Rivalry over Rulership at Aššur
The Puzur-Sîn Inscription*

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Rivalry over rulership at Aššur inflicted hardship upon its people and confusion upon its historians. For the successful rival the reward was power and glory but in periods of intense rivalry the success was often short-lived and the name of the victor soon forgotten. Such was the fate of Puzur-Sîn. Native king lists and chronicles completely ignore him and if he had not left an inscribed stone tablet, fortunately excavated by modern archaeologists, we would not know of his existence. This is a sobering thought for any who think the basic list of Assyrian rulers is now complete.

The reason Puzur-Sîn was forgotten has to do with the chaos of the period in which he was active. As will be demonstrated later, he must be placed chronologically shortly after the time of Šamšī-Adad I (c. 1813–1781 B.C.), a period of fierce rivalry over control of the city Aššur. At that time there were several pretenders to the throne and the authors of the Assyrian king list were confused about whose names to list and whose not. The result was two different lists in two different versions but in neither list does Puzur-Sîn's name appear.[1] Whether additional names were ignored, only time and the chance of archaeological discovery will tell.

Rivalry over Rulership in Assyrian History: A Brief Survey

By way of background to this edition of the Puzur-Sîn text I shall first survey briefly the periods of rivalry over rulership at Aššur. Little is known of the political status of the city-state Aššur in the third millennium.[2] While it was under the control of Sumer and Akkad for much of the Old Akkadian (beginning c. 2269 with Maništūsu) and Ur III periods (c. 2112–2004 B.C.), it is probable that during some of this time it was ruled by a local man. After the fall of the Third Dynasty of Ur a line of indigenous rulers held sway at Aššur, the most important of which were Ilu-šūma and Erišum I (sometime between c. 2000–1800 B.C.).

The first known disruption in the second millennium occurred at the end of this period when Šamšī-Adad I, of Amorite extraction, gained rulership over the city (c. 1813–1781 B.C.). Only echoes of the rivalry preceding this event have been recovered.[3] Šamšī-Adad was succeeded by his son, Išme-Dagan I (c. 1780–41 B.C.), but after that chaos reigned. The Assyrian King List gives the names of several claimants to the throne, all of which are called usurpers ('sons of nobodies').[4] From this it is clear that there was a dynastic break from the Šamšī-Adad line but no ruler had unanimous support. In the main Assyrian king list the chaotic period concludes with the reign of Adasi who was regarded in the mainstream tradition as the founder of the subsequent line of Assyrian kings. This fact is clearly stated in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon (680–69 B.C.).[5] But there was at least one different list of names of rulers for the period, as will be shown later. Yet a third version of who held control of Aššur is represented by Puzur-Sîn who narrates in the text edited below how he brought an end to the line of Šamšī-Adad I and restored 'native' Assyrian hegemony over the city. What relationship or dealings Puzur-Sîn had with Adasi are entirely unknown but it appears they represented two different factions and in the long term the Adasi faction was successful.

The remaining cases of rivalry over rulership at Aššur are all matters of inner tribal or family contests.[6] There are two instances in the fifteenth century B.C. The Assyrian King List tells us that Aššur-rabi I gained sovereignty by forcibly deposing his nephew.[7] The other case is a certain Bēr-nādin-

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[1] Grayson, *RLA* 6 p.106 §§13–15 and p.115 §3.10 lines 4f.
[2] Cf. Larsen, *City-State* pp.27–47.

