



STATE ARCHIVES OF ASSYRIA

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QUERIES TO THE SUNGOD

Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria

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INTRODUCTION

The corpus of tablets published here saw two major editions previously, those of J.A. Knudtzon, *Assyrische Gebete an den Sonnengott* 1893, and of E. Klauber, *Politisch-Religiöse Texte aus der Sargonidenzeit* (1913). A more recent survey of these materials is that of J. Aro, first presented as a paper at the Fourteenth Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (1965) and published in *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne* (CRRAI 14, 1966), pp. 109–117. This paper drew attention to the new materials which had come to light since the publication of the works of Knudtzon and Klauber, notably in the excavations conducted by King (later assisted by R. Campbell Thompson) at Nineveh in 1903–1905.

The corpus falls into two distinct groups: *queries* placed before the sun god Šamaš, and *extispicy reports*. The former are mostly from the reign of Esarhaddon; the latter, from that of his son, Assurbanipal. Each of the two groups is distinguished by its own formal characteristics, which have been discussed extensively by Knudtzon, Klauber, and Aro, so that only brief descriptions and additional remarks need be offered here.

The queries in particular are distinguished by their distinct opening and closing formulas, as well as by an extensive chain of formulas beginning with the word *ezib*, "disregard," whose main purpose seems to have been to eliminate any misunderstanding, untoward event, mishap, or cultic impurity caused by thought, word or deed, which might affect the outcome of the extispicy.¹ The tablets on which the queries were written are characterized by their large, coarse appearance, and by the equally large, coarse shape of their cuneiform writing, which usually runs broadside, across the rectangular tablets. Exceptions to this rule, such as there are, are to be found mostly among the reports from the reign of Assurbanipal. No. 320 (photo EANE p. 208) may serve as an example of a tablet written in a clear, neat Assyrian hand.

The queries were placed before the god Šamaš, often with another clay or papyrus document containing the name of the person about whom the query was made and/or other relevant details.² Omens derived from the extispicies performed, if included at all, always follow the query, and are placed wherever there is space left on the tablet, usually on the side, or following, or in between the closing formulas. As a result, this part of the text is often written in a smaller script, sometimes perpendicular to the main body of the text. In some cases, no omens are included at all; in other cases, two and occasionally three extispicies are recorded. Relatively few of the queries are dated.

In the extispicy reports, on the other hand, the query usually follows the list

of omens, and is on the whole brief. In contrast to the queries, the reports generally also present a summary of the unfavorable protases after the omen section, although this practice is not always followed. Most, if not all, reports appear to have been originally dated. Both reports and queries draw their omens from the major extispicy series and compendia of the first millennium such as the *Bārûtu* and the large compendium KAR 423.

This corpus of queries and reports is unique to the later Sargonids, Esarhaddon and his son, Assurbanipal, and appears to have been specifically produced for the needs of these two monarchs. The formal difference between the queries and the reports is possibly due to an evolution of the former into a simpler format, rather than to different traditions.³ The early texts from the reign of Assurbanipal (i.e. those which can be dated between the years 668–657 B.C.) are, with the exception of no. 299, in no way different in form from those of Esarhaddon. The later ones (i.e. those which can be dated to the years 652–650 B.C.) are the much simplified "reports." The apparent hiatus is probably due merely to accident. The best represented eponym in the reports is Sagabbu (651 B.C.).

The subject matter of these queries and reports reflects some of the most immediate or pressing concerns of the later Sargonids, such as the intentions or activities of an enemy or enemies, named or unnamed; the loyalty of serving officials or of prospective appointees to sundry offices, specified or unspecified, of the realm; illness in the royal family, and the like. In the case of Assurbanipal, queries concerning the outcome of his struggle with his rebellious brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, king of Babylon, and related matters, form the major topic of the reports. As a source of history, the importance of these texts is enhanced by the fact that they are free of the kind of tendentious editing which characterizes the annals and related royal records, or the self-serving interests permeating the correspondence of courtiers. The diviners may have manipulated some of the results of the extispicies, but not the facts stated in the queries placed before the god of justice.

All this is not to imply that queries to the gods have been unknown in Mesopotamia prior to the reigns of the later Sargonids. Far from it. Queries are attested, in fact, as early as the Old Babylonian period.⁴ Queries to sundry gods are also embedded in the introductory formulas of Kassite extispicy reports.⁵ There is also an unquestionable similarity in the formulary of the Sargonid queries and another divinatory genre, also consisting of queries, the *tamîtus*, some of which, as we now know, go back to the OB period,⁶ and with which the Sargonid queries share numerous features in the formulary. It is clear, then, that the formulary of the Sargonid queries goes back to much older traditions.

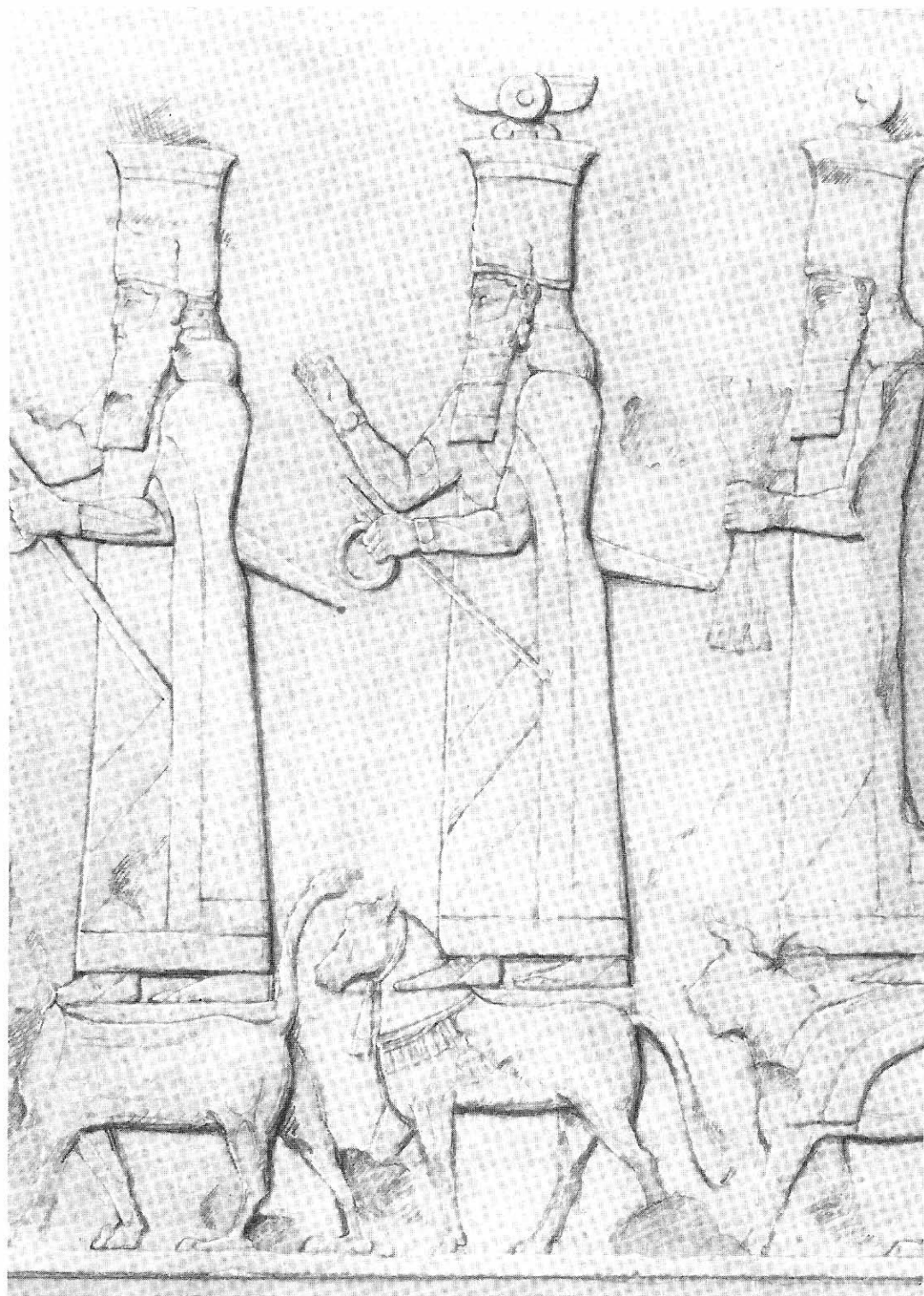


FIG. 1. Šamaš: Maltese rock carving (reign of Sennacherib).
ORIGINAL DRAWING II, 26.

