



COURT POETRY  
AND LITERARY MISCELLANEA

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## FOREWORD

First we would like to thank the editor, Dr. Alasdair Livingstone, for his wholehearted and enthusiastic participation in the project. This book is doubtless not the one that he would have prepared had he set out to produce a work on Assyrian literature *ab initio*, but the completion of a volume within the somewhat limiting framework of the SAA series format in a timely manner owes much to his willing co-operation. These texts call for much more comment and discussion than can be provided by this format and we fully expect that Dr. Livingstone will provide additional commentary in the near future. One of the goals of the series is to provide Neo-Assyrian texts with the best possible transliterations, and towards this end Dr. Livingstone has made five collation trips to the British Museum in London and one to various museums in Berlin.

The project wishes to express its appreciation to the many institutions that have continued to make the publication of this series a possibility: The British Museum, London; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin; Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin; Musée du Louvre, Paris; and the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft. It must be kept in mind that behind the names of these institutions there are people, too numerous to be thanked individually here, whose work makes possible the access to texts and illustrative material without which the project could not function.

Our thanks are again due to the Olivetti (Finland) Corporation for continuing to provide the project with computer hardware and software, maintenance, and advice; to the Finnish Ministry of Education for providing printing subsidies for the volumes of the series; and last, but hardly least, to the Academy of Finland for the financial support that has made the project a reality.

Helsinki, May 1989

Robert M. Whiting

## PREFACE

The present volume began as a corpus of nine texts, but background research and the realization that it would be necessary to include certain Assyrian texts written in the Standard Babylonian dialect resulted in its expansion to the present size. Although the subject of Assyrian as opposed to Babylonian literature has been neglected, its importance has not passed unnoticed. Referring to the lyrical passages in Sargon II's account of his eighth campaign, formulated as a letter to the god Aššur, and deploring the one-sided view of Assyrian civilization often current, A. L. Oppenheim wrote as follows of the citizens of the god's city:

These citizens must have been interested in hearing about the sounds and smells of the mountain forests, the dizziness felt on dangerous trails, they must have enjoyed the references to cities that grow like trees (l. 239) or shine like stars (l. 288) on mountaintops. Such imagery can have meaning only to an audience that is receptive to the beauties of a landscape seen in its reflection in a poet's soul. It is rather obvious that appreciation for such literary genres can only be the result of a living tradition that has conditioned the audience. One may think in this respect of the lost love songs that are listed in the unique catalogue found in Assur (KAR 158) and of all the songs of battle and triumph, the songs in praise of the king and of the city, and those songs which we cannot even imagine, that have all disappeared because not even their incipits were written down or the songs themselves in such numbers as to bring about their preservation and discovery. One may, moreover, think of the epical tradition of Assyria, of which only a few fragments have survived and which it will be the task of future historians of Mesopotamian literature to follow up and to relate in some way with the contemporaneous revival of such literature in Babylonia.

All this unexpected complexity and multifaceted sophistication shows that we have not yet begun to utilize all the information that the cuneiform texts contain. (JNES 19 1960, p. 147)

Apart from the special case of KAR 158, the material referred to by Oppenheim is substantially that which forms the contents of this book, and it is hoped that the book constitutes at least a small step toward realizing his stated objectives. If so, this results from a co-operative effort. My greatest debt of thanks is to Prof. S. Parpola, for involving me in the project in the first place, and for constant encouragement and advice throughout the processes of research and completion of the manuscript. The selection and order of texts in this edition owes much to him, and many of the new texts included in it were

originally identified by him. At the final stage, Prof. Parpola devoted a very substantial amount of his time and energy to scrutinizing the transliterations and translations, contributing important new readings and interpretations and thereby improving the final version. He also contributed the present reconstruction of the Nineveh version of the Marduk Ordeal (no. 35), and personally prepared the score transliterations of texts 34, 35 and 38, the glossary, and all the indices to the volume. Thanks are also due to Prof. Parpola's assistants, Raija Mattila, Laura Kataja, and Hannes Hägglund for their help and co-operation during my stay in Helsinki, and at other times, and the competent work done by them in entering text and monitoring the photocomposition process is gratefully acknowledged.

My work has also benefited from the advice of Prof. K. Deller, who read through an initial version of the manuscript in the summer of 1988, and made many valuable suggestions. Subsequently, despite the pressures of running three Departments during the temporary vacancy of the Heidelberg chairs of Semitics and Islamic Studies, he was always ready to discuss textual difficulties and problematic passages, conversations which invariably led to new insights.