[3] Cf. Grayson, *ARI* 1 pp.27f.
[4] Grayson, *RLA* 6 p.106 §§13–15.
[5] Borger, *Asarh.* p.35 §23:5, etc.
[6] The only source for the majority of the family relationships is the Assyrian King List and Landsberger, *JCS* 8 (1954) pp.42f. has been justly sceptical of this evidence.
[7] Grayson, *RLA* 6 p.108 §33.

aḫḫē who appears only in legal texts. His genealogy and title there indicate that he was a ruler of Aššur although, like Puzur-Sîn, he is not mentioned in any of the native histories.[8] Tukultī-Ninurta I (1243–07 B.C.) was assassinated and replaced by a son.[9] Ninurta-apil-Ekur (c. 1191–79 B.C.), who claimed to be a 'descendant' (liblibbi) of an earlier Assyrian ruler, took the throne by force with Babylonian connivance.[10] The brothers Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur and Mutakkil-Nusku (c. 1133–32 B.C.) fought over the throne and Babylonia was involved.[11] Šamšī-Adad IV (1053–50 B.C.) claimed distant relationship in the Assyrian line and took the throne, again with Babylonian involvement.[12] In the first millennium there are several instances of tribal or family rivalry, all of which are well-known and need only be itemized. These are the periods of political chaos and sometimes insurrection which led to the accessions of Šamšī-Adad V (823–11 B.C.),[13] Tiglath-pileser III (744–27 B.C.),[14] Sargon II (721–05 B.C.),[15] and Esarhaddon (680–69 B.C.) respectively.[16]

Puzur-Sîn's Inscription: Former Studies[17]

The inscription of Puzur-Sîn has never been copied or fully edited for, despite its special significance, it presents many difficulties. The present discussion and edition of the text, necessitated by the inclusion of the text in RIMA 1, cannot claim to have solved all of these difficulties, but I hope some positive steps forward have been made.

The inscription appears on a small stone slab found by Andrae at Aššur. The object, like many from Aššur, eventually entered the British Museum.[18] A photograph made at the time of excavation was published in 1924 by Andrae and both Weidner and Sidney Smith published studies on the text. These two studies were primarily concerned with the identity of Puzur-Sîn and the date of the document. In 1954 a partial transliteration and translation of the inscription was published by Landsberger, who also mentioned some collations by Geers and Sachs. Landsberger provided in addition convincing evidence for dating Puzur-Sîn just after the reign of Šamšī-Adad I (c. 1813–1781 B.C.). Despite the significance of the text both for the his-

tory and political theory of early Assyria demonstrated by Landsberger, the inscription sank back into oblivion except for its inclusion in Borger's annotated bibliography and my translation of early Assyrian royal inscriptions.

Puzur-Sîn's Inscription: Script, Orthography, Dialect and Form

What has daunted scholars about this text from the beginning is the combined difficulty of reading and interpretation. The stone tablet is badly worn, particularly at the beginning, and the script and dialect are early, thus having few parallels. The script is similar to the archaic palaeography found in inscriptions of such early rulers of Aššur as Ilu-šūma and Erišum I.[19] By itself, however, this does not provide a very precise date for the text since this archaic palaeography can appear in texts as late as the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I (1243–07 B.C.).[20]

It is the orthography and dialect of the inscription which provide more definite dating since both are similar to Old Assyrian. As to orthography the sign values dí and ší normally appear only in Old Assyrian.[21] The value liq (line 44) is, surprisingly, attested in Old Assyrian. The writing a-dí-i (line 32) is known only in Old Assyrian (and Neo-Babylonian). Only one anomaly is apparent and that is aš-šur, an orthography otherwise attested only from the time of Aššur-uballiṭ I (1363–28 B.C.). Curiously this varies with the orthography (d)a-šur in the Puzur-Sîn inscription.

Turning to dialect note the uncontracted forms, typical of Old Assyrian:[22] rediᵖam (line 9) and naruᵖaᵓī (line 39). Also note the Old Assyrian form parḫum (lines 6, 42) for Babylonian perᵓum and lutārū (line 47) for Babylonian lutērū. One curiosity is the Babylonian form inneppušu (line 38) instead of the Assyrian inneppašu. Thus the script, orthography and dialect are almost totally consistent with the Old Assyrian documents but the two anomalies suggest a slightly later date with some Babylonian influence.

The form of the inscription is unusual.[23] It begins with a temporal clause in which the subject, the ruler Puzur-Sîn, is immediately introduced. Such a structure is unparalleled in Assyrian royal inscriptions. Even in Sumer and Babylonia, where sometimes a temporal clause begins a royal text, the first subject

[8] Grayson, ARI 1 p.37 n.39a; Saporetti, Eponimi pp.30f.; Grayson, BiOr 38 (1981) p.78.

