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Anonymous Neo-Assyrian Denunciations in a Wider Context

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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.

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>

- Kuyunjik Collection* (London 1979)
- CTN Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud (London)
- CTN 2 J. N. Postgate, *The Governor's Palace Archive* (London 1973)
- CTN 3 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

Anonymous Neo-Assyrian Denunciations in a Wider Context¹

Mikko Luukko, Würzburg

In Assyriology, issues of anonymity are usually discussed in relation to the authorship of literary texts. There are, however, many other Mesopotamian text corpora to which one may extend this discussion, as well as a number of questions that remain as yet unconsidered. At least one specific question seems worth addressing: Why did some writers of Neo-Assyrian letters (“authors”) occasionally send anonymous missives? In this paper, I would like to consider some possible answers to this question, looking especially to socio-cultural motivations. As I understand it, the decision to write anonymously does not derive from a single motive, but results, rather, from a combination of several different factors. In order to detect related features in Neo-Assyrian correspondence and other Mesopotamian textual sources, I will present several relevant examples from different text groups in the following discussion.

An Introduction to Anonymity and the Source Material

Anonymity, ancient and modern, is a peculiarly fascinating phenomenon: it not only permits the masking of one’s identity from other people but also the expression, for authors, informers or performers of action, of some of our most profound and authentic thoughts on other individuals, things, or circumstances.² For most of us anonymity may appear to be a self-evident term, but what does it actually mean? Wikipedia, for example, defines the word anonymous in its entry on anonymity as follows:

In colloquial use, ‘anonymous’ is used to describe situations where the acting person’s name is unknown. [...] The important idea here is that a person be non-

¹ This article was prepared within the framework of the project “Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals,” directed by Professor Daniel Schwemer, at the University of Würzburg. For reading a draft of this article and suggesting a number of improvements I would like to thank Daniel Schwemer, Karen Sonik and Greta Van Buylaere. For any errors, however, I remain responsible.

² It would of course be equally fascinating to consider the use of pseudonyms (cf. Baker 2002, 9), i.e., not persons’ real but made-up names. However, because of the nature of our sources, this would necessarily be too speculative an endeavour.

identifiable, unreachable, or untrackable.³

In this article, I present an overview of anonymity and related phenomena in the specific corpora of Neo-Assyrian letters, which are archival texts, and to a lesser extent, in the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals, which are literary texts and part of the exorcist's corpus (*āšipūtu*).⁴ Anti-witchcraft rituals are most prominently represented by manuscripts from the Neo-Assyrian period, especially those originating from the so-called Library of Assurbanipal from Nineveh, but also by various manuscripts from Assur, Kalhu (Nimrud) and Sultantepe, as well as many sites from Babylonia.⁵

Anonymous Letters

To begin with Neo-Assyrian letters, Table I lists all anonymous Neo-Assyrian letters currently known to me:⁶

SAA 1 203.⁷

SAA 5 111.⁸

SAA 5 139.⁹

SAA 5 171.¹⁰

SAA 10 30; SAA 13 43.¹¹

SAA 10 148, 270, 287, 307, 381; SAA 13 29, 148–149, 155; SAA 16 80.¹²

SAA 10 198.¹³

SAA 10 336–337.¹⁴

SAA 13 166.¹⁵

³ <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anonymity>>, last accessed 15 March 2016. For the importance of a personal name in ancient Mesopotamia, see Radner 2005. This importance is sometimes hinted at in letters, see, e.g., SAA 18 24: 12'-r.1.

⁴ For a discussion on anti-witchcraft rituals, which are primarily medical, therapeutic texts, see *CMawR* 1, 8–10.

⁵ The anti-witchcraft ritual texts are listed at <<http://www.cmawro.utorientalistik.uni-wuerzburg.de/ccmawr/>>.

⁶ Many astrological reports (SAA 8) sent to the king of Assyria are anonymous; see, e.g., nos. 3, 21, 163 (three NA reports) and 502, 528, 567 (three NB reports), which are brief anonymous “letters” or reports that are thematically close to anonymous denunciations.

⁷ More an administrative document than a letter (see already Behrens 1906, 1, n. 1; Waterman 1931, 168).

⁸ An administrative note.

⁹ An informal letter without an “address.”

¹⁰ Stylistically, this is somewhere between an informal letter and an administrative document.

¹¹ Two informal letters about “esoteric” topics.

¹² Ten informal letters sent to the king (no. 270 does not explicitly say so).

¹³ A continuation letter of SAA 10 197.

¹⁴ Two informal medical letters.

¹⁵ A “letter” titled as a “Memorandum on Affairs to be Discussed with the King.”

SAA 15 189+208, 199; SAA 16 62–71, 95; A 3660.¹⁶
 SAA 16 52, 54–55.¹⁷
 SAA 21 22, 38, 42.¹⁸
 ND 2657, 3470; VAT 8655.¹⁹
 Rāfidān 17 29; SÉ 152.²⁰
 TH 2.²¹
 VAT 8699.²²

Table I: Anonymous Neo-Assyrian Letters.

All of these anonymous letters, which date from the eighth²³ and seventh centuries BCE, were mainly sent to the kings of Assyria, and lack (rather strikingly) introductory formulae in addition to any indication of the identity of the sender. It appears, consequently, that without “signing” the letter with his or her own name at the beginning the sender may no longer be “entitled to” address or greet the recipient, although he may still bless²⁴ the superior recipient.

Denunciations

As we can see, Table I provides a relatively small corpus of 46 letters, the majority of which have been published in the *State Archives of Assyria* series. It contains tablets that continue a letter whose beginning appears on another tablet, letter orders, drafts or memoranda.²⁵ Thus, some of these texts may not actually be true anonymous letters. Moreover, it is also worth noting that Table I includes several informal letters written without the names of the sender and the recipient: this feature shows familiarity or closeness between the two participants of the correspondence, especially the familiarity of the sender with the king of Assyria in some letters

¹⁶ These are anonymous denunciations, possibly also SAA 16 73, 75–76 (for all of them, see below).

¹⁷ Three informal petitions: food for schoolboys in Kalhu (no. 52), starving after the division of father’s inheritance (no. 53), business letter (no. 54).

¹⁸ These three letters or letter orders are “anonymously” produced drafts or archival copies belonging to Assurbanipal’s correspondence; i.e., they are like royal letters, but without their usual label *abat šarri*, “the king’s word.”

¹⁹ Three letter orders.

²⁰ An informal private letter (SÉ 152) and a draft of such.

²¹ This is an anonymous “receipt” of a letter delivered (cf. Dornauer 2014, 31, 33–34).

²² An informal private business letter, possibly a continuation letter (cf. Deller 1984, 228 with n. 13).

²³ The eighth century anonymous letters were also listed in Luukko 2012, 99, n. 13.

²⁴ See SAA 10 148, 287, 307; SAA 16 65, 69–70; and lavishly but differently in the continuation letter SAA 10 198: 10–r.9.

²⁵ In practice the word memorandum is often used when we do not know the original purpose of a tablet for certain.

published in SAA 10 and SAA 13. While the anonymously written Neo-Assyrian letters were sent for different reasons, we can still narrow down the number of those that might prove most interesting. This article is, therefore, specifically concerned with a subset of letters that is formed by denunciations.

In Neo-Assyrian letters, we find many cases of both criticism and accusation, two different nuances of denunciations, but my emphasis will be on accusations.

