PIPOAC 3

DE L'ARGILE AU NUMÉRIQUE

MÉLANGES ASSYRIOLOGIQUES EN L'HONNEUR DE DOMINIQUE CHARPIN

édités par
Grégory Chambon, Michaël Guichard
et Anne-Isabelle Langlois

avec la participation de
Thomas Römer et Nele Ziegler

PEETERS
LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT
2019

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

WHO IS ELITE?
TWO EXEMPLARY CASES
FROM EARLY BRONZE AGE SYRO-MESOPOTAMIA

Walther Sallaberger*
with the collaboration of Katja Kröss[1]

1. The Problem: Elite as Term in Ancient Near Eastern Studies

For the author of this article, the introductory question "Who is elite?" is not just rhetorical, but thoroughly concrete and serious. Who belonged to an elite, and who did not? Is it expedient to suggest a division of society into elites and non-elites? The concept of the "elites" appears here and there in the scholarly literature on ancient Syro-Mesopotamia, and one cannot simply ignore it. There, it often reads as if an elite's features were obvious: Power or social influence, wealth of goods, land ownership, and education are parameters we often encounter here. Even if one agrees on these or similar criteria, it remains unclear which persons

* Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, München.

[1] In 2016/17, the ancient historian Katja Kröss led a PhD working group on "Elites" at the Graduate School "Distant Worlds" at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, in which I was able to participate. Not only did she sift through relevant sociological and anthropological literature, of which only a few works are quoted here, but she also sketched out a theoretically sound approach in an article entitled "Eliten: Theorien und Anwendbarkeit in den Altertumswissenschaften." (= Kröss in preparation). Our discussions together with the other members of the research group, Ralph Birk, Patrizia Heindl, Henry Heitmann-Gordon, Christoph Fink, Dominik Schenk, Samar Shammas, revealed the feasibility of her approach, and therefore I am most grateful to Katja Kröss that I can already refer to and quote central aspects from her work, although the article has not yet appeared. Beyond that, I benefitted from her remarks and discussions. To Steven J. Garfinkle and Katharina Schmidt I owe detailed comments on an earlier version that led to substantial improvements, and I am grateful to Gebhard Selz and Jason A. Ur for their remarks. Some of their observations and criticisms would deserve a more intensive discussion, but due to the restrictions of space I could not take up all aspects they brought up. They all cannot be blamed for any shortcomings of the article.

The contribution also benefited from the collaboration of the Munich students Felix Seifert, who tabulated the data on the participants at Bau's Festival in spring 2017, and Valeria Minaeva who collected secondary literature on the subject of elites in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the end of 2018 (of which, obviously, only a small percentage could be cited).

actually belonged to such a group, how large it was, and whether it is justified to speak of an elite as a group.

Although elite is an "etic" concept, there must be a real equivalent in a historical situation so that the concept becomes relevant in an analysis. Two case studies will be presented for groups of persons who can be described as "elite" according to common sociological and cultural anthropological understanding of the term (as defined in section 2 below). This procedure of describing elites on the basis of historical examples is also the most direct and least ambiguous approach as the models offered for imagining the basic features of society in Early Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamia differ so greatly and often cannot be reconciled.

An influential model for Mesopotamia was that "a relatively small, undoubtedly highly urbanized, Babylonian elite" (Adams 1974: 8) faced a broad rural population.

> "[I]ts [i.e., of a Babylonian town, W.S.] formal institutions were very largely controlled by, and in the main only concerned with, a small, profusely literate, self-conscious, cohesive, combinative, and acquisitive upper stratum of its citizenry." (Adams 1974: 8).

In this form Adams has drawn a stereotypical picture for ancient Mesopotamia, which has been adopeted by many and often without criticism of the postulated assumptions (and perhaps still is).[2] For the Early Dynastic period, however, he assumes a different situation:

> "There is also no doubt that there were large Early Dynastic temple communities whose "vertical" organization actively involved lower as well as upper strata of the population." (Adams 1974: 9).

Adams's scepticism that the scope of these organisations cannot be estimated will, by the way, no longer be defended in the same way today, since there are indications that a large proportion of the population

[2] The anthology edited by Hausleiter *et al*. (2002) shows how firmly the idea of Adams (1974) that an urban elite controls and exploits the rural population is anchored in Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Adams' model was part of a US American trend in the 1970's to investigate social leaders. Since then, sociological and anthropological research on elites seem to have had less influence on Near Eastern studies. Scott 2008: 27 describes the situation as follows: "The claim that elite researchers tended to overstate the power and cohesion of elites was unintentionally reinforced by the tendency of sociologists to use the word indiscriminately. At the height of its popularity almost any powerful, advantaged, qualified, privileged, or superior group or category might be described as an elite. The term became one of the most general — and, therefore, one of the most meaningless — terms used in descriptive studies." For the conclusion of Scott 2008 how to deal with the term see below Section 2.

belonged to the communal organisations (his "temple communities") during the period in question, the third millennium BCE (Sallaberger & Pruß 2015; Steinkeller 2017a).

Despite such individual references to strong vertical connections between leaders and their clients, the notion of upper and lower classes dominates the discussion, since social complexity per definitionem requires social stratification (e.g., Matthews 2003: 95–96). An upper class, which exercises power, control, and authority, is simply distinguished from the rest of the population:

> "By 'common people' we mean those elements of society who did not belong to dominant and elite groups, who did not live in palaces or high-status residences, whose daily activities were centred on the practice of child-rearing, agriculture, animal husbandry, and domestic food procurement and processing, with varying additional concerns such as cult, trade and perhaps military service. Common people enabled and shaped the existence of complex societies and empires simply by being there, by having and rearing children, by forming the bulk of the core population, by producing and processing food for all, by serving in armies and garrisons, by labouring on domestic and elite projects of construction, and by receiving, transmuting and opposing elite ideologies imposed from above." (Matthews 2003: 156).

For the Sargonic period, Foster (2016) draws a similar picture:

> "The Akkadian elite cultivated traits of their class and individuality in their self-presentation and way of life. Unlike the majority of the population, they were expensively dressed, used cosmetics, and wore jewelry on the head, neck, chest, arms, wrists, fingers, and toes. […] They ate a varied diet […] They attended school, where they received sufficient education to read and write in both Sumerian and Akkadian. Their personal names invoked wealth and, in later times, Naram-Sin was proverbial for his riches. They expected to be obeyed by their inferiors; the rhetoric of men in authority was forceful and assertive." (Foster 2016: 228).

In such descriptions, the elite corresponds largely to the "leisure class" brilliantly described by Veblen (1899), which is characterized by the delimitation from production (in agriculture, crafts). This upper class or elite also developed a group understanding, for example by distinguishing itself from non-members in festivals (Pollock 2003).

However, these and various comparable social models continue to be criticised for an important reason:

> "These models reconstruct fourth-millennium Mesopotamian society in ways remarkably similar to our own, especially in terms of class, administration and economic motivations." (Ur 2014: 250).

Ur (2014) goes in a different direction:

> "By examining the rich historical record of later Mesopotamian society [i.e., of the middle and late third millennium, W.S.], it is possible to identify an underlying structure that endured for millennia: the household as a structuring metaphor at different scales" (Ur 2014: 259).

In doing so, he follows the model of Schloen (2001). Ur does not examine Early Bronze Age society from the perspective of the leaders and does not presuppose classes, but refers to the interplay of the actors within a "household".

> "When conceptualized in terms of the small domestic household, inequality seemed as natural as the hierarchical relationship between a father and his sons." (Ur 2014: 263).

The contemporary perspective on the entirety of the actors in a society for which Ur (2014) was cited as an example does not, however, exclude the possibility that the leading personalities can be described as elites. Especially in connection with the "household" structures emphasized by Ur (2014) (which I would rather call communal organisations for the third millennium, see Sallaberger & Pruß 2015), the term appears to have utility:

> "In the Ur III administration high officials could be designated 'elders' to distinguish them from common personnel, and surely no tribal remnants can be assumed for that practice. Hence an interpretation of these men as 'élite' or 'high-ranking' seems more appropriate than as heads of families." (Van De Mieroop 1997: 124).

