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A STUDY IN CONTRAST:
SARGON OF ASSYRIA AND RUSA OF URARTU¹

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Structuralism is dead—and in the study of the Ancient Near East it had a relatively short-lived impact that only few scholars explicitly acknowledged. In the 1970–1980s the “Rome school” of Near Eastern historians, with Liverani, del Monte, Fales, and Zaccagnini as the driving forces, worked on a lexicon of Assyrian ideology inspired by semiotics. The group produced a series of groundbreaking books and articles, some more overtly structuralist than others.² These works had a great impact on studies of royal ideology in Mesopotamia, especially those on the Neo-Assyrian period, some of which took the ideas a bit too far in that they saw everything Assyrians produced through that lens.³ The structuralist approach has influenced ancient studies otherwise as well, perhaps in a more indirect way, in its concern with alterity, the representation of “the other,” or however else one wants to formulate it. The binary oppositions that lie at its basis suit the study of interactions between various groups well. In classics interest in that topic peaked in the 1980s and produced a set of excellent studies.⁴ In Ancient Near Eastern studies fewer scholars addressed the subject, but especially members of the same Rome school wrote on it.⁵ The basic idea these writings expressed is simple: all foreigners were enemies because they presented the negative mirror image of the cultures that wrote our sources. In essence the world can be summed up

¹ I was fortunate to read the text discussed here at the University of Oxford in 2007 with a group of excellent students: Matthias Egeler, Mary Frazer, Nathanael Shelley, Kathryn Stevens, and Jonathan Tilley. I would like to thank them for forcing me to make my ideas clearer and for inspiring some of my readings.

² The primary examples are Liverani 1979: 297–318; Liverani 1990 and the set of articles that were translated into English in his book, 2004, and various articles in Fales, ed. 1981.

³ See the critique in Bahrani 2008.

⁴ E.g., Hartog 1980.

⁵ Fales 1976: 149–273; Fales 1987: 425–435, and Zaccagnini 1987: 409–424. A more recent example that treats the Hittites is Cohen 2001: 113–129.

as divided into two: Assyrians and non-Assyrians,⁶ Greeks and barbarians,⁷ and many other variations. Alterity remains astoundingly relevant today and the source of much angry debate. Remarkably many speak of a “clash of civilizations” on the world stage or even in their own societies.⁸

The seminal study of scholarly interaction with the foreign east remains, of course, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which appeared just when I started my studies with Ben Foster. Ben must have read the book immediately after its publication and referred to it casually in the midst of a class where we read some Sumerian or Akkadian text. He did not intend to turn his students into post-colonial critics, but showed by example what he expected us to do: read ancient Mesopotamian texts closely, but also be aware of what is going on intellectually outside the field of Assyriology. And with this contribution to his *Festschrift* I hope to show him that I did listen: I propose here a close reading of a famous text, starting with some structuralist analysis but taking it outside that framework, as an illustration of why the approach failed. In the end, I hope to shed some light on the how the Assyrians thought about at least one “other” in a somewhat more nuanced way than a simple “us vs. them.”

The text I read here is Sargon’s report on his eighth campaign,⁹ a royal statement of military achievement that rightly deserves a place in Ben Foster’s anthology of Akkadian literature.¹⁰ Although written in prose, the author (or authors, a subject I will address later on) used poetic imagery, metaphors, and wordplay in a manner no other royal account of Assyria matches. Neologisms abound and throughout the text the language is unusual and startles the reader. I assume—maybe mistakenly—that the author was a man, and the language shows clearly that he knew his Akkadian very well. Our label “Eighth Campaign account” does not do credit to his work. Perhaps we should call it “Sargon II’s epic,” if I may

⁶ Fales 1987.

⁷ Cartledge 1993.

⁸ I merely refer to the recent book by Todorov 2008 to show how charged the issue remains.

⁹ Main publication: Thureau-Dangin 1912; additional fragments: KAH 2, 141 (ll. 99–109, 207–206, 334–344) and Weidner 1937–1939: 1–6. (ll. 96–103, 251–259, 334–337). A full edition is Mayer 1983. I use my own edition here.

