

## INTRODUCTION

### 0.1. Groundwork

Assurbanipal was the last great king of the Assyrian Empire (934-609 BC). He ruled from 668 BC until at least 630 BC, much longer than his predecessors, and gained splendid military and intellectual achievements. During his reign, the empire reached its imperial peak; he undertook military expeditions to Egypt, the Levant, Anatolia, Babylonia, and Elam and controlled almost all the area of the Ancient Near East. Taking advantage of his victories in Egypt and Babylonia, he collected a vast number of texts as booty, brought it to Nineveh, and built up a palace library, the so-called Assurbanipal library, to house his collection. Despite his remarkable success, the latter half of his reign is not well known due to a lack of sources. This may indicate that the empire began to decline. Twenty years after his reign, the empire rapidly collapsed. Hence his reign was one of the key periods of the Assyrian Empire.

Since the royal inscriptions of Assurbanipal contain much valuable historical information, they were already made available in an excellent critical text edition by Maximilian Streck at the beginning of the 20th century,<sup>1</sup> and at present there are new editions by Rykle Borger, Jamie Novotny and Joshua Jeffers.<sup>2</sup> In addition, for the last three decades, the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus (NATC) Project in Helsinki has been publishing editions of Akkadian (Assyrian and Babylonian) texts mainly found at Nineveh, including ones deriving from the reign of Assurbanipal.<sup>3</sup> Various dissertations on Assurbanipal's reign have also been produced in the past.<sup>4</sup>

Though Assurbanipal's correspondence is one of the essential bodies of research material on his reign, it has never before been subjected to a detailed analysis and study because much of it has been published in cuneiform copies only, and what has been published has been only partially or inadequately translated.<sup>5</sup> Even under such circumstances, several researchers have utilized the

---

<sup>1</sup> Streck 1916.

<sup>2</sup> BIWA; RINAP 5/1, RINAP 5/2, RINAP 5/3.

<sup>3</sup> SAA 2, SAA 4, SAA 7, SAA 9, SAA 10, SAA 12, SAA 13, SAA 14, SAA 16, SAA 18, SAA 19, SAA 21, SAA 22.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Gerardi 1987 and Novotny 2003a, but neither is published.

<sup>5</sup> Harper published cuneiform copies of 1471 letters found at Nineveh, including Assurbanipal's correspondence (Harper 1892-1914). After Harper's work, L. Waterman (Waterman 1930-1936) and R. H. Pfeiffer (Pfeiffer 1935) provided translation, transliteration, and commentary of the letters published by Harper, although both are now out of date. Later, Dietrich published selected letters from Nineveh meeting modern scholarly standards. Parpola

correspondence of Assurbanipal in their monographs. John. A. Brinkman examined Babylonian society and politics between 747 and 626 BC.<sup>6</sup> Bill T. Arnold investigated the relationships between Assyria and Uruk as well as the introductory formulae used by Urukian governors in the 7th century BC.<sup>7</sup> Grant Frame reconstructed Babylonian political history from 689 to 627 BC and examined detailed historical issues in Babylonia under the reign of Assurbanipal.<sup>8</sup> Matthew W. Waters also used the correspondence of Assurbanipal in his study on Neo-Elamite history (1000-550 BC).<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, none have dealt with the letters sent by Assurbanipal.

## 0.2. The Corpus

The extant correspondence of Assurbanipal consists of 345 letters or letter fragments, which fall into two main categories: 100 letters from Assurbanipal and 245 letters addressed to him. In this study, I will focus on the 100 letters from Assurbanipal (the so-called royal letters). In addition, I shall analyse letters addressed to him that are closely connected with the letters from Assurbanipal. I have, however, made full use of the remaining correspondence as well, which I have been able to utilize thanks to the resources of the NATC Project even before its publication. A critical edition of the correspondence of Assurbanipal are in two volumes. *The correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part I: Letters from the King and from Northern and Central Babylonia* was published by Parpola in 2018. *The correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part II: Letters from Southern Babylonia* was published by Frame and Parpola in 2023.