The term "elite" thus helps to describe a dominant class in society that distinguishes itself from the non-elite. But what does "elite" mean — in general or in a specific case? And who belonged to an elite? For a fruitful discussion, the first step is to discuss the definition and the common understanding of the concept of elites.

2. The Concept of Elites: Definitions and Methodologies

Elites are basically separated from "non-elites" and deliberately used as a general term to avoid more specific forms such as "nobility". The fact that the term can be used in a number of ways is a prerequisite for its application to ancient Near Eastern evidence.

> "One of the great merits of this concept [i.e. elite], I think, is that it subsumes all sorts of high level groups, including in those contexts where the concept of class would seem inappropriate. Such breadth is also liable to be viewed as an inconvenience however, in so far as bringing together members from disparate sectors entails a certain degree of imprecision" (Daloz 2011: 444).[3]

The term "elite" can describe various groups of people in everyday language as well as in specialist terminology (e.g., Daloz 2011; Abbink & Salverda 2013). In order to make this vague concept fruitful for the respective object of research, one cannot avoid specification. Starting from the work of Kröss (in preparation), the following points deserve attention for a historical study of elites and are thus fitting for our study as well. 1) and 2) offer a simple definition of "elites", 3) and 4) their historical positioning:[4]

1) An elite denotes a group of people,
2) exercising actual power in a field relevant to society as a whole.
3) The historical and social situation as well as the social fields relevant for the analysis must be determined in each case, and
4) emic terms and categories should be considered.

Concerning the different aspects:

1) According to all definitions, an elite always comprises a group that distinguishes itself from the rest of the population and from other elites or even counter-elites in the same historical situation. For our context it is crucial that the ruler does not belong to an elite due to this defining criterion of elite as a group, despite the fact that the proximity to the ruler can determine the affiliation of an elite. Whether this group appears homogeneous only from the outside, whether it distinguishes itself by a common habitus (in the sense of Bourdieu), and on the basis of which prerequisites, such as birth or achievement or common origin, it is recruited, has to be considered in each individual case. Additonally, its composition and its internal and external interactions, or the social cohesion in a vertical dimension are topics worth to be studied.[5]

[3] Just like Abbink & Salverda 2013, Daloz (2011) thus opposes the tendency of more recent research (above all Mills, Bourdieu, Hartmann) to expect a single elite. This open position, however, allows greater flexibility in a historical analysis.

[4] Here I follow the decisive points of the systematics of Katja Kröss (in preparation, see note 1) and limit myself to a few important aspects in this context.

[5] Daloz 2011: 451f discusses eminence vs. proximity of elites interacting with non-elites in a modern democratic context.

2) What these definitions also have in common is that membership in an elite is tied to power that is actually exercised:

> "The fundamental starting point must be that, at the very least, the word 'elite' should be used only in relation to those groups that have a degree of power." (Scott 2008: 28)
> "Elites are small groups of persons who exercise disproportionate power and influence in social domains." (Higley 2011: 759)[6]

Concerning the defining criterion of power in Mesopotamia, it also excludes mere personal proximity to the ruler as a sufficient feature for an elite (see below). Power as a means of determining the actions of other people is to be distinguished from expertise (e.g. of the artist), although the variety of a cultural "elite" has been described as well:

> "It is customary to distinguish between political elites, whose locations in powerful institutions, organizations, and movements enable them to shape or influence political outcomes, often decisively, and cultural elites, who enjoy a high status and influence in nonpolitical spheres such as arts and letters, philanthropy, professions, and civic associations." (Higley 2011: 759)

It is therefore obvious that the historian must take into account the possible diversity of elites and provide a more precise description in order to arrive at a meaningful analysis. Not only politics and culture, but also the military, the economy, and administration are mentioned as social fields of elites, so that different typologies of elites can be established (e.g. Scott 2008). This pluralistic approach allows us to avoid evaluative categorizations ("dominant" vs. "insignificant") or to simplify the analysis by assuming a single central elite. It is precisely because in a monarchic system essential aspects of political power accrue to the ruler[7] that elites offer a welcome opportunity to analyse further influential segments of the society.

The features of an elite group described so far contribute to its visibility.

[6] Similarly, e. g., Salverda & Abbink (2013: 3): "an *elite* is a relatively small group within the societal hierarchy that claims and/or is accorded power, prestige, or command over others on the basis of a number of publicly recognized criteria, and aims to preserve and entrench its status thus equired." Hartmann (2014[3]: 89): „Zur Elite zählen […] im Wesentlichen nur diejenigen Personen, die […] in der Lage sind, durch ihre Entscheidungen gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen maßgeblich zu beeinflussen." Scott (2008: 28) formulates the definition cited here after his critique of a too wide use of the term "elite" (see above).

[7] Kröss (in preparation) already pointed to this decisive aspect with regard to the monarchies in Greece and Rome.

3) The respective historical situation determines each single parameter decisively. This is at first a matter of time and space, since a Mesopotamian society in the Early Bronze Age functions differently than a Roman or even a modern one. The sector of a society or a state or which social field is analysed may also be relevant.

> "[E]lites do not exist in isolation but in relation to other people, and they cannot exist or be analyzed outside specific historical, cultural, and societal contexts. Their spatial contexts might be local, regional, national, or transnational. […] [E]lites […] exist […] within networks, webs, or constellations of relations that generate positions for people *as* elites." (Schijf 2013: 41).

The diversity of the concept of elites forces the researcher to identify the historical situation and his or her specific perspective.[8] Elites, as an element of social structuration, were always subject to traditions as well as changes. The historical situation determined not only which groups of persons could become members of an elite, but even which social fields were considered as relevant (note, e.g., the central social role of agriculture and animal husbandry in Early Mesopotamia). To be elite does not depend on inherent qualities, but on social practice, and therefore the historical communicative and cultural situation has to be taken into account. The different parameters cited in elite research imply that an elite presents itself differently when viewed on the basis of its political agency, its economic dominance, or certain cultural practices and achievements (e.g. buildings, poetry).

4) An essential aspect of the historical situation considered in the respective analysis is the emic representation of the elites. Besides the particular terms (e.g. Neo-Assyrian *rabbûtu* "the great ones" for the magnates at the royal court), other aspects of representation in their social context, such as certain forms of social practice (at festivals, funerals, etc.), in the use of exquisite or exotic goods, representation in clothing, residence, etc., are to be included as being of equal value. The challenge when dealing with ancient cultures is to evaluate the forms of representation in their historical social context.

[8] Keller 2014: «Von zentraler Bedeutung für die Verwendung des Konzeptes ist es, E[lite] als eine histor[ische] Kategorie zu verstehen, d.h. als ein Phänomen, das sich nur auf konkrete Zeithorizonte bezogen, in räumlicher Verortung und unter Berücksichtigung übergeordneter Bezugsgruppen (Stände, Klassen, Schichten) fassen und beschreiben lässt». K. Kröss (p. c.) also refers to Keller 1963: 124f (not seen).

3. Historical context of elites in Early Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamia

This paper discusses the evidence of the Early Bronze Age in Syro-Mesopotamia, the period of city–states that survived as provinces in the kingdoms of Akkade and Ur III, when a redistributive economy prevailed in communal organisations. The boundaries of the study are determined by the contingency of the sources: temporally by the appearance of relevant archives in the 24th century, spatially by the respective boundaries of the scribal culture; thus in the 24th century Ebla is integrated into the network of regular contacts that reaches from Babylonia ("Kiš") to Syria.