¹⁰ Foster 2005: 790–813. The recent article, Hurowitz 2008, contains a literary analysis of some aspects of the account, and quotes several passages I discuss here as well. The aims of Hurowitz’s investigation are quite different, however. He seeks to establish a literary motif throughout the text (“shutting up the enemy”) and concentrates on wording regarding speech and verbal expression. I am grateful to Michael Roaf for pointing this article out to me.

borrow Jan Assmann's suggestion for the report on the Nubian Piye's conquest of Egypt.¹¹ Sargon's report is ideal for close reading: it is almost completely preserved, of sufficient length, and focuses on one event, the defeat of Rusa of Urartu in 714 BC.¹²

The opposition between Sargon and his Urartian enemy has not gone unnoticed: the latter's cowardice is in sharp contrast to Sargon's heroism and piety, the Assyrian is righteous while Rusa is treacherous.¹³ But the way in which this opposition is expressed through sentences that are each other's mirror images has not been discussed, so far as I know. In the early part of the narrative, when Sargon is on the road to fight Rusa, two passages describe the Urartian and the Assyrian. In translation they read:

Rusa, the Urartian, who does not observe the command of the gods Assur and Marduk, who does not respect the oath of the lord of lords, mountain man, the seed of a murderous line, who has no common sense, whose lips babble foolishness and vicious talk, who does not observe the solemn command of the god Shamash, the great judge of the gods, and who yearly does not fail to overstep his boundaries. (ll. 92–94)

And

I, Sargon, the king of the four corners of the universe, the shepherd of Assyria, who observes the oath of Enlil and Marduk, who heeds the judgment of Shamash, the seed of Assur the city of wisdom and broad understanding, who respectfully attends to the word of the great gods, who does not overstep the boundaries they have set, righteous king, who speaks good things and abhors lies and from whose mouth do not come wicked and treacherous words, the wise one among all kings. (ll. 112–115)

The author meticulously chose his words to express how the two men were opposites.

Rusa:	<i>la nāšir zikir</i> ^d <i>Aššur</i> ^d <i>Marduk</i>	(l. 92)
	does not observe the command of the gods Assur and Marduk	
Sargon:	<i>nāšir samni</i> ^d <i>Enlil</i> ^d <i>Marduk</i>	(l. 112)
	observes the oath of the gods Enlil and Marduk	
Rusa:	<i>šaddû'a zēr nērti</i>	(l. 93)
	mountain man, the seed of a murderous line	
Sargon:	<i>zēr Assur</i> ^{ki} <i>āl nēmeqi pīt hasissi</i>	(l. 113)
	the seed of Assur, the city of wisdom and broad understanding	

¹¹ Assmann 2002: 322–334.

¹² I follow Foster 2005a in rendering the king's name in its Urartian form Rusa, where the Akkadian text has Ursa.

¹³ Fales 1991: 135–138 and Kravitz 2003: 81.

- Rusa: *la pāliḫu māmīt bēl bēlī* (l. 92)
does not respect the oath of the lord of lords (that is, Enlil)
- Sargon: *ša amāt ilī rabūti palḫiš ūtaqqūma* (l. 113)
who respectfully attends to the word of the great gods
- Rusa: *šattišam ana la egē ētettiḫu ušurtašu* (l. 94)
yearly does not fail to overstep his boundaries
- Sargon: *la isanniḫu ušurtašu* (l. 113)
does not overstep the boundaries the gods have set
- Rusa: *dabāb tušši nullāti tišbura šaptāšu* (l. 93)
his lips babble foolishness and vicious talk
- Sargon: *dābīb damqāte ša ikkibšu amāt tašgerti epiš lemmutim ḫabālu la uššu ina pišu* (l. 114)
speaks good things and abhors lies and from his mouth do not come wicked and treacherous words
- Rusa: *ša^d Šamaš dayyān ilī zikiršu kabtu la našruma* (l. 94)
does not observe the solemn command of the god Shamash, the great judge of the gods
- Sargon: *mupiq dēn^d Šamaš* (l. 112)
heeds the judgment of Shamash
- Rusa: *ša tašimtu la idū* (l. 93)
has no common sense
- Sargon: *mudū malkī ša kiššati* (l. 115)
is the wise one among all kings
- Rusa: ^{kur}*Urarṭāju* (l. 92)
Uartian
- Sargon: *rē^ʔ kurAssur^{ki}* (l. 112)
shepherd of Assyria

The parallelism in wording is so obvious I need not discuss it further.¹⁴ The gods Enlil, Marduk, and Shamash appear with both kings albeit in a different order and Enlil is referred to as *bēl bēlī* rather than named (l. 92), possibly as wordplay between *māmīt bēl bēlī* and *amāt ilī*. There can be little doubt that the author carefully selected the language to distinguish Sargon from Rusa. When he described another Assyrian opponent, Urzana of Muṣaṣir, in detail but outside this context, he used a different vocabulary:

ēpiš anni u gillati ētiq māmīt ilāni la kanišu bēlūti ekṣu šaddū'a ša ina adē^d Aššur^d Šamaš^d Nabū^d Marduk iḫṭūma

¹⁴ Hurowitz 2008: 112–114 focuses on the elements that deal with speech and trespass in this passage.

evil-doer and sinner, who transgresses a divine oath and does not submit to my lordship, vicious mountain man, who breaks the loyalty oath to Assur, Shamash, Nabu and Marduk. (ll. 309–310)

The contrasting characteristics of Sargon and Rusa (wise-foolish; modest-vain, honest-treacherous, pious-impious) all fit the stereotypes of orientalism as described by E. Said. Said pointed out other such polarities, several of which appear in the Sargon account as well.

I. Male-Female

Sargon's masculinity is beyond a doubt: he is a great warrior and when his troops are exhausted he sets off on his own in pursuit of Rusa (l. 130). The Urartian behaves like a woman, however. In one passage this is unequivocal: when Rusa mourns his army's defeat he is "like a woman in labor" (*kīma mi^harišti*, l. 151). Less obvious is his behavior when the battle turns against him: he abandons his chariot and flees on mares (^MANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ/*urītu*, l. 140). It may be true that this is an ethnographic observation of Urartians riding mares rather than stallions,¹⁵ but the indication of the horses' sex does not seem innocent.¹⁶ I suggest that the masculine-feminine contrast also appears in an unexpected context, that is, in the description of the natural environment. The author describes two mountains in very similar terms, Mt. Simirria, which is in Sargon's territory (ll. 18–22), and Mt. U'aush, where Rusa sets up his army (ll. 96–102). Mt. Simirria's attributes are feminine, Mt. U'aush's masculine:

Simirria: <i>ubān šadī rabītu</i>	(l. 18)
a great mountain peak	
U'aush: <i>šadī rabi</i>	(l. 96)
a great mountain	
Simirria: <i>kīma šēlūt šukurri zaqpat</i>	(l. 18)
which points upward like the blade of a lance	
U'aush: <i>kīma šēlti patri zaqpu</i>	(l. 99)
which points upward like the blade of a knife	
Simirria: <i>eliš rešāša šamāmī endā</i>	(l. 19)
its two peaks reach heaven above	

¹⁵ Oppenheim 1960: 139 n. 15.

¹⁶ Note that in the passage that praises Urartian horse-training (ll. 170–173), the horses are male.

- U'aush: *ina qereb šamê ummudā rēšāšu* (l. 96)
its two peaks reach into the midst of heaven
- Simirria: *idi ana idi mēteqa la išât* (l. 20)
from side to side it has no road
- U'aush: *ašaršu la ētiq* (l. 96)
(no-one) has crossed its terrain
- Simirria: *ina ahiša hurri natbak šadê huddudu* (l. 21)
in its sides ravines and chasms are deeply cut
- U'aush: *hurri natbak šadê ruqū[te]ušurrušu* (l. 99)
ravines and chasms are [] in the heart of the distant
mountains

The descriptions are worded in the same way, but there is an opposition of grammatical genders that seems not accidental. The author inserted the word *ubānu* “peak” when describing Mt. Simirria, which enabled him to use feminine grammatical forms throughout. The text goes on to tell how Sargon’s ingenuity enabled his troops to cross the feminine mountain Simirria, while Rusa uses the masculine U’aush as a gathering point for his army.

II. Individual-Group

Typically in discourse of alterity the individual’s actions on one side are opposed to the idea that the negative other can only act within a group. In Sargon’s account the Urartian king gained strength only from the presence of numerous troops, which the kings of all the countries in his territory supplied (ll. 107–108). Sargon’s army, on the contrary, is a burden to him. His men are weary-eyed and thirsty (ll. 127–129), so he leaves them behind and *itti narkabtija šēpēja ēdēniti u sisē ālikūt idija ša ašar nakri u šalmi la ipparakkū* “with only my personal chariot and the horses that go beside me and do not leave my side in hostile and friendly terrain” (l. 132) he attacks Rusa’s battle line. The description of his victory uses various metaphors to point out how numerous the opponents were he personally slaughtered: *šalmāt qurādīšu kīma buqli aštīma* “the corpses of his warriors I spread like malt” (l. 134), *damēšunu hurri natbaki nāriš ušardīma šēri kīdi bamāte ašruba illūriš* “their blood I let rush like a river down the mountain gorges and I dyed red the fields, plains and open country as if with berries” (l. 135), *kīma aslī uṭabbihma* “like sheep I slaughtered” (l. 136), and *šunu kī kulbābi ina pušqīšu upattū uruḥ pašqāti* “they, like ants in distress, chose whatever

