HOUSEHOLD STUDIES IN COMPLEX SOCIETIES
(MICRO) ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND TEXTUAL APPROACHES

edited by
Miriam Müller

with contributions by

Papers from the Oriental Institute Seminar
Household Studies in Complex Societies
Held at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
15–16 March 2013
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PREFACE

The current volume is the result of a two-day seminar at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago held on March 15–16, 2013. A wide-ranging group of scholars specialized in the Old and New World assembled from all over Europe and the US to find fruitful new approaches in the study of households in complex societies. By bringing together archaeology, science, and texts the speakers and participants in the conference exchanged their different approaches and techniques in uncovering household behavior from the material record and discussed their suitability for the respective region and site. Building on the methodological groundwork laid out in a number of recent publications on household archaeology the conference and assembled papers open up new avenues of research in this new subdiscipline and revealed problems and disparities with which the field is still struggling. It is hoped that the variety of case studies presented in this volume will further inspire the interested reader to establish research and excavation strategies that contribute to the development of household archaeology in the various regions covered in the different papers and beyond.

The idea for this conference sprang from my dissertation research on a neighborhood of the ancient city Avaris, modern Tell el-Dab‘a in the eastern Nile delta, once capital of the first foreign rulers over Egypt. I am particularly grateful to Manfred Bietak for his constant support, advice, and encouragement throughout my studies and in developing this project. In the same way I am indebted to Kate Spence for many fruitful discussions and thought-provoking ideas that shaped the outline of this conference and publication.

I would like to thank the Oriental Institute Chicago for welcoming me and providing such a stimulating work environment. My thanks go to Gil Stein, Director of the Oriental Institute, for his many ideas on the topic and generous funding of a large group of particularly international speakers. In addition, Neal Spencer and Adelheid Otto were able to participate in the conference due to the funding of the British Museum in London and the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin. I would like to thank Christopher Woods for his guidance and advice throughout the organization of the conference and his continuous support. The logistics of this conference would have been impossible without the knowledge and skills of Mariana Perlinac and Brittany Mullins. Thank you for dedicating your time to the success of this endeavor and creating such a welcoming atmosphere for all the participants. I would like to extend my gratitude to Yorke Rowan, Donald Whitcomb, and Jack Green for chairing sessions, and David Schloen for leading the roundtable discussion. My thanks go to the editors Tom Urban and Leslie Schramer for their expertise and skills in producing such a high-quality publication. Many thought-provoking and helpful comments were added by the anonymous reviewers. Last but not least I would like to thank all the speakers and the three additional authors, Aren Maeir, Brian Muhs, and Tasha Vorderstrasse, for their diverse and stimulating contributions to this book.
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Family Structure, Household Cycle, and the Social Use of Domestic Space in Urban Babylonia

Heather D. Baker, University of Vienna*

Introduction

In this paper I present my ideas about how the Babylonian terms for parts of the house may be correlated with contemporary architectural forms as represented by the excavated house plans of the first millennium B.C. Drawing on both archaeological evidence and cuneiform tablets, the paper aims to demonstrate that a better appreciation of how the Babylonians conceived of and described domestic space can help us to figure out how living space was apportioned, which in turn sheds light on family living conditions. Mapping the Babylonian terms onto the ground plan of the archetypal house in this way permits us to draw some conclusions about the social use of domestic space in situations where houses were divided up for ownership and/or occupation. We can then add to this scheme such information as is available for the function of different parts of the house. As a means of demonstrating the principles of spatial organization that emerge from this procedure, I shall then present and discuss three case studies, one from the Neo-Babylonian period, the second of (most likely) later Achaemenid date, and the third from the Hellenistic period. These case studies are intended to illustrate the potential for integrating the written and archaeological evidence in the study of house and household in first-millennium B.C. Babylonia, as well as the problems involved. The first case study compares a textually attested double house with an excavated house that seems to serve as a close parallel in terms of its general spatial organization. The second case study presents a new reconstruction of the house described in the enigmatic cuneiform tablet AO 17648. The third and final case study traces the history of a property which is attested in tablets from Hellenistic Uruk and which permits the study of house and household transformation over four generations.

* The research presented in this article arose out of work conducted during the period 2004–2008 as a member of the START Project led by M. Jursa at the University of Vienna and funded by the FWF (Austrian Science Fund). The article was completed within the framework of the project “Royal Institutional Households in First Millennium BC Mesopotamia,” led by the author since March 2009 and funded by the FWF (grant S10802–G18) as part of the National Research Network “Imperium and Officium: Comparative Studies in Ancient Bureaucracy and Officialdom.”
Sources and Methodology: An Overview

The textual sources that shed light on the Babylonian house consist primarily of legal contracts written in the Babylonian dialect of the Akkadian language using the cuneiform script impressed on clay tablets. The relevant tablets cover the period from the seventh century B.C. down to the second century B.C., with a significant peak in the sixth–early fifth century and another (albeit smaller, and restricted to the southern Babylonian city of Uruk) in the third–second centuries B.C.\(^1\) The tablets bearing the most detailed property descriptions are those involving sale, inheritance, and exchange, but other categories of document also add useful details.\(^2\) These tablets were produced by (or on behalf of) the very people who actually owned — and often also inhabited — the houses that the documents concern. They employ the vernacular Babylonian terminology for different parts of the house, and it is often used in a context that elucidates the family circumstances surrounding the apportioning of domestic space, especially in matters concerning inheritance and the transmission of property within the family. The tablets themselves are rarely provenanced since most were acquired by museums already in the nineteenth century, long before the advent of controlled excavation. However, the legal documents almost invariably name the place of writing, so that the city or town of origin can easily be determined (if broken, then often the contents offer some clue, especially via prosopographical information). They also supply the date, in the following format: month + day + regnal year + king’s name.

The archaeological evidence comprises some forty-six Neo-Babylonian houses from an urban context that have been cataloged and discussed in detail by Peter Miglus (1999, pp. 179–213, 307–14), plus a few later ones. In the following pages I devote more space to explaining the nature of the written evidence, simply because the nature of the cuneiform documentation is in all likelihood less familiar to the reader. Moreover, the archaeological evidence is rather more accessible, especially since the ground plans of the excavated Neo-Babylonian houses have been conveniently illustrated by Peter Miglus at a common scale and alignment (ibid., pls. 89–92, 94–100). Although the balance of my explanatory remarks is necessarily weighted toward the written documentation, this does not mean that I prioritize the textual record over the archaeological in terms of its value as evidence. Rather, I try to establish a recursive dialogue between archaeology and text in order to test ideas and build up a picture that does justice to both fields and complies with their respective methodologies.

In general, the layout of the Babylonian house could remain stable over many years (in some cases even over several centuries) without significant modification, owing in large measure to the practice of reusing the wall stubs of the previous phase as foundations for the next. Sometimes houses expanded or contracted in area according to the circumstances of the occupants, but there is a sufficient degree of regularity in plan for us to be able to extrapolate the essential principles of spatial organization as discussed in the following pages. The analysis presented here relies heavily on the houses excavated in the Merkes quarter of

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\(^1\) The archival material from Hellenistic Babylon is different in character from the Uruk corpus and contains little information of relevance for the present study.

\(^2\) There are other genres of text, including those parts of the omen corpus which relate to the house and household (Guinan 1989, 1996; see also Brusasco, this volume), as well as certain ritual texts and other kinds of literary compositions, which reflect social attitudes toward domestic space. However, consideration of these is beyond the scope of the present study.
Babylon, which represents the best-preserved area of first-millennium Babylonian residential housing uncovered to date. For the sake of matching the textual and archaeological data I take House I at Merkes as the “archetype” or classic form of the Neo-Babylonian house. It should be noted that the occupants of these Merkes houses were certainly situated toward the upper end of the social spectrum and that the houses reflect this in terms of their regularity of plan, quality of construction, and above average size.

House and Household in the Cuneiform Sources

When classical archaeologists write about the Greek or Roman house they tend to scatter their text with references to the written sources, typically referring to the rooms by their Greek or Latin names. Such an approach is not without problems, as scholars such as Lisa Nevett and Penelope Allison have shown. Given these difficulties, it seems that the Babylonian texts are in some respects better suited for the study of domestic space: we are dealing with a relatively homogeneous corpus of (primarily) legal documents that were written down to serve the immediate needs of the house owners and/or occupants. And yet, archaeological studies of Neo-Babylonian housing have failed so far to integrate the textual data with the material evidence to anything approaching the same degree as our colleagues in classical studies have done.