In the time of the city–states, the leading officials are first and foremost to be considered on the level of the state, not of the individual city or settlement. Who can one count among them? Steinkeller has quite precise ideas about "a powerful social group (identified by me [i.e., Steinkeller; W.S.] as the 'Managerial Class') that was a characteristic element of the social and political landscape of southern Babylonia since Late Uruk times" (Steinkeller 2017b: 3):

> "As a distinctive and solidly entrenched social group, the Managerial Class of Babylonia must have had its own political agenda, which probably more often than not was at odds with the politics of the king. As I define it, this group included some of the highest officials of city-states, such as sanga and sabra, the heads of temple households, who wielded enormous power, both economic and political. In some of the smaller city-states and many of the major cities, for example in Isin, Larsa, Keš, Karkar, Zabalam, and Girsu, the sanga in fact was the main administrative official. These functionaries undoubtedly were vested in the preservation of the traditional system of political organization, in which the real power rested with the temple households operating as largely independent and self-sufficient socio-economic institutions." (Steinkeller 2017b: 56–57)

The "Managerial Class" as defined by Steinkeller (2017) therefore is constituted of only one person, sometimes a few persons per city–state, so that the usual definitions of an elite as a group can hardly be applied. Slightly larger is the enumeration that Sollberger (1972: 186–188) offers for the Ur III period when discussing the highest officials as the "ruling classes" next to the king, who limit his power: "grand vizier" (*sugal*$_7$-*maḫ*), "heads of cities" (*ensi*$_2$), *šabra* (a temple administrator) and "military governor" or "general" (*šagana*); loosely he adds the "scribes" (*dub-sar*) above the "lower-class group" to these offices.

Garfinkle (2013) describes a slightly larger group as the top level within a city-state:

> "We can identify three groups of people in the city-states of the Near East, and each group can be precisely positioned by its relationship to the king's household. Below the king were the officials in charge of the various urban institutions of the state. These were priests, supervisors of granaries, overseers of various agricultural and craft activities, and so on. These officials often directly supervised the work of the dependent laborers who were at the bottom of the system. Between the officials and the dependent laborers was a large group of urban professions and craftsmen, such as merchants, smiths, heralds, wealthier farmers, and others." (Garfinkle 2013: 109)

Even such a seemingly simple analysis of a city-state's social stratification can be discussed, and our understanding changes constantly. Thus, the group of "(semi-free) dependent laborers", often called *eren* in the documents, are nowadays regarded as the "freemen" of a state (see e.g. also Schrakamp 2014):

> "[T]he term *eren* is a general designation of free dependents of the state, who possessed full social, economic, and legal rights. Included in this category was the vast majority of the society, from as high as the members of the royal family down to the ordinary farmers, craftsmen, shepherds, fishermen, etc. (Steinkeller 2017a: 539).

In Steinkeller's model of society in the 21st century BCE, which is based on emic categories, no ruling class is envisaged below the king. With a total of 3,600 men according to Steinkeller (2017a: 546), the *eren* group comprised more than a third of the entire urban population of 14,000 to 18,000 people, including about 1,500 "menials" and no more than 1,000 domestic slaves (*ibid*. 547–548).

These few examples from the secondary literature may illustrate the situation: elites are often postulated, but the descriptions differ largely and remain vague. In the following, two exemplary cases for elites in the Early Bronze Age are presented. Both cases are based on a series of documents that cover circles of persons "completely", so that absences of occupational categories (a profession, office, function) is meaningful. Single records of anecdotal value only are not considered. In both cases, persons at feasting are documented, whereby the role of feasting in social representation in the third millennium is well established (see, e.g., Pollock 2003, Sallaberger 2019). The first case concerns the ruler's guests, the second one the top social personages at a city festival.

Exemplary Case 1: The King's Guests

The guests hosted by the ruler received gifts, garments, jewels and precious items, and an ointment, and they were served excellent food and drink; for their benefit animals were slaughtered. The transfer of the characteristic goods of the palace was recorded in the administrative documents that stem from palaces. This economic sector of the palace, which concerns the accumulation and utilisation of the ruler's treasure and wealth as a basis for his political actions, I have described as the "palatial economy"; it is clearly distinct from the subsistence economy of the communal organisations aka "households" (Sallaberger 2013; 2018).

The most important palace archive of the Early Bronze Age is that from the Syrian Ebla (24th century BCE), while from Babylonia only parts of comparable archives are known, such as a part of the documents from Girsu under the Gudea dynasty (late 22nd century BCE, edited by Lehmann 2016) or "gift texts" and comparable documents from the Sargonic "Storehouse archive", which should be associated with the governor (23rd century BCE, Molina 2014: 33–35). As royal archives, the Ur III documents from Puzriš-Dagān (21st century BCE) on treasures, weapons, and shoes (Paoletti 2012) as well as those on animals for slaughter (Sallaberger 2004) offer relevant data.

The treasures acquired through taxes, tribute, purchase and trade, booty, or gifts were distributed by the ruler to the most important persons according to his viewpoint. The social practice of royal donations defines the circle of people here. Since one received royal gifts mostly because of his or her respective function or achievement, the documents regularly provide professional names and functional specifications as well as occasions for the gifts. The type of gifts in palace archives (Ebla, Puzriš-Dagān, Mari), i.e. jewellery, ceremonial weapons or a set of textiles, proves that they were personal gifts and not intended to be passed on to clients.

In addition, the documents allow a quantification unique in the ancient world on the basis of the quantities issued. Documents from the palace of Ebla provide a detailed list of all silver issues for an entire year. As an example, the documents of two different years (Ibbi-zikir 5 and 10) are cited (Tables 1, 2), each of which offers about 170 individual entries on the silver expenses of the palace. Two thirds of all these entries concern the gifts of silver to persons. The amounts are relatively small in each individual case, so not two thirds but "only" 48% or 31% of the

silver, for these two years respectively, is spent in this form. Silver was also expended for purchase of goods (23%, 15%), for the royal palace and representation (14%, 39%), and as donations to gods (11%, 10%; see Tabella 7 in Sallaberger 2018). It should be recalled that a third or half of the total silver expenditure of the palace is given away to persons (see Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of the annual palatial silver expenses given to individuals.

	***MEE* 10, 29 year Ibbi-zikir 5**			***MEE* 12, 36 year Ibbi-zikir 10**		
Recipients of silver	entries	total in silver		entries	total in silver	
persons from cities	29	86 m.	20 %	21	18 m.	5 %
Eblaites on expedition	20	22 m.	5 %	39	37 m.	11 %
Total foreign policy	**49**	**108 m.**	**25 %**	**60**	**55 m.**	**16 %**
Royal family	10	27 m.	6 %	15	15 m.	4 %
Persons in Ebla	54	74 m.	17 %	39	38 m.	11 %
Total persons in Ebla	**64**	**100 m.**	**23 %**	**54**	**54 m.**	**15 %**

Note: m. = minas (of 470 grams)

The unique documentation of Ebla, namely that all silver expenses of a year from the palace are recorded in their entirety, also permits the following statement: the ruler did not spend any silver for other projects in the two years, and also the people to whom he gave a silver ring, a disc, or a dagger within a year are listed there without exception.

The list of persons obtained in this way can be supplemented by the documentation of the expenditures of garments, as these were a much more frequent gift. Each single transaction was carefully noted in monthly lists, and they reveal the ruler's politics through gift giving. Gifts implied the ruler's recognition of a recipient's person and they acknowledged his or her service. Whereas other rulers were able to reciprocate on the same level with counter-gifts, the palace did not expect the subordinates to provide a material gift, but rather constant loyalty. It is for this very reason that the records of the ruler's expenses provide a direct testimony of the people who seemed most important to him; and based on the specific documentation of Ebla, we can be sure that there existed no other people who received such royal gifts.

