rather large and covered the entire territory of Philistia, two major southern Phoenician ports (Akko and Dor) and extended north up to Byblos. The control of the ports meant, among other things, surveying the trade routes leading to and from these ports (SAA II 5: r. iii 18'–21'). In order to oversee Baal's activities the Assyrians appointed a *qēpu* official in Tyre. Even though the tablet is quite fragmentary it is possible to draw at least some conclusions regarding the activities of this *qēpu* official. The *qēpu* official could/should⁷ attend councils held by the city elders. Moreover, he had to be present when royal letters were opened and read and without him no royal letter could be opened (SAA II 5: r. iii 6'–14'). These two conditions meant that the royal court controlled the convocation of the city council. The royal court could receive regular feedback about the reaction and execution of the orders contained in the royal letters and, if needed, the royal court had at its disposal an efficient instrument guaranteeing the implementation of the king's wishes.

Another *qēpu* official Immaštašu operating in the Levant was stationed in Hamu⁸ during Ashurbanipal's reign. According to the letter SAA XVII 155 Immaštašu was to come and settle down in the city of Hamu after the peace accord had been concluded between two local kings. He had probably some soldiers at his disposal.

As in Egypt, in the Levant the *qēpu* officials were of the same rank as local kings and governors. Their responsibility covered the military sphere (they had soldiers at their disposal), economic sphere (they controlled the Levantine trade), administrative/information sphere (they were present at the meetings of the city council of Tyre and thus became an important source of information).

Qēpu Officials Active in the North

The *qēpu* officials were also active along the northern frontier of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Because this territory was exposed to direct or indirect attacks from Urartu, the role of *qēpu* officials was to monitor the region. During Sargon II's reign at least one *qēpu* official was active in Kummu, a vassal state of Assyria.⁹ A very damaged letter from an unknown writer SAA V 106 indicates that the local inhabitants were not happy with the presence of this *qēpu* official whose name has not been preserved.¹⁰ The tablet mentions that there was a revolt against this *qēpu* official: "The city of Kummu in its entirety cannot stand the royal delegate." (SAA V 106 14'–15') It was the pro-Assyrian section of the Kummeans who reported the animosity of the rest of the Kummeans. Naturally in their report the servile Kummeans did not forget to underline their loyalty to the Neo-Assyrian regime. If this

6. SAA II, 29.

7. The verb is missing because the tablet is damaged at this point.

8. The city can be most likely identified with the Syrian city Hama.

9. Bradley J. Parker, *The Mechanics of Empire: The Northern Frontier of Assyria as a Case Study in Imperial Dynamics* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001) 250–1.

10. A proposal has been advanced identifying this *qēpu* official with Aššur-resuwa because the letter speaks about him also. However, this identification is far from being sure.

letter is combined with tablet SAA 107, then there was even a plot to kill this *qēpu* official. However, this letter is too fragmentary to enable one to draw any clear conclusion.

Another *qēpu* official probably active in the North is mentioned in a letter of Ša-Aššur-dubbu sent to Sargon II (SAA V 38). Ša-Aššur-dubbu was a provincial governor of Tušhan. He mentioned that a *qēpu* official came to him together with Duri-Adad, an Assyrian official. A part of a *qēpu* official's name has been preserved [x x]-*tú-šú* (SAA V 38:5). From the letter it is possible to conclude that provincial governors reported on movements of the *qēpu* officials (when they arrived and when they left) and the reconstruction of the broken parts of the tablet suggests that they also reported on what the *qēpu* officials said (SAA V 38: 6–7).

Qēpu Officials Active in Raši

The region along the foothills of Iranian mountains called Raši, was occupied by the Assyrians during Sargon II's invasion in 710 B.C.. After having secured the border with Elam, Sargon II's army turned back and passed through Raši along the piedmont road. The Elamite king controlling Raši avoided a pitched battle with Sargon II and opted to retreat into the Hamrin mountains. Therefore Sargon II had to satisfy himself with passing through evacuated cities (S II Ann 302–3).

