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Religious Texts as a Historical Source : Assyrian Prophecies as Sources for Esarhaddon's Nineveh A Inscription

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Abstract

The basic contractile unit of the sarcomere, will contract as the muscle postmortem. Depending on the conditions, such as the rate of pH decline and the mechanical restraint of the muscles, the longitudinal shortening will result in various postmortem sarcomere lengths as well as differences in the interaction between the myosin and actin filaments. This shortening is underlying the described as rigor contraction, thaw rigor, cold shortening and heat shortening combination with the molecular architecture of the sarcomere. The myosin filaments and the S2 units, the interaction with the actin filaments, the boundaries formed by the Z-disk will subsequently influence basic meat quality including tenderness and water holding capacity. Biochemical reactions from protein to glycogen metabolism interrelate with the sarcomere length in a complex way. Sarcomere length is also influencing the eating quality of meat products.

Keywords: Rigor contraction, thaw rigor, cold shortening, heat shortening, water holding

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2. Structural aspects
 - 2.1. Myosin filaments
 - 2.2. Actin filaments
 - 2.3. Titin, nebulin and obscurin
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 - 2.5. The M-band

ABBREVIATIONS

MARV I = H. Freydank, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin N.F. 3), Berlin 1976.

MARV II = H. Freydank, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin N.F. 5), Berlin 1982.

MARV III = H. Freydank, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 92), Berlin 1994.

MARV IV = H. Freydank, C. Fischer, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Ninurta (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 99)), Saarbrücken 2001.

MARV V = H. Freydank, B. Feller, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 106), Saarbrücken 2004.

MARV VI = H. Freydank, B. Feller, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 109), Saarbrücken 2005.

MARV VII = H. Freydank, B. Feller, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 111), Saarbrücken 2006.

MARV VIII = H. Freydank, B. Feller, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 119), Wiesbaden 2007.

MARV IX = H. Freydank, B. Feller, *Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 125), Wiesbaden 2010.

MSL 12 = M. Civil, *The Series of the Royal Related Texts* (Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon 12), Roma 1969.

NATAPA 1 = F. M. Fales, L. Jakob, *R V W -Assyrian Texts from Assur. Private Archives in the 9 R U G H U D V L D W L V F K H V 0* (State Archives of Assyria Bulletin 1991) W ,

NATAPA 2 = K. Deller, F. M. Fales, L. Jakob, *R V W -Assyrian Texts from Assur. Private \$ U F K L Y H V L Q W K H 9 R U G H U D V L D W* (State Archives of Assyria Bulletin 1991) W ,

ND = field numbers of tablets excavated in Nimrud

NL = H. W. F. Saggs, *7 K H 1 L P U X G / H V P M S I U V Iraq 17* (1955), 21-50 until Iraq 36 (1974), 199-221.

NWL = J. V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists: A Study of Men and Administration at the Assyrian Capital in the Eighth Century BC* (Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud), London 1972.

OIP 117 = S. W. Cole, *The Early Neo-Babylonian Governor's Archive from Nippur* (Chicago 1996)

PNA = K. Radner, H. D. Baker (eds.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Helsinki 1998-2011).

PNA 1/I = K. Radner (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Part I: A, Helsinki 1998.

PNA 1/II = K. Radner (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, part II: B±G, Helsinki, 1999.

PNA 2/I = H. D. Baker (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* 2, Part I: HK, Helsinki, 2000.

PNA 2/II = H. D. Baker (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* 2, Part II: LN, Helsinki, 2001.

PNA 3/I = H. D. Baker (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* 3, Part I: P±, Helsinki 2002.

PNA 3/II = H. D. Baker (ed.), *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* 3, Part II: ±Z, Helsinki 2011.

RGTC 7/1 = A. Bagg, *Die Orts- und Gewässername der neuassyrischen Zeit* I: Die Levante (Répertoire géographique des textes cunéiformes [Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Ostens] 7/1 [Wiesbaden, 2007].

RIMA 1 = A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the 3rd and 2nd Millenia BC (to 1115 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods), Toronto 1987.

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RIMA 2 = A. K. Grayson *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1185-9 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods) Toronto, 1991.

RIMA 3 = A. K. Grayson *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II: 858-745 BC* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Assyrian Periods) Toronto 1996.

RIMB 2 = G. Frame *Rulers of Babylonia from the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of the Assyrian Domination (1157-612 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Babylonian Periods) 2), Toronto, 1995.

RIME 4 = D. R. Frayne *Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)* (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia. Early Periods), Toronto 1990.

RINAP 1 = H. Tadmor, Sh. Yamada *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727 BC), and Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), Kings of Assyria* (Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period Vol. 1), Winona Lake, IN, 2011.

RINAP 3/1 = A. K. Grayson, J. Novotny *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC) Part 1 Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (vol. 3/1), Winona Lake, IN, 2012.

RINAP 3/2 = A. K. Grayson, J. Novotny *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC) Part 1 Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period* (vol. 3/2), Winona Lake, IN, 2014.

RINAP 4 = E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (689 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period), Winona Lake, IN 2011.

RINAP 5/1 = J. Novotny, J. Jeffers *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), and Sennacherib (627-612 BC), Kings of Assyria, Part 1* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5/1), Winona Lake 2018.

RIA = *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* Leipzig, Berlin, New York, 1928±

SAA = *State Archives of Assyria* Helsinki 1987±

SAA 1 = S. Parpola *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I. Letters from Assyria and the West (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1987.

