

A Note on sā rēši

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My primary concern in this article is with a letter from Ras Shamra, written in Akkadian and published by J. Nougayrol as RS 17.144 in *MRS* 12, 7f. and pl. III. It belongs to a small group of letters (nos. 3 to 8) with which I have already dealt in my article, "Toward a History of Glassmaking in the Ancient Near East," published in *JAOS* 93 (1973), 259-66. These letters are addressed to the governor of Ugarit and concern a type of commercial activity that I have tried to describe in my article.

The letter to be studied here (no. 6) is well articulated: after the customary introduction (lines 1 to 4), there is a long section (lines 5 to 29) in which the writer enumerates several demands expressed in a letter previously received, and goes on to report which specific requests of the governor he is fulfilling and which are still outstanding when our letter was written. In the subsequent section (lines 30 to 39) we find a passage that throws light on the relationship between the governor and his correspondent. It reads: "And since my brother has written to me as follows: 'If you send me these things I demand, then I myself will send [you] (objects) corresponding to them in value! (know) that I am always ready to make business transactions with my brother. As for myself, I want gold very much [... (two lines broken)]...'"¹ As an afterthought or perhaps as a modification of this direct demand for gold,² a final short section (lines 40 to 44) is added in which the writer specifically asks for raw glass and a copper container.

The requests of the governor enumerated in lines 5 to 29 are methodically dealt with: the iron dagger and the linen garment he demanded are being sent to him with our letter³ (see lines 5 to 9), and the *kušitu*-garment he ordered will be manufactured and delivered later (see lines 26 to 29).

Lines 10 to 25 require some comment. The request is clearly for something called LÚ.SAG and for a mule (written ANŠE.GÌR.NUN.N[A]). As for the mule, lines 20 to 25 tell us that "there are (at the moment) no mules at my disposal. As soon as they collect (*leqû*) mules, I will send a fine mule to my brother."

There remains the problem of the meaning of LÚ.SAG, to which reference is made also in the following context (lines 12 to 19): *u aššum sīsê tašpura u anumma ana abija* 1

1 This attitude is likewise expressed in a passage of the letter *MRS* 12, 16:r. 1' to 6'.

2 Possibly the two lost lines contained the reason for this change in requests.

3 For the use of the III/2 form for this purpose, see my remarks in *WZKM* 42 (1935), 6-12.

ANŠE.KUR.RA SAL.AL.LÁ⁴ u 1 DUMU.NITA *ultēbi[l]* u *ašrānumma ana*
 LÚ.SAG-*ut-tim līpušūšu* u DUMU.NITÁ *šūt damiq danniš*.

From this passage we learn, first, that the requested LÚ.SAG is referred to as *sāsû*, 'horse', and second, that instead of this LÚ.SAG horse, the governor is provided with a mare and its foal. Moreover, he is advised to have that foal, which is expressly described as a male, changed into a LÚ.SAG in Ugarit.

Since the reading of LÚ.SAG is in Akkadian *ša rēši* (see presently), the passage cited makes sense only if we realize that this word, which in certain texts denotes the eunuch as a court official, is referring in our letter to a gelded horse. Hence, in the absence of an available gelding, a suckling male foal was sent to Ugarit, with his mother, to be gelded there. This is referred to by the phrase *ana ša-rēšūti epēšu* 'to make into a gelding, to geld (a horse)'.⁵

The entire passage (lines 10 to 25) can therefore be rendered as follows: "Now as to (the fact that) you, my brother, have written to me about a gelding and a mule (here is my answer): as for the horse, I am sending herewith to my brother one mare and one male foal; let them turn it into a gelding there. By the way, the male foal is fine indeed. But there are (at the moment) no mules at my disposal. As soon as they collect mules (again), I will send my brother a fine mule."

This passage from Ugarit gives us new and direct evidence for the current assumption that the official whose designation is written either syllabically, *ša rēši*,⁶ partly syllabically, LÚ ša SAG, or logographically, LÚ.SAG, was indeed a eunuch.

And now to my second concern in this article—namely, to show that such a specific meaning must not be applied indiscriminately wherever the term *ša rēši* is used.