In her critique of the use of written sources in the study of Roman domestic space, Allison distinguishes two key genres of text: the writings of contemporary authors, and the epigraphical sources (Allison 2001). The former are completely lacking for Mesopotamia: authors are as good as unknown, and we have no narrative sources. The closest Babylonian counterpart to the Roman epigraphical sources (especially the papyri) comprises the numerous cuneiform legal documents, which come primarily from private family archives and were written for everyday, utilitarian purposes. According to Allison, the Roman epigraphical sources are more useful for investigating the composition of the household than for studying the social use of space within the house (ibid., p. 184). The Babylonian documents, by contrast, are useful for both, although so far they have only been investigated for the study of the household and family. In the following pages I concentrate on exploring ways of using this material for the study of domestic space.

The corpus of texts drawn on here includes contracts relating to urban property sales (ca. 390 tablets), leases (ca. 190), debt security (ca. 127), inheritance (ca. 56), and dowry (ca. 25), plus smaller numbers of miscellaneous contract types. Not all of these texts shed direct

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3 See the excavation report of Reuther 1926.
4 It is clear from the written sources that the same Babylonian terminology relating to domestic space was used throughout the land (allowing for some occasional minor regional variation in vocabulary). This, combined with the archaeological evidence for relatively standardized house forms, suggests that the results presented here are generally applicable. I rely here on the Merkes houses as the point of departure for the analysis of domestic spatial organization, on account of their generally good state of preservation and regularity of plan. Nevertheless, further, detailed study of the generally simpler and smaller houses excavated elsewhere, especially at Nippur and Uruk, is desirable.
5 For a critique of the use of written sources in this way, see Nevett 1995, p. 364; 2010, p. 20; Nevett, this volume; Allison 2001.
6 The tablets referred to here form part of the corpus of over 1,200 cuneiform tablets drawn upon in the author’s forthcoming study of the Babylonian cities of the first millennium B.C. Precise counts are not advisable, not least because there will always remain relevant unpublished tablets that could not be consulted. However, the sample is surely large enough to be representative.
light on the Babylonian terminology that is central to the present study, but as a group they provide a substantial amount of contextual detail and background for understanding the conditions surrounding the occupation and ownership of urban properties. These property-related tablets form only one part of the vast corpus of tens of thousands of Neo- and Late Babylonian everyday documents on which our understanding of the society and economy is based.

The present article represents the first attempt to combine these textual sources with the archaeological evidence from first-millennium B.C. Babylonia in investigating the social use of space within the house. This study has involved confronting the seemingly obscure Akkadian terminology and examining hundreds of potentially relevant documents, many of them still unedited or even unpublished. For the Old Babylonian period (earlier second millennium B.C.), by comparison, considerable progress has already been made in identifying the contemporary Babylonian terms for parts of the house (e.g., Kalla 1996; Jahn 2005; Gruber 2012; Gruber and Roaf 2012). Also, a number of recent studies have examined the Old Babylonian house in its social setting (Stone 1981, 1987; Charpin 2003; Feuerherm 2007). What is particularly interesting, however, is that the Old Babylonian terminology for the parts of the house differs radically from that used in the first millennium B.C. Significant differences can also be observed in terms of house layout and spatial organization (preliminary observations in Baker 2011b, p. 547). The intervening period, the later second millennium and the beginning of the first millennium B.C., is rather more poorly documented, both textually and archaeologically, and so it remains difficult to determine precisely when the key changes took place. These changes present significant opportunities for further research into the development of the Babylonian house and household over the longer term.

A recent study drew attention to the discrepancy between the size of excavated Neo-Babylonian houses and those documented in the cuneiform tablets (Baker 2004, pp. 57–62). New research based on a considerably larger corpus of textually documented properties of known size both reinforces this discrepancy and permits a more nuanced study of the question of property size (Baker 2014, and forthcoming, ch. 5). This phenomenon — of textually documented houses being substantially smaller on average than their excavated counterparts — has already been observed for earlier periods of Mesopotamian history going back as far as the Ur III period in the late third millennium B.C. (e.g., Van De Mieroop 1999, pp. 261–67; Waetzoldt 1996, pp. 145–47). It has been attributed to a number of factors but especially to the fact that the documents are often dealing only with parts of houses, whereas excavators will tend naturally to define a house by its external perimeter, insofar as this can be determined. As is well known, the Akkadian word bītu “house” can just as easily mean “room” or “(house) sector”; compare the uses of the word bait in Arabic (Bianca 2000, p. 77). Thus it should not be assumed that bītu in the context of a legal contract always refers to a “complete” house of the conventional type. One of the aims of this study is to examine more closely the instances in which only parts of houses are referred to in the cuneiform tablets, and to attempt to identify these sectors on the ground plans of excavated houses. An understanding of the Akkadian terminology relating to the house is essential for shedding light on the use of domestic space, especially because for this period there is little possibility of

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7 For an overview of the corpus of everyday documents, see Jursa 2005. By “everyday” documents I mean legal contracts, administrative documents, and letters (both private and official).
distinguishing discrete activity areas within the house based on artifacts found in situ, owing to the scarcity of good-quality excavation data.8

The shared ownership and/or use of a house may be accompanied by physical modifications to its fabric, but this is by no means necessarily the case. The archaeological evidence for physical alterations to Neo-Babylonian houses has been discussed elsewhere in an attempt to relate it to the textual evidence for shared occupation (Baker 2010, p. 21); that study contains further, detailed discussion of some of the issues that are only briefly touched upon here.

For the purposes of this study, as already noted, we rely primarily on the “everyday” documents, especially the legal contracts relating to the transfer of property. We witness social relations through a prism of legal relationships formed around the transfer of ownership/tenure under certain conditions (sale, inheritance, marriage, etc.). In contrast to the Old Babylonian period, we are confronted with an almost complete lack of private family archives found in situ within the excavated housing (cf. Brusasco 1999–2000 and this volume for Old Babylonian Ur; Stone 1981 and 1987 for Old Babylonian Nippur). There is not a single case known to me whereby a house described in a tablet can be matched up with the building in which the tablet was found. We are forced therefore to operate on a more abstract level, drawing on the information on family and household structure contained in the tablets but with no real possibility of relating these directly to particular houses and their occupants. Nevertheless, it is possible to elucidate principles concerning the social use of domestic space by examining repeatedly occurring Babylonian terms in the light of the contextual information supplied in the tablets and by attempting to correlate them with “standard” architectural forms.

In order to evaluate the cuneiform sources concerning urban properties, we have to bear in mind a number of key factors that shaped the written documentation. Record-keeping practices center around the need to demonstrate title to property and to record outstanding obligations. Especially in the realm of family affairs, difficult cases are more likely to have been written down, while straightforward ones are likely to be under-represented in the extant records.9 Contemporary legal practices are also important, especially with regard to inheritance procedure and dowry giving (see Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003 for an overview). To help us correlate the tablets with the archaeological record we also have to understand Babylonian surveying practices as well as the conventions governing the written description of urban properties (Baker 2011a).

Thanks to recent studies, we are pretty well informed about the Babylonian family of the first millennium B.C. (see, e.g., Roth 1991, 1994; Wunsch 1995, 2003). Ideologically speaking, importance was attached to the “father’s house” (bīt abī) as well as to the wider lineage,10 especially since we are often dealing with temple personnel whose offices were passed down from father to son, with close attention paid to purity of birth, one of the key criteria for admission to the priesthood (Waerzeggers 2008). In Neo-Babylonian times, the oldest son

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8 The attempt at a functional analysis by Castel (1992, pp. 71–98) relied primarily on the presence of built fixtures and on the treatment of walls and floors, rather than on artifact distributions. Miglus (1994) questioned some of Castel’s conclusions, pointing out that her distinction between roofed and unroofed spaces was based on faulty reasoning.

9 As repeatedly stressed by van Driel: “the normal does not require documentation” (van Driel 1998, p. 197).

inherited a half-share of the paternal estate, with the other half being shared by his brothers. So, depending on the amount of family property and other resources to be disposed of, a younger brother might take a smaller share in the paternal house(s) or might form his own household elsewhere. In the textual record we can observe processes similar to those observed by Elizabeth Stone (1981) for Old Babylonian Nippur, with brothers/cousins buying out their co-heirs when necessary in order to consolidate fragmented holdings and avoid the undesired effects of repeated division. Upon marriage, a woman went to live with her husband, and any dowry house that she might own typically served as a source of rental income for her. The properties owned by women were significantly smaller than average, based on study of the textually attested house-size data (Baker forthcoming), and many of them correspond in size to what (as I argue presently) was the equivalent of a more or less standard unit of living space within a typical house.

