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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between dwelling size, household structure and social status in urban Babylonia during the first millennium BC. For this period we have a wealth of complex data on dwelling size that, properly contextualised, can contribute significant insights to the wider debate concerning living space in antiquity. In contrast to comparable studies for other parts of the ancient world, which have relied on archaeological evidence alone, the dataset for Babylonia at this period is supplemented by a sizable corpus of textually-documented urban property sizes. However, matching the written and archaeological evidence is, as we shall see, no straightforward matter. One of my tasks here will be to evaluate the problems and pitfalls in the hope of determining how we might make the best use of the available data.

The relationship between dwelling size and household size is of interest for a number of reasons. Although the present paper is not primarily concerned with methods of

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1 Much of the research on which this article is based was conducted during the period 2004–2008 within the framework 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 under the auspices 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'.
estimating urban populations, nevertheless the findings presented here are of some
relevance because demographic studies in archaeological research normally rely on
some method of determining occupation densities, for example by using a multiplier
such as the number of households per hectare, or the number of persons per hectare.²
The application of such methods in a Mesopotamian context have been discussed by
Postgate, based on case studies from the Early Dynastic and Old Babylonian periods.³
It should be noted that for 1st millennium BC Babylonia there is barely a single
crushed urban settlement for which the total area of occupation can be reliably
estimated, at least within a historically meaningful timeframe.⁴ In spite of the problems
posed by this lack of accurate information on the extent of urban occupation, there
remain other aspects of urban demography that can be usefully addressed based on
the study of living space. For example, the data on the size of houses (and of urban
properties in general, including unbuilt land) provide a means of detecting changes
in living densities over time and space.⁵

As the fundamental unit of social organisation, the household and any discernible
variation in its size and composition are issues of central importance for the study of
Babylonian society. Dwelling size, including degrees of variability across time and space,
may serve as an indicator of social status, prosperity and degrees of relative equality/
inequality. House size has been discussed as a possible means of studying standards of
living in other parts of the ancient world,⁶ but the rich Babylonian data have not yet
been investigated from this perspective, although in some cases it is possible to identify
significant changes over the very long term. For example, it is clear that there was a
significant increase in dwelling size between the Old Babylonian period (earlier 2nd
millennium BC) and the Neo-Babylonian period, as well as a much bigger range of
attested dwelling sizes, suggesting ‘an unprecedented degree of social inequality’ in
the first millennium BC.⁷ The topic is therefore central to the study of urban living
conditions in Babylonia, especially the question of how far dwelling size and household
structure varied according to social status and other parameters. Thus Babylonian
household demography is a topic worthy of study in its own right, since the evidence
available to us offers an opportunity to examine trajectories of social change and
development over the very long term. A nuanced appreciation of the relationship
between the physical dwelling and the household may also help us to refine the
framework for interpreting the excavated remains of domestic architecture, both within
the Mesopotamian region and beyond.

² E.g. Naroll 1962, based on prehistoric settlements. In a recent study of the Roman economy
Bowman and Wilson 2009, 57–8 expressed a preference for methods based on population densities
per hectare, or on the number of dwellings per settlement, over those based on the floor area of
houses.
³ Postgate 1994.
⁴ Uruk is something of an exception: the Seleucid occupation is estimated at c. 300 hectares,
and the early Parthian occupation at least 200 hectares (Finkbeiner 1991, 213).
⁵ See Baker 2009, 93–4 on unbuilt urban land as an indicator of urban living densities, and on
variability in occupation densities between different city districts in Hellenistic Uruk.
⁶ See, e.g., Morris 2005 on housing as an indicator of living standards in ancient Greece.
⁷ Baker 2011, 541.
Since this study depends on the judicious integration of the textual and archaeological sources for Babylonian housing, a brief introduction to both is in order. As to the written sources, comprising cuneiform tablets written in the Babylonian dialect of the Akkadian language, the most important documents are those recording the transfer of urban properties through sale, exchange, inheritance and dowry-giving. Since these tablets were intended to serve as proof of ownership, they typically include the most complete property descriptions of all document types. The most detailed examples give the following categories of information: area; property type; location (city district, city); dimensions of each side plus details of adjacent properties and their owners as well as any adjacent topographical features; price. In addition we are told the names and ancestry of the parties involved, as well as the witnesses, scribe, place and date. Given this considerable amount of detailed information, the tablets constitute a valuable resource for studying the physical characteristics of the urban properties thus described and for relating the resulting findings to the wider socio-economic context. In terms of their chronological range, the relevant cuneiform tablets are not evenly spread over the first millennium BC. Like other document categories, they predominantly come from the 7th century through to the earlier 5th century, with a smaller number dating to the later Achaemenid period. The Hellenistic period is also well represented by the Uruk corpus, with a much smaller number of relevant tablets from Babylon, and a very small number from other settlements.