The control of the region was provided by *qēpu* officials. To Sargon II's reign are dated three letters mentioning a *qēpu* official active in Raši. In the first letter (SAA XV 35) Nabû-bel-ka'in¹¹ received an order from the king to dispatch a letter, probably containing some important information, to Nabû-iqiša and to the *qēpu* official of Raši. The letter is dated to Sargon II's reign (707 B.C.).¹² From this letter it can be concluded that the *qēpu* officials had access to information which was not publicly available. The second letter (SAA XVII 152) also dates to Sargon II's period. It mentions a captive Elamite deposing his testimony during an investigation before the *qēpu* official of Raši. The testimony of the Elamite saved the life of the sender of the letter. Thus, this letter points to the jurisdictional dimension of the *qēpu* official's authority. In the third letter the *qēpu* official of Raši received two local officials, Balassu and Kurrala'u. The letter informs the king about this visit (SAA XVII 153: 13-r.9). The royal court, thus, received detailed reports about the activities of *qēpu* officials.

A letter from Esarhaddon's period mentions a *qēpu* official of Raši, Pa'e (SAA XVI 137). When there was pillage in one of the villages, Pa'e sent a messenger to Nippur asking for an explanation and recalling the peace treaty the Nippureans had concluded. This letter and letter SAA XV I 138 indicate that Pa'e, the *qēpu* official of Raši had the authority to give orders to the top officials of the region such as Nabû-ra'im-nišešu, the official active during Esarhaddon's reign in eastern regions of the Assyrian Empire as well as to remind the officials of their responsibility to keep the region in order.

11. Letter SAA XV 35 belongs to the series of letters concerning the Diyala region. For various possibilities determining the role of Nabû-bel-ka'in in Neo-Assyrian administration see *Prosopography 2/II*, 816.

12. SAA XV, 13.

Qēpu Officials Active in Assur

From the complaint of the mayors and elders of Assur mentioning *qēpu* officials we can deduce another use of the term *qēpu* (SAA XVI 96). According to this letter the mayors and elders of Assur were exempt from paying taxes. During the reign of Esarhaddon the people “of the house of the [governor] (of Assur)” appointed some officials LÚ.*qe-ba-a-ni* over the Inner City (Assur). The task of these officials was strictly administrative, i.e. they had to exact corn and straw taxes from the mayors and elders of Assur. Thus, in this letter the term *qēpu* is used not only for the delegate appointed directly by the king, but also for designating low-ranking officials appointed by highly-placed Assyrian officials.

Qēpu Officials Active in Birati

Nabû-bel-šumati, was a *qēpu* official active in the city of Birati located on the River Euphrates, north of Sippar, during Sargon II's reign (SAA I 84; 210; VII 58). His rights and duties were similar to those of provincial governors. He had access to the royal court and could make his appeal to the king (SAA I 210: r.6–11). He not only could, but also had to pay regular visits to the royal court. From a list of precious items issued to visiting delegations we can conclude that during one of the regular visits, he received some golden objects from the king (SAA VII 58: iii r. 21). According to SAA I 84 Nabû-bel-šumati failed to pay a regular visit to the king and received from the king a letter of rebuke asking for an explanation (SAA I 84: 11-r.2). In case of this irregular visit he was first received by Ṭab-šil-Eššara, the governor of Assur (URU.ŠA-URU),¹³ because the latter was responsible for receiving emissaries and other provincial officials (SAA I 76). Ṭab-šil-Eššara informed the king that Nabû-bel-šumati, the *qēpu* official of Birati, came to him to explain why he had been disloyal. In his report Ṭab-šil-Eššara even adds that Nabû-bel-šumati was afraid of the royal audience.

Nabû-bel-šumati, a *qēpu* official of Birati, also had at his disposal some armed servants to protect his region against the Arab tribes (SAA I 84: r.3–8). Thus, his responsibility was not limited to the city of Birati, but it extended over Sippar, about 200 km distant from Birati, including the city *Galšabri* of unknown location and it covered a part of the desert south of the Euphrates. That both SAA I 84 and 210 report on Nabû-bel-šumati suggests that despite the name of his office *qēpu*, a trustworthy official, the royal court preferred to double-check the activities of their “trustworthy” officials, using the same mechanisms as they did in the case of provincial officials.

