

Madawada

Portrait of a “Businesswoman”?

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Abstract: This article aims to bring together the information available so far about a non-Assyrian woman named Madawada who lived in Kaneš in the 19th century BCE. Madawada left behind a small archive with ten tablets written in the Old Assyrian dialect. This archive, its contents and chronology will be discussed. In particular, the question of her status as the wife of a merchant or businesswoman will be investigated.

The Old Assyrian period (1972–1718 BCE) is characterised by long-distance trade between Kaneš (mod. Kültepe), located in contemporary Anatolia (Turkey), and Aššur (mod. Qal’at-Šerqat), located in present-day Iraq.¹ Due to 23,500 cuneiform tablets (cf. Erol 2018, 35), written in the Old Assyrian dialect, discovered in Kaneš, we are well informed about many aspects of life during this period. The detailed correspondence of Assyrian merchants with their trading partners, employees, and family members, as well as numerous (legal) documents, offers insights into the different aspects of daily and business life of that time. Most of the texts originate from the Assyrian sphere, i.e. were written by Assyrians, while only a few texts can be attributed to the native or rather non-Assyrian population.²

The lives of women as represented in the Old Assyrian sources attracted much attention over the last years (see e.g. Michel 2006; Thomason 2013; and most recently Michel 2020). There are many possibilities to trace their lives in ancient Kaneš as well as Aššur. They sent letters and were active in business-related undertakings, not only on their husband’s behalf but also on their own. Especially Assyrian women played an important role, professionally speaking, according to their family’s archives. In Kaneš, Assyrian and non-Assyrian families lived next to one another but much less is known about the non-Assyrian women. The biographies of only some of them have been studied in detail, mainly because they were first wives of Assyrian merchants and figured prominently in their husband’s archives, e.g. Kunnaniya, wife of Aššur-mūtappil or Ḫatala, wife of Lā-qēpum. In some cases, even the lives

¹ Abbreviations follow the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (Berlin etc., 1928–2018).

² The classification Assyrian vs. non-Assyrian is based on a distinction between Akkadian (Assyrian) names on one side and on the other side all other names that appear in Old Assyrian documents, namely Hattic, Hittite (or better Hittitoid; see Kloekhorst 2019), Hurrian, and Luwian names, which make up a large group of the Old Assyrian onomastics. There is still a large group of personal names that we cannot assign to any

language family. For a discussion of these categories see Schlüter 2020, 83–85 and 89–93. When classifying people’s names, it must always be kept in mind that a person with an Assyrian name does not necessarily have to be an Assyrian, because in the course of time the onomasticon of the Old Assyrian sources also became mixed. The classification postulated here must be viewed with extreme caution and can only be used as a rough tool of investigation. Note that the reading of the Hittitoid names follows Kloekhorst 2019.

of second wives have attracted attention, e.g. Šašaḥšušar, wife of Aššur-nādā or Annanna, wife of Ennam-Aššur.³

Aside from the information provided in the archives of the prominent merchants, little is known about non-Assyrian women and their businesses. One exception seems to be Madawada, a woman who acted as a creditor and is often referred to as a “businesswoman”. Her archive also contains a slave purchase deed, which is why I came upon her story while working on my dissertation. She is the protagonist of the following article, which provides a short biography of Madawada and her life in ancient Kaneš.

1. Madawada and her archive

Madawada⁴ left behind a small archive, which to date contains ten texts of which seven were published and discussed by I. Albayrak (1998).⁵ They all shed light on her activities as a “businesswoman”: in eight texts she lends various sums of silver and/or barley, in one she buys a female slave. The last document is a legal record which refers to one of her debt notes (see Appendix).⁶ The composition of her archive is typical of those of non-Assyrians, as

they usually contain no letters but only legal documents, like sale contracts and debt notes (Michel 2011, 102–105).