The Neo-Assyrian denunciations are distinct from other letters and, at least on the level of their rhetoric, share some interesting features with anti-witchcraft rituals. For example, in Neo-Assyrian denunciations the accusatory tone, accompanied by urging to kill the conspirators, is comparable to the treatment of figurines representing witches (and warlocks) in anti-witchcraft rituals. In this respect, probably the most obvious examples can be culled from Nabû-rehtu-uşur's explicit (non-anonymous) denunciations:

Nikkal [*has revealed*] those who sinned against [your] father's goodness, and your [father's] and your own treaty. Destroy their [peopl]e, name and seed from your palace! [May] she cast [.....]! [May] the accomplices of Sasî [*die quickly*]! Hear me, O king my lord! I k[now] the words of Nikkal. Let [the people] die! [Rescue] your life and the life of your family! Let [the goddesses ...] be your father and your mother, and let them li[ft up]! Do not destroy your life, [do not let] the kingship [slip] from your hands! (SAA 16 59: 4–11)²⁶

From the above Table I, then, only the following compositions qualify specifically as Neo-Assyrian anonymous denunciations: SAA 16 62–71, and 95; one may add to them also SAA 16 73, 75–76.²⁷ To these we might add three Neo-Babylonian anonymous denunciations: SAA 18 69, 83 and VAT 4923.²⁸ Strikingly all of these anonymous denunciations were sent during the reign of Esarhaddon in the early seventh century BCE. SAA 16 (*The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*) contains a chapter titled “Denunciations,” in which three additional relevant letters, SAA 16, nos. 59–61, all authored or sent by Nabû-rehtu-uşur and including his name, are edited.²⁹ In addition to the seventh century denunciations we also have a couple of comparable compositions from the eighth century: SAA 15 189+, 199 and perhaps A 3660.³⁰

²⁶ See also SAA 16 60–61.

²⁷ These denunciations form a rather coherent group since ten of them originate from only two main senders (nos. 62–68 and nos. 69–71); for a discussion of their date and other features, see Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002, xvi, xix and especially xxx–xxxv. The beginning of nos. 66–68, 71, 73, 75–76 is broken away and we cannot be sure that they were sent anonymously. As for SAA 16 72 and 74, it is not certain whether they really are denunciations.

²⁸ VAT 4923 about the crimes of Nabû-ahhe-iddina, son of Kuppuptu, from the early reign of Esarhaddon, many years before his “Succession Treaty” (SAA 2 6), was edited by Weidner (1954, 5–9). For a discussion of this denunciation, see Frame 1992, 66–67, cf. *PNA* 2/II, 796, no. 7. Further, perhaps add to these also SAA 18 121–123.

²⁹ Cf. Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002, xxix. The letters from Nabû-rehtu-uşur were previously edited and discussed in detail by Nissinen (1998, 108–153).

³⁰ A 3660 was first edited by Donbaz (2002), who did not consider it as a denunciation. The much earlier Old Babylonian witchcraft accusations against women in Mari letters have

Altogether, then, there are eighteen anonymous denunciations (the three denunciatory letters of Nabû-rehtu-ušur, which include his name, are of course excluded from this tally, though important as comparanda), but we can only guess at how many such denunciations might have been written since the beginning of many Neo-Assyrian letters is entirely broken away.³¹

Of these denunciations, SAA 15 189+,³² a late eighth century anonymous letter about the conspiracy of Marduk-šarrani and Merodach-baladan, is of particular interest; it recounts how Marduk-šarrani tried to persuade Merodach-baladan, among others, to take action against the interests of Assyria. Without this letter we might get an all too one-sided impression that all denunciations come only from the early seventh century, especially when considering the importance of Esarhaddon's succession treaty with all its implications, something that I discuss selectively here.³³ My purpose in this discussion is not to touch upon the general political situation of Esarhaddon's reign but rather – despite the relatively scant evidence – to point out that similar denunciations were almost certainly sent also to Sargon II and other earlier Assyrian kings. In any case, the emphatically expressed urge to denounce and seize any suspected persons, and to make their potentially treasonous or harmful activities against the king of Assyria known to the latter, is explicitly expressed in Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty.³⁴

With specific respect to the Neo-Assyrian letters, then, it is interesting to examine the specific subjects of the relevant denunciations:

SAA 16 62	Sasî, possibly also Hamnanu, Nabû-kabti-ahhešu ³⁵ and a priest.
SAA 16 63	Tarsî the (city-)scribe of Guzana; ³⁶ Zazâ the wife of Tarsî; ³⁷ the scribe Kufî; [the scribe] Tufî; the priest Adad-killanni and his wife; the chariot driver Qurđî; the chief of accounts Niri-Ia'u; [the depu]ty (governor) Palti-Ia'u.
SAA 16 64	Uncertain, possibly the <i>sartinnu</i> or [... o]f Harhar. ³⁸
SAA 16 65	Parruţu, a goldsmith of the queen's household; ³⁹ Sasî and a woman whose name is broken away. ⁴⁰
SAA 16 66	It is uncertain whether anybody is denounced in this letter.

been discussed, e.g., in Schwemer 2007, 121–122 (with previous literature); for a witchcraft accusation in a broken Middle Babylonian letter, see *ibid.*, 125.

³¹ In total, for example, 621 introductory formulae are available to us from the eighth century Neo-Assyrian letters, but inversely this means that “the beginning of many letters is too broken to be used in the statistics” (see Luukko 2012, 104, 114–115).

³² SAA 15 189 + 208 is a join by Greta Van Buylaere that will be edited elsewhere.

³³ In particular, the finding of a copy of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty tablet from a distant provincial capital of Kunalia – also known as Kullania, etc., in Neo-Assyrian sources – in 2009 (modern Tell Tayinat) (see Lauinger 2012 and, e.g., Fales 2012 [2013]; Lauinger 2013; Lauinger 2015; Ponchia 2014; Watanabe 2014; Watanabe 2015 all with previous literature) has sparked new interest in the Neo-Assyrian treaties.

³⁴ See SAA 2 6: 73–82, 108–122, 130–161, 499–507, and especially 259–265, 608–611. Such a public plea was not an innovation of Esarhaddon or of his scholars, but goes back to much earlier times, e.g., in Mesopotamian law codes. For the political climate after Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, producing informers in great numbers to denounce suspicious people as threats against the ruling house, see, e.g., already Parpola 1972, 30–31 (cf. also SAA 10 96: r.8–10, 161). For breaking the king's treaty, see, among others, SAA 10 316.

³⁵ Probably a scribe or an exorcist; see Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002, il, n. 88.

SAA 16 67	Possibly [<i>T</i>]attî, son of [NN], Sukkaya (and) Mu[...] and the lady Ekallitu. ⁴¹
SAA 16 68	Presumably the accused people are Zeru-ken and [<i>Adad</i>]-killanni. ⁴²
SAA 16 69	Šin-balassu-iqbi, son of Nikkal-iddina, and Sasî.
SAA 16 70	Probably [<i>Urdu</i>]-Issar. ⁴³
SAA 16 71	Sasî and perhaps the governor of Que. ⁴⁴
SAA 16 73	Unknown. ⁴⁵
SAA 16 75	Unknown. ⁴⁶
SAA 16 76	Possibly [<i>Inur</i>]ta-ahu-ušur, the chief <i>tailor</i> , and [NN], the nephew of Hanbî.
SAA 16 95	The governor of Assur, his wife and their servants.

