From Chief Cupbearer to Chief of the Guard: Towards a Closer Identification of the Role Presumed by the Noun רַב in the Tanakh

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the Hebrew noun רַב, which carries the principal meaning of "chief." In particular, the study attempts to determine whether the noun implies anything about the entity it represents without making this explicit. The study, therefore, analyses the occurrences of the noun רַב in the Tanakh to determine whether the noun implies anything about the individuals it designates, irrespective of the literary context. As far as I know, this exercise has not been attempted with the noun רַב before, which is the unique contribution of this publication. In the Tanakh, the noun רַב does not appear on its own in the absolute state but is exclusively used as part of construct formulations. In each case, the analysis begins by focusing on the lexical meaning, etymology and textual application of the nomen rectum *(i.e. the noun that follows רַב in the construct term) and ends by considering the* nomen regens, *which is always רַב in our case.*

KEYWORDS: Chief; Babylonia; Assyria; Aramaic; Hebrew; Akkadian

A INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew noun רַב carries the principal meaning of "chief."[1] This study aims to determine whether the noun implies anything about the entity it represents without having to make this explicit. For example, if the hypothetical term "chief of the academics" is used in any particular context to describe a specific person,

[1] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic, Based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius* (transl. Edward Robinson; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 913, s.v. II רַב; David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Volume VII: צ-ר* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 388, s.v. רַב II.

can we deduce certain information about the person in question from the mere usage of the English word "chief"? Does the term "chief of the academics" imply that this "chief" is an academic herself or that she merely manages academics? Does the word "chief" always presume authority over people or can it also in English be used to denote authority over other things, such as animals or a building? Does the word "chief" typically imply a position of great, medium or little authority? Is the word "chief" used to describe a person's relationship with inferiors or superiors? Would it say something different about that person if the term was "chief academic" instead of "chief of the academics"? Answering these questions will assist in better understanding the role and position of persons described by the word "chief," especially in literary contexts where little else is said about the individual described by this word. The aim of this article is, therefore, to analyse the occurrences of the noun רַב in the Tanakh in order to determine whether the noun implies anything about the individuals it designates, irrespective of the literary context. As far as I know, this exercise has not been attempted with the noun רַב before, which is the unique contribution of this publication.

In the Tanakh, the noun רַב does not appear on its own in the absolute state but is exclusively used as part of construct formulations. We will, therefore, examine constructions that start with רַב in this study. However, the aim of the study is not, in the first place, to understand these constructions better but to understand the noun רַב better. It is impossible to understand רַב without first considering the constructions in which this noun appears, especially given that the noun only appears in the construct state in the Tanakh. As such, much attention will be devoted here to analysing the constructions with רַב before reaching conclusions about the noun רַב. This will require analysing the lexical meaning, etymology and textual application of the construction's *nomen rectum*. The *nomen rectum* is the noun that follows a construct noun as part of a Semitic phrase or construction.[2] The first construct noun in that phrase is known as the *nomen regens* and will always be רַב in our case. In other words, much space will be devoted to investigating the *nomen rectum* of each construction, but the ultimate aim of all this is to better understand the *nomen regens* shared by all these constructions, namely רַב. As such, the analyses of individual constructions will follow a familiar pattern: after considering known interpretations and explanations of the construction and its *nomen rectum*, attention will in each case turn to what one can learn about רַב from this information. More than enough information is available on the *nomina recta* of constructions with רַב, much of which will be included in this article. The purpose here is not to expand on this information. Instead, the purpose and unique contribution of this article is to

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[2] Cf., e.g., Friedrich W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch and S. A. E. Cowley; 2nd English ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 247, 414; Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 27; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), 253.

build on our knowledge of the noun רַב. I am particularly interested in what was presumed about this noun by its Jewish users but left *unexpressed* in texts and lexicons. In particular, I am interested in answering the following questions: Does it make a difference to the meaning of רַב whether the *nomen rectum* appears in the singular or plural? Should the person signified through the noun רַב be included in the group represented by the *nomen rectum*? Does רַב always presume authority over other *people* or can it also presume authority over something else? If it can also presume authority over something else, over what? Is the individual represented by רַב at the top, middle or bottom of the implied hierarchy? Is רַב used to describe a relationship with inferiors, superiors or both?

The methodology of the article is perhaps best described as a word study, focusing on the noun רַב. However, the methodology is not a traditional word study, since very specific, unconventional questions are posed, as listed above. Each construction is first analysed by considering the lexical meaning of the *nomen rectum*. This part of the analysis is largely dependent on existing lexical and etymological information about the *nomen rectum*, although the literary context is also considered when it is presumed to shed light on the construction in question. This is in each case followed by an attempt to answer the questions listed above. Ultimately, all this information is synthesised in the conclusion to determine the connotations behind רַב that are often left unexpressed in texts. In turn, other researchers can use the findings of this study to better understand individuals designated by a term with רַב, especially when little else is known about the relevant person or revealed about them in the relevant text. Some of the dictionaries and commentaries used here are older, which means that some of the English translation options are a bit archaic and outdated. However, I have chosen to present these options as they appear in these sources in order to give a full account of the semantic fields of certain Hebrew and Aramaic words.

B HEBREW

1 רַב־טַבָּחִים

The noun רַב appears most often in the Tanakh as part of the term רַב־טַבָּחִים, which refers exclusively to Babylonian officials or delegates.[3] The Hebrew noun טַבָּח

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[3] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 913, s.v. II רַב. Cf. 2 Kgs 25:8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 20; Jer 39:9, 10, 11, 13; 40:1, 2, 5; 41:10; 43:6; 52:12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 24, 26, 30. Our term רַב־טַבָּחִים is synonymous with שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים, which is used in Gen 37–41 to describe an important political and/or military officer of the Pharaoh in Egypt. See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 428, 458, 475; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 702, 746; Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 468; cf. Gen 37:36; 39:1; 40:3, 4; 41:10, 12; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 371, s.v. טַבָּח, 913, s.v. II רַב.

has two main lexical meanings, namely "cook" and "guardsman/bodyguard."[4] When referring to a cook, the Hebrew noun implies someone who also kills and butchers animals as part of their culinary efforts.[5] In its reference to a bodyguard, the Hebrew noun probably originated from the concept of a "royal slaughterer" or "executioner."[6] Indeed, the *verb* טָבַח means to "slaughter."[7] Sweeney mentions that רַב־טַבָּחִים literally means "chief of the slaughterers," while Roncace and Thompson consider the literal meaning to be "the chief butcher."[8] It is not difficult to see how the two lexical meanings of the noun טַבָּח might have developed from the semantic overlap between the ideas of slaughtering animals as a cook and "slaughtering" humans as an executioner.[9] When appearing as part of the construction רַב־טַבָּחִים, the noun טַבָּח is usually taken to mean "bodyguard" or "guardsman."[10] Hence, the term רַב־טַבָּחִים is variously translated as "chief of

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[4]   Isaiah Hoogendyk, David DeSilva, Randall Tan, and Rick Brannan, eds., *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2012), s.v. ἀρχιμάγειρος; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 371, s.v. טַבָּח; cf. Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 468; Walter C. Kaiser Jr. (with Tiberius Rata), *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2019), 302; cf. e.g. 1 Sam 8:13; 9:23–24.

[5]   David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Volume III: ט-י* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 340, s.v. טַבָּח; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 371, s.v. טַבָּח; cf. Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988), 318–319; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52* (ed. Paul D. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 292; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 91.

[6]   Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 371, s.v. טַבָּח; cf. Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (BERIT OLAM: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 169; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91; Hoogendyk et al., *Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint*, s.v. ἀρχιμάγειρος.

[7]   John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 158; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 339, s.v. טבח, 340, s.v. טַבָּח; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 370, s.v. טָבַח.

[8]   Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 467–468; Mark Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (LHBOTS 423; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 120, 138; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), § Jer 39:9–10 n. 13.

[9]   Cf. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91.

[10]   Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 371, s.v. טַבָּח.

the guards,"[11] "the captain of the guard,"[12] "chief of [the] guardsmen,"[13] "the captain of the bodyguard,"[14] "captain of (the body)guard(s),"[15] "commander of the imperial guard,"[16] "the captain of the royal guard,"[17] "the commander of the bodyguard"[18] and "provost marshal."[19]

The Hebrew term רַב־טַבָּחִים is a loan translation of the Akkadian term *rab nuḫatimmu*.[20] The noun *nuḫatimmu* literally means "cook."[21] According to Reiner and Biggs, the Akkadian term *rab nuḫatimmu* literally refers to the "official in charge of the kitchen" and should typically be translated as "chief cook."[22] Tawil agrees that this term points to the "official in charge of the kitchen" but adds "court dignitary" as a lexical option.[23] In an ancient Assyrian letter,[24] someone uses this term to speak of the "chief cook" expressly as "my supervisor."[25] This idea of supervision and oversight corresponds to the most straightforward and direct meaning of *rab* in Akkadian, which is presented by Black, George and Postgate plainly as "chief, overseer of."[26] The term further

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[11]   Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 467.

[12]   Esv, Rsv, Nrsv, Kjv, Nlt, Nkjv and Leb; Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 530; Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 40:1; Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah*, 120.

[13]   Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 913, s.v. II רַב.

[14]   Nasb.

[15]   Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 340, s.v. טַבָּח; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 388, s.v. רַב II.