The archaeological evidence I shall be discussing consists of some 46 excavated Neo-Babylonian houses. Residential areas of the Neo-Babylonian/Achaemenid period have been excavated at Babylon (Merkes), Ur and Uruk, but there are some reasons for believing that those at Babylon and Ur are rather atypical (in so far as they appear to represent high-status quarters). For the Hellenistic era we have a certain amount of continuity in the use of some of the Merkes houses at Babylon, but other residential parts of the city remain unexplored. Virtually nothing has been excavated of the residential sectors of Hellenistic Uruk, and it is here especially that the textual data come into their own; without them, we would know virtually nothing about the conditions of urban living. Finally, it should be noted that Neo-Babylonian houses with upper storeys are only rarely attested, therefore for the sake of the figures and the discussion presented below, I shall assume that we are dealing with single-storey structures.

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8 For a specimen tablet see Baker 2009, 90.
10 See Kose 1998, 380, fig. 232 for the small area of Seleucid-era housing uncovered in square U/V 18.
11 In my view the textual record confirms the conclusion that Miglus 1999, 204–5 arrived at based on the archaeological evidence. Even when upper storeys (or lofts) are attested, it cannot be assumed that their presence doubled the amount of available roofed space, since we could just as easily be dealing with smaller and/or more ephemeral structures built on the roof. For further discussion see Baker forthcoming.
DWELLING SIZE: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

So far I have deliberately used the word ‘dwelling’ in preference to ‘house,’ because in the Mesopotamian textual record a ‘house’ need not necessarily equate to a complete house of the kind typically recovered through excavation; this issue will be addressed in greater detail below. Dwelling size had, potentially, a profound effect on the quality of life of the inhabitants, but on its own it tells us little about the domestic lives of the householders. Ideally, we need to know not only the amount of available domestic space, but also its social and functional allocations, as well as the size and composition of the co-resident group. We need to understand how living space was apportioned among members of the household, as well as how it was used, including not only the stable functions that might be assigned to specific rooms or areas, but also changes in use throughout the course of the day, or with the seasons.\(^\text{12}\)

Another related question is the relationship between house size and the number of inhabitants: does a larger house imply a correspondingly larger household,\(^\text{13}\) or is the relationship more complex than that? That is, did larger houses have different modes of spatial organisation and use that were not linked solely to the presence of a larger household? It has been suggested, for example, that the largest and most complex Neo-Babylonian ‘houses’ actually served as both the residences and the bureaux of high administrative officials.\(^\text{14}\) If this is correct then we should expect such a residence to accommodate not only the official’s own family, but also some other household members, such as subordinates and slaves, as well as providing space for conducting official duties and receiving visitors. Even if some of the subordinates and slaves resided elsewhere, their daily activities would still have required space within the residence. In any case, it is clear that with increasing house size come greater possibilities for allocating specific functions to different rooms/sectors and also for separating different individuals or groups within the household, whether on a temporary or a long-standing basis. Very likely, then, we are dealing with both a larger resident household and a greater degree of complexity in spatial organization.

In general, the inclusion (or not) of family slaves within the household remains pretty much an unknown quantity since data on numbers of slaves per household, and especially on their modes of residence, are hard to come by. It is clear that wealthier Babylonian families owned considerably larger numbers of slaves than middle-income families (and the poorest citizens would have owned none at all).\(^\text{15}\) However, these

\(^\text{12}\) As attested in the traditional housing of the Middle East; see, e.g., Ragette 2003, 84–5 on horizontal and vertical nomadism.

\(^\text{13}\) Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 92–3 notes the tendency of wealthy families to live in larger households, citing larger numbers of children and servants as possible factors.

\(^\text{14}\) Baker 2011, 541.

\(^\text{15}\) The number of slaves owned at any one time by middle-ranking temple personnel, such as the Nappâḫu family of Babylon, was rather small (Baker 2004, 70–3). However, the addition of only 2–3 slaves to a simple family unit of c. 5 persons would of course make a significant difference in terms of household size. Although I have characterised these middle-ranking temple prebendaries
slaves might well have been dispersed among the multiple residences which wealthy city-dwellers typically owned, and some of them might even have been based in other cities. Occasionally the textual sources attest to slaves living independently of the family they served, in rented accommodation. On present evidence, then, the various possible scenarios cannot be quantified and the lack of reliable information on the numbers of slaves and their place of residence is a serious impediment to estimating household size, especially in the case of middle and higher income families.