Table II: Persons denounced in Neo-Assyrian letters.

As becomes clear from the summary provided in Table II, the denounced people were often high-ranking officials or other notable citizens of the Assyrian Empire; the list includes not a single case of a foreigner being denounced. Some people, Sasî in particular, appear in more than one letter and many of the above letters relate

³⁶ Other people may also have been denounced in this letter: Taršî's son, or sons in plural in r.25, acts as the chief of accounts; this passage is connected with Aššur-zeru-ibni's position, who may have been the governor of a neighbouring province (cf. [Aššur]-zeru-ibni in SAA 16 95: 15). SAA 16 63 also mentions the governor Šamaš-emuranni; the treasurer Nabû-qati-šabat; the chariot owner Adda-sakâ, and two informers by name (r.9–11) but obviously these people appear in positive light as well as Marduk-išmanni, or Marduk-šimanni (r.32e), and Milki-nuri (s.1).

³⁷ Together two (Zazâ and Adad-killanni's wife) or more women of the same clan (for the latter interpretation, see Schwemer 2007, 126 [n. 289]) are hinted at "practicing witchcraft" as they "bring down the moon from the sky" (*CMawR* 1, 8a: "This is very likely an allusion to the performance of witchcraft before astral deities (including the moon), a technique that the diagnostic texts, rituals and incantations primarily associate with 'cutting-of-the-throat' magic (*zikurudû*).") Of course one could go one step further, take the accusation "literally" and claim that this depicts an attempt by the human agents – or the supernatural witches – to cause a lunar eclipse. For a discussion of the related themes, but based on the *Eclipse Myth* (*Utukkû Lemnûtu*, Tablet XVI), see Wee 2014, 58–59.

³⁸ See r.10–11e.

³⁹ Scholarly disciplines that were restricted to a chosen few are said to have been taught to his son by a Babylonian.

⁴⁰ See r.8' of the letter. The woman in question must have been introduced in the part that has been broken off.

⁴¹ They seem to have stolen Ilumma-le'i's gold (lines 7'–8'); Ekallitu might also stand for Šadditu, see the critical apparatus of SAA 16 67 (p. 66), on r.5.

⁴² And not, e.g., Nasî'-bar, the village manager (lines 20' and r.7'), and Sumutî, the scribe (r.6'). Possibly the same [*Adad*]-killanni as in no. 63.

⁴³ For the restoration of the name, see *PNA* 3/II, 1405, no. 19. The letter concerns a horse.

⁴⁴ "May the king ask Sasî, just as the king wrote to us in Harran" (lines 3'–7'). At the end of this fragment, a person whose name is broken away refers to the treaty he has entered and vows to tell the king (of Assyria) whatever he hears (r.2–6).

⁴⁵ "... they were told to inform the king about anyone who is seen in his company, so he may be [pun]ished" SAA 16 73: 5'–r.5.

⁴⁶ "He committed a crime" (line 5'), and the fragment continues in the same vein.

to the same specific events in the final years of Esarhaddon's reign.⁴⁷

Non-anonymous Denunciations

Not all Neo-Assyrian denunciations were sent anonymously; many were also sent by name. The three letters of Nabû-rehtu-ušur, published as SAA 16 59–61, are probably the best-known examples of this type. The following letters also contain denunciations (or complaints) sent to Esarhaddon with the name of the sender included:⁴⁸

SAA 10, nos. 2, 112, 169, 199, 283, 289.⁴⁹

SAA 16, nos. 21, 32–33, 41, 42, 43.

SAA 18, nos. 54⁵⁰, 70, 100–106⁵¹, 113, 114–115, 119, 125–126, 128, 130, 131–132, 152, 153, 157, 160⁵², 170⁵³, 176, 181, 183, 185, 192, 201–202, 204 (NB letters from the correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal);

YBC 11382.⁵⁴

Table III: Non-anonymous denunciations sent to Esarhaddon.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ The fascinating but elusive Sasî – and the conspiracy against Esarhaddon – is, e.g., extensively discussed by Nissinen (1998, 108–153), Radner (2003) and Frahm (2010, 94–96, 120–127) as well as more briefly treated in *PNA* 3/I, 1093–1094.

⁴⁸ Note also SAA 5 149, a denunciation against the deputy of the palace herald (= Šulmu-beli?) by a high official or a local ruler (unfortunately the sender's name is broken away; the ruler of Hargu is sent to the king as a “witness”) and SAA 5 260, titled as “Insults and Accusations,” was presumably written to denounce a local ruler. The letter is fragmentary and does not preserve any personal names (the beginning is broken away: it could be anonymously sent, but this is not necessary). In addition, the absorbing but not very informative SAA 7 47, “Memorandum re Activities of a Eunuch, etc.,” in all likelihood from the late reign of Esarhaddon or early reign of Assurbanipal, may report on the malpractices of the two Kushite eunuchs Dari-šarru and Šulmu-šarri (see *PNA* 3/II, 1278, no. 12). This document might be an anonymous denunciation written on a two-column tablet, although less than half of the tablet is preserved, but as it shares a number of features with texts that concern debts, calling it a denunciation would be too speculative with the present knowledge.

⁴⁹ Cf. Parpola 1983, 475.

⁵⁰ This denunciation is related to SAA 8 309 and SAA 10 169 (listed above); see *PNA* 3/II, 1432a, no. 4b.

⁵¹ The beginning of these letters is broken away. Thus, it is not certain whether they were sent anonymously or not. To this group might also be added the fragmentary SAA 18 109, 112 and 116.

⁵² A letter by Šuzubu to Aqarâ, probably governor of Babylon (Reynolds 2003, xxx and xxxviii, n. 76 with previous literature).

⁵³ Nos. 114–115, 119, 130, 152, 157, 170 similarly as in the previous footnote (no. 170 not sent to the king of Assyria, but probably to the governor of Babylon).

⁵⁴ Frahm 2010.

⁵⁵ In Tables III and IV, I do not claim to have followed a rigorous methodology in listing the letters as denunciations. Some of them may be complaints, more akin to criticisms of an

A common feature of all of these letters is that they specifically denounce people by name or profession. The denounced people are usually said to conspire, incite, obstruct justice, plot against the whistle-blower or rebel against the king of Assyria. Some of these denunciations also refer to the king's treaty and/or illicit ritual practices (e.g., SAA 10 112 and SAA 16 21).

Although the most prominent denunciations available to us were sent to King Esarhaddon, the extant Sargon correspondence still comprises the largest Neo-Assyrian letter corpus, followed by that of Esarhaddon (and Assurbanipal). To serve as a counterbalance to the denunciations from Esarhaddon's reign, it is worth noting similar tablets from the voluminous correspondence of Sargon II:

SAA 1, nos. 35, 46, 106, 118, 146–147, 149, 153–155, 159, 171–172, 181–183, 191, 194, 205, 208, 224, 235–237, 244.
SAA 5, nos. 14, 46, 53, 63.

Table IV: Non-anonymous denunciations sent to Sargon II.