In order to offer proof for this contention, I propose to discuss here, in a systematic if condensed manner, the evidence available, taking into account the textual as well as the iconographic material that bear on the *ša rēši*.

4 This logogram also occurs in the Hittite Laws; see J. Friedrich, *Die Hethitischen Gesetze, Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui* 7 (Leiden, 1959), 80 § 65*:41 and § 66*:42. See below, p. 328, for the possible importance of this fact.

The qualification AL of cows occurs in OB only in texts from Ur (*UET* 5, 819-40, some of which are cited in *MSL* 8/1, 67) and reappears in NB Uruk texts to describe also other female domestic animals. For cows see *BIN* 1, 108:1; *GCCI* 1, 164:1; *UCP* 9, 70, n. 58:15; *YOS* 6, 58:5, 7; for ewes see *BIN* 1, 174:1; *GCCI* 1, 272:2; 310:2; 416:1, *YOS* 6, 58:1; 7, 143:5, 6, 8; for she-goats see *YOS* 7, 143:10. Only the atypical references in which AL qualifies GUD are cited in *MSL* 8/1, 72, n. 1.

5 The new word *ša-rēšūtu* which means here 'eunuchship', recurs in *KAV* 94:4 (see J. N. Postgate *Neo-Assyrian Royal Grants and Decrees, Studia Pohl: Series Major* 1 [Rome, 1969], no. 27), as referring to a manor granted a *ša-rēši* official for his sustenance (see *ibid.*, 58).

6 For the reading of LÚ.SAG as *ša rēši* in a vocabulary, see B. Landsberger "Akkadisch-Hebräische Wortgleichungen" (in *Hebräische Wortforschung, Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* [Leipzig, 1967], 199 and n. 1, with reference to the equation in the series *Igituh* (short version), which reads, lines 232f.: *lú.sag = ša re-ši*, *lú.sag.lugal = MIN šar-ri*. Note also the passage in the commentary published in E. Leichty, *The Omen Series šumma izbu, TCS* 4 (1970), 233:6, which explains DUMU É.GAL (in xiv 10) simply by *ša re-eš*.

I begin with the Old Babylonian attestations. They come, on the one hand, from omen texts;⁷ on the other, from the letters from Mari. The omen passages,⁸ be they Old Babylonian or their reflection within the later tradition, prove only that the *ša rēši* belongs to the higher officialdom and was in close contact with the ruler; he could be a threat to his life, rebel against him, or deliver him to the enemy. Quite similar apodoses appear in connection with other high officials of the realm.

The references from Mari give a different impression. First of all, the word occurs here only in the plural (*šūt rēši*, written *šu-ut* SAG. (MEŠ) and in *ARM* 3,7:14, *LÚ šu-ut* SAG.MEŠ) and refers clearly to a class of persons of minor rank forming part of the court organization. They are concerned, for example (*ARM* 2, 140:22), with the plucking of sheep, with repair work on the irrigation system (*ARM* 3, 7:14), and with other rather menial tasks (*ARMT* 13, 43:14). According to *ARM* 4, 17:17, they are recruited from among dwellers in towns as well as in the open country, and they participate in military activities together with other military contingents (such as the *bibru* and the *Hana*-people); *ARM* 2, 25:r. 5 mentions one hundred *šu-ut* SAG.MEŠ. They are attached to the king (*ARM* 4, 2:12) and to the crown prince ruling in Mari (*ARM* 1, 31:30). In the former passage they appear beside another class of palace officials called *girseqû* (see the dictionaries, s.v.) whom we know also from the Ur III period. The *girseqûs* are often mentioned in Mari texts in connection with military activities, as J. Bottéro has pointed out in *RA* 52, 170. It thus seems that in the court organization, at least at Mari—we know next to nothing about the court of the kings of the First Babylonian Dynasty—there were two classes of attendants, functionaries, or whatever designation one might apply: *ša rēši* and *girseqû*. We have no means of discovering functional or status differences between them except by resorting to etymology, and even this is hazardous since the Sumerian loanword *girseqû* (written *gìr . se . ga*, *gìr . si g_{5/6} . ga*, and *gìr . si g . ga*) is as difficult for us to understand as it was for the Mesopotamian scholars of the second millennium. It seems to be derived from a verb 'to attend to a person' and is in a lexical text connected with a word referring to young persons as an age group (for details, see *CAD*, s.v. *girseqû*, lex. section and discussion), two indications to which I will have to come back later. When one turns to the meaning of *ša rēši*, one discovers in it a reference to the ceremonial position of a person called 'he who (stands/keeps himself/walks) beside (his master)' in the retinue of the head of the household in which such a *ša rēši* serves. He had the privilege of being allowed near the master⁹ as his attendant,