The Babylonian Terminology for Parts of the House

Babylonian terms for rooms of specific function occur relatively rarely in the everyday documents of the first millennium B.C. This does not necessarily mean that most rooms were multi-functional, but rather it reflects the prevailing conventions of record-keeping: room function was irrelevant in contexts where properties were being transferred, therefore it normally went unrecorded (Baker 2007, p. 71). The small number of references to bedrooms (bīt eršī) confirm that specific functions could be assigned, at least to some rooms.\textsuperscript{11} The terms which are attested much more frequently in the first-millennium tablets are those referring to key sectors of the house, namely, the central courtyard (tarbaṣu) and the rooms/suites enclosing it, the bīt iltāni, bīt šūti, bīt amurri, and bīt šadī. These latter four terms are designated after the compass points, literally meaning “room/suite of the north/south/west/east” respectively. The use of these terms is restricted to contexts where houses are in divided ownership and/or occupation; when an entire house was transferred there was no need to refer to its constituent parts. Detailed study of these terms has shown that they mean the exact opposite of their conventional interpretation, that is, a bīt iltāni (literally “room/suite of the north”) is not a “north room/suite” but rather a “north(-facing) room/suite,” situated to the south of the central courtyard, and so on. Upon examining all of the occurrences of these terms in those legal tablets which contain a detailed property description (mainly the sale tablets and records of inheritance division), and on drawing up a schematic diagram of the house described in each instance, it became clear to me that the suite in question was always on the “wrong” side of the courtyard that it adjoined.\textsuperscript{12} These rooms/suites are clearly named after the direction in which they faced, looking across the adjacent central courtyard

\textsuperscript{11} A detailed study of the Akkadian terminology relating to the house will be published shortly (Baker forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{12} For a brief explanation of this finding, see Baker 2008. It was through study of the Hellenistic tablets VS 15 39 // 40 // 49 (see Case Study 3 below) that this phenomenon first came to my attention. The fact that the principle clearly applies with regard to the house complex described in YOS 6 114 (see Case Study 1), a tablet also from Uruk but written some 375 years earlier, supports its general validity in a first-millennium Babylonian context. Furthermore, the argument that it applies also to cultic structures, specifically the ziggurat temple of Babylon (as suggested by Baker 2008) has been accepted by Andrew George in his commentary on the recently published “Tower of Babel Stele” (George 2011, p. 158). Further case studies drawn from the Babylonian legal documents will be discussed in Baker forthcoming.
that served as their principal source of light and air through the doorway which normally formed their only means of access.

Matching the Babylonian Terms with the Archaeological Evidence

In the light of this new interpretation of these terms for the key sectors of the house, it is possible to locate them on the ground plan of the typical Neo-Babylonian house with confidence. It is clear that the *bīt iltānī* ("north[-facing] room/suite") typically corresponds to the main living room, which was usually the largest room in the whole house and was normally situated on the southeast side of the central courtyard: among the data collected by Miglus there are only three exceptions to this out of a total of forty cases (Miglus 1999, p. 343, table 29; for the relevant plans see pls. 89–92, 94–100). Such a location, typically facing toward the northwest, would have afforded the most favorable living conditions for the climate of southern Mesopotamia. The largest room of the house is often referred to in the literature as the "reception room" (or "Empfangsraum"), but I prefer to avoid this term as it presupposes a function that is, to my mind, not proven. Entertaining may have been one of its functions but it seems to me likely that its primary purpose was to serve as the main living space for the family. In cases where the house was occupied by different groups belonging to one extended family, it presumably served the overall head of the household and his family, thus reflecting and at the same time reinforcing his social status.¹³

As for the usage of these terms *bīt iltānī* and the like, contextual examination shows that in some instances they refer to a single room accessible directly from the courtyard, but more often they refer to that room together with the smaller rooms associated with it. The *bīt iltānī*, consistent with its function as the main living room of the house, tended to have the largest number of other rooms associated with it. Taking House I (Babylon, Merkes) as an example (fig. 16.1),¹⁴ it is possible to identify the different architectural units according to their Akkadian terms. The rooms associated with the entrance form a separate suite that may be characterized as semi-public space (see below). The common Babylonian term for this house sector is uncertain since it is called by name only very rarely in the texts, and different terms are used in each instance; one such term, *kisal pāni*, is discussed briefly below.

Within this scheme we may distinguish between the principal living rooms and their associated rooms, forming suites which were self-contained and could be closed off if necessary by simply shutting the door from the courtyard, and those that were accessible to all, namely, the entrance suite, the courtyard, and any single rooms which were directly accessible only from the courtyard. The archaeological evidence suggests that a typical location for the kitchen was in a single room on the eastern side of the courtyard, that is, what the Babylonians called a *bīt amurri* (fig. 16.2).¹⁵ The detailed written descriptions of the Hellenistic

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¹³ Compare the remarks of Brusasco (2004, p. 148) on the main living room of the Old Babylonian house.
¹⁴ Throughout this article the sectors of the house have been systematically labeled in the figures according to the following scheme: N = north(-facing) suite (*bīt iltānī*); S = south(-facing) suite (*bīt šūti*); E = east(-facing) suite (*bīt šadî*); W = west(-facing) suite (*bīt amurri*); C = courtyard (*tarbaṣu*); V = vestibule/entrance suite.
¹⁵ Baker 2010, pp. 189–91, citing examples from Isin and Nippur. The identification of kitchens follows the excavation report in each case and is based on the presence of built ovens etc. Since the rooms in question are small, it seems likely that they were used solely for food preparation and therefore the functional designation "kitchen" seems plausible.
Figure 16.1. Babylon, Merkes, House I, with sectors labeled according to their Babylonian names

period (see below) make it clear that a bedroom (*bīt erši*) would have been one of the smaller rooms associated with a main living room. Thus, in the light of the excavated house plans, a bedroom would have been located either at the short end of such a main living room, or perhaps in a second row of rooms behind it (see the *bīt iltāni* and *bīt šūti* in fig. 16.1), but bearing in mind that smaller houses elsewhere tended not to have such an additional row (see, e.g., fig. 16.3). The archaeological evidence for bathrooms and, more rarely, toilets, indicates that in the Neo-Babylonian period these facilities were most frequently integrated into the main living suite of the house (that is, the suite I identified as the *bīt iltāni*), and less
Figure 16.2. Houses with rooms identified as kitchens: (a) Babylon, Merkes, House VI; (b) Isin, Nordabschnitt III; (c) Nippur, WC-2, Building B, Level I
frequently with the courtyard (Miglus 1999, p. 344, table 31; examples in fig. 16.4). In the case of houses of more complex plan, differential accessibility and other features may point to social differentiation within the household. See, for example, Case Study 1, below, for a detailed discussion of the double-courtyard house.

So far I have outlined the main principles of spatial organization of the Neo-/Late Babylonian house. I should add that I am assuming that most houses of this period were single-story (following Miglus 1999, pp. 204–05; on the written evidence, see Baker forthcoming). There were certainly exceptions, but even in those cases it cannot be determined for certain that we are dealing with complete second floors covering the entire roofed space of the ground floor, as opposed to less substantial structures built onto (part of) the roof.

A concern with family privacy is suggested by several elements of house design and spatial organization. One such element is the potentially self-contained nature of the main living suites (see above). Another is the nature of access to the house: normally the single door from the outside formed part of an entrance suite which was configured so as to prevent visual access to the house interior, that is, the courtyard. Also, it may be that this entrance area, typically situated at the end of the building farthest from the main living suite, served as semi-public space where visitors were received. In the Neo-Babylonian house it was quite
Figure 16.4. Houses with rooms identified as toilets: (a) Isin, Nordabschnitt III; (b) Babylon, Merkes, House IX; (c) Babylon, Merkes, House II
common to have to pass through more than one room in order to reach the courtyard from the house entrance. Even when only a single room formed the passageway linking the outside with the courtyard, it often had at least one side room associated with it. These side rooms could well have been used to entertain visitors, thus keeping them away from the house’s interior and maintaining family privacy (see the entrance areas in figs. 16.1, 16.4:c). Such an arrangement finds a close parallel in the men’s reception room of the traditional Islamic city house, and it has also been noted in a Greek context that access to different parts of the house might have been regulated according to the nature of the visitor’s relationship with the family.  

Finally, it is worth noting that the possibilities for spatial segregation — both of people and of activities — depended on the size of the house itself as well as on the number of occupants and their relationship with one another. Some textually documented scenarios make it clear that courtyard houses could be shared by families that were not related to one another, especially in (but not restricted to) rental situations; such cases are, however, somewhat rare.

**Case Study 1: The House Described in Tablet YOS 6 114**

In order to develop further these ideas about relating the Babylonian terminology to domestic architecture, I take as my first case study YOS 6 114, a tablet recording a division of inheritance that was written in the southern Babylonian city of Uruk in 555 B.C. A new edition of this tablet will be published shortly (Baker forthcoming); here I focus on comparing the property it describes with the contemporary excavated housing.