[9] Grayson, ABC Chron. 22 iv 1–13; RLA 6 p.110 §47.

[10] Grayson, RLA 6 p.111 §50.

[11] ibid. pp.111f. §53.

[12] ibid. pp.112f. §59.

[13] See Grayson, CAH 3/1 p.268.

[14] See Grayson, CAH 3/2 (in press) Chapter 22.

[15] ibid. Chapter 22.

[16] ibid. Chapter 23.

[17] All the studies mentioned in this section are listed later in the bibliography.

[18] Cf. Grayson, ARRIM 1 (1983) pp.15–18.

[19] See for example the copies in Messerschmidt, KAH 1 and Schroeder, KAH 2.

[20] E.g. Messerschmidt, KAH 1 no.16.

[21] Cf. von Soden and Röllig, Syllabar; Borger, Zeichenliste.

[22] Cf. von Soden, GAG §16 and Hecker, Grammatik §§19–20.

[23] Cf. Grayson, Or. n.s. 49 (1980) pp.150–62. Deller, Oriens Antiquus 22 (1983) p.14 suggests this is a private dedicatory text but this does not seem to be the case.

introduced is a god or gods, not the king. The unique introduction led Weidner to theorize that this inscription might be the second tablet of a larger text but Weidner, quite rightly I think, then rejected his own theory.[24] The conclusion of the inscription (lines 36ff.) is also odd. Normally in an Assyrian royal inscription when future rebuildings are envisaged, the text first contains the wish that this ruler's inscriptions will be restored and blessings are pronounced on those who do such restoration. Those who do not are cursed. In other words blessings precede curses.[25] But in the Puzur-Sîn text the opposite is the case. The last part of the conclusion (lines 47–54) is unparalleled in Assyrian royal inscriptions.

The unusual form of the text suggests two possible lines of investigation. Either the author of the inscription was not very familiar with the accepted form of an Assyrian royal inscription or he was writing at a time when such an 'accepted form' was not established. The first possibility can be dismissed quickly. It implies either that the text was the product of a provincial or that it was a late forgery. Now the text is written in good Akkadian, of the Old Assyrian dialect, and the sign forms well made so that one cannot say it is 'provincial' or 'barbaric'. As to its being a 'late forgery' there is no evidence.[26]

Turning to the second possibility, it is conceivable that the text was composed in a period when the form of an Assyrian royal inscription was in flux. Such an era extended from about the time of Erišum I to Aššur-uballiṭ I. By the reign of Erišum I standard early Assyrian text types had been established but the subsequent appearance of Šamšī-Adad I brought Babylonian influences into the composition of Assyrian royal inscriptions resulting in major changes. Between the time of Šamšī-Adad I and Aššur-uballiṭ I further changes took place resulting in new forms which incorporated some Babylonian elements, especially in dialect. The inscription of Puzur-Sîn could well belong to this experimental phase.

Who Was Puzur-Sîn?

The problem that plagued early commentators the most was the identity of Puzur-Sîn, who does not appear in any Assyrian king list, and his chronological position. A plausible solution was eventually put forward by Landsberger who identified the Šamšī-Adad mentioned in this text with the first king of that name. He drew attention to a fragmentary king list which diverged from the other king lists in having names of several successors to Šamšī-Adad I not found in the other lists.[27] He suggested that the name Asīnum, which he deciphered in line 5 of the Puzur-Sîn inscription as a successor of Šamšī-Adad I, should be restored in line 5 of this divergent list. Although there seemed to be no room to restore the name Puzur-Sîn afterwards in the list, Landsberger nonetheless reconstructed a divergent tradition which listed Puzur-Sîn after Asīnum. While the restoration and reconstructed list are still highly hypothetical and unsubstantiated, the relative chronological framework proposed by Landsberger thirty years ago remains plausible.[28] As I have demonstrated earlier, the script, dialect and form of the inscription are consistent with this conclusion.