7 The passage PN SAG PN₂ in the Old Babylonian letter *CT* 43, 44:9 (=Kraus *Abb* 1, no. 43) is atypical and SAG should certainly not be rendered in such a context simply by 'Eunuch'.

8 Here are the passages: "(as to the king) *šu-ut re-ši-šu idukkušu* his court officials will kill him." in *YOS* 10, 59:r. 5 (OB) and 2, with *rubûm* instead of *šarrum*; also *rubû ardānišu šu-ut* SAG.MEŠ-*šu ana nakrišu inaddinušu* (Leichty, *Izbu* xiv:24). The singular is attested in *ša re-ši-šu ZI-ma* GAZ-*šû* in Leichty, *Izbu*, xxi:6.

9 Though this is obviously not the place to enter into an investigation of the spatial arrangement of the king's retinue and the relationship between ceremonial position and assigned function—a task which would require the collaboration of an archaeologist interested in iconography—a few remarks may not be amiss. In the Mari ritual (*RA* 35, 5:ii 15) we read, e.g., "one of the king's servants sits beside him (*ina idi šarrim*), to the right and the left" and so learn something about the complexities of the arrangements. Moreover,

of performing certain services, and was a person of trust to whom orders were given which he had to execute. The designation *ša reši* corresponds to that of *mazziz panî*, 'courtier', lit. 'one who stands before/in front of (his king)' as another 'spatial' term denoting a rank at court. We will presently discuss other ties between these two designations of royal servants.

Before we continue to present the Mesopotamian evidence for *ša reši* we have first to turn to Hittite texts in which our official appears in the spelling LÚ.SAG.

The evidence comes mainly¹⁰ from instructions given to the LÚ.SAG official who is a member of the royal household. These instructions have been published by E. von Schuler, *Hethitische Dienstanweisungen für höhere Staatsbeamte, Ein Beitrag zum antiken Recht Kleinasien*, AfO Beiheft 19 (1957). As H. G. Güterbock has pointed out, in *Oriens* 10 (1957), 361, there are indications in these instructions that the LÚ.SAG had to deal to a significant extent with the women of the royal harem and that he was therefore most likely a eunuch. It might furthermore be noted that Güterbock identified in the mentioned paper another designation for the eunuch in Hittite texts and, significantly enough, it was likewise written with a Sumerogram—that is, LÚ.ŠÀ.É, 'he of the bedroom'.

The very use of LÚ.SAG in our letter from Ugarit in reference to a gelded horse confirms this suggestion of Güterbock's inasmuch as the practice of gelding horses is indeed attested for the Hittite empire, as Güterbock himself has shown in *JCS* 15 (1961), 76. Apparently both the practice of gelding horses and the designation of such a horse as LÚ.SAG came from Hattuša to Ugarit (see also above, n. 4).

From this point on, I propose to continue my investigation along two lines: first the Babylonian evidence—that is, that of the Middle and Neo-Babylonian period; and then that of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, taking into consideration also what is known from other proveniences.

From the Kassite period on, the designation *ša reši*, beside which appears from then on also a *ša reš šarri*, is well attested in administrative contexts, and in legal texts where this official appears as witness in important land-grant documents. Many of these references have been cited in J. A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia, 1158-722 B. C.*, *An. Or.* 43 (1968), so that I need mention here mainly additional material.