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The Formulary and Terminology of the Queries

The Opening Line

The Sargonid queries invariably begin with the line *Šamaš bēlu rabû ša ašallūka anna kīna apalanni*, "Šamaš, great lord, answer me with a firm 'yes' to what I ask you," a formula they have in common with the *tamītu* texts (see below).⁷

As a haruspical terminus technicus, the expression *anna apālu*, "to answer with a 'yes'" is already attested in the Old Babylonian period; cf., e.g., "the enemy had extispicies (*têrētim*) made ... to which the god will not give him a positive answer (*annam la ippalūšu*): he will go to his destruction, (but) it is favorable (for us)" (RA 33 172:37ff, a letter to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari); "I had extispicies made; my extispicies were favorable, and the god answered me with a firm 'yes' (*ilum annam īpulanni*)" (ARM 3 84:24f, see also ARM 3 42:8ff). The opposite term *ulla apālu*, "to answer with 'no'," is attested in an unpublished omen: "If the 'path' descends on the right, and is split on the right, he who gave you a negative answer (*ša ulla īpulū[ka]*), will give you a positive answer" (BM 122657:1f).⁸

Occasionally, if the suggested restorations are correct,⁹ the latter part of the opening line may also appear in the repetition of the query, see no. 52:4, 53:4, and 235 r.4.

The Stipulated Term

The introductory line is followed immediately by the query, which often opens with a statement of a specified period of time (*adannu*) in which the event described in the query may occur and to which the efficacy of the divination is limited.¹⁰ This specified period places a time limit on the answer to the query, which may refer to enemy action anticipated or in progress, such as an attack on Assyrian territory, a garrison, etc; or, to the Assyrian king himself when embarking or planning to embark on some military or diplomatic activity necessitated by enemy action. The number of days in this specified time period varies from query to query, and was no doubt governed by such practical considerations as the occasion called for, but in the extant queries it is from 7 to 100 days (and nights); 20, 30, 40, 50 and 90 days are also attested. The fullest version of the formula is: "From this day, the ...th day of this month MN, until the ... day of MN of this year, for a period of x days and x nights, the term stipulated for the performance of the extispicy — within this

stipulated term ..."; for variants, see Knudtzon AGS, p. 14f.

Stipulated terms are attested not only in queries necessitated by enemy threat,¹¹ but also where action is initiated by the king, as in nos. 16, 28, 81, 124, etc. Noteworthy is also the fact that such terms are attested in queries in which the loyalty of sundry officials of the realm is questioned (see nos. 139, 142, 144, 145, etc.; a stipulated term of 90 days is preserved in full only in no. 139). The significance of this fact is that it does point to a *specific* event of unrest or rebellion and may explain the laconic statement in the Esarhaddon Chronicle¹² that in the king's eleventh year (i.e. 670 B.C.) numerous officers had been put to death, an event which must have left open numerous vacancies in the ranks of the royal officials.

In some cases, when the stipulated term is carried over into the following year, this is carefully indicated in the formula. See, for example, no. 60:2ff ("[from this day, the ... day of this month], Shebat of [this year, to the ... day of Nisan of the c]oming [year], 40 days [and nights ...]"); further 124:2ff, 125:3, 263:2, and 265 r.7. Note also the formulation of no. 28:3, "twenty days and nights, the passing and the coming days (included)".¹³ In cases when the days of the stipulated term were shared by two adjacent months, the latter was consistently designated as "the coming month" (cf. nos. 23 r.8; 128:2; 142:2, r.7; and see Klauber PRT, p. xiii).

The practice of designating a specific period of time for the efficacy of an extispicy is known from the OB period. Several examples are attested in Mari, e.g. *têrêtim ... arhu 30 ûmî u 30 mušêtim*, "extispicies (for) a month, thirty days and nights", JCS 21 228 M:7ff; "extispicies which are (valid) to the beginning of the month," ARM 13 115:9ff; "the extispicy is favorable to the third day," ARM 3 30:9f.¹⁴

The individual too could set for himself a specified term for the efficacy of his request. In two recently published OB *ikribus* from Tell ed-Der, dated to the reign of Ammisaduqa, the suppliant is setting a term of a year or so (360 days to be exact, 6 *šuši*) for the efficacy of his prayer to be valid.¹⁵ On the occurrence of a stipulated term corresponding to the *adannu* in the classical sources, see C.J. Gadd, CRRAI 14 (1966), p. 31f.

The term for extispicy occurring in the *adannu* formula (*nêpešti bārûti*) is also attested in the introductory formulas of late OB extispicy reports, e.g. "one lamb for *nêpešti bārîm*, JCS 11 91 no. 8:1, similarly JCS 2 77:8; note also "six birds for divination (*nêpešti bārîm*)," BE 6/1 118:1.¹⁶ Another, more common term for extispicy in the late OB and Kassite reports was *lipit qāti*,¹⁷ and in letters from Mari, *nêpeštu* "extispicy" appears side by side with *têrtu* "oracle."¹⁸ It is clear from the relevant contexts that all three terms, *lipit qāti*, *têrtu*, and *nêpeštu* appear in apposition to each other, and should be considered, for practical purposes, synonymous. More narrowly defined, the word *têrtu* referred to the omens derived from the inspection of the exta, while *lipit qāti* designated the inspection of the exta itself and *nêpeštu* was the general term for the ritual acts performed in the course of extispicy.¹⁹

The Query Proper and its Formulary

The oracular queries are enclosed within an elaborate formulaic framework. Rarely does a query proceed directly from opening to closing formula. Almost invariably it winds its way, as it were, through a maze of formulas until it comes to its conclusion. The theme of a query is usually stated twice, once on the obverse and once on the reverse, and each statement is characterized by its own distinct formulary.

The first statement of the query is, naturally enough, the more extensive and elaborate one. In its simplest form, a query may proceed directly from line 2 to its closing formula ("Does your great divinity know it?", etc., see below), followed by the chain of *ezibs*; cf., for example, no. 41:2ff, "Kaštaritu, city lord of Karkašši, who wrote to Mamitīaršu, a city lord of the Medes: 'Let us act together and break away from Assyria' — Will Mamitīaršu listen to him? Will he comply? Will he become hostile to Esarhaddon this year?" See also nos. 3, 10, 23, and 269. (When a stipulated term is called for, the query follows it, as, for example, in no. 45.)

More commonly, however, certain stereotyped key phrases embedded in the wording of the query serve as its opening formula, leading to an equally stereotyped core. For example, when referring to action to be undertaken by the king, a query typically begins with the precatives of the verbs *šarāmu* and *kapādu* (e.g., "should Esarhaddon strive and plan?", 44:2, 64:2, 84:2, 86:2, 100:2, 110:2, 149:2 and *passim*), followed by a statement of the action to be undertaken or contemplated. Where a stipulated term follows the opening line, these precatives follow immediately after, e.g. 51:4, 60:4, and *passim*. When enemy action or intention is referred to, the present-future of *šarāmu* and *kapādu* is used, e.g. 14:3f, "Will they strive and plan (*išarrimû ikappidû*)? Will they take the road from where they are and march on Que?" See also nos. 4, 5, 18, 43, and *passim*. Occasionally, the two formulas are found in the same query, e.g. 28:7 (*lišrim likpidma*) and 13 (*išarri[mû ik]appidû*). This particular query is concerned with an Assyrian expedition which is expected to encounter enemy opposition.

The query proper abounds in other stereotyped key phrases. For instance, when dispatch of troops by Esarhaddon is referred to, the phrase is commonly *šābē sīsē emūqē mal libbašu ublu lišpur*, "should he send men, horses, (and) troops, as (many as) he wishes?" When the concern is the safe return of troops to Assyrian soil, the phrase used is *mišir ša māt Aššūr kabāsu*. When Assyrian or enemy troops are about to set out on their way, it is *urha harrāna šabātu*. When they are about to engage in battle, it is *kakkī qabli tāhāzi epēšu*. When an enemy attack is involved, the verbs *dāku*, *habātu*, *šalālu* are commonly used. When the query is about the possible capture of a city, the verbs *šabātu*, *erēbu*, *kašādu*, as well as *ina qāti manû* are commonly used.²⁰ When the fate of Assyrian troops is in question, the verbs used are *šētu*, *eṭēru*, *ezēbu* Š, and *ašû*. When the subject of the query is the potential capture of a city (especially by the enemy), the question commonly involves a tedious listing of all the possible means, fair or foul, by which the city may be captured (see, e.g., nos. 43, 44, 63, and 101).

