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Shigeo Yamada (ed.)

NEO-ASSYRIAN SOURCES IN CONTEXT  
THEMATIC STUDIES OF TEXTS, HISTORY, AND CULTURE

THE NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXT CORPUS PROJECT

State Archives of Assyria Studies is a series of monographic studies relating to and supplementing the text editions published in the SAA series. Manuscripts are accepted in English, French and German. The responsibility for the contents of the volumes rests entirely with the authors.

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Set in Times

The Assyrian Royal Seal emblem drawn by Dominique Collon from original Seventh Century B.C. impressions (BM 84672 and 84677) in the British Museum

Cover: Sennacherib sitting on his throne at Lachish, BM 124911 (detail)

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# NEO-ASSYRIAN SOURCES IN CONTEXT

*Thematic Studies on Texts, History, and Culture*

*Edited by*

Shigeo Yamada

THE NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXT CORPUS PROJECT

2018



## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The emergence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the eighth-seventh centuries BC is one of the outstanding phenomena in the history of the ancient Near East. The multi-language and multi-cultural state stretching over an extensive area of the ancient Near East has long been recognized and studied as one of the earliest imperial political entities. The philological study of inscriptional sources from the Neo-Assyrian period has rapidly progressed, especially since the 1980s, with a number of large-scale editorial projects that include the State Archives of Assyria Project (Helsinki), the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project (Toronto), the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period Project (Pennsylvania), the Assur Project (Berlin) and the *Edition literarischer Keilschrifttexte aus Assur* (Heidelberg). These projects have provided us with the text editions and hand copies of various materials (such as administrative/legal texts, letters, religious/literary texts, and royal and private commemorative inscriptions, etc.), either previously known or newly worked on, with high standards of philological accuracy. Hence, the time has come to undertake a variety of advanced research on the texts of the Neo-Assyrian period from new perspectives using different sorts of sources in combination, alongside the study of specific corpuses and text genres. On this tide, the seminar “Interaction, interplay and combined use of different sources in Neo-Assyrian studies: Monumental texts and archival sources” was held at the University of Tsukuba and the Tsukuba International Congress Center (Tsukuba, Ibaraki, Japan) on December 11–13, 2014, with the program given below. The event was supported by the fund for the Finnish-Japanese joint seminar sponsored by the Academy of Finland and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (representatives: Raija Mattila and Shigeo Yamada), as well as by a Japanese research grant (MEXT KAKENHI 24101007). I especially owe gratitude to Raija Mattila, Daisuke Shibata, and the staff of the Research Center for West Asian Civilization at the University of Tsukuba for their kind cooperation in organizing the meeting.

Seminar Program:

**Day 1 (Dec. 11)**

13:30~17:30 Session 1 (Chair: Shigeo Yamada)

Sebastian Fink, “Different Sources – Different Kings? The Picture of the Neo-Assyrian King in Inscriptions, Letters and Literary Texts”

Raija Mattila, “The Military Role of Magnates and Governors: Royal Inscriptions vs Archival and Literary Sources”

Jamie Novotny, “Late Neo-Assyrian Building Histories: Tradition, Ideology, and Historical Reality”

Shuichi Hasegawa, “Use of Archaeological Data for the Investigation of the Itineraries of Assyrian Military Campaigns”

**Day 2** (Dec. 12)

10:00~12:00 Session 2 (Chair: Daisuke Shibata)

Greta Van Buylaere, “Tracing the Neo-Elamite Kingdom of Zamin in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Sources”

Shigeo Yamada, “Ulluba and Its Surroundings: Tiglath-pileser III’s Province Making Facing the Urartian Border, Reconsidered from Royal Inscriptions and Letters”

13:30~17:30 Session 3 (Chair: Raija Mattila)

Robert Rollinger, “Yawan in Neo-Assyrian Sources: Monumental and Archival Texts in Dialogue”

Sanae Ito, “Propaganda and Historical Reality in the Nabû-bêl-šumāti Affair in Letters and Royal Inscriptions”

Andreas Fuchs, “How to Implement Safe and Secret Lines of Communication Using Iron Age Technology: Evidence from a Letter to a God and a Letter to a King”

Jamie Novotony and Chikako E. Watanabe, “Unraveling the Mystery of an Unrecorded Event: Identifying the Four Foreigners Paying Homage to Assurbanipal in BM ME 124945-6”

**Day 3** (Dec. 13)

10:00~12:00 Session 4 (Chair: Robert Rollinger)

Grant Frame, “Lost in the Tigris: Trials and Tribulations in Editing Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II of Assyria”

Karen Radner, “The Last Emperor: Aššur-uballit II in Archival and Historiographic Sources”

13:30~17:30 Session 5 (Chair: Chikako Watanabe)

Saana Svärd, “‘Doing Gender’: Women, Family and Ethnicity in the Neo-Assyrian Letters and Royal Inscriptions”

Silvie Zamazalová, “Images of an Omen Fulfilled: *Šumma ālu* in the Inscriptions of Sargon II”

Mikko Luukko, “The Anonymity of Authors and Patients: Some Comparisons between the Neo-Assyrian Correspondence and Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals”

Daisuke Shibata, “The Akītu-festival of Ištar at Nineveh: Royal Inscriptions and Emesal-prayers”

The present volume contains 14 articles. The majority of them follow the original papers read in the seminar relatively faithfully, though some have largely been expanded and/or changed in the focus of discussion. Daisuke Shibata and Robert Rollinger preferred to keep their papers out of this volume and may publish their research results elsewhere.

The combined use of different genres of text is an obvious need for many thematic studies, and it has already been attempted for a long time in studies concerning the Neo-Assyrian period and Assyriology in general. Thus, the collection of articles in this volume may mostly not be very special in the methodological sense. It may be of value, however, to classify the articles from the viewpoint of the theme of the above-mentioned seminar to review what sorts of studies were made and what kinds



of approaches and methods were used. In this volume, the articles are presented in the same order as they are given in the following rather arbitrary overview:

(1) One major group comprises a variety of historical studies that naturally require the use of various textual sources related to historical reconstructions of any kind (political, social, administrative, cultural, or geographical), either commemorative or archival, dated or undated, literary texts or practical sober documents, or textual or pictographic. Eight articles may be assigned to this group. **Mattila** highlighted the military role of high officials, magnates, and governors that is concealed and only rarely referred to in royal inscriptions but often referred to in other texts such as private inscriptions, administrative texts, eponym chronicles, letters, oracles, and literary compositions. **Yamada** scrutinized the process of Tiglath-pileser III's province-building along the Urartian border, utilizing the king's inscriptions and Eponym Chronicles as a chronological backbone while reinforcing those data with Assyrian letters and Urartian inscriptions. **Fuchs'** article is a unique piece discussing geo-political issues and Assyrian strategic thinking related to Sargon's campaign against Urartu in 714 BC, with the complementary use of two different sources, i.e., the highly literary composition stylized as a letter to a god commemorating this military enterprise on one hand, and a practical intelligence report written during the ongoing campaign on the other. **Van Buylaere** tackled the problem of Zamin, a town attested in Neo-Elamite sources, and identified it with Samuna of Neo-Assyrian/Neo-Babylonian sources. Thus, bridging between the different linguistic materials, she reconstructed the historical-geographical circumstances under which this town was situated. **Ito** advanced a new study of the affair of Nabû-bêl-šumāti, the rebellious prince of Bit-Yakin punished by Ashurbanipal. To reconstruct the relevant events historically, she analyzed details given in rich epistolary sources in combination with information from royal inscriptions and other texts. The joint study of **Novotny and Watanabe** dealt with the personal and ethnic identity of four foreigners depicted on a wall relief of the North Palace in Nineveh as submitting to Ashurbanipal after the fall of Babylon. The study analyzed the pictographic details with circumstantial evidence from the king's inscriptions. **Svård** assembled and viewed data about groups of women involved in the temple administration (*šēlūtu*, *kazrutu*, *mašītu*, *qadissu*, *entu*) from various archival texts – contracts, administrative records, decrees, oracles, and letters – to consider the social context in which they were involved. Finally, **Radner's** study concerned the last ruler of Assyria, Aššur-uballit II. She pointed out a remarkable fact that Aššur-uballit was regarded only as a crown prince in Assyrian archival documents even after the death of his father, Sin-šarru-iškun, persuasively explaining this phenomenon by reflecting the lack of the accession ceremony after the fall of the religious capital, Assur. Thus, she displayed the official Assyrian view in contrast with the Babylonian Chronicle, where Aššur-uballit II is referred to as the king of Assyria.

(2) Another group comprises comparative or contrastive literary studies of different text genres concerning specific terms, concepts, and ideologies, and it occasionally also deals with the problem of intertextuality. **Fink** analyzed royal portraits as projected in royal inscriptions, letters, and various literary works – historiographical texts, wisdom literature, and folk tales – touching on their different ideological-functional modes of composition. The unique article of **Luukko** concerned the anonymity and related phenomena commonly observed in the corpora of Neo-Assyrian denunciation letters and Mesopotamian anti-

witchcraft rituals. Comparing both corpora, he discussed the common motive of self-protection found behind them and attempted to explain the social norm in which the anonymous denunciation letters were written. **Zamazalová** investigated the image of mountains from the Mesopotamian viewpoint in monumental texts, letters, and literary and scholarly compositions. Thus, she demonstrated the ideologically formulated description of mountains as royal heroic space in royal inscriptions, particularly those of Sargon II, while comparing it with texts of other genres and discussing possible intertextuality between them.