The Kassite evidence yields only occurrences in letters (*PBS* 1/2, 17:1, 3; and 8, 28:6) apart from those listed in Brinkman, *History*, n. 2070-72, and they all are rather uninformative. We find the *ša reši* at times in high administrative positions (see Brinkman, *History*, n. 2073-79), as is also the case with the *ša reš šarri* (*ibid.*, n. 2080-87).¹¹

in the Mari ration list *ARMT* 9, 27 there is a distinction made between those persons who are *awilū ša reš awilim* (iii 20) and those who are behind the master, *ša warki awilim* (iii 22). Note in this context the use of the expression *man-za-zi SAG-ia* (Bauer, *Asb.* 1, pl. 24, K.2634:3) instead of the customary *manzaz* (var. *mazzaz*) *panî*. Is there a difference intended? The word recurs in a different context in the "*Hof- und Staatskalender*," E. Unger, *Babylon, Die heilige Stadt* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1931), 285 and pl. 54:iii 34, where it introduces the enumeration of all court officials: "*ma-an-za-zu ša re-e-ši-ia*."

¹⁰ The evidence, kindly put at my disposal by H. G. Güterbock, is as follows: *KUB* 5, 3:i 8-10; *KUB* 7, 1:iv 15f.; 25:r. 8f.; *KUB* 10, 18:iv 19f.; 21:vi 1f.; *KUB* 13, 33:iv 7; 35:i 38; iii 13; *KUB* 20, 8:vi 9f.; 99:iv 2; *KUB* 21, 38:22; *KUB* 26, 3:r. 34; *KBo* 18, 83:4.

A similar distribution can be observed in the texts of the subsequent period; see *ibid.*, n. 2073-79, for references to *ša reši*, and n. 2088-92 for those to *ša reš šarri*.

In general, the passages in which a *ša reši* occurs in Neo-Babylonian texts do not provide any useful information; apart from an isolated Sippar text (*Nbk.* 131:23), they come mainly from Uruk texts—for example, *YOS* 7, 32:19, 28; 125:16; 197:37; *BIN* 1, 131:11. The king's *ša reši* is well attested in the top administrations of Uruk temples, though rarely in those of Sippar, as can be seen from M. San Nicolò, *Beiträge zu einer Prosopographie neubabylonischer Beamten der Zivil- und Tempelverwaltung*, SBAW II/2 (Munich, 1941), 18-21; 25, n. 37; 30, n. 72f.; 31, n. 89. From Uruk comes a reference to a certain Nabû-aḫa-iddin, who is also a high official; he is called LÚ.SAG.LUGAL LÚ.EN[NAM . . .]. More *ša reš šarri* officials are attested in *Ner.* 7:9; *Nbn.* 250:3f.; 260:3 and 8, 782:5; *Camb.* 368:3; *Dar.* 544:3;¹² and in the letter *JRAS* 1926, 107:1 and 23, two *ša reši* officials of the crown prince Belshazzar are mentioned.

Other occurrences, if only we were better able to understand them, might be more revealing. In *BRM* 1, 81:2f., a tablet coming from Babylon and written in the twenty-sixth year of Darius, appears a certain Aplāj, who is called LÚ.SAG.LUGAL LÚ.si-pir *ša* LÚ.SAG.MEŠ *ekalli ešši*, "the king's *ša reši*-official, the administrator of the *ša reši*-officials of the new palace"; he receives large quantities of dates from the city prefect (*šākin tēmi*) of the capital. This is important inasmuch as it seems to show that the *ša reši* personnel of the palace was organized along similar lines in Babylon and in Nineveh. The *sipiru* of the *ša reši* attendants¹³ at the Babylonian court thus corresponds to the LÚ.GAL.SAG at the Assyrian court (see below, p. 332).

From quite a different angle we learn about the *ša reši* through two Uruk texts, *YOS* 7, 108:8 and 114:1, which identify two oblates of the Ištar of Uruk as LÚ.SAG LÚ.PA+KAB+DU—that is, as *ša reši* (and) oblates. There exist quite a number of instances where persons with specific skills (such as *nappāḫ siparri*, *nuḫatimmu*, *išparu*, *pūšaja*, also LÚ.APIN and *usandû*¹⁴) are oblates; still it is strange to find the *ša reši* in such company. Was he in this period a specialist, trained as an administrator, supervising the execution of his master's directives? (See below, p. 333, for *ABL* 322.)