The contract describes a “main/great house” — in Akkadian, **bītu rabû** — and a second sector called the **tarbaṣu bābānû** “outer courtyard.” The whole complex is divided between three brothers and their paternal uncle; evidently the father of the three brothers had not divided the property with his own brother while he was still alive, and so his share passed to his sons. The father, Arad-Innin, must have been older than his brother Eanna-lipu-ūṣur since his three sons inherited the greater share of the property. (At this period the oldest heir typically took a preferential share of the paternal estate and in the event of his death this devolved to his own heirs, hence the priority of the brothers over their uncle.)

The main house (**bītu rabû**) was taken jointly by the oldest brother and the youngest brother, who was very likely still a minor since the two brothers’ individual shares are not described in detail: if both were adults capable of forming their own households, the tablet would have recorded a precise description of their shares in the house, according to the usual practice. As for the other part of the property, the term **tarbaṣu bābānû** (literally “outer courtyard”) clearly refers not to a courtyard alone but also to the rooms around it, since later on in the text these same rooms are apportioned in detail between the other two heirs, the middle brother and his uncle. Judging from the detailed description given in the tablet, the **tarbaṣu bābānû** represents a house of the typical central courtyard type, though apparently it was considered secondary to the “main house” (**bītu rabû**). This is confirmed by the respective

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16 Ragette 2003, p. 75; Brusasco 2004, p. 150; also Brusasco 1999–2000, pp. 87–88, for similar observations concerning Old Babylonian Ur. 

17 See, e.g., Nevett 1995, pp. 372–74. Cf. also Spence 2010, pp. 290–92, and in this volume on the ancient Egyptian houses at Amarna (where the main hall is used to control access in a similar fashion); I am grateful to Miriam Müller for drawing my attention to this article.
sizes of the two sectors, as given in the tablet: bītu rabû — ca. 441 square meters; tarbaṣu bābānû — ca. 343 square meters. In addition to sharing the rooms around the courtyard, the middle brother and his uncle also each took a half-share in the courtyard itself and in an outbuilding (asuppu) situated in the courtyard, an arrangement that was typical in cases of shared occupation of a courtyard house. A schematic representation of the property showing the various shares allocated to the four parties is shown in figure 16.5.

The layout of the house clearly corresponds to the double-courtyard type of which three Neo-Babylonian examples have been excavated, namely Houses II, IV, and X at Babylon, Merkes (Miglus 1999, p. 191 ["Doppelhäuser"] and pl. 92, figs. 410–12). In all three examples one courtyard sector is somewhat smaller in area than the other, as in YOS 6 114. In the case of Houses II and IV, the secondary (smaller) courtyard sector had an internal courtyard flanked by rooms on only three sides. In the third case, House X, both sectors lacked a row of rooms on the northern side (the courtyard of the southern sector adjoined the north(-facing) wing of the northern sector, without any direct access between the two). The same phenomenon may be observed in single-courtyard houses: the norm was for the courtyard to be enclosed by rooms on all four sides, but there are excavated (and also textually attested) examples with rooms on only three sides, or even two. In the case of the house described in this

Figure 16.5. Schematic representation of house described in YOS 6 114, with details of inheritance shares

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18 The textual sources provide few details concerning asuppu. However, insubstantial structures have occasionally been excavated within house courtyards, e.g., Building B, Level I, in the WC-2 area of Nippur (for a plan, see fig. 16.2c). It is possible, but not certain, that these remains correspond to the Akkadian term asuppu. Other terms for structures located in the courtyard are occasionally attested, such as kāru, although asuppu is the most common term for such a feature. For further discussion of outbuildings, see Baker forthcoming.

19 E.g., Houses XII and IX at Babylon, Merkes (Miglus 1999, pl. 89, figs. 402 and 404); houses d1 and d7 at Uruk (ibid., pl. 94, figs. 417 and 419).

20 House d6 at Uruk (Miglus 1999, pl. 94, fig. 418). For a textually attested example, see Case Study 3, below.
inheritance-division tablet, both sectors appear to have had a courtyard that was enclosed by rooms on all four sides. Although there is no precise parallel for this among the excavated housing, I believe that its layout conforms in its general spatial organization to the double-courtyard house type, and thus it may be compared with House IV excavated in the Merkes quarter of Babylon (see fig. 16.6) (Reuther 1926, pp. 105–08).

The northern sector of House IV would correspond to the main house (bītu rabû); at 410 square meters in area it is substantially bigger than the other sector and has a courtyard enclosed by rooms on all sides. The smaller (220 sq. m), southern sector contains an entrance that serves both sectors, though the northern sector also has an entrance of its own (the corridor-like arrangement, rooms 8 and 9, is unparalleled). This secondary sector of House IV,
which may be compared with the *tarbaṣu bābānû* of YOS 6 114, has a courtyard that is enclosed only on three sides: east, south, and west. Aside from the vestibule (room 1), it comprises a two-room *bīt iltāni* (rooms 3 and 4), a two-room *bīt amurri* (rooms 6 and 7), and a single-room *bīt šadî* (room 5). The *bīt iltāni* and the *bīt amurri* measure about 65 and 52 square meters respectively. There is another interesting point of comparison between the house described in tablet YOS 6 114 and House IV at Merkes. As part of his share in the secondary house (*tarbaṣu bābānû*), the uncle took two *bīt amurri*. This can only refer to a pair of self-contained rooms/suites on the east side of the courtyard, each accessed by its own doorway from the courtyard. There is a precise parallel to this scenario in the main, northern sector of House IV, which has two such single rooms on the eastern side of the courtyard (fig. 16.6:a, rooms 20 and 21), each communicating only with the courtyard. In fact, in the typical house layout, it is generally only the *bīt amurris* and *bīt šadîs* that may feature as single rooms, since the *bīt iltâni* is always associated with at least one smaller room accessible from it, and the *bīt šūti*, normally forming the second largest room/suite in the house, often has at least one other room attached to it (see, for example, figs. 16.1 and 16.3).

As noted above, there is some archaeological evidence to suggest that a single room on the eastern side of the courtyard (that is, a *bīt amurri*) was a typical location for a kitchen (fig. 16.2).

**Case Study 2: The Enigmatic Tablet AO 17648**

In the light of this new interpretation of the Babylonian house terminology, it is now possible to elucidate the contents of a tablet from the Louvre, AO 17648, that has so far evaded satisfactory explanation. It is of no certain provenance but probably belongs with a small tablet archive from late Achaemenid-period Nippur centered around a man named Ninurta-aḥḫē-bullīṭ (Joannès 1982, pp. 70–86; 1992; Jursa 2005, pp. 111–12, “the Absummu archive”).

The tablet contains only seven lines of text, beginning with the extraordinary heading “This is the configuration (*tapristu*, literally “dividing up”) of our house in which I live.” Unfortunately, the writer is anonymous and has not left us his address. The remaining six lines list the main parts of the house together with their dimensions. In addition to the four suites identified by the compass directions, the tablet lists a courtyard (*tarbaṣu*) and a “vestibule” (*kisal pāni*). This latter term, *kisal pāni*, literally means “court of the front” and has been translated as “cour de devant” and “forecourt” (see Joannès 1982, p. 81; and Robson 2008, pp. 204, 206, respectively). However, although the Akkadian word *kisallu* can refer to an open...
courtyard, in this context we are certainly dealing with a roofed space associated with the main entrance to the house, so I prefer the translation “vestibule” to avoid confusion. The only unroofed space in the house was the central courtyard, and for this the contemporary legal documents always use the term tarbaṣu. The use of kisal pāni in this tablet represents one of very few surviving vestiges of the Old Babylonian terminology; at that period the term kisallu features in association with the front part of the house (Jahn 2005, pp. 140–49).