A similarly good documentation is available for the expenditure of cattle for slaughter from the royal holdings of the Third Dynasty of Ur

(21st century BCE). Again, monthly lists of expenditures as well as hundreds of individual documents reveal which persons received royal gifts. Directly comparable with Ebla are the gifts of jewels and precious items as well as shoes, but there are only a little more than one hundred individual documents (mostly with several entries), so that some minor groups of gift recipients could be missed. The documents on animals for slaughter, however, also make it certain for the Ur III period that no important group of recipients of royal gifts is missing (see Table 2). Sallaberger (2004) analysed the 164 documents about the expenditures of animals from an entire year (the year Amar-Suena 4); the list thus obtained was supplemented by a few beneficiaries from other years. Cattle for slaughter represented a high value, and therefore it is to be regarded as one of the prestige goods in Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia, just like jewels or robes. Even more clearly than in the case of the valuables in the palace of Ebla, the kings of Ur used livestock to reward people: almost 40% of all animals went to the "kitchen" to feed mostly military troops, almost 40% to individuals, and about 10% were sacrificed in the temples (Sallaberger 2004: 50 Table 1). Table 2 combines the evidence from these two archives.

Table 2. Recipients of precious gifts at the palace of Ebla (24th century BCE) and in the kingdom of Ur (21st century BCE).

Archive:	**Ebla, palace:** textiles, precious metals (based on annual accounts *MEE* 10, 29 and 12, 36, with additions)	**Ur III, Puzriš-Dagān:** treasure and shoes (after Paoletti 2012, ch. 8)	**Ur III, Puzriš-Dagān:** animals for slaughter (after Sallaberger 2004: 52–54)
royal family	royal women: queen (*maliktum*), queen mother (AMA GAL EN), and others; sons, nurses, attendant (PA_4.ŠEŠ)	royal women: queen (Abī-simtī), *lukur*, daughters; princes, wet-nurses	royal women: queen, +*lukur*; daughters, her sister; his brother, son; brother of queen; wet-nurses
political key persons	Ibbi-zikir and family	grand vizier ($sugal_7$-*maḫ*), chief cupbearer ($zabar$-dab_5), governor ($ensi_2$), Amorite (mar-du_2)	grand vizier ($sugal_7$-*maḫ*), governor (of Irisaŋrig); Amorite (mar-du_2)

foreign policy	Rulers, elders and other persons from cities; Eblaites on expedition	rulers (*ensi*$_2$), messenger (*lu*$_2$ *kiŋ*$_2$-*gi*$_4$-*a*), individuals	individuals and messengers from numerous cities and countries, Amorites
army	„News“ from the battle-field, victories, conquests	general (*šagina*), lieutenant (*nu-banda*$_3$)	general (*šagina*); + lieutenant (*nu-banda*$_3$)
communications	commissioner (MAŠKIM), runner (*ma-za-lum*) etc.	envoy (*sugal*$_7$), messenger (*lu*$_2$ *kiŋ*$_2$-*gi*$_4$-*a*), wagon/boat drivers (*ra*$_2$-*gaba*)	envoy (*sugal*$_7$), wagon/boat drivers (*ra*$_2$-*gaba*)
merchants	merchants, „(for) delivery of NN“ (ŠU MU.TAKA$_4$ NN)	merchant (*dam-gara*$_3$)	+ merchant (*dam-gara*$_3$)
administration, crafts	judge (DI.KU$_5$), equerry: keeper of mules (UGULA SUR$_X$.KUNGA$_2$); rarely: scribe (DUB.SAR), smith (SIMUG), carpenter (NAGAR)	person for spices (of beer?; *lu*$_2$-*ur*$_3$-*ra*), boatsman (*ma*$_2$-*laḫ*$_5$), scribe (*dub-sar*), cowherd (*unu*$_3$), fattener (*gurušta*), controller of herds (*na-gada*), fuller (LU$_2$.TUG$_2$)	judge (*di-ku*$_5$), cook (*muḫaldim*), person for spices (*lu*$_2$-*ur*$_3$-*ra*) – each with one reference only), + steward (*sagi*, rarely), fowler (*mušen-du*$_3$)
cultic personnel	royal daughter as high priestess; attendant (PA$_4$.ŠEŠ), escort(?) (ŠEŠ.II.IB)	high priestesses and some priests	High priest(ess) of Inana (*en*); diviner (*maš*$_2$-*šu-gid*$_2$-*gid*$_2$); + cultpriest (*guda*$_4$), high-priestess (*ereš-diŋir*), female attendant (*lukur*)
music, entertainment	singer (NAR), dancer (NE.DI), acrobat(?) (ḪUB$_2$$^{(ki)}$), twarf (BA.ZA)	singer of lamentations (*gala*), sports: wrestlers	singer of lamentations (*gala*), (female) singer (*nar*-(*munus*)), *tigidlu* musician, + bear leader (*u*$_4$-*da-tuš*)

The overview presented in Table 2 is based on the testimony of hundreds of documents that testify to the expenditure of palace goods to individuals invited by the ruler. Despite certain regional and historical differences, the evidence from Ebla and the kingdom of Ur resemble each other in central aspects. So who is listed?

A first category of gift recipients are the political representatives of other states, including the vassals, whereby mostly the ruler, sometimes family members, and often also the respective "elders" received gifts. Regarding the recipients within the state, according to the Ebla evidence the family of the ruler is prominently attested including the princes and the "royal women", his wife, the queen-mother, daughters, and furthermore the wet-nurses and the "attendants" (PA$_4$.ŠEŠ) of the ruler and the queen. The first dignitary at Ebla was the so-called vizier (here Ibbi-zikir), and his family also received gifts. In these cases, the permanent personal, familiar, or quasi-familiar relationship and obligations were of fundamental importance. Therefore, birth, marriage, festivals, illness, and death offered the occasions for presents to other courts as well as to members of the family or the highest dignitaries of the palace.

The administrative personnel of Ebla only rarely received gifts. The overseer of the mules, the precious equids of the ruler's wagons, the equerry of the period, appears more often. Others, like the cook or the overseer of the storehouse of wool, or craftsmen like smiths or carpenters, received such gifts only occasionally. Employees of the palace received more modest garments, white rather than coloured, but such distributions should be regarded as annual allotments of basic goods instead of gifts (Archi 2018).

The exact function of the two judges at Ebla remains unknown. However, "judges" also appear in the Ur III documents as recipients. In the third millennium, acting as a judge was not a profession but a function performed by respected members of the society. Can the gift to the judges thus be seen as a recognition for their service in the society? The judges' role as intermediaries becomes even more important if one considers the fact that an early Mesopotamian ruler was always evaluated according to his performance of justice.

The interest of the court in prestige goods can also be observed in the quite frequent gifts to their suppliers at the court of Ebla. Among others, we meet deliveries of delicacies like birds, some vegetables, or wine and grapes.

Messengers form a prominent group who delivered goods and/or news. At their arrival or their departure they received gifts. Thus the palace obliged its informants, because such news was valuable: the ruler obtained knowledge of the events at other courts, or the outcome of battles and sieges, and was thus enabled to reach political decisions. Military matters played an important role; in this area, presents included gifts to

the victorious leader in the battlefield and presents for news from battles or even for the decapitated head of the hostile ruler. One would therefore also expect gifts for the highest members of the army. Because they are not apparent at first sight, they may hide behind some personal names, and we may have misunderstood some occupational titles.

Surprisingly, Ebla's religious personnel are not among the first recipients of gifts. The "attendants" (PA_4.ŠEŠ) of gods and the ŠEŠ.II.IB, who care for the divine statues, were holders of a cultic office, often for a restricted period, and often they came from a royal background.

The last group of recipients of gifts were the musicians: the singers with their Sumerian names who in large part came from Mari, and the dancers and acrobats who primarily came from the distant city of Nagar.

An impressively parallel picture can be obtained from the treasure archive of Puzriš-Dagān from the Ur III period (Paoletti 2012). The royal family, including the royal women, the wet nurse, the military commanders, sometimes rulers of cities and of foreign regions, merchants or suppliers of stones and copper, and messengers and envoys received presents, mostly silver rings. Occasionally, some prominent members of the administration appeared, basically those who dealt with animals. Persons in music and sports appear as well. The evidence of the main archive of Puzriš-Dagān on the distribution of animals for slaughter confirms this distribution (Sallaberger 2004).

