

Belijatum: an agricultural entrepreneur in the Old Babylonian period¹

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[Summary: A group of Old Babylonian texts mentioning Belijatum, the *iššakku*, is studied here to provide an answer to the question: Was Belijatum an agricultural entrepreneur? Figures from two of the texts discussed, the so-called surface-grain texts, indicate that Belijatum rented fields at a fixed renting rate from individuals. Thus, it is argued, Belijatum took the risk of the agricultural operation, while the owner/holder of the field secured his income.]

Introduction

In recent years several studies have paid attention to the rôle of the *iššakku* in the Old Babylonian period.² Through these studies better judgement of cases of individual *iššakku*'s is possible. In most studies the question arises whether these *iššakku*'s are closely connected to a "big institution" and thus cultivate Palace/Temple fields or whether they should be considered as entrepreneurs. Arguments for both positions can be found. Most of these arguments were summed up by M. Birot, who was to conclude: "..., il ne nous est pas possible de savoir si le statut de l'*iššakkum* était celui d'un simple fermier ou d'un administrateur".³ In order to present the state-of-affairs in the *iššakku* debate, D. Charpin noted, *grosso modo*, an "institutionalist" and a "free enterprise" approach to the discussion.⁴ In our contribution we will treat the sources with the "free enterprise" paradigm in mind.

We will discuss here several difficult texts from the reign of Ammišaduqa mentioning Belijatum,

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2. M. Birot, *Tablettes d'époque babylonienne ancienne conservées au Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève* (Paris, 1968) pp. 44-46; M. de J. Ellis, *Agriculture and the State in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, 1976) pp. 27-45; N. Yoffee, *The Economic role of the Crown in the Old Babylonian Period* (Malibu, 1977) pp. 108-9; F.R. Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen der altbabylonischer Zeit* (Leiden, 1984) pp. 338-349; D. Charpin, "Le rôle économique du palais en Babylonie sous Hammurabi et ses successeurs" in: E. Lévy (ed.) *Le système palatial en Orient, Grèce et à Rome* (Leiden, 1987) pp. 114-117.

3. M. Birot, *Tablettes (o.c.)* 46.

4. D. Charpin, "Le rôle économique" (o.c.) 116.

the *iššakku*. This group is called here "the Belijatum Archive".⁵ Though difficult and diverse, the texts from this archive contain a wealth of (quantitative) information. Among the eight texts we find a letter, a list of agricultural workers, two surface-grain texts, a hire of a person, a receipt etc. Many of the texts have been discussed and/or commented upon earlier. (For comments on and collations, transliterations and translations of the single texts see the Appendix.)

The Belijatum archive allows us to look for an answer to the question referred to above: was Belijatum, the *iššakku*, an entrepreneur? We consider an entrepreneur "someone who (voluntary) accepts the position of agricultural manager without belonging to the organisation within which he will act".⁶ The agricultural entrepreneur himself will of course not carry out the heavy manual labour. He has at his disposal the capital to finance the agricultural undertaking. He hires human and animal labour for cultivation and again (a lot of) human labour in the harvest period. In addition he has to invest in barley for sowing. With all these investments he takes risks.

The Sources

We will focus our discussion on the two surface-grain texts (TCL I 230 and BBVOT I 11) and a barley-account probably concerning barley from the same fields (TCL I 168). A "surface-grain" text gives the surface measure of one (or more) field(s) in combination with (an) amount(s) of barley. In these texts it often remains unclear what the amount of barley represents. Is the amount the (expected) yield of the field in question or is it just part of this yield that has to be delivered as tax or rent?

The obverse of TCL I 230 is severely damaged but shows some expenditure items at the lower end. The preserved part of the reverse registers the surface measures of five fields, belonging to five different persons. For each field a share (*zittu*) of the yield is noted. Then the rent (*biltu*) is registered.

This surface-grain text has, together with TCL I 229, often been used in discussions on barley yields and sowing-rates.⁷

Recently another surface-grain text was published in BBVOT I as no. 11. Although Belijatum does not appear (anymore) in this broken text, the text clearly belongs to the Belijatum archive. In rev. 3', 5' & 7' we see the same sequence of persons as in TCL I 168 3, 4 & 6 and TCL I 230 rev. 33', 36' & 39': Ibissu, Ardu(m) and Sin-šemi dumu.gala.maḥ. The fields of these persons have the same size in TCL I 230 and BBVOT I 11.⁸ Lamassāni, the *naditu* of Šamaš, who appears in Edg. 1' of BBVOT I 11, also appears in many other texts of the Belijatum archive. The structure of TCL I 230 and BBVOT I 11 is very much alike; BBVOT I 11 also lists expenditures on the obv. and gives the field measures plus amounts of barley on the rev. side. But the rev. sides of both texts show a remarkable difference in terminology:

5. The archive comprises the following texts: TCL I 54; 166; 167; 168; 174; 229; 230 and BBVOT I 11. In OLA 21 84 our Belijatum may also be mentioned. Although we use here the term "archive", text TCL I 54 (a letter from Sin-iqišam to Ubarrum and Marduk-muballit), for example, is not likely to have been part of any archive of Belijatum himself. It is perhaps better to talk of the Belijatum text-group, since our only criterium to group these texts together has been the reference to Belijatum. This prosopographical criterium can not be the sole guideline in identifying an archive; see, most recently, E. Von Dassow, "The Family Archive from Borsippa" *AuOr* 12 (1994) pp. 108f. (with lit.).

Earlier discussions of this archive are: R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (Istanbul, 1975) 235-7 (cf. Harris, *Studies A.L. Oppenheim* [Chicago, 1964] 132-3); N. Yoffee, *The Economic role* (o.c.) 119-22.

6. Definition from: G. van Driel, "The Role of the Entrepreneur in Mesopotamian Agriculture" Paper delivered at the XLI RAI, Berlin 4-8.7.1994.

7. W. Schwenzner, "Altbabylonisches Wirtschaftsleben" *MVAeG* 19/3 (1914) 61 (cf. M. Powell, *ZA* 75 [1985] 23²³); K. Butz, "Ur in altbabylonischer Zeit als Wirtschafts-faktor" in: E. Lipiński (ed.) *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East* (Leuven, 1979) 285-305; G. Mauer, "Agriculture of the Old Babylonian Period" *JANES* 15 (1983) 68⁷.

8. In TCL I 168 no surface measures are given.

TCL I 230: x iku a.šà ša PN

šà(.ba) x še.gur ha.la (*itti*) Belijatun

ezub x še(.gur) gú.un a.šà

“x acres of land of PN, from it x kor is the share (with) Belijatun, apart from x kor, the rent of the land”.

BBVOT I 11: x še.gur ⁹bán ^dUtu ha.la KI PN

ištu x še(.gur) gú.un x iku a.šà (...) *ap-lu*

“x kor according to the *sītu*-measure of Šamaš, the share with PN (= owner/holder of the field), after x kor, the rent of x acres of land, (...) has been paid”.

In the first instance the amount of barley called ha.la is described as being (available) with Belijatun, while in the second instance it is (available) with the owner/holder of the field.⁹

The cultivator has to deliver the gú.un (akk. *biltu*, “rent”) of the field to the person(s) on whose behalf he cultivates the field. Therefore we interpret the remaining amount qualified as ha.la (akk. *zittu*, “share”) as that part of the yield which the cultivator of the field receives. Also, as expected, the “share” which the cultivator holds is by far larger than the “rent” which he has to deliver.

The sum of the amount of barley described as ha.la (“share”) and the amount described as gú.un (“rent”) is almost the entire harvest of the area given.¹⁰ From TLB I 121 we learn that the costs of labour (*mānahtu*) and barley for sowing (še.numun) with its rent (máš) were also part of the account made up prior to the cultivation or after the harvest. TLB I 128 adds the costs of feeding and hiring of oxen. We find expenses like these on the obv. side of both our surface-grain texts.

	TCL I 230		BBVOT I 11	
Ibissu	133,33	(8)	133,33	(8)
Ardu(m)	60	(3,6)	60	(3,6)
Sin-šemi	240	(14,4)	240	(14,4)
Saniq-pi-Šamaš	133,33	(8)	[]	

Table 1 Rent (*biltu*) in sila per iku and, between brackets, in gur per bur. For a tabulation of the figures from TCL I 230 see already F. Pomponio, *I contratti di affitto dei campi per la coltivazione di cereali pubblicati in YOS 13* (Napoli, 1978) 18.

	TCL I 230		BBVOT I 11		TCL I 168	
Ibissu	300	(18)	300	(18)	300	(18)
Ardu(m)	315	(18,9)	315	(18,9)	292,5	(17,5)
Sin-šemi	655	(39,3)	655	(39,3)	600	(36)

Table 2 Share (*zittu*) in sila per iku and, between brackets, in gur per bur. For TCL I 168, where no surface measures are given, the surface measures of the other two texts are assumed.