The individual measurements for each space are given in cubits (kùš = ammatu, ca. 0.5 m) and fingers ((šu.)si = ubānu, ca. 0.02 m). In some instances a fraction of a cubit is given in place of the equivalent in fingers (e.g., 2/3 cubit = 16 fingers). The terms equivalent to “length” and “width” are šiddu “(long) side” and pūtu “short side” (literally “front”). These terms are conventionally employed in pairs in contemporary urban property surveys, even when the plot is an exact square. The dimensions of each sector are expressed using the following formula:

\[ x \, \text{šiddu} \, (\text{uš}) \, \text{ana} \, y \, \text{pūtu} \, (\text{sag.ki}) \]

“x (measurement), the long side, times y (measurement), the short side”

The measurements are summarized in table 16.1, following the order given in the tablet. As expected, the width of the roofed rooms (that is, all excluding the central open courtyard, tarbaṣu) always falls below the maximum span that could be roofed using locally available timber, that is, around 3.5–4.0 meters (Miglus 1999, p. 264; Moorey 1994, p. 355).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Long Side (šiddu)</th>
<th>Short Side (pūtu)</th>
<th>Length × Width (m)</th>
<th>Area (sq. m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bīt iltāni — north-facing room</td>
<td>11 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>7 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>5.67 × 3.67</td>
<td>20.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kisal pāni — vestibule</td>
<td>6 2/3 kùš</td>
<td>3 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>3.33 × 1.67</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tarbaṣu (tur) — courtyard</td>
<td>12 2/3 kùš</td>
<td>11 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>6.33 × 5.67</td>
<td>35.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bīt šāti — south-facing room</td>
<td>11 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>5 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>5.67 × 2.67</td>
<td>15.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bīt šadî — east-facing room</td>
<td>12 2/3 kùš</td>
<td>3 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>6.33 × 1.67</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bīt amurri — west-facing room</td>
<td>6 2/3 kùš</td>
<td>3 kùš 8 si</td>
<td>3.33 × 1.67</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>93.52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of attempts have been made to reconstruct the basic layout of the house described in this tablet. I now review these previous proposals and then argue for a new reconstruction that conforms to the new understanding of the Akkadian terminology outlined above as well as to the archaeological evidence for the layout of the Neo-Babylonian house.

In his edition of the tablet, Francis Joannès published three possible versions of a reconstruction of the house. His first two suggestions (reproduced here as fig. 16.7:a–b) have to be discounted since it is only his third proposal (see fig. 16.7:c) that places the courtyard at the center of the house, where it clearly has to be.²⁵ Contextual study of the terms bīt iltāni

²⁵ Joannès 1982, p. 83, figs. 1–3. These figures (and that of Robson 2008, fig. 7.6) that are reproduced below as figs. 16.7–9 have been systematically relabeled according to the scheme explained in note 13 to aid comparison with one another.
etc. shows that they only ever occur in direct association with an adjacent courtyard: this is integral to their very conceptualization. So Joannès’ third proposal is a fair representation of the house sectors as described in AO 17648, though of course we have to swap his labels around, exchanging north for south and east for west in the light of our new understanding of the key terms. Having done this, we arrive at a modified version of his reconstruction, shown here as figure 16.8.

This reconstruction looks somewhat odd because the corners of the house are missing, but I believe that it is essentially correct and that the tablet does not describe the house in its entirety, only the key elements. I return to this point shortly, but first I discuss another attempt at a reconstruction recently published by Eleanor Robson (2008, pp. 204–05, fig. 7.6) (see fig. 16.9). Her version is based on a comparison with a supposedly contemporaneous house plan drawn on a clay tablet. The plan as reproduced comprises a courtyard enclosed only on three sides, with the south-facing room (bīt šūti) and west-facing room (bīt amurri) to the north, the east-facing room (bīt šadî) to the west, and the north-facing room (bīt iltâni) to the south, adjacent to the “forecourt” (kisal pāni) which is placed in the bottom right (= southeast) corner.26

I believe this version to be incorrect, for a number of reasons. First, the house plan with which it is compared is said to be a “roughly contemporaneous house plan from Larsa” (Robson 2008, p. 206). Robson does not present any argument for dating this house plan tablet to the Neo-Babylonian period, and in fact this date is by no means certain. An Old Babylonian date has been tentatively ascribed to it by other scholars who have studied tablets bearing house plans (Heisel 1993, p. 29; Dolce 2000, p. 376, fig. 7; Bagg 2011, p. 572). There are very few such tablets that are securely datable to the first millennium. In fact, previously it has

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26 In fact, Michael Roaf has kindly pointed out to me that there are traces visible on the original published photograph of the tablet which may indicate the presence of rooms on the fourth side; see Parrot 1968, p. 157. None of the subsequent studies that reproduce this plan as a line drawing includes any such additional rooms, but having looked at the photograph, I find this suggestion quite convincing (I have not had an opportunity to examine the original tablet). If there are indeed rooms depicted on the east side of the courtyard, then this invalidates Robson’s use of this plan to support her reconstruction, independently of the other problems raised here.
been suggested that there are none at all (Baker 2004, p. 59), though this statement must be modified since the plan on the reverse of tablet BM 46740 is certainly of Neo-Babylonian date (Wiseman 1972, p. 144, fig. 3; Bagg 2011, p. 575 [no. 27], p. 584, fig. 27). As Donald Wiseman noted (1972, p. 145), the style of the drawing on BM 46740 differs significantly from the house plans of the Old Babylonian period: the walls are shown as single lines with double hatches to indicate doorways, whereas the older house plans depict the thickness of the walls in more realistic fashion, with gaps for doorways. The style of the Larsa plan places it squarely within the older group. Given this uncertainty regarding the date of the house plan, it is methodologically more secure to use the excavated first-millennium houses as a point of reference, especially since they are relatively numerous and we can be confident that they really are roughly contemporaneous with tablet AO 17648.

My second reason for rejecting Robson’s reconstruction is that, judging by the excavated housing, the entrance and its associated vestibule (kisal pāni) are likely to have been situated at the farthest end of the house from the main living room (bīt iltāni) rather than adjacent to it. Third, Robson’s reconstruction takes into account my new interpretation of the Akkadian terminology but misapplies it in one crucial respect. The west-facing room is placed in the northeast corner of the house, to the north of the courtyard; however, as we have seen, it should be situated on the east side of the courtyard, facing west across it. The written property descriptions of the first millennium that contain the term bīt amurri confirm

27 House d7 at Uruk is a very rare exception to this principle; see Miglus 1999, pl. 94, fig. 419.
without exception that such a room/suite faced westward across the courtyard, not southward as in Robson’s reconstruction. A fourth objection relates to the overall layout of the reconstruction, which does not conform to the general principles of Neo-Babylonian house design. Aside from the adjacent “forecourt” (or rather, “vestibule”), the north-facing room is depicted as occupying the entire southern side of the house. We know from the tablet AO 16748 that this is the largest room of the house (20.72 sq. m), falling within the lower half of the size-range for excavated “reception rooms” (see Miglus 1999, p. 343, table 29). However, all of the excavated “reception rooms” (which correspond to the bīt iltānī, considered here to be the main living room) have at least one smaller room associated with them, but this one does not. Moreover, the long sides of the bīt iltānī, bīt šadî, and bīt šūti all match precisely the lengths of their corresponding courtyard sides, which suggests (but does not prove) that they were actually coterminous. The kisal pāni and the bīt amurri are an exception to this since their combined long sides (6.67 m) are longer than the adjacent courtyard side (6.33 m), but this can be explained by the presence of a wall in between them. Allowing for a wall of (typically) 1 meter width, the north end of the kisal pāni must have projected beyond the north side of the courtyard, as depicted in the new reconstruction presented below.

The house is reconstructed by Robson on the assumption that the five rooms (aside from the courtyard) listed in AO 16748 represent the house in its entirety. However, as already mentioned, I believe that the tablet does not describe the complete house, but rather it lists only the main rooms which were accessed directly from the courtyard, omitting the other, smaller rooms reached via these main rooms. Essentially, we are dealing with the layout depicted in figure 16.8, but with the corners occupied by rooms not listed in the tablet. It is possible to arrive at a house plan approximating quite closely to contemporary excavated examples if we (1) add rooms at the corners of the house by projecting the lines of the existing rooms; (2) add walls of approximately 1-meter thickness (since the dimensions given in the tablet refer only to the interior of the rooms); (3) add doorways located according to the architectural conventions of the day. For the resulting reconstruction see figure 16.10a. If we compare this proposed reconstruction with (the considerably larger) House I from Babylon, Merkes (fig. 16.10b), we can see that there is quite a high degree of similarity in terms of their general spatial organization.

The additional rooms added at the corners measure approximately 4.46 square meters (northwest corner), 2.20 square meters (northeast corner), and 6.13 square meters (southwest and southeast corners). Thus the house has a total roofed living space of about 112.10 square meters (93.18 [room measurements given in tablet] + 18.92 sq. m [corner rooms added]). The total house area including the walls is about 216 square meters. The courtyard is of a typical size (ca. 35.83 sq. m) though as a percentage (ca. 17%) of total house area it falls at the lower end of the known range.30 The house itself is of a size typically owned by middle-ranking temple personnel, judging by the excavated housing associated with the precincts of the Eanna temple at Uruk and the ziggurat Etemenanki at Babylon. These range between 95 and 570 square meters, with an average size of 240 square meters and a median size of 216 square meters.30 If the house was indeed associated with the family of Ninurta-ḫē-bullît, whose

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28 House walls in this period were significantly thicker than those of the Old Babylonian period; Miglus (1999, p. 184) cites widths of 1–2 meters for the walls of houses at Ur and Babylon.