SAA 2 = S. Parpola, K. Watanabe *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1988.

SAA 3 = A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanies (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1989.

SAA 4 = I. Starr, *Queries to the Sungod: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1990.

SAA 5 = G.B. Lanfranchi, S. Parpola *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II: Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1990.

SAA 6 = T. Kwasman, S. Parpola *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I. Tiglath-Pileser III through Esarhaddon (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1991.

SAA 7 = F. M. Fales, J. N. Postgate *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I. Palace and Temple Administration (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1992.

SAA 8 = H. Hunger, *Astrological Reports to Assyrian Kings (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1992.

SAA 9 = S. Parpola *Assyrian Prophecies (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1997.

SAA 10 = S. Parpola *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Schools (State Archives of Assyria X)*, Helsinki, 1993.

SAA 11 = F. M. Fales, J. N. Postgate *Imperial Administrative Records, Part II: Provincial and Military Administration (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1995.

SAA 12 = L. Kataja, R. Whiting *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1995.

SAA 13 = S. W. Cole, P. Machinist *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Priests to Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 1998.

SAA 14 = R. Mattila, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part II. Assurbanipal through Sennacherib (State Archives of Assyria)*, Helsinki, 2002.

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SAA 15 = A. Fuchs, S. Parpoli, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III. Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces* (State Archives of AssyriaXV), Helsinki, 2002.

SAA 16 = M. Luukko, G. Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon* (State Archives of AssyriaXVI), Helsinki, 2002.

SAA 17 = M. Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib* (State Archives of AssyriaXVII), Helsinki, 2003.

SAA 18 = F. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sîn-* (State Archives of AssyriaXVIII), Helsinki, 2003.

SAA 19 = M. Luukko, *The Correspondence of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II from Calah/Nimrud* (State Archives of AssyriaXIX), Helsinki, 2012.

SAA 20 = S. Parpoli, *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic texts* (Helsinki 2017).

SAA 21 = S. Parpoli, *The Correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part II: Letters from the King and from Northern and Central Babylonia* (State Archives of AssyriaXX), Helsinki, 2018.

SAA 22 = G. Frame, *The Correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part II: Letters from Southern Babylonia* (State Archives of AssyriaXXI), Helsinki, forthcoming.

SAAS 8 = A. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.* (State Archives of Assyria Studies III), Helsinki 1998.

StAT 1 = K. Radner, *Ein neuassyrisches Privatarchiv der Tempelgoldschmiede von Sippar* (Studien zu den Assur-Texten 1), Saarbrücken 1999.

StAT 2 = V. Donbaz, S. Parpoli, *Neo-Assyrian Legal Texts in Istanbul* (Studien zu den Assur-Texten 2), Saarbrücken 2001.

StAT 3 = B. Faist, *Alltagstexte aus neuassyrischen Archiven und Bibliotheken der Stadt Assur* (Studien zu den Assur-Texten 3), Wiesbaden 2007.

TAVO = Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Ostens (Wiesbaden 1962-1994).

TCAE = J. N. Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire* (Studia Pohl: Series Maior 3), Roma 1974.

TCL 3 = F. Thureau-Dangin, *Une relation de la huitième campagne de Sargon (714 av.)* (J. C. (Textes cunéiformes du Louvre) Paris 1912).

TFS = S. Dalley, J. N. Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 3), London 1984.

TIM 9 = J. van Dijk, *Cuneiform Texts: Texts of Varying Content* (Texts in the Iraq Museum 9), Baghdad Wiesbaden 1976.

Ugaritica 5 = J. Nougayrol, *Ugarit. Choix de textes littéraires* (968).

INTRODUCTION

Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi, Raija Mattila, Robert Rollinger

Due to the collective effort of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project in Helsinki the Neo-Assyrian epoch is one of the best documented periods within Ancient Near Eastern history. So far 21 volumes have been published presenting the most important bulk of the archival, literary and religious sources in new and reliable text editions, collated and indexed, and complemented with English translations and elucidating introductions. In the meanwhile, most of the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions are as well available in modern editions with English translations, thanks to the efforts of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia and the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period projects.

Having these facts in mind, in early 2014 we decided that it was time to launch an international conference aiming at establishing a full-fledged methodological address to the problems concerned with the “Writing of Neo-Assyrian History”. This approach included a clear cut look at the sources, and at the problems connected with their interpretation and “transformation” into what is used to be called “history”. Accordingly, the conference focused on several main topics connected to this issue, and therefore we organized an international meeting in September 2014 at the University of Helsinki when Robert Rollinger held his Finland Distinguished Professor at the Department of World Cultures, University of Helsinki (Research Director of the project “Intellectual Heritage of the Ancient Near East”, 2011–2015).

The structuring of the volume mainly follows the outline of the conference with some additions and adaptions. The first section “History of Research and General Questions” is devoted to important problems of defining the Neo-Assyrian empire as well as its history within broader frameworks. How does the composition and structure of the empire look like? What about ethnicities, languages and identities? How did the Neo-Assyrians themselves approach their past and how? Which role are texts, scribes and literary tradition playing in shaping what we are used to call Neo-Assyrian history? What does Neo-Assyrian history mean and what is the place of Neo-Assyrian history within world history? This also includes modes of modern approach and terminologies. Gendered history is a keyword in this respect, but there is also the vast problem that Neo-Assyrian history — as Ancient Near Eastern history in general — is still widely perceived through western lenses and encapsulated in western terminologies. These are defined by sources from the Biblical and Classical World, and this bears important consequences on how we assess and qualify

historical processes and developments. These issues give way to a broad range of topics which are dealt with in the second section of the volume.