(3) Other articles, though each unique, discuss the philological or historiographical problems of royal inscriptions in some connection with archaeology. **Frame**'s article presented the unusual philological complexity that he encountered in his editing of Sargon II's inscriptions, particularly those inscribed on the stone slabs found at Khorsabad. He described dramatic historical circumstances that later caused complexity, i.e., the loss of excavated original inscriptions and the subsequent remains of incomplete fragmentary and oft-contradicting records. Then, he illustrated his complicated work in reconstructing the lost original. **Hasegawa** discussed the reliability of "itineraries" found in Assyrian royal inscriptions and that of archaeological data for the identification of ancient sites. He gave several caveats for the critical interpretation of both sorts of evidence. **Novotny** critically analyzed the building accounts of the late Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions by interrelating and comparing those from various periods. Thus, he showed that the "building history" given in the royal inscriptions refer only selectively to the predecessors' building works and often appear misleading or incorrect.

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In various stages of editorial work, I had kind advice and assistance from Raija Mattila, Daisuke Shibata, Jamie Novotny, Chikako Watanabe, Keiko Yamada, and Yasuyuki Mitsuma. I am very grateful to all of them. I would like to thank Simo Parpola for his generous acceptance of this volume in the State Archives of Assyria Studies, as the director of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND OBJECT SIGNATURES

### Bibliographical Abbreviations

<i>AAA</i>	<i>Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology</i> (Liverpool)
<i>ABL</i>	R. F. Harper, <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Letters belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum</i> (Chicago 1892–1914)
<i>ActAnt.</i>	<i>Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i> (Budapest)
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i> (Berlin etc.)
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i> (Chicago)
<i>AMD</i>	Ancient Magic and Divination (Groningen/Leiden)
<i>AnOr.</i>	Analecta Orientalia (Rome)
<i>AOAT</i>	Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn/Münster)
<i>AS</i>	Assyriological Studies (Chicago)
<i>BA</i>	Beiträge zur Assyriologie und semitischen Sprachwissenschaft (Leipzig)
<i>BagM</i>	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i> (Berlin/Mainz)
<i>BBVO</i>	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient (Berlin)
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago</i> (Chicago/Glückstadt)
<i>CDOG</i>	Colloquien der Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (Saarbrücken/Wiesbaden)
<i>CHANE</i>	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East (Leiden)
<i>CM</i>	Cuneiform Monographs (Groningen/Leiden)
<i>CMAwR 1</i>	T. Abusch and D. Schwemer, <i>Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals, Volume One</i> , AMD 8/1 (Leiden/Boston 2011)
<i>CMAwR 2</i>	T. Abusch, D. Schwemer, M. Luukko, and G. Van Buylaere, <i>Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals, Volume Two</i> , AMD 8/2 (Leiden/Boston 2016)
<i>CT</i>	<i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</i> (London 1896ff.)
<i>CT 53</i>	S. Parpola, <i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, Part 53: Neo-Assyrian Letters from the Kouyunjik Collection</i> (London 1979)
<i>CT 54</i>	M. Dietrich, <i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Part 54: Neo-Babylonian Letters from the</i>

- CTN *Kuyunjik Collection* (London 1979)  
 CTN 2 Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud (London)  
 CTN 3 J. N. Postgate, *The Governor's Palace Archive* (London 1973)  
 S. Dalley and J. N. Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser*  
 (London 1984)  
 CTU M. Salvini, *Corpus dei testi urartei*, I-III (Rome 2008)  
 CUSAS Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology  
 (Bethesda, MD)  
*Hchl* F. W. König, *Handbuch der chaldischen Inschriften*, AfO Beiheft  
 8 (Osnabrück 1955)  
*IEJ* *Israel Exploration Journal* (Jerusalem)  
*IranAnt.* *Iranica Antiqua* (Gent/Leuven)  
*Iraq* *Iraq: Journal of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq*  
 (London)  
*Isimu* *Isimu: Revista sobre Oriente Próximo y Egipto en la antigüedad*  
 (Madrid)  
*JA* *Journal Asiatique* (Paris)  
*JAOS* *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (New Haven etc.)  
*JCS* *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (New Haven etc.)  
*JESHO* *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*  
 (Leiden)  
*JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (Chicago)  
*KAR* E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts* (Leipzig  
 1919)  
*Kaskal* *Kaskal: rivista di storia, ambiente e culture del vicino oriente*  
*antico* (Padua)  
*LAS* S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings*  
*Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, AOAT 5/1-2 (Neukirchen-  
 Vluyn 1970–1983)  
 MC Mesopotamian Civilizations (Winona Lake, IN)  
 MDP Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse (Paris)  
 MSL Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon = Materials for the  
 Sumerian Lexicon (Rome)  
*MVAG* Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft (Berlin/  
 Leipzig)  
*NABU* *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* (Rouen/Paris)  
 OLA Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven)  
*Or. / Or. NS* Orientalia Nova Series (Rome)  
*Orient* *Orient: Reports of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan*  
 (Tokyo)  
 PIHANS Publications de l'Institut Historique-Archéologique Néerlandais  
 de Stamboul (Leiden)  
*PNA* K. Radner (1998–1999) and H. Baker (2000–2011) (eds.), *The*  
*Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, 1–3 (Helsinki  
 1998–2011)  
*RA* *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale* (Paris)  
 RGTC Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes (Tübinger  
 Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Beiheft Reihe B, Wiesbaden)

ABBREVIATIONS AND OBJECT SIGNATURES

RIMA	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods (Toronto)
RIMA 1	A. K. Grayson, <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennium BC (to 1115 BC)</i> (Toronto 1987)
RIMA 2	A. K. Grayson, <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC: I (1114–859 BC)</i> (Toronto 1991)
RIMA 3	A. K. Grayson, <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC: II (858–745 BC)</i> (Toronto 1996)
RIMB 2	G. Frame, <i>Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 BC)</i> , The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Periods 2 (Toronto 1995).
RIME 2	D. R. Frayne, <i>Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)</i> , The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 2 (Toronto 1993)
RINAP	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period (Winona Lake, IN)
RINAP 1	H. Tadmor, and S. Yamada, <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria</i> (Winona Lake, IN 2011)
RINAP 3/1	A. K. Grayson and J. Novotny, <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1</i> (Winona Lake, IN 2012)
RINAP 3/2	A. K., Grayson and J. Novotny, <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 2</i> (Winona Lake, IN 2014)
RINAP 4	E. Leichty, <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)</i> (Winona Lake, IN 2011)
RINAP 5/1	J. Novotny and J. Jeffers, <i>The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC), Aššur-etel-ilāni (630–627 BC), and Sîn-šarra-iškun (626–612 BC), Kings of Assyria, Part I</i> (Winona Lake, IN 2018)
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie (und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie)</i> (Berlin/Leipzig)
SAA	State Archives of Assyria (Helsinki)
SAA 1	S. Parpola, <i>The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West</i> (Helsinki 1987)
SAA 2	S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, <i>Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths</i> (Helsinki 1988)
SAA 3	A. Livingstone, <i>Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea</i> (Helsinki 1989)
SAA 4	I. Starr, <i>Queries to the Sun god: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria</i> (Helsinki 1990).
SAA 5	G. B. Lanfranchi and S. Parpola, <i>The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II: Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces</i> (Helsinki 1990)
SAA 7	F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, <i>Imperial Administrative Records, Part I. Palace and Temple Administration</i> (Helsinki 1992)

- SAA 8 H. Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings* (Helsinki 1992)
- SAA10 S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Helsinki 1993)
- SAA 11 F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records, Part II* (Helsinki 1995)
- SAA 13 S. W. Cole and P. Machinist, *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* (Helsinki 1998)
- SAA 14 R. Mattila, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part II: Assurbanipal through Sin-šarru-iškun* (Helsinki 2002)
- SAA 15 A. Fuchs and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III: Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces* (Helsinki 2001)
- SAA 16 M. Luukko and G. Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (Helsinki 2002)
- SAA 17 M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib* (Helsinki 2003)
- SAA 18 F. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia* (Helsinki 2003)
- SAA 19 M. Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud* (Helsinki 2012)
- SAA 20 S. Parpola, *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts* (Helsinki 2017)
- SAA 21 S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part I: Letters from Assyria, Babylonia and Vassal States* (Helsinki 2018)
- SAAB *State Archives of Assyria. Bulletin* (Padua)
- SAACT State Archives of Assyria. Cuneiform Texts (Helsinki)
- SAAS State Archives of Assyria. Studies (Helsinki)
- SANER Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records (Boston/Berlin)
- SAOC Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization (Chicago)
- STAT 2 V. Donbaz and S. Parpola, *Neo-Assyrian Legal Texts in Istanbul, Studien zu den Assur-Texten 2* (Saarbrücken 2001)
- STT O. R. Gurny and J. J. Finkelstein, *The Sultantepe Tablets*, vols. I–II (London 1957, 1964)
- TCL Textes cunéiformes. Musées du Louvre (Paris)
- TCL 3 F. Thureau-Dangin, *Une relation de la huitième campagne de Sargon (714 av. J.-C.)* (Paris 1912)
- TCS Texts from Cuneiform Sources (Locast Valley, NY)
- TH J. Friedrich, G. R. Meyer, A. Ungnad and E. F. Weidner, *Die Inschriften vom Tell Halaf. Keilschrifttexte und aramäische Urkunden aus einer assyrischen Provinzhauptstadt. AfO Beiheft 6* (Berlin 1940)
- TIM Texts in the Iraq Museum (Baghdad/Wiesbaden)
- WO *Die Welt des Orients: Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Kunde des Morgenlandes* (Wuppertal/Göttingen)
- ZA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* (Berlin etc.)



*ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*  
(Mainz/Wiesbaden)

## Object Signatures

A	Aššur collection of Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri
Assur	Siglum of texts excavated in the German excavation at Assur
BM	British Museum, London
HMA	Hearst Museum of Anthropology of the University of California at Berkeley
K	Kuyunjik collection of the British Museum, London
MMA	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
N	Nippur collection the University Museum, Philadelphia
ND	Field numbers of tablets excavated in Nimrud
O	Siglum of texts in the Royal Museum of Art and History, Brussels
Rm	H. Rassam collection of the British Museum
SÉ	The convent Saint-Étienne, Jerusalem
VA	Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin
VAT	Tablets in the collections of the staatliche Museen, Berlin.
YBC	Babylonian collection of the Yale University Library, New Haven



## Different Sources – Different Kings? The Picture of the Neo-Assyrian King in Inscriptions, Letters and Literary Texts

*Sebastian Fink, Helsinki*<sup>1</sup>

If we concentrate on royal inscriptions the Assyrian king presents himself as the foremost hero<sup>2</sup> of unquestionable virtues, he knows no fear of his enemies and is able to kill whole armies by his own hand. Hayim Tadmor describes the picture of the king in the following way:

The heroic principle of royal omnipotence is the *leitmotif* in the accounts of campaigns – which comprise the main bulk of the royal inscriptions. The king traverses difficult terrain, makes way for his chariot, hacks through forbidding paths, crosses rivers and climbs mountains steep and high; he personally combats the enemy and kills hundreds, even thousands, of warriors [...]; he conquers their cities, carries off their booty and burns, razes and destroys the enemy land.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the support of the gods he alone is able to spread panic in the army of the enemies.<sup>4</sup> In the inscriptions this motif is used in a somewhat exaggerating way when we are informed that some of the king's enemies start to flee when they see the dust of the approaching Assyrian army or hear the clangor of its weapons.<sup>5</sup> Every won battle helps to consolidate the legitimacy of the king because a victory is clearly considered as proof that the king is chosen and favored by the gods. Thus Tadmor concluded that most of the Assyrian Royal inscriptions can be rightfully described as “expressions of royal political ideology.”<sup>6</sup> The moral qualities and the heroic supremacy of the king are clearly articulated in his epithets and are depicted by his pious deeds. Additionally – as already Mario Fales<sup>7</sup> has shown in a paper held

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<sup>1</sup> I have to thank Simo Parpola and Robert Rollinger for discussing this article with me and providing me with several corrections.

<sup>2</sup> See Lanfranchi 2007 for a discussion of the usefulness of the concept “hero” regarding Mesopotamia.

<sup>3</sup> Tadmor 1997, 326.

<sup>4</sup> See Kaelin 2016 for an interesting comparison of the role of the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian king in combat.

<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion of this concept is given in Rollinger 2016b.

<sup>6</sup> Tadmor 1997, 334.

<sup>7</sup> The approach taken by Fales is best described by Liverani 1973, 181: “The most productive type of study of the single document towards its total comprehension derives therefore from

at the Rencontre in 1978<sup>8</sup> – the picture of the righteous Assyrian king is sharpened by the depiction of his evil enemies that show all signs of moral corruption.

This picture changes somewhat if we take the letters to and from the Assyrian kings into consideration that give us a more private approach to the personality of the king. In letters, especially those to and from scholars, we can grasp the uncertainty and sometimes even the fear of the Assyrian king. His scholars, equipped with a broad knowledge of the scholarly traditions, are in a powerful position as the king seems to rely heavily on their advice, even if he sometimes fears that a scholar might not tell him the truth. As Gianni Lanfranchi has demonstrated scholars were able to use unorthodox ways in order to reassure the king in case of a bad portent.<sup>9</sup> Either fitting rituals to avoid the evil were proposed or the omen was re-interpreted, so that thanks to the scribes sophisticated hermeneutics even a seemingly very bad omen finally could turn out to be a good one for the king.

The last group of texts that will be taken into consideration are the literary texts. Despite the fact that these texts were mostly preserved in Assurbanipal's royal library they often give a quite negative picture of the king. This prototypical king – his name is not mentioned in most of the texts – shows heavy signs of moral degeneration and especially his personal greed is a reoccurring motif in the texts.

Finally the picture resulting from these three groups of texts will be compared and the question will be touched how these differences can be explained. It will be shown that analyzing the texts in their “homologues series” contributes to the understanding of every single text in the series. The “combined use of different sources” – the topic of the conference where this paper was originally read – brings us one step further.<sup>10</sup> Still – especially outside the field of Assyriology – scholars concentrate on certain groups of texts, often the royal inscriptions that present us a very one-sided picture and take them as the only key to the understanding of Ancient Mesopotamia. It will be demonstrated in this article that the resulting picture of the king is quite different in every source group and that the comparison of this three resulting images of the king – in the inscriptions, the letters, and the literary texts – contributes to an increased understanding of the interconnection and the differences of all these texts. So finally this comparative study making use of three different text groups intends to be a contribution to the “complete understanding of the single document”<sup>11</sup> by analyzing it in a broader context.

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the setting of the text in a homologous series, chosen so as to enlighten the particular structure under study, and to set apart the paradigmatic variant and the syntagmatic succession [...].”

<sup>8</sup> Fales 1982.

<sup>9</sup> Lanfranchi 1989.

<sup>10</sup> That the scarcity of sources and their one-sidedness might result in a wrong picture of the past was prominently formulated by F. R. Kraus 1960, 117 who stated that Benno Landsberger's ingenuity had helped to release the Mesopotamians “aus jener resignierenden Dumpfheit, jenem freudlosen Ernste” that resulted from the one-sidedness of the available sources, problems with the interpretation of humorous literature and some scholars professional lack of humor.

<sup>11</sup> Liverani 1973, 181.

## The King in Royal Inscriptions – the case of Sennacherib

For the royal inscriptions I decided to focus on Sennacherib’s self-representation as his inscriptions provide us with one of the most sophisticated examples of this genre in Neo-Assyrian times. In the following I will investigate the representation of the king in these texts which were intended to depict “the irresistible, ever-victorious, heroic and completely reckless king”<sup>12</sup> – mainly in contrast to his enemies.<sup>13</sup>

In nearly all royal inscriptions the king and his virtues are introduced by traditional formulas that emphasize different – mainly physical and moral – aspects of the king.<sup>14</sup>

1) <sup>md</sup>EN.ZU.ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*eri-ba* LUGAL GAL LUGAL *dan-nu* LUGAL KUR *aš-šur*.  
KI LUGAL *šá-na-an* RE.É.UM *mut-nen-nu-ú pa-li-iḫ* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ  
2) *na-šir kit-ti ra-'i-im mi-šá-ri e-piš ú-sa-a-ti a-lik tap-pu-ut a-ki-i sa-ḫi-ru*  
*dam-qa-a-ti* 3) *eṭ-lum gít-ma-lum zi\*-ka-ru qar-du a-šá-red kal ma-al-ki*  
*rap-pu la-'i-iṭ la ma-gi-ri mu-šab-ri-qu za-ma-a-ni* 4) <sup>d</sup>*aš-šur* KUR-ú GAL-ú  
LUGAL-ut *la šá-na-an* [ú]ṭ-*šat-li-ma-an-ni-ma* UGU *gi-mir a-šib pa-rak-ki*  
*ú-šar-ba-a* GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-*ia*

Sennacherib, great king, strong king, king of Assyria, unrivalled king, pious shepherd who reveres the great gods, guardian of truth who loves justice, renders assistance, goes to the aid of the weak, (and) strives after good deeds, perfect man, virile warrior, foremost of all rulers, the bridle that controls the insubmissive, (and) the one who strikes enemies with lightning: The god Aššur, the great mountain, granted to me unrivalled sovereignty and made my weapons greater than (those of) all who sit on (royal) daises. (Sennacherib 1: 1–4)

The first two traditional titles “great king” and “strong king” are known since the third millennium. Also “king of Assyria” and “unrivalled king” are titles that need no further explanation but all the other titles solely concentrate on moral qualities of the king. He is – we will come back to this motif in the section dealing with the literary texts – the guardian and guarantor of justice, a divine tool that ensures justice in the world. His moral qualities are of utmost importance as they guarantee the divine favor for the king and his country.<sup>15</sup>

After having celebrated the strong, just and pious king the texts introduce the enemy of the king – Marduk-apla-iddina of Babylon – “an evil foe, a rebel with a treacherous mind, an evildoer whose villainous acts are true” (Sennacherib 1, 6).