Ṭab-šil-Eššara, the governor of Assur, mentions in his letters a Biratean who was a regular provincial official. Ṭab-šil-Eššara sent him a letter and the Biratean's task also was to provide security for messengers heading towards the royal court (SAA I 85; 87; 90). Since SAA I 84 mentions the other city rulers, it stands to reason that the Biratean, mentioned in letters SAA I 85; 87 and 90, was the city ruler of Birati. Thus, it can be concluded that Nabû-bel-šumati and his authority was independent of the local structure.

13. His eponym was 716 B.C., i.e. Sargon II's reign; SAAS II, 47.

Qēpu Officials Active in Šibtu

From the hands of ʿTab-šil-Eššara comes a letter also mentioning the *qēpu* official of the town of Šibtu, located in the vicinity of Arrapha (SAA I 97). From this letter we can gain some information about the *qēpu* office. The *qēpu* official of Šibtu was appointed in this town to survey the surrounding region. The entire area was in trouble and the governor of Arrapha had to send 100 soldiers there. The soldiers were under the command of the *qēpu* official of Šibtu who had the exclusive right to use them. According to this letter neither the governor of Arrapha, nor ʿTab-šil-Eššara could get hold of them. Therefore ʿTab-šil-Eššara suggested to the king that he send a letter to the *qēpu* official of Šibtu and ask him to remove 50 soldiers from under his authority and move them to Assur. Thus, it can be concluded that the *qēpu* official of Šibtu was under the direct command of the king and not even the governor of Assur could give him orders.

Qēpu Officials Active in Der

Šamaš-bel-ušur was acting as a *qēpu* (*qīpu*) official of Der according to letter SAA XVII 120:9.¹⁴ S. Parpola presents very solid arguments for connecting this letter with Sennacherib's 7th campaign against Elam and thus dating it to 693 B.C..¹⁵ The letter reports on the difficult period before and after the battle at Bit-Ha'iri, mentioned in this letter (SAA XVII 120: r.11–21), in which the Assyrians defeated the Elamite troops. Šamaš-bel-ušur, the *qēpu* official of Der, figures in the first part of the letter. He sent his messenger to Nabû-šuma-lišir¹⁶ and Aqar-Bel-lumur, officials in Gambulu, warning them of an imminent Elamite invasion (SAA XVII 120: 8–13). At the outset the officials of Gambulu resisted the *qēpu* official's orders, but when they learned that the messenger of the *qēpu* official was under king's orders to mobilize the people from Der as far as the river Nergal (SAA XVII 120: 14–23) they moved people to the fortified places. The second part of the letter describes the situation after the defeat of the Elamites at Bit-Ha'iri, commenting that the region returned to normal when they learned that "there (was) nothing to worry about" (SAA XVII 120: r.11–21).

14. The identity of Šamaš-bel-ušur is the theme of debate. Šamaš-bel-ušur was the sender of letters SAA XV 111–28. According to these letters he was the governor of Der. Two letters of Nabu-duru-ušur are sent to his governor (SAA XV 131, 133 and possibly also XV 129–30). Since the letters of Nabu-duru-ušur and Šamaš-bel-ušur are interconnected, it is possible to conclude that Nabu-bel-ušur was the deputy of Šamaš-bel-ušur. The problem, however, is their dating. There have been advanced two proposals. The first connects the correspondence of both officials with the crisis in Ellipi that took place shortly after 707 B.C. (SAA XV, 35); the second connects the letters with Sennacherib's 7th campaign (694–692 B.C.); see S. Parpola, "A Letter to Sennacherib Referring to the Conquest of Bit-Ha'iri and Other Events of the Year 693," in *Ex Mesopotamia et Syria Lux: Festschrift für Manfred Dietrich zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Oswald Loretz, Kay A. Metzler, & H. Schaudig; AOAT 281; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 574–6. The former, based on mentioning Dalta's name (SAA XV 129) is more preferable. Thus, it can be concluded that Šamaš-bel-ušur, the *qēpu* official of Der, was either a different person (less likely), or that the governor of Der became a *qēpu* official seeing the problems in the region.