A substantial debt of gratitude is owed to Dr. R. Whiting for handling communication between Heidelberg and Helsinki, and the gradual incorporation into the computerized manuscript of new material and corrections sent from Heidelberg. Moreover, during a two week research visit which I was able to make to the Department of Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki, in September/October, 1988, Dr. Whiting read through many of the texts with me from the point of view of English style, an exercise which not infrequently led to improving the translation.

Prof. W. von Soden communicated new readings of his for certain lines of the Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Crown Prince (no. 32); his contributions are acknowledged individually in the critical apparatus to that text and he is thanked here for his generosity. Both Prof. W. G. Lambert and Prof. R. Borger read through a list of texts to be included, and made helpful suggestions. Prof. H. Tadmor extremely generously gave permission to include his new reconstruction of no. 33 in the volume even before the appearance of his own fundamental study of this important text.

The selection of illustrations has benefited not only from the expertise of Dr. J. Reade, but also from that of Frau Dr. E. A. Braun-Holzinger. At an early stage in the preparation of the manuscript, before it had become clear that Dr. Reade would act as general editor for illustrations for the whole series, Dr. Braun-Holzinger sought out and collected suggested illustrations on the basis of a list of key words and topics, with much scholarly engagement. She produced a substantial amount of useful material, but in a special working session with Dr. Reade on the illustrations for the whole series, held in Helsinki in October 1988, it was decided that many of her suggestions would fit other volumes in the series better, and were accordingly set aside for that purpose. On the basis of our discussions, Dr. Reade subsequently made available a large selection of excellent British Museum prints, and the final selection from this material was made in the course of the paste-up process by Prof. Parpola in consultation with Dr. Reade. My thanks are thus due to both Dr. Reade and Dr. Braun-Holzinger, but I would like to emphasize that the bulk of the final illustrations and all the captions for them stem from Dr. Reade alone. Special thanks are due to Nadja Wrede for taking time from her

doctoral work to prepare the line drawing of the engraving on a pebble given on p. 41.

Thanks are due to the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to collate or publish certain tablets in their keeping, and for providing photographs for study and for illustrations, and to their staff in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities for their unfailing courtesy and assistance. Dr. I. L. Finkel helped with the collations, and provided valuable information about the rules of play of the Royal Game of Ur from an unpublished text. I am grateful to the Director of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, Frau Dr. L. Jakob-Rost, for permission to make collations of tablets in her care, and to Dr. J. Marzahn for his helpfulness. Prof. J. Renger, Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, and Frau Dr. E. Strommenger, Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin, made it possible for me to consult excavation photographs of Assur tablets in the Charlottenburg Museum. Prof. O. R. Gurney generously lent me such photographs as he had available of the Sultantepe tablets included in this volume.

Financial support to undertake collation trips and my visit to Helsinki was provided by the Academy of Finland.

I would like to express my awareness of, and appreciation for, the large amount of time and dedication expended by the project staff and the staff of the Helsinki University Press in the production of the volume.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for providing me with a liberal education involving three distinct parts of the world. The book is dedicated to Anita and Kristina.

Heidelberg, May 1989

Alasdair Livingstone

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Cultural and Historical Background of the Corpus

#### *Babylonian versus Assyrian Literature*

It has sometimes been asserted that the Assyrians possessed no literature, although it would be truer to say that they adopted the Babylonian literature as their own. This fact must be stressed at the outset, since it is critical for the bi-cultural nature of the contents of the present volume as well as its lack of linguistic uniformity in contrast to the other volumes in the series. Interest in the literature from the South is well attested on the part of Assyrian kings from the Middle Assyrian period on, and this was only one aspect of a multi-faceted cultural borrowing. Already in Middle Assyrian times the Babylonian calendar replaced the original Assyrian one. Gods of Sumero-Babylonian origin infiltrated the Assyrian pantheon, or were equated with Assyrian gods. In many cases (cf. text no. 38 in the present corpus) the drive to introduce originally Babylonian ritual practices into Assyria is made explicit. By the Sargonid period a long and complicated history of Assyrian-Babylonian affairs on the political and cultural planes had also transpired and many of the texts here edited reflect aspects of this history. The prestige of the Babylonian language and literature in particular manifested itself in various ways. Assyrian kings corresponded with many Babylonians in Babylonian, although at times Aramaic was not even allowed in the return correspondence. The military annals of the Sargonid kings were composed in Babylonian, albeit with frequent Assyrianisms. The Assyrian interest in Babylonian literature reveals itself above all in the collections of the libraries of Assurbanipal (see below).