Another important issue which affects any study of urban populations is the question of how representative are the available data on house size. The problems of extrapolating from relatively small areas of excavated housing have confronted other scholars, especially those interested in estimating urban populations. These difficulties also hinder our ability to investigate intra-site variability in house size and household structure: for example, it seems likely that poorer/low-status dwellings would have been particularly concentrated at the urban margins and that they are under-represented since excavators have typically focused on the centres of urban settlements. The textual data can to some extent make up for the relatively small samples of excavated housing available for study. However, it should be borne in mind that the written data too may not be entirely representative. We have to reckon with structural biases in the dataset, such as the fact that rental contracts hardly ever give the size of the house, therefore the kinds of houses occupied by people who did not have the means to buy their own house will not normally be represented in the house size dataset drawn from the cuneiform tablets. Or at least, if such houses are represented, they will not be readily identifiable as rental properties, since houses attested in sale documents cannot normally be matched up with the houses that are the subject of rental contracts.

### HOUSE SIZE DATA: THE MESOPOTAMIAN BACKGROUND

For the first millennium BC, textually attested Babylonian ‘houses’ of known size are much more numerous than the actual excavated examples, therefore they form a

---


17 It seems reasonable to assume that the majority of tenants were of rather lower status and means, compared with those who owned their own dwellings. However, there were certainly exceptions to this, with known house owners renting additional houses, in some cases clearly to further their business interests.

18 A rare exception from the Nappāḫu family archive is discussed below; see note to Table 2.3, case 1.
substantial addition to the dataset. However, matching the two is not straightforward, since it has often been noted by Mesopotamian scholars that textually-attested house plots tend to be substantially smaller than their excavated counterparts. Van de Mieroop, for example, provides the following figures for the third and second millennia BC in Mesopotamia (Table 2.1).

When we compare some of these data with the excavation evidence, we find that several of the excavated houses at Fara and Abu Salabikh measured over 400 m$^2$, that is, almost ten times larger than the houses at the lower end of the textually-attested size range. Similarly, all of the textually attested Old Babylonian houses fall below the average excavated house size, though there is a substantial overlap between the two size ranges. The excavated houses of the earlier 2nd millennium BC range in size from 8.5 m$^2$ to 700 m$^2$, with an average size of 152 m$^2$ and a median of 110 m$^2$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Textually-attested ‘house’ size range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fara (c. 2500 BC)</td>
<td>42–72 m$^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-Sargonic Lagash (c. 2700–2350 BC)</td>
<td>18–63 m$^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sargonic (c. 2350–2200 BC)</td>
<td>24–66 m$^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ur III (c. 2100–2000 BC)</td>
<td>36–366 m$^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Old Babylonian (c. 2000–1600 BC) | 2.45–144 m$^2$ (Ur)  
6–120 m$^2$ (Kutalla) |

---

19 This dataset will be presented and discussed in full in Baker forthcoming.

20 Postgate 1992, 89.

21 Though note that the Old Babylonian documents refer only to roofed space, therefore one must add an adjustment for the area occupied by walls in order to make a direct comparison between the textually attested size data and the excavated houses of known size; see below for further details.

22 Concerning the reduction in (excavated) house size between the late Early Dynastic and Old Babylonian period, Postgate (1992, 90) remarks: “it is tempting to see the differences as reflecting a shift in the residential structure of society, involving changes in the size and/or complexity of households”. He cites an Old Babylonian text from Kish listing the members of individual households and notes that it contains no examples of ‘multiple family households’ (Postgate 1992, 93, text 5.3), which would fit rather well with the smaller average house size at this period.

23 Based on the data presented by Miglus 1999, 329–31, table 12. My figures take into account all 138 instances where a total house area is given, including a few which are restored or represent minimum areas.
The reason for this discrepancy is clear, as Van de Mieroop and others have noted: the sale documents which routinely mention ‘house’ size are often dealing only with parts of houses – individual rooms, or suites of rooms – rather than with complete houses. On the other hand, the area of an excavated house is typically measured by its external perimeter, in so far as that can be determined. Thanks to these structural differences between the two categories of evidence, archaeological and textual, the prevalence of what are actually only parts of houses among the sale (and related) documents drives down the average size of the textually-documented properties when compared with their excavated counterparts. This same point was stressed by Charpin recently in his study of the large merchants’ houses at Old Babylonian Larsa, where he noted that the tablets document realities which have yet to be identified in excavation. A recent preliminary study of the Neo-Babylonian data confirmed that this phenomenon, long noted for the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, holds true also for the 1st millennium: textually attested house sizes are on average considerably smaller than their excavated counterparts.