<sup>12</sup> Fuchs 2011, 381.

<sup>13</sup> The transliterations, translations and enumerations of the texts are those of RINAP 3/1.

<sup>14</sup> See Sazonov 2016 for an overview of the most common Assyrian titles up to the times of Tukulti-Ninurta I. Karlsson 2016 provides an analysis and lists (413–492) of the royal titles and epithets of the early Neo-Assyrian period.

<sup>15</sup> Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 220 stresses that also the healthy and beautiful body of the king plays a major role concerning securing divine favor, especially regarding the king’s relationship to Ištar / Inanna. For an overview of the early history of this special relationship of the king with this goddess see Westenholz 2000.

The only option in the royal inscriptions to elaborate the consequences of sinful and wrong behavior of a king is obviously the depiction of the enemy king. So the Babylonian king is clearly depicted as the exact counterpart of Sennacherib.<sup>16</sup> He has a bad character, he is not reliable and he commits evil acts. The moral judgment is clear – the Assyrian king is the darling of the gods because he fulfills their wishes and acts according to their regulations. The Babylonian king commits evil acts and therefore the gods make use of the Assyrian king to punish him. When we hear that the Babylonian king even conspires with the foreign king Shutur-Nahundu II of Elam, the arch-enemy of all righteous Mesopotamian rulers, and raised a gigantic force of exotic and dangerous soldiers, it is obvious that the gods will make him pay for his numerous sins:

8) *mim-ba-ap-pa* LÚ.tur-ta-nu-[šú it-ti gi-piš um]-ma-na-ti-šú *mta-an-na-a-nu* LÚ.3.U<sub>5</sub> 10 LÚ.GAL KI.ŠIR.MEŠ *a-di* <sup>md</sup>U.GUR-na-šir LÚ.su-tu-ú *la a-di-ru ta-ḥa-zu* 9) 80 LIM LÚ.ERIM.MEŠ GIŠ.「PAN」 [GIŠ.az-ma-re-e 8 ME 50 GIŠ].「su」-um-「bi ANŠE」.KUR.RA.MEŠ *it-ti šú-nu-ti-ma a-na* KUR EME.GI<sub>7</sub> *ù URL.KI iš-pu-ra re-「su」-[us]-「su」* 10) *ù šu-「ú」* [LÚ.kal-du lem-nu e-piš *ḪUL-tim* NUMUN *né-er-ti* UNUG.KI] 「ARARMA」.KI ÚRI.KI *eridu.KI kul-aba*.KI *ki-is-「sik.KI」* URU.*né-med-<sup>d</sup>la*「gu」-da

To the land of Sumer and Akkad, he (Shutur-Nahundu) sent to his (Marduk-apla-iddina's) asis[tance] Imbappa, [his] field marshal, [together with the massed body of] his [tr]oops, Tannānu, (his) third man, ten unit commanders, including Nergal-nāšir, a Sutilian who is fearless in battle, 80,000 archers (and) [lancers, (and) 850] wagons (and) horses that were with them. Moreover, he [the evil Chaldean, evildoer (and) offspring of murder], gathered together [Uruk, Lars]a, Ur, Eridu, Kulaba, Kissik, (and) Nēmed-La[gu]da [a long list with names of cities and tribes follows in lines 11–15] . (Sennacherib 1: 8–10)

As we have expected the bad character and the evil deeds of the Babylonian king triggers the rage of the gods, as well as that of Sennacherib. Sennacherib's rage is described in form of a direct speech and the text further indicates that Sennacherib himself was leading his troops into the battle fighting with his army:<sup>17</sup>

25) *la-ab-biš an-na-dir-ma al-la-bi-ib a-bu-bi-iš it-ti* LÚ.*qu-ra-di-ia la game-lu-ti še-riš* <sup>md</sup>AMAR.UTU-IBILA-SUM.NA *a-na kiš.KI áš-ta-kan pa-ni-ia*  
26) *ù šu-ú e-piš lem-né-e-ti a-ka-mu ger-ri-ia a-na ru-qé-e-ti e-mur-ma im-*

<sup>16</sup> Again I can refer to the analysis provided by Fales 1982.

<sup>17</sup> Obviously this does not prove anything regarding the king's presence on the battlefield but it shows quite clearly that according to the paradigm of the heroic king it was expected that the ruler accompanies his troops and that he takes up the fight against his enemies as he had to imitate the role of Ninurta. See Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 219–270. If the kings always kept up with these expectations is another question. We even have one letter (SAA 16, no. 77) in which it is stated that the king should behave like his ancestors and watch the battle from a hill. Fuchs (2011, 383) argues that it would have been too dangerous for the whole empire – and his argument is fostered by all the power struggles after the death of Neo-Assyrian kings – to put the life of the king at risk at so many occasions.

*qu-su ḥat-tu gi-mir el-la-ti-šú e-zib-ma a-na KUR.gu-zu-um-ma-ni in-na-bit*

I raged up like a lion and became furious like the Deluge. With my merciless warriors, I set out for Kish against Marduk-apla-iddina. Moreover, he, (that) evildoer, saw the cloud of dust of my expeditionary forces from afar and fear (*ḥattu*) fell upon him. He abandoned all of his forces and fled to the land Guzummanu. (Sennacherib 1: 25–26)

In Sennacherib 34 and 22 we have another example of false kings full of fear who flee from the battlefield in order to save their lives. This fear of the false kings is a clear indication of their inferiority and the superiority of the Assyrian king:

53b) LUGAL KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI ù LUGAL KUR.ELAM.MA.KI *ḥur-ba-šú MÈ-ia is-ḥup-šú-nu-ti qé-reb* 54) GIŠ.GIGGIR.MEŠ-šú-nu *ú-maš-še-ru-ni zu-ú-šú-un e-diš ip-par-šid-du-ma ma-tu-uš-šú-un* 55) *in-nab-tu*

Terror of doing battle with me overwhelmed the king of Babylon and the king of the land Elam. They released their excrement inside their chariots, fled alone, and ran away to their (own) land(s). (Sennacherib 34: 53b-55a)

29b) *ki-i ša at-mi* TU.MUŠEN 30) *kuš-šu-di i-tar-ra-ku lib-bu-šú-un ši-na-te-šú-un* 31) *ú-šar-ra-pu qé-reb* GIŠ.GIGGIR.MEŠ-šú-nu *ú-maš-še-ru-ni* 32) *zu-ú-šú-un a-na ra-da-di-šú-nu* GIŠ.GIGGIR.MEŠ 33) ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ-ia *ú-ma-'e-er EGIR-šú-un* 34) *mun-na-rib-šú-nu ša a-na nap-šá-a-te ú-šu-ú* 35) *a-šar i-kaš-šá-du ú-ra-sa-bu i-na* GIŠ.TUKUL

Their hearts throbbed like the pursued young of pigeons, they passed their urine hotly, (and) released their excrement inside their chariots. I ordered my chariots (and) horses to pursue them. Wherever they caught (them), they killed with the sword the runaways amongst them, who had fled for (their) lives. (Sennacherib 22: vi 29b–35)

Once again we see a false king fighting against the true king becoming the victim of fear – despite his huge and dangerous army – and in this text already a sign for the arrival of Sennacherib’s army leads to the panic of Marudk-apla-idina. In the detailed account of the campaign against Marduk-apla-iddina found in Sennacherib 1 it is described that after the victory the wrath (*uggat libbi*) of the Assyrian king turns into happiness (*ḥud libbi u numur pāni*), how he takes the booty and punishes the “guilty” citizens of the conquered cities and the soldiers of the enemies severely (Sennacherib 1: 24). Again the king is represented as a just king – after his wrath has vanished, he ends the indiscriminate killing and returns to a well-structured and orderly world, in which only the guilty persons are punished according to divine rules.<sup>18</sup> In Sennacherib 4 we find another example of the justice of the king after

<sup>18</sup> The numerous references and allusions to literary texts in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions were early recognized and a lot of research has been devoted to intertextual relationship; see e.g., Weissert 1997. For a detailed analysis of the flood stories and their relationship to royal inscriptions, see Lang forthcoming. It is a striking parallel between Sennacherib’s inscriptions and Atra-ḥašīs that the destruction and the fight against chaos is described by allusion to the

the victory; again we can see the rightful king ordering the world after his victory:

46) URU.*al-ta-qu-ú* URU.*ta-am-na-a al-me* KUR-*ud áš-lu-la šal-la-su-un a-na* URU.*am-qar-ru-na aq-rib-ma* LÚ.GÌR.NÍTA.MEŠ LÚ.NUN.MEŠ *ša ħi-iṭ-tu ú-šab-šú-ú a-duk-ma ina di-ma-a-ti si-ħir-ti* URU *a-lul pag-ri-šú-un* 47) DUMU.MEŠ URU *e-piš an-ni ù gil-la-ti a-na šal-la-ti am-nu si-it-tu-te-šú-nu la ba-bil ħi-ti-ti ù gul-lul-ti ša a-ra-an-šú-nu la ib-šu-ú uš-šur-šu-un aq-bi*

I surrounded, conquered, (and) plundered the cities Eltekeh (and) Tamnâ. I approached the city Ekron and I killed the governors (and) nobles who had committed crime(s) and hung their corpses on towers around the city; I counted the citizens who had committed the criminal acts as booty; (and) I commanded the rest of them; (those) who were not guilty of crimes and wrongdoing, (to) whom no penalty was due, be allowed to go free. (Sennacherib 4: 46–47)

After the campaign is finished Sennacherib starts building works in Nineveh, completely removes the old palace and builds a new one and thereby shows his skills as a pious builder-king. Sennacherib 16 offers an example for the heroic king marching, or sometimes being carried in a chair, at the head of the army:

Col. iv 79) *it-ti* LÚ.*qur-bu-te* GÌR.II-*ia* 80) *na-as-qu-ti ù* LÚ.ERIM.MEŠ 81) *ta-ħa-zi-ia la ga-me-lu-ti* 82) *a-na-ku* GIM AM *ek-di pa-nu-uš-šú-un* 83) *aš-bat ħur-ri na-ħal-li na-at-ba-ki* 84) KUR-*i me-le-e mar-šu-ti* Col. v 1) *i-na* GIŠ. GU.ZA *áš-ta-am-di-iḫ* 2) *a-šar a-na* GIŠ.GU.ZA *šup-šu-qu* 3) *i-na* GÌR.II-*ia áš-taḫ-ħi-ṭa* GIM *ar-me* 4) *a-na zuq-ti šá-qu-ti še-ru-uš-šú-un e-li*

Like a fierce wild bull, with my select bodyguard and my merciless combat troops, I took the lead of them (the soldiers in my camp). I proceeded through the gorges of the streams, the outflows of the mountains, (and) rugged slopes in (my) chair. Where it was too difficult for (my) chair, I leapt forward on my (own) feat like a mountain goat. I ascended the highest peaks against them. (Sennacherib 16: iv 79 – v 4)

In other inscriptions the king also insists on being with his fighting forces and as in this example he also has to leave his chariot when the terrain is too difficult. Then he rides on the horseback or even walks “on foot like a wild bull.” (Sennacherib 22: i 70)

In Sennacherib 22 which recounts eight campaigns, Sennacherib describes the outcome of his divine support and his victories as following:

Col. i 10) <sup>d</sup>*aš-šur* KUR-*ú* GAL-*ú* LUGAL-*ut la šá-na-an* 11) *ú-šat-li-ma-an-ni-ma* UGU *gim-ri* 12) *a-šib pa-rak-ki ú-šar-ba-a* GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-*ia* 13) *ul-tu*

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flood in Sennacherib’s inscriptions. This parallelism is further elaborated when we take into account that in both texts the destruction ends with the ordering of the world and the decision that only the guilty persons will be punished in the future (Atra-ḫasīs vi, 25 – see Lambert and Millard 1969, 101).



A.AB.BA *e-le-ni-ti ša šá-lam* <sup>d</sup>UTU-ši 14) *a-di tam-tim šap-li-ti ša ši-it* <sup>d</sup>UTU-ši 15) *gim-ri šal-mat* SAG.DU *ú-šak-niš še-pu-ú-a* 16) *ú mal-ki šep-šu-ti e-du-ru ta-ḥa-zi* 17) *da-ád-me-šú-un iz-zi-bu-ma* 18) *ki-ma su-tin-ni*.MUŠEN *ni-gi-iš-ši* 19) *e-diš ip-par-šú a-šar la 'a-a-ri*

The god Assur, the great mountain, granted to me unrivalled sovereignty and made my weapons greater than (those of) all who sit on (royal) daises. He made all of the black-headed (people) from the Upper Sea of the Setting Sun to the Lower Sea of the Rising sun bow down at my feet. Thus the recalcitrant rulers come to fear battle with me. While they were abandoning their settlements, they flew away like bats (living) in crevices to inaccessible place(s). (Sennacherib 22: i 10–19)

Sennacherib describes himself as a daring commander, he is at the front of his troops and he accompanies them to the remotest places where none of his predecessors dared to go before.<sup>19</sup> Due to the assistance of the gods and especially the god Assur Sennacherib's foes behave like cowards. They are afraid of him because they are somehow aware of his divine support and / or the gods somehow infect the enemy with this fear and panic and their panic causes them to abandon their troops, which leads to their defeat in battle and the loss of many lives. Sennacherib is the just and real king and this is proven by his victories over his foes. He has the legitimization of victory.

## The King in Letters

If we have a look at the letter-corpus – I take my examples from SAA 10 as the letters from scholars to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal<sup>20</sup> allow an intimate look at the king as a living being<sup>21</sup> – we are tempted to see the Assyrian kings as fearful victims of superstition, a position that Simo Parpola strongly rejected.<sup>22</sup> Parpola is surely right in pointing out that we should try to abandon our supposedly superior position of educated westerners and try to develop a more neutral picture of the Sargonid

<sup>19</sup> See Rollinger 2014 for an analysis of the motif of a distant mountain in the east, where no former ruler had gone before, in the cuneiform sources and in the Alexander historiography.

<sup>20</sup> It should be stated here that it is not always clear to whom of these two kings a certain letter is addressed. As this does not seem relevant for the topic of this article I will not go into that discussion.

<sup>21</sup> The letters from the king to his officials or to foreign dignitaries are obviously of a more official character. For an in-depth analysis of the letters from Assurbanipal, see Ito 2015; for the royal image of the king especially 91–117.

<sup>22</sup> “Under no circumstances are we justified in characterizing the Sargonid kings a fearful and ‘superstitious’ men completely under the sway of the court ‘magicians’ and ‘soothsayers,’ [...] Far from acting out of fear or ignorance, the kings were following the highest dictates of contemporary religion and state ideology, while the men who advised them truly believed in the importance and efficacy of their craft and its ‘scientific,’ even divine, basis.” (SAA 10, XXVII)

kings. But even a well-trained historian has to struggle with his interpretation of concepts that seem to be barbaric and cruel to our standards, like the ritual of the substitute-king. The letters inform us that a substitute-king is enthroned, that the king himself is addressed as “Farmer” during the ritual and that the substitute king is put to death after a period of about 100 days with his wife because of some stellar or earthly phenomena that were perceived as threatening the life of the king (SAA 10, nos. 1–3).<sup>23</sup> But besides this the letters give us a glimpse of the personal problems and worries of the Assyrian kings. In the following I will first discuss reoccurring topics in the letters and then I will turn to an examination of the occurrences of the verb *palāhu* (“to fear”) that – as we have seen above – is widely used in the inscriptions and attributed to the enemies in order to emphasize the divine support of the Assyrian king in war.

### *Family affairs: worries about princes, babies and the royal mother*

The numerous health-reports about princes, royal babies or the royal mother (SAA 10, nos. 244, 297) inform us that the kings took good care of their families and were devoted fathers who tried to guarantee the best possible medical aid for their children. An impressive example is found in the following letter:

6) [š]a LUGAL *be-lí iš-pur-an-ri<sup>1</sup>* 7) [m]a-a ŠÀ-bi *ma-ri-iš a-dan-niš* 8) *ša ina še-ḥe-ri-ia an-ni-ri<sup>1</sup>* 9) ŠÀ-bi *iš-pil-u-ni a-ri<sup>1</sup>ke-e<sup>1</sup>* 10) *né-pu-uš lu-ú ša pa-ṭa-a-ri<sup>1</sup>* 11) *ši-i mi-šil ma-ti-i-ka* 12) *lu ta-din lu tap-ṭu-ra-áš-ši* 13) *mi-i-nu né-pu-uš* LUGAL *be-lí* 14) *dul-lu ša a-na e-pa-a-še* 15) *la il-lu-ku-ú-ni šu-ú*

As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: “I am feeling very sad; how did we act that I have become so depressed for this little one of mine?” – had it been curable, you would have given away half of your kingdom to have it cured! But what can we do? O king, my lord, it is something that cannot be done. (SAA 10, no. 187: 6–15)

Here we can clearly see that also the seemingly almighty king had to face powerlessness in some situations. All his power and wealth and also the expectation of his most esteemed experts to be rewarded with half of the kingdom were not able to cure his beloved ones.