Many denunciations that included the name of the sender were thus sent to Sargon in the late eighth century BCE. This point reveals the degree to which we are dependent on the nature of the textual sources surviving and available to us. While the contextual differences between the anonymous denunciations and those written by name are subtle and difficult to detect, several points are worth noting: the choice between anonymous and non-anonymous denunciations seems to be influenced by the status of the participants, their familiarity or unfamiliarity with one another, their probable collegial rivalry, their ethnic background, i.e., whether all the parties involved were Assyrians or “foreigners,” and the distance of the place of crime from the Assyrian capital city. These were, consequently, probably among the specific criteria that determined whether an informer denounced people with or without his/her own name included in a letter.

In some cases, anonymity may have been chosen as a prudent strategy because of the practical risks of sending letters; this method may have especially been favoured in letters dispatched from a long distance. If a letter had fallen into the wrong hands it may have had dramatic consequences for the sender.⁵⁶ It is likely that the sensitivity of the subject matter also influenced the choice to write anonymously: at least in certain circumstances, the roles might be reversed, and the writers/accusers themselves could be accused of being “warlocks” or “witches”, viz., persons who want to hurt other people on purpose.

individual or a group of people, and not accusations. A number of them may also concern foreign enemies who are routinely slandered.

⁵⁶ “They intercepted the letter which was brought to Merodach-baladan and read it [in] our [pre]sence.” SAA 19 87: 8'–10'; but this letter from [Aššur-šallimanni] contains the only passage I know where a letter is explicitly said to have been intercepted. However, see also SAA 18 91 whose critical apparatus (Reynolds 2003, 74) provides previous literature on the letter.

Anti-Witchcraft Rituals

Let us turn now to the anti-witchcraft rituals. These are literary texts usually available to us in “library” copies from a limited number of significant Mesopotamian cities. Most of these texts have recently been published in two volumes of the *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals (CMAwR)*.⁵⁷ The third and final volume of this corpus is in preparation. To these one has to at least add *Maqlû*,⁵⁸ the most extensive and elaborate Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft ritual, and the royal purification ritual *Bīt rimki*.⁵⁹ The purpose of anti-witchcraft rituals can be defined as follows:

Anti-witchcraft rituals: The basic goal of most Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals is a simple reversal of the patient’s and the witches’ fate. The witchcraft that warlock and witch employed against their victim is removed from the latter and returned to its originators: warlock and witch are destroyed by having their witchcraft sent back to them and by the ritual destruction of their representations [= figurines].⁶⁰

As is common in the exorcist’s corpus, anti-witchcraft rituals are “anonymous” texts in a number of ways that render them problematic as a historical source: their authors are anonymous⁶¹ and so, mostly, are their ritual practitioners. Consequently, the identities of the exorcists (*āšīpus* and *mašmaššus*), who countered witchcraft often remains unknown, although colophons sometimes tell us their names.⁶² Nevertheless, these colophons also establish that the exorcists were mostly mere copyists and not the original authors of these texts. Be that as it may, an important feature of these rituals is that the accused male warlock or female witch is never mentioned by name, although sometimes these rituals contain a passage which states that the name of a warlock or a witch is to be written on the left shoulder of a figurine to be destroyed: “A few anti-witchcraft rituals instruct the exorcist to inscribe the figurines, representing the witches with their names. Texts that give instructions in case the name of the evildoer is unknown indicate that these inscriptions could consist of actual names rather than generic designations like ‘my

⁵⁷ *CMAwR* 1 (2011) and *CMAwR* 2 (2016). The same texts are also available online under the moniker CMAwRo: <<http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/cmawro/corpus>>. Further information on Mesopotamian witchcraft can be found at <<http://www.cmawro.altorientalistik.uni-wuerzburg.de>>.

⁵⁸ See now Abusch 2016 and Schwemer 2017.

⁵⁹ Thus far there is no critical edition of *Bīt rimki* with all the known manuscripts of the ritual. For a description of the ritual, see, e.g., Ambos 2013, 39, 41–45 or more extensively Hrůša 2015, 138–52. A German translation of the Ritual Tablet of *Bīt rimki* is published by Farber 1987.

⁶⁰ <<http://www.cmawro.altorientalistik.uni-wuerzburg.de/subject-glossary/>>.

⁶¹ In the case of tablets from Nineveh, often Assurbanipal’s library colophon type c (see Hunger 1968, no. 319) is extant, but it does not help us in identifying the author of a text.

⁶² Naturally also the archival context, especially in the case of tablets not from Nineveh, may appear to be helpful in determining the most likely exorcists who copied the tablets from earlier manuscripts.

witch’.”⁶³ But usually anti-witchcraft rituals “emphasize the patient’s ignorance of the identity of the witch,” and thus the identity of those accused of practicing witchcraft remains unknown to us.⁶⁴

Exceptionally, however, these texts may hint at the known identity of an evildoer:

If [you know] the one who [performed sorceries against him], you b[ur]y [... *under the thre]shold* of his gate. If you do not know the one who performed sorceries against him, [... . Then ...] ... will return to those who performed them (*CMAwR* 2, text 8.33: 15’–17’).

The patient of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals almost always appears as anonymous in the transmission of literary texts, although some exceptions are known.⁶⁵ This is, however, not a specific feature of anti-witchcraft rituals, but characteristic of the *āšipūtu* corpus in general and part of the text format. During the performance of the ritual, the patient was of course not anonymous.

Influential Law Codes and River Ordeal

One might maintain that anonymity is more common in other genres of written texts than in letters from ancient Mesopotamia. It is interesting in this regard to consider the comment of Abusch and Schwemer in their introduction to the *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Rituals*:

⁶³ *CMAwR* 1, 5a. Abusch and Schwemer also state in the preceding sentences that “It also prevents the anti-witchcraft ritual from creating even further social tensions through public witchcraft accusations against specific persons. This, of course, says little about the actual suspicions individual patients may have had about who had performed or instigated the witchcraft against them.” The examples of anti-witchcraft rituals with (proper?) names inscribed on figurines are collected and discussed in Schwemer 2007, 201–202, including notes 41–43. One may also note that in Neo-Assyrian queries, SAA 4, personal names were explicitly presented to the sun-god, especially in the queries of appointing officials (*ibid.*, Chapters 9 and 18), but in other categories too, and it was then formally Šamaš, who decided the loyalty and trustworthiness of a given person in many politically important cases.

⁶⁴ A note in *CMAwR* 2, text 8.33 (p. 283) on lines 15’–17’ elaborates on this: “knowing the identity of the alleged witch was of some significance for the way in which this ritual had to be performed. Anti-witchcraft rituals often prescribe that the names of the witches be written on the figurines representing them. In those contexts, *šumu* ‘name’ may refer to a generic designation like ‘my witch,’ but the present text would suggest that also actual names were employed.” Also, “But in fact there are some significant differences between anti-witchcraft rituals and the actions commonly imputed to warlock and witch. Anti-witchcraft rituals employ a consistently defensive rhetoric and regularly emphasize the patient’s ignorance of the identity of the witch. The rituals claim to be (and probably mostly were) performed openly, while the sorcerers are accused of having acted in secret. Any form of contact with the accused (but usually unknown) sorcerers is avoided ...” *CMAwR* 1, 20.

⁶⁵ In this respect exceptional are at least the rituals that concern Šamaš-šumu-ukin; they were found in Sippar.