The first query is always formulated as an interrogative main clause, recognizable from predicates showing a lengthening of the final vowel or (in verbs

ending in a consonant) an "overhanging" vowel, as usual in Neo-Assyrian; for example, *i-šar-ri-mu-ú i-kap-pu/pi-du-ú* (plural) 23:6 and 43:6, but *i-šar-ri-i-mi i-kap-pi-id-di* (singular) 18:5; *i-kaš-šá-a-da* (singular) 43:12 (cf. 44:13), but *i-kaš-šá-du-ú* (plural) 62:7.²¹ In precativ forms, the vowel lengthening was usually left unexpressed in the singular (e.g., *lišrim likpidma* "should he strive and plan?", passim) but not in the plural (cf. *lišpurma ... lillikû*, "should he dispatch, and should they go?" 63:2ff).²²

In its most elaborate formulation, the query is structured as follows:

- (a) RN *ša inanni ... ana šapārīšu tišmurūma*
- (b) *ilūtka rabīti idû*
- (c) *kî pî ilūtika rabīti Šamaš bēlu rabû u purussêka šalmu*
- (d) *bēl MU.MU annî RN lišrim likpidma ...*
- (e) *eli ilūtika rabīti táb kîma iktapduma iltapru ...*

"RN who is now intent on sending ... (b) (and whom) your great divinity knows — (c) in accordance with the command of your great divinity, Šamaš, great lord, and your favorable decisions, (d) should RN strive and plan? ... (e) Is it pleasing to your great divinity? If he, having planned, sends ..."

This formula was mostly used where the plans or intentions of Esarhaddon are the subject of the query. See, for example, nos. 28, 34, 81, 108, 111, 124, 137. The king is usually referred to in this formula as EN—MU.MU (see below). These queries may refer to the sending of troops (e.g. no. 28) or an individual (e.g. nos. 108, 111).

In practice, the formula need not include all of its parts. Parts (b) and (c) alone are attested in no. 77:2ff: "The city Šiṣṣirtu, which ... is located on the border of Ellipi and (which) your great divinity knows — in accordance with the command of your great divinity and your favorable decisions, Šamaš, great lord, hath the enemy captured that city?" Note also no. 88:2ff: "Ša-Nabû-šû, whom [Esarhaddon] has now sent and who has gone, (b) whom your great divinity knows — (c) in accordance with the command of your great divinity, Šamaš, great lord, and your favorable decisions, (d) should the subject of this query (EN—MU.MU), Ša-Nabû-šû ..."

The Meaning of EN—MU.MU

EN—MU.MU is usually said of the king, occasionally of the crown prince (e.g., no. 196), and only rarely of his highest officials (no. 88, just quoted, and no. 98, both referring to the chief eunuch). EN—MU.MU is also attested in the ezibs.²³ The meaning and reading of MU.MU in these contexts cannot be determined with absolute certainty, because it is never written syllabically. The traditional translations, such as "the person referred to in the query (*der genannte*)" or the like, are far from certain.²⁴ In the *tamītu* texts, the client is referred to as "the owner of this (black) wool and hem (of the garment)" (EN *sīg u tūg.sīg*),²⁵ and indeed, we find in Craig ABRT 81 r.1 *ezib ša BUL.BUL EN sīg u [tūg.sīg ...]* "Disregard that NN, the owner of the wool and hem [...]." The *ikribus*, i.e., the rituals of the haruspex, speak of *ikrib sīg u tūg.sīg tuhhi* (BBR 75–78 and passim). These designations may have something to do with the identification of the client. We do know that nail-marks and the hem of a garment served as marks of identification of diviners and prophets, as well as

clients on whose behalf an oracular query or an extispicy was made. This was apparently the purpose of sending the lock of hair and the hem of the garment of the mantics described in the prophecy texts from Mari. In the rituals of the diviner, the latter is described as "the owner of this fingernail" (*bēl šupri ubāni annī*), and, indeed, nos. 142 and 172 display impressions of nail-marks. Impressions of nail-marks side by side with, or in place of seals, are quite common in contracts.²⁶

Ownership, of course, need not be physical, it may also refer to an abstract concept, so that *bēl MU.MU* may stand for *bēl zikir/zakār šumi*, *bēl šumāti*, or the like.²⁷ The rendering adopted in the present edition ("subject of [this] query") takes *MU.MU* as a synonym of *tamītu* "query," referring to the invocation of the god Šamaš at the beginning of the query. Note that the assumed reading and meaning is actually attested in no. 43:9, in the phrase *adē zakār šumi ili* "treaty by (lit., 'invocation of the name of') a god" replacing the more common *adē tamīti* (SAA 2 2 i 15).

The Closing Formula of the Query Proper

The query proper usually terminates in the following closing formula:

- (a) *ilūtka rabīti idē*
- (b) *ina šalimti ina pī ilūtika rabīti Šamaš bēlu rabū qabi kūn(i)*
- (c) *āmīru immāra šēmū išememē*

"Does your great divinity know it? (b) Is it decreed and confirmed in a favorable case, by the command of your great divinity, Šamaš, great lord? (c) Will he who can see, see it? Will he who can hear, hear it?"

The order of the elements of the formula is, however, not absolutely fixed and all queries did not have all the elements. For example, (a) follows (c) in no. 7 and is missing in 20:10, while (b) is missing in 57:7 and 62:13. In some texts (b) is complemented by an infinitive or infinitives summarizing the contents of the query, e.g., "is the capture (*šabāta*) of that city by the enemy decreed and confirmed ..." 43:14, cf. 44:14, 63:4, 88:17, 139:23, 141:5, 142:22, 187:6 etc.

A further element, "Will Esarhaddon be troubled and angry?", and its opposite, "Will Esarhaddon be pleased, be happy, and rejoice," is attested in some texts where enemy action or risky military operations are referred to. See, for example, nos. 5, 7, 24, 59, 61, 66, 111, and 115ff. Where present, it is regularly inserted between the query proper and element (a).

The string of ezibs usually immediately follows element (c).

The Non-Standard Ezib Formulas

The ezibs may be divided into two major groups: those which appear in standard form and follow a standard order in all the queries, and those which derive from specific situations and whose wording therefore depends on the contents of the particular query in which they appear. Those ezibs which appear in standard form can easily be restored where necessary. This is not

true of the other group, which usually cannot be restored when in broken context, as is often the case. Because such ezibs refer to specific aspects of the query in which they are found, they are usually attested in that particular query only. The dependence of these ezibs on the contents of the queries in which they are embedded is illustrated by the following examples:

1. "Disregard that Mugallu the Melidean [...]," 12:10;
2. "[Disregard that *in*]side Bit-Hamban [...]," 40:3;
3. "[Disregard that *in*] their midst either the M[edes or the], *ibid.* 2;
4. "Disregard what (happens) in besieging the city, or [in ...]," 63:17;
5. "Disregard that talk of *removing*, a word of *averting* ...," 76:5;
6. "Disregard that [.....] to Trans-Euphrates, to the city Ashkelon ...," 81:14.

Many ezibs in this group are too fragmentary to be intelligible, e.g. 65:15, 87:14ff, 166:12, 226:2, 227:1.

Queries which have a stipulated term may begin with "Disregard what is (i.e. happens) after my stipulated term." This ezib as it stands is evidently incomplete, but seems to refer to the possibility that the occurrence exceeded the stipulated term.²⁸

Intermediate between these and the standard ezibs are others which occur more than once (three to eight occurrences are attested), and should be considered a group in its own right. They differ from the standard ezibs in that they are attested much less frequently than the latter, and do not occur in a strict order. When they occur in a query, they usually precede the standard ezibs. Their subject-matter is not always easy to elucidate, because we are not familiar with the context to which they refer. Take, for example, 81:19, *ezib ša ikrib ili mērešti šibsat il[i u ištari]*, "Disregard that a votive offering requested by the god, anger of go[d and goddess]." The query in question concerns Esarhad-don's expedition against Ashkelon. Does this ezib refer to a specific votive offering of some special significance made on this occasion, at a local shrine, perhaps, by the king? It brings to mind the episode in the Epic of Keret where that king made a vow to Ašera of Tyre and Sidon on his way to war, one he apparently failed to fulfill, with dire consequences for himself, in the form of a debilitating illness. This ezib occurs also in 199:6 and possibly in 104:4 as well as in an unpublished *tamītu* (IM 67692:317, cited in CAD M/2 p. 22). Somewhat differently phrased, it occurs also in nos. 196 and 197, although not among the ezib formulas: "Should he (viz. the crown prince Assurbanipal) frequent [the holy places of] his [gods, *providing*] them with votive gift(s) and the things requested by [gods and goddesses], (so that) [the wrath of god] and goddess [may not befall] him and his father?" (196:10ff). This parallel suggests that the ezib is given in an abbreviated form, and should be understood to read "Disregard what(ever errors are committed while making) the votive offering requested (to soothe) the anger of the gods."

Also in no. 81 there is another interesting ezib (line 15) which can be restored from 115:4 and 126:5 to read, "Disregard that an angry man, or one in distress spoke angrily the words of his report." This ezib is thematically related to ezib 7 (below), where the diviner refers to imperfections in the delivery of his recital.