The recipients of royal gifts were, as said before, those members of the society whom the ruler was obliging. The narrow circle of the family and the highest dignitaries must be the base and centre of every social foundation of power in Early Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamia. The central importance of the army in the exertion of power becomes clear in all palace archives. Compared to the army, the priesthood is only rarely attested. Members of occupations listed here for Ebla (in Table 2) more often worked in the palace, and not in the temple. Apparently the king was not interested in obliging the highest priests with the bribe of precious goods.

Also the governors (*ensi*$_2$) in the service of the Ur III king or managers of estates and of temples (*saŋŋa, šabra*, etc.) can hardly be found in these records, and these are precisely the officials who dispose of economic goods and power over persons. Interestingly, they appear as wealthy suppliers of animals in the documents issued by the royal livestock administration of Puzriš-Dagān, an indication of their active role in the state as contributors (Sallaberger 2004: 57–58), but they hardly ever received

gifts from the ruler.[9] This group corresponds quite well to the managerial class so designated by Steinkeller (2017b).

Because scribes are called "elite" by many modern researchers (while in ancient Mesopotamia they belonged rather to the craftsmen in an emic view), their absence is also to be mentioned.

Which of the king's guests of Table 2 can be seen as "elite" in the sense defined above? The people at the service of the palace, such as the nurses, enjoyed proximity to the royal family; and the specialists, such as singers and dancers, had considerable expertise; but neither possessed power, so they should be excluded. Thus, an Early Bronze Age elite at a royal court was composed of the following groups, whereby the findings of Ebla and the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur coincide to a large extent in an impressive way:

- Royal family: the queen (above all) and some royal wives and princes; they all also act independently in influential positions
- Foreign political delegates: rulers and their families as well as elders
- Military: the generals and other individuals who may receive gifts for outstanding achievements
- Political functions: grand vizier, judges
- Communications: envoys, messengers, drivers, dealers
- Priesthood: isolated priestesses and priests of high standing
- Administration: individual administrators mainly of palace goods

The ceremonial banquets at the palace, during which the royal gifts were distributed, provided a communicative space in which group memberships could be established. In addition, some categories overlapped in certain individuals; for example, royal daughters were married to befriended rulers or leading military officers or served as high priestesses themselves, and princes may have been generals or military governors. The grand vizier fulfilled an important political task by acting as the ruler's right hand, who was responsible for the army and all personnel matters in the country. The economic elite of the merchants and the administrators of palace goods (e.g., the equerry at Ebla) had less power but regularly visited the court. A central role was played by the envoys, messengers, drivers, and traders, who often travelled on behalf of the ruler on missions regarding foreign policy or administration, thereby

[9] This shows impressively that a mere activity of persons in royal or state affairs, as recorded in documents from Puzriš-Dagān, is not sufficient to determine an elite of royal guests. Methodically, it is crucial to pay close attention to the role of people in social practice (see Sallaberger 2004; 2013).

representing the ruler's authority. In the 24th to the 21st centuries BCE, envoys carried out diplomacy directly, because letters did not yet serve political exchange.

How were the elite members of the court recruited? On the one hand by birth as the royal children, and on the other hand by achievement and prestige, if one considers, e.g., the elders of cities or the remuneration for military achievements; and even among the princes the most capable had to prove themselves. The strong presence of the envoys in these circles, who acted as representatives of their masters, cannot be overemphasized.[10]

Royal weddings or visits to state festivals were probably the most important occasions on which representatives of this group gathered in large numbers around the ruler. Such meetings probably contributed essentially to a successful face-to-face politics at that time, both in foreign and domestic policy.

Exemplary Case 2: The Dignitaries at a State Festival

The second category of exceptional documentary evidence for an elite in the third millennium stems from the southern city of Girsu in the 24th century BCE. Girsu served as the capital of the "city–state" of Lagaš that included other larger cities such as Lagaš and Niŋen as well as several other settlements. The documents concern a city festival in honour of the goddess Bau, wife of the city-god Ninŋirsu, which was largely organised by the organisation of the ruler's wife, the "female quarter" (e_2-*munus*). Thanks to the approximately 1,700 preserved documents from this organisation, we are better informed about this feast than that of any other of the period. I would have liked to compare Bau's Festival with an Ur III example, but I could not find a dossier of a similar quality.[11]

At the annual festival of Bau, all members of the female quarter, which was led by the wife of the city ruler, received festival donations. The men with maintenance fields got an allocation of the precious grain emmer, and on the main festival day, all members of the Emunus consumed bread with

[10] The family background of such messengers and envoys has never, to my knowledge, been investigated on a larger scale.

[11] The beer and bread distributions from the Inana Temple of Nippur, which document the hosting of guests at the Inana Festival in the 6th month, could be compared as a parallel source; see Zettler 1992: 191–195. However, it is not the tops of society who are guests here, but representatives of various professions or musicians. For the guests at the main festivals of Ur and Nippur in the documents from Puzriš-Dagān it might be possible to obtain an appropriate documentation.

fish or vegetables, beer, and oil for anointing. Even the neighbours received a festive gift. In addition to these local people, guests arrived at the festival. The documents distinguish between two groups: the "acquaintances of the ruler" and the recipients of "holy milk and holy malt".

"Acquaintances of the ruler" is the designation of people[12] to whom the Lady of Lagash distributed at Bau's Festival a high variety of foodstuffs — barley, emmer wheat, dates, apples, ghee, and cheese — partly in large quantities (Table 3). Perhaps the persons consumed the rich gifts together with their menial staff, or they brought a portion home.[13]

Table 3. Group known as "acquaintances of the ruler" at Bau's festivals; evidence of DP 134 (year 3+x of Lugalanda).

3	high priestess of Bau with two of her people
9	9 women of ruling family, known elsewhere as "the sisters of the ruler" (DP 127 i 1–ii 11), including the mother of the Lady, the mother of the temple lord of Nanše
5	family members(?): Munussa, (princess, with her companion) Gankikuga; Aya'enratum (prince, with his companion) Ninemušše; Kitušlu, son of Musub (the sister of the Lady, thus the Lady's nephew)
5	wives of 4 officials in city-state and one wife of an Elamite: – Ninuma, wife of Gubi (former **temple-lord of Ninmarki**, BIN 8 351) – **wife of Enabzuatum, overseer of troops** – wife of the charmer (*isib*) of Ninŋirsu – Meniŋarta, **wife of chief scribe** – wife of Niŋduba, Elamite
2	wives of producers: – wife of Ur-Mesandu, tanner – wife of [...], overseer at wool-place
4	officials from temples or cities: – Aya'agrigzi, **temple lord of Ninmarki** – Subur-Bawu, **singer of lamentations** – Ur-Ninŋirsu, ("palace elder" (*ab-ba* e_2*-gal*) of Bagara (of Ninŋirsu at Lagaš) – Šatar, "lord" (temple lord) of the palace

[12] The designation results from the combination of emmer expenses at Bau's Festival to "the acquaintances of the city-ruler" (lu_2 *su-a* $ensi_2$*-ka-*ke_4*-ne*; *DP* 161 i 3, probably year Urukagina 2) with the list of persons in *DP* 225, a text comparable with our example text of Table 3, where exactly the same amount of emmer is booked. The term of an "acquaintance" (of the ruler's wife) is used for some persons known from our example text in other documents (*VS* 25, 19 and *VS* 25, 54).

[13] Texts: *DP* 127 (Lugalanda „0"), Nik 1 53 (Lugalanda 1), *RTC* 61 (Lugalanda 2?), *DP* 134 (Lugalanda 3+x). Is it due to Urukagina's reforms that this group no longer appears under his government at Bau's Festival? However, a coincidence of preservation cannot be ruled out.