[16]   Niv; Kaiser, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 245.

[17]   Net.

[18]   Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 39:9–10.

[19]   Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 293.

[20]   Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Jersey City: KTAV, 2009), 355, s.v. רַב־טַבָּחִים = Akk. *rabi nuḫatimmī*; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 318–319; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 292–293.

[21]   Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, eds., with the assistance of Tina Breckwoldt et al, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (2nd corrected printing; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 257, s.v. *nuḫ[a]timmu[m]*.

[22]   Erica Reiner and Robert D. Biggs, eds., with the assistance of Brigitte Groneberg, et al., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Volume 11: N, Part II* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1980), 316, s.v. *nuḫatimmu* in *rabi nuḫatimmi*; cf. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 169; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91.

[23]   Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב־טַבָּחִים = Akk. *rabi nuḫatimmī*.

[24]   Published in Robert Francis Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 601.

[25]   Reiner and Biggs, *The Assyrian Dictionary 11*, 316, s.v. *nuḫatimmu* in *rabi nuḫatimmi*.

[26]   Black, George, and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, 293, s.v. *rab*.

seems to have implied a court dignitary.[27] It is clear from certain literary contexts that one of the tasks of the *nuḫatimmu* ("cook") when preparing food was butchering animals.[28] From these considerations, it seems that the Akkadian term *rabi nuḫatimmi* referred to a person in charge of other cooks, most probably a cook himself. As a functionary within the palace, the specific individual typically had some standing as a court dignitary. According to Holladay, "one must understand that the title [*rab nuḫatimmu*] is archaic and that in this period it is the designation of a high Babylonian officer."[29] In all likelihood, the additional connotations of "butcher" and "executioner" were introduced in the Tanakh when the Akkadian noun *nuḫatimmu* was translated with the Hebrew noun טַבָּח.[30] Cogan and Tadmor are correct that "executioner" is not a correct translation of the original Akkadian title.[31] Nevertheless, the introduction of this gruesome concept suited the translators just fine since the Babylonian officials described by this term were indeed regarded by the ancient Jews as "slaughterers of humans" during the Babylonian exile (see below).[32]

Whatever the etymological origins of רַב־טַבָּחִים, English translators of the Hebrew Tanakh are correct to render this term as "chief of the guard" (and similar translations: see above), since the term indisputably functions in 2 Kgs 25 and Jer 39–43, 52 as the title for a leading Babylonian court official and military officer.[33] Some of the Babylonian officials behind the archaic term רַב־טַבָּחִים are even mentioned by name, the most famous of which, at least in Jewish history, is Nebuzaradan, who not only destroyed Jerusalem with the Chaldean army[34] but also "carried into exile to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city [of Jerusalem], those who had deserted to him, and the people who remained."[35] The historicity of Nebuzaradan is confirmed in a list of King Nebuchadnezzar's court officials on a prism discovered in Babylon.[36] On the

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[27] Reiner and Biggs, *The Assyrian Dictionary 11*, 316, s.v. *nuḫatimmu* in *rabi nuḫatimmi*.
[28] See Ibid., 313–316, s.v. *nuḫatimmu*; cf. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91.
[29] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 293; cf. also Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 39:9–10 n. 13; Collins, *Daniel*, 158.
[30] Cf. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 169.
[31] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 319; cf. also Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב־טַבָּחִים = Akk. *rabi nuḫatimmī*.
[32] Cf. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 169; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91; Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah*, 120; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 467–468.
[33] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 293; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 340, s.v. טַבָּח; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 468; Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב־טַבָּחִים = Akk. *rabi nuḫatimmī*.
[34] See 2 Kgs 25:8–10; Jer 52:12–14.
[35] Jeremiah 39:9 (Esv); cf. Jer 40:1–3; 52:15, 28–30; 2 Kgs 25:11.
[36] See Eckhard Unger, *Babylon, die heilige Stadt der Babylonier* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931), 282–294; cf. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 169.

prism, his Akkadian name is presented as *Nabû-zēr-iddinam*,[37] which literally means "Nabu [the deity] has given me offspring."[38] Remarkably, this prism not only mentions that Nebuzaradan was the "chief cook" (*rab nuḫatimmu*) but also that he was a court official.[39] Other court officials mentioned include Nabuzeribni, the "chief armourer," one who was "in charge of the palace officials" (the text breaks off where his name appears), Ardia, the high official of the so-called "House-of-the-Palace-Women," Nabuahusur, "the chief of the engineers," Nergalresua, "the chief of the singers" and so on.[40] The first section of the list is introduced by the Akkadian term *mašennu*, meaning "high court officials," and Nebuzaradan's name appears first in this opening section.[41] This would suggest that he was very high up in the hierarchy of courtiers, perhaps even second-in-command after the king. Thompson refers to him as "Nebuchadrezzar's special representative in Jerusalem."[42] This understanding of Nebuzaradan as the king's representative or agent is confirmed by Jer 39:11, which recounts Nebuchadnezzar speaking "by the hand of" (בְּיַד) Nebuzaradan – a common term in the book of Jeremiah to signal direct agency.[43] Furthermore, Nebuzaradan's prominent position seems to be confirmed by the biblical account of the Babylonian exile, which shows that Nebuzaradan had the authority to decide who could remain in Jerusalem, choosing to leave behind "some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen."[44] He also had authority over the spoils of the conquest, with the Chaldeans seizing the bronze and other miscellaneous items in the Temple, while Nebuzaradan seized the gold and silver.[45] Nebuzaradan personally took the most important political and religious

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[37]   A. Leo Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed. with supplement; ed. James B. Pritchard; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 307; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91.

[38]   Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 318; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 292; Kaiser, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 245.

[39]   Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 9; Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 1993), § 2 Kgs 25:8–21; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 318; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 292–293.

[40]   Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," 307–308.

[41]   Ibid., 307, esp. n. 1.

[42]   Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 52:12–13.

[43]   Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah*, 126.

[44]   See 2 Kgs 25:12 (Esv); cf. Jer 39:10; 41:10; 43:5–6; 52:16; cf. also Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 293; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 169; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 91; Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב־טַבָּחִים = Akk. *rabi nuḫatimmī*.

[45]   See 2 Kgs 25:13–15; Jer 52:17–19.

leaders of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king for punishment to death.[46] In the words of House, Nebuzaradan "supervises Jerusalem's destruction."[47]

It should be clear from this overview that the רַב־טַבָּחִים was a leader over many inferiors but ultimately accountable to the king of Babylon, placing him somewhere near the top of the hierarchy but not at the very top – a position that the king occupied. The term רַב־טַבָּחִים expresses the relationship of the chief of the guard to his inferiors by featuring them as the *nomen rectum* (טַבָּחִים). However, some literary contexts also emphasise the relationship of the chief of the guard to his superior, the king. Consider, for example, the description of the chief of the guard as "a servant [or slave: עֶבֶד] of the king of Babylon" in 2 Kgs 25:8 (ESV). In an ancient context, it was not impossible for a person to be both a slave and a court official representing the king. In this context, however, the description "slave" is probably a symbolic expression meaning "officer" of the king, as opposed to a literal slave.[48] At any rate, the *nomen rectum* of רַב־טַבָּחִים is in the plural and refers to people, literally a group of cooks or bodyguards. The most difficult question to answer in this case is whether or not the רַב־טַבָּחִים should be regarded as a member of the group it leads. In other words, was the "chief of the guard" also a bodyguard (or executioner) himself? It is curious that Nebuzaradan is depicted in 2 Kgs 25:8–21 (par. Jer 52:12–27) as the acting subject, together with the Chaldeans, of all the despicable deeds against the Judeans *except* actually killing the captives, which King Nebuchadnezzar does, according to verse 21. If anything, one would expect the "chief of the executioners" to handle the execution. However, one should understand the king's act of "putting them to death" in verse 21 as an order of execution, just as one should regard the activities attributed to Nebuzaradan in the preceding verses as actions taken under his directive.[49] The reason the acting subject changes in verse 21 is because the king has entered the story at that point and become the highest commanding authority, not because he physically performed the executions. It is therefore possible that Nebuzaradan actually performed the executions, as some commentators presume,[50] but this is not stated explicitly or even suggested by the text.[51] Without any further clues, one has to conclude that the texts under consideration fail to clarify whether the רַב־טַבָּחִים should be regarded as a טַבָּח himself.

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[46] See 2 Kgs 25:18–21; Jer 52:24–27; cf. Jer 40:1–3; cf. Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC 8; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), § 2 Kgs 25:8–12. For other examples of the authority of the רַב־טַבָּחִים, see Jer 41:10; 43:6; 52:12–30.

[47] House, *1, 2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 25:8–12; cf. also Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 52:12–13; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 653.

[48] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 319; cf. Jer 52:12.

[49] Cf. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 653; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 530.

[50] See, e.g., House, *1, 2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 25:18–21.

[51] Cf. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 653.