A difficult ezib occurring in two fragmentary texts, 32:6 and 115:3, can be restored and interpreted with the help of an unpublished *tamītu*, cited by Aro, CRRAI 14 (1966) 111.²⁹

The meaning of some other ezibs remains obscure, because we are not certain what they refer to; e.g., *ezib ša ina pa-a-ti idabbubū ulū idabbubū*, "Disregard what they (i.e., the people present at the site of the extispicy, the temple or palace courtyard?) speak 'with (their) mouths,' or what they think," 5:11, 7:8, 12:9, 45:10, 98:3, 116:8, 119:5, and possibly 107:10. Since we remain ignorant of the circumstances that gave rise to this ezib, the translation remains uncertain.³⁰

"Disregard that they (may) think about it, and then return and *go away* (GUR-*ma* BAR.MEŠ)," 43:17.³¹ While GUR is written syllabically in 18:14 (*ú-ta-ru-ú-ma*), this is not the case with BAR.MEŠ, the reading of which remains uncertain. CAD D 11b reads *umaššarū* and translates "neglect (it)," but this is not sure. However, if the restoration of 120:4f is correct, it would support the CAD rendering: [*ezib ša itti libbišun i-dab-b*]u?-*bu-ú* [*utarrūma ú-ma*]š-šá-*ru*; note the identical order of the first ezibs in 18:14.

"Disregard that they (may) inf[lict a defeat] and plunder the(ir) open country," 43:18, similarly 51:12. This ezib evidently allows for some variation in the order of its parts, e.g. 44:18 and 54:5. All the attested examples of this ezib require restorations.

Other ezibs also appear to have occurred more than once, but not enough of them is preserved for certainty. For example, "Disregard that the messenger [...]," 36:4 and 37:8; "[Disregard that ...] *behind* the enemy [...]," 67:1 and 87:16; possibly also "Disregard that the heart of the troops [...]," 80:15 and 224:2. Because of their highly fragmentary nature, it is not clear whether these various pairs were truly identical in wording, or whether the identity of their preserved parts is merely accidental.

The Standard Ezibs

We are on much surer ground with the "standard" ezibs, whose overriding concerns are the proper form of the rituals and the cultic purity of everything connected with the divination, including the haruspex and his assistants, the sacrificial animal, and the place where the extispicy was performed. Since these ezibs follow each other in standard order in all the queries, we may refer to them as the standard ezib formulas. These formulas are discussed extensively by Klauber PRT, pp. xvii-xxiii, and the numbering system used there for the ezibs is retained here for reference purposes. To save space, Klauber did not include translations of the standard ezibs in his texts, but merely listed them by number because of their repetitive nature. The format of the present edition, with its side-by-side transliteration and translation, makes it possible to include translations of all the ezibs without making concessions to space limitations. The translations of the standard ezibs in the present edition are set in smaller type than the rest of the query.

Ezib 1 is attested in a short (a) and long (a+b) form, and reads in its entirety as follows: (a) *ezib ša (ikrib) dīn ūmi annī kīma ṭāb kīma haṭū* (b) *ūmu erpu zunnu izannun*, "Disregard the (formulation) of (the prayer for) today's case, be it correct, be it faulty, (b) (and that) the day is overcast, and it is raining." The Akkadian word rendered with "the (formulation) of" literally means "that of"; it is taken here to refer to everything associated with the

prayer (*ikribu*) for the oracular 'judgment' (*dīnu*), which the haruspex said before slaughtering the sacrificial sheep, i.e. both to the prayer itself and the accompanying ritual acts.³² The word *dīnu* here connotes a case brought before the divine judge. Note ABL 1396 (= LAS 71) r.3f, "let him speak his case (*dēnšu*) before the god." The divine response to an extispicy query was "written" on the entrails of the sacrificial animal.³³

The second part of the formula (*ezib 1b*) is attested in only a few queries (see 43 r.1, 89:8, 90:10, 263:11, 272:13), probably simply because it, dependent as it was on weather conditions, was rarely needed. Cloudy weather during the performance of the ritual, hiding the face of Šamaš from the diviner, was probably interpreted as a bad omen.³⁴

Ezib 2, *ezib ša ellu lu''û immer*³⁵ *niqê ulappitu ulû ana pān immer niqê iptarriku*, "Disregard that a clean or an unclean person has touched the sacrificial sheep, or blocked the way of the sacrificial sheep," may refer to the incidents on the way of the sacrificial sheep to the scene of the extispicy.

Ezibs 1a and 2 are sometimes combined into one (1+2). The combined formula is attested in complete form only in 77:9, and elsewhere in incomplete contexts. A shorter version, terminating in *ulappitu*, is also attested.³⁷

Ezib 3, "Disregard that an unclean man or woman has come near the place of extispicy and made it unclean," is attested in two variants, (a) and (b), differing from each other by word order only: *ezib ša* (a) *lu''û lu''ûtu ašar bīri usanniqūma ule''û*; (b) *ašar bīri lu''û lu''ûtu usanniqūma ule''û*.

Ezib 4, *ezib ša ina ašar annî lu''û/lu''ê bīra ibrû*, is traditionally rendered "Disregard that an unclean person has performed extispicy in this place."³⁸ This is doubtful, however, since the word *lu''û* in this formula is several times attested in the genitive case (cf. 23 r.1, 25:6, 77:10, 110 r.1, 129:13, 149 r.1, etc.), and a syllabic spelling in a previously unpublished text (*ab-[ru-û]*, 221 r.1) indicates that the word (MAŠ-û), hitherto read *ibrû*, in fact is a first person form. Hence a more correct rendering of this *ezib*, at least in the cases listed above, seems to be "Disregard that I have performed (the) extispicy in this unclean place."

A fusion of *ezibs 4 and 3* is attested in 77:10 and 229:4, *ezib ša ina ašar annî lu''û bīra ibrû ulû lu''ûti* DIB-MEŠ-*ma ula''û*.³⁹ As already pointed out by Knudtzon (AGS, p. 36), the fused formula, omitting *lu''û* and *ašar bīri* which are found already in *ezib 4*, probably owed its existence simply to a desire to economize.

While *ezibs 2-4* were concerned with the defilement of the extispicy by a (ritually) unclean person or site, *ezib 5* is concerned with the possible imperfection of the sacrificial sheep:

*ezib ša immer ilūtika (rabīti) ša ana bīri*⁴⁰ *barû maṭû haṭû*, "Disregard that the ram (offered) to your (great)⁴¹ divinity for the performance of the extispicy is deficient or faulty."

Ezibs 6 and 7, finally, are concerned with the effect of the diviner's own actions, either in word or in deed, on the ritual. These two *ezibs*, unlike the others, display a goodly number of additions or sub-sections to the basic formulas (6a and 7a). The wording of *ezibs 6 and 7* is essentially identical, except for the fact that the former, phrased in the third person, refers to a person "touching the forehead of the sacrificial sheep,"⁴² while the latter, in the first person, pertains to the haruspex himself. Klauber (PRT, p. xix) suggested

that the "toucher of the sheep" was an assistant to the haruspex, and it is quite possible that this was indeed the case, because more than one person was involved in performing the ritual; cf. Fig. 2, and see also the discussion of ezib 6f below.

A composite ezib 6 formula, with all its attested parts included, runs as follows:

- (a) *ezib ša lāpit pūt immeri šubāt ginêšu aršāti labšu*⁴³
- (b) *mimma lu''û ikulu ištû ipšušu ulappitu ukabbisu*⁴⁴
- (c) *ina mūši gilitti piritti imuru*⁴⁵
- (d) *mihha maṣhata mē haṣbu u iṣāta ulappitu*⁴⁶
- (e) *kūn qāti enū uṣātiru uṣpêlu*⁴⁷
- (f) *ulū tamīt ina pīšu i/uptarridu*

"Disregard that he who touches the forehead of the sheep (a) is dressed in his ordinary soiled garments, (b) has eaten, drunk, anointed himself with, touched or stepped upon anything unclean, (c) has seen fear and terror at night, (d) has touched the libation beer, the *maṣhatu*-flour,⁴⁸ the water, the container and the fire, (e) has altered, added to, or changed the ritual proceedings, (f) or has jumbled the oracle query in his mouth."

The composite formula, however, never appears in its entirety, and the constituent parts are usually abridged.⁴⁹ The most common combination is 6a, b, and e. In nos. 24, 81, 154, 156, 229 and 275, 6a alone constitutes the formula and is immediately followed by ezib 7. In no. 5, it is combined with ezib 5. Ezib 6d is sometimes combined with ezib 6a;⁵⁰ twice (120 r.3 and 221:3) it apparently totally merges with this formula, replacing its concluding words (after *lāpit pūt immeri*).