Indeed, I believe the study of script, dialect and form show more than this. The orthography and dialect are essentially Old Assyrian in contrast to the more Babylonian nature of the texts of Šamšī-Adad I. The Puzur-Sîn text clearly represents an attitude hostile to Šamšī-Adad I and his heirs proclaiming that they are not of Assyrian blood and did improper things in Aššur including destroying shrines. Conceivably the introduction of Babylonian writing practices and dialect into Assyrian royal inscriptions was one of these 'improper things' and the author consciously reverted to Old Assyrian. Thus the Puzur-Sîn inscription appears to be not only of a ruler who deposed a successor of Šamšī-Adad I but also one who attempted to revert to the practices and customs before the Amorite dynasty gained control. The old practices and customs so far as they concerned the composition of royal inscriptions survived no better than the short-lived dynasty which Puzur-Sîn wished to restore.

Technical Details

The inscription is on a stone tablet (c. 16 × 32 cms.) now in the British Museum, BM 115688 (Ass 6366, Ph Ass 972–73). It was found by Andrae at Aššur in a private house near the An-Adad temple. Found with this stone were seven narrow strips of lead, rolled up, bearing inscriptions in hieroglyphic Hittite. Andrae observed that the stone and lead objects originally could have nothing to do with each other nor with the An-Adad temple. Rather, they must have come into the possession of the builder of the house, possibly as family heirlooms, who then put them together for a foundation deposit to his house. The content of the inscriptions, which presumably he could not read, was of no interest to him; but the

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[24] Weidner, *AfO* 15 (1945–51) p.97.

[25] See C. D. Meltzer, *Concluding Formulae in Ancient Mesopotamian Royal Inscriptions: The Assyrian Sources.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1983.

[26] Regarding anciently forged royal inscriptions see Gelb, *JNES* 8 (1949) pp.346–48 and n.12; von Soden, *Or. n.s.* 21 (1952) pp.360f.

[27] Schroeder, *KAV* no.14. Cf. Grayson, *RLA* 6 p.115 §3.10.

[28] The Puzur-Sîn, father of the *līmu* Ṣabrum, attested in Old Assyrian texts — see Balkan, *Observations* p.100 — must be a different person.

magical protection of any inscription on durable material was of great importance. Andrae argued that this deposit was probably made at the end of the seventh century B.C. Thus the specific provenance of the stone tablet does not tell us anything about the inscription.

The stone is tapered so that the bottom is narrower than the top. The bottom is 'dressed', indicating that nothing has been broken off, but the top retains marks from crude cutting. This suggests that something, possibly a relief or figure, was cut off the original object in antiquity. It is even possible that some inscription was cut off. But the text as preserved seems to have coherence and thus it is assumed in this edition that it is complete. The text is inscribed in three columns on the obverse and one column, back to back to the third column, on the reverse. To read the reverse one 'flips' the stone like a clay tablet. Columns i and iv and the bottom of the obverse are damaged.

Bibliography

1905	Andrae, *MDOG* 28 p. 29 (provenance)
1924	Andrae, *Hettitische Inschriften* p.1–5 and pl.1 h-i (photo)
1924–25	Weidner, *AfK* 2 p.96 n.2 (study)
1928	Smith, *EHA* pp.206 219f. 386 (study)
1945–51	Weidner, *AfO* 15 pp.96f. (study)
1954	Landsberger, *JCS* 8 pp.31–33 (edition)
1961	Borger, *EAK* 1 pp.18f. (study)
1972	Grayson, *ARI* 1 pp.29f. (translation)
1982	Miglus, *ZA* 72 pp.266-79 (study)
1983	Deller, *Oriens Antiquus* 22 pp.14f. (study)