29 Based on the data collected in Miglus 1999, p. 342, table 28.

30 Based on the figures presented in Miglus 1999, p. 341, table 27. For further discussion of house size and its correlation with different sectors of society, see Baker 2014.
members included temple brewers, then it conforms well to the housing typically occupied by people of their social status.

The purpose for which the tablet was originally drawn up remains obscure. In contrast to the detailed property surveys found in the contemporary house sale documents, which (unlike their Old Babylonian counterparts) calculate the total area based on the external perimeter of the plot (Baker 2004, p. 57), in this tablet it is the interior measurements of the main rooms which are given. An approximation to a complete survey could have been achieved by extending the lines of the existing rooms and by using an average wall thickness (just as I have done in fig. 16.10:a), but on balance it seems to me more likely that the tablet was drawn up to meet some private family purpose rather than as part of a formal property survey.

Case Study 3: The Šumāti Family of Hellenistic Uruk

The third and final case study involves the history of a house belonging to members of the Šumāti family in Hellenistic Uruk. The written documentation from Uruk at this time is particularly rich in the terminology relating to different parts of the house: numerous detailed urban property descriptions permit us to study the spatial organization of the house complex in the context of its immediate neighborhood. We can also make use of prosopographical data.
relating to the owners and their neighbors. Problems include the impossibility of making any kind of statistical extrapolation as to which ownership/residence scenarios were the most common — we can simply illustrate the range of possibilities. Also, we have to bear in mind the scarcity of archaeological evidence for contemporary housing at Uruk that we might use as a control, although there is no real reason to suspect that the form of the housing differed significantly from that of other cities or from that of the Neo-Babylonian period. Despite a general strong degree of continuity with the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods, there are nevertheless some notable changes to be taken into account: in the Hellenistic period the oldest son no longer received a preferential share in the paternal estate (McEwan 1984, p. 227), there are signs of a substantial improvement in the economic position of women (Baker forthcoming), and, with regard to the property documents, the size of a house was no longer given in the tablets as a matter of routine.

When the cuneiform tablets from Hellenistic Uruk mention more than one sector of the same house, they do so in a fixed order, beginning with (1) the internal roofed space, progressing to (2) the internal unroofed space (courtyard) and any outbuilding located within it, and finally to (3) the semi-public space of the (privately owned) alley serving the house and linking it to the public space of the city’s street network:

1. internal roofed space
   1.1. living suite (bīt šadî etc. = the main room/suite on a specific side of the house, directly accessible from the courtyard)
   1.2. its dulbânu (meaning uncertain)\(^{33}\)
   1.3. its bedroom (bīt ēršî, mentioned only very rarely but always in association with a specific main room/suite)

2. internal unroofed space
   2.1. courtyard (tarbasu)
   2.2. outbuilding (asuppu, always located within the courtyard)

3. semi-public space
   3.1. alley (mûsû, lit. “exit”; a blind alley, privately owned and shared between neighbors where necessary. Some houses were, of course, directly accessible from a public street, but where an alley served the house then it, or a share in it, was always the last named part of the house complex)

This case study concerns the transmission and transformation of a property through four generations of the Šumâti family. The property in question was situated in the Adad Temple district of Uruk. We are dealing either with two adjacent houses or with a double-courtyard house (cf. figs. 16.5–6). In each house the courtyard, located in the northeast corner, was enclosed on only two sides, west and south. I refer to these houses (or house sectors), which are treated in the tablets as one complex, as the “northern sector” and the “southern sector.”

The transmission history of the property complex is summarized in the following paragraphs.

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\(^{31}\) See Kose 1998, p. 380, fig. 232, for the small area of Seleukid housing excavated in squares U/V 18.65.

\(^{32}\) The continuity in conventions governing the written descriptions of houses tends to support this, as does the fact that at Babylon, Merkes, some of the Neo-Babylonian houses remained in use through to the Hellenistic period.

\(^{33}\) CAD D 49 s.v. dalbânu (dulbânu) suggests “corridor, alley, passageway.” Such an interpretation is plausible, based on the identification of a textually attested dalbânu with a passageway under the stairs in the Rēš temple of Hellenistic Uruk (Baker 2013, p. 31). However, in the context of a first-millennium house it is hard to see what dulbânu might have referred to.
1st Generation (Reconstructed; before 180 B.C.; fig. 16.11)

Anu-ahḫē-iddin owned the entire house complex; it had a street to the south and a blind alley along most of its eastern border (NB: according to the texts, the alley was roofed).

2nd Generation (Reconstructed; before 180 B.C.; fig. 16.12)

The double-courtyard house was inherited by four sons of Anu-ahḫē-iddin: two sons shared the northern sector, and the other two sons shared the southern sector. Each son took a share of the courtyard belonging to the sector in which his share was located:

Northern sector:
1. Sumuttu-Anu east(-facing) suite + larger share of courtyard
2. Ubār north(-facing) suite + smaller share of courtyard

Southern sector:
3. Rīḫat-Anu east(-facing) suite + larger share of courtyard
4. Nidinti-Anu north(-facing) suite + smaller share of courtyard

3rd Generation (180–168 B.C.; figs. 16.13–14)

The whole house was divided up between six cousins, the grandsons of Anu-ahḫē-iddin. This is recorded in the inheritance division document VS 15 39 // 40 // 49, written in 180 B.C. The northern sector was shared between two cousins and the southern sector between four further cousins (two pairs of brothers). In the tablet the house is described and measured as ten individual quadrilateral plots, corresponding to the four shares of the previous generation as follows (fig. 16.13):

Northern sector:
1. plots 1–3 share of Anu-ahḫē-iddin son of Sumuttu-Anu
2. plots 4–5 share of Illūt-Anu son of Ubār

Southern sector:
3. plots 6–8 share of Iqišaya & Anu-ab-uṣur, sons of Rīḫat-Anu
4. plots 9–10 share of Anu-ahḫē-iddin & Rīḫat-Anu, sons of Nidinti-Anu

Some twelve years after the division, Anu-ahḫē-iddin sold his share (plots 1–3) outside of the family, to a member of the Aḫḫūtu family (tablet VS 15 30, written in 168 B.C.; see fig. 16.14). Assuming that the buyer — or a tenant of his — actually took up residence, then the northern sector would now have been shared between unrelated individuals (Illūt-Anu and the new owner/tenant of the adjoining share).

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34 There are three extant exemplars. The tablets are not duplicates; they present the same information, but in a different sequence. Probably each heir took a copy, and in each case his own share was described first.
4th Generation (Partially Reconstructed; 151 B.C.; fig. 16.15)

A division was recorded on tablet YOS 20 78 (151 B.C.) between Nidinti-Anu son of Iqišaya, and Riḥat-Anu and Anu-aḫḫē-iddin sons of Anu-ab-uṣur. (The division between three cousins implies that their fathers, the brothers Iqišaya and Anu-ab-uṣur, had shared the property without ever carrying out a formal division.) Thus, out of the four sons (second generation) of the original owner Anu-aḫḫē-iddin, the descendants of only one, Riḥat-Anu, now had a stake in the inherited property (although some descendants of another, Nidinti-Anu, were still present). (We cannot tell whether the sons of Sumuttu-Anu and Ubār had died without heirs, or whether they had sold out to Iqišaya in transactions which are now lost.) Although the first share (plots 1–3) had been sold out of the family during the previous generation, it seems to have been brought back into the family by Iqišaya (third generation) at some point (documentation of this is lost), since it now formed part of the share of his son Nidinti-Anu. Iqišaya had also acquired plots 4–5 from his cousin, Illūt-Anu son of Ubār. Like his brother Iqišaya, Anu-ab-uṣur had taken steps to enlarge his own share by acquiring an adjacent house to the east, on the other side of the alley. The alley itself was now truncated since its northern part was now apparently incorporated into the northern sector, whereas previously it had formed part of its eastern boundary (it had adjoined plot 4 and part of plot 5). The various shares were now distributed as follows:
Figure 16.13. Schematic reconstruction of house described in VS 15 39, third generation (division implemented in 180 B.C.)