When whole houses are attested in the written sources, the context often involves surveying and describing inherited properties rather than sold ones, as noted by Van de Mieroop based on data from the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. Again, the same principle can be detected in the first millennium data. This is owed to the tendency to retain whole houses within the family whenever possible, with the result that complete houses were rarely the subject of sale, except in cases of persistent or severe hardship. On the other hand, complete houses could be passed on via inheritance, and their size in their ‘intact’ state may well not be documented in such cases since it was not directly relevant to the transaction, although the original size is sometimes documented in (or can be reconstructed from) subsequent inheritance division documents. A proper understanding of the house size data and the conditions under which house size was documented (or not) therefore requires close attention to contemporary record-keeping practices and modes of property transmission. At the lowest end of the textually-documented size range, it is generally clear that we are dealing with only small parts of larger dwellings, since the properties in question are so small that they cannot possibly have functioned as viable houses. However, 

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25 In cases where there are no immediate neighbours this is done by tracing the outer walls of the house. When adjacent dwellings shared one or more party walls, one dwelling is distinguished from the next using other criteria, such as the integrity of architectural units and the presence or absence of doorways.
26 Charpin 2003, 320.
27 Baker 2004, 57–9; a more detailed study based on a considerably bigger dataset will be published in Baker forthcoming.
28 Van de Mieroop 1999, 263.
29 For example, a tablet from Hellenistic Uruk mentions a ‘house’ measuring 5.25 m², clearly the equivalent of a small room (BiMes 24 26, dated 230 BC). Similarly, Van de Mieroop refers to an Old Babylonian ‘house’ measuring 3.36 m² in a tablet from Tell Sifr.
with larger textually-attested dwellings it may be difficult – if not impossible – to
determine whether we are dealing with an ‘intact’ house or a part of a still larger one,
since even quite large houses were sometimes subject to division, depending on the
family circumstances.\textsuperscript{30}

In investigating long-term trends in house sizes we have also to be sensitive to
changes in the nature of the sources. For example, when comparing the written data
on Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian houses, we have to bear in mind the different
conventions for surveying and describing houses. Whereas Old Babylonian house sizes
take into account only roofed space (é.dù.a), the Neo-Babylonian documents give the
total area of the plot, that is, including walls and the courtyard.\textsuperscript{31} Thus if we compare
an Old Babylonian textually-attested house with a Neo-Babylonian one of the same
size, the latter would have less roofed space since its total area included also the walls.

Another factor to consider when integrating the written and archaeological data over
the longer term is that Neo-Babylonian house walls were typically thicker than their
Old Babylonian counterparts – Miglus has determined that c. 50\% of the Neo-Babylonian
house area was occupied by walls, compared with c. 30–40\% in the Old Babylonian
period.\textsuperscript{32} The presence or absence of party walls is another factor to be borne in mind: in
areas of smaller and more densely occupied Neo-Babylonian housing, valuable
building space was saved by the use of party walls.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{HOUSE FORM IN RELATION TO HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AND MODES
OF INHERITANCE}

The average simple (‘nuclear’) family, generally assumed to consist of c. 5 individuals
(parents plus children),\textsuperscript{34} could be supplemented by the addition of one or more
members of the extended family (e.g. unmarried sister, widowed mother),\textsuperscript{35} as well as
by the presence of one or more slaves (see above). Residence was virilocal, and instances
of adult sons living in the same household as their father would have been relatively
few.\textsuperscript{36} Where adult brothers occupied the same house (‘frérèche’), they presumably
did so as heads of their own households and thus their combined families would in