In this second section “How to deal with the Neo-Assyrian Sources” some general questions are addressed. The various contributions focus on three main categories of sources that can be defined as “historical” *stricto sensu*: royal inscriptions, eponym lists, and eponym chronicles.

The next seven sections develop a broader focus on Neo-Assyrian history by defining and discussing all available sources and their specifics: the religious texts, the literary texts, the letters, the administrative and legal texts, the treaties, archaeological sources. In this context the sources themselves are introduced and qualified, distinguishing between the different categories of source production and their *Sitz im Leben*. This includes both the written and the archaeological sources. Bureaucratic contexts and redaction processes are taken into consideration and the relevant archaeological contexts are revealed. Assyrian royal inscriptions and treaties, religious texts and literary texts, letters, administrative and legal texts on the one side, archaeological remains, reliefs, and works of art as well as urban planning on the other side are evaluated and put into their specific contexts. Each section’s discussions do not only imply the simple question of how to use and deal with these sources, but to reflect on text production and context and to develop an updated theory of how to approach these sources. Their specific characteristics are outlined, their validity are analysed and the main problems addressed a modern historian is facing who is using these sources. In this respect the problems of transforming the available sources into “history” are specified and discussed in detail. How can a modern historian use these sources and what are the main problems he/she encounters when he/she is dealing with them?

The volume concludes with two additional sections. The first one focuses on the Neo-Assyrian Onomastics and its relevance for writing Neo-Assyrian history. The second one deals with the Periphery of the Assyria by discussing two exemplary neighbouring regions of the empire and their text production.

By addressing these questions the conference was aimed at singling out paradigmatically a specific and extraordinarily well documented period of Ancient Near Eastern history and at addressing the basic questions of any historiographical approach. This should be done within an Ancient Near Eastern framework, where Classical and Biblical historiographies are not taken as a defining leitmotiv but as a point of reference where specific regional and cultural developments are taken into considerations accordingly.

True, the goals of this conference were ambitious; but we are convinced that the various contributions, how diverse and varicoloured the sources of Neo-Assyrian history are, could contribute to an intense methodological discussion and to a robust increase of historical self-consciousness in Neo-Assyrian studies. We also were, and still are convinced that this is a distinct field of historical research offering an enormous potential for historical analysis, methodology and sophisticated *Quellenkritik*. It allows rich insights in general historical problems which not only deserve to be considered by specialists but also by any historian who can learn as much from Neo-Assyrian history as, just to take some examples, from histories of the French Revolution, the First World War or the Cold War. Neo-Assyrian history is important, illuminating and exciting, and the path towards it are the sources we have. These were the aims of our conference, and we very much hope that with this publication its targets have been somehow accomplished.

INTRODUCTION

* * *

This volume contains most of the contributions of the conference held in Helsinki in September 2014. However, after the conference, we considered that some important fields were not covered due to various reasons; thus, we requested some scholars to submit additional contributions so as to have a more complete view on the general topic of “How to write Neo-Assyrian history?”. Not all those who agreed, however, were able to submit their text, and in late 2017 we decided to proceed for final publication with the available texts at our hands.

* * *

With the publication of such a volume it is always a pleasure to thank those colleagues and institutions without whose assistance and help this volume would not have been possible. This is first the University of Helsinki which launched the project “Intellectual Heritage of the Ancient Near East” and hosted Robert Rollinger as Finland Distinguished Professor (2011–2015). We are especially grateful to Prof. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila the former Director of the project who was excited about the conference and its aims from the very beginning. A special thanks goes to the Getty Foundation that offered Robert Rollinger a Getty Scholarship during which the final steps of the editing process of this volume could be accomplished. We wholeheartedly thank Prof. Simo Parpola, Editor in Chief of the *State Archives of Assyria* series, for accepting this volume in the series *State Archives of Assyria Studies*, of which he is Project Director. Last but not least, we thank Dr. Silvia Gabrieli, Università degli studi di Verona, for her difficult but very successful enterprise of preparing the indexes of this volume.

We very much hope that the volume will be useful not only for specialists but for all those who are interested in ancient Near Eastern history of the first millennium BCE, a period of high interest and relevance that still does not have the place in world history it really deserves.

Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi, Padova
Raija Mattila, Helsinki
Robert Rollinger, Getty Villa, Los Angeles

RELIGIOUS TEXTS AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE: ASSYRIAN PROPHECIES AS SOURCES FOR ESARHADDON'S NINEVEH A INSCRIPTION

Martti Nissinen

Can prophetic texts be used in historical reconstruction?

Religious texts, by the strictest definition, are not historical sources, at least if the definition concerns the textual genre. It is questionable, however, if such a genre as “religious texts” can be postulated, since there are many so kinds of texts that can be characterized as religious, representing different modes of expression and relating to the world outside them in a variety of ways. There is probably no strict delineation of the category of “religious texts.” The broadest common denominator of religious texts would be that they are in one way or another related to divine beings, to divine-human communication, or to theology or ideology based on such communication. In other words, any text that has a religious content or religious use could be designated as a religious text.