Figure 16.14. Schematic reconstruction following sale of part of house recorded in VS 15 30, third generation (168 B.C.)
Northern sector:

(1–2) plots 1–5 Nidinti-Anu son of Iqīšaya

Southern sector:

(3) plots 6–8 Anu-aḫḫē-iddin son of Anu-ab-uṣur

[(4) plots 9–10 “sons” (unnamed) of Anu-aḫḫē-iddin (3rd gen.), not part of current division]

(5) new house Rīḫat-Anu son of Anu-ab-uṣur

The physical transformation of the house over time is summarized in figure 16.16, and the family stemma is shown together with lines of descent and/or property transmission in figure 16.17. The transmission history of this house complex and the details contained in the tablets enable us to determine the approximate amount of living space allocated to the various heirs of generations 3 and 4; presumably each served as head of his own (simple) family household:

Northern sector:

\[2 \times \text{bīt šadî} + \text{larger share of courtyard:}\]

(plots 1–3) 62 sq. m Anu-aḫḫē-iddin (3rd gen.)

\[\text{bīt iltāni} + \text{smaller share of courtyard:}\]

(plots 4–5) 46 sq. m Illūt-Anu (3rd gen.)

\[2 \times \text{bīt šadî}, \text{bīt iltāni} + \text{courtyard (now incorporating part of former alley):}\]

(plots 1–5) 130 sq. m Nidinti-Anu (4th gen.)

Southern sector:

\[\text{bīt šadî}, \text{bīt pāni} + \text{larger share of courtyard:}\]

(plots 6–8) 72 sq. m Iqīšaya and Anu-ab-uṣur (3rd gen.)

(plots 6–8) 96 sq. m Anu-aḫḫē-iddin (4th gen.)

NB: the size discrepancy between the third and fourth generations is unexplained; it may be related to the reconfiguration of the alley.

\[\text{bīt iltāni} + \text{smaller share of courtyard:}\]

(plots 9–10) 57 sq. m Anu-aḫḫē-iddin and Rīḫat-Anu (3rd gen.)

(plots 9–10) — unnamed sons of Anu-aḫḫē-iddin (4th gen.)

new house 72 sq. m Rīḫat-Anu (4th gen.)

According to Neo- and Late Babylonian house surveying conventions, these measurements would represent not only roofed space (as in Old Babylonian practice), but the entire perimeter of each share, including the walls. Miglus (1999, p. 184) observed that walls might occupy 50 percent or more of the total area of a Neo-Babylonian house, compared with 30–40 percent in Old Babylonian, so we must adjust our figures downward accordingly if we wish to represent the available living space. On the other hand, each courtyard occupied roughly one-third of its house (sector), despite being enclosed by rooms on only two sides. At ca. 34 square meters (northern sector) and 45 square meters (southern sector), they both fall within the known size range for the courtyards of excavated Neo-Babylonian houses, and also the proportion of the total house area that they occupy is within the attested range (Miglus
Figure 16.15. Schematic reconstruction following inheritance division recorded in YOS 20 78, fourth generation (151 B.C.)

Figure 16.16. Overview of transformation of house and its ownership history through four generations
1999, p. 342, table 28). This confirms the importance attached to courtyard space, even in relatively small houses with a lower roofed area and/or fewer rooms.

At this point it is worth making a few general observations. The size of the entire original house complex was about 238 square meters. This corresponds very well to the average size (ca. 240 sq. m) of house typically occupied by members of the middle-ranking temple personnel during the Neo-Babylonian/early Achaemenid period (sixth and early fifth centuries B.C.), based on excavated examples from Uruk and Babylon (Baker 2011b, p. 543). Bearing in mind that the house complex was originally in the hands of one man — Anu-aḫḫē-iddin — who was almost certainly a temple prebendary himself (his descendants were, and these offices were passed down from father to son), we are potentially witnessing a considerable degree of continuity over several centuries as regards the basic living circumstances of people belonging to this stratum of society.\footnote{Note that the house discussed above in Case Study 2, which may well also have belonged to a temple prebendary, was of a similar size.}

We may compare the house of this case study with a property described in tablet VS 15 50 (lines 11–18), written in 178 B.C. This property comprises a house and unbuilt plot, situated in the Adad Temple district of Uruk (as in the house discussed above), and measuring 239 square meters in total (fig. 16.18). The property formed part of the inheritance share of Nidinti-Anu, a member of the Aḫḫūtu family, that is, a temple-related family that belonged to the Urukean élite.\footnote{On the Aḫḫūtu family, whose members included some of the very highest-ranking officials at Uruk, see most recently Monerie 2012.} In this case, the entire house was apparently in the hands of one man, and none of the neighbors can be identified for certain as a relative of his (none of them is among the other heirs named in the division tablet). Since the house itself is not being divided up, there is no information given as to its internal spatial organization. Moreover, according to this same division tablet, Nidinti-Anu also inherited another house measuring...
about 687 square meters in a different part of the city, the Lugalirra Temple district. Much of this division tablet is unfortunately lost, but given that this one heir (out of a total of seven) received two houses, including a very large one, it is clear that the entire estate in this case was very much bigger than that of the Šumâti family discussed above. This presumably reflects the higher social status of members of the Aḫḫūtu family, whose ranks included high officials within the civic and temple community. Comparison with the Šumâti family house discussed above illustrates the difficulty of using house size alone as an indicator of household size and complexity, since we are dealing with two house complexes of practically identical size, but their conditions of ownership/occupation were completely different, as was the status of their owners.

Discussion and Conclusions

For the first time it is possible to determine with some confidence how the Babylonians of the first millennium B.C. called different parts of their houses, and to identify these sectors on the ground plans of excavated dwellings. Detailed study of textually documented scenarios for the shared ownership and use of houses provides vital context for understanding how the relevant terms were applied in everyday use. This close correlation of the terminology with known architectural forms helps us to understand the principles governing the allocation of living space within the extended family in circumstances that necessitated shared occupation.

I have focused especially on architectural units that formed self-contained suites and could be made into separate living spaces as the need arose. Since each suite of this kind was accessible directly from the courtyard, it could easily be closed off for the sake of privacy.

Figure 16.18. Schematic reconstruction of the house described in VS 15 50, lines 11–18 (178 B.C.)
Family Structure, Household Cycle, and the Social Use of Domestic Space in Urban Babylonia

by simply shutting the door (cf. Bianca 2000, p. 77, writing of “houses within the house”). There is some archaeological evidence to suggest that when houses of this period were physically divided into separate living suites, kitchen facilities remained in communal use (Baker 2010, pp. 189–90, 192–93), and in two cases the kitchen was located in a room that we now know corresponds to a *bit amurri*.37 There are many examples in the cuneiform tablets of suites being assigned to individuals under varying circumstances — whether through inheritance, dowry, marital gift, widow’s settlement, rental arrangement, etc.38 — and so it seems reasonable to suggest that such a suite formed the standard minimal living space normally available for allocation to an individual or a simple family unit when a house had to be shared between members of an extended family.39 (Of course, more than one suite could be allocated to an individual or family, as demonstrated by Case Studies 1 and 3.) I noted above that in the southern sector of House IV, Merkes, it is possible to identify a *bit iltāni* measuring about 65 square meters and a *bit amurri* of 52 square meters. Units of this size range occur often in the corpus of textually documented “houses” of known size, which lends support to my contention that the allocation or transfer of these architectural units as living space lies behind a fair number of the extant legal transactions. This is not to say that a typical courtyard house, conceived as comprising four such sectors, would normally accommodate four simple family units. In fact, division of a house between four parties is rarely attested in the written documentation: where possible, strategies were adopted to counteract the unwelcome effects of excessive fragmentation (see below). I am simply arguing that when a house was divided up for shared ownership and/or occupation, a suite of this kind was, under normal circumstances, the basic unit of division. It is no coincidence that areas of 5 and 6 Babylonian reeds (ca. 61.25 and 73.50 sq. m, respectively) are the most frequently occurring “house” sizes in the texts, since a house sector of this size would be equivalent to one of these suites. Occasionally this is made explicit in the written sources, for example, the tablet TuM 2/3 2 (Borsippa, 493 B.C.) involves a 5-reed *bit šūti* (south-facing suite) given as dowry. Similarly, in the British Museum tablet BM 33092 ([Babylon], 564 B.C.) a *bit iltāni* (north-facing suite) is given by a man to his wife; it forms part of a 20-reed (ca. 245 sq. m) house. In this latter case it can be assumed that the *bit iltāni*, as the largest suite containing the main living room, occupied somewhat more than a quarter (61.25 sq. m) of the house’s total area.