9. For the different nuances of *itti* see the clarifying article by D.O. Edzard, “Zu den altbabylonischen Präpositionen *itti* und *qadam*” *Fs. L. Matouš I* (Budapest, 1978) 69-89.

10. Contra K. Butz, “Ur in altbabylonischer Zeit” (*o.c.*) 296-8. Strangely enough, Butz pays no attention to the amount of barley described as ha.la.

In Table 1 we have summarized the amounts of barley which Belijatum had to deliver to the holder or owner of the field. This summation shows that Belijatum leased the fields against regular rents. The field of Ibissu was rented at 8 gur per bur, the standard in field-tenure agreements from the reign of Ammišaduqa.¹¹ From the rent of the field of Ardu we can assume that it was cultivated for the first time (see BBVOT I 11, rev. 6': ki.kal). Since the reign of Abi-ešuḫ the norm in renting ki.kal-fields was 60 sila per iku.¹² The rent of the field of Sin-šemi is, although perhaps not unique,¹³ exceptionally high.

The remaining barley, i.e. the share of Belijatum, is summarized in Table 2. Leaving the uncertain figures accounted for by TCL I 168 aside,¹⁴ we see, again, recurrent numbers. If we assume that the three texts, two of which are not dated (anymore), concern the yield of the same fields over three different years, the amounts of remaining barley are almost unbelievably stable. Is it possible that the two surface-grain texts are accounts drawn before accepting the fields for cultivation, or at least before the harvest of the fields? In that case the accounts functioned as a preview of the undertaking to follow. (TCL I 168, however, is dated in the fourth month, that is *after* the harvest period.) Another solution might be that the two surface-grain texts concern the harvest figures of one and the same year, but were written for two different partners in the exploitation (cf. below).

Belijatum: manager of fields

From the quantitative information presented above we learn that at least three out of four individuals entrusted their fields to Belijatum at a regular tenure-rate. The rent (*biltu*) was a fixed amount. This constitutes a form of tenancy proper ("fermage") in which the tenant is considered an entrepreneur.¹⁵ Because of the fixed amount he alone bears the risk of the failure of the harvest. In an exceptionally good season, on the other hand, he takes all the profit. Unless otherwise noted the tenant provides the investment capital (rent on seed etc.) and the means of production.

Several passages in texts from the archive hint at the financing of the agricultural exploitation through partnership (*tappûtum*): TCL I 168, 15-16: sag.níg.ga ša a.šà *tappûtum* "(amount of barley) debit of the partnership-field"; TCL I 229 lists expenditures of Belijatum and Elmešum, who is known to be the owner/holder of a field in TCL I 168 etc. (cf. Appendix *sub* TCL I 230), concerning a field: harvesters with replacement, barley for sowing and oxen with replacements (cows).

The procedure in financing the agricultural exploitation of a field in partnership with the owner/holder of the field would go along the lines termed by W. Eilers a "Sonderfall".¹⁶ Both partners normally provided half of the required investment in the exploitation of the field. The owner/holder of

11. G. Mauer, *Das Formular der altbabylonischen Bodenpachtverträge* (München, 1980) 108; H. Petschow, "Die §§ 45 und 46 des Codex Hammurapi" ZA 74 (1984) 208.

If one constructs [5]1/2 iku in TCL I 230 rev. 1-3 and [5 iku] in BBVOT I 11 rev. 1-2 one also arrives at a *biltu* of 8 gur per bur for the field of Elmešum/[Elmešum].

12. Mauer, *Das Formular (o.c.)* 108.

13. Cf. BE 6/1 nr. 77 (Ae); cited after Mauer, *Das Formular (o.c.)* Übersichtstabelle 2, but note that the 4 PI is not clear on the copy.

14. Note that the amounts of barley in TCL I 168 are measured according to the *sîtu*-measure of Marduk, while the amounts in BBVOT I 11 are according the *sîtu*-measure of Šamaš. The obverse of TCL I 230: 26'-29' gives the totals of two columns of amounts listed for expenditures according to both *sîtu*-measures and according to the *abán šuku*, for which see now also BBVOT I 11 Edg. 1".

15. Terminology follows P.W. de Neeve, "Colon et Colon Partiaire" *Mnemosyne* 37 (1984) 128-131 (cf. the English summary by R.J. van der Spek in: *De agricultura* [Amsterdam, 1993] xi & xiii). In contrast to tenancy proper stays share-cropping ("métayage") where the tenant bears much less risk because the rent is a percentage of the yield.