Such a definition, however, would make the category too large to be functional. It would have to include, for example, all myths and epics where divine beings have an agency, royal inscriptions because of their strong theological component — indeed, entire canonical compositions such as the Bible. On the other hand, our sense of what can be seen as religious content may not fully recognize what was perceived of as religious in the ancient readers’ world. The same can be said of our sense of religious practice — in many cases we cannot be sure how a text was used, and even if we do, we may miss the religious element of the use of a given text. Thus, at the end of the day, it seems like “religious texts” is not a very practical category. At least it needs to be narrowed down or, alternatively, divided into better-functioning sub-categories.

In the present volume, different groups of texts — royal inscriptions, literary texts, letters, administrative texts, legal texts, and treaties — are discussed from the point of view of “how to use and to deal with them” when reconstructing Neo-Assyrian history. This roughly corresponds to the principal groups represented by the Neo-Assyrian archival corpus and clearly narrows down the category of religious texts, which for the purposes of the present volume would comprise ritual texts, prayers, cultic and otherwise religious poetry, prophetic oracles and perhaps, to a certain degree, other kinds of divinatory texts and wisdom texts. Even this is far too much to be discussed in this short chapter, hence I will content myself with the material I am most familiar with, that is, prophetic oracles.

It is clear at the outset that prophecies were not uttered for the purposes of history-writing, and even written prophecy, that is, written versions of spoken oracles,¹ did not serve such a purpose. However, it is the shared scholarly conviction that the ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts are often firmly anchored in historical events. Especially in the case of the letters from Mari and the Assyrian prophecies, this has been convincingly demonstrated.² Sometimes prophetic texts indeed refer to events reported in other sources³ and can, therefore, be included in the sources from which ancient history is reconstructed. Using prophetic texts for the purposes of historical reconstruction requires the same set of critical questions to be asked as with any other written source, concerning the origin, genre, and textual transmission of the given text. Why and by whom has the text been written? Whose interests have thereby been served? What is the relation of the event to the written product? What is the intended audience, who interacts with whom?

These questions serve as a check-list preventing the contents of the text from being too easily equated with the historical fact. Such questions have become especially burning in Biblical studies, where the historical problems of the prophetic literature have been discussed for quite some time. Connections between the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and the history of Israel have been thoroughly perused over the past decades, with the somewhat pessimistic result that we probably know less today than we believed to know some time ago. Critical scholars have in many cases revealed a considerable distance between the text and the event, hence relativizing the historical applicability of the text to that particular event.⁴ This problem is, of course, caused by the long history of transmission of biblical texts, which often makes it desperately difficult to date individual passages and draw reliable historical consequences from them.⁵

The situation is better with regard to Assyrian prophecies which in many cases can be dated rather precisely, and the historical state of affairs to which they refer is well known and beyond any reasonable doubt.⁶ This is not always the case, of course, and there are cases where the historical setting of a particular text has been interpreted differently. For instance, the letter of Aššur-hamatu'a to Assurbanipal (SAA 13 139), which according to Simo Parpola and myself speaks about the return of the statue of Marduk to Babylon,⁷ has been dated by Matthijs de Jong to the aftermath of the Šamaš-šumu-ukin war.⁸

¹ The term “written prophecy” refers to a contemporary written record of an oral utterance. Written prophecy should be differentiated from “literary prophecy”, which means a written product communicating recontextualized prophetic utterances over a chronological distance or creating them for literary purposes. See Lange 2006, 248–275, esp. 250.

² For historical references in the letters of Mari, see, e.g., Charpin 2015, 11–58; 2014, 23–33; Heintz 2015. For historical references in Assyrian prophetic texts, see, e.g., Parpola 1997; Nissinen 1998; de Jong 2007, 171–188, 249–285; Weippert 2014.

³ For example, the prophetic demand to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, concerning an estate in Alahtum (FM 7 38 and 39; see Durand 2002; Nissinen 2003a, 16–22).

⁴ For recent case studies, see Kratz 2015, 143–160; Mack 2011; de Jong 2007.

⁵ Recent contributions to this discussion, see, e.g., Wright 2014; de Jong 2011; Kratz 2011, 3–17; Nissinen 2013; Nissinen 2009; Barstad 2009.

⁶ See Parpola 1997, lxviii–lxxi.

⁷ Nissinen & Parpola 2004.

⁸ de Jong 2007, 279–282.

I will not go into details of this or any other disputed text here but would like to present a case which, in my view is not controversial in terms of dating and which can shed some light to the question of how to use and how to deal with prophetic texts as a historical source. I would like to be able to demonstrate that religious texts such as prophecies, which were actually related to specific events of the past, were utilized by the Assyrian scribes when they prepared texts relating the same events. There is at least one case where I would argue this to be demonstrable, and that is the Nineveh A inscription of Esarhaddon, particularly the first column and the beginning of the second column (RINAP 4 1, i 1–ii 11), telling the story about Esarhaddon's war against his brothers and his ascending the throne of his father Sennacherib.⁹

Esarhaddon's Nineveh A inscription and prophetic oracles

Nineveh A is the longest preserved inscription of Esarhaddon. It is without doubt designed as the official account of his reign until the year 673 when the text was written. Several copies of this inscription were inscribed shortly before Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin were nominated as crown princes of Assyria and Babylonia — in fact, the texts were written in preparation of this very event, which in the eyes of the contemporaries may have been a dubious move. Esarhaddon needed to convince his audience, himself, and even the gods of the divine sanctioned foundation of his rule and political decisions.¹⁰

