

‘*Apirū* AND *Munnabtūtu*—THE STATELESS OF THE  
FIRST COSMOPOLITAN AGE

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IN his admirable series of studies on what he calls dimorphic structure and topology in ancient Southwestern Asia, M. B. Rowton has been developing a brand of historiography which is greatly needed in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies, namely one which is based on a structural approach. Beyond viewing events as points along an ordered chronological sequence, he tries to understand them as organic processes, and instead of focusing on words within their narrow philological context he aims for an integrated reconstruction of institutional relationships. The soundness of the method is matched by the quality of the substantive results he has already obtained: as he broadens his inquiry, a number of phenomena seem to fall into place as if of their own volition, so natural is the fit between fact and theory. This is notably true of his article which appeared in a recent issue of this journal.<sup>1</sup> There he argues for a meaning of the term ‘*apirū*’ as “the uprooted, the social outcast, whether from tribal society or from urban society”;<sup>2</sup> he also defends the validity of an interrelationship between the social and the ethnic dimension of the phenomenon. The point of this brief communication is to suggest an extension of this reasoning in a political key.

At the basis of my considerations there is the suggestion that the notion of “fugitives” (*munnabtūtu*), so prominent in the textual documentation of the second half of the second millennium B.C., is very closely related to the notion expressed by the term ‘*apirū*’, as understood by Rowton. This correlation is certainly not new. It was first proposed by Bottéro in the conclusion to his masterly analysis of the evidence bearing on the problem of the ‘*apirū*’ which was presented at the fourth *Rencontre Assyriologique*,<sup>3</sup> and it has subsequently been expounded in a number of articles by another scholar whose work is also a model of historical methodology, M. Liverani.<sup>4</sup> If I am reproposing it here it is in order to supplement accordingly the investigation of Rowton and also in order to clarify in a manner which has not yet perhaps been quite considered, the relationship between the two terms mentioned above. If ‘*apirū*’ means “fugitives,” was it used as a free variant of *munnabtūtu*, which also—in fact, primarily—means “fugitives”? Or can lexical synonymity be differentiated more firmly in terms of the historical context to which the terms apply (providing, as it were, a historical deep structure analysis for a linguistic correlation)? I believe the second alternative to be the correct one. Using the same structural approach followed by Rowton, one may say that the two terms refer to

<sup>1</sup> M. B. Rowton, “Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the ‘*Apirū*’-‘*Ibrim*,’” *JNES* 35 (1976):13–20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> J. Bottéro, *Le problème des Habiru à la 4<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris, 1954), pp. 192–98.

*contre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris, 1954), pp. 192–98.

<sup>4</sup> M. Liverani, “L’estradiation dei rifugiati in *AT* 2,” *RSO* 39 (1964): pp. 111–15; “Il fuoruscitismo in Siria nella tarda età del bronzo,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 77 (1965): 315–36; “Implicazioni sociali nella politica di Abdi-Ashirta di Amurru,” *RSO* 40 (1965): 267–77.

one and the same phenomenon, from different visual angles. The phenomenon is that of individuals who choose to transfer their social and political allegiance from one human group (whether city or tribe) to another: as socially uprooted they were known as *ʿapirū*, as politically displaced they were known as *munnaḫtūtu*.

It is in the nature of things that the evidence should be primarily circumstantial. The two terms occur almost in complementary distribution. The term *munnaḫtūtu*, in the political sense of “displaced persons” or “persons seeking political asylum,”<sup>5</sup> is used by rulers when they define the nature of their sovereignty: if a ruler is forced into a *foedus iniquum*, he finds his sovereignty curtailed in that he must return the “fugitives” to their original ruler; if, on the other hand, two rulers are on equal footing, they recognize their reciprocal right to hold on to the “fugitives” who have sought asylum in their territory. The term *ʿapirū*, on the other hand, describes the social dimension of the same phenomenon, whereby an individual is viewed as part of a class in relationship to a given stratification, without reference to questions of political allegiance. That the two connotations might overlap is only natural, as when Rib-Adda writes to the Egyptian pharaoh that some of his enemies have “turned into *ʿapirū*.”<sup>6</sup> Here the term seems to be used in a derogatory sense: “they are ready to stoop as low (socially) as the *ʿapirū*,” meaning “they will (politically) desert our camp and seek political asylum in the camp of our adversary.” Explicit connections are rare, and the best one remains the one pointed out already in 1954 by Bottéro<sup>7</sup> linking the “fugitives” ([*ša innabbūt*]) from Ugarit with a settlement of *ʿapirū* in Hittite territory. A complementarity of terms of this kind is quite natural—see for instance how the rulers of Syrian city-states use either the term “king” (*šarru*) or, especially when they want to stress their role as quasi-functionaries vis-à-vis the suzerain, the term “mayor” (*ḫazannu*).<sup>8</sup>