\textsuperscript{30} For an example of a large house divided between four heirs see the case study of YOS 6 114,
discussed in Baker in press (b) as well as below (note to Table 2.3, case 6).
\textsuperscript{31} Baker 2004, 57. Neo-Babylonian land survey and property description conventions are treated
detail in Baker 2011.
\textsuperscript{32} Miglus 1999, 184.
\textsuperscript{33} For example, party walls are found in the housing associated with the Eanna temple at Uruk,
but not in the Merkes district of Babylon; for plans see Miglus 1999, pls. 87 and 93.
\textsuperscript{34} See, e.g., Bowman and Wilson 2009, 58 (citing 4.5–5 people for a nuclear family unit).
\textsuperscript{35} Attested scenarios include, e.g., a household comprising a widowed male, his two young sons,
his widowed mother, and his two unmarried sisters (Baker 2010, 185).
\textsuperscript{36} See Gehlken 2005, 103 for the finding that around half of Neo-Babylonian temple personnel
worked alongside their father for up to five years. Gehlken (p. 103) also revises downward the age
of marriage for Babylonian males, to c. 20 years (from 29, as proposed by Roth).
theory number approximately 10 (2 brothers) or 15 (3 brothers). Textual references to more than three brothers sharing the same house are very rare, and even in those cases – which invariably involve a division of inheritance – it is by no means clear that we are dealing with actual living arrangements which would be maintained for any length of time: in practice, brothers often ‘fissioned’ to form their own households.

At this period various measures were taken to help prevent the family estate from being depleted through repeated inheritance division. Most notably, the oldest son received a double share in the father’s property and any brothers shared the remainder between them equally. Formal division of the inherited property could be postponed, with property (especially rural estates) being administered jointly by the heirs. Daughters had no actual right of inheritance but received a share of the paternal estate in the form of dowry; however, only a minority of dowries included a house (or a part of a house). Despite these various measures to mitigate the negative effects of repeated division, much depended ultimately on the size of the inherited estate and on the number of surviving male heirs who were to share it.

The typical Babylonian house of the first millennium BC consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by suites of rooms on all four sides (although occasionally rooms on only three, or even two sides are attested). It had a single entrance from the exterior, usually opening onto a vestibule suite which was configured so as to prevent direct visual access to the house’s interior. The central courtyard (tarbaṣu) was typically surrounded on all four sides by rooms or suites known in the contemporary written sources as bit iltāni, bit šūti, bit amurri or bit šadī, that is, ‘north/south/west/east(-facing) suite’ respectively. House I from Babylon, Merkes, can be taken as a ‘classic’ Neo-Babylonian house layout; its plan is reproduced in fig. 2.1, with the different sectors labelled according to their names.

This type of house corresponds rather closely in its basic features to what Nevett

---

37 Oelsner, Wells and Wunsch 2003, 938; Wunsch 2012, 20 n. 27.
39 For a detailed study of the spatial organisation of the Neo-Babylonian house and the correlation of the Babylonian terminology with the excavated ground plans see Baker in press (b) and Baker forthcoming.
Heather D. Baker

has termed in a Greek context the ‘single entrance, courtyard house’. This form is found throughout large parts of the eastern Mediterranean region and the Near East in antiquity and it is also traditional in much of the Middle East. The type, although widespread, nevertheless admits of considerable variation, even within Mesopotamia: the typical Old Babylonian house, for example, shared similar basic features with the Neo-Babylonian house but its layout still differed significantly in certain crucial respects. In order to get a better idea of the disposition of domestic space during the Neo-Babylonian period we can break down the total area of our ‘archetype’, Merkes House I, as shown in Table 2.2.

In this particular case, if it had been necessary to apportion self-contained architectural units within House I to different individuals or family groups, then the possibilities would have been limited to three sectors: the north(-facing) suite (NFS), the south(-facing) suite (SFS), and the east(-facing) suite (EFS). The entrance suite clearly had to be available for use by all occupants, and archaeological evidence suggests that the west(-facing) suite, in this case a small single room, was a typical location for

40 Nevett 1995, 373.
41 See, e.g., Bianca 2000, 77 who writes of ‘major cellular units which were grouped around a central distribution space or a courtyard’. Numerous examples from across the region are illustrated in Ragette 2003.
42 Baker 2011, 547.