2 רַב־מָ֒ג and רַב־סָרִיס

Despite ordering the execution of Jerusalem's leaders, the king spared Jeremiah and commanded Nebuzaradan to: "Take him [Jeremiah], look after him well, and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you."[52] This is followed in Jer 39:13–15 by a very interesting narration of what happened next:

> [13] So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard [רַב־טַבָּחִים], Nebushazban the Rab-saris [רַב־סָרִיס], Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag [רַב־מָ֒ג], and all the chief officers [וְכֹל רַבֵּי] of the king of Babylon[14] sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard [מֵחֲצַר הַמַּטָּרָה]. They entrusted him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So he lived among the people. [15] The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the guard [בַּחֲצַר הַמַּטָּרָה].[53]

The same events are narrated in Jer 40:4–6, where Nebuzaradan acts without the assistance of these other "chief officers," which seems more historically plausible.[54] Historicity aside, the Babylonian terms featuring רב in the text quoted above are directly relevant to the current discussion. Jeremiah 39:13–15 provides the names of the two individuals who acted as רַב־מָ֒ג and רַב־סָרִיס respectively as Nebushazban (וְנְבוּ שַׁר־סְכִים) and Nergal-sar-ezer (נֵרְגַל שַׁר־אֶצֶר).[55] Unlike רַב־טַבָּחִים, which *translates* the original Akkadian, רַב־סָרִיס and רַב־מָ֒ג *transliterate* the original Akkadian, namely *rab ša rēši* and *rab mugi,* respectively.[56] The term רַב־סָרִיס literally means "chief eunuch" or "head of the eunuchs" and functions as the title of a political official and/or military officer.[57] It is important to recognise that eunuchs were typically court officials in the ancient world and that they were not always castrated.[58] Potiphar is called the

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[52] Jeremiah 39:11–12 (Esv).

[53] Esv.

[54] Cf. Jer 43:5–6; cf. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 531, 536.

[55] Cf. Jer 39:3.

[56] A. Leo Oppenheim, Erica Reiner, and Robert D. Biggs, eds., with the assistance of Johannes M. Renger and Marten Stol, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Volume 10: M, Part II* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1977), 171, s.v. *mugu* in *rab mugi*; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 229, 319; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 291; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 85.

[57] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 710, s.v. סָרִיס; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 229; cf. Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 39:1–10 n. 1; Collins, *Daniel*, 134; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 530; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 85, 92; Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury* (Bibliotheca Sacra; Fearn: Christian Focus, 2005), § 2 Kgs 18:17–25 n. 14; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 414.

[58] See David Mark Rathel, "Eunuch," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (ed. John D Barry; Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), s.v. eunuch; cf. M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), s.v. eunuch; Collins, *Daniel*, 134–

Pharaoh's סָרִיס in Gen 37:36 and 39:1 but Potiphar was married.[59] Clines includes both "eunuch" and "high official" as lexical options for סָרִיס, adding that the word is rarely used literally to denote a eunuch in the sense of a castrated male.[60] Further, there is no conclusive evidence that the Akkadian term *ša rēši* carried the meaning "eunuch" in Assyria or Babylonia, although the fact that some of them worked as administrators of the royal women's quarters suggests that at least some of them were indeed castrated.[61] The Akkadian term *ša rēši* actually means "of/at the head," which could indicate not only the official's high position in the court hierarchy but also their role as attendant standing close to or "at the head of" a notable political figure.[62] During the neo-Assyrian period, the term *ša rēši* referred to personal attendants of various personnel in the Assyrian court, from high officials to members of the royal family.[63] The king's attendant, for instance, was called *ša rēši šarri*, who was at the same time also a high official.[64] During the same period, *ša rēši* functioned to identify beardless officials, distinguishing them from bearded officials, who were called *ša ziqni*.[65] In the same period, the plural form *šut rēši* functioned in royal annals as a general designation for provincial administrators.[66] Tawil translates the term *ša rēši* as "chief of the royal guard."[67] According to Cogan and Tadmor, the Assyrian *rab ša rēši* was often sent on military campaigns, leading the troops.[68] The introduction of סָרִיס ("eunuch") into the Tanakh probably occurred due to the similar look and sound of *ša rēši*,[69] which actually places the rendering רַב־סָרִיס somewhere between a translation and a transliteration. As with רַב־טַבָּחִים, the translation from Akkadian to Hebrew introduces connotations not present in the original title. Despite this imprecise translation, the *Hebrew* text has סָרִיס and should therefore be translated as "eunuch."[70] Even so, the idea of castration is less relevant in Jer 39:13 than the identification of Nebushazban as the person in

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135; Mark Allan Powell, ed., *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (revised and updated; 3rd ed.; New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 265.

[59]   Collins, *Daniel*, 134; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 458; cf. Mathews, *Genesis*, 746.

[60]   David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Volume VI: פ-ס* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 197, s.v. סָרִיס I.

[61]   See Collins, *Daniel*, 134–135.

[62]   Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 291; Collins, *Daniel*, 134; cf. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 458; John Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 5.

[63]   Collins, *Daniel*, 135.

[64]   Ibid.

[65]   Collins, *Daniel*, 135.

[66]   Ibid.

[67]   Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב־טַבָּחִים = Akk. *rabi nuḫatimmī*.

[68]   Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 229.

[69]   Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 291.

[70]   *Pace* Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 245, in Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 291.

charge of a particular group of court officials.[71] In fact, Clines does not even include "chief eunuch" as a translation option of רַב־סָרִיס but only "chief official," which he further defines as the title of a high-ranking official of the king in Jer 39:13.[72]

The second term, רַב־מָג, includes the noun מָג, which is an Assyrian-Babylonian loanword that might have Sumerian origins, literally meaning "astrologer" or "soothsayer."[73] The term therefore literally means "chief soothsayer" or "chief of the soothsayers."[74] As with רַב־סָרִיס, רַב־מָג is best understood in Jer 39:13 as a title for the person in charge of a certain group of court and/or military officials.[75] Whether or not that group was made up of actual fortune-tellers is less important in the context of Jer 39:13 than identifying Nergal-sar-ezer as one of the high officials in the Babylonian court.[76] Swanson, in fact, defines the noun מָג simply as an "official, i.e., one in authority" and the term רַב־מָג as a "high official, i.e., a person of very high authority in a political or military setting," adding that the exact function of רַב־מָג is currently unknown to scholarship.[77] Oppenheim, Reiner and Biggs conclude their overview of Akkadian texts describing the term *rab mugi* as follows:

> From the texts it seems the *rab mugi* was a high military official who occasionally served as special envoy to foreign rulers. The evidence of the Akk. texts is corroborated by the occurrence of the *rab māg* in Jer. 39:3, 13.[78]

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[71]   Cf. R. L. Thomas, *Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance* (updated ed.; Anaheim: Foundation Publications, 1998), §2749.

[72]   Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רַב II; cf. also Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 39:1–10 n. 1; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 530; Davis, *2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:17–25 n. 14.

[73]   Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 550, s.v. מָג.

[74]   Ibid., 913, s.v. II רַב; Thomas, *Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary*, §7248; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רַב II.

[75]   Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רַב II.

[76]   Cf. Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רַב II.

[77]   James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.; Oak Harbor: Logos, 1997), §4454, §8059; cf. also G. Fohrer, ed., in collaboration with H. W. Hoffmann, et al, *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* (trans. W. Johnstone; London: SCM, 1973), 137, s.v. מָג; Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 39:1–10 n. 1; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 291; William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 181, s.v. מָג; Kaiser, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 244.

[78]   Oppenheim, Reiner, and Biggs, *The Assyrian Dictionary 10*, 171, s.v. *mugu* in *rab mugi*; see also Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 356, s.v. רַב־מָג = Akk. *rab mugi*.

It would seem that all the individuals mentioned by name in Jer 39:13 were military officers and/or royal officials and that all the designations starting with רב were therefore the titles used of such leaders. This is confirmed not only by the closing phrase "and all the chief officers [וְכֹל רַבֵּי] of the king of Babylon" but also by Jer 39:3 where the same terms are introduced by the opening statement: "Then all the officials [כֹּל שָׂרֵי] of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate."[79] It is further confirmed by the definition of רב provided by Swanson: "commander, military officer, i.e., a person with soldiers under his command [but] in some contexts this may be a civil officer."[80]

The *nomen rectum* of both רַב־סָרִיס and רַב־מָג designates a group of people. We are interested in the literal terms themselves, which identify these groups of people as eunuchs and soothsayers. Unfortunately, the texts under examination use the terms in a purely titular sense, meaning that very few conclusions can be reached from their usage in this literary context. We can tell that these high officials were under the direct command of the king, and it is likely that the same would have been true when these roles involved literal eunuchs and soothsayers. It is likely that these individuals operated somewhere in the middle of the palace hierarchy, under the ultimate authority of the king. The terms highlight the relationship between these individuals and their inferiors by featuring the words סָרִיס and מָג. However, these terms appear in the singular, which means that they could denote the role of the *"chief"* as "eunuch" or "soothsayer," not that of the groups. Even so, the chief's relationship with his inferiors is still more in focus than his relationship with his superior(s), who is/are not mentioned as part of the term at all.

Again, the most difficult question to answer is whether these individuals should be regarded, respectively, as eunuchs and soothsayers themselves. Since these terms function as mere political titles in our text, one cannot look to the literary context for answers. The fact that the *nomina recta* of these terms appear in the singular might be relevant to that question. To have "chief eunuch" instead of "chief of the eunuchs" might require an interpretation that regards this "chief" as a eunuch himself. One would have to investigate the occurrences of *nomina recta* with רב in other contexts to reach any definitive conclusion in this regard. In sum, a definitive conclusion is not forthcoming on whether the "chief eunuch" was a eunuch himself, although the singular grammar of the *nomen rectum* might suggest as much. The same is true for the "chief soothsayer."