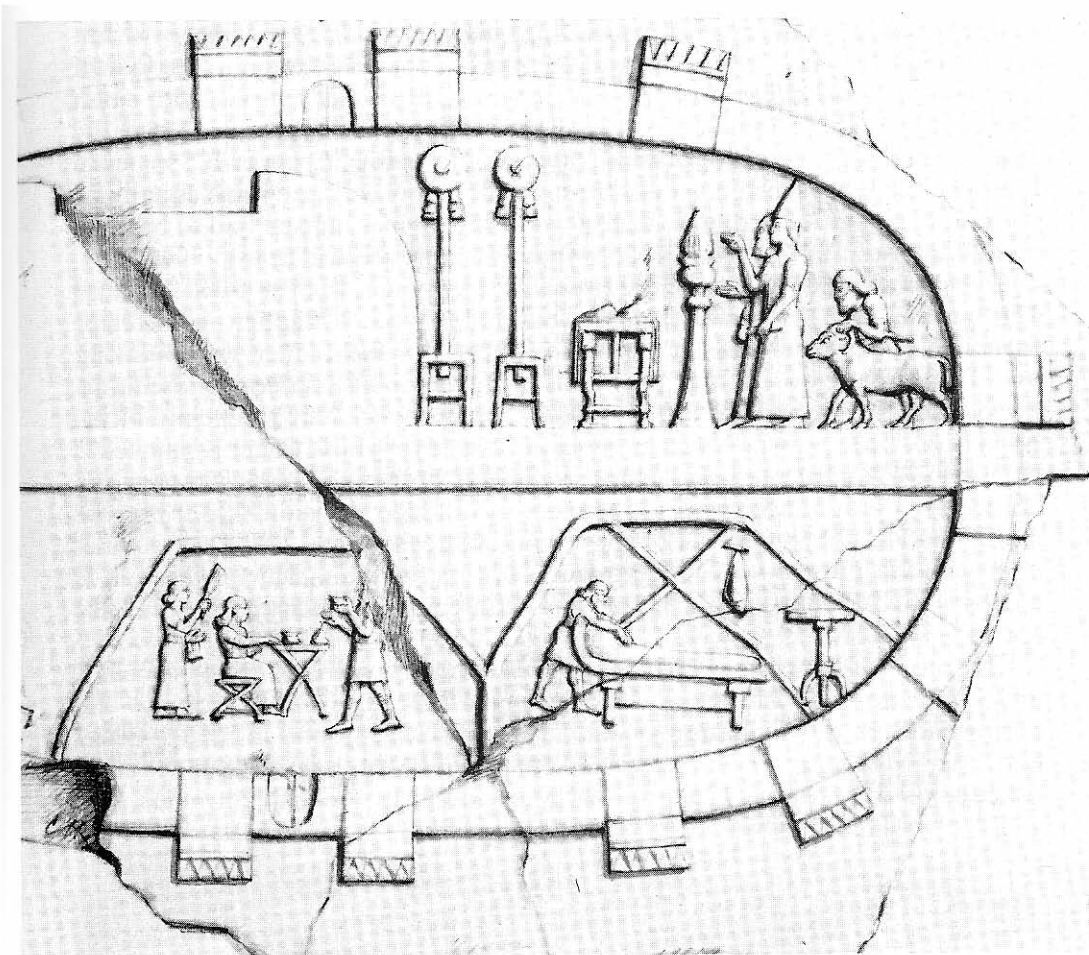
Ezib 6d occurs more frequently than its counterpart, ezib 7d. Ezibs 6c and 6f, on the other hand, are much more rarely attested than 7c and 7f (see below); to my knowledge, each occurs only once, in 108 r.2 and 69:3, respectively. This can hardly be accidental but is likely to derive from the functional difference between the haruspex and his assistant, since it was only the former who would normally have pronounced the query, the very subject of ezibs 6f and 7f.

As already noted, the composite formula of ezib 7, running as follows, largely parallels that of ezib 6:

- (a) *ezib ša anāku mār bārê aradka šubāt ginē'a aršāti labšāku*
- (b) *mimma lu''û ākulu aštû apšušu ulappitu ukabbisu*
- (d) *mihha maṣhata mē haṣbu u iṣāta ulappitu*
- (e) *kūn qāti enū uṣpêlu*
- (f) *ulū tamīt ina pīya i/uptarridu uhtaṭṭû*.⁵¹

"Disregard that I, the haruspex your servant, (a) am dressed in my ordinary soiled garments, (b) have eaten, drunk, anointed myself with, touched, or stepped upon anything unclean, (c) have seen fear and terror at night, (d) have touched the libation beer, the *maṣhatu*-flour, the water, the container and the fire, (e) have changed or altered the proceedings, (f) or the oracular query became jumbled in my mouth."

As noted above, there are significant differences in the actual distribution of the constituent parts of the two ezibs. Ezib 7c, for example, whose counterpart 6c is attested only once, is quite common, and sometimes follows immediately after 7a, as in nos. 63, 84, 129, 134, 136, 217 and 263. Ezib 7d, on the other hand, is only occasionally attested, e.g. 62 r.6 and 265 r.4 (in both cases, it



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FIG. 2. *Camp scene with priests (reign of Tiglath-Pileser III).*
ORIGINAL DRAWING I, 14.

follows 7b). The constituent parts of ezib 7 are subject to a similar variation as those of ezib 6, and also the formula as a whole has three major abridged variants:

(A) *ezib ša anāku mār bārê aradka tamīt ina pīya uptarridu kūn qāti ēnū ušpêlu* "Disregard that I, the haruspex your servant, have jumbled the oracle query in my mouth, (or) changed or altered the proceedings."⁵² In this version of the formula, (f) invariably precedes (e).

(B) *ezib ša ina pī mār bārê ardīka tamīt iptarridu* "Disregard that the oracle query has become jumbled in the mouth of the haruspex your servant." It occurs in 43 r.6, 67:5, 75 r.3, and *passim*.

(C) Another formula, attested only in a few cases, is an abbreviated version of 7a+b: e.g. 190 r.5, *ezib ša anāku mār bārê aradka mimma lu"û ākulu aštû apšušu* "Disregard that I, the haruspex your servant, have eaten, drunk, or anointed myself with anything unclean." Other examples are 139 r.7, 149 r.5, 154 r.15.

We learn from the "standard" ezib-formulas that everyone and everything associated with the oracular proceedings had to be cultically clean. The cultic cleanliness of the haruspex, the sacrificial sheep and of the place of divination

were necessary conditions for a successful divination. The contact of the unclean (described as *lu''û*, *la ellu*, and the like) or the uninitiated in the lore of the diviner, *la kâšid ihzi* of the rituals (passim in BBR, see below), with either the sacrificial sheep (ezib 2) or the place of divination (ezibs 3–4) had the effect of making a favorable divine response impossible. From ezib 5 we learn that the sacrificial sheep must not be deficient in any way and must equally be without blemish. According to ezibs 6 and 7 the diviner himself had to be most fastidious about his attire, as well as about what he ate and drank.

We learn as much also from the rituals of the diviner, such as BBR 1–20 and 75–101, the latter known as *ikribus*, "prayers." What is implicit in the ezib-formulas, is made quite explicit in these rituals. For the diviner, the following qualifications are called for: "He who is proficient in his lore and whose limbs are perfect,"⁵³ can partake in the oracular proceedings. The physically blemished (e.g., BBR 1–20:5, "one who is squinty-eyed or whose finger is infected"; cf. BBR 24:31), on the other hand, could not do so, nor could he near the consecrated ground which was "the place of oracular decision" (*ašar purussê bārûti*, BBR 1–20:6). Only after becoming cultically clean could the diviner approach the gods for an oracular decision.⁵⁴ As for the sacrificial sheep, it is clearly stated that it has to be "a pure, consecrated lamb whose limbs are sound" (BBR 98:7).

The ritual of the diviner started "at dawn, before sunrise" (BBR 11 r.iii 2 and duplicate *ibid.* 75–78:14) when he made his preparations prior to the performance of the divination. A similar description is found in BBR 1–20:69 and 149: "May your servant make his offering at dawn." An echo of the early practice of the divination may possibly be found in the ezib formulas, e.g.