#### *What is Meant by Literature in this Volume*

Having asserted that the Assyrians adopted the Babylonian literature as their own, it must be explained that while the above statements apply to written literature generally, the word literary in the title of this book is used in a much more restricted sense. Accurate definition is extremely difficult, since ancient civilizations obviously produced written material to satisfy their own needs and objectives, and these do not necessarily answer neatly to the

categories of modern literary criticism or folkloristics. Moreover, in many cases the circumstances in or for which a given work was composed are not known. The term "belles lettres" may be suggestive, but a definition must be by exclusion: compositions exemplifying and expressing a creative effort, but not including functional genres such as rituals, incantations, or royal inscriptions, which follow a fixed tradition and format, nor the day to day religious literature.

### *The Babylonian Background of Assyrian Literature*

Apart from the problem of definition, many gaps remain to be filled before a history of Babylonian or Assyrian literature can be written. Nevertheless, a number of attempts have been made to review the material. Among these could be mentioned a synopsis of the presently known textual groups and compositions, and several interpretive essays.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, an attempt has been made to see the literature in its historical development.<sup>2</sup> This study suggests that the first major stimulus for the development of Akkadian literature may have been at the time of the first hegemony of a native Akkadian dynasty over Sumer and Akkad (c. 2300-2200 B.C.). At least, under this dynasty royal inscriptions were produced in a Semitic dialect, Old Akkadian, and there are a few examples of literary texts in this dialect.

But it is not until from half a millennium later that a flourishing Akkadian literature is preserved. The language, Old Babylonian, shows radical differences from Old Akkadian which do not seem to be explicable by simple linguistic evolution. However, Old Babylonian literature — as distinct from the amply attested letters — employed certain features known from Old Akkadian, presumably as part of a conscious attempt to create an elevated and archaic style. These features included original locative and terminative nominal endings and certain words, often employed in senses somewhat different from those known from the Old Akkadian texts. Sumerian influence also continued to be pervasive. Natural and linguistic influence in personal letters contrasts with exaggerated Sumerianisms in the literature.

Later, as Babylonia fell under Kassite domination, there was much literary activity, but this seems to have lacked spontaneousness. There was a striving to employ, and even to contrive artificially, words and expressions which revealed great erudition, but were unlikely to have had an immediate impact on the common man.

### *First Millennium Literature*

Old texts continued to be recopied, and new texts were also produced, following traditional types and forms of literary language. In spite of this weight of tradition, there is a small but definable group of texts, with examples in both Late Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian dialects, where there is a clear attempt to escape from the tradition, and produce new material, whether by introducing elements from the colloquial or folk tradition, or by improvisation. In a sense, it is this small group of poetical works written in

Neo-Assyrian dialect which forms the core of the present collection of texts, since it cannot be denied that it represents a native Assyrian creative initiative. It is the purpose of this volume to present these texts together with examples of literary prose in Neo-Assyrian and to bring them into association with a larger group of texts written contemporaneously in Assyria in the Standard Babylonian or Late Babylonian dialects, but which belong to the category of Sargonid Court Poetry, or specifically represent the Assyrian as opposed to the Babylonian cultural view-point.

### *Aššur, Anšar, and Royal Ideology*

The subject of Mesopotamian royal ideology, even confined to one period, is of course vast, but there are certain points salient in the present volume which should be singled out and brought forward for notice. Sargonid scribes frequently wrote the name of the Assyrian national god, Aššur, with the signs AN.ŠÁR, originally used to designate a primeval deity in Babylonian theogonies, whereas earlier scribes did not do so. Behind this scribal innovation lies an ideological coup. In one Babylonian theogonic system, Anšar and Kišar — literally "heaven circle" and "earth circle" — precede the senior Babylonian gods Enlil and Ninlil, separated from them by Enurulla and Ninurulla ("Lord" and "Lady" of the "primeval city").<sup>3</sup> In this way, the Assyrian Aššur, who did not figure in the Babylonian pantheon at all, was made to appear to be at the head of it. A form of this ideology is stated in the Marduk Ordeal, no. 34, l. 54: "It is said in *Enuma Eliš*: When heaven and earth were not yet created, Aššur (AN.ŠÁR) came into being."