narrow path open to them” (l. 143). Also later in the account, when Sargon makes the detour to Muṣaṣir, he does so *itti ištēt narkabti šēpēja ēdēnīti u 1000 pīḥallīja šitmurti* “with his single chariot and a thousand select cavalrymen” (l. 320). It is remarkable that in the entire account before the subscript only one Assyrian other than Sargon is named: Sin-aḫ-uṣur, the king’s brother (l. 132). On the contrary Rusa’s allies are listed in detail and when Sargon captured 260 members of Rusa’s court the latter, left alone, fled (ll. 138–140).

III. Order-Chaos

Rusa’s defeat was a rout and his troops ran away in a panic. The contrast with the Assyrians’ calm is obvious. The same opposition between chaos and order also seems to apply to the natural environment, whose detailed description makes this text so unusual. Rusa’s habitat was inhospitable and dangerous as the long passages on mountain ranges repeatedly stress (ll. 15–16, 18–21, 96–102, 322–328). The setting of the campaign in wild nature stands in contrast to the cities, which Sargon describes as places of order. For example, Tarui and Tarmakisa were well-fortified storage centers for the abundant grain harvests. When the inhabitants abandoned them they entered *ina nābali ašar šumāmi madbariš* “dry wasteland, a place of thirst like the desert” (l. 193), a comparison that is quite inappropriate for the lush Zagros Mountains, which elsewhere in the text are said to contain mighty waterfalls. But the negative opinion of the natural environment is not unusual in Assyrian literature; mountains especially were considered unpleasant, a feeling shared in much other ancient literature on the region.¹⁷ As Meissner pointed out a long time ago, the Akkadian term *šaddū’a*, “mountain man,” is an insult.¹⁸ In the parallel phrase, Sargon’s connection to the city of Assur is stressed (see above).

Sargon’s success in overcoming natural obstacles is a running motif throughout the text and in Mesopotamian literature in general heroic kings tame wild nature.¹⁹ The mountainous locale of the Eighth Campaign may have been a major element in its visual representation, now

¹⁷ Briant 1976: 163–258.

¹⁸ Meissner 1912: 1–18. I think that Zaccagnini’s reading of that term as an ethnographic note is too literal (Zaccagnini 1987: 412).

¹⁹ See, for example, Sargon (of Akkad)’s birth legend (Westenholz 1997: 40–42) where cutting passes through difficult mountains is mentioned. Foster (2005b: 63–64) compares such passages in Sargon’s Eighth Campaign account to episodes in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

mostly lost unfortunately. In Sargon's palace at Khorsabad Emile Botta excavated a set of reliefs that were destroyed when the boat carrying them sank in the Tigris. Some drawings survive and show that one relief from Room 13 depicted Sargon's troops raiding Muṣaṣir.²⁰ Another from Room 14 may present the siege of a fortress in Zikirtu, mentioned in Sargon's account (ll. 74–78).²¹ Mountains feature prominently in the background of both. Moreover, in Assur Walter Andrae excavated a group of glazed decorated tiles that were mostly of Middle Assyrian times, but Weidner pointed out that some of them were part of Sargon's renovation of the Ehursagkurkurra-temple.²² The only scene published so far shows the king on his chariot riding between mountains identified with epigraphs as Nikippi and Upa, which appear as challenging obstacles in the campaign account (ll. 15–16, cf. l. 418).²³ Other tiles are said to represent sieges, army camps, etc.

Other oppositions between Sargon/Assyria and Rusa/non-Assyria appear throughout the account of the Eighth Campaign. The text is a gold mine for a structuralist semiotician. Sargon's author was not the first to use these binary oppositions. An earlier example from Egypt is the account of Rameses II's battle of Qadesh, where all these ideas appear as well in text and imagery.²⁴ Nor was he the last one to use these clichés that distinguish “us from the other.” Stereotypes like it still abound today.

Reality is not so simple, however, and polarities—while easy to assert—break down when we look at “the other” more closely and replace stereotypes with observations. The Greeks struggled with this: Homer's Trojan heroes were much like his Achaeans. It was only under the pressure of the Persian wars that the image of the eastern barbarian arose in order to bolster Greek self-confidence and the sense of a common identity in opposition to a foreign threat.²⁵ The author of Sargon's Eighth Campaign account was well aware that the Urartians were not simply the

²⁰ Thureau-Dangin 1912: xviii; Albenda 1986: pl. 133. Remarkably one fragment of that relief, showing the seated king and two scribes, reached the Louvre Museum (AO 19892; Nougayrol 1960).