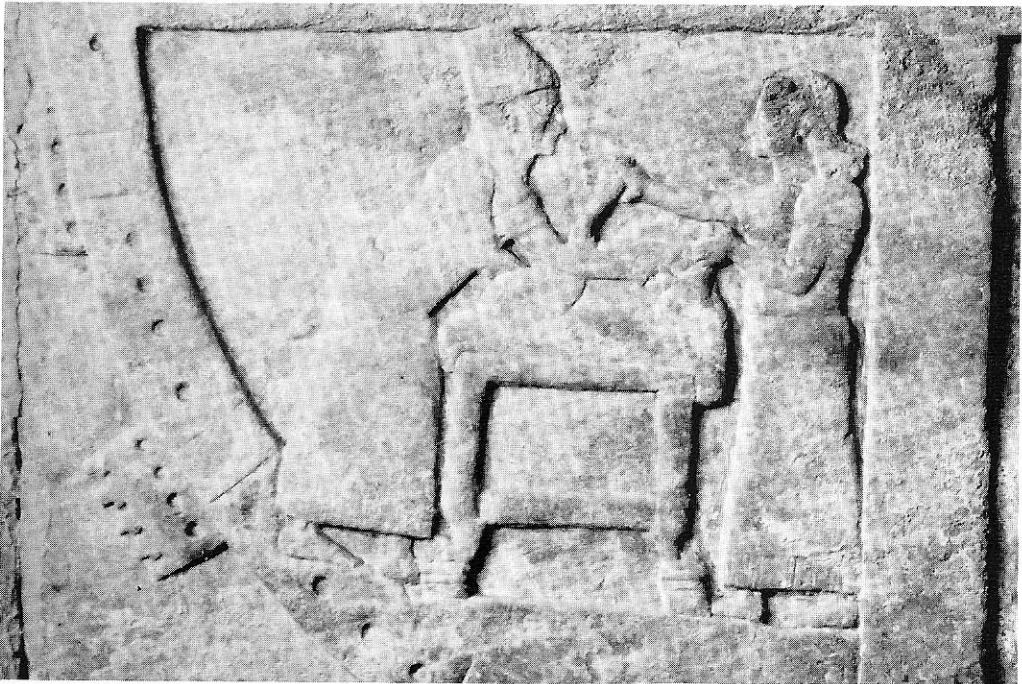


FIG. 3. *Camp scene with priest extracting entrails (reign of Assurnasirpal II).*
BM 124548.

206:6 and 98 r.1f (restored), *e-zib ša ... ūmu išqa* "Disregard that ... the day has already progressed."

The Conclusion of the Ezib Chain

The chain of ezibs regularly ends with the phrase *lū nashā lū bēra*, usually written logographically with or without phonetic complements (ZI.MEŠ-*ha*, BAR.MEŠ-*ra*), the last word occasionally also syllabically (*bé-e-ra* 53:4, 76:12 and passim).⁵⁵ This phrase is usually translated "whether excerpted or only a selection" (see, e.g. AHW 122b and CAD B 213a), and taken to refer to the diviner's recitation of the ritual formulary. However, since it always comes at the end of the ezib section and is not dependent on what precedes it, it is more likely to be a closing plea expressed as a precative, summarizing the contents of the ezib section.

lū nashā would then mean "let them (i.e. the undesirable things specified in the ezib chain) be 'taken out'," i.e. left out of consideration, removed from the scene of the extispicy. This does not fit the meaning of the other precative *lū bēra*, if derived from the verb *bēru* "to select," but if the latter is taken as the feminine plural stative *bēra* of *bēru/bēšu* "to depart, move out" (CAD B 214, logogram BAR), with the meaning "set apart, moved away" (note the verbal adjectives *bēru/bēšu* "far apart, distant" [CAD B 207–208 (s.v. *bēru* B) and 214, logogram BAR]), the two precatives parallel each other perfectly. Note that BAR is not attested as a logogram for *bēru* or any other Akkadian verb meaning "to select," and that the basic semantic range of Sumerian *bar* is "outside, foreign," or, as a verb, "to set aside, take/go away" (PSD B 93ff and 110ff), corresponding to Akkadian *ahu*, *itû*, *kamāti*, *kīdu*, *šahatu* "outside," *bēru/bēšu* "to depart, move away" *nesû/nussû* "to depart/remove," and *uššu-ru*, *ukkušu*, *uṣṣû* "to remove, oust, release."

Accordingly, the rendering of *lū bēra* adopted in this edition is "let them be put aside," and the whole phrase is understood to mean "let these (undesirable) things be excluded and left out of consideration."

The Repetition of the Query

The phrase *lū nashā lū bēra* serves as the link between the first statement of the query and its repetition, an abbreviated version of the former,⁵⁶ which invariably begins with *ašâlka Šamaš bēlu rabû* "I ask you, Šamaš, great lord."⁵⁷ In contrast to the query proper, the repetition is always formulated as an indirect question, beginning with the subjunction *kî* "whether" and having its predicates in the subjunctive, as is normal in Akkadian subordinate clauses.

Occasionally, if the suggested restorations are correct, the latter part of the opening line may also appear in the repetition of the query; see nos. 52:4, 53:4, and 235 r.4 and cf. Klauber PRT, p. xii and p. 6.

The Closing Formulas

The repetition of the query is followed by two formulas (A and B) closing the query. The two formulas often occur as a pair (A+B), but in queries containing omens they may be separated. A normally directly follows the repetition of the query, but may be separated from it by a string of omens, as in nos. 5 and 43. The standard wording of A is as follows:

*ina libbi immeri annî izizzamma anna kîna ušurāti šalmāti šērē tamīt
damqāti šalmāti ša šalimtim ša pî ilūtika rabīti šuknamma lūmur*

"Be present (lit. 'stand') in this ram, place in it an affirmative answer, favorable designs, favorable, propitious omens of the oracular query by the command of your great divinity so that I may see (them)."

A has an abbreviated variant (a) occurring in some texts, e.g. no. 9:

ina libbi immeri annî izizzamma anna kîna šuknamma lūmur

"Be present in this ram, and place in it an affirmative answer, so that I may see (it)."

Formula B has the following wording:

eli ilūtika rabīti Šamaš bēlu rabû lillikma tērtu lītappal

"May (this) query go to your great divinity, O Šamaš, great lord, and may an oracle be given as an answer."

B is the closing formula *par excellence* and usually appears at the very end of the query tablet. It seems that both A and B were inscribed on the tablet before the actual extispicy took place, often with a blank space left between them for omens to be filled in during the extispicy. In some queries, this blank space still remains empty; in others, like no. 43, it apparently was not wide enough so that omens registered in the course of a check-up extispicy had to be entered after formula B.

The Queries and the *tamītu* Texts

We have noted above that the Sargonid queries have much of their formulary, from the opening line to the *ezibs*, in common with another divinatory text genre, likewise consisting of oracular queries, known as *tamītus*. The available evidence shows that the latter are Old Babylonian in origin,⁵⁸ and thus much earlier in time than the queries. The formulary of the latter accordingly must have evolved from that of the former. The available evidence is limited at present to a few published *tamītus*.⁵⁹ The *tamītus* differ from the queries in that private persons too could avail themselves of the services of this oracular practice.⁶⁰

1. The opening line. The major difference between the opening line of the queries and that of the *tamītus* is that the latter are addressed, as are the *ikribus*, to Šamaš and Adad, co-patrons of divination,⁶¹ whereas the queries are addressed to Šamaš alone. It should be noted, however, that the opening formula of the queries, *Šamaš bēlu rabû ša ašallûka*, etc., is also attested in the *tamītus*, e.g., K 8139:10 (cited Klauber PRT, p. xxv).

2. The stipulated term. The queries also share with the *tamītus* a stipulated term, e.g. "from Nisan (I) at the beginning of the year to Addaru (XII) at the end of the year," IM 67692:237 (cited CAD Q 284a s.v. *qītu*).

3. The term *nēpešti bārûti* "extispicy" too is attested in the *tamītus*.⁶² Although the relationship of the *tamītus* to extispicy is never made explicit in the texts themselves, the presence of this term, more than any other, implies a dependence of the *tamītus* on extispicy in spite of the lack of extispicy reports in them.

4. Many of the key formulas and phrases of the queries are paralleled in the *tamītus*, e.g., "whom your great divinities know," "in accordance with the command of your great divinities," "is it decreed and confirmed in the command of your great divinities, Šamaš and Adad?," "may they be taken out and put aside," and "go to kill, loot and plunder."⁶³

5. *Ezibs*. Aside from Craig ABRT 81 r.1 cited above, p. XIX, note also AfO 11 361:19, *e-zib ša* ^{d30} EN GAL-ú ana AN.MI ^{dUTU} it-tum ú-kal-la-mu "Disregard that Sin, the great lord, (may) show a sign for a solar eclipse," and cf. *ibid.*, 18 and 20.