### Table 2.2 Disposition of space in House I, Babylon, Merkes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Babylon, Merkes, House I—disposition of space</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total area</td>
<td>745 m²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walls</td>
<td>348 m²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usable area</td>
<td>397 m²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courtyard</td>
<td>100 m²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>roofed space</td>
<td>297 m²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>north(-facing) suite</td>
<td>169 m²</td>
<td>8 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>south(-facing) suite</td>
<td>50 m²</td>
<td>4 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entrance suite</td>
<td>38 m²</td>
<td>3 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>east(-facing) suite</td>
<td>35 m²</td>
<td>2 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>west(-facing) suite</td>
<td>5 m²</td>
<td>1 room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the kitchen.\footnote{See Baker in press (b).} In the case of shared occupation by members of an extended family household, it is clear that the NFS would have been occupied by the head of the household. It is interesting to note that the NFS occupied almost exactly twice as much roofed space as the SFS and EFS combined. The sizes of the respective suites would conform nicely to a hypothetical scenario whereby an older son inherited a double share in the house (the NFS) and one or two younger brothers of his occupied the remainder (the SFS and the EFS). This correspondence may be fortuitous, but it certainly reminds us of the kind of situation that features repeatedly in the contemporary documents.

Though the ‘single entrance, courtyard house’ was the dominant form in Babylonia, we also have to reckon with other kinds of house design and to consider their implications. For the Old Babylonian period a different type of house has been identified, namely, the ‘linear house,’ with rooms on two or three sides of a courtyard (or in some cases simply a row of rooms without any adjacent courtyard at all), in contrast to the ‘square house’ with rooms on all four sides.\footnote{Stone 1981, 26.} Based on this distinction and on the textual evidence for the division of houses through inheritance and subsequent adjustments, Stone suggested that the linear houses accommodated nuclear families while the square houses were associated with extended families.\footnote{Stone 1981, 29.} This is supported by her study of the ownership history and physical transformation of House I in the TA sounding at Nippur: what was originally a courtyard house inherited by four brothers was soon transformed in such a way that only one of the brothers remained in possession of a linear house comprising three rooms, the remainder of the original house having been acquired by neighbours. This is not to say that all linear houses were necessarily formed out of what had originally been courtyard houses: some were no doubt planned and built from scratch, perhaps in situations where the availability of land for building was an issue. In fact, there is also evidence for the converse process, that is, for linear houses being combined in order to form a larger house. For example, Gruber and Roaf suggest that the Old Babylonian house plan depicted on tablet BM 86394 was a sketch suggesting how two such linear houses, each formed out of two ‘3(or 4)-room row-houses’, could be combined into a single dwelling made up of four rows of rooms.\footnote{Gruber and Roaf 2012; their contribution is an appendix to Gruber 2012, which contains further detailed discussion of tablet BM 86394.}

Linear houses have also been found at other sites apart from Nippur, such as Old Babylonian Ur.\footnote{For illustrations see Miglus 1999, pl. 6; Gruber and Roaf 2012, 194–5, figs. 6–9. See also Brusasco 1999–2000, 20–26, who divides the more simple Ur houses into single room/court buildings (fig. 1.6), buildings without courtyard (fig. 1.7), buildings with rooms on one side of the courtyard (fig. 1.8), and buildings with rooms on two sides of the courtyard (figs. 1.9–1.11).} The more simple linear house forms, those without any courtyard, have no counterpart among the excavated Neo-Babylonian houses. This raises the
question of whether the known house types of the first millennium BC are representative of the entire spectrum of housing types, or whether – as in the Old Babylonian period – there would also have been simpler forms which have not yet been recovered because they lay beyond the areas that have been excavated. Since housing located in the outer areas of Neo-Babylonian sites has rarely been investigated, and the total amount of housing uncovered is not great, this clearly remains a possibility that cannot be discounted. Thus, while it may be assumed that most textually-documented ‘houses’ which are smaller than the smallest attested size for a viable courtyard house represent parts of such houses (individual rooms or suites of rooms), it remains possible that some of them were actually independent small dwellings.

In the case of the linear houses, it is clear that they were generally unsuitable for further subdivision for the purpose of shared occupation by members of an extended family, and as Stone supposed, they must have been occupied by simple family households. This was normally the case also with the houses at Late Bronze Age (13th–12th century BC) Emar: upon inheritance, individual houses were not normally divided up but rather separate houses were distributed among the heirs. The oldest son, as head of the family, was typically assigned the ‘main/large house’ (bītu rabû), while other siblings received smaller, secondary houses. Instances of heirs having to share the same house were relatively rare, and in common with the linear houses of the Old Babylonian period, the Emar houses could not easily be divided into self-contained suites. Furthermore, they were relatively small, with an average roofed living space of 43 m².