²¹ Albenda 1986: pl. 136.

²² Weidner 1926.

²³ Andrae 1923: pl. 6. The published scene clearly is a compilation of miscellaneous tiles, some of which do not belong, and the restorer placed them upside down. One of the latter includes a type of throne that Sargon would not have used, which led Fridman (1969) to dispute the Sargon date of the entire scene and to suggest a Tiglath-Pileser III connection instead. I find Weidner's suggestion more convincing.

²⁴ See Tefnin 1981: 55–76 for an explicitly structuralist analysis of those.

²⁵ Hall 1989.

negative mirror image of the Assyrians. They had accomplished many things that were praiseworthy. A large part of the narrative describing the progress of Sargon's army after Rusa's defeat contains statements that contradict the idea that everything related to the enemy had to be negative. In seven sections the author relates the conquest of enemy cities and districts repeating a tripartite structure:

- A. description of the target in laudatory terms
- B. indication that the inhabitants fled in fear
- C. description of the thorough destruction by Sargon's army

The admiration of Urartu's achievements has bothered commentators before. Oppenheim saw it as ethnographic detail to keep the audience's interest,²⁶ Zaccagnini and Fales thought it the height of Assyrian disparagement as "the bigger they are, the harder they fall."²⁷ Kravitz focused on the second element in the tripartite structure: the inhabitants should have resisted rather than flee, and the positive descriptions restore the proper heroism to the Assyrians' deeds, which otherwise seem tame.²⁸

The passages are constructed in such a way that parts A and C run parallel: what was in perfect condition is utterly destroyed.²⁹ The correspondence between the two parts is the clearest in the description of the irrigation system at Ulhu,³⁰ but other examples are the statement that Sargon let loose beasts of burden (l. 187) on the fields in a region that is famed for its horse breeding (ll. 170–173) and the emphasis on the destruction of orchards (ll. 265–267) in the place whose palaces smell pleasantly because of the roof beams (l. 246). The positive characteristics of Urartu are not limited to these passages. Earlier in the account Rusa's troops are praised as *lē'ūt tāḥazi tukulti ummānišu* "skilled in battle, the protection of his army" (l. 104) when Sargon chides his own men for being tired and sluggish (ll. 127–128). Rusa was a worthy opponent and it is here, I think, that the binary opposition between the Assyrian and the other breaks down and where a structuralist analysis falls short.

²⁶ Oppenheim 1960: 146–147.

²⁷ Zaccagnini 1981: 275 and Fales 1991: 144.

²⁸ Kravitz 2003: 92–94.

²⁹ Zaccagnini 1981: 263–276; Fales 1991: 131, and Kravitz 2003: 92.

³⁰ Zaccagnini analyzed the passage in detail. I would add to his list the fact that Rusa gave his thirsty people water (ll. 201–202), while Sargon gave his troops sweet wine like water (l. 220).

The core issue of Sargon's account is kingship³¹ and kingship itself has a contradictory dimension in that it is both constructive and destructive. In order to do good for his own people the king has to harm others. We know that Assyrian royal inscriptions adjusted the description of devastation to the kind of account in which it is embedded. Sennacherib, for example, inserted his account of the annihilation of Babylon by water in a building inscription that honored his construction of canals to provide Nineveh with water.³² In essence all Assyrian royal inscriptions are an expression of that contradiction: they commemorate building activity but are filled with details on tearing things down. Every positive action has a negative parallel. This kind of thinking was fundamental in Mesopotamia, and pervades the omen literature where a good outcome on the right is matched with a bad outcome on the left and so on.³³ The actions of kings have the same dichotomy; positive and negative results are like two sides of the same coin.

Real kings—both Assyrian and not—are alike and when they do good things to their people, they do bad things to their enemies. The Assyrians rarely expressed that sameness explicitly although they did refrain from using deprecatory language when discussing cultures on the same level as their own, thus silently acknowledging the fact.³⁴ Sargon's account may be unique in stressing that Rusa was a legitimate king, in a startling passage that describes the coronation ritual in Urartu (ll. 336–342).³⁵ The Urartian king was crowned before the god Haldi during a great celebration involving the entire population of Muşaşir. The point of his royalty is reinforced in the description of the last item of loot carried off from the city. It is:

*ištēn šalam Ursa itti 2 sīsē pēḥallišu ša mugirrišu adi šubtišunu erī šapku
ša tašriḫtu ramanišu mā ina 2 sīsēja ištēn ša mugirrija šarrūt māt Urarti
ikšudu qāti barim šēruššun*

A statue, cast in copper, of Rusa with his two horses and charioteer together with its base (inscribed with) his self-glorification “with my two horses and one charioteer I took the kingship of Urartu.” (ll. 403–404)

³¹ Kravitz 2003: 92–94.