Scholars and Diviners in the Court of the Later Sargonids

Hardly any correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal with haruspices (*bārû*) is attested in the voluminous mass of documents from the reigns of these two monarchs. What correspondence there is⁶⁴ sheds little or no light on the practice of extispicy at the time. Yet this group of scholars, by virtue of its being in charge of a major branch of divination, was bound to play an important role in the policy-making decisions of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, one which finds expression in the corpus of oracular queries and reports edited here. The scarcity of haruspical letters indicates that queries and reports were the standard medium of written communication between haruspices and the king, and that the former wrote letters only exceptionally, for instance to submit a petition.⁶⁵ It may also be that the diviners had to be on hand close to the court (whether at Nineveh or Calah) to perform extispicies on demand, so that an extensive correspondence was unnecessary.⁶⁶

While the queries and reports forming the present corpus were specifically tailored to the needs of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, the earlier Sargonids also availed themselves of the services of the diviners when the need arose. In the eighth campaign of Sargon II, for example, a haruspex was evidently

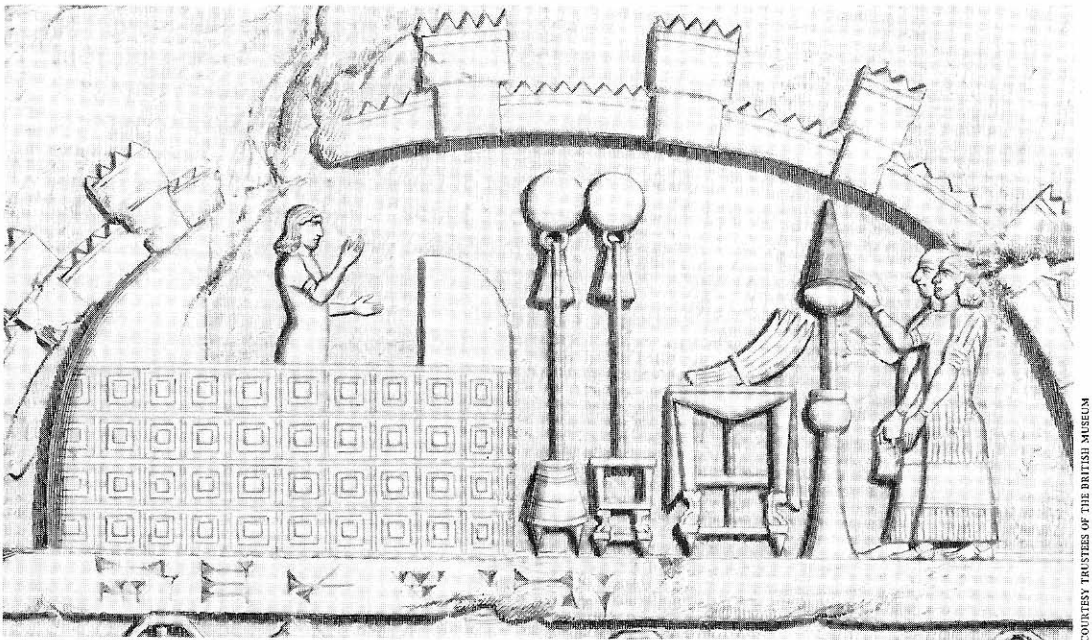


FIG. 4. *Camp scene with priests (reign of Sargon II).*
BOTTA AND FLANDIN, *Monument de Ninive II*, 146.

present at the king's camp, and in an interesting text known as the "Sin of Sargon," Sennacherib commissioned diviners to discover the cause of his father's fate.⁶⁷ It should be noted, however, that this text is not an omen text but a literary work, perhaps of the kind described nowadays as a pseudo-autobiography.⁶⁸ The fact that hardly any divinatory texts from the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib are available may be due to the fact that their archives have not yet been brought to light.⁶⁹

Haruspices were not the only group of specialists on whom the Sargonids relied for advice on matters affecting the safety of the king and country. A group of scholars prominent at the time in the Assyrian capital and throughout other major cities of Assyria and Babylonia consisted of specialists whose reports on astrological and other natural phenomena of ominous import had been published at the turn of the century by R. Campbell Thompson under the exotic title *The Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon in the British Museum*,⁷⁰ although it is clear now that these people were not strictly speaking astrologers, and certainly not magicians. To a large extent they interpreted the ominous significance of eclipses, meteoric and other natural phenomena, such as earthquakes for the person of the king and the safety of the country. In the period under discussion some of these scholars especially from among those working in the Assyrian capital, attained positions of great influence at the court. One of their number, the scholar Balasî, became tutor to the crown prince, Assurbanipal.⁷¹

I should like to point out here that I do not propose to deal in this study with the origins of these scholars, or their relationship, if any, with the authors of the so-called astronomical diaries. My concern is with the scholars and diviners of seventh century Assyria whose activities are described in the documents mentioned above.

The social and institutional position of these scholars under the Sargonid kings had been studied by Oppenheim in his article "Divination and Celestial Observation in the Last Assyrian Empire," *Centaurus* 14 (1969), 97–135, and more recently by Parpola.⁷² In the period under discussion their reports to the king reflect, in the words of Oppenheim (*ibid.* 97 and 114), the working of a well-established institution whose members may be described as practitioners of a discipline. In practice, the scholars excerpted from the major astrological and related compendia those omens which appeared to them to have the closest bearing on observed natural phenomena of the gravest concern to the king such as eclipses, earthquakes, etc., and forwarded them, often with elaborate explanations and comments to support their conclusions. As for the manner of reporting, an interesting description is provided by ABL 1096 (= LAS 60), a letter from Nabû-ahhe-eriba to Assurbanipal detailing the procedure followed in the days of his father, Esarhaddon, when the reports of the scholars were read and explained to him on the river bank, in a *qersu*, the sacred enclosure known from the NA royal rituals.

Interpreting celestial phenomena can hardly have been an easy task. Faulty observations by some of the king's correspondents on these matters are attested in the reports. The results of such celestial observations were called into question in no uncertain terms by other scholars. Nabû-ahhe-eriba writes to the king (ABL 1132 = LAS 65), "he who wrote to the king that Venus is visible in the month of Adar is despicable, a fool and a liar", and continues in the same vein, "if he does not know, he should shut up."⁷³ Similarly Akkulanu

writes, RMA 235 rev.2f, "this omen is nonsense: the king should disregard it."⁷⁴ The frustration of these scholars with those they considered dilettantes who provided the king with false information, or to use a colloquialism, who gave the profession a bad name, are summed up by Ištar-šumu-ereš in the following proverb (ABL 37 = LAS 12 r.3ff.), "the inept can frustrate a judge; the ignorant can trouble even the mighty."

But even the more competent scholars could not always provide all the answers. Occasionally they had to admit, "there is no reference to it" (ABL 519 = LAS 13 rev. 12 and 22), or "there is absolutely no reference to it" (ibid. 27). It is not surprising therefore, that at times the king indicates growing impatience with his correspondents over the lack of unequivocal answers. On this score, the diviner appears to have been in a much more secure professional position than the scholar.

For the former, producing a balance-sheet of favorable and unfavorable protases was evidently sufficient for a prognosis. For the latter, excerpting the appropriate omen from the astrological compendia was not in itself sufficient to convince the king or allay his fears. An elaboration of the omen considered relevant to the portended sign was often necessary,⁷⁵ should the king ask: "Where did you see it? Tell me!" (ABL 1391+ = LAS 110+ r.5).

In fact, if the king chose to follow their advice, the activities of the scholars actually tended to curtail his mobility, forcing him on occasion to the subterfuge of a substitute king to avoid the unpropitious signs predicted by eclipses and other natural phenomena. Similar considerations affected the comings and goings of the crown prince, from leaving his residence (ABL 354 = LAS 46) to having an audience with the king (ABL 356 = LAS 45).⁷⁶ An example which concerns both Assurbanipal as crown prince and Šamaš-šumu-ukin speaks for itself: "Why did he (i.e. Adad-šumu-ušur) say: The crown prince and Šamaš-šumu-ukin should not go outdoors before the 22nd of Tishri? Did he see any sign? ... He swore: I did not see any sign" (ABL 594 = LAS 249:6ff). The same may be said of other members of the royal family, notably Aššur-mukin-paleya, another son of Esarhaddon.⁷⁷

The fact of the matter is that for some of the major concerns of the later Sargonids, the haruspices rather than any other group of specialists were called upon for help. It is doubtful whether any other branch of divination could have served this purpose. A case in point is the celebrated eighth campaign of Sargon II, in which both an astrologer and a haruspex appear to have been present in the royal camp, where an astrological omen had been confirmed, apparently, by means of extispicy.⁷⁸ This fact is neither surprising nor unique. It merely confirms evidence going back to Old Babylonian Mari, where similarly a lunar eclipse, as well as dreams and visions of mantics had to find confirmation by means of extispicy.⁷⁹

