CHAPTER FOUR

KIN GROUPS IN CENTRAL BABYLONIA: NIPPUR AND MARAD

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The literary composition “Advice to a Prince”, also known as the Fürstenspiegel, asserts Nippur’s privileged place along with Babylon and Sippar among the cities of Babylonia and cautions any king against abusing the rights of these cities. Originally known from Kuyunjik, a copy of the Fürstenspiegel was excavated at Nippur with a collection of tablets consisting primarily of letters dating to the mid-eighth century known as the governor’s archive. Lambert has suggested that the Fürstenspiegel was composed between 1000 and 700, while Diakanoff is more specific in his assertion that Sennacherib was the royal person for whom the advice was intended. Regardless of how precisely one dates the composition the Fürstenspiegel, it is very likely that it belongs within the milieu of the early Neo-Babylonian period and that its topic resonated with Babylonia’s urban leadership. The archeological context in which the Nippur copy was found, though secondary, associates it with an archive of

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2 Lambert suggests that the Fürstenspiegel depicts a weak king, reliant of foreign support, and therefore could be any one of several Babylonian kings between 1000 and 700 (BWL, 111). I.M. Diakonoff believes that composition of the Fürstenspiegel could not have occurred prior to the reign of Sargon II on the basis that much of the terminology and phraseology employed in the text is not used in inscriptions that pre-date that king. It is his opinion that the attitude of Sennacherib towards Babylonia makes him the most likely addressee of the text and that Shalmanesser V and Merodach-baladan II are the kings alluded to as cautionary examples (“A Babylonian Political Pamphlet from about 700 BC,” in Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger, AS 16 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965], 343–349).
letters, the owner of which may or may not have been Nippur's governor the šandabakku but was undoubtedly a member of the upper segment of society at Nippur. An excerpt of the text in a letter to Esarhaddon from Bēl-ušēzib, an influential scholar in the Assyrian court and possibly a native of Nippur, further contextualizes the Fürstenspiegel by demonstrating how literary works could be used to influence political figures. Bēl-ušēzib had asked that Esarhaddon show the same aortention to Nippur that he was lavishing on Babylon given Nippur's historical status. Such petitions were not without foundation. Past Assyrian kings had acknowledged Nippur's status by freeing the city from obligations of service and putting it on an equal footing with other Babylonian cities. The discovery of an edition of the Fürstenspiegel in the same archeological provenience as the letter archive and contemporary appeals to its contents illustrate an awareness of civic identity among an important segment of the population at Nippur and a belief in associated privileges that no doubt existed among other Babylonian urban elites with regard to their own cities.

As one of Babylonia's most venerable religious centers, Nippur enjoyed from early on the distinction of being the seat of Enlil, the king of the gods, even if no king ever made Nippur his capital city. Its religious status ensured that Nippur received royal patronage from an array of rulers throughout its history and at times made it a legitimizing prize for competing dynasties.

Nippur prospered under the Kassite dynasty during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries. The occupied area of Nippur expanded, the city's temples were renovated, and a wealth of textual evidence, most of which dates to the years 1356 to 1223, testifies to the array of

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3 See above, n. 25.
4 CT 54 212 = SAA 18 124 (K 8681). It had been thought that the writer was named Bēl-lišir, but collation of the tablet for SAA 18 has resulted in the reading of the name as Bēl-ušēzib and the attribution of this letter to the Babylonian scholar of that name (see K. Fabritius “Bēl-ušēzib,” in Karen Radner, ed., PNAE, Vol. 1, Part II: B–G [Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999], 338–339).
5 A point made by Reiner in “The Babylonian Fürstenspiegel in Practice,” 322.
6 The term used in the Fürstenspiegel for this freeing from obligation is šubarrû (Lambert, BWL, 112:30). In the course of campaigning in Babylonia, Shalmanessar III acknowledged the freedom of the citizens of Babylon and Borsippa (RIMA 3, A.0.102.5 vi 4). In his inscriptions, Sargon claims to have established this status for the cities of Sippar, Nippur, and Babylon (Winckler Sar. pl. 40:2 and Lyon Sar. 1:4 and 20:7). Likewise Esarhaddon claimed to have been the one who confirmed the freedom of Nippur, Babylon, Borsippa, and Sippar (Borger Esarh. 81 § 53:41).