³² Galter 1984: 159–173.

³³ Guinan 1996: 5–10.

³⁴ Oppenheim 1960: 139.

³⁵ Oppenheim 1960: 141 and Kravitz 2003: 86–87.

It is interesting that another Sargon text that describes some of the same loot omits the quote of the inscription on the base.³⁶ The Eighth Campaign account has Rusa speak to us asserting that his kingship was a personal accomplishment and contradicting the earlier idea that he could only survive with the support of the masses. Sargon and Rusa were on the same level, and Oppenheim even suggested that the rise to power of both was equally unorthodox.³⁷ There is no negative mirror image here but sameness.

The awkward likeness is resolved in the last narrative element of the account, once more a startling passage that describes Rusa's reaction to the news that Muṣaṣir was sacked. The author used rare words and expressions and invented new ones to show how upset the king was.

išmēma Ursa qaqqariš ippalsiḥ naḥlapātišu ušarriṭma uššerā idēšu išḥuṭ kubussu pērassu iḥsipma urappis³⁸ libbašu ina kilallēšu buppāniš issaḥip izzizma ṣurrušu iḥmuṭa kabattuš ina pišu ittaškunū qubbē marṣūte

When Rusa heard this, he threw himself on the ground, tore his clothes, and his arms hung limp. He ripped off his headband, pulled out his hair, pounded his chest with both hands, and threw himself flat on his face. His heart stopped and his liver burned. Screams of pain kept rising from his lips. (ll. 411–413)

The brief description has no parallels in Assyrian royal inscriptions, although elements of it appear elsewhere, some of them possibly inspired by Sargon's Eighth Campaign account. Also Merodach-baladan "threw himself on the ground (and) tore his garment" (*qaqqariš ippalsiḥ naḥlap-tuš išruṭ*) when the king of Elam betrayed him according to Sargon's Annals.³⁹ Ripping one's clothes was a recurring sign of frustration. Esarhaddon did it when he heard his brothers plotted against him (*ṣubāt rubūtija ušarriṭ*),⁴⁰ as did the prince of Elam when he heard that Assurbani-pal had defeated his father (*naḥlaptāšu išruṭu*).⁴¹ The Poor Man of Nipur did the same when he despaired (*lubūšešu ušarriṭa*).⁴² Esarhaddon

³⁶ A 16947, Tadmor 1958: 24. Hurowitz (2008: 118) sees the reference to the inscription in the Eighth Campaign account as another example of Sargon's silencing of Rusa.

³⁷ Oppenheim 1960: 141–142.

³⁸ See Foster 2005a: 813 for this reading.

³⁹ Fuchs 1993: 153.

⁴⁰ Borger 1956: 43.

⁴¹ AfO 8 178: 6; Borger 1996: 300: 6 I 17.

⁴² Gurney 1956: 154.

went on “to beat his hands together” (*arpisa rittija*)⁴³ but the other passages do not resemble Sargon’s account further.

Another of Rusa’s actions is found in royal context as well. Assurbanipal threw Dunanu, the prince of the Gambuleans, flat on his face (*buppāniš ašupšu*)⁴⁴ but for the rest the author of Sargon’s Eighth Campaign account showed unique creativity and a good knowledge of Akkadian literature. When Rusa ripped off his headband (*išḫuṭ kubussu*) the author used the same verb as when Humbaba in the Epic of Gilgamesh took off his six coats of mail⁴⁵ or when divine tiaras were removed in Akkadian literature.⁴⁶ Rusa’s *kubšu* “headband” was equated with *agû* “tiara” in lexical lists.⁴⁷ Other expressions are very unusual and artful. When the author wrote about Rusa *izzizma šurrušu iḫmuṭa kabattuš* he may have wanted to contrast “standing still” (*uzuzzu*) with “hurrying” (*ḥamāṭu*).⁴⁸ I found no parallels for “his arms hung limp,” and “he tore out his hair.” Overall, Rusa’s behavior has no clear analogy elsewhere. The final words of the description which state that he uttered “screams of pain” (*qubbê maršûte*) might point at inspiration from medical texts, but I was unable to find similar vocabulary there. The author also did not use the standard phraseology of people going mad and the verb *maḥû* does not occur in his description.⁴⁹

The author clearly played with words and several pairs are obvious:

ippalsih—naḥlapātīšu
ušarriṭ—uššerā
iḫsip—issahip
pērassu—urappis

and perhaps also:

išḫuṭ—iḫmuṭa
kubussu—kabattuš

⁴³ Borger 1956: 43.