Law collections from all periods of Mesopotamian history, from the late third millennium to the first half of the first millennium, impose a severe punishment, usually the death penalty, on those who have been found guilty of practising witchcraft against other people. (...) Of course, a witchcraft accusation was notoriously difficult to prove, and false witchcraft accusations would be punished as severely as the crime itself (*Laws of Hammurāpi*, § 2). This legal principle may have contributed to the fact that witchcraft suspicions seem to have led to public court cases only in exceptional cases and were usually dealt with on a ritual level by the performance of an anti-witchcraft ritual (*CMAwR* 1, 7b).⁶⁶

We may refresh our memory by taking a brief look at the second “paragraph”⁶⁷ of the Old Babylonian *Code of Hammurapi* and at a paragraph from the *Middle Assyrian Laws*;⁶⁸ their partial translations run as follows (the use of italics below is my emphasis):

Code of Hammurapi

§ 2 *If a man charges another man with practicing witchcraft but cannot bring proof against him*, he who is charged with witchcraft shall go to the divine River Ordeal, [he shall indeed submit to the divine River Ordeal]; if the divine River Ordeal should overwhelm him, his accuser shall take full legal possession of his estate; if the divine River Ordeal should clear that man and should he survive, *he who made the charge of witchcraft against him shall be killed; he who submitted to the divine River Ordeal shall take full legal possession of his accuser's estate* (Roth 1995, 81).⁶⁹

Middle Assyrian Laws

§ 47 *If either a man or a woman should be discovered practicing witchcraft, and should they prove the charges against them and find them guilty, they shall kill the practitioner of witchcraft.* A man who heard from an eyewitness to the witchcraft that he witnessed the practice of the witchcraft, who said to him, ‘*I myself saw it, that hearsay-witness shall go and inform the king.*’ (vii 14) *If the eyewitness should deny what he (i.e., the hearsay-witness) reports to the king, he (i.e., the hearsay-witness) shall declare before the divine Bull-*

⁶⁶ For an overview of witchcraft and the law in the ancient Near East, see, e.g., Westbrook 2006.

⁶⁷ “The designation by seriatim numbers or letters of these units and the division of the text into ‘laws,’ ‘provisions,’ or ‘paragraphs’ is purely the work of modern scholarship and not of the native compilers.” (Roth 1995, 3).

⁶⁸ Whereas the roughly contemporary Hittite laws state as follows: “§ 44b If anyone performs a purification ritual on a person, he shall dispose of the remnants (of the ritual) in the incineration dumps. But if he disposes of them in someone’s house, it is sorcery and a case for the king.” As well as: “§ 111 [If] anyone forms clay for [an image] (for magical purposes), it is sorcery and a case for the king’s court.” Furthermore, “Telipinu Edict 91 50: Regarding cases of sorcery in Hattuša: keep cleaning up (i.e., investigating and punishing) instances. Whoever in the royal family practises sorcery, seize him and deliver him to the king’s court.” Hoffner in Roth 1995, 223, 230 and 237.

⁶⁹ On an already earlier connection of witchcraft and the River Ordeal in §13 of the Sumerian laws of Ur-Namma, see Schwemer 2007, 118 (n. 260 with previous literature); cf. Roth 1995, 18 and 21 (n. 12).

the-Son-of-the-Sun-God, “He surely told me” – and thus he is clear. As for the *eyewitness* who spoke (of witnessing the deed to his comrade) and then denied (it to the king), the king shall interrogate him as he sees fit, in order to determine his intentions; an *exorcist* shall have the man make a declaration when they make a *purification*, and then he himself (i.e., the exorcist) shall say as follows, ‘*No one shall release any of you from the oath you swore by the king and by his son; you are bound by oath to the stipulations of the agreement to which you swore by the king and by his son*’ (Roth 1995, 172f.).

The message conveyed by these Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian “law codes” had far-reaching implications in ancient Mesopotamia. It might be exaggerating to say that anonymity in texts to do with accusations and/or denunciations was a logical corollary of these paragraphs, but certainly they reflect a prevailing view held both in Babylonia and in Assyria in both the second and early first millennium BCE. Thus, nothing indicates that public witchcraft accusations were ever taken lightly in the ancient Mesopotamia. On the contrary, there were probably always very few of these because the accusations could have been turned against the one who expressed or initiated them and result in severe punishment.⁷⁰

The river ordeal, *hursān*, which was to prove the accused person’s guilt or innocence, was still in use in the Neo-Assyrian period.⁷¹ None of the preserved cases from this period, however, provide us with a clear-cut example corroborating the deployment of the river ordeal against the suspects of witchcraft. In this respect, a horizontally inscribed Neo-Assyrian tablet 83-1-18,231⁷² is probably the most interesting piece of evidence we have. It records two cases of the river ordeal resulting from the denunciations of the official named Asalluhi-nadin-ahi. An absorbing detail of the text is the inclusion of the name of this informer himself, who served under Milki-nuri.⁷³ Asalluhi, Marduk’s alter ego in magic (originally the two names were separate), is an extremely rare name in seventh century Assyria. Moreover, the fact that Asalluhi-nadin-ahi denounced two persons by referring to a ‘king’s word’⁷⁴ explicitly made these two river ordeals cases for the king.⁷⁵ In both instances the nature of the crime was extraordinary since the denounced persons

⁷⁰ See, e.g., the discussion in *CMAwR* 1, 8.

⁷¹ “The procedure was basically applied when other means of proof (documentary evidence, testimony of witnesses, oath) failed to reveal the truth” Faist (2014, 198), with previous literature, whose article offers the most updated discussion on the ordeal in the Neo-Assyrian context.

⁷² Published in Kataja 1987.

⁷³ Milki-nuri’s importance and an approximate date of this document was already pointed out by Kataja (1987, 66). Later on, *PNA* (2/II, 752, with previous literature) has succinctly summarized what we know about him. Presumably the same person, eunuch of the queen, is attested in SAA 7 130; SAA 11 37; SAA 14 1–7; SAA 16 20, 60: r.12’ and in the above discussed anonymous denunciation SAA 16 63. Unfortunately, we do not know much about him, but Milki-nuri was in the service of successive queens. He may even have been a leading officer in the Assyrian “secret police.” Be that as it may, he is certainly an enigmatic person about whose activities we would like to learn more.

⁷⁴ *abat šarri*; on this institution, cf., e.g., Postgate 1974 and Frahm 2010, 106 (with previous literature).

⁷⁵ Cf. n. 68 (above) for what is said in the Hittite laws about sorcery.

wanted to give the name of an Assyrian king to their sons – an act that seems to have been considered a crime.⁷⁶ (This is probably because such an act can be interpreted to have an evil intent.) It is worth noting that in at least one of the two instances the denounced person was a local ruler on the far-away Kašiyari mountains and his “professional” title *bēl āli*, literally “city lord,” in itself indicates the area’s remoteness from Assyria proper.⁷⁷

Women as Witches in Neo-Assyrian Denunciations?

Finally, we may ask what part women played in Neo-Assyrian denunciations.⁷⁸ Were they believed to be “witches,” blamed for their pernicious influence and feared because of their behaviour? Or were they scapegoats, identified as intrinsic carriers of evil so that they might be blamed for all manner of harms? Unfortunately our sources are too insufficient to answer any of these questions in a nuanced way. Therefore, these alternative “angles” to define the role of women in these texts cannot signify any practical difference as to the treatment of women but, at least theoretically, such rhetorical questions might provide interesting food for thought concerning Mesopotamian mental history. In any case, the readiness to treat women harshly and accuse them seems a shared feature of Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals and Neo-Assyrian denunciations.⁷⁹ Consequently, it may be observed that a relatively high proportion of women do appear in the Neo-Assyrian denunciations in the final years of Esarhaddon’s reign. Nonetheless, Table II (above) clearly shows that the majority of denounced people were men, whereas Table V enumerates the women involved in detrimental activities *against* the Assyrian royals:

[1] A slave-girl of Bel-ahu-ušur (SAA 16 59).