4	various overseers – Subur, captain (*nu-banda*$_3$, chief official of Emunus organisation) – **Urdu, overseer of herds** (of the Emunus organisation) – Adda, assistant of herdsmen (*gab*$_2$-*kas*$_4$; received beer in palace VS 14, 176) – Urbiše ("overseer of the menials", *gal lu*$_2$ DUN-*a* VS 25, 22 i)
5	producers, craftsmen: – Ayadiŋirŋu, of oil vessels – En-Nanšeki'aŋ, cook (included in "various people" as term for prominent persons, DP 181; VS 25 34) – Alla, ropemaker/knotter (*tu*$_9$-*du*$_8$; his wife received a sheep for her birth-giving, DP 219) – Ešela, stone worker – Igiga (a craftsman?)
6	musicians: 4 people of the holy kettledrum, 2 singers
4	unclear: Enŋirinisi (position unclear, person of importance); Ur-Bau (unknown); small ... (KU.KU) and large ... (KU.KU)
47	

Note: Individuals marked in bold re-appear among the recipients of "holy milk and holy malt" in the central ceremony, see Table 4)

These 47 people, the "acquaintances" of the ruler (Table 3), included such different people as the "High Priestess of the Bau" (probably the lady herself), musicians, temple lords and their wives, and craftsmen. With regard to a determination as elite, what was said above about the gift recipients of the palace must also be repeated here. In general, power and social influence define an elite, while other groups also appear here; these include, first, those who contributed to the feasting, such as the musicians and probably also the craftsmen, and second, for instance, the women from the family of the ruler, who were close to him, without any discernible further influence. The category of "acquaintances" of the city ruler is thus inconsistent, and the respective lists cannot define an elite of a city-state. As with the court society of the Ebla palace, here too personal proximity to the ruler does not only apply to the politically, socially, culturally, or economically powerful. Conversely, these documents from Girsu (Table 3) as well as from Ebla (Table 2) provide excellent evidence of different court societies in Early Dynastic times.

The group of more than 40 people (Table 4) who received the exquisite donation of "holy milk and holy malt", in a unique rite at Bau's Festival, presents itself quite differently. Even the ritual framework makes these people the most important participants of the festival, because they were served by the leading officials of the female quarter (led by Eniggal) and

by the most personal entourage of the lady (such as chambermaids or cupbearers). As the wife of the city god stood in the centre of Bau's Festival, the women of the state's most important office bearers received the gifts. Only rarely did the men themselves come (probably as substitutes for their wives). The primary role of men in society (not in the festival performance) is clear from the fact that they are identified by name and occupation in the texts, while women usually remain anonymous. As examples, I have selected the last text of Lugalanda and the first of Urukagina from a series of five documents from a period of six years (Table 4).[14]

Table 4. Overview of recipients of "holy milk and holy malt" in a central ceremony of Bau's Festival (texts DP 132, year 5 of Lugalanda 5; DP 133, year 1 of Urukagina).

			L5	U1
Representatives of three main temples				
wife of	temple lord (*saŋŋa*)	of Nanše	+	+
wife of	field surveyor (lu_2-$eše_2$-gid_2)	of Nanše	+	+
wife of	chief scribe (*dub-sar-maḫ*)	of Nanše	–	+[15]
wife of	chief singer of lamentations (*gala-maḫ*)	of Nanše	–	+
wife of	temple lord	of Ninmarki	+	+
wife of	captain (nu-$banda_3$)	of Ninmarki	+	+
wife of	chief scribe	of Ninmarki	–	+
wife of	chief singer of lamentations	of Ninmarki	–	+
wife of	captain	of Ninŋirsu	+	+
wife of	chief herdsman ($šuš_3$)	of Ninŋirsu	+	+
wife of	chief scribe	of Ninŋirsu	+	–
wife of	field surveyor	of Ninŋirsu	+	–
Temple lords of deities, temples, and cities				
wife of	temple lord	of Ḏumuzi	+	+
wife of	temple lord	of Ḏatumdu	–	+
wife of	temple lord	of Ḫendursaŋ	+	+

[14] *VS* 14, 173 (Lugalanda 4/1), *DP* 226 (Lugalanda 4/2), *DP* 132 (Lugalanda 5), (no texts from Lugalanda 6 and Urukagina *ensi* year), *DP* 133 (Urukagina 1), *TSA* 5 (Urukagina 2). On this group of texts see the summary of Selz 1995: 73–78.

[15] Corresponds to chief scribe of Niŋen in L5?

wife of	temple lord	of Inana	+	+
wife of	temple lord	of Nindara	+	+
wife of	temple lord	of Ningublaga	+	+
—	temple lord	of Abzu temple	–	+
wife of	temple lord	of Bagara temple	–	+
wife of	temple lord	of DUG.RU temple	+	–
wife of	temple lord	of Ebabbar temple	+	+
wife of	temple lord	of Šagepada temple	–	+
wife of	temple lord	of (city) Pa'enku	–	+
—	temple lord (Lugal-dalla)	of (city) Pasira	+	+
wife of	temple lord	of (city) Urtur	–	+
wife of	temple lord	of (city) Urub	+	+
wife of	temple lord (*saŋŋa niŋ*$_2$)	"of things"	–	+
Officials of cities				
—	chief singer of lamentations	of Girsu	+	+
wife of	chief singer of lamentations	of Lagas	+	+
—	chief singer of lamentations	of Niŋen	+	–[16]
wife of	chief scribe	of Lagas	+	–
Officials of ruler, female quarter and children				
wife of	chief merchant (Ur-Emuš)	of the ruler	+	–
wife of	comander (*gal-uŋ*$_3$, Il)	of the ruler	+	–
wife of	chief herdsman (Amar-izim)	of the ruler	+	+
wife of	chief merchant (Ur-Emuš)	of the ruler	–	+
—	chief merchant (Ur-Emuš)	of female quarter	+	–
—	chief herdsman (Urdu)	of female quarter	+	+
wife of	captain (Ur-igiamaše)	(of the children)	+	+
Various occupations				
wife of	chief seafearing merchant (*gaeš*$_3^{ga}$*-maḫ*)		+	+
wife of	chief herald (*niŋir-maḫ*, Zaŋu)		+	+[17]
wife of	herald (*niŋir*, Lala)		+	+

[16] Corresponds to chief scribe of Nanše in U1?
[17] Without name in U1.

wives of	four commanders: Enabzuatum, Urki, Irika Ur-Ninŋirsu	4 + +[18]	1 – +
wife of	commander of the large boats (*gal-uŋ$_3$ ma$_2$ gal-gal*)	–	+
wife of	chief envoy (*sugal$_7$-maḫ*)	+	+
wife of	chief scribe (Lugal-šudude)	–	+
wife of	accountant (*saŋ-du$_5$*)		
wife of	ploughman (*engar*, Lu-Bau)	+	–
—	ploughman (Ur-dam)	+	+
wife of	ploughman (Lugalkur)	+	–
wife of	field surveyor (Lugalkur)	–	+
wife of	leader of plough team (*saŋ-apin*, Aiagirizal)	–	+
wife of	oxen driver (*gud-laḫ$_5$*, Ur-Bau)	–	+
wife of	foreman of granary (*ka-kuru$_{13}$*)	+	+
wife of	sailor	+	+
wife of	*ensigal* (a title)	–	+
Only mentioned by name			
wives of	Egalesi Bau-amadari	+ –	– +
—	Mašgura	+	–

Summary:

	individuals	**L5**	**U1**
Representatives of three main temples	12	8	10
Temple lords of deities, temples, and cities	16	9	15
Officials of ruler, female quarter and children	6	6	4
Officials of cities	4	4	2
Various occupations	20	14	15
Only mentioned by name	3	2	1
Total	*61*	***43***	***47***
individuals attested in both years	*28* =	65%	60%

Note: L5 = Luganda year 5; U1 = Urukagina year 1

[18] Without title in L5.