Time and again, the Nineveh A inscription makes statements that are conspicuous to anyone familiar with the Assyrian prophetic oracles, especially those included in the oracle collections SAA 9 1 and 9 3.¹¹ I would like to argue that this is not a coincidence but that the scribes who authored the inscription had access to these texts which were filed away in the archives and thus readily available to the scribes. I cannot present this as startling new knowledge: Simo Parpola has marked the links between the texts already in his introduction to the Assyrian prophecies,¹² I have myself done the same in the footnotes of the anthology *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*,¹³ and Matthijs de Jong has discussed the texts at some length more than a decade ago.¹⁴ Nevertheless, no one to my knowledge has properly analyzed the intertextuality between the Nineveh inscription and the prophetic texts,¹⁵ so it makes sense to present some thoughts on their relationship today. In

⁹ Leichty 2011, 9–26, esp. 11–14; see also Nissinen 2003b, 137–142.

¹⁰ For the inscription and the historical events reflected by it, see Eph'al & Tadmor 2006, 156–163; Nissinen 1998, 14–34; Porter 1993, 18–26, 106–109. Recently, Andrew Knapp has noted that the earliest manuscripts of Nin A date to the 4th month of the year 673, that is, soon after Esarhaddon's failed campaign to Egypt. This leads him to the conclusion that the primary reason for the writing of the inscription was the apology for this failure rather than the investiture of the crown princes; see Knapp 2015, 320–325.

¹¹ Parpola 1997, 4–11, 22–27; Nissinen 2003b, 102–111, 118–124; Weippert 2014, 207–212, 217–221.

¹² Parpola 1997, lxviii–lxxiii; cf. already Weippert 1981, 93–95.

¹³ Nissinen 2003b, 141f.

¹⁴ De Jong 2003–04; cf. *id.* 2007, 251–259.

¹⁵ Recently, Johannes Bach (2016) has perused the intertextual network of Nineveh A without however, including Assyrian prophecies in his analysis.

what follows, I will pay attention to passages in the Nineveh inscription that seem to have a counterpart in the Assyrian prophetic texts.

The first points of reference can be found in the introduction where Esarhaddon presents himself:

Property of Esarhaddon, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, governor of Babylonia, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four regions (*šar kibrāt erbetti*), the rightful shepherd, the beloved of the great gods, whom Aššur, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, and Ištar of Arbela called to the kingship of Assyria when he still was a baby.¹⁶

Several elements of the long title of the king are familiar from the prophetic oracles. 1) The title “king of Assyria” (*šar māt Aššūr*) is, of course, used everywhere, but also the idea of Esarhaddon as the “king of the four regions” is expressed in a prophecy: “Aššur has given him the totality of the four regions” (*kippat erbettim Aššūr ittanaššu*).¹⁷ These standard epithets alone are not enough to establish an intertextual link between texts. 2) The presentation of the king as the beloved¹⁸ of the gods (*migir ilāni rabūti*) comes closer than the standard epithets to the language of the prophecies proclaiming the love and favour of the gods, Ištar in particular, to Esarhaddon, for example: “Esarhaddon, leg[itimate] heir, son of Mul[lissu]! I keep thinking of [you], I have loved yo[u] great[ly]!”.¹⁹ 3) The mention about the kingship being given to Esarhaddon when he still was a baby (*ultu ſeherišu*) quite strongly resonates with prophecies presenting the goddess as the king’s mother or midwife, the prophecy of Bayâ in particular: “I protected you when you were a baby” (*ſeherāka attašakka*).²⁰ In this prophetic oracle Ištar tells how the great gods stood there with her protecting him when his mother gave birth to him. The prophecy mentions almost exactly the same gods by name: Aššur, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Ištar of Arbela, plus Sîn who even in the Nineveh A inscription usually belongs to the standard list of the Great Gods.²¹

The royal career of Esarhaddon began as the crown prince:

In a favorable month, on an auspicious day, in accordance with their lofty command, I triumphantly entered the Palace of Succession (*bīt rēdūti*), the formidable residence where the one to be appointed to kingship is located.²²

¹⁶ RINAP 4 1, i 1–7.

¹⁷ SAA 9 3.2, ii 3.

¹⁸ The word *migru* refers to a “person endowed with divine or royal favor” and “contendedness of heart” (CAD M/2: 48), which semantically comes very close to “love.”

¹⁹ SAA 9 1.6, iv 24; cf. SAA 9 9, 4–6: “They (scil. Mullissu and the Lady of Arbela) [lov]e and incessantly bestow their love [upon] Assurbanipal, the creation of their hands.”

²⁰ SAA 9 1.4, ii 32; cf. especially SAA 3 13, r.6–7: “You were a child, Assurbanipal, when I left you with the Queen of Nineveh; you were a baby, Assurbanipal, when you sat in the lap of the Queen of Nineveh!” Cf. also SAA 9 1.6, iii 15–18: “I am your great midwife, I am your excellent wet nurse”; SAA 9 2.5, iii 26–27: “I am your father and mother. I brought you up between my wings”; SAA 9 7, r.6: “You whose mother is Mullissu, fear not! You whose nurse is the Lady of Arbela, fear not!”

²¹ Sîn is included in RINAP 4 1, i 9, 17, 45, 59; ii 16, 32, 56; iii 28; iv 78, and omitted in RINAP 4 1, i 5–6; ii 45–46; v 33–34; vi 44.