One thing is quite certain about the passages in which the *ša reši* or the *ša reš šarri* occur in all these texts: not the slightest indication connects them with a harem or points to them as eunuchs.

From Nuzi texts come a few syllabic spellings for *ša reši* which have, so far, escaped attention. They are: *ša reši* in *HSS* 14, 94:14, in a list of persons obviously connected with

11 Brinkman drew attention in his book, p. 310, n. 2080, to the fact that the titles *ša reši* and *ša reš šarri* appear side by side in the late Kassite kudurru *BBSt.* no. 4:i 17, and ii 6. A parallel to this may be found in a passage of an inscription of Aššurnāṣirpal II (883-59 B. C.), which runs *ša* LÚ *ša* SAG.MEŠ *ša* LÚ *ša* SAG.MAN.MEŠ-ni (*AKA* 286, i:92).

12 In one instance SAG is followed by a sign which I cannot read: *BRM* 1, 101:27.

13 Note that also in *Dar.* 544:3 (from Babylon, 21st year of Darius) a *ša reš šarri* is called a LÚ *si-pir*.

14 Following is one reference for each profession in the sequence given above: *An. Or.* 8, 74:2; *RA* 12, 6f.:2; *TCL* 13, 161:3; *YOS* 7, 137:11; 158:2; *TCL* 13, 168:6.

the queen's household; *HSS* 14, 102:3, where bread rations are recorded for a *lāsimu*, a messenger, a wetnurse, the TUR.TUR—that is, the 'boys'—and a *ša re-ši*; and *HSS* 15, 42:12, where, in a list of persons in menial professions, we read of *ṣuḫārū ašar LÚ.MEŠ ša re-ši ašbu*. Here again, as was the case in Mari, the *ša re-ši* is a household member whose function remains obscure and who is listed as receiving rations along with craftsmen and other personnel.

The evidence from Assyria is quite complex. From the Middle Assyrian period we have administrative documents, the Law Code, the Harem Edicts and a royal ritual, all of which are relevant. Least important are the few administrative documents of the reign of Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur,¹⁵ documents which mention the LÚ ša SAG as an official at court without furnishing any further information.

In two passages of the Law Code we find the phrase *ana ša-re-še-en turru*, to make into a *ša re-ši*, that is, into a 'eunuch'. This is stipulated as punishment in a case of adultery (§ 15) and in a case of homosexuality (§ 20), respectively (*KAV* 1, ii:54 and 97). These instances are clear evidence that castration of human beings was practiced, at least as a corporal punishment.

The Harem Edicts attest to the actual use of eunuchs in the royal harem. In this regard, there are several problems which cannot all be solved, but which should not be glossed over with apodictic statements, either.

The relevant passages, *Afo* 17, 276:50 and 286:98, mention that certain palace officials have to be examined by the "physician of the inner section" in fact, by a "committee" that included the "herald of the palace" and the "chief-*zārīqu*,"¹⁶ only after having passed this examination were the officials allowed into the palace or, more likely, into certain parts of the palace compound.

The persons to be examined were called *mazziz panî* (p. 276) and also "mazziz panî and servants [?] of the palace staff" (p. 286). In the former passage they are said to comprise *lu ša reš šarri lu mazziz panî*, which gives the impression that the *ša reš šarri* was included in the class *mazziz panî*. Such an impression is confirmed by the regulation that those of the examined who were found not to be *marruru*¹⁷ had to be operated on a second time in order to belong to the category *mazziz-panuttu*. In other words, those who were not properly changed into eunuchs had to undergo the operation again,¹⁸ and this operation is called *ana mazziz-panutte turru*. The term *mazziz-panuttu* corresponds exactly to *ša-rešūtu* in our letter from Ugarit.