While in the case of Mari it can be argued that no astrological compendia were available at the time, this was not the case in the days of Sargon II. The reason for the continued importance of extispicy lies in the nature of divination. Of the two types of divination, *impetrata* and *oblative*, only the former could function at will. *Oblative* were of more limited application, because they depend on the occurrence of natural phenomena, which could not be produced on demand. In fact, the only other way attested for inquiring about an impending eclipse without recourse to the scholars was by means of another type of oracular query from among the *impetrata*, discussed above. One of the very

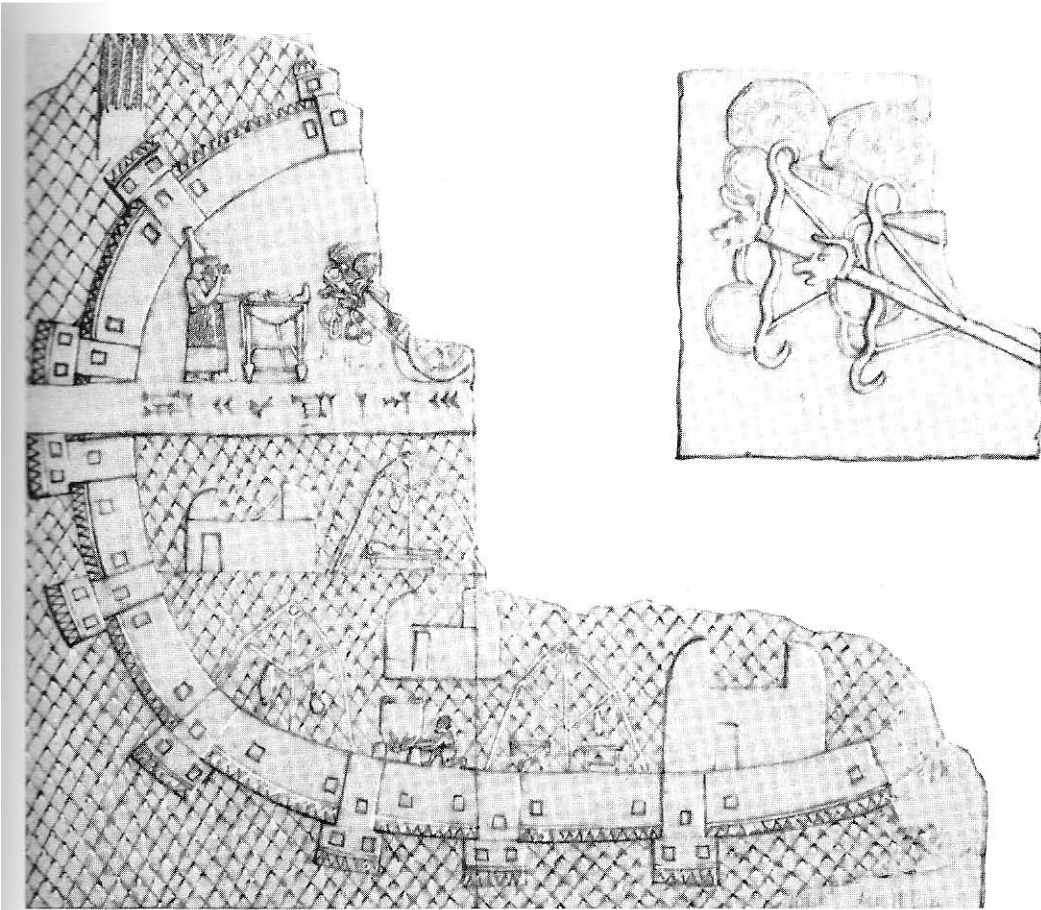


FIG. 5. *Priests in camp* (reign of Sennacherib).
ORIGINAL DRAWING IV, 65.

COURTESY TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

few *tamītus* published is a query concerning a lunar eclipse.⁸⁰ Since the corpus of *tamītus* as a whole has not yet been published, we do not know if this was common practice.

Whatever the case, this brings us back to extispicy. Although no extispicy reports are attached to the extant *tamītus*, the two must have been closely related. We have noted above that references in the formulary of the *tamītus* to the sacrificial lamb and to the "performance of extispicy" (*nēpešti bārūti*) indicate that answers to the queries presented in them were determined by means of extispicies. In other words, there was no substitute for extispicy as a means of eliciting the divine will, because it alone could create on demand, as it were, the conditions necessary to receive the divine response.

In theory, of course, any impetrated omen could render such service. In practice, however, extispicy was the only major royal tool among the impetrata. None other (e.g., lecanomancy, libanomancy, etc.) is attested as having played a similar role in practice.

The astrological reports provide us with a wealth of information about internal conditions in Assyria and Babylonia in the reigns of the later Sargonids, their relationships with the scholars and other courtiers, and most important, about the personality of Esarhaddon, who was most receptive to the

practices of the scholars and diviners, and relied on them heavily. We know now that this was not due entirely to superstition, but to his deteriorating state of health.⁸¹ But to the student of Assyrian diplomacy in that period, the importance of the reports as a source of history is, unlike that of the oracle queries, at best peripheral. Since most queries, aside from those dealing with illness in the royal family or loyalty of officials, are concerned with conditions on the frontiers of the Assyrian empire, especially those on the north and east, it is these which shed light on Assyrian diplomacy in these regions at the time.

In fact, the information they provide is, unlike that of the classical sources, a *primary* source for the history of these regions at that period. By way of contrast, in the entire corpus of astrological reports there are only a few which can be said to have made a contribution to our understanding of the foreign policy of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. An exception is the correspondence of Bel-ušeziḫ, a Babylonian scholar who displayed, it is said, a greater interest in politics than in astronomy. One need only mention ABL 1237 and CT 54 22 to make the point. (We shall return to these two letters below).

The astrological omens which Bel-ušeziḫ cites in most, if not all, of his letters, were merely meant, in Oppenheim's view,⁸² to establish his academic credentials. This evaluation is sorely in need of modification in the light of recently published new letters of Bel-ušeziḫ in CT 54,⁸³ and a better understanding of the significance of some long known letters by the same author. These show that when the need arose, Bel-ušeziḫ displayed the same expertise in the use of astrological omens as did his colleagues. In ABL 1216, for example, he reminds Esarhaddon that it was he who correctly predicted from the celestial signs the latter's succession to the throne of Sennacherib.⁸⁴ In CT 54 22 he likewise brings celestial omens to bear on a prediction for a victory over the Mannaeans. This report, together with ABL 1237, is in fact our most informative source for Esarhaddon's Mannean war of 675 B.C. Whether things in reality turned out as Bel-ušeziḫ predicted for this campaign is another matter.

From the reign of Assurbanipal one should mention ABL 1391 (= LAS 110). The historical significance of this letter, which can now be positively dated May 15, 657 B.C., has been greatly enhanced by its join to ABL 679 (= LAS 300), a letter from Akkulanu to the king. It not only sheds light on the extent of Cimmerian expansion into Syria, but also on the economic hardship in Assyria that year due to crop failure.⁸⁵

The opposite is the case with the oracle queries. They reveal nothing about the relations of the diviners with the court. We can only speculate about the king's reaction to the pronouncements of the diviners. Not that there is any shortage of information about liver divination in ancient Mesopotamia, but with the exception of the Mari letters it is to be found almost entirely in *impersonal* contexts, such as omen texts, extispicy reports, models, etc. The haruspices, unlike the other classes of scholarly experts, apparently were not required to offer elaborate explanations other than the bare results of their extispicies in the form of a balance-sheet of favorable and unfavorable pro-tases. Admittedly, this practice is explicitly stated only in the Neo-Assyrian compendia and reports, but the process is observable already in reports from Mari,⁸⁶ and remained consistent throughout. To be sure, instances of unusual abnormalities on the exta meriting the attention of the court are not unknown, but they appear to have been treated outside the context of extispicy. An early

example comes from a Mari letter (ARM 4 54), where the correspondents, Išme-Dagan and Yasmah-Adad, discuss some abnormalities on the exta.⁸⁷ Similarly, several instances concerning kidneys of sacrificial animals are recorded in the Sargonid correspondence. The most explicit is ABL 975, where such a kidney was to be sent to the court, to be examined "by the scholars" (*ummānu*, rev.14).

The roles of scholars and diviners in the Sargonid royal court should not be underestimated.⁸⁸ In spite of their total dependence on royal favor for their position and livelihood, the king depended on them to relieve him of his well attested fears and anxieties. The conclusions of the astrologers and haruspices derived from observations of celestial phenomena and the sheep's exta, respectively, provided the "scientific" basis for decision making. That Esarhaddon questioned, disputed, or simply misunderstood — and that was often the case — what had been explained to him by the scholars does not alter this view.