16. W. Eilers, *Gesellschaftsformen im altbabylonischen Recht* (Leipzig, 1931) 50-2. G. Mauer (in: *Das Formular [o.c.]* 77) introduced the better term "Gemeinschaftspacht".

the field received after the harvest half (50%) of the rent supplemented by half (50%) of the remaining barley after deduction of the costs made. The tenant received an equal share. Of course the dividing of investment was not always fifty-fifty. In TCL I 229 for instance, Belijatun seems to invest far more than Elmešum. This had its consequences in the dividing of shares after the harvest.

Belijatun could lease fields against fixed amounts of barley and thus take the risk of harvest failure or be the one to profit from a good harvest. By financing the undertaking in joint exploitation with the owner/holder of the field, however, he reduced the risk as well as the profit.

Conclusion

In pursuit of an answer to the question asked in the introduction to this article, we have to acknowledge that the evidence from the sources is by no means unequivocal. Terminology, in particular, constitutes a problem. We think, however, the figures presented in Table 1 are an indication in the discussion on the position of Belijatun.

The texts at our disposal seem to deal with a group of fields in the Kar-Šamaš district.¹⁷ Belijatun bears the responsibility (gīr; *bēl piḫatim*; a.šà GN *piḫat* Belijatun)¹⁸ for these fields, but they remain the property of the individuals mentioned. These individuals are people of rank: a *rē' ū* ("shepherd"), a *pašišu*-priest, the son of a *kalamāhu* and a *nadītu* of Šamaš. Because of their occupation they have to leave the cultivation of their assets to someone else. As we have seen in Table 1 Belijatun leases these fields against regular renting-rates. Because these rates are fixed amounts, Belijatun takes the risk of loss or profit. This risk can be large when Belijatun has to bear all the costs of the means of production (tools, labour, seed) himself. Belijatun covers the risk partly by joint exploitation: he as well as the landowner invest capital in the agricultural undertaking. This diminishment of risk implies diminishment of loss or profit.

In the picture we present Belijatun can be viewed an agricultural entrepreneur. He leased fields from individuals and therefore was no part of any institution. He had to invest capital and took risk by doing so. This risk allowed him to make a profit.

Appendix

The texts belonging to the Belijatun "archive" were collated during a stay in Paris in april 1995, made possible through a grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). I'd like to thank here Dr B. André-Salvini and the members of the staff of the Louvre for their hospitality.

– TCL I 54

transcr. & transl. forthcoming in AbB 14, now VAB 6 245

– TCL I 166

transcr. & transl. of ll. 3-5: N.Yoffee, *The Economic role of the Crown in the Old Babylonian Period* (Malibu, 1977) 119

17. TCL I 54:21; 167:11 & 230 Obv.: 18". L. Dekiere proposes a location for one of the two places with this name in *NAPR* 3 (1989) 7-14.

18. gīr: "intermediary". See M.v.d. Microop, *Crafts in the Early Isin Period* = OLA 24 (Leuven, 1987) 93, for the two different meanings of this term.

piḫatum: "Verwaltung(sbereich)" (AHw II, 862). Note the remark by B. Landsberger in MSL I (1937) 130 (6.): "An diesen Stellen handelt es sich um staatliche Feldverwalter (*iššakku*), sodass dieser Sprachgebrauch, aus dem sich die Bedeutung *piḫatu* = "Verwaltungsbezirk" entwickelt hat, wohl auf die staatliche Felderwirtschaft beschränkt war." Landsberger reaches this definition on the basis of the assumption "*iššakku*" = staatlicher Feldverwalter". With a different assumption one might reach a different definition.

– TCL I 167

transcr. & transl.: Yoffee, *The Economic role*, 120transl.: M. Stol, *BSA VIII* (1995) 204

– TCL I 168

Obv.

- 1 7;0.0.0 še.gur ^{gis}bán ^dMarduk
 2 HA.LA it-ti ²El-me-šum sipa
 3 3;0.0.0 še.gur HA.LA it-ti ²I-bi-su gudu,
 4 3;4.3.0 še.gur HA.LA it-ti Ar-du-um
 5 dumu dingir-lam-ni-šu
 6 8;0.0.0 še.gur HA.LA it-ti ^dEN.ZU-še-mi
 7 dumu gala.mah
 8 21;4.3.0 še.gur ŠA
 9 8;4.0.0 gur še.muš₅
 10 qá-du 2;1.0.0 gur ša Be-li-ia-tum

Rev.