In Dan 1:3, the Babylonian king orders "his chief eunuch" (רַב סָרִיסָיו), Ashpenaz, "to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal

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79   Esv.
80   Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, §8042.

family and the nobility."[81] It is not clear whether Ashpenaz was castrated but his role as high official is beyond serious doubt.[82] Clines translates רַב סָרִיסָיו in Dan 1:3 as "chief of his officials."[83] The best evidence we have of the use of castrated eunuchs as court officials comes from the Persian period.[84] One gets the distinct impression from Dan 1:1–21 that Ashpenaz was in charge of those who served the Babylonian king in his palace, which would henceforth include Daniel and his companions. Newsom regards Ashpenaz as "the head of his [Nebuchadnezzar's] household staff" and Seow calls Ashpenaz "the palace master."[85] To prepare the four Jewish nobles for their task as royal servants, Ashpenaz was expected to teach them the language and literature of the Chaldeans and oversee their three-year training.[86] Although the Hebrew term for the Chaldeans (כַּשְׂדִּים) often refers to the Babylonians in the Tanakh,[87] the term had acquired a secondary meaning by the Hellenistic period, when the book of Daniel was written, pointing to a class of divinatory experts who specialised in soothsaying, astrology and the like.[88] In other words, when Dan 1:4 says that Ashpenaz taught Daniel and his friends "the language and literature of the Chaldeans," it means that they were taught "the technical literature of these divinatory experts, composed and transmitted in Akkadian cuneiform."[89] In order for Ashpenaz to teach them this technical literature, he must have had some knowledge of it, probably as a diviner himself. Ashpenaz's authority over the four foreigners is indicated not only by the fact that he renamed them[90] but also by the fact that Daniel had to ask him for permission not to consume the royal food and wine.[91] Nonetheless, his authority was practically executed through other palace staff like "the steward [הַמֶּלְצַר] whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah."[92] At the same time, the

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[81]   Niv. Cf. Christopher T. Begg, "Daniel and Josephus: Tracing Connections," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (BETL 106; ed. Adam S. van der Woude; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 540.

[82]   Collins, *Daniel*, 134; cf. C. L. Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 27.

[83]   Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VI*, 198, s.v. סָרִיס I.

[84]   Collins, *Daniel*, 134; cf. Plato, *Laws* 3.694D, 695A; *Alc. maj.* 1.121D; Herodotus 2.92; 8.105.

[85]   Carol A. Newsom, *Daniel: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 41; Seow, *Daniel*, 25.

[86]   Daniel 1:4–5.

[87]   See, e.g. 2 Kgs 25:4; Isa 47:1; Jer 21:4; Ezek 1:3; Dan 5:30; 9:1.

[88]   Newsom, *Daniel*, 44; cf. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 16–17.

[89]   Newsom, *Daniel*, 45; cf. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 16.

[90]   Daniel 1:7.

[91]   Daniel 1:8; cf. John Goldingay, "Story, Vision, Interpretation: Literary Approaches to Daniel," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (BETL 106; ed. Adam S. van der Woude; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 298.

[92]   Dan 1:11 (Esv).

king had ultimate authority over Ashpenaz, as verse 10 clearly indicates.[93] The purview of such a "chief eunuch" did not always end with managing palace staff but could include much greater political and military responsibilities. We will see an example of this in the next section. The term רַב־סָרִיס emphasises the dominion of the רַב over inferiors through the noun סָרִיס but the subordination to at least one superior, the king, is also expressed through the pronominal suffix "his." It is therefore no difficult task to find that the *nomen rectum* in this case portrays people as inferiors and that the *nomen regens* should be regarded as someone in "middle management" with authority over these inferiors under the direct command of the Babylonian king.

The more interesting consideration in this case is that the *nomen rectum* occurs in the plural, which means that it should technically read "the chief of his eunuchs." The question here is why the author veered from the usual rendering of the רַב־סָרִיס in the rest of the Tanakh with the *nomen rectum* in the singular. One explanation might be the influence of neo-Assyrian literature, in which the plural form *šut rêši* functioned as a general designation of provincial administrators (see above). However, the authorship of Daniel long after this period makes such a direct literary influence unlikely. Another explanation could be the influence of the *Aramaic* titles that follow in the rest of Daniel, which tend to have a plural *nomen rectum* (see below). A third possibility is that the author wanted to indicate that the "chief" was not himself a "eunuch" but merely in charge of the eunuchs. However, it is more likely that the grammatical number of the *nomen rectum* in terms with רַב was fluid and interchangeable, without semantic significance (see below). As it stands, the grammatical number of the *nomen rectum* in רַב סָרִיסָיו tells us little or nothing about the inclusion or exclusion of the *nomen regens* in the group represented by the *nomen rectum*. To reiterate, we are dealing here with an archaic term that might no longer refer to actual eunuchs, although some degree of overlap possibly still exists.

3 רַב־שָׁקֵה

The same and similar terms as in Jer 39:13 (see above) are also used of *Assyrian* officials in the Tanakh, as in 2 Kgs 18:17 (Esv):

> And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan [אֶת־תַּרְתָּן], the Rab-saris [וְאֶת־רַב־סָרִיס], and the Rabshakeh [וְאֶת־רַב־שָׁקֵה] with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem.[94]

The רַב־סָרִיס ("chief eunuch") appears again here but two other terms are also introduced. The first is תַּרְתָּן, which does not include the noun רַב and refers to

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[93] Cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 143; Seow, *Daniel*, 27.

[94] According to the parallel text in Isa 36:2, only the רַב־שָׁקֵה travelled with the army to Jerusalem, which seems more historically credible. See Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39: A Continental Commentary* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 388.

the king's viceroy or field commander.[95] According to Cogan and Tadmor, the תַּרְתָּן "was the highest official after the king and occasionally replaced him when the latter did not campaign."[96] The second is רַב־שָׁקֵה, which literally means "chief butler."[97] The noun שָׁקֵה probably derives from the verb שָׁקָה, which means to "give/cause to drink" in its *hiphʿil* stem, so that the title רַב־שָׁקֵה has some relation to the idea of a cupbearer.[98] Clines actually prefers "chief cup-bearer" as the only possible translation of רַב־שָׁקֵה.[99] Tawil includes both "chief butler" and "cupbearer" as translation options.[100] However, the *Hebrew* participle of שָׁקָה, which carries the meaning "cupbearer," is מַשְׁקֶה.[101] In fact, the more usual term for "cupbearer" in Hebrew is מַשְׁקֶה.[102] In Gen 40–41, the more typically Hebrew term שַׂר־הַמַּשְׁקִים is used to denote the "chief of the cupbearers," who is mentioned in conjunction with the "chief of the bakers." The latter term likewise translates a more typically Hebrew term, namely שַׂר־הָאֹפִים.

The etymology of the term רַב־שָׁקֵה is therefore best discovered in Akkadian, not Hebrew. The literal meaning of the parallel Akkadian term, *rab šāqî*, is "chief cupbearer" but it seems from ancient Assyrian texts that this person was a court administrator who typically managed finances, including loans, but also owned territories, even provinces, as well as slaves.[103] Reiner, Biggs and Roth explain: "The translation 'chief cupbearer' is not meant to describe the functions of the person so designated, who in all references is a high

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[95] Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah* (The Expositor's Bible Commentary; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), § Isa 36:1–3; Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:17; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 129; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 388; Davis, *2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:17–25 n. 14; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 414; cf. Isa 20:1.

[96] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 229; cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 388; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39* (NAC 15A; Nashville: B&H, 2007), § Isa 36:2.

[97] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 230; House, *1, 2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:19–25 n. 47; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 129; cf. 2 Kgs 18:19, 26, 27, 28, 37; 19:4, 8; Isa 36:2, 4, 11, 12, 13, 22; 37:4, 8.

[98] See Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רב II; David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, Volume VIII: ת-שׁ* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 547–549, s.v. שׁקה; cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 389; Grogan, *Isaiah*, § Isa 36:1–3; Logos Bible Software, n.p.

[99] Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רב II; cf. Davis, *2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:17–25 n. 14; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 404, 414.

[100] Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 356, s.v. רַב־שָׁקֵה = Akk. *rab šaqê*.

[101] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1052; Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 382; cf. Gen 40:1.

[102] Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 389.