²² RINAP 4 1, i 20–22.

The prophecy of Sinqiša-amur proclaims: “[I]n the Palace of Succession [I prote]ct you and [rai]se you”.²³ Even though Esarhaddon is called the king of Assyria, the prophecy presents itself to have been pronounced already when he was still residing in the Palace of Succession.²⁴ Whether or not there is a real link between the texts here, they both present the Palace of Succession as the god-given prelude to Esarhaddon’s kingship, anticipating the outcome of the war, which in the case of the inscription was a *fait accompli* to the audience.

What follows in the inscription, reads like an expanded first-person account of what the god Aššur says in the oracle probably pronounced on occasion of Esarhaddon’s coronation:

Now these traitors conspired against you, expelled you and surrounded you. You, however, opened your mouth, crying: “Hear me, O Aššur!”. I heard your cry and appeared as a fiery glow from the gate of heaven, to throw down fire and have it devour them. As you were standing in their midst, I removed them from your presence, drove them up the mountain and rained fire and brimstone upon them. I slaughtered your enemies and filled the river with their blood.²⁵

This prophetic account of the civil war preceding Esarhaddon’s enthronement finds many counterparts in the Nineveh A inscription. The brothers of Esarhaddon, so says the inscription, “spoke evil of me and fabricated libellious rumors about me in a godless manner, they spread malevolent lies and hostility behind my back”.²⁶ There are, however, obvious discrepancies between the texts, too. The prophecy says that the traitors expelled Esarhaddon, whereas the inscription ascribes his transferring away to a secure place to Aššur and Marduk (RINAP 4 1 i 38–39). According to the inscription, the “gentle heart of my father [scil. Sennacherib] they alienated from me against the will of gods, though in his heart he secretly commiserated me and his eyes were set upon my kingship”.²⁷ Some historians, including myself, have interpreted this somewhat contradictory sentence so that it was Sennacherib who indeed “secretly commiserated” his son and sent him to a secure place.²⁸ A third source dealing with the matter, probably the oldest one, is the oracle of Aḥat-abiša, SAA 9 1.8, in which the Lady of Arbela says to Queen Naqi'a, Esarhaddon’s mother:

Since you implored me, saying: “The one on the right and the other on the left you have placed in your lap. My own offspring you expelled to roam the steppe!” Now, king, fear not! Yours is the kingdom, yours is the power!²⁹

This texts ascribes Esarhaddon’s expatriation to the goddess Ištar and says nothing about Sennacherib who may already have been murdered when the prophecy was

²³ SAA 9 1.2, i 33–35; cf. SAA 9 7, 6: “[I will take ca]re of you in the Palace of Succession, [your father] will gird the diadem.” For the Palace of Succession, see Porter 1993, 19f.

²⁴ That Esarhaddon is already addressed as “King of Assyria” does not necessarily disprove this assumption (thus Weippert 2014, 194). If Sennacherib was already killed, there was no king in Assyria, and the purpose of the prophetic message was to pronounce divine support for Esarhaddon’s kingship.

²⁵ SAA 9 3.3, ii 10–23.

²⁶ RINAP 4 1, i 26–28.

²⁷ RINAP 4 1, i 29–31.

²⁸ Nissinen 1998, 20f.; cf. de Jong 2003–04, 114f., who thinks that Esarhaddon had fallen out of his father’s favour, and this was the reason why he had to flee from Nineveh. Also Knapp 2015, 317–325, thinks that Esarhaddon was involved in the assassination of his father.

²⁹ SAA 9 1.8, v 13–23.

first performed, but there is one historically important detail that may actually correspond to the historical fact, namely that the number of the brothers who rebelled against their father was two, thus corroborating the biblical account that knows even the names of Sennacherib's murderers: Adrammelek and Sarezer (2 Kings 19:37).³⁰

Taken together, the three texts — RINAP 4 1, SAA 9 3.3, and SAA 9 1.8 — confirm Esarhaddon's sojourning outside of Assyria but present different interpretations of its reason. The prophecies view it in a negative way as an expulsion put into effect by either the brothers or the goddess Ištar, while the inscription presents his refuge as a “secure place, safe from their evil deeds”, indeed, a “sweet shade” of the gods Aššur and Marduk. The different tone of the texts is easy to understand if one compares the standpoint of the Queen Mother who is frantic about the fate of her son to that of the scribe who writes an ideological account of the events, knowing the end result. From Naqia's perspective, Esarhaddon's sojourning in the West was comparable to “roaming the steppe”, which alludes to the tribulations of Gilgameš;³¹ this is quite far from the “sweet shade” of the inscription. Either way, the texts are not unanimous about how and by whom Esarhaddon was transferred, but we may notice that the prophecy of Aħat-abiša (SAA 9 1.8) is the source that is most immediately connected to the actual event promising the kingship to Esarhaddon during his expatriation.³²

Otherwise, the prophetic and the inscriptional account tell essentially the same story. Even in the inscription, Esarhaddon cries to the gods:

By means of prayers, lamentations, and humble gestures I implored Aššur, the king of gods, and Marduk, to whom treachery is an abomination, and they accepted my plea. I soon heard about their evil deeds. I cried out ‘Woe!’ (*ū'a aqbīma*). With raised hands I prayed to Aššur, Sîn, Šamaš, Bel, Nabû, Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, and Ištar of Arbela, and they accepted my words.³³

Esarhaddon's “Woe!” seems to reflect the first prophecy on the tablet SAA 9 1: “Fear not! You have got cramps, but I (scil. Ištar of Arbela), in the midst of wailing (*ina libbi ū'a*), will get up and sit down”.³⁴ Even the divine response is mentioned in the inscription — not however, as a prophetic oracle but, rather, as an “oracle of encouragement” (*šīr takilti*)³⁵ which is, rather, the outcome of extispicy.