According to Hertel (2014, 50 Appendix 1), Madawada was the owner of house no. 108 in Kaneš but there exists no location or information regarding the house itself. The eight tablets with the kt o/k excavation numbers (see appendix) were not found in her house.⁷ Veenhof (2008–2009, 190) notes that the circumstances of finding are somewhat uncertain. He supposes that the tablets of Madawada’s archive may come from house no. 19 which may have belonged to a man called Agûa, son of Šu-Anum.⁸ Why these documents were discovered in this specific house remains unclear and cannot be answered due to the lack of published archaeological data.⁹ The remaining two texts (CCT 1, 9b; JCS 14, 5) in which Madawada is mentioned derive from illicit diggings and therefore have no archaeological context.

As the dates on three of the debt notes indicate, Madawada’s archive can be dated to level II of Kaneš (1972–1835 BCE), but the exact dating

³ For more information on these women see the excellent portraits and text editions in Michel 2020, 444–481.

⁴ The name once is written *ma-da-ma-da* (see fn. 33) in all other cases *ma-da-wa-da*. The fact that the same person is meant is evident from the directly related CCT 1, 9b and JCS 14, 5: both of which have a debtor of the same name who owes the same amount of debt; only the debtor’s name was written differently (cf. Zehnder 210, 219–220).

The origin of the name remains unclear (Kloekhorst 2019, 74); Zehnder (2010, 219–220) provides an overview of previous attempts of interpretation.

⁵ Most of the non-Assyrian archives from Kaneš remain unpublished (see Michel 2011, 99–102 and Günbattı 2016, 7 for an overview). As an exception now AKT 10 (= Günbattı 2016) can be mentioned; that volume contains editions of the archives of Šarapunua and Pirua.

⁶ As the Appendix shows, eight texts have kt o/k excavation numbers and were thus discovered during excavations in 1963.

⁷ Several of the kt o/k-texts were published in AKT 4 (= Albayrak 2006), others in journal articles by the same author (e.g. Albayrak 1998; Albayrak 2005).

⁸ Hertel (2014, 45) is not certain about the owner of that house. House no. 19 had a size of 80 m² and was separated into four rooms. According to Veenhof’s (2008–2009, 190) analysis of the excavation data, the archive of Madawada must have been found in room 2. For a map of the houses of the Lower Town see Hertel 2014, 29 fig. 3 and fig. 4 (with a plan of house no. 19).

⁹ Normally, one takes into consideration that people who did not own a house, or rather, did not have the possibility to keep tablets (e.g. caravan personnel, travel agents), gave them to other people to keep their documents for them. Veenhof (2003, 115–119) calls these tablets “strange records” because they had no personal relation to the archive owner (see also Veenhof 2013, 32). Why Madawada’s tablets were not found in her house remains uncertain, they might have been brought to house no. 19 after her death, but this is only speculation.

remains uncertain.¹⁰ Hecker (aATU) dates CCT 1, 9b to REL¹¹ 93 (= 1880 BCE) and kt o/k 40 and 72 to REL 107 (= 1866 BCE). In this case, the texts would have been written in the heyday of Kaneš, which can be dated roughly between REL 80–110 (1893–1863 BCE).¹² But for CCT 1, 9b not only *līmum*¹³ Iddi(n)-abum, son of Narbītum (REL 93 = 1880 BCE) is possible (as suggested by Hecker), but also *līmum* Iddi(n)-abum (REL 122 = 1851 BCE). The most probable candidates for the *līmum* of kt o/k 40 and 72 are Enna(m)-Suen, son of Šu-Aššur (REL 107 = 1866 BCE) and Enna(m)-Suen, son of Šu-Ištar (REL 115 = 1858 BCE).¹⁴ Therefore, both texts can also be dated to the time after the heyday of Kaneš level II – a prosopographical analysis does not provide helpful information.

It is nearly impossible to reconstruct Madawada's social network in Kaneš because only impersonal texts are preserved. The individuals mentioned as debtors in the documents all bear very common names and do not provide enough material for a prosopographical investigation. This is a common problem philologists face when dealing with texts from non-Assyrian archives in Kaneš.¹⁵ Therefore, we can only read between the lines – which will be attempted in the second part of this paper.