The great antiquity of the courtyard house in the Near East has often been noted by scholars of traditional Arabic-Islamic housing, with particular reference to the AH quarter of Old Babylonian Ur.40 Similarly, in his study of the Old Babylonian housing at Ur, Brusasco draws attention to strong similarities in design between the Ur houses and the traditional “oriental houses” of modern Iraq (see Brusaco, this volume). Using a space syntax approach, he situates these within the wider context of Eurasian societies that shared broadly the same patterns of residence and inheritance, comparing them with houses in African society based on “a matrilineal system with matrilocal residence and lateral inheritance and relative

37 Similarly, for the Old Babylonian houses Brusasco (2004, p. 143) distinguishes between living room suites, on the one hand, and facilities such as kitchens, stairways, lavatories, and workrooms which were accessibly directly from the central courtyard, on the other hand.
38 For details, see Baker forthcoming.
39 There are also textually attested instances where parts of houses were rented by outsiders.
40 E.g., Hakim 1986, p. 95 with fig. 25; Bianca 2000, pp. 56–58; Ragette 2003, p. 52. For an account of the excavations at the AH site at Ur, see Woolley and Malldowan 1976, chapter 2 and plan on pl. 124.
equality and lack of tension." The Babylonian housing of the first millennium has not yet been examined from such a perspective; in the present study I have adopted a different and — I hope — complementary approach that focuses on matching the Babylonian terminology with known architectural forms and on analyzing the resulting scenarios in the light of contextual information drawn from the contemporary written sources. The outcome of this process on the one hand highlights regularities in how the Babylonians conceptualized domestic spatial organization, and on the other hand it reminds us of the unending variation in domestic living arrangements.

Despite the significant differences from housing of the earlier second millennium highlighted above, the configuration of the typical Neo-Babylonian house nevertheless betrays a concern for family privacy that has very close parallels with its Old Babylonian counterpart as well as with the traditional housing of the Islamic world. Nor are the available comparanda limited to the ancient and traditional housing of the Middle East, since the Babylonian houses bear comparison with other courtyard house traditions in antiquity. For example, many of the key features which Lisa Nevett identifies in what she terms the “single entrance, courtyard house,” based on her study of fourth-century B.C. houses at Olynthos (with parallels at other Greek sites; see Nevett 1995 and this volume), are also found in the typical Babylonian house of the first millennium B.C. Once again, the shared features are particularly those which served to promote domestic seclusion: a single door from the outside; the blocking of direct visual access to the house’s interior, and the use of an open courtyard to control access to different parts of the house. Nevett concludes that these measures served to regulate social relations, in particular by restricting contact between the women of the household and unrelated male visitors. In Babylonia domestic seclusion was promoted not only by the configuration of the house itself, as detailed above, but also often by the use of blind alleys leading into the heart of the residential blocks. These served as semi-public space, being owned (jointly, where necessary) by the occupants whose house(s) they served.

Another respect in which it is worth considering the Babylonian evidence in a cross-cultural perspective concerns the textual references to shares of houses: what exactly did this mean in real terms for the inhabitants of those houses? What were the potential problems posed by dividing up houses repeatedly, and what measures were taken to mitigate them? The phenomenon of fragmentation is attested in other ancient societies that have produced comparable corpora of everyday documents, for example, in medieval texts from the Cairo Genizah, house fractions as small as 1/48 are attested (Goitein 1983, pp. 82–83). Clearly, such small shares are most unlikely to have corresponded to actual units of living space, and it

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41 Brusasco 2004, p. 150. For a more detailed account of his work on Ur, which draws on the cuneiform tablets found within the houses as well as on the archaeological evidence, see Brusasco 1999–2000.
42 Bianca 2000, pp. 77–80; Ragette 2003, pp. 75–77. See also Fentress 2000, pp. 21–22, who links the configuration of the traditional Arab house, especially the use of the central courtyard to control activities and communication, and the bayonet entrance which screened the courtyard from sight, with the patriarchal family whose members were subordinate to the male head of the household.

43 The terminology reflects the perspective of the inhabitant, not the visitor, since the word for a blind alley (mūṣû), also often used to refer to the house entrance itself, is formed from the verb “to go out.” Similarly, Brusasco (2004, p. 152) notes that both the Ur houses and the Islamic houses were conceived “from the inside outwards.”
44 The textual evidence shows that blind alleys are under-represented in the excavated housing areas of the first millennium B.C. (Baker 2007, p. 70). On this extension of domestic space into the semi-private space of the street network, cf. Abu-Lughod 1987, p. 168 n. 83.
is assumed rather that they functioned as monetary units. Similarly, fractions of houses are attested in the papyrological sources from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt (see Muhs, this volume; also see, e.g., Hobson 1985; Muhs 2008; Rowlandson and Takahashi 2009, p. 121), and these must also often have represented spaces so small that they could not realistically have been apportioned as living space. These houses (e.g., those at Ptolemaic Hawara studied by Muhs) are not all of the courtyard type, so they are not necessarily directly comparable with the Babylonian ones, but nevertheless it may be instructive to compare the various strategies adopted to mitigate the undesirable effects of repeated division, a phenomenon generally associated with partible inheritance. According to Brian Muhs, one strategy adopted at Ptolemaic Hawara was to use “virtual” fractions whereby houses were only divided in theory, not in practice (Muhs 2008, p. 188). The typical Babylonian courtyard house of the first millennium b.c. lends itself very well to division since, as noted above, the principal suites around the central courtyard were normally self-contained and the available living space could easily be divided up without recourse to physical modification. However, there are no written references to actual house shares smaller than one-fourth (smaller shares in ancillary structures are attested, albeit very rarely). It is clear from this that the Babylonian house shares were always “livable,” that is, they referred to an actual share in living space and never developed into the tiny “unlivable” shares attested in the Cairo Genizah and in the Roman Fayum, whose value lay not so much in their utility but in the fact that they could be converted into money.

There are a number of possible reasons for the differences between Babylonia and Egypt in this respect. One is the Babylonian practice of assigning a preferential share to the oldest son (although by the Hellenistic period — which has produced much of our written evidence for the shared ownership/occupation of houses — this was no longer done). Another factor may be that in Greco-Roman Egypt sons and daughters inherited equally, whereas in Babylonia only sons enjoyed a right of inheritance. Dowry was a potential means by which daughters could share in their paternal estate; however, the documentation indicates that only a minority of dowries actually contained any urban property (Roth 1991–93, p. 26 n. 109). Also, the properties owned by women in first-millennium b.c. Babylonia were significantly smaller than average (Baker forthcoming). These factors clearly worked to limit the degree to which houses might become fragmented, but of course ultimately much depended on the size of the paternal estate in relation to the number of surviving male heirs. In Case Study 1

45 Such modification, when it did take place, was implemented primarily by blocking doorways and/or creating new ones, so as to alter circulation patterns; see Baker 2010. When the term “party wall” (Akk. amaṣtu) occurs in the documents it tends to feature as a wall dividing two different shares, that is, it normally refers to a wall within a house rather than to an external wall shared between neighboring owners.

46 Hobson 1985, p. 225 (referring to shares as small as 1/27).

47 On Neo-Babylonian inheritance, see Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003, pp. 938–40; for inheritance in Hellenistic Babylonia, see McEwan 1984.

48 Another reason why fragmentation never developed in Babylonia to the extreme degree that it did in Egypt may be the scarcity of land available for house building in Egypt, since agricultural land was at a premium. The houses of the Fayum typically had a much smaller footprint, and tended to extend vertically rather than horizontally, with often two or even three stories (Muhs, this volume). The Babylonian houses were considerably larger on average, and upper stories were rather uncommon, as noted above. Moreover, although urban land was certainly at a premium in Babylon during its heyday in the sixth century b.c., in general the pressure on space in urban Babylonia was not so great as to inhibit extended family households from fissioning.
I discussed an inheritance division of a considerably larger than average house shared between four heirs. Despite the necessity to share (assuming these men did actually occupy the quarters they inherited), their living conditions would have been very different from those of, say, the occupants of a house like the one described in tablet AO 17648 if it had to be shared between four heirs. It goes without saying that such circumstances radically affected the possibilities for designating specialist activity areas within the house. The heirs themselves, or their descendants, could counteract fragmentation by buying out one another’s share(s) or by other forms of mutual adjustment; this was quite a common strategy in the first millennium B.C., as it had been in the Old Babylonian period (see Stone 1981 for a case study from Old Babylonian Nippur). The sheer range of different household scenarios attested in the texts makes it difficult to extract quantitative data for the study of household demography since it is not possible to determine how representative any particular situation was. On the other hand, this same variability opens up enormous possibilities for further research into modeling the household cycle and investigating processes of transformation within urban residential neighborhoods.

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>siglum for objects in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (Department of Near Eastern Antiquities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>siglum for cuneiform tablets in the collections of the British Museum (Department of the Middle East)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TuM 2/3</td>
<td>see Krückmann 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS 15</td>
<td>see Schroeder 1916</td>
</tr>
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<td>YOS 6</td>
<td>see Dougherty 1920</td>
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<td>YOS 20</td>
<td>see Doty 2012</td>
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49 For this reason I have attempted elsewhere to present a series of “benchmark” dwelling sizes, each associated with a known family scenario or with a specific social group or class (Baker 2014, pp. 18–21).
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