More than elsewhere, the social texture of the city-state becomes clear in the composition of this group of special guests (Table 4). The 43 or 47 people represent the most important offices of the city-state. The temple lords (*saŋŋa*) of gods and cities were an important group, to which communal organisations of several hundred workers were subordinate, so that each of them represented a total of one or two thousand inhabitants. People were also subject to the commanders (*gal-uŋ*$_3$) and the captains.[19] Prominent professions such as chief scribe, accountant, and chief singer of lamentations fulfilled important tasks for society (in administration or at funerals). Economically significant were the chief merchant Ur-Emuš or selected representatives of various professions. I consider it important that a herd administrator, a ploughman, or a cattle leader also belonged to a city-state's elite. They were individual representatives of an entire professional group, and the importance of agricultural production must also be assessed against the technical background of the Early Bronze Age. Among the elite who were honoured in a special rite at Bau's Festival, the military as well as the ruling family were missing; only very few people overlap with the "acquaintances" of the city ruler (marked in Table 3).

Who belonged to the elite, however, changed with the transition to a new ruler. When Urukagina took office, he carried out far-reaching reforms on taxation and the control of arable land, which were accompanied by a renaming of communal organisations after gods. This is reflected in the fact that under Urukagina considerably more temple lords appeared as the guests' husbands than under Lugalanda. Individuals were also exchanged in other ways, but two thirds of those previously honoured remained in this group. During each reign, the composition of the group remained quite stable.

As already noted, the goddess's festival focused on the wives of the office holders. The social ties that were established among the dignitaries of the city-state were thus enormously strengthened when their families via their wives were involved in a personal relationship. Only for Bau's Festival do sources exist enumerating individual festival participants, but we know that this was only one of eight equally ranked festivals in the city-state, at which more or less the same circle of persons must have stood in the centre of attention.

[19] In a similar list hypothesized for another festival elsewhere, the Female Quarter would be represented by its captain Eniggal.

4. Discussion

For our project to identify an elite in a particular historical situation it was crucial not to anecdotally adduce individual sources or only to list individuals appearing in certain groups of documents in any role, but to select a documentation that is complete to the extent that a lack of certain persons or groups among an elite is relevant and cannot be explained by the state of the source material. Both exemplary cases were situated in the context of feasting, because banquets and festivals offered an occasion to select people, namely a) the political elite at the festive banquets in the palace (Table 2) and b) the administrative-economic or social elite of the city-state at the annual festival of the goddess Bau (Table 4).

In both cases, significantly less than 1 percent, perhaps only one or a few per thousand of the population, were present: in Presargonic Girsu, some 40 people from perhaps some tens of thousands of inhabitants of the city-state participated;[20] in the case of Ebla, entire towns were represented only by their leaders and a handful of elders.

In both cases people were selected for their competence and power in a social field — for example in the military, politics, the organisation of people, the administration of goods, and trade — but by being invited into the circle of festival participants their influence beyond that was obvious. In both cases, this influence affected the entire state, no longer a single city or organisation, so it was a state elite in each case. Due to the political circumstances, a certain fluctuation of persons is to be noticed everywhere. On account of their relevance to the state and their involvement in foreign policy, the two groups of elites thus contribute decisively to the social cohesion of a state, without such a task having to be ascribed primarily to the ruler.[21] The consistent and historically comprehensible selection of dignitaries in all groups examined (guests of the ruler in Ebla and Puzriš-Dagān, Bau's Festival in Girsu) also shows that

[20] This rather low estimate is based on the number of communal organisations and the calculation that the female quarter (Emunus) provided for about 1,500 to 2,000 people; see Sallaberger 2019. This does not take into account the fact that, according to the known figures, Ninŋirsu's organisation was twenty times as large as Bau's, the Emunus.

[21] As emphasized above in Section 2, the study of elites allows an analysis of the social groups below the ruler; essential is the function of feastings to represent, transmit, negotiate and confirm the social order (see generally Dietler & Hayden 2001). The study by Steinkeller (2017) on his "Managerial Class" or that by Garfinkle (2015) on the connectivity of the persons featuring in the documents from Puzriš-Dagān form other approaches to do justice to the significance of these social groups.

the ruler or his wife did not invite their guests only on the basis of purely personal preferences.[22]

Both elite groups can claim the criterion of "visibility", as these individuals appeared at festive occasions which were also attended by other people. The royal gifts distinguished the recipients outside the palace (Sallaberger 2018), and perhaps the "holy milk and holy malt" served as a recognizable marker as well.

On the basis of the extraordinary documentation, two different groups of persons can thus be identified who represented a state elite and for whom the usual criteria cited for an elite apply. However, the two groups differ fundamentally from each other. Thus the administrators (apart from those of the palace goods), the leading officials (such as accountant, field surveyor), and the top officials of the communal organisations are absent from the palace both in Ebla and in the Ur III period. These social leaders, however, met at an urban festival. The people in the palace do not include members of the producers active in agricultural or craft production.[23] At the religious festival, on the other hand, representatives of the whole society took part, most noteworthy also representatives of the economically central fields of agriculture and livestock breeding.

With the differences between the two groups, similarities are all the more striking. For example, merchants are represented both at the royal court and prominently at the religious festival; some of them therefore circulated in the court, but their activities also covered the communal organisations. Since only the chief merchant is mentioned at Bau's Festival, the social embedding of his subordinate merchants does not seem to have been limited to the circle of an elite.

At the religious festival of the goddess, women participated for their husbands, the leading persons in the city-state (Table 4). The queen or princesses, on the other hand, are attested as independent actors; at the royal court they received precious gifts, and accordingly they appeared with their own names and titles (Tables 1 and 2). Thus, without further indications, the representation of women at festivals in images (Otto 2016) does not indicate which of the two groups the women could belong to.

[22] However, some of the "acquaintances" of the city-ruler (Table 3) may well have been chosen on the basis of personal preferences.

[23] T. Veblen's (1899) designation of this group as "leisure class" is ambiguous, since it naturally includes people from the military, diplomats, etc., who take on important functions in society; Veblen's central issue is differentiation from the producers.

These two concrete examples of elites in the Early Bronze Age also represent two social fields. The elite in the palace, distinguished by its proximity to the ruler, with the grand vizier, the military, and the envoys, as well as the representatives of the cities, defines in particular the agenda of foreign policy, including warfare. This corresponds to the royal sector in the Ur III period. To classify the role of precious gifts, I refer only to the observations of Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 183ff), according to which it is economically expensive, but in a less institutionally determined rule unavoidable, to bind a certain circle of society personally to the ruler through gifts — a perspective very applicable for ancient Mesopotamia. The percentage of the ruler's expenditure on individual persons described here as elite is 30% and 50% of the total respectively in Ebla, 40% in Puzriš-Dagān. This enormous amount of expenditure on silver or cattle for slaughter most clearly indicates the relevance of these individuals to the state. Here I confined myself to indicating their activities by their respective official titles alone and not elaborate these further.

The administrative-economic or social elite of the city–state from the second exemplary case (Table 4) then represents the so-called "institutional economy" as it has been labeled by Steinkeller (2017a and more often), the subsistence economy with its obligatory participation in long-distance trade, whereby most of the working people belonged to communal organisations and also lived in the same city or city quarter (Sallaberger & Pruß 2015). Steinkeller (2017b) called the highest representatives of these organisations the "managerial class", but the example of Bau's Festival proves that this group also included the administrators of smaller towns and shrines as well as various officials and representatives of occupations in agriculture. This internal social elite represented the cities and communal organisations of the entire city-state, and if their solidarity was strengthened by the regular participation in festivals, this also strengthened the resilience of the social order and the communal economy to survive in times of political crisis.

Who is elite? The two exemplary cases show that conclusive answers are hardly possible without more information and more precise definitions. Depending on the context, two different groups of people with only a few overlaps prove to be elites: the military and foreign policy elite at the palace and the administrative-economic or social elite of the city-state at the religious festival.