A further point which is relevant to the understanding of some passages is the virtual identity of the god Aššur and the city Assur. While it was not unusual for a god to be evoked by the name of his temple — or even occasionally by the name of the city of which he was patron — recently collected evidence shows that Aššur, city and god, constitutes a special case.<sup>4</sup> Being a numinous phenomenon associated with a particular locality, and originally lacking a personified identity, the god Aššur did not at first have a family as was usual with Babylonian and Sumerian gods. At a later stage Enlil's (Illil's) wife, Ninlil (Mullissu) was attributed to him, identifying Aššur himself to some extent with Enlil. Later, as can be seen for example in the Aššur hymn, no. 1, he took on attributes of Marduk, particularly strongly during the reign of Sennacherib. It is well known that the Assyrian kings considered themselves to be the appointees of the god Aššur, in which capacity they also exercised the highest priestly function in his temple. It is interesting to note the extension of this idea to actual genealogical relationship, both with the god Aššur and with the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela (stated clearly in nos. 3, 11, and 13).<sup>5</sup> Finally it is perhaps instructive to observe an occasional similarity in terminology between statements of Aššur's relationship to Assurbanipal, and the latter's relationship to foreign rulers trained at the Assyrian court and installed by him (e.g. no. 3, obv. 23 compared with no. 31, rev. 12).

## The Sources and Attribution of the Texts

### *The Assurbanipal Libraries*

The libraries assembled by Assurbanipal at Nineveh have probably contributed more than any other single source to modern knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian literature. Using the material from these libraries is however a painstaking process, since they were smashed to pieces and burned when Nineveh was sacked in 612 B.C. by a coalition of Median and Babylonian forces. This was the final outcome of the Assyrian attempt to control Babylonia, a theme ever present in several of the genres presented below. Clay tablets are not destroyed by fire, but many pieces have been lost and some probably remain yet to be recovered. Despite these difficulties, the extreme importance of this material, now housed in the British Museum, can be gauged by the fact that it accounts for 42 of the total of 65 tablets or fragments edited here.

Little is known of the arrangement of the libraries in Nineveh, but something can be said of their formation and composition. An *amat šarri*, or royal directive, in Babylonian dialect, instructs a certain Šadunu to obtain for the king a number of specified compositions in Borsippa,<sup>6</sup> and other evidence shows that this was not an isolated occurrence. It was usual then for such compositions to be recopied in Neo-Assyrian script and entered into one of the libraries. Some tablets with Assurbanipal colophons specify the cities from which exemplars had been used in various stages of the redaction of the text. As to where the new tablets were to be placed, many tablets were specified in their colophons for Assurbanipal's palace, while others were for the temple of Nabû. In several texts edited below, Assurbanipal emphasizes his eruditeness and strong dependence on Nabû, patron of the scribal craft (cf. in particular nos. 2, 12, 13, and 47). Several ancient catalogues of texts and tablets suggest that present knowledge of the content of late libraries is not so incomplete as one might have feared, since most of the texts can be identified.<sup>7</sup> In relation to specifically Assyrian literature, however, the situation is more complicated, as will be explained below. What is at least certain is that literature in a strict sense constituted a relatively small proportion of texts, within a much greater mass of functional and quasi-scientific material: ritual directions, incantations, divination, magic, omens, medicine, astronomy, as well as lexical and historical texts, and much else.

### *Other Libraries Represented in the Present Corpus*

In Assur, the source of 11 texts in the present corpus, some idea of the distribution of texts and libraries within the city at the time of its destruction can be gained, since the exact find spots of the objects found were recorded.<sup>8</sup> Of these 11 tablets, information is available on five. The Assurbanipal coronation composition was found in a private house within a large library and archive belonging to a family of exorcists, the older members of which bore the title "exorcist of the Aššur temple". In the same house were found the tablet with the mystical compendium (no. 39), and a tablet with part of the Marduk Ordeal composition (no. 34). A further tablet of the latter was found in the library of the Aššur temple. The composition the "Assyrian Crown Prince's View of the Netherworld" was found in a private house in a library of which remain 20 tablets or fragments of miscellaneous contents. The impression given by these find spots agrees generally with the distribution of literature within the various libraries and archives in Assur. Specialist priests did not necessarily confine themselves to their speciality, a circumstance reflected also in the study of intertextuality, which is discussed below in relation to two specific examples.

Of the remaining 13 texts in the present corpus, one was found in the non-literary archive of the governor's palace at Calah, one is of unknown origin, and the rest are from the private library partially recovered at the provincial town near the modern village of Sultantepe.