- 11 ù 1;1.0.0 gur ša La-ma-sà-ni
 12 lukur ^dUtu

-
- 13 30;3.3.0 še.gur ^{gis}bán ^dMarduk
 14 qá-du še.muš₅
 15 sag.níg.ga
 16 ša a.šà tap-pu-tum
 17 a-na KI.UD ša Pa-as* -ma-at^{KI}
 18-20 date: 12.IV.Aš 13

– TCL I 174

transcr. & transl.: Yoffee, *The Economic role*, 121-2; R. Harris, *Ancient Sippar* (Istanbul, 1975) 235-6¹⁷

– TCL I 229

transcr. & transl.: R. Sweet, *On Prices, Moneys, and money uses in the Old Babylonian Period* (Diss. Chicago, 1958) 54-5

line 8 remained unclear to us after collation.

– TCL I 230

transcr. of rev. 13-17: W. Schwenzner, *MVAeG* 19/3 (1914) 61transl. of the rev.: Harris, *Ancient Sippar*, 237

rev.1: It is of course tempting to see in this Elmešum the same person as is mentioned in TCL I 168 and 229. In TCL I 168:2 Elmešum is qualified as sipa (“shepherd”). Collation, however, showed that there is probably not enough room for the sign PA+LU to justify the reading “(..) Elmešum sipa^d ‘Utu’”, suggested to me by M. Stol.

– BBVOT I 11

Obv.

1' ša še-am iš-tu kar [a-na?] gá.gi.a iz-bi* -lu

-
- 2' 0;4.0.0 i-di 16 eren₂.meš ša 3 giš.ma₂
 3' i-na KI.UD in.nu ú-ma-al-lu-ú ú-ša-aq-qú-nim-ma
 4' i-na kar UD.KIB.NUN^{KI} ip-pu-lu²

5' 0;0.3.0 a-na ma-aš-ti-a-at 16 eren₂ meš za-bi-il in.nu

6' 1;0.3.0 še.gur i-di "EN.ZU-na-sir dumu Ip-qu-an-nu-ni[-tum]

7' "Id-da-tum [

8' "Nu-úr-[

9' x[

Rev.

1' 8;0.3.0 še.gur ^{sis}bán "Utu HA.L[A

2' iš-tu 2;1.0.6 2/3 qa še.gur gú.un x[

3' 3;0.0.0 še.gur ^{sis}bán "Utu HA.LA KI I-bi-s[u

4' iš-tu 1;1.4.0 še.gur gú.un 3 iku [

5' 4;1.0.0 še.gur ^{sis}bán "Utu HA.LA KI Ar-du x[

6' iš-tu 0;4.0.0 še gú.un 4 iku a.šà ki.kal ap-lu

7' 8;3^{*}.4.0 še.gur ^{sis}bán "Utu HA.LA KI "EN.ZU-še-mi
dumu.gala.mah

8' iš-tu 3;2.0.0 še.gur gú.un 4 iku a.šà 1 iku
0;1.0.0 e 0;4.0.0 še ap-lu

9' [] "Utu[]

Edg.

1' []gur ^{sis}bán šuku 'La-ma-sà-ni lukur "Utu 5;4.2[

2' []-mu-ša-lim ma-aš-ša-ar kar iš-[-tu

3' [T]am-la'-tum' lú ká.gal 4;4.2[

4' 12;2.1[

5' ša k[i-

transl. of Obv.:

"[...]who carried the barley from the quay to the cloister.

240 liters (of barley): wages of 16 labourers, who filled three boats with straw at the threshing-floor, brought them upstream to me and delivered them as payment at the quay of Sippar.

30 liters (of barley): for drinking rations of 16 labourers, carriers of straw.

330 liters of barley: wages of Sin-nāsir son of Ipqu-Annunītum, Iddātum [...], Nur-["

Comments

Obv.3': CAD M¹ p. 185^a: *mullû*, "to load a boat". More often the verb *sênu* is used for loading a boat (see for example AbB 3 44).

Obv.5': For the profession of *zābilu* see F.R. Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen in altbabylonischer Zeit* (Leiden, 1984) 337-338.

Obv.6': For this person see Wilcke, ZA 73 (1983) 49-54 (+ Kraus, ZA 77 [1987] 96-7; to which add now H. Klengel in: *Fs L. De Meyer* [Leuven, 1994] 169-178, VAT 808:40).

Rev.8': Read at the end of this line: 1 iku <0;1.0.0> e 0;4.0.0 še, "(i.e.) 240 liter of barley per iku".

Edg.3': cf. Waterman, *BDHP*, 16:16 (Aš 14).