2. Madawada – Wife or Businesswoman?

Assyrian and non-Assyrian women could act not only as creditors but also as agents or business partners of their husbands (Michel 2020,

302). While their names appear in different types of documents it is often unclear if they acted on their own or on their husband's behalf. Family correspondences indicate that husbands while on a caravan trip or while for business in Aššur often gave instructions to their wives – irrespective of their *aššatum* or *amtum*-status¹⁶ – how to handle the household or which business affairs they had to look after.¹⁷

Aside from Madawada, a man named Iddi(n)-Aššur is mentioned in two documents, whereas he may have been her husband, as already suggested by Albayrak (1998, 11) and therefore the legitimate question arises whether she conducted business on behalf of her husband. But what evidence do we have for this theory? Comparisons with other women might provide new insights.

An indicator that Madawada was the wife of an Assyrian merchant could be that three of the eight debt notes used *hamuštum*-eponyms (see Appendix). Dercksen (2011, 236–237) points out that this form of dating texts was alien to non-Assyrians and only occurred when one of the individuals involved was “an Assyrian or appears to be involved in the Assyrian community, or if the creditor wants to be explicit about the start of the debt”.

Three documents from Madawada's archive name *hamuštum*-eponyms but an Assyrian party can be found only once (CCT 1, 9b). The two other texts (kt o/k 40 and 72) contain only

¹⁰ For the Old Assyrian chronology see Barjamovic – Hertel – Larsen 2012, 1–40.

¹¹ For the Revised Eponym List (REL) see Barjamovic – Hertel – Larsen 2012, 92–97.

¹² See Barjamovic – Hertel – Larsen 2012, 55.

¹³ *Līmum* designates a whole year associated with a certain person, *hamuštum* a “week” (see Kryszat 2004, 57–65 for *līmum* and 159–197 for *hamuštum*). It is still not clear how many days an Old Assyrian “week” contained; the mainstream pleads for a seven-day unit (Dercksen 2011, 235).

¹⁴ There are two more *līmū* of men called Enna(m)-Suen, son of Iddin-abum (REL 136 = 1837 BCE) or Enna(m)-Suen (REL 138 = 1835 BCE), but these can

be excluded because the dates in the debt notes contained *hamuštum*-eponyms which were not in use after REL 125 anymore (see Kouwenberg 2019, 183).

¹⁵ See e.g. Ašiat, son of Arurupa (Donbaz 1986 and 1988; Schlüter 2020, 222–226).

¹⁶ In the Old Assyrian sources, the first wife was called *aššatum*, the second wife *amtum*, which can also be translated as “female slave”.

¹⁷ See e.g. the correspondence between Šašaḥšušar and Aššur-nādā (OAA 1, 50–58); Annanna and Ennam-Aššur (e. g. AKT 6b, 225; 238; 239; 299–304; 307–314) or Ištar-baštī and Imdī-ilum (CCT 4, 28a; TC 3, 56).

non-Assyrian names of parties and witnesses. The use of *ḥamuštum*-eponyms might thus reflect the influence of an Assyrian husband. Nevertheless, the only case where Iddi(n)-Aššur and Madawada appear together as debtors contains no *ḥamuštum*-eponym (see also Dercksen 2011, 236–237 with n. 13).

A look at other non-Assyrian female creditors (Tab. 1) reveals that a date with *ḥamuštum*-eponyms (as well as *līmum*) only appears in debt notes if at least one of the debtors was Assyrian. This corroborates Dercksen's suggestion. Debt notes of Assyrian female creditors nearly always mention a *ḥamuštum*-eponym,

e.g., those of Aḥātum (BIN 4, 153; TC 3, 228) or Šāt-Anna (CCT 5, 20c; TC 3, 235; TC 3, 220).¹⁸ Therefore, one can assume that Madawada was a woman who worked for her Assyrian husband, namely Iddi(n)-Aššur. The other possibility is that Iddi(n)-Aššur may have been her business partner. In any case, the sometimes very large sums that Madawada lent (up to 180 shekels of silver!) indicate that she might have been representing a larger family firm – whether the silver belonged to her cannot be answered with certainty.