15. *Ibid.*, 571–4.

16. Nabu-šuma-lišir, the sender of the letter, was the governor of Gambulu. His seat was Dur-Abihara, the capital of the province of Gambulu, established during Sargon II's twelfth campaign (710 B.C.); *Ibid.*, 567.

To this period, most likely, belongs a fragmentary letter SAA XV 142.¹⁷ The sender of this letter objected to the commands received from the *qēpu* official at Der who asked him for 2,000 men. The sender did not feel free to ignore the *qēpu* official's order and appealed to the king, explaining why he was not able to provide the men.

From these letters we can conclude that the *qēpu* official of Der was appointed to prepare Sennacherib's 7th campaign and to administer the region prior to the campaign. He had access to information hidden from the provincial governors, was empowered by the king to master the troops for the royal campaign and to give orders to provincial governors. Nabu-šuma-lišir, the governor of Gambulu, was afraid to disregard the *qēpu* official's commands.

Qēpu Officials Active in Kitipata

In the list of the envoys from Iran Buzī, a *qēpu* official of the city of Kitipata, is mentioned (SAA XI 31: 3–4). The name Buzī is probably of Iranian origin. The report most likely comes from the reign of Sargon II or later.¹⁸

Qēpu Officials Active in Babylonia

The most numerous references to *qēpu* officials come from Babylonia. The *qēpu* officials were active in this region through most of the Neo-Assyrian period and had different kinds of responsibilities.

Sargon II

The activities of *qēpu* officials in Babylonia during Sargon II's reign are well attested in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian letters. After the conquest of Babylonia in 710 B.C. Sargon II appointed several *qēpu* officials to control the region. TCL 3 73 mentions that the king (Sargon II) appointed a *qēpu* official over Parsumaš in order to keep the land safe.¹⁹ SAA XVII 26: 7²⁰ and SAA XVII 30: r.19' mention the *qēpu* officials active in Babylonia. The former was sent by Bel-iqiša, active during the reign of Sargon II; the latter is too damaged to enable one to draw any conclusion regarding the date.

A different picture of the *qēpu* officials active in Babylonia is presented in SAA XVII 59, addressed to Sargon II. According to this tablet there was a letter sent to the king giving the impression that it had been written by Nabû-taklak, a highly-placed Neo-Assyrian official active in Bit-Dakkuri during the reign of Sargon II. However, the commander of the fortresses of Šabhanu warned the king that that letter had been written by Nabû-taklak's *qēpu* officials. According to this report the *qēpu* officials asked the king to remove the prefect (*šaknu*) of Bit-Dakuri. It can thus be concluded that the Neo-Assyrian high official Nabû-taklak had some *qēpu* officials who were either associated with him or under his authority. Moreover, the *qēpu* officials had authority to suggest to the king that he remove the prefect (*šaknu*) of the

17. Since in both cases the *qēpu* official of Der is mentioned and both letters deal with the same issue – mustering the men – it stands to reason that both letters are dated to the same period.

18. *Prosopography I/II*, 357–8.

19. CAD Š, 265.

20. He might have been a lower-ranking *qēpu* official since there is a suffix *-šu* "his".

region. Finally, the letter indicates that even the *qēpu* officials were closely watched and the royal court received information about their dubious activities.

Another letter, SAA V 261, from Sargon II's period mentions a *qēpu* official whose name was Musani.²¹ He was appointed a *qēpu* official of a city whose name has not been preserved (SAA V 261: r.3'). This letter from an unknown sender speaks about the *qēpu* official and reports that "he (the *qēpu* official) sleeps in his house" (SAA V 261: r.4').

Another group of Sargon II's *qēpu* officials was appointed to oversee the Babylonian temples. After Sargon II's conquest the Babylonian temples between Zabban and Sippar were inspected. The inspection was conducted by Bel-iddina. Once the inspection was completed, the temples were entrusted to Nabû-ahhe-bullit, the *qēpu* official of the temple Esaggil (SAA XVII 43: r.4).