[103] See Erica Reiner, Robert D. Biggs, and Martha T. Roth, eds., with the assistance of Jeremy A. Black et al., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Volume 17: Š, Part II* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1992), 30–32, s.v. *šāqû* A in *rab šāqî*; cf. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:17; Willem A. M. Beuken, *Isaiah, Part II; Volume 2: Isaiah Chapters 28–39* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 348; Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 356, s.v. רַב־שָׁקֵה = Akk. *rab šaqê*.

administrative official."[104] According to Cogan and Tadmor, the רַב־שָׁקֵה "was a high official whose duties were usually restricted to the court and the king's person."[105] This explains why Tawil also adds "high official" as a lexical option for both רַב־שָׁקֵה and *rab šāqî*.[106] Tawil goes on to say that the *rab šāqî* was "highly respected in the Assyrian court, ranking third or fourth in importance."[107] The Akkadian term might hark back to an earlier time in Assyrian history when this office was filled by someone in charge of the king's cupbearers.[108] If so, this meaning has moved to the background in both extant Akkadian literature and 2 Kgs 18:17.[109] The context of 2 Kgs 18:17 certainly implies more than a mere chief butler or supervisor of the king's personal servants.[110] Clines considers the רַב־שָׁקֵה to be a high-ranking official of the king and Sweeney regards him as "a senior officer, who functions as a diplomat or advisor to the king."[111] Childs argues that the רַב־שָׁקֵה should be seen as a "royal diplomat," considering that (1) he delivers the royal message; (2) it would explain his command of the local languages; and (3) it would also explain his familiarity with Judean internal affairs.[112]

Most Bible translations[113] prefer the transliteration "Rabshakeh" for רַב־שָׁקֵה but some do attempt a translation. For example, the NIV and NCV opt for "field commander";[114] the NLT chooses "chief of staff"; and the LEB, NET and LHI prefer "chief advisor." If Cogan and Tadmor are correct that the רַב־שָׁקֵה "never took part in military campaigns," translations like "field commander"[115] and "military officer"[116] would be off target.[117] Translations such as "chief of staff"[118] and "chief advisor"[119] would then be closer to the true meaning. Based on the Akkadian title, one could also propose a translation like "chief

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[104] Reiner, Biggs, and Roth, *The Assyrian Dictionary 17*, 32; cf. also House, *1, 2 Kings*, § 2 Kgs 18:19–25 n. 47; Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 284.

[105] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 230.

[106] Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 356, s.v. רַב־שָׁקֵה = Akk. *rab šaqê*.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 389.

[109] Grogan, *Isaiah*, § Isa 36:1–3.

[110] Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 389; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2.

[111] Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 389, s.v. רַב II; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 414.

[112] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1967), 82.

[113] ESV, NASB, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, HCSB, RSV, ASV, DARBY, YLT, D-R and LES.

[114] Cf. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2.

[115] NIV and NCV.

[116] CEV.

[117] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 230; cf. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 82.

[118] NLT.

[119] LEB, NET and LHI.

administrator." It is true that 2 Kgs 18:17 depicts the רַב־שָׁקֵה, who is accompanied by the תַּרְתָּן and the רַב־סָרִיס, as traveling to Jerusalem "with a great army" (בְּחֵיל כָּבֵד) but the רַב־שָׁקֵה does no more than negotiate with the representatives of Hezekiah, the Judean king, in 2 Kgs 18–19.[120] Negotiations are interrupted when the three Assyrian delegates return due to a rumour that the Assyrian king had left Lachish.[121] It is possible that the army came along to intimidate Hezekiah rather than initiate a battle.[122] Even if the army was there to start a battle, the תַּרְתָּן and רַב־סָרִיס would have been there to command the army, while it seems that the רַב־שָׁקֵה was there mainly to handle negotiations, perhaps under the direction of the תַּרְתָּן.[123] A reason for this might have been his ability to speak both Aramaic and Hebrew, which becomes very important to the negotiations in this particular case.[124] What is more, Evans argues persuasively that the Hebrew phrase translated here as "great army" (בְּחֵיל כָּבֵד) refers rather to "a military contingent accompanying these important Assyrian officials, sufficient to protect the emissaries but too small to be a real threat (even if allowed inside the city walls)."[125] It seems prudent to conclude from these observations that the רַב־שָׁקֵה is not depicted in 2 Kgs 18 as a military officer but rather as a high administrative official that accompanies the delegation to Jerusalem for the sole purpose of handling negotiations due to his command of the local languages.[126]

The terms רַב־סָרִיס and רַב־שָׁקֵה are clearly used in 2 Kgs 18:17 to identify high officials of the Assyrian court.[127] Adding to the preceding observations, the רַב־סָרִיס and רַב־שָׁקֵה are mentioned in conjunction with the Tartan, a high official himself, sent by the Assyrian king personally as part of this delegation to Jerusalem. Cohn refers to these envoys as the king's "closest advisors" and argues that by using only their titles in 2 Kgs 18:17 without their personal names and by introducing each of these titles with the direct object marker אֵת, the author "emphasizes the weightiness of these officials."[128] These Assyrian delegates

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[120] Cf. Isa 36–37; cf. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, 284; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 388.
[121] Cf. 2 Kgs 19:8; Isa 37:8.
[122] Cf. Cohn, *2 Kings*, 129.
[123] Cf. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 82; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2 n. 45; Grogan, *Isaiah*, § Isa 36:1–3.
[124] Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 230; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2 n. 45; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 416; Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 356, s.v. רַב־שָׁקֵה = Akk. *rab šaqê*; see 2 Kgs 18:26–35; Isa 36:11–20.
[125] Paul S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18–19* (VTSup 125; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 151–157, 161–162, quotation from 153; cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 388–389; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2 n. 43.
[126] Cf. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 82; Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, 284; Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 356, s.v. רַב־שָׁקֵה = Akk. *rab šaqê*.
[127] Cf. Ibid.
[128] Cohn, *2 Kings*, 128–129.

negotiate with the high officials of the Judean court[129] and the negotiations are led on the Assyrian side by the רַב־שָׁקֵה, who speaks on behalf of the Assyrian king and with his authority.[130] There is evidence in Assyrian-Babylonian literature of such delegations comprising these court officials, like the description on a clay tablet discovered at Nimrud, Assyria, of Tiglath-Pileser III sending a court official to Tyre.[131] An interesting aspect of these negotiations is that the רַב־שָׁקֵה expressly refers to the Assyrian king in 2 Kgs 18:23, 27 (par. Isa 36:8, 12) as "my master" (אֲדֹנִי), which could be either a plain expression of servitude and allegiance or an indication that the רַב־שָׁקֵה was in fact a slave.[132] The latter possibility might be supported by the fact that the רַב־שָׁקֵה includes himself among "the slaves of my master" (עַבְדֵי אֲדֹנִי) in 2 Kgs 18:24 (par. Isa 36:9), although this might again be a figurative way of referring to the king's subjects or officers in general, as we saw with רַב־טַבָּחִים above. In the same verse, the רַב־שָׁקֵה also refers to himself as a "governor" (פֶּחָה). Interestingly, פֶּחָה is an Assyrian loanword that denotes the "lord of a district."[133] This corresponds with our earlier observation that the Assyrian *rab šāqî* sometimes owned provinces. On the one hand, this means it is highly unlikely that the רַב־שָׁקֵה in 2 Kgs 18:17 was a literal slave. On the other hand, it means that although the title רַב־שָׁקֵה focuses on the dominion of the רַב over *people* given its construction with שָׁקֵה, it also connotes authority over a certain *domain* – in this case, a geographical district. Likewise, even though the term itself highlights the relationship with inferiors by identifying them as butlers or cupbearers (שָׁקֵה), the literary context also pays attention to the subordination of the רַב־שָׁקֵה to the Assyrian king when the רַב־שָׁקֵה refers to him as "my master" (אֲדֹנִי). At the risk of being redundant, we can confidently postulate that the רַב־שָׁקֵה should be regarded as operating near the top of this particular hierarchy but still under the authority of the king. As with Jer 39:13, the *nomina recta* of the relevant terms appear in the singular, which might support their inclusion in the group implied by the *nomina recta*, but this cannot be established beyond doubt without supporting evidence (see above).

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[129] See 2 Kgs 18:18, 37 // Isa 36:3, 22; cf. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, 284; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 129.

[130] See 2 Kgs 18:19–37 // Isa 36:4–22; cf. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 82; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 273; Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39*, 388; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, § Isa 36:2; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 414.

[131] See Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, Volume 1: Historical Records of Assyria from the Earliest Times to Sargon* (Ancient Records 1; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 288, §802–803; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 229–230, who argue that the Assyrian text rather refers to the *rab ša rēši* (רַב־סָרִיס).

[132] Cf. 2 Kgs 19:4, 6; Isa 37:4, 6.

[133] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 808, s.v. פֶּחָה.

4   רַבֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ

According to Jer 41:1–3, a member of the Judean royal family, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, assassinated the Babylonian governor of Judah, Gedaliah. Ishmael is here introduced as רַבֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, which is probably best translated as "one of the chief officers of the king."[134] It is worth noting, however, that the Hebrew phrase literally says "of the chiefs of the king" (רַבֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ). Why then is it legitimate for the English translations to add "one of" and change "chiefs" to "chief officers"? The addition of "one of" is simply a good way to express the construct plural of רַבֵּי in English, which points back to one individual, Ishmael, in the Hebrew syntax. Rendering "chiefs" (רַבֵּי) as "chief officers" is justified because it is clear from the *status constructus* with הַמֶּלֶךְ that Ishmael is being described here in terms of his role as a subordinate of the king, rather than the chief of a Judean tribe. The focus of the term is clearly on the relationship between Ishmael and his superior, the king. The immediate literary context also indicates that he was a high-ranking officer of the royal court, since (1) he was part of the royal family; (2) he was allowed to break bread with Gedaliah, the Babylonian governor of Judah;[135] and (3) he commanded ten men who were probably senior officers themselves given that they were also allowed to share a meal with Gedaliah.[136] In other words, the text describes Ishmael as an officer of the court with royal blood who commanded other officers of the court. Tawil understands רַבֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ as denoting "royal dignitaries" or "magnates of the king," which he likens to the Akkadian term *rabūte ša šarri* with the same meaning.[137] To identify Ishmael as a "chief officer" is therefore correct and to paraphrase the term further as "one of the king's high officials," as the New Living Translation does, would also be correct and perhaps even express the nature of the office more accurately in English.