The escape of the brothers is presented in the prophecy as the deed of Aššur, whereas the inscription makes them to leave on their own initiative:

But when those rebels, who made conspiracy and insurrection, heard the approach of my campaign, they deserted the troops who had trusted in them and fled to an unknown land (*ana māt lā idū*).³⁶

Both versions imply the same thing: Esarhaddon was not able to capture his brothers, but they managed to flee and were never heard of; only the Hebrew Bible knows

³⁰ For the sources related to Sennacherib's murder and murderers, see Parpola 1980, and cf. the dissenting view of de Jong 2003–04.

³¹ See already Zimmern 1910; cf. Halton 2009, esp. 57f.

³² For the historial background of this oracle, see Melville 1999, 28f.; Nissinen 1998, 22.

³³ RINAP 4 1, i 34–37, 55–56, 59–60.

³⁴ SAA 9 1.1, i 24–27.

³⁵ RINAP 4 1, i 60–62. The word *šīru*, “flesh”, is used for the result of extispicy; see CAD Š/3, 121f., and cf. RINAP 4 104 (Bab A), iii 12–14: “In the diviner's bowl, trustworthy oracles (*šīrē tukulti*) were established for me”.

³⁶ RINAP 4 1, i 82–84.

them to have ended up in the Land of Ararat (2 Kings 19:37). As to the slaughtering of the rest of Esarhaddon's adversaries, the inscription says:

The transgressors who had induced my brothers to the evil plans for taking over the kingship of Assyria I searched out, each and every one of them, imposed a heavy punishment upon them, and destroyed their seed.³⁷

A prophetic counterpart for this can be found in the fifth and last oracle of the tablet SAA 9 3, where Ištar says:

[When the conspirators] have been hauled up, [those at the right] and those at the left³⁸ will be there (*izzazzū*) and suffer (*naṣṣū*) [the punishment. The cour]tiers and [servants] of the palace, those who rebelled [against] you, [I have sur]rounded ([*alti*]bīa) and fixed them ([*as*]sakanšunu) to the stake by their teeth.³⁹

Interestingly, the verbs describing the punitive measures are both in stative (*naṣṣū*)/present⁴⁰ (*izzazzū*) and in past tenses (*altibīa*, *assakan*), which gives the impression that some of the rebels have already been punished while others — that is, the escaped brothers — are still awaiting their verdict.

Finally, the river filled with the blood of the enemies would hardly refer to anything else but the river Tigris, across which the troops of Esarhaddon jumped “as if it were nothing but a ditch”.⁴¹ The same river probably features also in the prophecy where Ištar says: “I have inspi[red you] with confidence, I have not caused [you] to come to shame! I will lead [you] safely across the River”.⁴² In both contexts, the “river” should be understood in a double meaning, that is, mythical as well as historical, the crossing of the River signifying both military victory and a divinely ordered act of salvation.⁴³ Nineveh could not have been reached without crossing the river Tigris, hence the river-crossing has a point of reference in real history. In a prophecy, however, this is not the only dimension of a river-crossing, which in mythological terms means entering and surviving a dangerous and potentially destructive liminal space. In SAA 9 3.3, Esarhaddon's successful river-crossing is contrasted with the fate of the rebels who were driven up the mountain, that is, another liminal space. They went there only to be slaughtered, so the river was filled with their blood as if it was flowing down from the mountain.

Prophecies as sources for the scribes

What can be learned from this material with regard to the use of religious texts such as prophecies in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, and how should we evaluate the prophecies themselves as a historical source?

³⁷ RINAP 4 1, ii 8–11.

³⁸ This refers to the rebelling brothers, echoing SAA 9 1.8, 15–20: “The one on the right and the other on the left you have placed in you lap. My own offspring you expelled to roam the steppe.”

³⁹ SAA 9 3.5, iv 22–30.

⁴⁰ Unless *izzazzū* is a prefixed stative; see Luukko 1994, 150.

⁴¹ RINAP 4 1, i 86.

⁴² SAA 9 1.6, iv 1–4.

⁴³ See Nissinen 1997, 44f. Cf. Weippert 2014, 191, who does not connect the crossing of Tigris with this particular event but takes it anyway as a metaphor for an extremely dangerous situation. For river-crossings in antiquity, see Rollinger 2013.

First of all, the common points between the texts are too many, matching to each other too well to be purely coincidental. It is quite evident that the texts have a relation to each other. They were included in the same archive and the same scribes had access to both materials. Even the direction of dependence is clear. In their present context, the prophetic oracles form part of compilations that have been selected from among earlier texts, that is, reports of individual oracles, hence the date of the material on the collection tablets is earlier than the collection itself. Moreover, the collections of prophecies were all written by the same scribe but not at the same time: tablet SAA 9 3 is probably compiled to be recited in Esarhaddon's coronation ceremonies in the year 681, while SAA 9 1 is roughly contemporaneous with the Nineveh A inscription, compiled from individual prophecies dating to the time of the civil war in the year 681. Thus, the texts of the prophecies must have served as the source of the inscription, not vice versa.