[2] The daughter of Bambâ (SAA 16 60).

[3] Zazâ, the wife of Taršî, and the wife of the priest Adad-killanni (SAA 16 63).

[4] A woman – with a man, probably Sasî – whose name is broken away (SAA 16 65: r.8’).

[5] Possibly the lady Ekallitu or Šadditu (SAA 16 67).

⁷⁶ “An act that was evidently considered a serious royal insult” Faist 2014, 196.

⁷⁷ See Radner 2006, especially p. 286.

⁷⁸ “Witchcraft accusations ... In all cases so far known, the accused persons are women, a fact that agrees with the primarily female characterization of the witch in the stereotypes found in the incantations and prayers of the anti-witchcraft rituals. Also the methods and effects of witchcraft as described in the letters are in line with the evidence from the ritual and medical texts.” *CMAwR* 1, 7b; see also Schwemer 2007, 250. For a study that deals with these stereotypes and women’s role in witchcraft, see Sefati and Klein 2002. Note also that Rollin 1983 offers a useful, although partly outdated general discussion, which is – despite its title – not really about the Neo-Assyrian period, and without any concrete or speculative witchcraft accusations of that era, but cf. *ibid.*, 36 and 42–44.

⁷⁹ See also Frahm’s (2010, 127f.) remarks upon denounced women and the role of a woman named Tabalitu in the letter, YBC 11382, edited by him.

[6] The wife of the governor of Assur and the daughters of the singer Qisaya (SAA 16 95).

Table V: Denounced women in letters to Esarhaddon

The crimes of these women are spelled out in the denunciations. The slave girl's crime, "false prophecy,"⁸⁰ is dramatically described in no. [1]:

[...] in a suburb of Harran; since Sivan (III), she is *enraptured* (= *sarhat*) and speaks nice words about him: 'It is the word of Nusku⁸¹: The kingship is for Sasî. I will destroy the name and seed of Sennacherib!' (SAA 16 59: r.2'-5').

On the other hand, the accusation in no. [3] is euphemistic, but the demanded punishment merciless:

Zazâ, the wife of Taršî, and her sons should not be kept alive. O king, my lord! The priest is a brother-in-law of Taršî. Their wives bring down the moon from the sky! (SAA 16 63: r.24-27)

It is not entirely clear what is going on in no. [4], but the letter writer's reaction gives an idea of the seriousness of the malpractice: "Let the king, my lord, give orders: if he [Sasî? Cf. r.2'] daubs her with *hiddu*, they should give it to me. The *hiddu* must be given to me, (whether) by force, (or) without anybody('s permission)!" (SAA 16 65: r.7'-10')

In no. [6], immediately following Sennacherib's death, the wife of the governor of Assur, whom Sennacherib had introduced in his palace, was brought out of the palace by her husband. On this occasion, "she burnt a female goat-kid" (SAA 16 95: 5), while the singer, Qisaya, and his daughters kept singing (hymns) before the governor's entourage (lines 10-11).

Unfortunately in no. [2] the fragmentary condition of the tablet prevents us from finding out whether the daughter of Bambâ was somehow involved in a rebellion or not (SAA 16 60: 6'-8').⁸²

Finally, in no. [5], Ekallitu's (or Šadditu's, Esarhaddon's sister) involvement in anything negative is purely speculative because of the letter's very fragmentary condition, although it reports on officials having stolen (probably) gold and presumably also on their other crimes.

Usually these accusations appear without any explanation, and one has to deduce the reasons from the context. In nos. [1], [4] and [6], one might label the

⁸⁰ Nissinen 1998, 121, 151-152 and 166-67.

⁸¹ Nissinen (1998, 122-125) correctly argues that the word of Nusku is invoked in the letter because of the god's cult in Harran. The case might be strengthened by Nusku's protagonist role in the most elaborate anti-witchcraft ritual *Maqlû* (for a discussion, see Abusch 2002, 309, references s.v. Nusku), but, in the absence of proof, one can only ponder whether the word of "Nusku" had to be countered with the performance of *Maqlû* in this case. In the "prophecy" of SAA 16 59, the most striking features are the deity's legitimation of the kingship for Sasî and the vow to destroy Sennacherib's name and offspring.

⁸² For a general discussion of this rebellion, see bibliographic references in n. 47.

crimes as illicit ritual practices, though at times, one cannot but speculate whether the most important factor behind these accusations resulted from direct gender discrimination. For example, such a stance is quite expressly pronounced in a text edited in *CMAwR* 1: “Šamaš, I do not know the person who keeps hold of me – truly, it is a woman, this is her image” (text 9.1: 4). And later on the same text states:

Šamaš, this is she, this is the figurine representing her, since she is not present, her figurine is standing (here). With regard to her, whether I know her or not, I bathe myself with water over her, I am returning the dirt to her – let her receive it from me! (*CMAwR* 1, text 9.1: 30–33)

Similarly, as to the “slave girl”⁸³ in SAA 16 59, whose name is not given in this denunciation, one may be reminded of the two anonymous slanders, SAA 3 29–30, against Bel-eṭir, leader of Bit-Ibâ. These two texts stereotypically attribute bad influence and low status to women: in no. 29 to the woman *Nasqat* (lines 6–7), Hulalitu (lines 8ff.) and “a prostitute”⁸⁴ (r.4). The “lowly” familial background of the slandered Bel-eṭir is further highlighted by equating him in no. 30, an *incantation* against him, with a “slave girl, woman, slave of the woman Balihitu, ‘beard’ of raped girls!” (line 4).⁸⁵

What many of these texts seem to have in common is their stereotypical role casting of women.⁸⁶ One may also speculatively reflect on the possibility that the most powerful women of the Assyrian Empire – the queen mother Naqi’a, Esarhaddon’s mother, or Šeru’a-eṭerat, Esarhaddon’s sister, or Libbali-šarrat, Assurbanipal’s wife and the queen in his reign – had something to do with all this. As briefly discussed above, the enigmatic official Milki-nuri, active in the events leading to the accusations of people, served under the successive queens during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Naturally, the role of the queen’s household should be clarified with additional evidence.⁸⁷

⁸³ “The appellation *amtu* does not have to be understood literally since it may be a defamatory designation of the person whom the writer does not want to call a prophetess.” (Nissinen 1998, 124, see also *ibid.*, 125 and 150–152.)

⁸⁴ Possibly referring to Hulalitu. Note that the obverse of the tablet, which provides the background of insults against Bel-eṭir, is in very fragmentary condition.

⁸⁵ On Balihitu, a daughter of Šamaš-ibni, leader of the powerful Chaldean Bit-Dakkuri tribe, see *PNA* 1/II, 259–260 and 3/II, 1198–1199 (s.v. Šamaš-ibni, no. 4).

⁸⁶ See also Abusch (2002, 3–25), for a discussion, based on literary texts, on a human (mainly woman) transformed into the demonized supernatural witch.