15 See E. F. Weidner, "Hof- und Haremserlässe assyrischer Könige aus dem 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr." *Afo* 17 (1954-56), 257-93.

16 There is a discrepancy in the membership of these two committees, as Weidner has pointed out in *Afo* 17, 286. For *zārīqu* see *CAD*, s.v.

17 I would like to suggest that the term *marruru* (pace Landsberger, "Akkadisch-Hebräische Wortgleichungen," 202 [see above n. 6]) is in fact a euphemism meaning literally 'checked', that is, checked for admission to the harem. The very fact that Akkadian uses only euphemistic terms even for castrated domestic animals (see B. Landsberger's list in *MSL* 8, 74f.) supports such a suggestion.

18 I refrain from speculating about the nature of either the original or the corrective medical intervention involved here.

The passage from the Harem Edicts proves that certain court functionaries had to be eunuchs in order to be admitted into certain parts of the palace, using *mazziz panî*, rather than *ša rēši*, as the word for 'eunuch'.

Just as one cannot, and must not, assume that every *mazzaz panî* (Bab. for Ass. *mazziz panî*) in cuneiform literature was a eunuch, neither should one assume the same for *ša rēši* (or *ša rēš šarri*). I suggest, therefore, that both terms refer primarily to the personnel of the court and of the larger households. This personnel was concerned with direct service to the master of the household, and only where and when the royal mores required the institution of a harem or similar arrangements did certain of these attendants have to be eunuchs.

Outside of the contexts of such courts, however, the specific meaning 'eunuch' for *ša rēši*—but not for *mazziz panî*—was well understood, as is shown by a passage from a ritual (CT 23, 10:4) in which we are told that the *šu-ut re-e-ši*¹⁹ has no semen and cannot beget children. In a like fashion, the Old Testament implies that the *saris* who, according to its text, served Assyrian, Egyptian, Babylonian and Persian, as well as native, rulers was a eunuch, as can also be seen in Isaiah 56:3—"neither let the *saris* say: Behold, I am a dry tree."

In the royal ritual, KAR 135, published in K. F. Müller, *Das Assyrische Königsritual*, MVAG 41/3 (Leipzig 1938), ii:37 and iii:2 (pp. 12 and 14), the high officials of the realm (*rabûtu*) are mentioned beside the *ša-rēš-šarrāni* at the top of the palace hierarchy exactly as we have it later in the concise description of a royal Assyrian household (referring to Šamaš-šuma-ukīn) in Iraq 7, 107, no. 34:27 (plus Iraq 13, 25:5), which reads *sekrētišu LÚ.GAL.MEŠ-šu LÚ šu-ut SAG.MEŠ-šu u niši libīt ekallišu*, "the ladies of his harem, his high official, his *ša rēši* officials and the other personnel of his palace."²⁰ In all these instances, the class of *ša rēši* officials forms an essential segment of the royal bureaucracy; they are not eunuchs by definition.

When we turn to the evidence of the Sargonid period we are faced with a new problem created by the possibility of correlating the documentary and the iconographic material. The reliefs and murals of the kings of the Neo-Assyrian period have been taken—rightly or wrongly—to bear on the evidence for the meaning of the word *ša rēši*.

19 The form cited here refers normally to the plural as the omen passages cited in n. 6 above show. On the other hand, in Lambert, *BWL*, 114:55 in the sequence *lu rē'u lu šatam ekurri lu šu-ut SAG LUGAL*, the singular is meant, as is most likely the case in line 45 *ummân u šu-ut SAG manzaz pân šarri*. Line 14 of the same text *NUN u šu-ut SAG-šu*, 'the ruler and his official(s)', remains ambiguous.

There is, as a matter of fact, a minor problem related to the plural form of the word under discussion: as plural of LÚ.SAG we find in the NA Letter *ABL* 322:12 the spelling *LÚ.SAG.MEŠ-ni*, that is, **ša-rēšāni*. In the MA royal ritual *KAR* 135, iii:2 (see this page) we find *LÚ ša SAG LUGAL.MEŠ-ni* (without *-ni* in the same text, ii 37) which is to be read *ša-rēš-šarrāni*. See also n. 11.