Text	Creditor ¹⁹	Debtor	Debt	<i>ḥamuštum</i>
ICK 1, 16 a/b	Annanna (luw.?)	Ḫuluš; Azue	47 ¼ s. silver	-
ICK 1, 24 a/b	Annanna (luw.?)	Šataḥšušar	11 <¼> s. silver	-
kt m/k 147: 46–53a ²⁰	Azzukanni(n) ²¹ (hurr.)	Ilī-bēlī, son of Šu-Kūbim	122 s. refined silver	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Itūr-ilī
kt m/k 147: 53b–60	Azzukanni(n) (hurr.)	Puzur-šaduē	30 m. copper <i>šikkum</i> ²²	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Aššur-imittī
AKT 6d, 833 ²³	Ḫutita (hatt.) ²⁴	Šamaš-ṭāb	[x] s. refined silver	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Pūšu-kēn u Puzur-Annā
kt n/k 860 ²⁵	Kulšan (hitt.?)	Abāya, Lamassatum, Kuzīya	25 ½ s. refined silver	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Aššur-iddi(n) u Šu-Ištar
AKT 1, 45	Kuripa (hurr.) ²⁶	Ḫatitim	9 s. silver	-

¹⁸ Further examples are Ennum-Ištar in kt 86/k 160 (see Veenhof 2017, 673); Šalimma, wife of Ir'am-Aššur in kt 91/k 518 a/b (= AKT 8, 209; see Veenhof 2017, 674). More instances are provided by Michel (2020, nos. 182–184). There are also some exceptions to be found: kt a/k 335 (see Albayrak 2005, 30–31) where Ištar-bašti lends silver to Atali or AKT 8, 209 where Šalimma lends silver to Išḥašara and Aliaḥšušar. These texts mention no *ḥamuštum*-eponym.

¹⁹ The origin of the name is listed in brackets behind the name of the creditor. Abbreviations: hatt. = Hattian; hitt. = Hittite (Hittitoid); hurr. = Hurrian; luw. = Luwian.

²⁰ For kt m/k 147 see Hecker, aATU folder kt m/k pp. 113–116.

²¹ Cf. Richter 2016, 82–83.

²² This means copper of poor quality (cf. Kouwenberg 2019, 172).

²³ The last line of this debt-note is ambiguous: KÙ.BABBAR *ša* DAM.GÀR-ri-<im> “silver of the merchant” (Transliteration is following Larsen 2018, 98). This may indicate that the silver which Ḫutita lent to Šamaš-ṭāb was not her own silver, probably also not her husband's.

²⁴ See Zehnder 2010, 167.

²⁵ See Michel 2020, 291–292 no. 188.

²⁶ Cf. Richter 2016, 25 n. 76 *Kurimpa “orphan”.

Text	Creditor ¹⁹	Debtor	Debt	<i>ḥamuštum</i>
AKT 1, 46	Mus/za (hurr.?) ²⁷	Ašqūdum, son of Aššur-rēšī	3 2/3 s. and 15 grains <i>līti</i> -silver ²⁸	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Ušur-ša- Ištar
Prague I 584	Nimaḥšušar (hitt.)	Šašia; Šašnina	6 s. <i>līti</i> -silver	-
kt 91/k 170 ²⁹	Šupianika (hitt.)	Ḥašui; Šarnikan; Ḥatala	[x]+2 s. silver	-
AKT 1, 60	Zizizi (hurr.?) ³⁰	Nakiliet, Manamana	34 1/2 s. silver	-
AKT 1, 72	Zizizi (hurr.?)	Šurama(?) ³¹	93 1/2 s. silver	-

Tab. 1: Non-Assyrian female creditors; (m. = mina; s. = shekel).