## 0.3. The Methodology

My methodology is philological in a large sense. Most of the correspondence of Assurbanipal was published in cuneiform copy only from the end of the 19th century or the opening decades of the 20th century onwards, but I take advantage of the electronic database of the NATC Project, the Corpus of Neo-Assyrian (CNA) Texts, created under Parpola's directorship. The CNA contains all Neo-Assyrian and a large number of Babylonian texts in transliteration, and all the transliterations of my research corpus are extracted from it. I have been allowed by Parpola to use the letter corpus and his preliminary translations of the letters prepared by him for the forthcoming text edition. Likewise, Frame kindly provided me with his transliterations, translations, and critical comments on the

---

(Parpola 1979) and Dietrich (Dietrich 1979) published 593 cuneiform copies for most of the remaining letters.

<sup>6</sup> Brinkman 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold 1985. See also Arnold 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Frame 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Waters 2000.

Neo-Babylonian letters of Assurbanipal. I also had an opportunity to study the cuneiform tablets of some letters in the British Museum in 2009. I analyse these letters from the point of view of the royal image and the politics of the Assyrian Empire.

#### 0.4. The Aims and Scope of this Study

The primary purpose of this study is to find out what kind of royal image Assurbanipal presented in his correspondence and how he utilized it in order to further Assyrian policies in practice towards the areas within and outside the territory of Assyria, especially during the time of the revolt of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn (652-648 BC) and its aftermath (648-646 BC), which shook the empire to its foundation.

The Assyrian Empire established its hegemony over the Ancient Near East. Since vast areas in this region were brought under the control of Assyria, the empire became heterogeneous. In order to maintain and run the empire, embracing its multi-ethnic population, the Assyrian king had to integrate inhabitants from different backgrounds into the empire as a single unified nation. For this purpose, he subjected the population to the strong influence of Assyrian culture and propagated Assyrian royal ideology and religion. Once this population assimilated into the empire and recognized the Assyrian king as legitimate, the king exercised his power and implemented Assyrian policies with the help of the administrative infrastructure and court scholars. In the empire as a coherent entity, he subjected the inhabitants, for instance, to tax and military service and at the same time gave them peace and security from external threats. The figurative aspects and the royal image of the Assyrian king were shared between the rulers and the ruled. These perceptions of the Assyrian king were also transmitted to independent states in the Ancient Near East under the influence of Assyria.<sup>10</sup> Hence it seems that the people in the Ancient Near East shared many elements of their view of the world.

The image of the king was embodied in the iconography and concretized in Assyrian royal inscriptions, hymns, praises of the king, myths, epics, and prophecies, whereas in his own letters Assurbanipal described the image of the king himself. He conveyed it in his letters, making it appealing to the common people as well as the ruling classes, and made use of it for national interests under the complicated political conditions. So far, however, there has been little discussion about the royal image represented by the Assyrian king. I shall try to examine it and clarify the political thinking behind it.

---

<sup>10</sup> Parker 2011, Parpola 2010, Parpola 2004b, Annus 2002, Parpola 1997a, Porter 1993a, Parpola 1993a.

## 0.5. The Manner of Presentation

When a text of the Neo-Assyrian period is dated, it contains a name of the eponymous official. Thanks to the study on Assyrian eponym lists and chronicles by Millard, the order of eponyms between 910 and 649 BC has been established.<sup>11</sup> Such lists beyond 649 BC have not been preserved, although the eponym dating system continued until the collapse of the empire. A provisional order of eponyms between 649 and 609 BC was proposed in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (PNA) by Parpola.<sup>12</sup> In accord with the accepted convention by Assyriologists, an asterisk (\*) is added to a year number during this period (e.g., 648\* BC). The chronology used in this study follows the order established by Millard and Parpola. The present study also follows the dates of the reigns of Assyrian kings as indicated in PNA.<sup>13</sup>

Dates are presented by year-month (in capital Roman numerals)-day. Each year has been equated with a single Julian year, but it should be remembered that the Assyrian calendar began around the time of the vernal equinox so that an event occurring late in the Assyrian calendar actually took place early in the next Julian year. The names of Assyrian months are occasionally given in this study.

