THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE NADĪTU WOMEN IN OLD BABYLONIAN NIPPUR *)

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To date, our understanding of the Old Babylonian naditu institution has been based almost entirely on the information contained in the Sippar texts. Rich though it is in data on the rights and activities of the naditus, the Sippar corpus is meager indeed in its documentation of the rights and activities of the male segment of its population. The evidence suggests that the preponderance of naditu texts is more the result of selective sampling than a true reflection of Old Babylonian economic activity at Sippar. An examination of the contracts from Sippar shows that although men are participants in some of the transactions, in nearly 70% of the texts one or both participants are women, in most cases described as naditus. Furthermore, in 97% of the cases where a record exists of a transaction between a man and a naditu, the role of the naditu is such that she would have been the one to keep the text; i.e. the recipient of property, lessor of property, etc. ¹) This evidence suggests that the majority of the tablets must have been found in the houses of the naditus. Since the Sippar naditus are known to have been cloistered ²), it seems safe to assume that only the cloister suffered the

*) Abbreviations used in this article follow those listed in the A Volume of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, with the following additions: ARN = M. Çığ, H. Kızılıyay and F. R. Kraus, Altbabylonische Rechtsschriften aus Nippur (Istanbul, 1952); OIMA = Oriental Institute Microfiche Archives; SEON = E. Stone, The Social and Economic Organization of Old Babylonian Nippur, University of Chicago Unpublished PhD. Dissertation (Chicago, 1979); TIM = Texts in the Iraq Museum.

¹) These percentages are derived from the tables on pp. 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 342, 343, 345, 346, and 347 of R. Harris, Ancient Sippar, (Istanbul, 1971).

attentions of tablet hunters. The Sippar sample, then, must be approached with a full understanding of its limitations.

At Nippur, the situation is quite different. Of the approximately five hundred contracts that are available for study ³), only about 10% concern nadītu, and the pattern of excavations at Nippur has been such that these contracts cannot have been derived from a single area ⁴).

Thus, at Nippur it is possible to study the nadītu within the broader context of the society as a whole. Not only can we compare the structural-functional attributes of the nadītu institution, but it becomes

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⁴) The first recorded excavations at Nippur were conducted by Sir Austin Henry Layard (*Discoveries among the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, [New York, 1871]), who made a small sounding in 1851. In the following years the site was occasionally visited by interested archaeologists, but it was not until 1889 that full-scale excavations were begun. These were conducted by the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania and were directed by John P. Peters and H. V. Hilprecht (see J. Peters, *Nippur I* and *II*, [New York, 1899 and 1904]; H. Hilprecht, *Explorations in Bible Lands during the Nineteenth Century*, [Philadelphia, 1903]; and C. Fisher, *The Excavations at Nippur*, [Philadelphia, 1905]). After 1900, when this series of excavations came to a halt, no formal excavations were undertaken until 1948, when a new series was begun by the University Museum in collaboration with the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. In the interim, however, objects and tablets found their way into the hands of the Baghdad dealers in antiquities, thereby testifying to the activities of illicit diggers. Although the University Museum dropped out after the first three seasons, the Oriental Institute has continued this series of excavations until the present day. Only the second and third seasons uncovered substantial numbers of Old Babylonian contracts (see D. McCown and R. Haines, *Nippur I*, *OIP* 78, [Chicago, 1967]).