These observations confirm earlier understandings of רַב as a high-ranking military and/or political officer of the court.[138] Perhaps more importantly, these observations suggest that the word רַב implied some type of leadership position under the authority of the person at the top of that particular hierarchy, which would typically be the king when dealing with a political or military setting. It is interesting to note in this context that Hebrew has a separate word for "chief" when referring to the ruler of a tribe, namely אַלּוּף.[139] Likewise, the Tanakh consistently translates the "master" of slaves or servants as אָדוֹן.[140] It seems likely that רַב connotes "middle management," albeit high-ranking "middle

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[134] See, e.g., ESV, RSV, NRSV, LEB and ASV.
[135] Cf. Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*, § Jer 41:1.
[136] Cf. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 296.
[137] Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב = Akk. *rabû*.
[138] Cf. Ibid.; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 388, s.v. רַב II.
[139] Cf., e.g., Gen 36:15–19, 21, 29–30, 40, 43; 1 Chr 1:51, 54.
[140] Cf., e.g., Gen 24 *passim*; Exod 21 *passim*; 2 Kgs 5 *passim*; Prov 25:13; 27:18; 30:10; Isa 36–37 *passim*.

management," rather than the absolute authority of either a traditional tribal chief or a slave owner. In fact, רַב is not at all used in the Hebrew Tanakh to describe either of these two personalities, nor is it ever used to describe an independent landowner as such. In other words, the noun seems to be reserved for individuals in the middle of any particular hierarchy, usually near the top of that hierarchy but not at the very top. In this case, the *nomen rectum* is clearly in the singular because it represents Ishmael's superior, the king, instead of his inferiors. The *nomen regens* is automatically excluded from the *nomen rectum* because the individual represented by the *nomen regens* cannot logically be his own superior. One should therefore expect the *nomen regens* of all constructions with רַב that include one or more superiors as the *nomen rectum* to be automatically excluded from the *nomen rectum*. It follows that such exclusion cannot be used to say anything about whether or not the *nomen regens* of constructions with רַב should be included in the *nomen rectum* when the latter designates a group of *inferiors*. Moreover, given the focus of the term on the רַב's superior, one cannot expect the term itself to reveal whether the רַב is in charge of people, a domain, a function or something else. Fortunately, the context does reveal that the term implies authority over people. By the way, the same conclusions apply to the term כֹּל רַבֵּי מֶלֶךְ ("all the chief officers of the king"), mentioned in passing during our foregoing discussion of Jer 39:13.

5   כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ

Esther 1:8 states: "And drinking was according to this edict: 'There is no compulsion.'[141] For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace [כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ] to do as each man desired." As with Jer 41:1, the relation and accountability of the palace staff towards their superior, the king, is in focus, given the formulation "staff *of his palace*." Interesting about the phrase כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ in this verse is that the *nomen rectum* is not a group of people but an inanimate object, namely a "house" (בַּיִת). According to Swanson, the term כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ refers here to the head waiters of the palace, who managed royal festival food and drink.[142] If this is correct, it would indicate that רַב can indeed appear in constructions that identify the individual's *function*, rather than their superior or inferiors. Logically, a person can be put in charge not only of other people but also of a particular function or task. The allocated task might involve others, so that the term *implies* a group of inferiors who would assist in accomplishing the task at hand but the grammatical focus remains on the task. In the case of כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ, the head waiters would have overseen the work of waiters, servants and slaves under their watch. Another possibility is that כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ refers more generally to all the managerial staff in the king's palace. Tawil provides translation options for רַב בַּיִת like "head steward or palace official" and "major domo," the latter of

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[141]   Esv.
[142]   Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, §8042.

which denotes the chief steward of a large household.[143] This would seem to indicate that כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ refers to all the most important or highest-ranking stewards of the palace. If the term does indeed refer to the (most senior) managerial staff, the term's grammatical construction emphasises neither the function nor the relation to inferiors but the *domain* where these individuals exert authority, namely the palace. This would *imply* the involvement of inferiors and accountability to one or more superiors but the grammatical focus would be on the physical space where authority is exercised. A different term that fulfils the same function of indicating the *domain* of authority in conjunction with the office of appointment is נְגִיד בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים in 1 Chr 9:11, which the ESV translates as "the chief officer of the house of God."[144] Semantically, this is close to Clines's translation of כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ as "every official of his house."[145]

Whether the focus is on a function or a domain, the רַב בֵּיתוֹ are clearly depicted as middle management, seeing as the phrase expressly mentions their superior through the suffix "his" (see above) and implies the supervision of inferiors with the word "house" (בַּיִת). This introduces an interesting question: should the "house" be understood as a literal building or as a figurative expression of the palace residents, including staff? In the former case, we are correct to view the *nomen rectum* as referencing a domain of authority, but in the latter case, it again refers to people. In my view, the former option should be preferred, since the use of the construct state makes better sense here as a reference to the palace building rather than the people in that building. Consider, by way of comparison, the following hypothetically erroneous translation: "For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace residents [כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ] to do as each man desired." One can intuitively notice that something is not quite right with such an interpretation and translation. The likelihood that the *nomen rectum* refers to a physical domain explains why it is grammatically singular. The *nomen regens* is therefore automatically excluded from the *nomen rectum*, since these palace supervisors are obviously not literal buildings or rooms within buildings. The grammatical number of the *nomen rectum* is singular in the current case because it refers to a domain, *not* because it implies inclusion or exclusion of the *nomen regens* in the domain behind the *nomen rectum*. One cannot deduce from the singular grammar of the *nomen rectum* and the exclusion of the *nomen regens* in cases where the *nomen rectum* refers to a domain anything about the inclusion or exclusion of the *nomen rectum* based on its grammatical number in cases where it refers to inferiors.

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143 Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion*, 355, s.v. רַב בַּיִת = Akk. *rab bīti*.
144 Cf. also 2 Chr 35:8; Jer 20:1.
145 Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 388, s.v. רַב II.

6 רַב הַחֹבֵל

In Jonah 1:6, the captain of the ship is referred to as רַב הַחֹבֵל.[146] Despite the minor uncertainty surrounding חֹבֵל, the lexical meaning "sailor" provided by Brown, Driver and Briggs as well as Clines is probably correct, which would mean that רַב הַחֹבֵל literally translates to "chief sailor" or "the master of the sailors."[147] In specific reference to Jonah 1:6, Clines translates the term as "chief of sailors, i.e. captain."[148] Louw and Nida explain that "[i]n some languages a captain is simply 'the chief of a ship' or 'one who commands the sailors.'"[149] The lexis חֹבֵל ("sailor, roper") functions here as a collective noun,[150] comparable to the singular of "guard" in the English term "chief of the guard." The definite article before חֹבֵל is present precisely because the *nomen rectum* functions as a collective noun.

In Jonah 1:6, the relation of the captain to his inferiors is in focus, given the formulation "chief *of the sailors.*" It is worth mentioning that not all skippers in the ancient world owned their own ships.[151] The use of a term like רַב הַחֹבֵל in Jonah 1:6 implies that this was also true here, which would have made the captain accountable to the ship-owner, known in Greek as the ναύκληρος.[152] It is also possible that the ship was part of a royal fleet, in which case the "chief of the sailors" was probably in charge of the whole fleet. This would make him accountable to either the king directly or the person in charge of all the king's fleets. Interestingly, the same Babylonian prism considered above in relation to Nebuzaradan also lists a certain "Nabumarsharriusur" as one of King Nebuchadnezzar's court officials and goes on to identify this man as "the chief of the sailors."[153] This strongly suggests that the "chief of the sailors" in Jonah 1:6, which also has a Mesopotamian context in mind, points to someone in charge of a fleet belonging to a Mesopotamian king. If this is correct, it would reveal how anachronistic the translation "captain" really is. At any rate, the *nomen rectum* of רַב הַחֹבֵל literally denotes a group of people, namely sailors as inferiors, while the *nomen regens* constitutes someone in the middle of that

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[146]   Albert Kamp, *Inner Worlds: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to the Book of Jonah* (trans. David Orton; BibInt 68; Boston: Brill, 2004), 135.

[147]   Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 287, s.v. חֹבֵל; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 152, s.v. חֹבֵל; cf. W. Dennis Tucker Jr., *Jonah: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Hebrew Bible Series; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 23.

[148]   Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 152, s.v. חֹבֵל.

[149]   Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains: Volume 1 (Domains)* (Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1993), 547, §54.28.

[150]   Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 152, s.v. חֹבֵל; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 287, s.v. חֹבֵל.

[151]   Cf. Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, §2480; cf. Acts 27:11.

[152]   Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 157, §54.29.

[153]   Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," 308.

particular socio-economic hierarchy, supervising sailors and reporting to the owner of the ship or fleet, who might in fact be the king. Additional proof of the superiority of the רַב הַחֹבֵל is provided by the question, "What is it with you?" (מַה־לְּךָ) that this "captain" goes on to ask Jonah in verse 6. In the Tanakh, one finds this formulation "always in the mouth of a superior to an inferior party."[154] The captain's peremptory and imperious tone is reinforced when he continues in verse 6 to address Jonah with two imperatives (קוּם; קְרָא) and a sardonic question.[155] In this context, it is likely but not necessary that the "chief of the sailors" would have been a sailor himself.