Besides reports on the health status of his family members the king also took care that the princes performed journeys and their cultic obligations on appropriate days that were determined by his experts (SAA 10, nos. 48, 49, 52, 53, 73).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Huber 2005 for a discussion of this ritual in Mesopotamian as well as classical sources.

<sup>24</sup> Hemerologies were quite widespread in Mesopotamia, see now Livingstone 2013.

*Illness of the King*

Also the king himself was affected by illness and when we examine the letters we can see the tendency that the scholars wanted to calm down the ill king with giving him natural explanations for his suffering.<sup>25</sup> Especially in the case of Esarhaddon we know that he had severe health problems<sup>26</sup> and also Assurbanipal seems to have faced health problems from time to time. Besides natural explanations illnesses were often seen as a result of divine anger or witchcraft.<sup>27</sup> It is obvious that it is a key function of the royal scholars to protect the king from wrong or sinful actions that could possibly provoke divine anger. Therefore it is perfectly clear why the scholars favored natural explanations: simply because other causes for illnesses could have convinced the king that they were incompetent and that they should be replaced.<sup>28</sup> In the context of the major scientific innovations that took place at the Neo-Assyrian court also this phenomenon might have played a role.<sup>29</sup>

But now let us have a look at some further letters. Three letters in SAA 10 inform us about a strange behavior of the king. The king interprets his illness or bad luck as a divine punishment and he is in despair. Through fasting he seeks to overcome the wrath of the gods. His scholars strive to calm him down and to convince him that he should stop fasting after three days (SAA 10, no. 43). In another letter it is stated that the king was already staying in the dark for three days without eating or drinking. His exorcist tries to calm him down and even uses an allusion to the sun god<sup>30</sup> to convince the king to leave the dark:

14) *a-ta-a šá-ni-ú ina UD-mi* 15) *an-ni-e GIŠ.BANŠUR ina pa-an* 16) LUGAL *be-lí-ia la e-rab e.* 17) *a-na* <sup>d</sup>UTU 18) LUGAL DINGIR.MEŠ 19) *man-nu* <sup>r</sup>*id-du-ru* <sup>r</sup> 1) UD-*mu k[a]* <sup>r</sup>*mu-šú* 2) *e-da-ar tu-ú-ra* 3) *ši-it-ta ú-ma-ti* 4) LUGAL EN KUR.KUR *ša-al-mu* 5) *šá* <sup>d</sup>UTU *šu-ú mi-ši-il* 6) UD-*me ú-ta-da-ar*

<sup>25</sup> To give just one example: SAA 10, no. 236 speaks of a “seasonal illness” that has befallen the king.

<sup>26</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the illness of Esarhaddon see Radner 2003, 169–170. She also discusses the effect that this illness might have had on the mental state of this king.

<sup>27</sup> K 891 resembles older letter prayers, but the exact genre of this text is not clear. It can be attributed with certainty to Assurbanipal but it contains no mentioning of the king’s name and titulary. The text reports the pious deeds of Assurbanipal, and finally Assurbanipal questions his fate: “I have done good for god and man, for the dead and the living. (So) why are illness, grief, demise and loss entangled with me? Discord in the country and strife in the family do not depart from [m]y side. Disorder and evil matters constantly beset me. Unhappiness and bad health have bent my body. I finish my days in woe and alas. I am troubled on the day of the city god, the festival day. Death holds and constricts me. Day and night, I moan in depression and worry. I am exhausted, my god, give (these things) to the irreverent, and let me see your light! For how long, O god, will you treat me this way? I have been treated like someone who does not revere god and goddess.” (SAACT 10, no. 19: r. 2–13)

<sup>28</sup> “Replacement” might be a euphemism in this case as we can assume with good reasons that these scholars with all their intimate knowledge of the king’s mental and physical condition were not allowed to sell their knowledge to the enemies of the king, but rather were “neutralized” in some way.

<sup>29</sup> See Brown 2000 and Brown 2010 for an analysis of the Neo-Assyrian scientific revolution.

<sup>30</sup> See Frahm 2013 for an analysis of allusions to the cosmos and especially the sun regarding the Assyrian kings. SAA 10, no. 43 is discussed on page 105.

Why, today already for the second day, is the tablet not brought to the king, my lord? Who (now) stays in the dark much longer than Šamaš, the king of the gods; stays in the dark a whole day and night, and again two days? The king, the lord of the world, is the very image of Šamaš. He (should) keep in the dark for half a day only! (SAA 10, no. 196: 14–r. 6)

After some quite broken lines that might contain a quotation of a proverb also the final lines of the letter are written in “wisdom-style” and they contain the following advice to the king:

r.14) *mi[l'-ku dam-q]u ih-ḥa-sa-a* 15) *ka-[ru-u i]k-ki* 16) *la a-[ka]-lu la šá-tu-u* 17) *ṭè-e-mu ú-šá-šá* 18e) *mur-ṣu ú-rad* 19e) *an-ni-tu s.1) LUGAL a-na*  
 [ARAD<sup>1</sup>]-[šu] [liš<sup>1</sup>]-[m]<sup>i</sup>

G[ood ad]vice is to be heeded: restlessness, not eating and not drinking disturbs the mind and *adds to* illness. In this matter the king should listen to [his se]rvant. (SAA 10, no. 196: r. 14–s.1)

SAA 10, no. 275 proves that fasting – or in this case rather a form of diet – was part of certain rituals, as the text states that the “king does not eat anything cooked; the king wears the clothes of a nurse” (SAA 10, no. 275: r. 3–5).

### *Worries about concealed portents*

In several letters we see that the king is concerned about the possibility that his scholars keep important portents secret.<sup>31</sup> So he actively asks his scholars about portents and in the case of SAA 10, no. 45 we have quite a long request of the king and in the reply he is told that there is no portent to report.

In SAA 10, no. 109 the king is informed that in the times of his father manipulations did occur and that the scribes and haruspices were given order not to disturb the king with bad omens. SAA 10, no. 120 reports a curious case. Someone writes to the king because a cow gave birth to a lion – obviously a strange event and an important portent<sup>32</sup> – and a person called Sin-ereš allegedly tried to keep this secret. Sin-ereš struck down the lion, ate it in order to eliminate all evidence and killed a farmer and a scribe that witnessed his actions. Finally the sender of the letter asks the king to make the servants of Sin-ereš testify in order to unravel this plot.

Also in SAA 10, no. 265 we can see that the king questioned the truth of the scribe’s words what made the scribe swear under oath that he told the king the truth and that he never concealed anything – “be it good or bad” – from the king. The

<sup>31</sup> This fits well Radner’s characterization of Esarhaddon as a king who “met his environs as a rule with overwhelming distrust” (Radner 2003, 167).

<sup>32</sup> The omen-series *šumma izbu* treats the portents resulting from abnormal births like in this case and the birth of monstrosities. A cow giving birth to a likeness of a lion is mentioned in this text (Izbu xix, 24’-27’). For editions see Leichty 1970 and De Zorzi 2014.

same kind of protestations of honesty is also found in SAA 10, nos. 286 and 333. I think we can conclude from the examples mentioned here that the king could never be sure about the honesty and loyalty of his advisors and that he regularly questioned them about portents that were reported to him from other sources.<sup>33</sup>

### *The king is afraid of a certain portent*

As we have seen in the inscriptions the king is often presented as a hero without fail, someone who knows no fear. But the letters depict another king – as we would expect – as a human being with all its sorrows and worries about the future. From SAA 10, no. 33 we learn that the king has consulted his chief-scribes because a mongoose passed under his chariot. SAA 10, no. 42 is the answer to a request of the king concerning lightning that struck some fields in Hariḫumba, a city that the king obviously never visited. Therefore his scribe tries to calm him down and to persuade him that this event has no importance for him:

10) [LUGAL<sup>1</sup>] *a-ta-a ú-ba-'a-a* 11) [*ina*] [É<sup>1</sup>] LÚ.*qa-tin-ni* LUGAL 12) [*a*]-*ta-a ú-ba-'a-a-ma* 13) [HUL<sup>1</sup>] *ina ŠÀ É.GAL la me-me-ni* 14) [LUGAL<sup>1</sup>] *ina URU. ḫa-ri-ḫum-ba* 15) *im-ma-te il-lik-ma*

Why does the king look for (trouble), and why does he look (for it) [in the home] of a tiller? There is no evil inside the palace, and when has the king ever visited Hariḫumba? (SAA 10, no. 42: 10–15)

Also in omens concerning earthquakes we find the above mentioned tendency to explain events by a natural explanation in order to calm the king's worries or, when no adequate explanation can be given as in the case of earthquakes, to convince the king that they are not so extraordinary as it might appear at a first glance:

r.13) *ina ŠÀ AD.MEŠ-šu AD–AD.MEŠ-šu* 14) *ša LUGAL ri-i-bu-u* 15) *la-áš-šu a-na-ku* 16) *ki-i qa-al-la-ku-ni* 17) *ri-i-ba-né-e* 18) *la a-mur DINGIR šu-u* 19) *uz-ni šá LUGAL* 20) *up-ta-at-ti s.1) ma-a up-ni-šu a-na DINGIR lip-ti ma-a* 2) NAM.BÚR.BI *le-pu-uš ma-a lu e-ti-ik*

Was there no earthquake in the times of the king's fathers and grandfathers? Did I not see earthquakes when I was small? The god has (only) wanted to open the king's ears: "He should pray (literally 'open his fists') to the god, perform the apotropaic ritual and be on his guard." (SAA 10, no. 56: r. 13–s.2)

SAA 10, no. 57 urges the king not to be afraid of an eclipse. SAA 10, no. 67 discusses a conjunction of Jupiter and Mercury and again the king is told not to be afraid of it.