But the offices and occupations mentioned in these two cases also indicate which persons we should not expect a priori under an elite in the

third millennium: priests are by far not as prominent as often suspected; likewise scribes or even "scholars" are missing.[24]

And both lists demonstrate another point quite clearly: an occupation alone tells very little about the social position of an individual of this occupation. The urban elite included merchants, chief herdsman, cattle guides, and ploughmen, but these were always a few selected persons. So it is completely wrong to conclude that "ploughmen" generally were elite, but two selected ploughmen were members of the social elite at Bau's Festival.

The two exemplary cases may offer a definite idea of who belonged to an elite that may prove helpful for future work on elites or the society of Early Bronze Age Syro-Mesopotamia. At the same time, the strong differences between the two lists may encourage describing and defining the term "elite" according to its specific historical context and to the scholar's analytical perspective.

Bibliography

Abbink J. & T. Salverda (eds.), 2013: *The anthropology of elites. Power, culture, and the complexities of distinction*, New York.

Adams R. McC., 1974: "The Mesopotamian social landscape: a view from the frontier", in *Reconstructing complex societies: an archaeological colloquium*, BASOR Suppl. 20, p. 1–20.

Archi A., 2018: *Administrative texts: allotments of clothing for the palace personnel (Archive L. 2769)*, Archivi Reali di Ebla Testi 20, Wiesbaden.

Bourdieu P., 1990: *The logic of practice*, Stanford, CA [Engl. translation of *Le sens pratique*, Paris 1980].

Daloz J.-P., 2011: "The distinction of social and political elites", *Comparative Sociology* 10, p. 443–455.

Dietler M. & B. Hayden (eds.), 2001: *Feasts: archaeological and ethnographic experience on food, politics, and power*, Washington.

Foster B. R., 2016: *The age of Agade: Inventing empire in ancient Mesopotamia*, London/New York.

Garfinkle S. J., 2013: "City-states of the ancient Near East", in P. Fibiger Bang & W. Scheidel (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the state in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, Oxford, p. 94–119.

[24] A statement such as "scribes and scholars belonged to the social elite" (Pearce 1995: 2265) cannot be confirmed for this period.

—— 2015: "Ur III administrative texts: building blocks of state community," in P. Delnero & J. Lauinger (eds.): *Texts and contexts. The circulation and transmission of cuneiform texts in social space*, Boston/Berlin, p. 143–165.
Hartmann M., 2013: s.v. "Elite", in G. Endruweit *et al.* (eds.), *Wörterbuch der Soziologie*, Konstanz/München, p. 89–90.
Hausleiter A. *et al.* (eds.), 2002: *Material Culture and Mental Spheres. Rezeption archäologischer Denkrichtungen in der Vorderasiatischen Altertumskunde*, Münster.
Higley J., 2011: "Elites", in B. Badie *et al.* (eds.), *International encyclopedia of political science*, vol. 3, Thousand Oaks, CA, p. 759–764.
Keller K., 2014: "Elites", in F. Jaeger (ed.), *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit Online*, Online article in enzyklopaedie-der-neuzeit/*-a0891000; consulted 01/2019.
Keller S., 1963: *Beyond the ruling class. Strategic elites in modern society*, New York.
Kröss K., in preparation: "Eliten – Theorien und Anwendbarkeit in den Altertumswissenschaften" (working title), manuscript (version of 2017).
Lehmann U., 2016: *^{d}šára-ì-sa$_6$ und ur-ba-gára. Untersuchungen zu den Verwaltungstexten der neusumerischen Lagaš II-Periode aus Girsu,* Münster.
Matthews R. J., 2003: *The archaeology of Mesopotamia. Theories and approaches,* London/New York.
Molina M., 2014: *Sargonic cuneiform tablets in the Real Academia de la Historia. The Carl L. Lippmann collection,* Madrid.
Otto A., 2016: "Professional women and women at work in Mesopotamia and Syria (3rd and early 2nd millennia BC): The (rare) information from visual images", in B. Lion & C. Michel (ed.), *The role of women in work and society in the ancient Near East*, Boston, p. 112–148.
Paoletti P., 2012: *Der König und sein Kreis: Das staatliche Schatzarchiv der III. Dynastie von Ur*, Madrid.
Pearce L., 1995: "The scribes and scholars of ancient Mespotamia", in J. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East*, New York, p. 2265–2287.
Pollock S., 2003: "Feasts, funerals, and fast food in early Mesopotamian states", in T. L. Bray (ed.), *The archaeology and politics of food and feasting in early states and Empires*, New York, p. 17-38.
Sallaberger W., 2004: "Schlachtvieh aus Puzriš-Dagān. Zur Bedeutung dieses königlichen Archivs", *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux* 38 (2003–2004), p. 45–62.
—— 2013: "The management of the royal treasure. Palace archives and palatial economy in the cncient Near East", in J. A. Hill *et al.* (ed.), *Experiencing power, generating authority. Cosmos, politics, and the ideology of kingship in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, Philadelphia, p. 219–255.
—— 2018: "Il tesoro reale e il suo significato economico e politico nell'Antico Oriente", in M. V. Valerani (ed.), *Valore delle cose e valore delle persone*, Roma, p. 1–24.
—— 2019: "Festival provisions in Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia", *Kaskal* 15 (in print).
Sallaberger W. & A. Pruß, 2015: "Home and work in Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia: 'Ration lists' and 'private houses' at Tell Beydar/Nabada", in

P. Steinkeller & M. Hudson (eds.), *Labor in the ancient world*, Dresden, p. 69–136.

Salverda T. & J. Abbink, 2013: "Introduction: an anthropological perspective on elite power and the cultural politics of elites", in J. Abbink & T. Salverda (eds.), *The anthropology of elites. Power, culture, and the complexities of distinction*, New York, p. 1–28.

Schijf H., 2013: "Researching elites: old and new perspectives", in J. Abbink & T. Salverda (eds.), *The anthropology of elites. Power, culture, and the complexities of distinction*, New York, p. 29–44.

Schloen J. D., 2001: *The house of the father as fact and symbol. Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the ancient Near East*, Winona Lake.

Schrakamp I., 2014: "Krieger und Bauern. RU-lugal und aga/aga_3-us_2 im Militär des altsumerischen Lagaš", in H. Neumann *et al*. (eds.), *Krieg und Frieden im Alten Vorderasien*, Münster, p. 691-724.

Scott J., 2008: "Modes of power and the re-conceptualization of elites", in M. Savage & K. Williams (eds.), *Remembering elites, Sociological Review Monograph Series* 56/s1, p. 27–43.

Selz G., 1995: *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des altsumerischen Stadtstaates von Lagaš*, Philadelphia.

Sollberger E., 1972: "Ur-III society: some unanswered questions", in D. O. Edzard (ed.), *Gesellschaftsklassen im Alten Zweistromland und in den angrenzenden Gebieten: XVIII. Rencontre assyriologique internationale, München 29. Juni bis 3. Juli 1970*, München, p. 185-189.

Steinkeller P., 2017a: "An estimate of the population of the city of Umma in Ur III times", in Y. Heffron *et al*. (eds.), *At the dawn of history. Ancient Near Eastern studies in honour of J. N. Postgate*, Winona Lake, p. 535–566.

—— 2017b: *History, texts and art in early Babylonia. Three essays*, Boston/Berlin.

Ur J. A., 2014: "Households and the emergence of cities in ancient Mesopotamia", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 24, p. 249–268.

Van De Mieroop M., 1997: *The Ancient Mesopotamian city*, Oxford.

Veblen T., 1899: *Theory of the leisure class* [numerous reprints].

Zettler R., 1992: *The Ur III temple of Inanna at Nippur. The operation and organization of urban religious institutions in Mesopotamia in the late third millennium BC*, Berlin.