C ARAMAIC

1 רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא

The term רַב־טַבָּחִים was considered above, where we saw that the Hebrew noun טַבָּח carries the two lexical meanings of "cook" and "guardsman," with etymological origins in the idea of a "royal executioner." We further found that the term רַב־טַבָּחִים means "chief of the guard" in the Hebrew Tanakh and functions in 2 Kgs 25 and Jer 39–43, 52 as the title for a leading Babylonian court official and military officer. The same term also appears in Dan 2:14, which forms part of the Aramaic section in Dan 2:4b–7:28.[156] Here, the term is in the plural determined state of טַבָּח. In addition to absolute and construct, Aramaic also has the determined state, where אָ is added at the end of a noun and functions much like the definite article ה in Hebrew, likewise translated as "the…"[157] Hence, the Aramaic רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא is grammatically equivalent to the Hebrew רַב־טַבָּחִים. According to Sokoloff, the lexis טבח carried the principal meanings of "butcher" and "slaughterer" in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic during the Byzantine period.[158] Davis translates the term here as "chief of the executioners."[159] Goldingay explains that although "slaughterer" represents the etymological roots

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[154] James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1993), 50; cf. Eugene F. Roop, *Ruth, Jonah, Esther* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottsdale: Herald, 2002), 116; Amy Erickson, *Jonah: Introduction and Commentary* (Illuminations; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2021), § Jonah 1:4–7; cf. Gen 21:17; 1 Kgs 19:9; Isa 22:1; Ezek 18:2.

[155] Cf. James Bruckner, *The NIV Application Commentary: Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), § Jonah 1:4–12; Kamp, *Inner Worlds*, 152; Tucker, *Jonah*, 24–25.

[156] Cf., e.g., Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Book of Daniel and Matters of Language: Evidences Relating to Names, Words, and the Aramaic Language," in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19/3 (1981): 211–225; Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 177.

[157] Frederick E. Greenspahn, *An Introduction to Aramaic* (2nd ed.; Resources for Biblical Study 46; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 25.

[158] Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990), 220, s.v. טבח.

[159] Davis, *2 Kings*, § Dan 2:1–49.

of טבח, it can also be used to simply mean "guard" or "police."[160] As in 2 Kgs 25 and Jer 39–43, 52, the רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא is also mentioned by name. In this case, his name is Arioch. Daniel 2:14 mentions that Arioch "had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon" (ESV), most likely drawing on the lexical connotation of the noun טַבָּח with the function of "slaughterer" or "executioner."[161] If this is correct, the act of killing the Babylonian magi would imply that רב should in this context be included in the group identified by the *nomen rectum*. In *Antiquities* 10.10.3, paragraph 197, Josephus describes the רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא in the Book of Daniel literally as "the one entrusted over the bodyguards of the king" (τῷ τὴν ἐπὶ τῶν σωματοφυλάκων τοῦ βασιλέως ἀρχὴν πεπιστευμένῳ). Whiston translates the Greek more economically as "captain of the king's guards."[162] Our earlier claim that "chief of the guard" is a correct translation of רַב־טַבָּחִים in 2 Kgs 25 and Jer 39–43, 52 is presently confirmed. Josephus further confirms that the noun רב implies being appointed over a group of people in a supervisory capacity by a superior but without excluding the semantic options of being appointed over a task or domain in other literary contexts. We have seen a similar application of the noun רב throughout, connoting the appointment of a chosen individual by a superior to supervise a certain group of inferiors or oversee a particular task, with the superior usually at the top of the hierarchy in question.

After being identified as the "chief of the guard" (רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא) in verse 14, verse 15 identifies him again but this time as שַׁלִּיטָא, which is the determined form of שַׁלִּיט. When used as a noun, as it is in Dan 2:15, שַׁלִּיט denotes someone who has power, most commonly a ruler or governor but also an official, prefect, officer, captain or commander.[163] It is variously translated as "captain,"[164] "ruler,"[165] "commander,"[166] "officer"[167] and "royal official."[168] Since שַׁלִּיט refers to the same individual and office as רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא, our earlier finding that רַב־טַבָּחִים represents a leading Babylonian court official is here confirmed. In Dan 2:14,

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[160] Goldingay, *Daniel*, 33.

[161] Cf. Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 6; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), Gen 37:36 n. 13; Collins, *Daniel*, 158; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 33; Seow, *Daniel*, 39–40.

[162] William Whiston, *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, the Celebrated Jewish Historian* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter & Co., 1895); cf. also Collins, *Daniel*, 158.

[163] Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, §8954; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VIII*, 392, s.v. שַׁלִּיט; Logos Bible Software, n.p.; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1115, s.v. שַׁלִּיט; Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 553, s.v. שַׁלִּיט; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Judean Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2003), 82, s.v. שַׁלִּיט.

[164] KJV, NKJV, ASV, ESV and RSV.

[165] LES.

[166] LES ALT and NASB.

[167] NIV, CSB and HCSB.

[168] NRSV and LEB.

the relationship of this officer to his inferiors is expressed through the construction רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא (lit. "chief *of the bodyguards*") but his relationship to his superior, the king, is also highlighted with the addition of דִּי מַלְכָּא to form the genitival chain רַב־טַבָּחַיָּא דִּי מַלְכָּא, which can be translated as "the chief of the bodyguards of the king," "the king's commander" or "the king's chief of the guard." This again highlights the middle-management role fulfilled by the רַב in this context.

2 רַב־סִגְנִין

In Dan 2:48, the protagonist is promoted to "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect [וְרַב־סִגְנִין] over all the wise men of Babylon."[169] The *nomen rectum* of רַב־סִגְנִין is in the plural, which means that it should literally be translated as "chief of the prefects," rather than "chief prefect." Brown, Driver and Briggs agree with the ESV that סְגַן means "prefect" and add that it is an Akkadian loanword.[170] Swanson also has "prefect" and adds "governor or senior officer over an area, similar to a satrap in the governance of the kingdom."[171] Barry defines a satrap as a "viceroy or vassal ruler placed over the provinces in the neo-Babylonian and Persian empires."[172] According to Newsom, סְגַן can refer to "a kind of undersatrap and to a variety of provincial administrators."[173] Clines offers "ruler" as the main translation possibility but goes on to specify the identity of this ruler more closely as a "non-Israelite governor or official."[174] Clines also indicates that the passive participle of the verb סגן means "appointed one," "official" or "prefect."[175] One gets a good sense of the semantic domain to which סְגַן belongs from the list in Dan 3:2:

> Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps [לַאֲחַשְׁדַּרְפְּנַיָּא], the prefects [סִגְנַיָּא], and the governors [וּפַחֲוָתָא], the counselors [אֲדַרְגָּזְרַיָּא], the treasurers [גְּדָבְרַיָּא], the justices [דְּתָבְרַיָּא], the magistrates [תִּפְתָּיֵא], and all the officials of the provinces [וְכֹל שִׁלְטֹנֵי מְדִינָתָא] to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.[176]

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169 Esv.

170 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1104, s.v. סְגַן; cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 172; Thomas, *Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary*, §5460; Newsom 2014:104.

171 Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, §10505; cf. Newsom, *Daniel*, 85.

172 John D. Barry, ed., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), s.v. satrap; cf. Seow, *Daniel*, 88.

173 Newsom, *Daniel*, 104.

174 Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VI*, 117–118, s.v. סגן.

175 Ibid., 117, s.v. סגן.

176 Esv.

According to Seow, the list is presented from most to least senior, starting with imperial high officials and ending with local agents.[177]

It is curious that the author of Dan 2:48 chooses a lexis that usually denotes rulership over a geographical area – that is, "prefect" (סְגַן) – to describe Daniel's rulership over a group of people – that is, "all the wise men of Babylon." Considered on its own, the term רַב־סִגְנִין denotes the person responsible for all the Babylonian prefects. However, the addition of עַל כָּל־חַכִּימֵי בָבֶל ("over all the wise men of Babylon") indicates that it means something entirely different in this context, namely the person supervising all the Babylonian clairvoyants and magicians. Such confusion might suggest that the author used the term רַב־סִגְנִין deliberately to inflate the importance of the imagined office. Speaking against this, however, is the fact that the verse states at the outset that Daniel was appointed "ruler over the whole province of Babylon," so that there was no need to amplify his importance subsequently. It seems more likely that חַכִּימֵי בָבֶל is a collective term that includes all the different categories of mystics, magicians and oracles in the kingdom, which is how commentators unfailingly understand the term.[178] This is confirmed by the rest of the narrative.[179]

To return to the original question, how should the unwieldly phrase "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" then be understood? A final possibility is that the term רַב־סִגְנִין is not intended literally but that it rather functions archaically to denote a royal appointment over any group. This seems to me the best explanation for the awkwardness of the phrase "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" in Dan 2:48. Additional support comes from the likelihood that this title and office were anachronistically invented by the author since there is no evidence that either Assyria or Babylonia had a general head of mystics and/or sages.[180] Instead, individual groups of divinatory experts each had their own leaders, usually bearing the title of *rabû*.[181] This explains why Goldingay translates סִגְנִין as "the leaders of the guilds of sages."[182] Collins simply translates רַב־סִגְנִין as "chief officer," which seems more semantically appropriate and supports our argument here.[183]