Sennacherib

The *qēpu* officials were also present in Babylonia during Sennacherib's reign acting as witnesses to business transactions. From this period is preserved the loan document SAA VI 150. In the contract it is stated that 5 ½ minas of silver belonging to Dumuqâ have been given to Balassu, the *qēpu* official and to five other officials. The money had to be returned within two years. If not, then the officials would have to pay 5 shekels for one mina every month. This contract indicates that the *qēpu* officials were not exempt from the rules regulating loan contracts. On the other hand the *qēpu* official may have been a witness to a legal transaction as well. Similarly Riba-ahhe, the *qēpu* official of Kar-Šamaš, is listed among the witnesses to the purchase of a vineyard in Tursana (SAA VI 188: r.7'). The contract is dated to Sennacherib's reign.²² A similar document (SAA XII 96) mentions that a *qēpu* official, whose name has not been preserved, was a witness to the donation by Nabû-sakip to the temple of Nabû. This *qēpu* official had been put in charge of two temples in Babylonia, one dedicated to Nabû and the other to Ninurta.

Esarhaddon

To Esarhaddon's reign is dated letter SAA XIII 178 in which Šuma-iddin, probably a priest from Babylon, informs the king about recent events in Babylonia. He reports that three servants (grooms) of a *qēpu* official whose authority extended over Borsippa made an appeal to the king. The grooms were dispatched to the royal court. A short investigation conducted by Šuma-iddin justified the appeal of these servants. The servants were to denounce the *qēpu* official, their master, saying that he had hidden two fugitives from Assyria in his house and then sent them to Borsippa. The denunciation was secret and the king was asked to act before they might learn about it and escape. Šuma-iddin, even though the transgression of the *qēpu* official was clear, did not feel authorized to intervene and capture the fugitives since they were under the aegis of the *qēpu* official. Therefore Šuma-iddin asked the king to send his messenger who was authorized to intervene. Even though the *qēpu* officials were entrusted with authority, which no local official could ignore, they were also closely watched even by their own servants. On the other hand only the king

21. According to Zadok the name is of Aramaic origin. If this were true then this would be an example of a non-Assyrian *qēpu* official; cf. *Prosopography 2/II*, 771.

22. SAA VI, 11.

could lift the immunity of the *qēpu* officials; the executor of king's will could have been a royal messenger.

Letter SAA XIII 181 indicates that the *qēpu* official operating during Esarhaddon's reign in Babylonia had power to appoint local officials, however, the appointments was made together with Šamaš-iddin.²³

The largest group of Esarhaddon's *qēpu* officials acted as the supervisors of the Babylonian temples. After Sennacherib's destruction of Esaggil in 689 B.C., Esarhaddon committed himself to rebuilding this temple complex in Babylon. At least one *qēpu* official supervised the construction. His authority was not only to oversee the work but also to stop it as well as to regulate the offerings in the temple. Letter SAA XIII 179 reports on the command of this *qēpu* official to stop construction work. His words were endowed with royal authority (SAA XIII 179: 16'). The sender of this letter is evidently not pleased by this prohibition and defended himself by listing all the works he had done so far. However, he did not dare to ignore the *qēpu* official's command and thus the regular offerings to Bel were stopped in the temple.

Another group of the temple *qēpu* officials is found in the correspondence of the Neo-Assyrian high official Mar-Issar who was appointed to reorganize temple activities in Babylonia during Esarhaddon's reign. During this period several *qēpu* officials were appointed in the local temples (cf. SAA X 352–5²⁴). Lines SAA X 364: r.4–8 confirm the presence of the *qēpu* officials in at least four major Babylonian temples (Sippar, Cutha, Hursagkalama and Dilbat). According to Mar-Issar's letter Esarhaddon concluded a loyalty agreement (*adū*) with the *qēpu* officials (SAA X 354: 19–27) and Mar-Issar gave them their shares (SAA X 354: 10–2) and they took fright when the situation became too difficult (SAA X 352: r.7–9). According to this letter the *qēpu* officials serving in the Babylonian temples seemed to be under the authority of Mar-Issar. However, Mar-Issar's authority was limited and without the presence of the *qēpu* officials he could not check the gold in the temple of Uruk (SAA X 349: e.27-r.10).