Transliteration

1 [i]-⌈nu⌉-mì
2 [p]ù-zur₈-ᵈZUEN
3 [É]NSI ᵈa-šur
4 [DUM]U(?) ᵈa-šur-be-el-AN-e
5 ⌈le-mu-tu⌉ a-sí-nim
6 [pa-r]a-aḫ ᵈUTU-ši-⌈ᵈ⌉[IŠKUR]
7 ⌈ša x pu⌉[x] [š]a UR[U.aš]-⌈šur⌉
8 ⌈ú-na⌉-ap-[pí]-lu x
9 [x x] x [x] re-di-⌈am⌉
10 [a]-⌈na URU⌉.aš-šur [(lu)] ú-⌈up(?)⌉-pí-šu
11 x x ù a-ḫi MU-šu
12 [ší-bi-i]ṭ(?) ⌈a-ḫi-tim(?)⌉ la ší-ir
13 [URU].⌈ᵈ⌉a-šur
14 [...] x
15 ᵈ⌈a⌉-š[ur x x (x)] x qa-te-⌈šu⌉
16 KÙ.[MEŠ]-ti
17 i-na ⌈kí-na⌉-te-šu
18 ú-⌈ZA(?)⌉-i-da-šu-ma
19 la dam-qa-⌈am⌉ šu-a-ti
20 ⌈i⌉-na ⌈qí⌉-bi-it ⌈ᵈ⌉a-šur-ma
21 [b]e-lí-a qa-at u[p-p]í-šu
22 [BÀ]D.KI(?) ù É.GAL

23 ᵈUTU-ši-ᵈIŠ[KUR]
24 a-bu a-bi-š[u] ší-bi-i[ṭ(?)]
25 a-ḫi-tim la UZU URU.aš-š[ur]
26 ša iš-ra-at URU.aš-š[ur]
27 ú-na-aq-qí-⌈ru⌉-[m]a
28 ⌈É.GAL GÌR(?)⌉ [x šu]-⌈a-ti⌉
29 e-⌈pu⌉-šu a-qúr-ma
30 iš-tù pa-ri-ik-tim
31 ša KÁ ᵈi-lu-la-a
32 a-⌈dí⌉-i ku-mi-im
33 ša iš-tù du-ri-im
34 LUGAL ma-ma-na
35 la ú-šé-pí-šu BÀD.KI
36 e-pu-uš i-nu-mì BÀD.KI
37 šu-ut e-nu-ḫu-ma
38 in-ni-ip-pu-šu
39 ša šu-mì ⌈ù⌉ na-ru-a-⌈ì⌉
40 a-nàm ú-ša-sà-k[u]
41 ᵈa-šur be-el URU.KI-⌈šu⌉
42 ⌈šu-um-šu ù⌉ pa-ra-aḫ-š[u]
43 ⌈i-na URU.KI⌉ ù ma-tim
44 ka-li-ša lu-ḫa-liq
45 ù na-r[u]-⌈a⌉-i a-nàm
46 a-na aš-ri-šu-ma
47 lu-ú-ta-ru i-n[u]-m[ì]
48 BÀD.KI a-nàm e-p[u-šu]
49 i-na pa-ni-ia [x x x]
50 e-pu-uš be-x [x x]
51 a-na qa-ti [x x x]
52 ka-al-la-[x x (x)]
53 um-ta-as-s[ú-ú-ma (?)]
54 uš-ší ša BÀD.K[I] [x x]

Translation

1–14) When Puzur-Sîn, vice-regent of the god Aššur, *son of* Aššur-bēl-šamê, destroyed the evil of Asīnum, offspring of Šamšī-[Adad (I)] who was ... of the city Aššur, and instituted *proper rule* for the city Aššur; (at that time) [I (Puzur-Sîn) *removed*] ... a foreign *plague,* not of the flesh of [the city] Aššur.

15–35) The god Aššur justly ... [with] his pure hands and I, by the command of Aššur himself my lord, destroyed that improper thing which he had worked on, (namely) the *wall* and palace of Šamšī-Adad (I) his grandfather (who was) a foreign *plague,* not of the flesh of the' city Aššur, and who had destroyed the shrines of the city Aššur. (I destroyed, I say) that palace ... which he had worked on. I built a wall from the *facade* of the Gate of the deity Ilula to the residence, (a structure) which no (other) king had ever built before.