⁴⁴ AfO 8 182: 21; Borger 1996: 303: 21 II 27.

⁴⁵ GE IV 199, cf. George 2003: 598.

⁴⁶ En. el. I 67: Ea ripped off Apsu’s tiara (*ištaḥaš agāšu*); and Erra III 46 (Cagni 1969: 98): Marduk takes off his tiara (*agê bēlūtišu ištaḥaš*). Hallo and Moran 1979: 96 doubt the appearance of this expression in SB Zu I 79 (*šaḥṭuma . . . agūša* cf. Annus 2001: 20).

⁴⁷ CAD K: 485; AHw: 497–498, and cf. Kravitz 2003: 88.

⁴⁸ CAD Š: 259 takes *izziz* from *ezēzu* “to be angry” but that would also be unique.

⁴⁹ For example, Esarhaddon’s brothers *imaḥḥū* (Borger 1956: 42) and Taharqa *illika/u maḥḥūtiš* when Assurbanipal defeated the Nubian army (Streck Asb 8 I 84 = Piepkorn 32 l. 81; Borger 1996: 20: A I 84 B I 80). Also the word *fēmu*, which occurs elsewhere in contexts of insanity (CAD Ț: 95–96), does not appear here.

This pairing of words with similar consonants seems to have driven the composition of the lines and the creation of new expressions. The author's skill is visible throughout the account but here he excelled. The special care he devoted to this passage indicates its importance in the entire account. It is here that the antithesis between Sargon and Rusa is destroyed, as Rusa stops being a king and can no longer be compared to Sargon. As Kravitz correctly pointed out, these lines describe his de-coronation.⁵⁰

Kravitz suggested a parallelism between Rusa's story and the description of Urartian achievements discussed above. The positive element (A) was the coronation, the destruction of it (C) the de-coronation, and we have to go back much earlier in the account to find Rusa's flight (B). There is a major difference, however, with the other descriptions of Urartu's accomplishments: Rusa was the agent of his own de-coronation and even if Sargon inspired it, he took no part in it. The theme of Rusa taking matters in his own hands is even clearer in other accounts of his defeat, where the statement that he committed suicide is routine. The Annals declare openly that Rusa survived and spent some period in mourning before he took his own life:

namurrat Aššur bēlija iṣḥupašuma ina patar parzilli ramanišu kīma šaḥî libbašu iṣḥulma napištašu uqatti

The brilliance of the god Assur my lord overwhelmed him, He stabbed his heart with his own iron dagger, like a pig, and ended his life.⁵¹

Other inscriptions telescope events and make him commit suicide when he heard the news of Muṣaṣir's sack:

ḥepê Muṣaṣir šalâl^d Ḥaldia ilišu iṣmēma ina qātē ramanišu ina patar parzilli šibbišu napištašu uqatti

When he heard of the sack of Muṣaṣir and the theft of Haldi, his god, he ended his life by his own hand with the iron dagger at his belt (Display 77).⁵²

šālil māt Muṣaṣri ša Ursa šar māt Urarṭi ina puluḥtišu rabīti ina kakki ramanišu uqatta napištuš

⁵⁰ Kravitz 2003: 88.

⁵¹ Annals lines 164–165; Fuchs 1993: 116–117.

⁵² Fuchs 1993: 215. The same statement about his suicide appears in the Nimrud Cylinder 41 (Gadd 1954: 177) and the Cyprus Stele (Luckenbill 1927: 102).

who raided Mušasir, because of which Rusa the king of Urartu, in his great fear, terminated his life with his own weapon (Khorsabad Cylinder 27).⁵³

Previous detailed analyses of the Eighth Campaign account argue that the text contains two narratives that have not been fully integrated. They suggest that more than one author worked on it⁵⁴ or that the account was revised at the last minute before it was presented to the public.⁵⁵ I am not convinced. The passage of Rusa's de-coronation does not read like a hasty revision; on the contrary it was the result of a careful phrasing of a crucial point in the narrative. I also find that the idea that the account represents a collection of views on the enemy⁵⁶ ignores the contradictions inherent in kingship. A binary opposition between Sargon and Rusa is too simplistic and I do not see why a single author could not have presented the more complicated view from the start.