That this group of *qēpu* officials were not completely independent is also suggested by the following letter. During the visit of the bodyguard Nergal-šarru-ušur and the deputy of Laharite four *qēpu* officials were removed and new *qēpu* officials were appointed. According to Mar-Issar's letter the *qēpu* officials were removed at royal order (SAA X 364: r.4–8).

The *qēpu* officials of the Neo-Babylonian temples also attended personal and official business matters outside of Uruk. In the Neo-Babylonian temples the authority and power of *qēpu* officials was lower than the authority of the *šatammu* officials.²⁵

23. Because letter SAA XIII 181 comes probably from the hands of Šuma-iddin it possibly depicts the profile of this *qēpu* official in Babylon. First he had high authority over the construction works and offerings (SAA 179). Moreover, he could appoint local officials. The appointment of the official seemed to have been of little use since he was afraid of the son of Dakuru who had frightened some towns in Babylonia. Finally, if letter SAA 179 also belongs to this group then this *qēpu* official played a double game. On the one hand he transmitted the king's orders, but on the other hand he hid two Assyrian fugitives (SAA XIII 178).

24. A *qēpu* official is mentioned in letter SAA X 353: r.17. But this part of the tablet is so badly damaged that it is impossible to reconstruct anything out of it. Since he was mentioned in the letter sent by Mar-Issar, it is possible to conclude that the *qēpu* official was a *qēpu* official serving in one of the Babylonian temples.

25. For bibliography see R. H. Sack, "Royal and Temple Officials in Eanna and Uruk in the Chaldean Period" in *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherrn von Soden zum 85.*

Ashurbanipal

Ashurbanipal used the *qēpu* officials to control Babylonia as well. After having settled the problems in Babylonia caused by the insurrection of his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin, Ashurbanipal installed *qēpu* officials (in plural) in Babylonia (Prism A IV: 104). The *qēpu* officials were appointed together with the governors (LÚ.GAR).

Letter SAA IV 310 witnesses a query dated to Ashurbanipal's reign. The query was performed to obtain a confirmation to appoint a man whose name was inscribed on the tablet sent to the office of the royal delegate in a Babylonian temple. The result of the query was unfavorable. This tablet indicates the importance given to the appointment of a *qēpu* official – the choice case of a *qēpu* official, who was to perform his activity in a temple, was consulted by means of query.

Similarly, the removal of the *qēpu* official was also connected with a query described in SAA VIII 316: 18-r.3. Munnabitu, a Babylonian astrologer active during Esarhaddon's or Aššurbanipal's reign recommends removing some high officials including a *qēpu* official. This removal is recommended as the interpretation of the eclipse of the moon. Thus, the appointment as well as the removal of *qēpu* officials was connected with queries and sign readings.

Sin-shum-lishir

Several other letters mention the presence of *qēpu* officials at contracts. Thus, letters SAA XIV 163 and 164²⁶ indicate some special rights of the *qēpu* officials in loan contracts. These two contracts prevent the *qēpu* official and his prefect from having the usufruct of even the half of the field. Since these two officials are explicitly prohibited from having usufruct of the field it can be concluded that in some cases the *qēpu* official and his prefect could enjoy usufruct of the field even if it was transferred to a different owner.

Conclusion

From the collection of data given above we can draw following conclusions. The term *qēpu* official designates two different kinds of officials: the lower-ranking *qēpu* officials and higher-ranking *qēpu* officials. The first kind of officials is quite rare in the Neo-Assyrian documents (see the case of Assur in SAA XVI 96). The latter is used more frequently and designates the officials appointed directly by the king often by means of a query.