DWELLING SIZE ACROSS THE SOCIAL SPECTRUM

In this section I present a synchronic study of dwelling size in urban Babylonia in the first millennium BC. Given the multiplicity of possible residence scenarios and the problem of determining their relative prevalence, it is difficult (if not impossible) to extrapolate the ‘typical’ amount of domestic space available to the average simple family household. It seems more productive therefore to establish a series of benchmark sizes, based on textual and/or archaeological evidence that associates dwellings of known size with particular individuals/families or with members of a particular social class. The selected data are summarised in Table 2.3, with further explanation and references given in the accompanying notes below.

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48 The Neo-Babylonian houses excavated in the WC sounding at the southern tip of Nippur, near to the city wall, are an exception to this (Gibson et al. 1983; discussed also by Baker 2010).
49 The smallest excavated courtyard houses measured c. 90 m² and 95 m² (Baker 2004, 62); see also Table 2.3, case 2 and notes ad loc.
50 See also the remarks below referring to Table 2.3, case 1.
51 Mori 2003, 35–9.
52 Mori 2003, 38.
53 McClellan 1997, 45.
### Table 2.3 Dwelling size across the social spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Dwelling category</th>
<th>Details of dwelling category</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minimal living suite (part of house)</td>
<td>House shared as member(s) of extended family (or as tenant)</td>
<td>c. 73.50 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Small house (excavated)</td>
<td>Smallest excavated courtyard house</td>
<td>c. 90 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small house (textually attested)</td>
<td>Širku ('temple oblate'), Uruk, c. 555 BC</td>
<td>c. 120 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Slightly bigger house</td>
<td>Middle-ranking temple personnel within temple precinct (excavated houses, Eanna &amp; Esagila)</td>
<td>c. 240 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Average house</td>
<td>Average excavated house size (all sites)</td>
<td>c. 417 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Double courtyard house</td>
<td>Textually attested example from Uruk, 555 BC</td>
<td>c. 784 m² (441 + 343)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Large house (three courtyards)</td>
<td>E.g. Babylon, Merkes, House III</td>
<td>c. 1,475 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Official residences/bureaux</td>
<td>E.g. Achaemenid Residence, Abu Qubur; house ‘al-Bayati’, Babylon</td>
<td>c. 2,000 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Local governor’s palace</td>
<td>E.g. ‘Palace of Bel-šalṭi-Nannar’, Ur</td>
<td>c. 5,743 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Royal palace</td>
<td>Babylon, Südburg</td>
<td>c. 43,840 m²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Explanatory notes to Table 2.3**

1. The ‘minimal living suite’ is a self-contained architectural unit within the typical Neo-Babylonian courtyard house. Such suites can be equated with those known in the contemporary written sources as bīt īltānī, bīt šūti, bīt amurri or bīt šadi (see above). There are documented instances of such suites being assigned to individuals for residence, and occasionally their sizes are mentioned. Owners/occupants of such suites include women (as dowry recipients or as widows), and also (albeit rarely) tenants in rental situations. An example is a 5-reed (c. 61 m²) south-facing suite (bīt šūti) received by a woman from Borsippa as part of her dowry in 494 BC and then rented out by her to a third party (see Baker 2010, 186). A similar scenario may lie behind the case of a house in the Šuanna district of Babylon which was purchased by Iddin-Nabû of the Nappāḥu family and then rented out by her to a third party (see Baker 2004, 47–9, section 5.2, with schematic reconstructions). In this case the ‘house’, measuring c. 62 m², was not explicitly described by one of the aforementioned Babylonian terms for a ‘suite’, but given its size it is likely to have formed one part of a larger courtyard house. The adjacent owners were apparently not related either to the owner, Iddin-Nabû, or to the tenant, Nabû-ī-lū-salim. Alternatively, if the assumption that this ‘house’ formed part of a larger, courtyard house is incorrect, then we are dealing with an entirely different type of housing, of a linear or even possibly an agglutinating character, that has not yet been recovered through excavation.
Some of the people attested as owning or occupying suites of this kind no doubt headed their own simple family household, but others (e.g. widows) may have had the suite to themselves. For further details and discussion see Baker 2010, 185–7 and Baker in press (b).

2. The smallest excavated Neo-Babylonian courtyard house is House C at Nippur, measuring 90 m² (TA, level V), according to Miglus 1999, 341, table 27. This house expanded considerably in levels IV and III (see Miglus 1999, pl. 97, figs. 431–433). The next smallest house is House d6 at Uruk, with an area of 95 m² (Miglus 1999, 341, table 27 and pl. 94, fig. 418). Both of these houses had four rooms, in addition to the courtyard.