The preceding narrative does not say anything about Daniel being a Babylonian high official before his appointment in Dan 2:48. However, it does portray Daniel as an oracle before his appointment, which would include him as one of "the wise men of Babylon." Even so, Daniel would not have been a *Babylonian* oracle or overseer. Deciding on the inclusion of רַב in the group

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[177] Seow, *Daniel*, 53; cf. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 65; Newsom, *Daniel*, 104.
[178] Cf., e.g., Collins, *Daniel*, 223.
[179] Cf. Dan 2:2; 4:3–4 [ET: v. 6–7]; 5:11.
[180] Newsom, *Daniel*, 85.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Goldingay, *Daniel*, 53.
[183] Collins, *Daniel*, 223.

identified by the *nomen rectum* is therefore thorny in this case. When considering the term רַב־סְגְנִין by itself, Daniel should probably not be regarded as part of the group of prefects represented by the *nomen rectum* since he was actually appointed over Babylonian mystics, not Babylonian prefects. The term is probably archaic in any case, which makes its utility in deciding the question of inclusion doubtful. The other questions are easier to answer. Irrespective of whether the appointment is over prefects or mystics, the *nomen rectum* represents people (specifically, Daniel's inferiors) from that point on. Daniel 2:48[184] mentions that "the king" (מַלְכָּא) appointed Daniel to this lofty position, indicating that although he was made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon" and "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon," he was still under the authority of the king.

3   רַב חַרְטֻמַיָּא

Daniel 4:6 (ET: v. 9) describes Daniel as "the chief of the magicians" (רַב חַרְטֻמַיָּא). The noun חַרְטֹם could denote both a magician and an engraver or writer,[185] which could partly explain the use of חַכִּימִין ("wise men") in Dan 2:48. Newsom translates רַב חַרְטֻמַיָּא as "head of the mantic experts" and Goldingay translates it as "head of the diviners."[186] Brown, Driver and Briggs agree with the translation of חַרְטֹם as "magician."[187] Under domain 10282, Swanson has "diviner" for חַרְטֹם and defines the word as "an interpreter of mysterious dream omens, as a class people."[188] He expands on this definition in domain 3033, where he identifies חַרְטֹם as a "soothsayer priest" and defines it as "a class of persons in the Levant that interpret dreams and omens as well as perform (seemingly?) supernatural acts." Clines includes both "soothsayer" and "magician" as translation possibilities.[189] Clines goes on to speculate that "minister (of state)" could also be a semantic option for חַרְטֹם, which would be interesting considering the ambiguous usage of רַב־סְגְנִין in Dan 2:48 (see above).[190] As Newsom reminds us, "Babylonian astrological and divinatory knowledge enjoyed a high degree of cultural prestige throughout the Persian and Hellenistic periods."[191]

In Dan 4:6, the *nomen rectum* is in the determined state and in Dan 5:11 (see above) it is in the absolute state, suggesting that the state of the *nomen rectum* was generally fluid and relative. In both Dan 4:6 and 5:11, the *nomen rectum* of the term "chief of the magicians" appears in the plural. The *nomen*

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[184] Esv.

[185] Thomas, *Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary*, §2748–2749.

[186] Newsom, *Daniel*, 124; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 78.

[187] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1093, s.v. חַרְטֹם; cf. Gen 41:8; Exod 7:11, 22.

[188] Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*; cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 223.

[189] Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III*, 316, s.v. חַרְטֹם.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Newsom, *Daniel*, 45.

rectum constitutes people as inferiors, with Daniel as their superior who reports to the Babylonian king. Throughout the book, Daniel and the Babylonian mystics are played off against each other. On the one hand, Daniel is depicted as besting them at every turn[192] and, on the other, the mystics are depicted as plotting against Daniel at every turn, often getting him in life-threatening trouble with the king.[193] Although Daniel was, on the surface, one of them, given that he was also a mystic and even appointed as their ruler, he was never really one of them due to his ethnic-religious background. Whether or not Daniel should be included as one of the mystics that he rules over is left unanswered in the book, perhaps deliberately so. The uncertainty adds to the suspense and tension in the narrative. It also underscores the precariousness and uncertainty of Daniel's place in the Babylonian court, oscillating between high official and defiant dissenter. If this is correct, it would follow that Aramaic terms with רַב do not in and of themselves presume participation of the person behind the *nomen regens* in the group represented by the *nomen rectum*. This might only be a feature of *nomina recta* in the plural but it might also be true for all *nomina recta* regardless of grammatical number. More evidence is required from other Aramaic texts to be certain. In the case of Dan 4:6 and 5:11, it seems justified to conclude that the inclusion of רַב in the group of the *nomen rectum* is deliberately left unresolved.

D CONCLUSION

In the Tanakh, constructions with רַב are often used when describing foreign leaders, especially Assyrian and Babylonian leaders. In such cases, these constructions typically function as archaic titles of court officials, especially political and military leaders. The conclusion is therefore inescapable that these titles derive from Mesopotamia, which is not a new finding.[194] A side note worth making is that the "chief" seems to be almost exclusively male, as one would expect in an ancient patriarchal milieu.

In the Tanakh, there is only one example of a רַב construction that has something other than a person or a group of people as the *nomen rectum*, namely the "domain" in Esth 1:8. In this case, the *nomen rectum* still implies subordination to the person who owns that domain as well as authority over certain people who reside and/or work in that domain. In all the texts featuring רַב in the Tanakh, the "chief" is never in absolute authority but is always part of "middle management." In most cases, the "chief" is directly subordinate to the person at the top of the hierarchy in question. Whenever absolute authority or leadership is in view, the Tanakh consistently prefers nouns like רֹאשׁ and שַׂר.[195]

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192 Cf. ET Dan 2:1–49; 4:4–27; 5:1–30.
193 Cf. ET Dan 3:8–12; 6:1–13.
194 Cf., e.g., Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 913, s.v. II רַב; Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew VII*, 388–389, s.v. רַב II.
195 Cf. R. Merrill, "Authority," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook* (ed. D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, and R. Hurst; Bellingham: Lexham, 2014), s.v. רֹאשׁ.

Hence, the *nomen regens* of רַב constructions in the Tanakh always represents someone appointed by a superior to supervise a group of inferiors, even when these inferiors are not mentioned by the *nomen rectum*. The *nomen rectum* of רַב constructions in the Tanakh can represent either the superior or the inferiors of the "chief." In other words, the *nomen rectum* could describe either the person who put the "chief" in charge of others or the group of people over whom the "chief" was appointed. The latter is much more common. Likewise, the *nomen rectum* could appear in either the singular or the plural. When describing the superior party, the *nomen rectum* is always in the singular, as one would expect. When describing the inferior party, the *nomen rectum* appears in either the singular or the plural. Looking only at the occurrences in the Tanakh, it would seem that Hebrew prefers the *nomen rectum* of רַב constructions representing inferiors to be in the singular, whereas Aramaic prefers it to be in the plural. However, this would have to be substantiated with additional evidence from literature outside the Tanakh. It follows from these observations that רַב constructions were very flexible, with the *nomen rectum* denoting either people or something else, representing either the inferior or the superior party and featuring in either the singular or the plural. Such flexibility lends these constructions to a wide variety of applications but also makes it difficult to determine whether the "chief" should be included, in any particular context, in the group of inferiors represented by the *nomen rectum*. It seems that the inclusion or exclusion of רַב in the group represented by the *nomen rectum* is not determined by the construction but by the literary context. The evidence for this is more compelling in the case of plural *nomina recta* than singular *nomina recta*.

In sum, the following answers can be given to the questions posed in the introduction:

- Does it make a difference to the meaning of רַב whether the *nomen rectum* appears in the singular or plural? The grammatical number of the *nomen rectum* has little or no influence on one's understanding of the *nomen regens*, רַב. Considering only the occurrences in the Tanakh, Hebrew seems to prefer the *nomen rectum* of רַב constructions representing inferiors to be in the singular, whereas Aramaic prefers it to be in the plural. Mostly, singular and plural *nomina recta* with רַב are used interchangeably without any apparent loss in meaning or nuance.
- Should the person signified through the noun רַב be included in the group represented by the *nomen rectum*? It would seem that the noun רַב does not presume either the inclusion or exclusion of the person signified by רַב in the group represented by the *nomen rectum*. The evidence for this is clearer with plural *nomina recta* than singular *nomina recta*.
- Does רַב always presume authority over other *people* or can it also presume authority over something else? The noun רַב is mostly used to express authority over people, although it can also express authority over

something else, such as a domain or a function. In these latter cases, authority over people is still assumed.

- Is the individual represented by רַב at the top, middle or bottom of the implied hierarchy? The person signified by רַב in these constructions is always in the middle of the hierarchy, albeit usually near the top – often second-in-command. The person is always appointed by a superior to supervise and manage a group of inferiors.
- Is רַב used to describe a relationship with inferiors, superiors or both? Grammatically, constructions with רַב usually express a relationship with inferiors, although it can also be used to express a relationship with a superior. Either way, the literary context often indicates that both inferior and superior parties are involved.

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