On the other hand, the virtually simultaneous scribal work on both the inscription and the oracle collection speaks for a common reason for producing both texts as a part of an ideological project that the scribes were in charge of. Even though the prophetic texts known to us are likely to have been used by the craftsmen who authored the inscription, they did not simply copy the prophecies but used them as one source among others to form their own ideologically coherent account of Esarhaddon's reign. The prophecies do probably not contain too many historical details that were not known to the scribes who compiled the inscription just a few years later, hence they were probably not used primarily as a source of historical information but, rather, as a source of theological, mythological and ideological inspiration.

Of course, the prophecies formed but one type of sources utilized by the scribes. The Nineveh A inscription also contains several allusions to the Epic of Ninurta, or Lugale,⁴⁴ which was probably not used as a historical source, but which nevertheless inspired the scribes and even served as the source of exact quotations, for instance “Go ahead, do not hold back!” (*alik lā kalāta*).⁴⁵ Even Ninurta cries “Woe!” (*ū'a*) when he hears about the evil deeds of Asakku;⁴⁶ he beats his thigh with his fist like Esarhaddon who clenched his fists;⁴⁷ and both Ninurta and Esarhaddon spread their wings to attack the enemy, Asakku or the rebels.⁴⁸

We do not know to what extent the scribes paid attention to what to us appear as textual genres. The simultaneous quoting from prophecies and the Epic of Ninurta may suggest that they used both texts as a literary reservoir of tropes by which they could demonstrate their own learnedness and ideological sophistication. The use of prophetic and mythical sources in the same inscription tells about the scribes' interpretation of the mythical events and the divine will expressed by the mouths of the prophets coming true in historical events at the same time.

The “historical” prophecies and the “metahistorical” epic are used in the inscription to tell the same story: Esarhaddon is the “true shepherd, favorite of the great gods” (*rē'ūm kēnu migir ilāni rabūti*, line i 4), and whatever he achieves is done “with the support of the great gods, his lords” (*ina tukulti ilāni rabūti bēlīšu*, line i

⁴⁴ See Parpola 2001, 185f.; Annus 2002, 100. For this and many other examples of intertextuality between Nineveh A and other texts, see Bach 2016, 356–390.

⁴⁵ RINAP 4 1, i 61; cf. Lugale 236; see van Dijk 1983, 80.

⁴⁶ Lugale 70 (van Dijk 1983, 61).

⁴⁷ Lugale 73 (*ibid.*).

⁴⁸ Lugale 246 (van Dijk 1983, 80).

53 etc.). The inscription presents the actual king as doing the deeds of the mythical king, something that was already proclaimed in prophetic performances that took place at the time of the actual events. The scribes were certainly aware of these prophecies because they were uttered no more than years earlier, and compiled by the same scribes. Thus, it is probable that the very same persons who decided to prepare collections of prophetic oracles were reusing these collections a few years later; they certainly knew where to find them in their well-organized archive.

It is certainly no coincidence that the prophecies alluded to in the Nineveh inscription are to be found in the oracle collections which represent the first stage of prophecy becoming literature. As a part of edited collection, the individual prophecy was recontextualized so that its primary interpretative framework is the collection as a whole. The historical event at the time of the prophetic performance remained part of the memory of the scribes. However, their editorial work, involving selecting and organizing the source material, perhaps even changing the source text to some extent, channels the memory using an ideological compass which determines its direction. Therefore, the oracle collection is already the product of interpreted memory, apt to become reinterpreted in other scribal products.

How about prophetic texts as sources for actual historical events? It is apparent to every critical historian that prophetic oracles are thoroughly ideological texts not written for purposes of history-writing, whether ancient or modern. On the other hand, it is also evident that the oracle collection SAA 9.1 contains many references that are widely agreed to correspond to the actual circumstances. I have already mentioned to the number of the rebelling brothers which according to the prophecy and the Hebrew Bible is two. Other historical circumstances include the paramount importance of Ištar of Arbela as the oracular deity; her leaving for the “Palace of the Steppe” (SAA 9.1.9; cf. SAA 9.5);⁴⁹ raising up the crown prince in the Palace of Succession (SAA 9.1.2);⁵⁰ the crucial role of Queen Naqi'a in supporting Esarhadon, her son (SAA 9.1.7; 1.8; SAA 9.5);⁵¹ and so on. These examples are enough to make it probable that the texts are based on oral performances which indeed took place and were related to real events.

The authors of the Nineveh inscription were probably not dependent on the prophecies as sources of historical information and could have written the inscription even without using them — or the Epic of Ninurta, for that matter. However, the prophecies, uttered at the time of the actual events, seem to have given not only ideological but also historical credibility to the account of the inscription, serving as benchmarks of the shared memory of the scribes and their putative audiences. As modern historians, we are in multiple ways dependent on the ancient ideological constructs produced by this shared memory, which often provides us the only, however deficient, access to historical events.

⁴⁹ For the “Palace of the Steppe” (É.GAL EDIN), that is, Ištar’s akītu-chapel in Milqia, outside of Arbela, see Pongratz-Leisten 1994, 79–83; Nissinen 2001, esp. 183–186. For the sources, see George 1993, 87, #313.

⁵⁰ See above, fn. 22.

⁵¹ For Naqi'a, see Melville 1999; Svärd 2015.

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