Structuralism failed because it was too rigorous: if underlying configurations determine everything, where does that leave creativity? In reaction scholarship has turned its attention to the individual, the unusual, the divergence from the norm, etc. Authorship has re-emerged as a primary concern in literary studies, but scholars of the Ancient Near East are frustrated by the fact that anonymous authors composed most of its literature.⁵⁷ The account of Sargon's Eighth Campaign was created for a single occasion as a letter to the god Assur, one of only a few examples of this genre of letters.⁵⁸ Whether or not it was ever read out aloud to the citizens of Assur, as Oppenheim suggested,⁵⁹ we will never know. The sole preserved manuscript⁶⁰ was found in an unexpected location, in a

⁵³ Fuchs 1993: 36.

⁵⁴ Fales 1991: 147.

⁵⁵ Kravitz 1999: 98–100, and Kravitz 2003.

⁵⁶ Fales 1991: 147.

⁵⁷ Ben Foster dealt with the issue of authorship several times, see Foster 1991: 17–32 and Foster 2007: 5–6. The colophon of the Eighth Campaign supports the conclusion of his 1991 article that the transmitter of the text is as crucial as the creator. Michalowski (1996) offers an interesting discussion of the absence of authorship in Ancient Near Eastern texts with a consideration of Prague School Structuralism in literary studies. See also Glassner 2002.

⁵⁸ Borger 1957–1971: 576, and Levine 2003: 119* n. 25.

⁵⁹ Oppenheim 1960.

⁶⁰ The publication history of the tablet may lead to the impression that there existed three or more manuscripts, but the publications after Thureau-Dangin's *editio princeps* of the Louvre tablet AO 5372 are of additional fragments kept in the Assur collection in Berlin. The Louvre Museum was able to acquire the large tablet in 1910 (cf. http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=26705) because

private house at Assur that belonged to a family of exorcists. It was part of a large library with incantations, prescriptions, lexical lists, a copy of the Erra epic, and much more.⁶¹ The owners of the house had nothing to do with the people identified at the end of the tablet.

Who authored the account? Ostensibly it was Sargon, of course, who described his achievements in the first person, but we do not even know whether or not the king was literate and the quality of the writing indicates that a very educated person composed the text. The colophon names two men.⁶² Ṭab-šar-Aššur conveyed the tablet to the god Assur (*Ṭab-šar-Aššur mašennu rabû ina pani^dAššur bêlija ultēbila*, l. 427). He is well known as Sargon's treasurer, the author of a group of letters to the king,⁶³ and the eponym of the year 717. In this colophon he received the title *lišānu rēšēti*, which Foster translates as "best orator."⁶⁴ The term only appears elsewhere in another letter to the god Assur, and must have something to do with the delivery of the contents of the tablet to the god.⁶⁵ Was Ṭab-šar-Aššur an especially skilled public reader? The scribe who wrote the tablet was Nabû-šallimšunu *ṭupšar šarri rabû giburu ummân Šarrukēn* "great royal scribe, amanuensis,⁶⁶ and scholar of Sargon." He is only vaguely known otherwise⁶⁷ and not one of the well attested scribes of his age. Was he a simple amanuensis, copying faithfully what his master created or did he have a hand in the composition?⁶⁸ This will remain a mystery, but we do know that whoever composed this account was a great writer and had deep insights into the royal condition.

many finds from Assur appeared on the antiquities market even when the excavations were still in progress. See Grayson 1983: 16 and Wartke 2001: 80. (I am grateful to Karen Radner for information and bibliography on items stolen from the Assur excavations).

⁶¹ See Pedersén 1986: 41–76. The tablet is no. 477 in his list.

⁶² I am unconvinced by Hurowitz's argument that this is not a colophon (2008: 105–110) and am especially skeptical of the idea that the 430 lines of the text coincide on purpose with the number of cities Rusa captured.

⁶³ SAA I 41–74.

⁶⁴ Foster 2005a: 813.

⁶⁵ Cf. AHw: 556. The other occurrence is Esarhaddon's letter to Assur (Borger 1956: 107) where the term is written out syllabically. Ungnad 1935: 112 n. 4 translated it as "Professor Eloquentiae."

⁶⁶ Foster 2005a: 813.

⁶⁷ Baker 2001: 870.

⁶⁸ Levine 2003: 115* sees him as the author of the account.

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