A look at other archives, however, reveals the active involvement of wives in trade. One woman for whom similar activities are attested is Lamassutum, the wife of Elamma. Lamassutum also lived in Kaneš with her husband. She was participating in business affairs before but mainly after Elamma's death: she bought slaves (AKT 8, 154 and 157) and granted loans (AKT 8, 158; 159; 161; 162). As with Madawada, she is never referred to as a wife in these cases. Even though Lamassutum's husband, Elamma, was still alive during the time she conducted some of her transactions, she was also very active as a widow and accumulated extensive wealth, as a listing of her estate shows (cf. AKT 8, 164). A similar assumption can be made in Madawada's case, as she may have been particularly active in managing business affairs after her husband's death.

Nonetheless, drawing up contracts such as the above discussed debt notes was an unusual task for a non-Assyrian wife of an Assyrian merchant, as a comparison with such wives shows: The *amtum*-wives Šašahšušar and Annanna left

no debt notes behind that would confirm them as creditors – on the contrary, there is a letter which proves that Annanna was indebted (s. AKT 6a, 12). Šašahšušar received instructions from her husband to collect his debts (s. OAA 1, 51: 19–22; OAA 1, 53: 8–17). The same applies in Kunnaniya's case, as she is not recorded as a creditor in the sources either. Only Ḥatala is mentioned as a creditor in a letter (Prague I 669: 11–15) where her husband instructs her to collect the silver of her tablet (KÜ.BABBAR : *ša DUB-ki* “the silver of your tablet”) – but as can be seen, such exceptions are rare.

It is interesting to note that women – both Assyrian and non-Assyrian – mentioned as creditors in debt notes are usually not further designated as “wife of PN” or “daughter of PN”. For this reason, even the Assyrian female creditors cannot be prosopographically linked to an archive or family, as this is only possible due to the archaeological context of archives.

As this brief overview has shown, the information available at hand is not sufficient to

²⁷²⁷ The origin of the name is doubtful. Zehnder (2010, 227) supposes a Hurrian origin as most convincing. Michel (2020, 287) suggests that the name Musa belonged to an Assyrian woman since she designated her as “Assyrian Woman” in the caption. That Musa is a female individual is indicated by the verbal form *tīšu* “she has” referring to her as creditor.

²⁸ For this special kind of silver see Veenhof 2014, 396.

²⁹ See Veenhof 2017, 672.

³⁰ See Zehnder 2010, 275. The element *-ziz* is frequently found in Hurrian names (s. Richter 2016, 515). But the name could also be a nickname, which was used for Ištar-baštī II., the daughter of Imdī-ilum and Ištar-baštī I. (cf. Kryszat 2007, 216; for an overview of her correspondence: Kienast 2015, 219–224).

³¹ This name is often rendered as Šu-Rama (cf. Michel 2020, 291). A name of the type Šu-DN makes one expect a theophoric element, but a deity called Rama is unknown to the author.

contextualise Madawada and her activities. It seems likely that she was the wife of an Assyrian merchant and that she mainly acted as an independent businesswoman after his death, but this is only one possible interpretation.

3. Conclusion

The investigation of Madawada's archive and her activities demonstrates how difficult it is to trace the life of a non-Assyrian individual, even if parts of the archive of this person are preserved. There are two main reasons for this circumstance:

- 1.) No letters are available that could help to reconstruct the social network or gain insight into family relations.
- 2.) The seldom identification of individuals by naming their father, husband, etc. Often the same personal names occur without further information that would allow a more precise identification.

Nevertheless, the modern researcher can attempt to shed some light on individuals like Madawada, especially with regard to our current knowledge about life in Kaneš during the Old Assyrian period. Recent research by Michel (2020) has clearly shown how much

information we have about women from Kaneš and Aššur. Perhaps in other cases, it will be possible to reconstruct the biographies of non-Assyrian women, but so far this has proven itself to be a challenging task without the archives of their husbands. Madawada thus remains unique for the time being: her small archive cannot be placed in the larger one of a possible husband, as is the case for many other women (cf. Lamassutum), and the circumstances of the discovery also remain questionable, since the texts do not seem to have been found in her own house.