36–46) When that wall becomes dilapidated and is rebuilt, whoever removes this inscription and stele of mine, may the god Aššur (and) his city lord destroy his name and his offspring from city and country entirely. May this stele of mine be returned to its place.
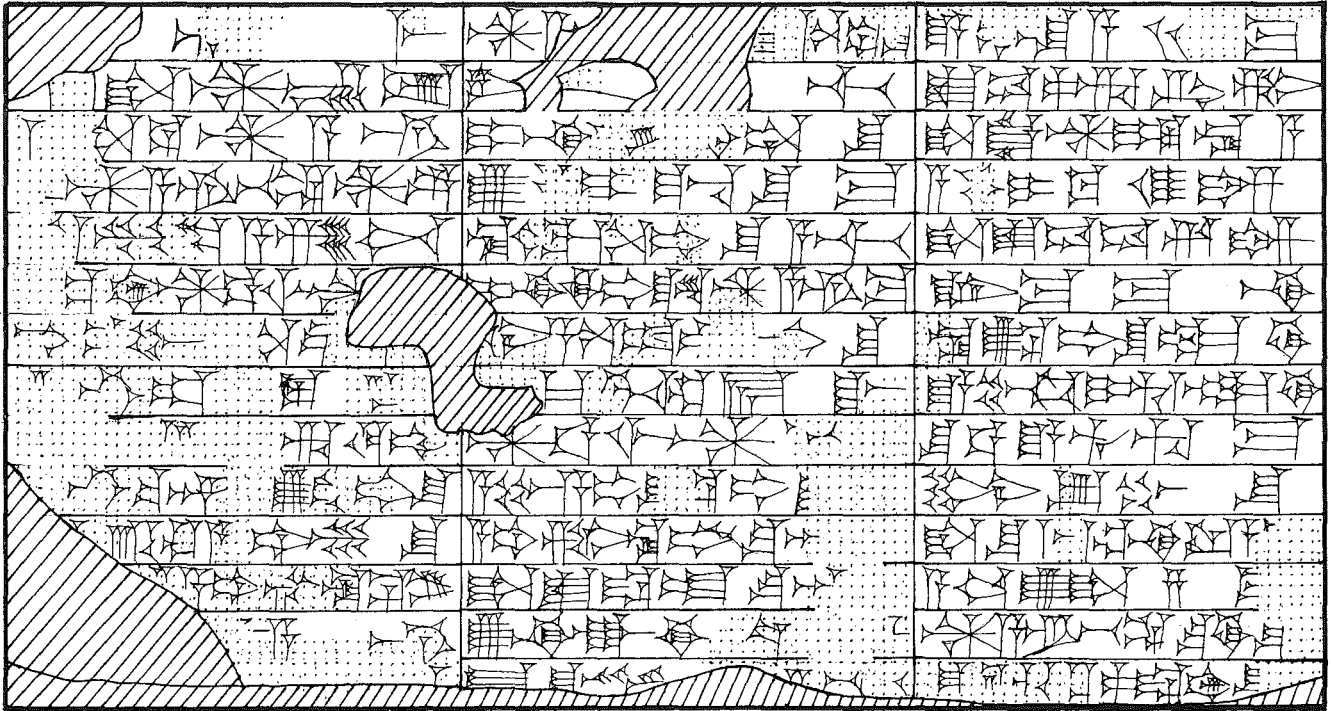
BM 115688 (obverse)
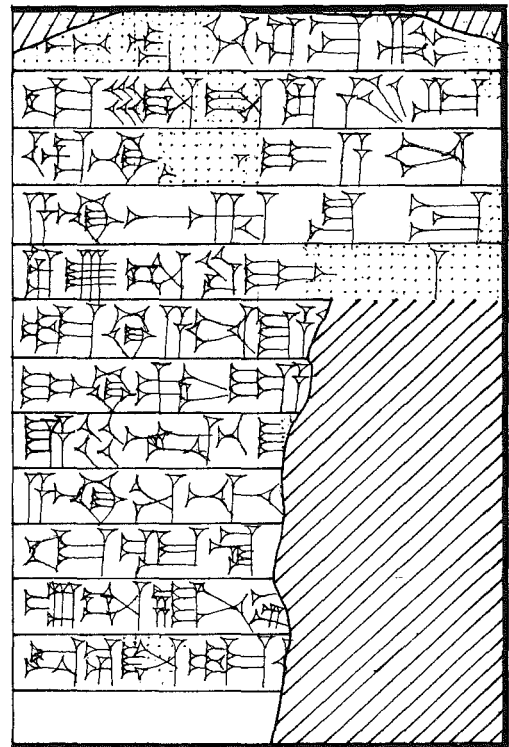
BM 115688 (reverse)