The broader context within which we must place the phenomenon, political and social, of the “uprooted fugitives” is the intensification of truly international contacts in the Near East of the Late Bronze Age. States of radically different national and political structure were forced, by the closeness of their relationship, to develop an explicit framework of mutually acceptable patterns. Linguistically, this is manifested in the adoption of a given language (Akkadian) to serve as lingua franca throughout the entire area. Institutionally, we witness, among other things, the vigorous growth of international law in the true sense of the word: the notion of sovereignty is now elaborated with a considerable degree of sophistication, with the introduction, for instance, of the parallel notions of citizenship<sup>9</sup> and of extradition.<sup>10</sup> The city-states and the expanded territorial states were the natural locus for such a political and legal development, and it is with them that the political term *munnaḫtūtu* originates. The social term *ʿapirū*, on the other

<sup>5</sup> The private acceptance of the term, “runaway slave,” must be considered in this respect a homonym.

<sup>6</sup> EA 74: 23–29. The ingressive notion “to enter into the state of *ʿapirū*” is expressed by the periphrastic expression *ana ʿapirī nēpušu* (on the historical meaning see E. F. Campbell, “The Amarna Letters and the Amarna Period,” BA 23 [1960]: 14–15; G. E. Mendenhall, “The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine,” BA 25 [1962]: 71–73, now reprinted in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, 3d ed. (Garden City, New York, 1970), pp. 54–75 and 100–120. On the possibility of a finite denominative verbal form *ihbiʿar* see J. Bottéro, “Ḫabiru,” RLA 3 [1972]: 27a). The ingressive notion

“to enter into the state of *munnaḫtu*” is normally rendered by finite forms of the verb *nābutu*.

<sup>7</sup> RS 17.238, quoted by Bottéro, *Le problème des Ḫabiru*, p. 122, and now published in MRS 9, pp. 107–8.

<sup>8</sup> See my *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria* (Rome, 1967), pp. 65–66.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>10</sup> See my article, “1 Re 18, 20,” *Bibbia e Oriente* 5 (1963): 10 and 13 (on the oath as applied in extradition procedures in texts from Alalakh, Ugarit, Sefire, and the kingdom of Israel from the fifteenth to the sixth century B.C.); also Liverani, “L’estradizione.”

hand, is more closely linked in its origins with the outcasts from a tribal group, or “detrribalized” individuals, as Rowton calls them, although by the second half of the second millennium the term is commonly used for individuals uprooted from their original group in general, whether urban or tribal. The growth of the universal state (the “empire”) in the first millennium accounts for the disappearance of the phenomenon—and therefore of the two terms in their meaning described here: the political centralization achieved by the Assyrians, and others after them, left no interstices within the politico-territorial fabric of the Near East through which the “fugitives” could slide.

The period antecedent to the universal state is the one which W. McNeill has aptly termed a “cosmopolitan age”:<sup>11</sup> it was indeed a time when a whole world of nations was struggling for internal unity after the model of the city. The “fugitives” are to be considered as a normal side-effect of this urge for overall harmony built on internal differentiation. The intense network of contacts among diverse political, social, and cultural entities favored the movement from one over to the other. Their diversity acted as a magnet because dislocation seemed to hold as a promise the possibility of a real change in the life of the individuals concerned. At the same time, this diversity and consequent autonomy of the various states acted as a safeguard to the effect that, within limits, the phenomenon of dislocation would be recognized and protected. It is thus in the cosmopolitan age of the ancient Near East that, perhaps for the first time, a sizable class of stateless persons developed. It was an important phenomenon which, because of the very fact of its short duration, contributes to a more accurate understanding of the process of political and social growth of the ancient Near East.

<sup>11</sup> W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (Chicago, 1963), pp. 110–66.

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