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[Note: Immediately before this paper was published, an article by J. G. Dercksen that discusses aspects of Madawada's business appeared. See J. G. Dercksen, *Money in the Old Assyrian Period*. In: L. Rahmstorf – G. Barjamovic – N. Ialongo (eds.), *Merchants, Measures and Money. Understanding Technologies of Early Trade in a Comparative Perspective*, *Weight & Value 2* (Kiel – Hamburg 2021) 331–359, especially 341–347.]

4. Appendix: Madawada's archive

Text	Genre	Madawada's role	Debtor	Debt	<i>ḥamuštum</i> and date
CCT 1, 9b = Albayrak 2 ³² = EL 82	debt note	creditor	Imlikāya	106 s. refined silver	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Šu-Kūbim; IX. of <i>līmum</i> Iddi(n)-abum
JCS 14, 5: 20b–28a	juridical statement ³³	creditor (with Iddi(n)-Aššur)	Imlikāya	106 s. silver	-
kt o/k 39 = Albayrak 1	sale document	buyer	-	-	-
kt o/k 40 = Albayrak 3	debt note	creditor	Tamuraia, Talia, Iatalka	60 s. silver; 3600 litres grain, half wheat, half barley; 60 breads	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of <i>kaššim ša qāte</i> Ikūn-pīya; II. of <i>līmum ša qāte</i> Enna(m)-Suen
kt o/k 44 = Albayrak 4	debt note	creditor	Lulu, Kammalia	22 ½ s. silver	-
kt o/k 46 = Albayrak 5	debt note	creditor	Abbāya	[x] s. silver; [x] + 30 litres barley	-
kt o/k 64 = Albayrak 6	debt note	creditor	Kupidaḥšu, Azulka	180 s. silver	-
kt o/k 72 ³⁴	debt note	creditor	Ḥarša, Kaka[x]; Ḥapuala; [x]; Liḥš[uman]	[x] s. <i>liti</i> -silver	<i>ḥamuštum</i> of Šu-Kūbim; <i>līmum</i> Enna(m)-Suen
kt o/k 81 = Albayrak 7	debt note	creditor (with Iddi(n)-Aššur)	Pirua	810 litres grain: half wheat, half barley	-
kt o/k 106 = Albayrak 8	debt note	creditor	Šarnikan, Ḥašušra	10 ½ s. silver; 2 sacks gifts (?)	-

Abbreviations Appendix: s. = shekel

³² Text number in the publication of Albayrak (1998).

³³ Only a part of this statement relates to the debt note CCT 1, 9b: ^(20b) 1 2/3 *ma-na* = 6 GÍN = KÙ.BABBAR ⁽²¹⁾ KÙ.BABBAR *ša im-li-kā-a* ⁽²²⁾ *a-na ma-da-ma-da ḥa-bu-lu* ⁽²³⁾ *i-dí-a-šur ú-bu-bu-šu im-li=kā-a* ⁽²⁴⁾ 1 2/3 *ma-na* 6 GÍN ⁽²⁵⁾ KÙ.BABBAR *ša-bu im-li-kā-a* ⁽²⁶⁾ *a-na i-dí-a-šur a-na a-wa-tim* ⁽²⁷⁾ *a-ni-a-tim a-mi-ma šu-um-šu* ^(28a)

ú-lá i-tù-a-ar “(Concerning) 106 s. silver, silver which Imlikāya owes to Madamada and (from which) Iddi(n)-Aššur cleared him: Imlikāya is satisfied with 106 s. silver. Imlikāya will not raise a claim against Iddi(n)-Aššur concerning this case regarding anything.”

³⁴ See Albayrak 2005, 30–31.

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