<sup>33</sup> It seems that worries of this kind are mirrored in a text usually labeled "The Sin of Sargon" where Sargon's son Sennacherib divides the haruspices into "several groups, apparently intending that each group should give him its answer independently." Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola 1989, 9.

That these formulations are not just rhetoric devices but rather refer to real concerns of the king is demonstrated by SAA 10, no. 208. There a letter of the king is quoted where he explicitly states that he has become afraid because of a certain portent.

SAA 10, no. 217 treats the case of an official who vomited bile. This is analyzed as portent and the king's exorcist informs his concerned master that even though the vomited bile does not portend good, everything will turn out well in the end.

### *palāḫu in the royal letters*

I want to close this short examination of the letters in SAA 10 with an analysis of the instances of the verb *palāḫu* ("to fear"),<sup>34</sup> as it is especially this term that exemplifies the king's fear:

SAA 10	Subject	Cause of fear	Do-not-fear-formula
353: r. 22	Mar-Issar	afraid of punishment of the king	
43: r. 10	King's advisors	fasting of the king	
285: 3'	Governor	letter(?) of the king	
311: 7'	"Farmer"	unknown	x
67: 7	King	portent (conjunction of Jupiter and Mercury)	x
57: 6	King	portent (eclipse)	x
278: 7	King	portent	x
320: 11	King	illness of a prince	x

We can clearly see that that the king's advisors were aware of the fears and worries of their master and that they tried to calm him down. What appears only all too human for us is interesting from an ideological point of view. The royal inscriptions try to describe the fear of the enemy as a result of their sinful actions that provoked divine anger. The victories on the battlefield over evil enemies are a proof of the good relationships of the Assyrian king with the gods and the enemy's fear reveals his sins against humans and gods.

Obviously the Assyrian king himself fell victim to his propaganda (if we are allowed to use this somewhat anachronistic term) and feared that his known and unknown sins might fall back on himself, what – if no appropriate actions were taken by his experts – could have ended in losing the favor of the gods and consequently in a defeat on the battlefield or a punishment by illness.

<sup>34</sup> Quite a number of references that can be found in the index of SAA 10 are not cited here because this verb is also used to refer to fear of the gods, which is seen very positive (so for example in SAA 10, no. 188: 9–10: "Fear of the gods creates kindness, fear of the infernal gods returns life.") or in stock phrases that are not very informative, so that only eight out of 37 instances found their way in this table.

## The King in literary Texts

While the Royal inscriptions as well as the letters we have discussed so far form rather homogenous groups and can be clearly attributed to a certain group of persons,<sup>35</sup> and were produced in a certain time span, the texts that I will discuss under in this chapter are a quite non-homogeneous group. Usually literary texts cannot be attributed to a certain author and in the few cases an author is mentioned he mostly remains a kind of legendary figure.<sup>36</sup> So the author as well as the audience of the literary texts is difficult to determine. We can only draw some information from the number of known manuscripts and their find spots – but obviously the evidence here is incomplete and can be misleading. Some, rather uncertain information, can also be drawn from the character of the text itself. So the whole storyline of *The Poor Man of Nippur* indicates that this is a kind of folk-tale<sup>37</sup> but we don't have a lot of tablets of this text.<sup>38</sup> Especially for the first millennium we may consider that popular texts might have been written down on other media as well and in other writing systems that were less likely to survive than cuneiform tablets. Aramaic texts for example were often written on parchment or papyrus and these materials were not preserved in the Mesopotamian soil. In any case we have to rely on the surviving evidence. But we can be sure that also oral traditions played a vital role in the transmission of stories and we can imagine that burlesque texts were likely to have been transmitted orally and were known to a wide public. So it seems possible, even if we have no means except the many parallels in modern folktales to prove this assumption, that texts like *The Poor Man of Nippur* were known to more people than the royal inscriptions<sup>39</sup> and could thereby transport ideas and subversive criticism to a wider public.

### “Historiographical” literature

In Mesopotamian literature we can find a number of texts that openly criticize ancient kings for their inadequate and unjust behavior. The moral defects of a king and his hubris appear to be a standard ingredient of many Mesopotamian stories

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<sup>35</sup> The question of the authorship of Royal Inscriptions is not as easy as it might seem on first sight, as a number of unmentioned scholars might have worked on them, but officially the king is seen as the author of the text. Tadmor 1997, 328–329.

<sup>36</sup> Hess 2016.

<sup>37</sup> See Gurney 1972 and Jason 1979 for a discussion of the text and its parallels in modern folktales. For a recent treatment of the *Sitz im Leben* of this text see Dietrich 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Only four tablets are known today, see Ottervanger 2016, xvii.

<sup>39</sup> “Indeed, it could justifiably be argued that the gods were viewed as the primary audience of all the dedicatory-commemorative texts, especially those which begin with an invocation to the major gods of Assyria, [...]. The gods were the immediate and most obvious audience, even before the princely reader of the future who is addressed in the epilogues” (Tadmor 1997, 331). Tadmor also hints to Oppenheim's theory that the so-called letters to the gods were read aloud to the citizens of Ashur but actually we have no evidence that supports this theory. For a recent discussion of the question of the audience of royal inscriptions with numerous references see Rollinger 2016a.

about ancient kings. And as it is a well-known fact in the field of modern literature that, especially under censorship, authors formulate their critique of the actual state of things by using examples from the past, from far-remote and exotic people or they invent a future world which mirrors and enlarges actual problems. So it seems quite reasonable that this genre was, at least sometimes, used for an implicit critique on the present-day king by the author.

One of the oldest examples with a clear political intention – if we assume this text to be written by someone promoting the cult of Enlil in Nippur – is the Curse of Agade. This text, which was a prototype or forerunner of the later city laments,<sup>40</sup> describes the destruction of Agade as a result of Naram-Sin's anger at the missing oracular permission of rebuilding the Ekur that leads him to the destruction of this temple. So it's quite clear that the text criticizes and warns any king who does not obey the messages of the gods, given by oracles and interpreted by the diviners.<sup>41</sup>

A famous example of this kind of critique or “warning against hubris” is the “Cuthean Legend”.<sup>42</sup> Seven enemy kings attack the land and again it is Naram-Sin<sup>43</sup> who asks the oracle for advice but who does not obey:

I summoned the diviners and instructed (them). I designated seven lambs, one lamb for each of the seven. I set up pure reed altars. I queried the great gods: Ištar, Ilaba, Zababa, Annunītum, Šullat, Haniš, and Šamaš, the hero. The “latch-hook” of the great gods did not give me permission for my going and my demonical onrush. Thus I said to my heart (i.e., to myself), these were my words: “What lion (ever) performed extispicy? What wolf (ever) consulted a dream-interpreter? I will go like a brigand according to my own inclination. And I will cast aside that (oracle) of the god(s); I will be in control of myself.” (72–83)<sup>44</sup>

As we may expect this royal arrogance leads directly into a disaster. All the troops that Naram-Sin has sent out against the savage enemy hordes are killed, none of them returns. Once again the scribes try to inform the king about his limits – the gods are the real masters and only the scribes are able to understand the divine will. The king has to obey the gods and the oracles or he will lead the land and himself into ruin.

### *Sin of Sargon*

In this text it is Sennacherib who criticizes his royal father Sargon II.<sup>45</sup> It was a

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<sup>40</sup> See Cooper 2006.

<sup>41</sup> See Cooper 1983 for an edition and discussion of this text. For recent literature and a new translation see Attinger 2011.

<sup>42</sup> For an edition of the numerous versions of this text see Westenholz 1987, 263–368.

<sup>43</sup> Here we already can see that this king somehow became the prototype of a king who fell victim to hubris. For the concept of *Unheilsherrscher*, see Evans 1983.

<sup>44</sup> Evans 1983, 317.