47–54) When I built this wall, in my presence [*a priest*] performed [*rituals*]. ... for the hand [...] ... they washed/delineated and the foundation of the wall [*made firm*].

Summary of Content

Puzur-Sîn became vice-regent of Aššur by deposing Asīnum, a descendant of Šamšī-Adad I who was not a native of the city Aššur (1–10). He also did something to another non-Assyrian (11–14). When these events occurred Puzur-Sîn, by command of the god Aššur, righted the wrongs committed by Asīnum (15–21). This included the destruction of a wall (?) and palace built by Šamšī-Adad I and the building of a new wall (22–36). The text concludes with a curse, a wish and apparently a statement about religious ceremony at the time of building (36–54).

Commentary

1–14 The text begins with a temporal clause which seems to end in line 10 with the subjunctive *uppišu*. The verb of the main clause presumably appeared in line 14 where only a slight trace now remains.

1–4 introduces the subject of the entire text as well as of the temporal clause. Puzur-Sîn's father, Aššur-bēl-šamê, is otherwise unknown and the epithet *bēl šamê* is otherwise unattested for Aššur. The E sign at the end of line 4 is as copied and different from the form of this sign otherwise used in this inscription.

5–10 seem to contain two verbs (lines 8 and 10) and two objects (lines 5–7 and 9) in the temporal clause. Perhaps *palâm redîʾam* should be read in line 9, *redû* being an adjectival form with the same meaning as *rīdu/riddu* '(good) conduct' (see von Soden, *AHw* p.981).

8 The x does not appear to be MA, ŠU, ŠÚ, ŠI or Ù.

11–14 seems to be the main clause. Line 11 seems to contain a proper name followed by *šumšu* 'his/its name' but the line is obscure.

12 For *šibṭu* see the note to lines 19–29.

15–18 This passage is badly broken so that the reading and interpretation are very uncertain. The god Aššur seems to be the subject (15) and line 18 certainly contains a verb with a third singular suffix which can only refer to Asīnum (or his relative). The second sign seems to be ZA; there is not enough room for a larger sign, not even a NA.

19–29 The syntax of this section is doubtful. Line 19 seems to be resumed by *qāt uppišu* in line 21 with *ina qibīt* ^d*aššurma bēltia* being an anacoluthic interjection. But the construction is curious and the *-ma* a bit strange. Equally odd is line 22 which I have taken as construct to line 23. The last word in line 24 is doubtful since I know no parallel (other than line 12 above) for *šibṭu* being used of a person; but the phrase *šibṭi aḫʾāti* appears in Walker, *CT* 51 no.142: 7 (incantation).

30–36 For proposed identifications of these structures at Aššur see Landsberger, *JCS* 8 (1954) p.36 and Miglus, *ZA* 72 (1982) p.266 n.2.

36–47 In line 41 'his city lord' does not, I believe, refer to Aššur (cf. Larsen, *City-State* p.148 n.125). The scribe assumes that the future desecrator will be a foreigner and therefore wants both Aššur and the foreigner's own god to curse him.

49–54 The real meaning of these lines is still obscure.