⁸⁷ The denunciations by the anonymous informer of SAA 16 62–68 provide other indirect links with the queen’s household. For example, servants of the queen are mentioned first, before those of the crown prince in no. 63: r.20–21; the informer knows about the activities of Parruṭu, a goldsmith of the queen’s household (no. 65); he mentions the lady Ekallitu (or Šadditu) whose natural setting may have been the queen’s household (no. 67). Moreover, Nabû-rehtu-ušur, the sender of nos. 59–61, may have been “in the queen mother’s employ”; see Nissinen 1998, 108, n. 423. On a related note, we do not know much about the consequences of the death of Esarhaddon’s wife Ešarra-hammat in 673/672 (cf. Radner 2003, 168).

Conclusions

As to the purpose of the two text groups under discussion, the rationale behind anti-witchcraft rituals is to keep the patient or beneficiary of a ritual alive. According to these texts, the deaths of those who have caused the misfortune of the patient are necessary and, often, explicitly demanded: “Let them die, but let me live” *CMAwR* 1, text 8.2: 111 (and passim).⁸⁸ In practice, however, the death of evildoers is only carried out symbolically by destroying the figurines representing them. In a number of Neo-Assyrian denunciations, correspondingly, the goal is to gain the authority to seize the suspected conspirators. The urge to kill and destroy those who threatened the lives of the king and his offspring is also echoed, so that the king may outlive his opponents and be healthy. Therefore, the themes of killing and destroying, on the one hand, and living and surviving, on the other, are combining factors between the two genres.⁸⁹

Contrary to anti-witchcraft rituals, in Neo-Assyrian denunciations the witchcraft accusations are only implicit and euphemistic.⁹⁰ But, as these denunciations concern real-life situations, involving other people of flesh and blood, and not just figurines, they deviate from the symbolic actions of the rituals. That is probably why even the clearest witchcraft accusations (as in SAA 16 63) are moderate and subtle. Nonetheless, the exclamation, *šarru bēlī Šamaš*, “The king, my lord, is the sun!” almost at the end of the same letter (SAA 16 63: r.33e) may imply that this lengthy denunciation was expected to result in a symbolic legal case in a way similar to many anti-witchcraft rituals addressed to Šamaš. Although it is most likely that the writer of SAA 16 63 expected the king, with his infallible authority, to give his verdict immediately.

With respect to the discussion above, it is a rare feature that the identity of a writer or a sender of a letter is not given in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian denunciations.⁹¹ Consequently, Neo-Assyrian officials mostly denounced their colleagues or rivals candidly with their names inscribed in a letter. The decision to write anonymously, when it was undertaken, did not necessarily derive from a single motive, but was altogether rather the result of a combination of several different factors. Perhaps most importantly, anonymity is indeed a well-chosen strategy that functions as a form of self-protection in matters of a delicate and sensitive nature both in anti-witchcraft rituals and denunciations. But, what we have preserved in a small corpus of clearly identifiable Neo-Assyrian anonymous denunciations is not a hermetic group of texts. (Unfortunately, the state of preservation of many letters prevents us from identifying more anonymous denunciations with certainty.) The senders of these anonymous denunciations may often have worried that their missives would be intercepted, although an even more decisive factor in their

⁸⁸ Interestingly the same text also states earlier that “Šamaš, I[e]t me, ((NN)), know them and prosper!” *CMAwR* 1, text 8.2: 90.

⁸⁹ It needs to be stressed that the urge to kill and destroy is not only limited to anti-witchcraft rituals and denunciations, but also occur, e.g., in prophecies, royal inscriptions and treaties.

⁹⁰ Although one could interpret the accusations of SAA 16 21: 22–r.7 as if they were candidly referring to the performed *zikurudū*-magic, if not naming them as such, the letter from Šamaš-šumu-ukin to the king (Esarhaddon) is not an anonymous denunciation.

⁹¹ From anonymous letters, however, the entire introductory formula may be missing.

decisions was the gravity of the accusation, which might potentially be turned back on the accuser.⁹²

How the question of anonymity is intertwined with acceptable social behaviour is made clear by the earlier Mesopotamian law collections and further reflected both in Neo-Assyrian letters and in Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals.⁹³ By setting the norms of society, in addition to law collections, the Neo-Assyrian treaties had an enormous impact. As the single most important treaty, Esarhaddon's succession treaty between the king and his subjects intensified the hunt for any potential political opponents.⁹⁴

In gauging the impetus for denunciations, anonymous or otherwise, the fierce competition for employment at the royal court created fertile soil for denigration.⁹⁵ Related is the need for self-protection, defence against one's own potential slander and oppression and to receive a just and favourable treatment in an audience with the Assyrian king or his high officials.⁹⁶ Thus, overall, one should not underestimate the role of "fellow-humans," who were more than willing to tarnish their colleagues' reputation.⁹⁷ Yet denouncing a colleague was a risky and despicable act in practice, and it was up to the king and his highest palace officials to decide how well slander and denigration were tolerated in the social context of the Neo-Assyrian court.

With respect to the Mesopotamian anti-witchcraft rituals' silence on the names of the patients', clients' or beneficiaries' enemies and opponents, a common feature between these and the anonymous Neo-Assyrian denunciations is the unswerving judgment of the patients' and king's personal enemies and political opponents.⁹⁸ In this light, it was probably safer to denigrate⁹⁹ any personal enemies or rivals

⁹² The non-anonymous letter SAA 16 78, titled as "The Matter of the 'Third Man' of the Palace Scribe," also concerns women and may touch upon topics comparable to those discussed here. Mannu-ki-Libbali, the writer of the letter, complains to the king that the palace scribe is his "mortal enemy" (line 18 and r.4) and that "the wife of the 'third man' [of the palace scribe] speaks against me" (r.10). These animosities seem to at least partially result from something that involved the settling of the Kushite girls in the royal palace (lines e.22–23).

⁹³ The use of a "technical" term *bēl dabābi* "(male) adversary" in anti-witchcraft rituals also emphasizes the legal aspect of these texts.

⁹⁴ SAA 10 199 provides an example according to which women were hiding information from the king. As they violated the treaty stipulations, they had to die; for a discussion, see Frahm 2010, 112 (n. 64) and 127–128; cf. Parpola 1983, 121 and Nissinen 1998, 129. In SAA 16 59 and many other letters, the writer or sender's action is expressly motivated by the treaty.

⁹⁵ At the end of his reign, Esarhaddon kept the identity of the scholars advising him anonymous from one another; see Verderame 2014, 718–726. On scholarly rivalry, see, e.g., recently Wee 2014, 51–52.

⁹⁶ The popularity of a group of incantations known as Egalkura, "Entering the Palace," reflects this. These incantations are "about how to get access to the authorities in charge of jurisdiction in order to have one's claim or defense allowed and investigated, and to have the legal administrator judge favorably on one's case" (Stadhouders 2013, 305–306).

⁹⁷ Cf. *CMAwR* 1, 3b. "In most texts the stereotype of warlock and witch represents them as fellow-humans who have used specific sorcerous techniques or who have acquired a professional knowledge of such techniques and have been employed by other people to deploy their skills against the patient" (*ibid.*, 3a).

⁹⁸ On the way the enemy rulers were depicted in Assyrian royal inscriptions, see, e.g., Fales 1982 and Zawadzki 2014.