<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that it is Sennacherib who speaks in the text but it is unclear when the text was written. Weaver 2004 argues that this text was produced in the reign of Esarhaddon



disaster for the ideology of the heroic Neo-Assyrian king that Sargon II died on a far-from-home battlefield and his corpse could not be found and buried. Here Sennacherib presents himself as a pious man who seeks to explore the sins of his father. The idea that an event like the death of Sargon – Josef Bauer has called this kind of death “Der schlimme Tod”<sup>46</sup> – is a result of a sin and therefore has to be understood as a divine punishment is widespread in the Ancient Near East. The reasoning after Sargon’s death must have been the following: Sargon died an awful death. An awful death is a punishment of the gods. The gods punish sinners, therefore Sargon must have sinned. As it is apparent that Sennacherib strives to avoid this kind of fate he appears to have investigated the case of his father and tried to establish what kind of sin has led to his death on the battlefield. If we understand the text correctly then the result of Sennacherib’s investigations is that Sargon “honored the gods of Assyria too much above the gods of Babylonia.” In the reverse of the text – which is a direct speech of Sennacherib, the king tells his successor:

r. 21') *a-na-ku ul-tu ſa-lam* AN.ŠÁR EN-ia *i-pu-šu dul'-l[u' šá ſa-lam* <sup>d</sup>AMAR. UTU] 22') LÚ.DUB.SAR.MEŠ *aš-šur-a-a up-tar-ri-ku-in-ni-ma ſ[a'-lam* <sup>d</sup>AMAR. UTU EN GAL-i] 23') *a-na e-pe-ši ul id-di-nu-in-ni-ma ba-l[a' -ti ú-qat-tu-ú x x x x x]*

“As for me, after I had made the statue of Assur my lord, Assyrian scribes wrongfully prevented me from working [on the statue of Marduk] and did not let me make [the statue of Marduk, the great lord], and (thus) [shortened my li]fe.”<sup>47</sup>

This text clearly shows that texts like this – in fact it is quite hard to say what kind of texts this unique piece is – can openly talk about errors and sins of the kings, especially when they are dead.

### *Babylonian Theodicy*

In the Babylonian Theodicy the king plays a more or less marginal role – at least on first sight. A passage relevant for the topic of this article might exhibit that the king is not seen as the guarantor of justice, but rather as a greedy person who kills rich people in order to get hand on their fortune:

63) *gi-is maš-re-e* EN *pa-ni šá qur-ru-nu ma-ak-ku-ru* 64) *gi-riš ina u<sub>4</sub>-um la ši-ma-ti i-qa-am-me-šú ma-al-ku*

The one who is assigned wealth, the rich man who piled up treasures, like

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but this theory has to face the problem that the Sennacherib represented in the text seems quite different from the historical Sennacherib who, according to his own inscriptions, utterly destroyed Babylon.

<sup>46</sup> Bauer 1989.

<sup>47</sup> Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola 1989, 15.

the Fire-God, the ruler will burn (him) before his time (lit.: his destiny, i.e., predestined time for one's death).<sup>48</sup>

The interpretation of this passage, as the one in the poor man of Nippur, is not straightforward, as we could see the king in this passage also in his Ninurta-like function of a punisher of the wicked and the unjust, in this case the greedy rich person who did not share his riches with the gods.

### *The Poor Man of Nippur*

This quite unique text was found in a “school” in Neo-Assyrian Sultantepe. After its discovery one further fragment from the royal library at Nineveh and one from Nippur could be identified as belonging to this composition.<sup>49</sup> As I don't want to discuss the whole storyline of this interesting piece here, it should be enough to highlight some points. The whole trouble starts as the poor man offers a goat to the mayor of the Nippur and hopes that the mayor will reward him somehow for this gift. But the greedy mayor takes the goat and throws the poor man out of his house. Enraged by this injustice the poor man decides that he himself has to reestablish justice by taking vengeance. So the poor man, with the ambiguous name Gimil-Ninurta (meaning vengeance / benefit of Ninurta)<sup>50</sup> decides to visit the king, but he does not ask him to reestablish justice. Instead he uses the apparently well-known weaknesses of the king for his private plans:

72) <sup>m</sup>ŠU-<sup>d</sup>MAŠ *ana ma-ḥar mal-ku ina e-re-bi-šú* 73) *ma-ḥar-šu iš-ši-iq qa-q-qa-ru ma-ḥar-šú* 74) *ul-<sup>l</sup>tu<sup>2</sup> II<sup>2</sup>1 qātē<sup>l</sup>.meš-šú šar<sub>4</sub> kiš-ša-te i-kar-rab* 75) *e-til-[u b]al-ti UN.MEŠ MAN šá šu-ru-ḥu<sup>d</sup> LAMMA* 76) *ina qi-bi-ti-ka li-di-nu-nim-ma* 77) UD.I.KAM *e-ma ú-ša-am-ma-ru i-zi-im-tú lu-<sup>l</sup>ku<sup>2</sup>1-šu-ud* 78) *ša u<sub>4</sub>-me-ia a-<sup>l</sup>pi<sup>l</sup>-ti I ma-na ru-uš-šá-a ḥurāša* 79) *ul i-šal-šu mal-ku <sup>l</sup>i<sup>l</sup>-zi-im-ta-ka me-nu-um-ma* 80) *šá ina I-et GIŠ.GIGIR ta-š[a?-di?-ḥ]a?-[m]a? kal u<sub>4</sub>-me<sup>51</sup>*

Gimil-Ninurta came before the king, he prostrated and did homage before him, “O noble one, prince of the people, king whom a guardian spirit makes glorious, let them give me, at your command one chariot, that for one day, I can do whatever I wish. For my one day my payment shall be a mina or red gold.” The king did not ask him, “What is your desire, that you [will parade

<sup>48</sup> Oshima 2013, 20.

<sup>49</sup> See Gurney 1956 and Ellis 1974.

<sup>50</sup> The intention to describe the hero's character through his name was already observed by Jason through comparative evidence of similar folktales; she states: “The hero is usually designated. In modern variants the designations are clearly nicknames: ‘Son-of-a-bitch,’ ‘Owner of the pigeon’; in the Turkish version given by Gurney the hero's nickname is ‘Brother Cock.’ In the ancient version the hero's name can be interpreted as ‘Aggressive One,’ that is, it is a nickname parallel in intent with ‘Son-of-a-bitch’” (Jason 1979, 195).

<sup>51</sup> Gurney 1956, 152–154.

about] all day in one chariot?” (72-80)<sup>52</sup>

According to Jerold Cooper, the text demonstrates that the king’s major interest is gold, not justice and thereby it can be understood as a harsh critique of kingship or at least against a certain kind of king.<sup>53</sup> The king does not appear as an ideal, untouchable, almost holy figure in this text at all. The poor man is well aware of the king’s greed for gold and he uses this weakness to take revenge on the mayor, whom he beats up three times. Simo Parpola (personal communication) sees the king’s role more positive – although the king does not actively reestablish justice, he gives the poor man the means to do so himself.

Other texts criticizing kingship by ridiculing well-known text-formats are the Gilgameš-letter and the text LKA 62 that, according to Edzard, contains a parody of the reports of Assyrian military campaigns.<sup>54</sup>

## Different sources – different kings?

I hope that this overview could demonstrate that the justice of the King that is stressed in nearly every royal inscription is heavily questioned in the literary texts. The letters did not change our picture dramatically, but they show us another aspect of the king. In the letters we discussed above he is not the semi-divine hero, but rather a living being with all his weaknesses and sorrows.

However, in contrast to the royal inscriptions that can be attributed to certain kings, the monarchs in the literary texts – with the exception of the Sin of Sargon – are somewhat more prototypical, paradigmatic types. This is demonstrated by the fact that a lot of these kings – for example in the Poor Man of Nippur – don’t even have names. They are simply called *the* king or *the* ruler. But even Naram-Sin who is mentioned by name is no historical king anymore but rather the prototypical “Unheilsherrscher.” The critique in the literary texts – and this is basically what keeps texts alive and relevant to later generations – is applicable to all kings of all times.

It is quite interesting to see that these “counter texts”<sup>55</sup> seem to contradict directly the claims of the king in the royal inscriptions. In the royal inscriptions, the king (and his scribes) takes the chance to portray himself according to an ideal picture. In the royal inscriptions the king is often depicted as the prototypical, ideal king, and his picture is sharpened by the contrast to his enemies. The ideal king is daring and his revenge can be terrible, but on the other hand he is also pious and just and can show mercy on unexpected occasions. In literary texts we have ample evidence

<sup>52</sup> Foster 1993, 831.

<sup>53</sup> Cooper 1975, 169.

<sup>54</sup> Frahm 1998, 161–162 provides an overview of humoristic texts. For a discussion of the Gilgameš-letter and hints to further literature see George 2003, 119. LKA 62 is edited and discussed by Edzard 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Fink 2013 provides an overview over Mesopotamian texts that could be understood as “counter-texts.”

that the king wasn't always able to keep up with this ideals and the critique even goes so far that the king in literary texts sometimes behaves like the king's enemies in the royal inscriptions.

Finally we can state that even if the literary texts and the royal inscriptions seem to contradict each other as they represent the king in very different ways the differences are only on a superficial level. They can be easily harmonized regarding their image of the ideal king. While in both genres we can meet kings that don't keep up with the standards of the ideal king,<sup>56</sup> they make their judgements on the same standards. The ideal king has to be just and pious, terrible in his wrath but just and merciful when he calms down. Therefore we can conclude that these texts might depict different individual kings, but only one eternal ideal of kingship.

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<sup>56</sup> In the case of the royal inscriptions only enemies are depicted as unjust kings.

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