3. The average size of the dwellings of the temple oblates (širkus) at Uruk is based on the administrative document OIP 122 169 (555 BC) which lists residences assigned to them; the areas of 18 dwellings are preserved in the tablet. See Baker forthcoming for detailed discussion, and on the status of the širkus see Kleber 2011. It may be assumed that the temple oblates listed here were typically heads of simple family households.

4. The data for houses occupied by the middle-ranking temple personnel are based on the houses excavated to the west and southwest of Eanna in Uruk, together with the two houses excavated within the ziggurat precinct Etemenanki at Babylon (data taken from Miglus 1999, 341, table 27; for discussion see Baker 2011, 543). The attribution of these houses to this category of personnel is based on (a) the private family archives of temple prebendaries excavated in one of the houses associated with the Eanna temple (see Kessler 1991); (b) inscriptional evidence for temple prebendaries living within the Esagila precinct at Babylon.

5. Average house size here is based on all excavated Neo-Babylonian houses (from all sites) whose sizes are known or can be reconstructed (Miglus 1999, 307–14, with size data p. 341, table 27). The average size of the houses in Babylon, Merkes, is somewhat higher, at 538 m².

6. This example involves a double courtyard house described in the inheritance division tablet YOS 6 114 (Uruk, 555 BC). The house, which comprised a main sector (bītu rabû) and a secondary outer sector (tarbasu bābānû) measuring 441 m² and 343 m² respectively, was apportioned between three brothers and their paternal uncle. It is clear that the deceased father and his brother (the uncle of the other three heirs) had previously owned the house without any formal division: this was no doubt unnecessary because the house comprised two self-contained sectors, each of them equivalent to a typical courtyard house of the day. For preliminary remarks see Baker 2010, 188; for a more detailed discussion of this case see Baker in press (b); an edition of the tablet can be found in Baker forthcoming.

7. This category comprises the two largest excavated residential houses of the period: House III at Babylon, Merkes (1475 m²) and House 1 at Ur (1490 m²); see Miglus 1999, 341, table 27.

8. Official residence/bureaux: it has been suggested that these residences served to accommodate a high official and his family as well as his administrative department, implying a greater complexity of spatial organisation compared with ‘regular’ domestic dwellings (Baker 2011, 540).

9. Only one Neo-Babylonian building has so far been excavated that can plausibly be identified as the palace of a local governor: the so-called ‘Palace of Bel-šalṭi-Nannar’ at Ur (Woolley

54 An inscription of king Neriglissar refers to cultic personnel of Esagila (the main temple of Marduk at Babylon) living within the enclosure wall of the temple (CT 36 Pl. 19, ii 9–11 †// VAB 4 216, ii 8–10); for further discussion and commentary on this passage see Baker in press (a).
and Mallowan 1962, 41–3 and plan pl. 70). The building was formerly interpreted as the Egipar, residence of Nabonidus’s daughter Bel-šalṭi-Nannar (now read En-nigaldi-Nanna), which was rebuilt for her when she was consecrated as entu-priestess. This can now be ruled out and it is more likely that the building housed the local governor (Weadock 1975, 112–14).

10. The Südburg (‘South Palace’) in Babylon, built originally by Nabopolassar, rebuilt and extended by his son Nebuchadnezzar II; see the excavation report of Koldewey 1931. The palace has been reconstructed by Iraqi archaeologists.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored the methodological issues involved in making use of the rich data on house size from Babylonia. Analysis of these data should ideally take into account contextual information, including the following: domestic spatial organisation and its relationship with architectural forms; modes of property transmission, especially inheritance practice; record-keeping practices; conventions for measuring and describing houses, and socio-historical data on the family and household, including prosopographical study of specific case studies. Given the massive variation in attested Babylonian house sizes in the first millennium BC, with excavated examples ranging from c. 90 m$^2$ to very nearly 1500 m$^2$, it seems unsound to isolate one ‘typical’ house size/type as representative. I have tried instead to illustrate the range of housing across the social spectrum, associating different size brackets with particular residence scenarios where possible, and with particular sectors of the population. This approach is intended to encompass the known range of variation and to provide a more nuanced frame of reference for the comparative study of dwelling sizes, especially as an indicator of relative living standards. Finally, it should be noted that we cannot be certain that either the excavated houses or the textually attested ones are fully representative of the actual range, especially since the urban margins are generally under-explored and the sizes of rental properties were not usually written down.

REFERENCES


Baker, H. D. (forthcoming) The Urban Landscape in First Millennium BC Babylonia.