20 The dichotomy in the upper echelons between *rabû* and *ša rēši* seems to have a parallel in the late literary text published by D. J. Wiseman, "A Late Babylonian Tribute List?" *BSOAS* 30 (1967), 495-504, which mentions LÚ.SAG beside LÚ *qurrubûtu* in BM 82684, ii:16'f. Perhaps one may even refer in this context to the relationship between the *šut rēši* and the *girseqû* at the court in Mari (see above, p. 327).

Let me discuss the textual material first.²¹ The letters and administrative documents of the Sargonids have re-entered the limelight of Assyriological interest in the last years; one has only to mention the names Deller, Dietrich, Parpola and Postgate to bring this home. The new finds at Nimrud—communicated to us by Kinnier Wilson, Parker, Saggs, and Wiseman—have enlarged our horizon, though our understanding is still rather incomplete and sketchy.

Again, I cannot endeavor to present the entire evidence. The gathering of material done by Brinkman, *History*, 309ff., is quite sufficient and there is little point to list here references which have no informative value. One could, however, add to Brinkman's enumeration of *ša reši* officials attached to the king, to the crown prince, to the royal mother and the queen, one text (ADD 741+749:35) which runs LÚ *šakin tēmi u* SAG. MEŠ-šú 'the city prefect and his *ša reši* officials'. This line shows that every official of importance had to have his retinue of attendants and it is unwarranted to assume that all these *ša reši* were eunuchs.

The *ša reši* personnel of the palace were under a high official whose designation is consistently written LÚ.GAL.SAG. From the Aramaic docket on the tablet ADD 129 (=ARU 313)²² we learn that in Aramaic he was called *rb srs*.

There is no reason to assume that every one of the many *ša reši* and *ša reš šarri* mentioned in the texts of our period was a eunuch. As a matter of fact, I would like to draw attention to a Neo-Assyrian ritual (Zimmern, *BBR* 57, K. 6702) which clearly argues that the king's *ša reši* was an un mutilated male.

This text is a fragment of a ritual directed against enemies about to invade the country.²³

The king is to appear with the army, and the routine religious ceremonies (consisting of three reed altars with food and meat offerings, libations, etc.) are to be performed. The exorcist is to make a tallow figurine of the enemy, turn its head backward and then [LÚ] *ša* SAG LUGAL *ša kīma bēlišu šuma nabû tillē ša[rri labiš]*, that is, "a *ša reši* of the king who is called the same name as his master (and) is [clad] in the attire of the k[ing]" has to recite an incantation before Šamaš. The broken portion of the text must have contained a prayer for the help and the intervention of the god and the instructions for the ritual destruction of the figure of the enemy. Since such a ritual was considered a dangerous undertaking, the role of the king had to be assumed by a trusted servant, who was given the king's name²⁴ and clothing for that occasion, and who would not abuse the power conferred upon him by the change in name and apparel. It is inconceivable that a eunuch would have been selected to act for the king of Assyria.

More interesting than the ordinary run of references is a passage in the NA letter *ABL*

21 Attention should be drawn to an Urartean reference for *ša reši* pointed out by J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists* (London, 1972), 116.

22 See Louis Delaporte, *Epigraphes Araméens* (Paris, 1912), no. 21.

23 For this type of ritual, see Erica Reiner, *JNES* 26 (1967), 185 to *STT* 218-19.

24 In view of the fact that in Mesopotamia all persons who have contact with the administration carefully avoid using the personal name of the ruler, it is highly unlikely that the officiant for this ritual was selected on the basis of an accidental homonymy.

322. There, the names of four persons are given (lines 8 to 11) and the list is summed up as [*nap̄har* 4] LÚ SAG.MEŠ-*ni*, that is, altogether four *ša rēši* persons. Each personal name is followed by the name of a profession such as LÚ.BI.LUL 'cup bearer', LÚ *karkadinnu* 'cook for special dishes', LÚ *nuḫatimmu* 'baker' and—LÚ.SAG. This reference again gives the impression that the LÚ.SAG who appears here among experts in well-defined crafts must have had a specific function, as was the case with the oblate who was characterized as LÚ.SAG (see above p. 329). The fact that four specialists, among them one called a LÚ.SAG, are summed up under the general designation *ša-rēšāni* shows that the word has, in fact, two meanings: on the one hand, it denotes a class of persons attached to a large household who perform a wide variety of services depending on the importance of the master of the house and the tasks assigned to the individual *ša rēši*; and on the other hand, a person trained in a specific skill.