These higher-ranking *qēpu* officials were active in the economic sphere (for example they oversaw the Mediterranean trade); in the religious sphere (they oversaw the reconstruction of the Babylonian temples and controlled the cultic activities), in the administrative sphere (they assumed the role of the provincial governors and the city rulers), in the military sphere (they had soldiers at their disposal and were involved in preparation of the royal campaign) and in the intelligence sphere (they became an important source of information). Thus the duties and the responsibilities of the higher-ranking *qēpu* officials depended on the specific missions they were entrusted with. In terms of their responsibilities some of the *qēpu* officials were on

Geburtstag Am 19. Juni 1993 (ed. O. Loretz & M. Dietrich; AOAT 240; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995) 428.

26. The texts are dated to 622 B.C.

Table 1: The occurrences of the term qēpu in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian corpus.

Name	Location	Date	Source (SAA)
	Arabia (Samsi)	TP III	TP III Summ. 4:26'
[x x]-tū-šū	He came to Tušhan	Sargon II	V 38
	Kummu	Sargon II	V 106; 107(?)
	Raši/Araši	Sargon II	XV 35
	Raši/Araši	Sargon II	XVII 152
	Der	Sargon II	XV 142
Šamaš-bel-usur	Der	Sargon II	XVII 120
Plural	Bit-Dakkuri	Sargon II	XVII 59
Nabū-bel-šumati	Birati	Sargon II	I 84; 210; VII 58
	Sibte	Sargon II	I 97
	Babylonia	Sargon II	XVII 26
	Babylonia	Sargon II	XVII 30
		Sargon II	XVII 44
Nabū-ahhe-bullit	Babylon	Sargon II/Senn.	XVII 17
Nabū-ahhe-eriba	Tyre	Sennacherib	VII 128
Balassu		Sennacherib	VI 150
Riba-ahhe	Kar-Šamaš	Sennacherib	VI 188
	Tyre	Esarhaddon	II 5
		Esarhaddon	XVIII 203
	Borsippa	Esarhaddon	XIII 178
	Egypt	Esarhaddon	Borger Esarh. 65 r. 47; Ashurb. Prism A I 58–116
	Babylon	Esarhaddon	XIII 179
	Babylonia	Esarhaddon	XIII 181
Plural	Babylonia	Esarhaddon	X 352–355
Plural	Babylonia	Esarhaddon	X 364
	Babylonia	Esarh./Ashurb.	VIII 316
Immaštašu	Hamu	Ashurbanipal	XVII 155
	Egypt	Ashurbanipal	Ashurb. Prism A II 28–48
	Babylonia	Ashurbanipal	Ashurb. Prism A IV 104
	Assur	Ashurbanipal	IV 310
	Heart of Assyria (contract of Nabū-iqbi from Niniveh)	Sin-shum-lishir	XIV 163; 164
	Babylonia		XII 96
Šamaš-[xxx]			XI 32
?	?		XV 357
?	?		XVI 92
?	?		XVII 170

the level of the city rulers, some on the level of the provincial governors and others even above the provincial governors.

Because the responsibilities of the *qēpu* officials depended on their mission, their position in the Neo-Assyrian administrative system also depended on this specific mission. To understand the position of the *qēpu* officials in Neo-Assyrian administration it is useful to divide the Neo-Assyrian administrative system into two major branches: the Assyrian branch and the local branch. The Assyrian branch was represented by the governors, their deputies, etc. The local branch represented local kings, vassals, elders, city rulers etc. Besides this regular structure the Assyrians used special officials to control and supervise certain areas or, if needed, to support, control or oversee some links in the regular administrative structure. For these purposes there were designated two kinds of officials: short-term officials and long term officials. The former were appointed for a concrete mission that lasted for a limited time-period. To this group belong the royal messengers and body guards (*ša-qurbūti*). Typical representatives of the long-term officials were the *qēpu* officials. They were appointed by the king to accomplish certain missions lasting a longer period, often several years.

Finally the Neo-Assyrian *qēpu* officials like other high-ranking officials were also human beings and despite the name of their office (the trustworthy officials) they were also exposed to corruption. Thus the Neo-Assyrian court checked the activities of their trustworthy officials as well. The royal court used the same methods to control the activities of their *qēpu* officials as they did to control the other provincial officials.