### *The Scribes*

Unfortunately, little is known of the scribes responsible for the works in the present volume, apart from, in a few cases, their names, official positions, and the names and official positions of their forefathers, recorded in the colophons of tablets (cf. especially nos. 10 and 39). However, the existence of the texts themselves, and of the Assurbanipal libraries, testifies to the prestige of the scribal art. Colophons of Assurbanipal library tablets sometimes contain the information that they are for the king's own reading (as in no. 47, rev. 7). Assurbanipal himself even boasts: "I study stone inscriptions from before the flood, which are difficult, obscure and complicated!" (Streck *Asb* 256:18). In no. 12, obv. 8, a text possibly to be associated with Assurbanipal (see discussion below), the speaker claims to have even as a child longed to sit in the tablet house. In no. 2, rev. 22, Assurbanipal's acrostic hymn in praise of Marduk, one can scarcely doubt that the "humble, constantly praying scholar" is Assurbanipal himself. In view of the Babylonian associations already referred to, it is interesting to note in no. 49 the reference to Babylonian scribes from Borsippa, dwelling in the city of Assur. In the first text presented, "the writing on the celestial firmament" is even used as part of a metaphor describing the might of the chief god of Assyria.

But the life of a scribe was not always easy,<sup>9</sup> and there was much competition and jockeying for position, circumstances lying behind an allusion in no. 32, rev. 33-34.<sup>10</sup> In the final analysis, the achievement of the scribes was

in the literature which they produced. The contents of the present book confirm a statement made some half a century ago by a modern scholar who himself trod the pavements and entered the palaces, temples, and private houses of Assur and Babylon. Walter Andrae wrote: "(They) were not simply scribes, but philosophical poets, in whose oratory and writing the king found pleasure."<sup>11</sup>

### *The Kings*

An overall view is given here of those texts which can be associated definitely with a particular king.

Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.)

No.17 Urartu (Ararat) campaign

Šamši-Adad V (823-811 B.C.)

No.41 Letter from the god Aššur concerning the king's campaign against Babylonia, and in particular the capture of Der.

Sargon II (721-705 B.C.)

No.4 Prayer for the king's health and the land's prosperity, appended to a Nanaya hymn.

No.18 Military account in epic style

Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.)

No.33 Inquiry into the reason for his father's death on the battlefield

Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.)

No.10 Praise of the city of Assur

Assurbanipal (669-627 B.C.)

No. 1 Aššur hymn

No. 2 Marduk hymn

No. 3 Hymn to Ištar of

Nineveh and Arbela

No. 5 Nanaya hymn

No. 6 Hymn to Tašmetu and Nabû

No. 8 Praise of the city of Arbela

No.12 Righteous sufferer's prayer to Nabû (arguably Assurbanipal)

No.13 Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû

No.19 Assurbanipal addresses Ištar

No.20 Wars in Elam

No.21 Wars in Elam

No.25 Literary letter praising the king

No.26 "

No.27 "

No.28 "

No.31 Defeat of Teumman

No.32 Underworld vision (if Kummâ is Assurbanipal)

No.44 Letter from the god Aššur

No.45 "

No.46 "

## The Nature and Content of the Corpus

*Poetical Compositions in Neo-Assyrian Dialect*

The following is a list of the "Court Poetry" referred to above that constitutes the core of the present corpus.

Text no.	Content	Find spot
8	Praise of the city of Arbela	Huzirina (Sultantepe)
9	Adulation of Uruk	Nineveh
10	Hymn to the city of Assur	Huzirina
12	Righteous sufferer's prayer	Huzirina
14	Nabû/Tašmetu love lyrics	unknown
15	A woman dies in childbirth	Nineveh
16	Collection of short elegies	Huzirina
48	Incantation/ritual for birth	Nineveh

This short list includes genres of considerably varying character, and it is highly unlikely that these individual and specialized texts existed in isolation. There must have been much more poetical material in Neo-Assyrian, oral literature not yet reduced to writing at the time of the collapse of the Assyrian civilization, written on perishable materials, or simply not yet discovered.

Indeed, this assertion is proved by the fact that one of the Sultantepe tablets listed above clearly presents excerpts; the texts from which the excerpts were made are not yet known. This text, no. 16, consists of a series of only thematically related sections ruled off from each other by the ancient scribe. The same considerations would apply to the Na'id-Šihu (prose) composition in Middle Babylonian tinted with Assyrianisms (no. 50). Copied on the same tablet as a composition in Middle Babylonian dialect with which it has no thematic relation, it is obviously an excerpt from a historical epic.

So, rather than presuming to discuss "Neo-Assyrian literature", the aim here will be to put the more significant texts included briefly into their context and in so doing to illustrate how they give various dimensions to the theme of the present book: literature produced at or for the Sargonid court. Firstly, however, a discussion of the language of the other texts, and an excursus on the problem of intertextuality are given.