The relevance of the iconographic material for the investigation at hand is the last issue to be discussed in this article. The pertinent evidence has recently been presented by J. E. Reade in his very able article, "The Neo-Assyrian Court and Army: Evidence from the Sculptures," *Iraq* 34 (1972), 87-112. In it the author correctly characterized the evidence for the pictorial presentations of eunuchs as inconclusive (see pp. 91f. and 95f.).

One could go even further and cast doubt on the basic assumption that the attendants and officials represented as unbearded on Assyrian reliefs and murals, etc., are eunuchs.

This assumption is derived from the alleged parallelism between the observation that the late Assyrian kings are always shown surrounded by attendants, some of whom with beautiful beards and some of whom without beards, while contemporary texts speak of persons at the court as either *ša ziqni*, 'bearded' or call them *ša rēši*, which allegedly means 'eunuch'.

The observations made by Reade, *Evidence*, 101f., about the so-called 'eunuch labourers' represented on pl. xxxix b, and his remarks about 'eunuchs' as 'occasional shieldbearers', as participating in bevvies, in hunt-scenes, "carrying ropes and equipment for captive labourers," etc., suggest to me a quite different interpretation. It would be, as a matter of fact, not only unheard of but also very unlikely that eunuchs performed such tasks at the Assyrian court, let alone that persons so occupied were called *ša rēši*, a title used for persons in high office. On the other hand, we know from texts dealing with personnel that in Mesopotamian households many domestic and menial services were customarily performed by young males (*ṣuḫāru*). (See also above, p. 330.) Consequently, I would like to suggest that many of the males shown on reliefs, etc., without beards are meant to represent youths, that is, young, beardless males.

Conversely, the designation *ša ziqni*, 'bearded', used in reference to the court personnel would indicate that the person was not an adolescent but an adult. Confirmation for this viewpoint may come from the Nimrud Wine Lists, where a *bēl narkabti* is repeatedly described as *ša ziqni* (no. 3:i 27; 10:r. 10; 13:18; 14:26; also 16:26).

If one accepts the interpretation of *ša ziqni* as 'bearded' (in the sense of adult), new light is shed also on the *ša rēši*, because in all the instances cited in CAD, s.v. *ziqnu* in *ša ziqni*, the juxtaposition of *ša ziqni* and *ša rēši* is used as a merism to refer to the entire personnel at court. It would seem, then, that the *ša rēši* was traditionally a young person, a 'boy'; note from other languages such words as *page*, *Knappe*, and *garçon*. Such a personal servant of youthful age, without a beard, was called *ša rēši* because he was constantly at the side of his

master for personal services, a trusted person who could, according to his capacities, be even given important tasks in the service of his master. It is furthermore possible that the *ša rēši*, as a successful executor of the king's commands, was supposed to keep his youthful appearance by shaving his beard when he grew older. Thus, the figures represented as beardless on the Assyrian reliefs would fall into three categories: some were simply young men engaged in all sorts of tasks (see above); others were *ša rēši* attendants either still young and engaged in the personal service of the king, or clean-shaven grown men in high positions; and still others who were eunuchs serving in certain quarters of the palace.

This hypothesis I propose in order to escape from the untenable dilemma, 'eunuch or not eunuch', which has beset this lexical problem for nearly three-quarters of a century.²⁵ If it seems overcomplicated, I beg the reader to keep in mind that the internal structure of the Mesopotamian court was the result of a development stretching across several millennia and that, if we ever learn to understand it better, it will not be by means of simple explanations and straightforward categorizations.

25 Ever since H. Zimmern's remarks in *ZDMG* 53 (1899), 116, n. 2.