⁹⁹ See, e.g., the *Content* of *CMAwR* 1, text 8.13 and cf., e.g., *CMAwR* 1, text 8.3.2: 26.

by writing anonymously. In particularly serious accusations, which may include requests to kill conspirators, and to destroy figurines representing conspirators in anti-witchcraft rituals, we are dealing with two genres of texts that justify aggression and violence as acts of self-defence. Usually these texts first employ a more defensive tone seeking justice for a victim, but they subsequently turn aggressive, reversing the wrong the victims of hideous witchcraft have experienced.

It may come as a surprise that the unique corpus of scholarly letters edited by Parpola in SAA 10 does not, with one notable exception, denounce women. In his letter to Esarhaddon, a certain Kudurru boasts of having sent many “witches” to the king (SAA 10 371: r.2–5).¹⁰⁰ In any case, the scholarly corpus was created by the same people who also authored or at least copied many anti-witchcraft rituals for the kings of Assyria, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal; the royal family; and the imperial elite attached to the royal court at Nineveh. If we consider the very nature of the SAA 10 letters then, many therapeutic letters of the corpus, in which the king and his family appear as patients of various illnesses, are directly related to anti-witchcraft rituals.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, as these letters touch upon the mortality of royal figures, exposing their weaknesses, their contents are private, and they are not like the political, administrative letters that we can easily imagine to have gone through many hands before reaching the king. Correspondingly, any publicity of these medical royal letters would have been scandalous, and in a way distantly comparable to the possible consequences resulting from modern headlines screaming that our medical records are lost, stolen, or even leaked out to the public. Since the contents of these letters were potentially very shameful to the royal family, one may ask as a rhetorical question: why were they saved for posterity?

In spite of his successful military campaigns, with the conquest of Egypt as a highlight, and as a father of many children, guaranteeing the succession of the ruling dynasty, the end of Esarhaddon’s reign is clouded by all the negative conditions of “crisis, illness, insecurity and conflict.”¹⁰² In 672 at the latest, with the enforcement of his succession treaty, a text that forbids in plain terms the use of witchcraft and related evil deeds against the crown prince designate Assurbanipal,¹⁰³ Esarhaddon put into effect a plan to curb any anti-royal activities. Consequently, at the end of his reign the Assyrian Empire experienced an unforeseen purging of any suspected enemies of the crown. Although, as easily happens with such a pact, whose conditions were too far-fetched and could be interpreted too arbitrarily, it made many subjects of the king

¹⁰⁰ According to *PNA* (2/I, 633, no. 14), the sender of this letter is a Babylonian astrologer, but, as he refers to “the eclipse of Tammuz (IV)” in such a general manner in the letter, there is no way to ascertain his profession. This passage, the only one in a NA/NB letter context that uses the work *kaššāptu*, “witch,” is also briefly discussed in Schwemer 2007, 126. Sefati and Klein (2002, 569, n. 3) refer to an alternative translation of this passage given in *CAD K*, 291, but that translation does not make good sense since this passage, until the end of the letter, is about the writer’s good deeds, promoting himself and Nabû-šumu-lišir, obviously an exorcist close to him, to the king.

¹⁰¹ For example, SAA 10 200–201 and many others.

¹⁰² Note, e.g., “Witchcraft belief became virulent only in situations of crisis, illness, insecurity and conflict. (...) The person of the king always deserved special protection” since “because of his many adversaries and enemies the king was regarded as a prime potential victim of witchcraft” (*CMAR* 1, 4b).

¹⁰³ SAA 2 6: 259–265.

suspicious of anti-royal activities. The sour words of Urdu-Nanaya (physician-in-ordinary to the king), for example, contextualize very well the paranoid atmosphere of Esarhaddon's safety measures at the end of his reign:

Because of this speech of the king, Aššur and the great gods bound and handed over to the king these criminals who plotted against the (king's) goodness and who, having concluded the king's treaty together with his servants before Aššur and the great gods, broke the treaty. The goodness of the king caught them up. However, they made all other people hateful in the eyes of the king, smearing them like a tanner with the oil of fish (SAA 10 316: 19–r.8).¹⁰⁴

Earlier, the same tablet makes a reference to the suppressed conspiracy, i.e., to the same events to which the denunciations discussed in this article relate.

Finally, to tie up the connection between a group of Neo-Assyrian denunciations with anti-witchcraft rituals on a personal and social level, the author, less likely a mere sender, of the bulk of denunciations to Esarhaddon (SAA 16 62–68) was probably either an exorcist or an all-round scholar versed in exorcism.¹⁰⁵ One may maintain this claim by referring to the writer's advice to the king in no. 62: 5–13 to perform his (exorcistic) rites at once owing to an ominous matter that is related to the conspirators' doings (the fragmentary reverse of the tablet), and to the above-quoted passage on the malpractice with *hiddu* (no. 65: r.7'–10').

In times of crisis, there was no mercy for those who were considered the enemies of the crown. Presumably many men and women were thus executed as perpetrators of insurrection because of the specific stipulation in Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (SAA 2 6: 130–146) that demands the seizing, killing, and destroying of traitors.¹⁰⁶ A well-preserved passage in the Tell Tayinat version of Esarhaddon's succession treaty seems to suggest that the destiny of those who violate the treaty is similar to many figurines of witches and warlocks:¹⁰⁷ “May they *burn* you,¹⁰⁸ your

¹⁰⁴ Also quoted, e.g., in Nissinen 1998, 129 and commented in Parpola 1983, 242. As pointed out to me by D. Schwemer, the last sentence of this quotation is a direct allusion to anti-witchcraft rituals. For the use of fish oil in these rituals, cf. *CMAwR* 1, texts 8.1: 51', 58'; 8.4: 59; 8.14: 10'; *CMAwR* 2, texts 8.17: 16'; 11.3: 41; 11.5: 8.

¹⁰⁵ Note also Nabû-rehtu-ušur's familiarity with exorcism, reflected in his words: “May this letter be a spell, it will [...] upon you! Let the people die [quick]ly before they get ahe[ad] (of you)” SAA 16 60: r.16'–18' (cf. Nissinen 1998, 127).

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Nissinen 1998, 116 (n. 439), 117 (n. 442)–119, 122, 125. As the laconic entry in the chronicle texts indicates: “In Assyria the king put many of his magnates to the sword” (Grayson 1975, 86 [Chronicle 1: iv 29], 127 [Chronicle 14: 27]), these “traitors” included several very high officials.

¹⁰⁷ It should be emphasized, however, that the passage is not a comparison to do with witches, but compares the destiny of these “evildoers” with that of burnt offerings.

¹⁰⁸ *li-qi-lu-ku-nu* (of *qalû*) in T 1801: VIII 34, corresponds to line 636C of the Nimrud version, where the word is broken; Tell Tayinat excavation number (T 1801) is informed by J. Lauinger (personal communication). For an epenthetic vowel before the stress, in particular before *l*, see, e.g., Luukko 2004, 103. This interpretation, which slightly deviates from the one given in Lauinger 2012, 122 and Lauinger 2017, 166 (§ 96A), may be considered “expected” as it creates a powerful image. Here the word for a “male kid” is *gadû*, but note that it was a more common practice in rituals to burn a female kid, *unîqu*; see SAA 16 95: 5 (quoted above); for further references, see *CAD* U&W, 159b–160a.

sons, and your daughters [li]ke a spring lamb or kid.”

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