As for the notation of personal names, except for Tiglath-pileser III (Tukultī-apil-Ešarra), Sargon II (Šarru-kēnu), Sennacherib (Sīn-aḥḥē-erība), Esarhaddon (Aššur-aḥu-iddina), Assurbanipal (Aššur-bāni-apli), Merodach-Baladan II (Marduk-apla-iddina), and the Urartian king Sārdūrī III (Issār-dūrī),<sup>14</sup> all the other personal names are presented in accordance with PNA, which gives the presumed Neo-Assyrian realization.<sup>15</sup>

If an Akkadian text is given in an acceptable transliteration and English translation in a modern critical text edition, article, or book, I use them as they are. If the transliteration and/or translation is in need of major corrections, these are indicated in footnotes.

## 0.6. The Structure

Part One of this study presents the basic information of the letters from Assurbanipal including their destinations in geographical order, geographical coverage, chronology, and their recipients. Individual recipients are presented in alphabetical order, whereas collective recipients are given in a rough geographical order. It also discusses the process of composing letters, which is made possible by the fact that the research corpus contains drafts, archival copies, and finished

---

<sup>11</sup> Millard 1994.

<sup>12</sup> PNA 1/I, XVIII-XX. Cf. Novotny 2003b, 215; Reade 1998, 255-257.

<sup>13</sup> PNA 1/I, XXI.

<sup>14</sup> Issār-dūrī is the Assyrianized name of an Urartian name, Sarduri. Sarduri was the royal patronymic derived from an Urartian goddess Sardi. See Krebernik 2009-2011; Salvini 2009-2011.

<sup>15</sup> Parpola 1998b.

letters brought back to Nineveh for some reason. In addition, this part presents linguistic features of Neo-Assyrian (NA) and Neo-Babylonian (NB) found in the letters from Assurbanipal and examines the scribes who wrote these texts.

Part Two discusses and analyses the royal image of the Assyrian king and the empire's policies towards Babylonia and foreign countries. Besides overviewing the Babylonian political history in the reign of Assurbanipal and the role of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, this part studies policies towards Babylonia on the basis of the letters addressed to that region. It also investigates the foreign policies manifest in the research corpus. The final part deals with the conclusions of the study.

## PART I: PROLEGOMENA TO THE LETTERS OF ASSURBANIPAL

### 1.1. The Destinations of the Letters

A brief summary of the main topics of the letters is given below according to geographical coverage. In some letters, the names of addressees have not been preserved. The identification of recipients is discussed in the section on the recipients (see below pp. 34-62). The detailed contents that are related to the Assyrian royal ideology and Assyrian policies are to be found in Part Two.

#### *1.1.1. Babylon*

The city of Babylon (the origin of the word in Greek: Βαβυλών, *Babylōn*, see also Neo-Assyrian: Bābili), situated along the Euphrates about 90 km south of Baghdad,<sup>16</sup> was the most important metropolis in Babylonia because it had for centuries been the capital of lower Mesopotamia and an extensive territorial state. It had a long cultural tradition including scribal art, scholarship, and religion, and was respected and admired not only in the region but all over the Ancient Near East. Hence whoever controlled it had to respect its traditions and try to win over the support of its elite and inhabitants. After Babylonia became a part of the Assyrian Empire, controlling and maintaining its capital effectively became one of the priorities for the Assyrian kings. Despite their efforts, Babylonia sometimes brought upheaval to Assyria. Before examining the contents of the letters sent to the city, it is necessary to review briefly the political situation in Babylonia during the reign of Assurbanipal.

At the beginning of the reign of Assurbanipal, Babylonia was under the control of Assyria. His father Esarhaddon had been concurrently the king of Assyria and the king of Babylonia. However, he decided to divide the realm of the Assyrian

---

<sup>16</sup> Parpola and Porter 2001, Map 10 and p. 7.